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American public opinion from World War I  
until the present

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Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School

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**NAVAL  
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**THESIS**

**WHY WE FIGHT: MASS PERSUASION, MORALE, AND  
AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION FROM WORLD WAR I  
UNTIL THE PRESENT**

by

Richard A. Virginia Jr.

June 2014

Thesis Advisor:  
Co-Advisor:

Donald Abenheim  
Carolyn Halladay

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**WHY WE FIGHT: MASS PERSUASION, MORALE, AND AMERICAN PUBLIC  
OPINION FROM WORLD WAR I UNTIL THE PRESENT**

Richard A. Virginia Jr.  
Lieutenant, United States Navy  
B.S., Excelsior College, 2005

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(EUROPE AND EURASIA)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the role of U.S. mass persuasion during modern war and the effects of propaganda, strategic narrative, military strategy, and policy on morale and public opinion. Through historical analysis of several phases of U.S. war propaganda, from the world wars to the Global War on Terror, this study aims to understand the political essence and the cultural and functional nuance of propaganda in a wartime democracy.

Prevailing wisdom holds that the United States managed a coherent, focused, and intelligently wielded campaign of mass persuasion in Europe, 1941–1989. Yet, American strategic mass persuasion efforts since 2001 have consistently failed to persuade friend and foe of the strategic efficacy of American and allied campaigns.

This thesis finds that wartime propaganda has little effect if it is not derived from a concrete overall strategy, policy, and narrative. The most impactful uses of mass persuasion rely on a perpetual rebalancing of military theorist Carl von Clausewitz’s paradoxical trinity—violence, chance, and policy, anchored in democratic statecraft and the virtues of pluralism. Therefore, to better facilitate balancing, an independent governmental agency charged with information management during war may better serve the public, policy makers and the military, producing the desired political ends.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CPI	Committee on Public Information
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America
DOD	Department Of Defense
DSB	Defense Science Board
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HUAC	House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee
IO	information operations
IPA	Institute for Propaganda Analysis
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MISO	Military Information Support Operations
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
MOI	Ministry of Information
NSAM	National Security Action Memorandum
OCD	Office of Civil Defense
OEM	Office of Emergency Management
OFF	Office of Facts and Figures
OGR	Office of Government Reports
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
OWI	Office of War Information
PSYOPS	psychological operations
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces
USIA	United States Information Agency
WMD	weapons of mass destruction
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

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## I. ON PROPAGANDA

From the epoch of total war through present conflicts, the United States has employed mass persuasion, or propaganda, to influence morale and public opinion. This thesis examines how effective propaganda, strategic narrative, military strategy, and policy—as opposed to policy abstraction—together shape overall perception of war. By studying propaganda in a wartime democracy and its role in the mass mobilization of the public for conflict, the research reveals a deeper understanding into the political, cultural, and functional essence of mass persuasion, in either limited or total war. This analysis considers what propaganda is, what it does, and how it has worked in the past.

The author seeks to recognize instances of propaganda’s successful use to determine keys to its implementation in the future. The most effective example of U.S. propaganda during conflict occurred in Europe and provides a multitude of historical scholarship on the subject. The prevailing wisdom holds that the United States managed a coherent, focused, and intelligently wielded campaign of mass persuasion in the earlier period of hot and cold war in Europe, 1941–1990. Yet, the case changed in recent decades. Since 2001, American strategic mass persuasion at home and abroad has consistently neglected to persuade friend and foe of the strategic efficacy of American and allied campaigns.

Particularly in light of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, current analysis suggests an ongoing and worsening juxtaposition between policy and strategic narrative development. As a result of an overarching grand strategy abstraction, perceived strategic, operational, and tactical failures on the battlefield contrast with the perception that the Islamist enemy in its variety applies propaganda more efficiently and with greater success than those in the echelons of the U.S. government, including the armed forces.

Essentially, propaganda is of little effect if not derived from democratic statecraft vis-à-vis a concrete grand strategy, policy, strategic narrative, and perpetual rebalancing of military theorist Carl von Clausewitz’s paradoxical trinity, the threefold forces of war in the real world: “primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a



blind natural force; . . . the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and . . . its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”<sup>1</sup> Clausewitz focuses on the political and psychological dimensions of war. For him, the ideas not only matter; they are paramount. Jack LeCuyer writes, “We must define our strategic future and tell our national story in a compelling way—and jointly embrace that common narrative in both the executive and the legislative branches of the federal government.”<sup>2</sup> Where government policy goes, the military is sure to follow.

## A. IMPORTANCE

Propaganda—a term used here neutrally, not in its totalitarian sense—has returned to prominence in policy- and opinion-making circles as the global war on terror (GWOT) winds down and shifts phases. The role of mass persuasion in this context must be understood in terms of both its promise and its perils for strategy and soldiers as well as democracy. The fighting soldier will inevitably suffer from such a dichotomy of strategy and mass persuasion, whereby the efficacy of strategy rivals the easy resort to the “stab in the back” as a catch-all explanation for failure.

While one can argue that people remain surrounded by propaganda in one form or another, the message is not being contrived and implemented in America or abroad with an effective plan or concerted direction to counter the enemy’s efforts. In other words, it appears that the propaganda needed for raising domestic mobilization and supporting foreign strategic operations against fundamentalist Islamist enemies has been throttled way back or is out of commission. In the dimmest view, U.S. propaganda today has taken on a form that only mobilizes young war fighters, while ignoring the need for strategic propaganda on the national level to mobilize the general citizenry and to counter a non-state threat.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2008), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Jack LeCuyer, “Op-Ed: A National Strategic Narrative and Grand Strategy for the 21st Century,” *The Global Strategy Institute, Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2007, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/A-National-Strategic-Narrative-and-Grand-Strategy-for-the-21st-Century/2011/7/1>.

Without a clear policy, it is difficult to form a strategic narrative to explain U.S. actions on the battlefield, free of abstraction. Without that strong narrative driving propaganda, America has less of an impact on the way the enemy, citizens, soldiers, and allies view a conflict. The country currently lacks a strong plan and an explanation of that plan. National security analyst Anthony Cordesman explains that the United States “needs stronger public diplomacy and information campaigns.”<sup>3</sup> This thesis expands on his concerns, providing both the strategic insights and the empirical evidence that defines the underlying problem and, sketches in the possible steps of a solution.

## **B. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

The political and strategic role of mass persuasion in twentieth-century wartime as a means of home-front cohesion and international legitimation form a basis for comparison with the most recent efforts at mass persuasion and propaganda since September 11, 2001. Research shows that U.S. propaganda, strategic narrative, and policy in the epoch of total war constitute the point of departure for any present-day analysis of contemporary efforts by soldiers and public diplomats in counterterror campaigns since late 2001.

This thesis examines the theory, praxis, and effectiveness of propaganda at each of the key historical moments listed: WWI, the interwar academic study of propaganda, WWII, the Cold War including Korea and Vietnam, and the global war on terror, including Iraq and Afghanistan. Theory in this case describes the ways that propaganda supports policy and its overall adherence or furtherance of the strategic narrative. Praxis looks to determine how propaganda was developed, disseminated, and controlled, using standard operating procedures, directives, programmatic guidelines, and censorship. The question is not only why does America fight wars, but also whether the country does a good job at communicating the answer to that question to the public. What factors determine or affect America’s success when leveraging propaganda in times of conflict?

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman and Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Changing US Security Strategy: The Search for Stability and the 'Non-War' against 'Non-Terrorism,'" 2013, viii, [http://csis.org/files/publication/130917\\_Cordesman\\_ChangingUSSecurityStrategy\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/130917_Cordesman_ChangingUSSecurityStrategy_Web.pdf).

For example, propaganda's role in the effective mass mobilization of the U.S. population during WWII, in response to fascist and Japanese imperial aggression, is generally considered straightforward. Can the same be said for propaganda's effectiveness during the Korean and Vietnam Wars? Perhaps these proxy wars fought against global communism should be considered battles within an overarching Cold War, which the United States inevitably won. Therefore, it could be said that the Cold War propaganda apparatus actually worked. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can be viewed similarly. The final disposition of the conflict, while far from certain, can be affected by propaganda. These wars, too, call for propaganda waged from a codified strategic narrative derived from coherent grand strategy and in concert with policy and military strategy.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

At issue is the role propaganda plays in balancing the government, military, and the people in limited war. Clausewitz states in "the consequences for theory," a balance between these components must be achieved and more importantly maintained to realize a viable theory for war.<sup>4</sup> Thus, propaganda wielded haphazardly in an effort to support balance of the paradoxical trinity is less apt to be effective, because it does not, and cannot in its inherently flawed nature, balance the government, military, and the people. As Clausewitz states, "A theory that ignores any one of them or seeks to fix an arbitrary relationship between them would conflict with reality to such an extent that for this reason alone it would be totally useless."<sup>5</sup>

Clausewitz provides the theoretical framework for considering propaganda's use in the age of mass politics, while J. Michael Sproule's treatment of propaganda and democracy shows how they necessarily changed from their inception until the present. This aspect is important when considering the hatred and violence side of Clausewitz's trinity as it pertains to morale and mobilization. Initially, in the progressive era (circa 1900–1914), muckrakers like Will Irwin invented modern American total war

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<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

propaganda in WWI.<sup>6</sup> The advent of propaganda inspired a backlash against it circa 1920. Americans began to worry that effective domestic propaganda campaigns had tricked them into supporting the European war. That period of skepticism ultimately prompted a deeper academic inquiry into the essence of propaganda in the interwar period.<sup>7</sup>

For example, Walter Lippmann, a man of this era, saw the public as potentially becoming dupes of special interest, much like today's "low information voter."<sup>8</sup> This concern for the protection of democracy from propaganda led to what Sproule calls "the straight thinking and the polemical perspectives on social influence."<sup>9</sup> In the search for a deeper understanding of propaganda, two different approaches emerged. The straight thinkers believed in educating the citizenry how to think, rather than how to recognize propaganda, while the anti-propaganda polemicists opted for developing methods to recognize propaganda.<sup>10</sup> This struggle between these two camps played out in the Institute for Propaganda Analysis, which was ultimately undone by muckraking critics and the impending Fascist threat.<sup>11</sup>

As Philip Taylor explains, WWII saw the advent of extremely high quality propaganda.<sup>12</sup> The people who produced propaganda for Allied and Axis powers represented a struggle of mass society and political ideology, and this struggle likely led to its effectiveness as a weapon of diplomacy by other means.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> J. Michael Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy: The American Experience of Media and Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>12</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda, Third Edition* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), 211, 227.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

Propaganda reached deep at the time. Lord Reith, British Minister of Information declared, news is “the shock troops of propaganda.”<sup>14</sup> Even with a robust censorship program in place to help shape morale, Taylor shows that the number of clashes between the press and the Ministry of Information (MOI) were infrequent, occurring early in the war, and are a testament to the overall effectiveness of the British system.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, pre-censorship occurred at the London headquarters of the Press Association, which supplied domestic news outlets.<sup>16</sup> When MOI had completed its censorship, news was then released to the different media outlets. Censors did not change opinions found in content, leading the public to believe very little censorship was actually taking place, so their program was palatable even to liberal commentators.<sup>17</sup> In this way, Britain was effectively applying balancing to the anger and hatred side of the Clausewitzian trinity.

While not reaching the higher level of viewership in the U.S., Britain maintained nearly 30 million moviegoers a month in 1945—nearly half the population thus primed for propaganda. The movie houses did not disappoint.<sup>18</sup> Arguably, the success of the films of this period stemmed from average men and women being portrayed realistically, rather than as caricatures.<sup>19</sup> A similar phenomenon can be found in today’s popular reality television programs and their ability to shape public discourse and morality. However, unlike American reality television, which cannot be said to advance a coherent or unitary program, British films in the middle-1940s meant to express the need for citizens to unite for victory and the defeat of the German nation.<sup>20</sup>

Take for instance, *Mrs. Miniver*, a film produced by Metro Goldwyn Mayer in 1942. The underlying theme of the movie is not the overt villainization of the Third Reich, but an understated framing of English stoicism, which undoubtedly helped drive

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 220.

American support for inclusion into the Second World War. The main character, Mrs. Miniver, is portrayed as a compassionate mother, whose family is touched by war and who suffers as a result of it. Her family does not desire war, but surely do not shirk their responsibility to support it either. The movie effectively conveys the way in which total war is viewed as “the people’s war,” one in which all are involved and all must make sacrifices. It is brilliant propaganda, because Mrs. Miniver could be anybody’s mother, and as such she can be immediately appreciated. Viewers of the film can make a near instantaneous emotional connection with her, empathize with her, and support Mrs. Miniver’s compassion and resilience in the face of total war.

This film serves as just one example of how propaganda at that time was thoughtfully shaped and implemented on a mass scale by professional practitioners working to further a goal. Propaganda necessarily informed and influenced the views of the public, of the military, and most importantly the policymakers. Therefore, it is fair to consider that with continued public and military support to meet policy ends, policy makers would feel confident in their decision making processes both then and today.

In contrast to the rallying sensibilities during WWII, the prevailing narrative about the Vietnam War holds that the U.S. armed forces were somehow prevented from winning by nefarious civilian powers and the press. In real life, however, the press didn’t lose the war on its own, and the American public did not go soft on Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> The American public supported Vietnam for several years, at least until it became obvious that the war was unwinnable, following the Tet Offensive in 1968.<sup>22</sup> The sense that morale had been the weak link was not entirely true. Rather, the hatred side of Clausewitz’s trinity fell out of balance late in the war, though likely the sides of chance and policy were out of balance, too.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel C. Hallin, *The “Uncensored War”: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 211, 213.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

In 1960s Vietnam, the United States wanted to fight a conventional limited war.<sup>24</sup> The Air Force fought its war, and the Army, too, waged its own. President Lyndon Johnson did not fully mobilize the country out of fear. Johnson was living with the memory of the Korean War, whereby costs rose and public support fell.<sup>25</sup> Later, the aerial bombardment during the Siege of Khe Sanh and Tet Offensive slaughtered the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army, but it failed to make a difference. Unlike America, Vietnam was not fighting a limited war, but a total war.<sup>26</sup> This is the climax of the credibility gap. Meanwhile, President Richard Nixon's 1973 declaration of an agreement of "peace with honor" seemed to translate more as "stab in the back," particularly after the fall of Saigon.<sup>27</sup> In other words, a mismatch of strategic narrative derived from abstract policy led to poor domestic propaganda development, resulting in less than desirable ends. The paradoxical trinity was not balanced.

In fact, as a rule, the public has accepted the credible policy, strategic narrative, and the propaganda that emanates from its democratic government so long as it more or less brings results.<sup>28</sup> When the divergence between the strategic narrative and reality become too great, the problem is not propaganda, but the disconnect between mass politics, ends and means in war, and the ideal form of strategy, hence the need for a balancing of the trinity.<sup>29</sup> A balanced trinity is one in which all sides are engaged. A trinity where only politics and chance are engaged will not yield desired policy goals.

The power of propaganda typically relies on expert conception, development, and dissemination. Of course, in the case of a country at wartime, it must support some desired ends, such as democratic statecraft and strategy. If propaganda appears effective, but is attached to a poor, abstract, or otherwise unsound policy that does not support a grand strategy, then it will not generate the desired results in practice and in its final

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 212–13.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>27</sup> Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics* (London: Hurst, 2012), 210.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 188.

outcome. That is to say even “great” propaganda will yield little in the way of garnering public support or acquiescence of the enemy when strategically unsound. In fact, this propaganda may unwittingly have an adverse effect by bringing about enemy success on the battlefield and a lack of support on the home front. Any consideration of propaganda is all for naught if one does not first consider a theoretical framework within which propaganda can be justified and be used to support and further policy goals.

So why is it so difficult to balance mass persuasion during a war? In the modern vernacular, there is a value assigned and vast difference between kinetic or combat effect and strategic or military planning effect in the information and propaganda realm as it pertains to the conduct of war. Singaporean Lieutenant Colonel Teo Cheng Hang posits:

Unfortunately, non-kinetic methods are underrated, especially in the military. Compared to kinetic methods, their consequences tend to be indirect and therefore sometimes do not produce immediately observable effects. Kinetic methods and their intended effects are much easier to grasp because they create direct, immediately perceivable effects.<sup>30</sup>

Combat effects are immediately recognized, whereas strategic effect, a result of a demonstrable strategic narrative and concurrent propaganda push, are assumed to be less recognizable. Yet, certain incidents have countered that perception. The news of torture and abuse performed on detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison during the first few years of the Iraq war had an almost immediate effect on domestic and foreign perception of American conduct toward prisoners of war. Nearly a century before that, the sinking of the *Lusitania* leading up to WWI was similarly portrayed as a blatant atrocity. In both cases, the instigators of the activity acted without recognizing the negative strategic effect resulting from their behavior. America faced backlash resulting from the soldiers at Abu Ghraib, and Germany too suffered after the attack. Worsening the negative effect, Karl Goetz, a celebrated Munich artist, misunderstood strategic narrative and produced a medal commemorating the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, a misstep that Britain leveraged to their advantage.<sup>31</sup> Abu Ghraib was an example of prisoner abuse and a

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<sup>30</sup> Teo Cheng Hang, “Non-Kinetic Warfare: The Reality and the Response,” *Pointer: Journal of the Singapore Armed Forces* 36, no. 2 (2010): 54, <http://www.mindef.gov.sg/imindef/publications/pointer/journals/2010/v36n1/feature5.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 178–79.



misinterpretation of strategic narrative, which was captured on film and released with negative strategic effect to the U.S. and was leveraged with great affect by Islamist enemies. The sinking of the Lusitania was characterized as Nazi barbarism and with the release of the Goetz medal a similar negative strategic effect occurred and played into the hands of the British propaganda.

In summary, Clausewitz presents the theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between the three sides of his trinity—hatred, chance, and policy—and the need for an emphasis on the people to produce an acceptable outcome. In communicating a message to the people on a mass scale, propaganda has an effect on all three sides. A balancing of these three forces can and has occurred in previous wars, yet in some cases an imbalance has also occurred. As the U.S. fails to engender a strong enough sense of hatred and force to match the other aspects of policy and military chance, they are relegated to working alone, in a proverbial vacuum free of the masses. The U.S. can learn from both its past successes in balancing the Clausewitzian trinity and its shortcomings. Given events in Iraq and Afghanistan in the twenty-first century, coupled with an ostensibly ongoing conflict between the United States and radical Islamists, the country requires a framework for understanding the essence and nuance of propaganda used to achieve balance in this endeavor.

#### **D. METHODS AND SOURCES**

One significant problem with any efforts to categorically assign levels of political effectiveness to propaganda, either abroad or at home, is the inherent subjectivity in the dimensions of policy, strategy, and culture. By nature, propaganda's effectiveness is determined by the extent to which its audience adopts or accepts it in conflict and the passion of war. This relative effectiveness must be substantiated through corroborating literature; therefore, definitive proof of effectiveness is anecdotal at best, as it relies on voting records and public opinion polls, and erroneous at worst. Unfortunately, most available evidence related to the success of propaganda in influencing public opinion fails to rise to the level of scientific proof, leaving the relative successfulness of propaganda as a mostly subjective endeavor.

Lindley Fraser, in the forward of his book *Propaganda*, summarizes the difficulty in applying scientific methodology to the study of propaganda, and yet still manages to produce a work of note. First, Fraser explains that presenting a study, as a historical narrative is nearly impossible because “there is no continuous thread to follow.”<sup>32</sup> Second, it cannot “be analyzed as a systematic scientific discipline since its techniques vary so greatly according to the purposes for which it is used.”<sup>33</sup> This means one cannot analyze propaganda because one does not always know what is and isn’t propaganda, and because one does not always know the “secret” goal behind it. Still, as Clausewitz said:

Anyone for whom all this is meaningless either will admit no theoretical analysis at all, or his intelligence has never been insulted by the confused and confusing welter of ideas that one so often hears and reads on the subject of the conduct of war. These have no fixed point of view; they lead to no satisfactory conclusion; they appear sometimes banal, sometimes absurd, sometimes simply adrift in a sea of vague generalization; and all because this subject has seldom been examined in a spirit of scientific investigation.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, much like Lindley, this thesis will accept an uneasy compromise between an analytical and historical approach to the problem of propaganda in relation to war.

Given the myriad variables to consider, theory and praxis—which are a recurring theme in Sproule’s book *Propaganda and Democracy* in statecraft—designate a logical starting point. For this thesis, a measure of effectiveness will be determined as a verifiable strategic effect, which can be, at the minimum, attributed and accepted as a nominal indicator of propaganda’s success.

A highly selective cross section of entities relevant to propaganda research provide a sample of indicators. They include several types of entities, presented here out of historical sequence. The broadest source of historical evidence regarding propaganda’s effect comes from government agencies tasked with information management, including the Committee on Public Information (CPI), April 13, 1917–August 21, 1919; Office Of War Information (OWI), June 1942–September 1945; U.S. Information Agency (USIA),

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<sup>32</sup> L. M. Fraser, *Propaganda* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), vii.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 132.

August 1953–October 1, 1999, and the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI), October 30, 2001–February 26, 2002. Research is also made available from academic sources such as the Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA), 1937–1942. Finally, the contemporary era of conflict brings us detailed information through contracted or coalition entities including the Rendon Group, and the Coalition Information Center, which operated for a year ending October 2002, when it became the White House Office of Global Communication.

In addition, relevant empirics will provide contextual evidence to answer further questions and help reveal why propaganda may have been successful or less successful throughout the historical periods noted above. Where applicable, these include, but are not limited to:

- The level of mobilization of propaganda producing infrastructure
- The number of departments functioning during a certain period of time
- The number of servicemen and the number of casualties
- The deaths of famed journalists and informational leaders
- The degree of detail, in terms of clarity or abstraction, in directives controlling propaganda development.
- The number of ex-military politicians serving during time of conflict
- The presence and prevalence of technology in print media, art, posters, radio, film, cable television, cellular communication, digital media, and social networks

This further information enables a more holistic look at the theory, praxis, and effectiveness of propaganda's development and implementation as it pertains to the conduct of war.

This study is exclusively a comparative study per se. Instead, it follows along the lines of chronology, observing cause and effect throughout America's past wars, to discover significant factors related to the effectiveness of propaganda. Therefore, historical accuracy is paramount, and a careful consideration of propaganda, specifically from WWI to the present, will provide in-depth illustration of the approach at work. This thesis augments the sources cited in the literature review with *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-*

*1940*, by Stefan Goebel; *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, by Kenneth Osgood; and *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, by Harry G. Summers.

When considering propaganda in the twenty-first century, many involved in the most recent wars and the ongoing global war on terror—including the author—may question the effectiveness of propaganda as a product incongruous strategic narrative and abstract grand strategy. The grand strategy of a global war on terrorists, therefore, is a faulty means for providing a basis for building strategic narrative. Furthermore, it does little to mobilize the public beyond continuing to supply new, incoming soldiers to join the fight. This thesis augments the sources cited in the literature review with contemporary additions related to the topic, the books *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country*, by Andrew J. Bacevich; *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War*, by Douglas Porch; and *America's Victories: Why the U.S. Wins Wars and Will Win the War on Terror*, by Larry Schweikart.

Overall, the sources underlying this analysis are primarily books and scholarly journals addressing WWI, WWII, Cold War, and the global war on terror. In addition, the author has reviewed primary sources from the Hoover Institution Library to ascertain Office of War Information internal procedures for propaganda implementation. Finally, the research also considers a range of methods of propaganda dispersion across media, from artwork to posters, from radio to film, and television to the Internet. Beyond the literature review, cited sources related to multimedia propaganda include *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema*, Jo Fox; *Imagined Battles: Reflections on War in European Art*, by Peter Paret; *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, by Ron T. Robin; and *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial, Media-Entertainment Network*, by James Der Derian,

## **E. THESIS OVERVIEW**

Chapter II provides a critical analysis of propaganda. It explores what constitutes the difference between propaganda, strategic communication, information operations,

public relations, psychological operations, information dominance, information operations, and military deception. The analysis further concerns itself with the consumption of propaganda by domestic and foreign audiences and the uneasy pairing of propaganda and democracy. The chapter relies on examples of historical governmental practitioners and their general levels of success.

Chapter III examines the U.S. understanding of the threat of Germany during the First and Second World Wars. It focuses on the country's use of targeted propaganda and its level of success in supporting political policy (grand strategy), supporting military strategy (strategic narrative), or simply affecting mobilization. Chapter IV moves on to the Cold War. Considering the U.S. understanding of the communist threat and the use of propaganda in response, the author looks again at its level of success in supporting political policy (grand strategy), supporting military strategy (strategic narrative), or simply affecting mobilization. Chapter V examines the most recent U.S. threat, the Islamists. The analysis of U.S. propaganda from the past decade-plus of war and the nature of recent propaganda to determine its level of success in supporting political policy (grand strategy); supporting military strategy (strategic narrative); or simply affecting mobilization. In each case, the analysis structures itself on how the understanding of a threat shaped the use and success of propaganda.

In addition, all chapters contain analysis predicated on the desire to determine worthwhile observations regarding propaganda's capabilities and limitations in the past and possibilities for their successful implementation in the future. The goal is to determine what has worked in the past and what will likely work in the future, assuming that grand strategy and strategic narrative are quantified, solidified, disseminated, and acted on.

## II. DEFINING PROPAGANDA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH CLAUSEWITZ’S TRINITY

*So while we’re fighting the battle on the ground, we must also give due consideration to the battle in the mind.*

—Ellen K. Haddock,  
*On Words: Clausewitz, Bin Laden, and Public Support*

What is propaganda? And how does it differ from public relations, strategic communication, information operations, and psychological operations? As Carl Friedrich explains in his book *The New Belief in the Common Man*, propaganda really serves two functions: to inform and to educate.<sup>35</sup> These core functions allow propaganda to influence thinking and behavior through the presentation of information. Lindley Fraser explains, “Propaganda may be defined as the activity, or the art, of inducing others to behave in a way in which they would not behave in its absence.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, the areas of public relations, strategic communication, information operations, and psychological operations should be recognized as propaganda because they all share a common goal. They all seek to influence behavior. As Harold Lasswell states, “Propaganda is concerned with the management of opinions and attitudes by the direct manipulation of social suggestion rather than by altering other conditions in the environment or in the organism.”<sup>37</sup>

### A. DEFINITIONS

Propaganda surrounds citizens. Fraser writes that in politics, all sides practice political propaganda at all times in an effort to persuade the public. Economic propaganda is advertising, which seeks to persuade the public to buy its products; moral

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<sup>35</sup> Carl J. Friedrich, *The New Belief in the Common Man*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942), 85.

<sup>36</sup> Fraser, *Propaganda*, 1; The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) defines propaganda as “any form of adversary communication, especially of a biased or misleading nature, designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly.” Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 1-02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 2001, 213.

<sup>37</sup> Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1971), 9.

propaganda, as he explains, is a “halfway house” between political and religious propaganda, which aims to “induce standards of behaviour in conformity with both the religion of the propagandist and the political and social society in which he believes.” Therefore, propaganda in its many forms induces its audience to act a certain way.<sup>38</sup> He explains:

People must be controlled by manipulating their [instincts and emotions] rather than by changing their reasonings. This is a fact of which politicians have always made use when they have persuaded their constituents by appealing to their sentiments, rather than by employing [reasoning], which would never be listened to or at least never prove effective for moving the crowds.<sup>39</sup>

Harold Lasswell builds on the basic functions and elements of propaganda to study the use of propaganda in wartime. He identifies its four strategic aims:

- To mobilize hatred against the enemy.
- To preserve the friendship of allies.
- To preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the co-operation of neutrals.
- To demoralize the enemy.<sup>40</sup>

His very definition relates to the Clausewitzian trinity—hatred, chance, and policy—by emphasizing a negative view of the enemy and the importance of political strategy in securing allies. These are what drive the goals of propaganda in total war, but they should also be the goals of propaganda in limited war.

Propaganda, though, dates back to before the periods of war being examined in this thesis and before the history of the U.S. Its origins and initial uses are religious. The word “propaganda” itself emerged during the Counter-Reformation, explains Mark Miller. It comes from the seventeenth-century Latin *propagando*, meaning to propagate, to spread the faith of the Roman Catholic Church and convince the masses to convert to

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<sup>38</sup> Fraser, *Propaganda*, 1–2.

<sup>39</sup> Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2007), 219.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth Alan Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 2006), 26; Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, 195.

Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Over the years, propaganda developed a more negative connotation. As a result of its association with “lies” (the wartime propaganda especially of illiberal regimes), the term needed to be replaced and sanitized, if not upgraded.<sup>42</sup>

The first effort at rebranding propaganda settled on “public relations.” Public relations is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as the state of “the relationship between an organization or an important person and the general public; the occupation of establishing or maintaining a good relationship between an organization or an important person and the general public.”<sup>43</sup> The practical operation of public relation involves the methodology for maintaining that “good relationship.” On the one hand, the public and policymakers alike recognized the power of mass persuasion and saw the usefulness of such a capability, whether in convincing the public to buy products, support political candidates, policies, or support total war, as readers will see throughout this research. On the other hand, the propaganda aspect of these efforts is essentially camouflaged in the kinder, gentler nomenclature. Public relations is therefore a non-pejorative framing of the manipulation of information to induce a desired behavior; it is propaganda. Indeed, Edward Bernays, WWI propagandist practitioner and “father of modern public relations,” agrees, propaganda is most closely connected to public relations.

Next came strategic communications. The terminology is decidedly defense-oriented and was originally meant to “streamline the military's messaging but instead led to bureaucratic bloat and confusion,” as one newspaper reported.<sup>44</sup> Most closely related to public relations as Bernays saw it and propaganda as Fraser defines it, “strategic communications” was defined by the Department of Defense in 2009 as:

focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and

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<sup>41</sup> Edward L. Bernays and Mark Crispin Miller, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2005), 10.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>43</sup> “Public Relations, N.,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, January 28, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/154069>.

<sup>44</sup> USA Today, “Pentagon Drops ‘Strategic Communication,’” accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/03/pentagon-trims-strategic-communication/1743485/>.



objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.<sup>45</sup>

This definition is somewhat ambiguous in its description of the nature of the DOD's audience. Specifically, the definition does not make a clear delineation between domestic and foreign audiences, nor does it establish whether strategic communications are directed at one or both audiences. The article further explains, "The military has struggled for the past decade with its strategic communication. In 2001, an advisory board to the Pentagon was advised that it needed to do more to shape public opinion."<sup>46</sup>

While civilian news sources are not necessarily always academically sound, the number of stories they have reported related to this topic does indicate the apparently universal acceptance of strategic communication as a poor definition. In another story, the same publication quotes the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, weighing in on the term: "I really do not like the term at all. It confuses people," Mullen said. "It means all things to all people. It's way overused and way overrated. I literally try never to use the term."<sup>47</sup> In the end, the DOD did away with the term "strategic communication."<sup>48</sup> Admiral Mullen voiced this view in 2012, but he realized the flawed nature of strategic communication as a definition as early as 2009. Research indicates this terminology can and does drive national security decision-making.<sup>49</sup> Rosa Brooks, a former Bush administration political appointee working out of the Department of Defense policy office, explains that the DOD memo admonishing the term "strategic communications," is in effect another squabble between those who disagree that it is a function of strategy versus communications.<sup>50</sup> That is to say, besides the term itself being

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<sup>45</sup> Staff, "Joint Pub 1-02," 250.

<sup>46</sup> *USA Today*, "Pentagon Drops 'Strategic Communication.'"

<sup>47</sup> *USA Today*, "Pentagon Overseas Propaganda Plan Stirs Controversy," accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/11/19/pentagon-overseas-communications-strategy-stirs-controversy/1715741/>.

<sup>48</sup> *USA Today*, "Pentagon Drops 'Strategic Communication.'"

<sup>49</sup> Mike Mullen, "Strategic Communications: Getting Back to Basics," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 55 (2009): 2.

<sup>50</sup> Rosa Brooks, "Confessions of a Strategic Communicator," *Foreign Policy*, December 6, 2012, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/12/06/confessions\\_of\\_a\\_strategic\\_communicator](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/12/06/confessions_of_a_strategic_communicator).

confusing—meaning all things to all people—there is also confusion as to its role as either the simple generator of press statements, or a systematic synchronizer of information across all levels of war while conforming to a strategic narrative.

Information operations (IO) has a particularly military, or tactical, context. In this case, it is defined as, “The integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.”<sup>51</sup> IO is rightly thought of as akin to psychological operations (PSY OPS) or since 2010, Military Information Support Operations (MISO), necessarily directed toward the enemy:

Military Information Support Operations are planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator’s objectives.<sup>52</sup>

IO, PSYOPS, and MISO are all essentially propaganda. Like the other forms of propaganda discussed, each seeks to influence behavior. They are all efforts necessarily directed at the adversary.

The difference between IO, PSYOPS, or MISO and PR or strategic communications is in the intended audience and in the amount of untruth they contain. In fact, the amount of truth contained in communication correlates with the audience. The defense establishment recognizes the general responsibility of accountability and transparency that they owe a given audience. IO operators speak of "white propaganda" when they mean truthful accounts that are clearly targeted to a domestic audience. "Black propaganda" refers to truth-optional representations destined for foreign audiences. "Grey" propaganda falls in between the extremes as far as truth contained within, but almost always gets directed to external audiences.

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<sup>51</sup> Staff, “Joint Pub 1-02,” 127.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

In all forms of propaganda, regardless of audience, truth matters. Fraser said, “Many people believe that as a matter of experience, truthfulness is the best form of propaganda and that systemic lying will defeat the propagandist’s ends.”<sup>53</sup> Incredulous material or communication met with skepticism no longer has the desired effect of propaganda. In other words, the audience has to believe in the message of propaganda for it to have an impact. Kenneth Osgood explains, “Propagandists on many occasions used lies, misrepresentations, or deceptions, but propaganda that is based on fact and that rings true to the intended audience is more likely to be persuasive than bald-faced lies.”<sup>54</sup>

## **B. THE ADVENT OF PROPAGANDA (CA. 1914–1920)**

An expert in public affairs and America’s use of propaganda, Osgood recognizes how the American people have responded to these mass campaigns throughout the country’s history. He notes that around the time of WWI, “Urbanization and industrialization had eroded traditional bonds of locality and kinship, ... producing a vast workforce of atomized and isolated individuals comprising an ignorant, irrational public that was acquiring unprecedented power to shape the world around them.”<sup>55</sup> Walter Lippmann, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist of the era, made similar observations about the general population at that time. He “anguished over the power of ‘the mass of absolutely illiterate, of feeble-minded, grossly neurotic, undernourished and frustrated individuals.’”<sup>56</sup> In order to control this mass, “Elite experts, who used new instruments of mass communications and social science research, could tame what these intellectuals openly derided as the ‘herd.’”<sup>57</sup> And so propaganda on a level capable of mass persuasion was born.

True or not, many recognized the scientific approach being taken after the First World War, to employ psychologically manipulative propaganda and increase its

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<sup>53</sup> Fraser, *Propaganda*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

pervasive spread within the American democracy.<sup>58</sup> Philosopher John Dewey explained that propaganda could represent an especially difficult social problem.<sup>59</sup> The problem was that wartime practitioners “would not forget, ‘the possibilities of guidance of the news upon which the formation of public opinion depends.’”<sup>60</sup> The change had started some years earlier; Sproule writes, “The optimism about public opinion made it difficult to recognize media-oriented manipulation, the shift in the academic curriculum from argumentative oratory to informative composition had a similar effect by conveying an impression that public communication chiefly was a technical transfer of information.”<sup>61</sup> As early as the mid-nineteenth century, academia had begun a shift from oratory, rhetoric, and recitation to technical, written composition, no doubt a result of the industrial revolution.<sup>62</sup>

Hagen Schulze explains that in Europe, this transformation began in the prior era, when “the scientific spirit of enquiry was wedded to industrial enterprise ... the organization of work changed in ways that entailed major social adjustments.”<sup>63</sup> During the period from the French Revolution to the First World War, “the idea of the nation underwent a fundamental change—not so much as far as its essential meaning was concerned, but more as regards its political significance and function.”<sup>64</sup> The age of mass persuasion had begun. Schulze explains, “Soon a critical public emerged, eager for discussion and imposing on governments and cabinets specific aims and policies which had been formulated more rapidly and effectively than ever before with the help of the mass media.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>59</sup> Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 26, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Hagen Schulze and William E. Yuill, *States, Nations, and Nationalism: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 142.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 148.

### C. THE STATECRAFT DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA SUPPORTS IN WAR

Propaganda operations in war are a promotional activity.<sup>66</sup> They are, as Lasswell writes, “national prescription,” part of the application function of policy.<sup>67</sup> “War aims are the political purposes that govern the strategy of warfare and that designate the objectives whose achievement designate victory,” he said.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, the purpose of policy makers in this context is to ensure propaganda accurately reflects the goals of their policy.<sup>69</sup> In addition, these policy goals aim to determine the nature of the relationship between propagandists and policymakers and their involvement in policy making.<sup>70</sup> Likewise the role of the propagandist is to ensure policy goals are developed in a way that leverages propaganda to the fullest extent.<sup>71</sup>

Without a policy, grand strategy, military strategy, and strategic narrative, widely accepted as the gospel truth, the greatest propagandist practitioners struggle to provide an effective message that supports domestic mobilization, morale, and foreign support in defeating threats. Clausewitz provides a solid theoretical framework for understanding the problem of warfare as a whole, and as such it is the basis for considering propaganda’s role in the overall venture.

Clausewitz’s paradoxical trinity demands a balancing or equilibrium of its three sides. No one side can be more or less balanced. Propaganda can and does affect all three sides of this triangle. Clausewitz explains:

Essentially war is fighting, for fighting is the only effective principle in the manifold activities generally designated as war. Fighting, in turn, is a trial of moral and physical forces through the medium of the latter. Naturally moral strength must not be excluded, for psychological forces exert a decisive influence on the elements involved in war.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, xix.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 127.

Propaganda exerts influence on these moral, psychological forces. Domestically it influences policy, solidifies or weakens public resolve, and enrobes the military in the moral justness of its duty.

Randal Marlin contends, “Clausewitz wished to ensure that war had a rational purpose and that waging it—and experiencing its horrors—was necessary only to achieve some important objective.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, subordinating the military to political elites would ensure its use of violence only to reach humanitarian ends.<sup>74</sup> Specifically, Clausewitz understood the role of passion in warfare and of propaganda’s use in directing it.<sup>75</sup> That is to say, he understood that “[t]he stronger the enemy’s feelings, the costlier the war is likely to be. Conversely, he believed, if one’s own people don’t feel strongly about the cause, success will be less likely.”<sup>76</sup> The sense of visceral hatred that makes up one side of the Clausewitzian triangle relates closely to the strong feelings engendered by propaganda efforts. In his acclaimed work *On War*, the Prussian general writes, “Policy [*and arguably propaganda*] then, will permeate all military operations, and, in so far as their violent nature will admit, it will have a continuous influence on them.”<sup>77</sup>

Even though Clausewitz is primarily associated with conventional, state directed, modern warfare, some modern-day military experts find rereading his theoretical insights from the perspective of the twenty-first century and the current landscape of asymmetrical warfare may be of value.<sup>78</sup> Mika Kerttunen writes, “One should not understand the Trinity as a rigid triangle, but rather a framework that is structured yet flexible, where the three elements interact with each other.”<sup>79</sup> He goes on to apply Clausewitz, saying, “Understanding and managing postmodern wars and conflicts

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<sup>73</sup> Randal Marlin, *Propaganda and the Ethics of Persuasion* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002), 59.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, 87. Emphasis added.

<sup>78</sup> Mika Kerttunen, “Organic Clausewitz,” January 28, 2014, 4, <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/international/BalticDefenseCollege/Organic-Clausewitz.pdf>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 6.

requires that we—in a Clausewitzian manner—acknowledge both the social and political nature and the holistic ontology of war.”<sup>80</sup> This suggests a renewed focus on the people. In the twenty-first century, a proper balance of the trinity centers on the citizens. That is not to say that policy and the military should seek to manipulate the people. Instead, they can take cues from the success of the early days of propaganda. During the advent of propaganda, its practitioners began by convincing Americans what was right. This mechanism and approach was leveraged in total war, and this mechanism is fundamentally stronger than the twenty-first century approach to mass persuasion. Which is to say that propaganda today does try to convince people what is right, but not with the same fervor experienced in total war.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 10.

### III. TOTAL WAR & THE INTERWAR YEARS, 1914-1945

*We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is the logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society.*

—Edward Bernays  
*Propaganda*

This era saw total war, the advent of propaganda, the realization of propaganda's threat to democracy, and propaganda's reemergence as a powerful tool for leveraging mass persuasion and mobilization against an insidious threat to national security. If there was ever a time in America's history when it used propaganda with great effect—total mobilization and subsequent victory—this is it. From the creation of the Committee on Public Information (CPI) in 1917, to the Institute for Propaganda Analysis in 1937, to the Office of War Information in 1942, these agencies were devoted to either understanding propaganda in fundamental terms or leveraging propaganda in an effort to further inform and influence public opinion in support of government policy. Arguably, the greatest propagandists existed and plied their trade in this era. Leading propagandists Edward Bernays, Will Irwin, and George Creel were incredibly successful in carrying out their vision for why and how propaganda should be used in times of total war. They set the benchmark. Most importantly, they recognized that truthfulness of information was key to successful domestic propagandist endeavors and the following support for governmental policy.

#### A. WORLD WAR I

The CPI was established through Executive Order 2594 on April 13, 1917, just seven days after the U.S. declaration of war. It was charged with influencing U.S. public opinion. Creel was chosen by President Woodrow Wilson to head the agency. Today, Creel would be considered an investigative journalist, or even a reform-minded journalist, but in the early twentieth century, he was called a muckraker. A product of the times, Creel and his fellow muckrakers were driven to operate as truthful auditors of



industry, a kind of watchdog. It is important to note that Creel was very much a progressive of the era, and very supportive of President Wilson. This support likely played a role in his being tapped for the chairmanship. On the other hand, Creel's job—mobilizing and motivating a skeptical and isolationist home front—was no cushy political sinecure.

Indeed, Wilson's own stance during his 1916 re-election campaign had been premised on non-intervention in the war. Joseph Bassani states, "It is clear that America's entry into World War One represented a detour, rather than a departure, from America's grand strategy of neutrality, unilateralism, preemption and hegemony over the Western Hemisphere."<sup>81</sup> Despite this viewpoint—or perhaps because of it—supporters of U.S. involvement in the Great War cast the conflict in particular terms. "'This war,' declared the American Peace Society, 'is not a war of territory, of trade routes or of commercial concerns, but of eternal principles.' 'There can be no end of war until after the collapse of the existing German imperial government.'"<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, little polling data from this era in American history exists indicate levels domestic support for war. Therefore, statements like those made by the American Peace Society provide a quasi-reliable gauge of public opinion shortly after America's inclusion in the Great War. These examples indicate propaganda's power through rapidly changing foreign policy.

The shift owed as much to propaganda as to German unrestricted submarine warfare. Britain managed to cut German communication lines into the U.S. and capture German codes, cornering the propaganda battlefield for the United States.<sup>83</sup> Wilson declared war under the premise that this was a war between right versus wrong.<sup>84</sup> Wilson presented a strategic narrative that embodied policy in a form that was sold to the public in further support of ongoing military operations. He told the American people, "We have

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<sup>81</sup> Joseph A. Bassani Jr, "Saving the World for Democracy. An Historical Analysis of America's Grand Strategy in the 21st Century" (DTIC Document, 2005), 35, <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA436658>.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978), 81.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 177, 182; Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 10.

no quarrel with the German people. We have no feeling toward them but one of sympathy and friendship.”<sup>85</sup> Of course, the desired strategic effect was to divide the German people from their leaders, but this narrative also served another purpose. Americans were informed that the German people were not the enemy; it was the German regime that was the enemy. It was a militaristic German governmental ideology capable of endangering democratic principles that must be defeated.<sup>86</sup>

This strategic narrative supported the work of the CPI because it gave a clear embodiment of the enemy, the stakes, and the underlying premise for further propaganda efforts. They were given a clear narrative to present. In the end, that sense of direction and clarity helped bring about their success. Secretary of War Newton D. Baker wrote, “I am obliged to believe that the sword is mightier than the pen. But this war wasn’t to be won by the sword alone. It was won by the pen as well as the sword, and I am not speaking now of a purely military victory, because this victory is simply a point in time.”<sup>87</sup>

Propaganda employed during a time of war can take on various types of content and messaging. Lasswell designates sets of categories for such propaganda. One category features content related to the audience’s sense of values, including war aims, war guilt, and Satanism; another relates to their expectations, including the illusion of victory.<sup>88</sup> In the case of WWI, U.S. propaganda adopted the form of war guilt. This guilt was specifically an indictment aimed at the nation of Germany, rather than on the German people as a whole.<sup>89</sup> The illusion of victory was framed in terms of the defeat and near subjugation of Germany following an unequivocal Entente victory.<sup>90</sup> In addition, Entente propaganda along Satanism lines, directed its ire at Germany with the phrase, “Hang the Kaiser.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 184.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), xiv.

<sup>88</sup> Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I*, xxi.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., xxii.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

The U.S. initially refrained from such rhetoric against the Kaiser, which illustrates the difference between Entente and U.S. war aims.<sup>92</sup> Parsing of the differences between U.S. and Entente war aims is not the goal here; the goal is to understand that propaganda does, inherently support policy. As such, the propagandist requires guidance from policymakers to recognize the appropriate and necessary objects of propaganda's focus and attachment of guilt.<sup>93</sup> War aims, as a function of policy, are important to the propagandist. Their delineation helps to define propaganda production and further manage policy questions via inference, which could reduce the need for close guidance at lower levels.<sup>94</sup> As Lasswell explains, war aims create a "matrix of political and diplomatic objectives, which interweave strategies of propaganda with all strategies—military, economic, and others—pursued by a country at war."<sup>95</sup>

The CPI carried out the praxis of WWI propaganda most skillfully.<sup>96</sup> At full strength, the agency was nearly 150,000 strong, split into two main sections—domestic and foreign. Domestically, the CPI consisted of various divisions based on methods of propaganda dispersal: film, pictorial publicity, and speaking, which included the Four Minute Men, and the news division that published the "Official Bulletin"<sup>97</sup> With 75,000 speakers in 5,200 communities, the Four Minute Men completed an estimated 755,190 speeches.<sup>98</sup> They delivered remarks prior to movie screenings and were essentially the predecessors to the WWII newsreels viewed by movie-going audiences. The foreign division contained the Foreign Press Bureau, Wireless and Cable Services, and Foreign

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., xxiv.

<sup>96</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "Executive Order 2594 Creating Committee on Public Information, April 13, 1917," *The American Presidency Project*, February 10, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=75409>; Stephen Vaughn, *Holding Fast the Inner Lines: Democracy, Nationalism, and the Committee on Public Information* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 14.

<sup>97</sup> Robert A. Emery, "The Official Bulletin, 1917-1919: A Proto-Federal Register," *Law Library Journal* 102 (2010): 442.

<sup>98</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 7.

Film Service, which operated in over thirty countries. The foreign section further subdivided into twenty divisions.<sup>99</sup>

Domestically, the CPI existed for just 10 months.<sup>100</sup> Domestic war exhibits and inter-allied war expositions in nineteen cities totaled receipts of \$1,432,261.36—equivalent to \$2.9 billion today. Artists produced 1,438 drawings. The division of Women’s War Work addressed information, which organized and directed women toward supporting the war effort.<sup>101</sup> Still another division focused on rural, labor, religious, and periodical presses.<sup>102</sup> Another division was tasked with preparing still photographs for distribution to the press numbering over 200,000 images. In addition, that division developed a permit system, which allowed civilian cameramen access to military activities.<sup>103</sup>

More specific examples of CPI propaganda involved immigrant-targeted patriotism and anti-German messages. As Nancy Ford explains, the goal of immigrant propaganda was for “national and local nativists ... to vanquish the immigrants’ Old World traditions,” so that foreign-born Americans might fall “victim to public demands for cultural conformity.”<sup>104</sup> Posters in the immigrant neighborhoods played up this message: “‘Are you 100% American?’ ‘Prove it! Buy U.S. Government Bonds.’ Another Read: ‘Remember Your First Thrill of American Liberty—YOUR DUTY—Buy United States Government Bonds.’”<sup>105</sup> These efforts rallied a growing portion of the American population with propaganda that was both patriotic and related to overall strategic messaging. Creel explains the film, *The Immigrant*, was “a direct appeal to the

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<sup>99</sup> Nicholas John Cull, David Holbrook Culbert, and David Welch, *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion: A Historical Encyclopedia, 1500 to the Present* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 99; Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 183; Robert Jackall and Janice M Hirota, *Image Makers: Advertising, Public Relations, and the Ethos of Advocacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>100</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 8.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Nancy Gentile Ford, *The Great War and America: Civil-Military Relations during World War I* (Westport, CT.: Praeger Security International, 2008), 57.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

immigrant, not only to become an American Citizen but to feel his responsibility as a citizen.”<sup>106</sup> Likewise, the film *Columbia*, “portrayed historical events in America and the growth of the democratic spirit of America that is now fighting the militaristic spirit of Germany.”<sup>107</sup> Anti-German propaganda produced by the CPI was geared toward all and leveraged multiple avenues of influence. The Four-Minute men speeches “emphasized the dangerous ‘menace of Kaiserism.’”<sup>108</sup> CPI pamphlets for elementary school children described the horrors the Germans inflicted on the French and Belgium people.<sup>109</sup> On Liberty Loan Campaign posters, German “Huns” were depicted “as evil monsters who preyed on innocent women and children.”<sup>110</sup> And finally, the film *German Spies* was “to expose the methods German propagandists in this country, to teach the public to refrain from talking carelessly, and to watch for those who are circulating rumors and false news.”<sup>111</sup>

This propaganda endeavor, in support of the First World War, helped leverage America’s population of 103 million in 1917, with .04 percent taking up arms. According to the Department of Defense, 4.7 million Americans served in uniform<sup>112</sup> Still, the government’s promotion of the war effort was not enough on its own, some say. Howard Zinn contends, “Despite the rousing words of Wilson about a war ‘to end all wars’ and ‘to make the world safe for democracy,’ Americans did not rush to enlist. A million men were needed, but in the first six weeks after the declaration of war only 73,000 volunteered. Congress voted overwhelmingly for a draft.”<sup>113</sup> In fact, the Selective Service

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<sup>106</sup> United States and Committee on Public Information, *The Activities of the Committee on Public Information...* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 15.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ford, *The Great War and America*, 58.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> United States and Committee on Public Information, *The Activities of the Committee on Public Information...*, 15.

<sup>112</sup> US Census Bureau, “Population,” February 11, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/popclockest.txt>; US Department of Defense, “Principal Wars in Which the United States Participated,” *Defense Casualty Analysis System*, accessed April 8, 2014, [https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report\\_principal\\_wars.xhtml](https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/report_principal_wars.xhtml).

<sup>113</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-2001* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2003), 364.

Act of 1917 did account for much of the initial U.S. mobilization, but the effect of propaganda for the remaining eight and a half months of war is born out by the final numbers.

## **B. THE INTERWAR YEARS: A BACKLASH ON PROPAGANDA**

The irony of World War I, as far as propaganda goes, was that muckrakers not only failed to alert Americans to propaganda, but they created in the CPI a monster, with which they would eventually have to do battle.<sup>114</sup> That point came in the interwar years. Michael Sproule explains, “Because leaders now viewed public opinion as decisive ... ‘the basic problem of democracy was to protect news—the source of public opinion—from the taint of propaganda.’”<sup>115</sup> Essentially power brokers realized that propaganda had been and would continue to be a powerful weapon in shaping public opinion and managing consent.

Amid this concern, a desire for anti-propaganda education arose as part of the age of disillusionment and isolationism.<sup>116</sup> The Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA) a short-lived institution that operated from 1937 to 1942 “presented the progressive movement with a widely recognized institutional platform for a democratic, anti-propaganda critique.”<sup>117</sup> The IPA existed during peacetime, but it is believed to have had an important role in shaping the way Americans saw propaganda once the United States joined the war. Coupled with the explosion in social sciences during the interwar period, the IPA inadvertently contributed to the singularly effective American propaganda during World War II.

The IPA’s initial board of directors brought together progressive educators and activists: F. Ernest Johnson, Robert S. Lynd, James E. Mendenhall, Clyde R. Miller, and Robert K. Speer.<sup>118</sup> Lynd was most immediately concerned with charting the classical

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<sup>114</sup> Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 37.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

progressive view of the conflict between American democracy and special interests to leverage all forms of public intercourse.<sup>119</sup> Lynd believed “the greatest problem of democracy was the gap between how free public choice was supposed to work and how, in the context of private interests, democracy actually did operate.”<sup>120</sup> The IPA sought to understand the broader implications of propaganda and democracy, all the while desiring to remain detached from an inherent propagandization of their own findings. Miller further characterized propaganda as the work in which special interest groups engage.<sup>121</sup> His solution was for the IPA to act “to overcome the ‘chief danger of propaganda,’ which he believed was in its tendency to stimulate unreflective and emotional responses to problems.”<sup>122</sup> The goal was to understand the relationship between propaganda and democracy—its inner working—while maintaining an academic infallibility in their results. Their desire was to provide and disseminate impartial scientific finding, which could not be labeled “propaganda.” Together, they “became a focal center in the effort to sort out the relationship of free speech and social survival, of democracy and propaganda.”<sup>123</sup>

However, as World War II neared, the IPA worried less about anti-democratic rightwing elites leveraging media channels and focused more on foreign propagandists.<sup>124</sup> As a consequence, the IPA came to be seen as a “too-skeptical bystander,” treating English and German propaganda as equally dangerous—all foreign propaganda posed a threat, according to the IPA.<sup>125</sup> Prominent IPA members later tried to distinguish Allied propaganda as having some greater reliability or accuracy than its Axis counterpart, as “in a democracy, lies can be more readily exposed.”<sup>126</sup> Still, critics and observers came to dismiss the IPA as fundamentally flawed in its inability to differentiate

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 152–53.

between either forms moral credibility.<sup>127</sup> Critics contended that the IPA's broad view of propaganda meant that everyone who took a position on participation in WWII could be condemned as a propagandist.<sup>128</sup> In their desire to remain impartial, the IPA failed to recognize that publicizing a stance, any stance, does in reality constitute a form of propaganda. This hyper-sensitivity toward opinionated communication would eventually lead to the undoing of propaganda as a credible endeavor.

The IPA ultimately could not surmount the external critique of its inability to produce unassailable scientific analysis of propaganda. In the end, its funding sources dried up.<sup>129</sup> The final stance of IPA founder Kirtly Mather was that, "if democracy is not to perish from the earth, the average citizen must learn how to distinguish the plausible but false from the astonishing but true."<sup>130</sup> That was his dream. At that time, "many people wanted to take sides and take action to preserve democracies around the world."<sup>131</sup> The era of the IPA is important not only because it was devoted to understanding how propaganda functioned, but also it drove others to consider propaganda's use. This increased public concern and scholarship, even when focused on the negative side of propaganda, led a large number of academics, journalists, and other assorted practitioners to discover the inner workings of propaganda's theory and praxis. Arguably more deep thinkers than at any other time in American history focused specifically on propaganda. All were set to potentially influence World War II.

### C. WORLD WAR II

*We are fighting today for security, for progress and for peace, not only for ourselves, but for all men, not only for one generation but for all generations. We are fighting to cleanse the world of ancient evils, ancient ills.*

—President Franklin Delano Roosevelt,  
State of the Union Address, 1942

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 169.



The Second World War presented the United States with a critical problem. Not one, but three and more sovereign nations sought to upturn the balance of world power.<sup>132</sup> American foreign policy initially remained isolationist, resembling the country's positioning before World War I. Yet, after the attack on Pearl Harbor, "Public opinion, in turn, shifted abruptly. Americans, regardless of their personal interests or political beliefs, shed their isolationist postures and quickly rallied behind the cause of war, or so the story goes."<sup>133</sup> All the rose-colored nostalgia of the present age aside, the so-called Greatest Generation, in fact, required much convincing about the merits of the world war.

Even when shifts in public opinion seem situational, propaganda still plays a significant role. Political scientist Adam Berinsky contends, "The public might be briefly influenced by dramatic events, such as Pearl Harbor and 9/11, but—as in the domestic arena—public opinion is primarily structured by the ebb and flow of partisan and group-based political conflict. These factors shape support for policies of war just as they shape policies of peace."<sup>134</sup> He further supports his argument with polling data that clearly shows an overwhelming majority of Americans prior to 1941 opposed U.S. support to the Allies.<sup>135</sup> As expected, a December 1941 poll taken after Pearl Harbor showed 87 percent opposed "any peace plan that preserved the European status quo."<sup>136</sup> The reason, according to Berinsky, was "the realization of a policy that had been in the works for some time."<sup>137</sup> An organized propaganda agency soon followed. It is important to note that even in the absence of organized propaganda, in the sense that it is synchronized and supports policy, the decision to enter into war and the public reaction supporting it had

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<sup>132</sup> Larry Schweikart, *A Patriot's History of the United States: From Columbus's Great Discovery to the War on Terror* (New York: Sentinel, 2004), 589.

<sup>133</sup> Adam J Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 46.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

been “the realization of long-term developments in political and military strategies on the part of partisan political actors.” Propaganda had been at play.

Several governmental propaganda agencies formed in the years leading up to America’s involvement in World War II. In 1939, Roosevelt’s desire to establish an information bureau began with the Office of Government Reports (OGR), essentially “a press clipping service for all Washington agencies.”<sup>138</sup> In 1941, the Division of Information in the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) was created to coordinate all information from OEM agencies.<sup>139</sup> Also created in 1941, the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) “was to handle civilian protection, morale, and information.”<sup>140</sup> Prior to Pearl Harbor, in fall of 1941, the president expanded the division of OCD charged with morale into the Office of Facts and Figures (OFF), which was to “provide public samplings and give Americans an accurate and coherent account of government policy.”<sup>141</sup> As these separate government agencies developed, they all struggled with being branded as propagandists. Still, “Congressmen and newspapermen overcame their natural suspicion of an official information agency and urged the creation of an organization to coordinate and release government information.”<sup>142</sup> President Roosevelt was soon to act.

In 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in seventy lines what Wilson had done in four, namely establishing a propaganda operation.<sup>143</sup> The reason for pointing out this fact is that, while there can be no scientific correlation between the length of the executive order and the relative effectiveness of the ensuing propaganda operation, there may be a reason that the shorter message delivered more impact. The longer the document and the more abstract it becomes, the more likely it will create confusion among the audience. By extension, the more confusion among Americans, the less

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<sup>138</sup> Sydney Weinberg, “What to Tell America: The Writers’ Quarrel in the Office of War Information,” *The Journal of American History* 55, no. 1 (June 1968): 74, doi:10.2307/1894252.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>143</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “Executive Order 2594”; Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “Executive Order 9182 Establishing the Office of War Information. June 13, 1942,” *The American Presidency Project*, February 14, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16273>.

effective the operation will be. Still, the CPI was incredibly effective during WWI, and the OWI successful in WWII. In comparison, contemporary scholars may ask how long such an executive order might be today to launch a program as effective as its historic predecessors. In this regard, simplicity may be key. The Office of War Information (OWI) was established through Executive Order 9182 on June 13, 1942, six months after the U.S. declaration of war; former CBS radio commentator Elmer Davis was chosen to head the agency.<sup>144</sup> “The OWI had two main divisions: the Domestic Office, which, due to funding cuts, was virtually abolished a year after its creation; and the Overseas Branch, which placed itself under the control of Dwight Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF).”<sup>145</sup> The 1945 U.S. Government Manual reads:

The Domestic Operations Branch is responsible for coordinating and disseminating war information within the continental limits of the United States. It develops war information policies, coordinates the war information programs of Government agencies, and through the use of established communications facilities seeks to assure an accurate flow of war information to the public.<sup>146</sup>

This mission was more easily described than executed. Davis and other leaders at the OWI, were almost immediately at odds in determining what information policy should be.<sup>147</sup> A battle of sorts was waged within the OWI Domestic Branch between liberal Assistant Director Archibald MacLeish and his fellow assistant director, advertising executive Gardiner Cowles. MacLeish advocated not only fighting fascism, but also expressing a social agenda for the postwar era.<sup>148</sup> Fighting fascism knew no party line, but social agenda proselytizing could and would alienate conservative members of Congress. With this approach, MacLeish and his supporters stepped over an

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<sup>144</sup> David Holbrook Culbert et al., *A Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Information Control and Propaganda: Records of the Office of War Information* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986), v.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.; Office of Government Inquiries and Office of War Information, “United States Government Manual,” *United States Government Manual*, 1945, 88.

<sup>146</sup> Office of Government Inquiries and Office of War Information, “United States Government Manual,” 90.

<sup>147</sup> Allan Michael Winkler, *Politics and Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942–1945*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1974), 48.

<sup>148</sup> Daniel Belgrad, *The Culture of Spontaneity: Improvisation and the Arts in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 22.

invisible political line; ultimately, this more muscular activism cost OWI director Davis not only positions within his bureau, but also funding from Congress.<sup>149</sup> Their scenario reveals an important lesson. Partisan politics and successful propaganda campaigns directed domestically during total war do not mix.

Sydney Weinberg explains, “Davis knew that propaganda and news had to be divorced, he was forced to rely heavily on advertising and radio executives to run the governments promotional campaigns to stimulate bond sales, waste-paper collection, and other activities.”<sup>150</sup> Price Gilbert, an advertising executive familiar with poster advertising recognized the level of simplicity needed in poster design. He said, it “must be simple and direct because “high sounding words would lose the prospective audience.”<sup>151</sup>

This point is where the liberal and capitalist propaganda cohorts diverge in methodology. The progressive liberals of the early twentieth century, and those developed over the next thirty years, saw themselves as highly educated and altruistic persons, individuals in search of fairness for all. In stark contrast were the capitalist ad-men of Madison Avenue, who seek only profit. The conflict over propaganda methodology was based on ideology. The ad-men knew how to sell the product and produce results. Conflict was bound to occur. As graphics division chief, Francis Brennan told Davis about the valuable nature of using advertising techniques to reach an audience, saying, “Both you and Mr. Cowles have said that some advertising techniques are valuable. If by that you mean the fairly simple job of getting messages printed, distributed, and read, I agree. But if you mean psychological approaches, content, and ideas, I most firmly do not agree.”<sup>152</sup> Ultimately, numerous liberal writers left the OWI. Davis reported to the president following their departure:

Such a man is very apt to insist that he must proclaim the truth as he sees it; if you tell him that so long as he works for the Government he must

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>150</sup> Weinberg, “What to Tell America,” 81.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 86.

proclaim the truth as the President... [sees] it, he may feel that this is an intolerable limitation on his freedom of thought and speech. In that case, he must go. . . . In an organization that is going to get any work done you cannot do much with people who are convinced that they are the sole authorized custodians of Truth.<sup>153</sup>

As Weinberg states, a better way to address the problem would have been to explain from the beginning that autonomy would not be possible for the writers as it had in the past.<sup>154</sup> Such “independence of action was virtually incompatible with the function of a major government agency.”<sup>155</sup>

In promoting propaganda, the government was charged with the difficult task of upholding freedom of the press; maintaining the intellectual high ground and refraining from outright black (dishonest) propaganda use; and actively informing the public of the forthcoming war without exposing secret military specifics. In this effort, a governmental report explains, “News to be released must be true, but also it must not give aid and comfort to the enemy. He [Roosevelt] added that the decision to release or not to release war news was up to the heads of the War and Navy Departments.”<sup>156</sup> At first, the Secretaries for War, the Navy, and State were reluctant to support OWI’s efforts.<sup>157</sup> Eventually, the Army began to support Davis, and by mid-1942, so did the Navy, though the information was often slow in coming.<sup>158</sup> Finally on September 1, 1943, at Davis’ urging, President Roosevelt drafted letters to the Navy and War departments, directing the release of information “whenever and however the OWI requested.”<sup>159</sup> At the same time the Department of State was directed “to secure clearance and approval for all news releases” before issuance.<sup>160</sup> Davis wanted only “to persuade the agencies that they have

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> United States and Bureau of the Budget, *The United States at War: Development and Administration of the War Program by the Federal Government* (Washington, DC: G.P.O., 1946), 203.

<sup>157</sup> Winkler, *Politics and Propaganda*, 53–54.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 57, 60.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

got to do something which we can make intelligible.”<sup>161</sup> Again Davis’ goal was to tell the truth and explain to the American people government policy in a way the majority could understand. Yet Davis also recognized that the OWI was not officially tasked with maintaining national morale.<sup>162</sup>

So how did Davis do it? As Brewer explains, “To Hollywood, the OWI sent the *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*, asking it to consider, ‘Will this picture help win the war?’”<sup>163</sup> Specific examples of American propaganda praxis in total war illustrate the understanding that, “Millions must fight, produce, ration, conserve, and buy bonds.”<sup>164</sup> Interventionist Hollywood producers released films like, *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* (1939), *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), and *Sergeant York* (1941), which portrayed a simple country boy’s struggle with conscience and the biblical commandment “thou shalt not kill.”<sup>165</sup> As Koppes and Black explain, “Combat films reflected OWI’s influence probably as much as any type. In the bureau’s ideal combat movie an ethnically and geographically diverse group of Americans would articulate what they were fighting for, pay due regard to the role of the Allies, and battle an enemy who was formidable but not a superman.”<sup>166</sup> In addition to films, radio broadcasts, posters, and magazine artwork all played a role in mass persuasion.

In the end, this propaganda endeavor in support of the Second World War helped leverage an American population in 1941 of 133 million, with 12 percent of the population taking up arms. According to the Department of Defense, 16 million served in

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>163</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 102. On Page one of the manual the OWI states, “There have been many requests from the motion picture industry for basic information on government aims and policies in the war effort. To meet the demand, the Office of War Information has established an office in Hollywood. The purpose of this office is to assist the motion picture industry in its endeavor to inform the American people, via the screen, of the many problems attendant on the war program. Its set-up is purely advisory.” United States et al., *Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry*. (Washington, DC: Office of War Information, 1942).

<sup>164</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 88.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>166</sup> Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, “What to Show the World: The Office of War Information and Hollywood, 1942-1945,” *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 1 (1977): 95.

uniform.<sup>167</sup> As in the First World War, compulsory service in the form of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 was enacted, so enlistment numbers may not be a direct result of propaganda, though many consider its implementation in WWII successful.

In the final days of the war, just before the official surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945, the OWI came to a necessary and inglorious end. Executive Order 9608 signed by President Harry S. Truman on August 31 abolished the domestic functions and portions of the foreign branch to the State Department.<sup>168</sup> Both Roosevelt and Truman realized the politically toxic nature of domestic propaganda and the useful nature of foreign propaganda. Roosevelt did not want a centralized propaganda mechanism at all; it was only in the wake of widespread confusion within the public's eyes, that advisors finally convinced him.<sup>169</sup> An organized domestic propaganda machine surely played a role. Truman even thanked Davis, the OWI director, for "an outstanding contribution to victory."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> US Census Bureau, "Population"; US Department of Defense, "Principal Wars in Which the United States Participated."

<sup>168</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Executive Order 9608: Providing for the Termination of the Office of War Information, 13 August, 1948," *The American Presidency Project*, February 14, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=60671>; Winkler, *Politics and Propaganda*, 296.

<sup>169</sup> Winkler, *Politics and Propaganda*, 298.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

#### IV. LIMITED WAR 1946–1989

The Korean War and the Vietnam War, conflicts that occurred in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s during the Cold War, were limited wars. Neither is generally seen as a win for the U.S.; Korea typically is viewed as a draw and Vietnam, a loss. Yet, the United States and its propaganda did win the all-encompassing Cold War. The contrasts between the public perception of the larger Cold War strategy and the propaganda specific to the Korean and Vietnam wars brings into relief the dynamics of policy, propaganda, and Clausewitz's trinity in one nuclear age.

Callum MacDonald explains, "Communism was regarded as a political threat, to be contained by economic aid to key areas on the Soviet periphery which would restore prosperity and eliminate the conditions in which communism flourished."<sup>171</sup> Moreover, "the only way to deal with Stalin was from a position of military strength. NSC-68 advocated rearmament, both atomic and conventional. . . . Communism was to be rolled back, not only in the Soviet bloc but also in Russia itself."<sup>172</sup> While foreign propaganda extends outside the realm of this paper, the program of communist propaganda leveraged against European communists and Westerners alike marks a significant and effective campaign. Nathan Leites' study of Bolshevik operational code explains that, "in the eyes of the Bolsheviks, 'the only safe enemy is the one whose power has been completely destroyed.'"<sup>173</sup> This view framed Moscow's propaganda.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> C. A. MacDonald, *Korea, the War before Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 22.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–24.

<sup>173</sup> Ron Theodore Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 133.

<sup>174</sup> Nancy E. Bernhard, *US Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17. Bernhard explains, "The Cold War fully and finally eclipsed adherence to truth, even among the most dogged idealists. US information officers saw the dangerous lies promulgated by the Soviet propaganda machine among US allies, and they worried about how to bolster American resolve, so crucial to the defeat of world communism."



## A. THE COLD WAR

As Osgood explains, a generation of American military professionals and politicians alike had grown up in the age of propaganda expansion and technological advances of total war, and they realized the power of psychological warfare as an “indispensable element of modern warfare.”<sup>175</sup> They agreed that the American people needed to be agitated and organized with the same level of attention as provided to military troops; public relations and propaganda would fill these requirements.<sup>176</sup> Osgood further explains, “Propaganda advocates championed ‘a strategy of truth,’ but they also conceded that lies, media manipulation, and the withholding of information were necessary for national security.”<sup>177</sup> It should be noted that Osgood is explaining the understanding of leaders during the epoch of total war of how the Cold War may need to be fought. They accepted the reality of propaganda’s effectiveness.

The bipolar conflict that followed World War II was as much a war of the mind as the earlier conflicts in that it was a contest of ideologies.<sup>178</sup> Taylor explains, “As a consequence, international diplomacy appeared to be developing by the 1950s into a great game of bluff, counter-bluff, and double bluff all set against a climate of terror.”<sup>179</sup> Policymakers struggled to explain to the public the need for large peacetime defense expenditures for the foreseeable future.<sup>180</sup> The Red Bolshevik menace provided the necessary enemy, and at the root of this propagandist boon was fear.<sup>181</sup> Propaganda reaffirmed that the enemy was indeed, “genuine, legitimate, and justified.”<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 32.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 250.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

The Smith-Mundt Act passed in 1948 and “legalized the first peacetime propaganda program in the United States.”<sup>183</sup> As Osgood explains the role of the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) this way: “Through the use of the USIA, CIA, and other mechanisms, the United States waged a war of words to influence friends, woo neutrals, and alienate enemies.”<sup>184</sup> This reasoning is nearly identical with the prior total wars. On the other hand, the nature of public opinion was inescapable, and what policymakers coined “psychological strategy” sought “the shaping of policies to influence the thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and actions of public opinion at home and abroad.”<sup>185</sup>

During this era, the United States essentially made a distinct change in its view of propaganda by delineating the difference between propaganda and information. The latter, historian David Welch believes, “seeks to transmit facts objectively.”<sup>186</sup> Government officials used all manner of terms interchangeably. Precision and specificity were lost, arguably to the future detriment of the U.S. policy, strategy, and propaganda paradigm. As Osgood further explains, “The idea of propaganda as information conformed to the view psychological warfare planners had of themselves.”<sup>187</sup> They believed that they were informing, not propagandizing, but as Edward Bernays would likely agree, they were indeed propagandizing, and more specifically were engaged in black propaganda, which relies on mistruth.

A blurring of the lines between domestic and foreign propaganda emerged in this period. Most importantly, “Total war made distinctions between propaganda intended for ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ audiences meaningless.”<sup>188</sup> As such, white propaganda was subverted, renamed psychological strategy, and directed expressly at Americans.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Shawn J. Parry-Giles, “‘Camouflaged’ Propaganda: The Truman and Eisenhower Administrations’ Covert Manipulation of News,” *Peace Research Abstracts* 36, no. 3 (1999): 3.

<sup>184</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 8.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## B. KOREA

Within public view, America told South Koreans, “You are not alone. You will never be alone so long as you continue to play worthily your part in the great design of human freedom.”<sup>190</sup> This statement and an analysis by the CIA concluding that North Korea was, indeed, “a tightly controlled Soviet satellite” clearly led to a perception that the USSR had made a conscious decision to escalate the Cold War.<sup>191</sup> The Korean War marked a watershed moment in that “it sparked the emergence of the national security state to oversee a militarized version of global containment.”<sup>192</sup> In other words, it served to implement NSC-68, which, in turn, framed the political and civilian views from the perspective of war aims and the commensurate level of fear.<sup>193</sup>

At the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, President Truman was not in a hurry to begin mobilization, hence no large-scale domestic propaganda program to leverage war production and monetary support. As part of this low-key response, Truman sought to keep a tight grip on official statements.<sup>194</sup> As America’s lack of military preparedness for Korea became a leading focus of the media, Truman sought to bring public debate under his control.<sup>195</sup> Attacks from the right led him to fire not only Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, but also eventually General Douglas MacArthur. Finally, Truman decided to “establish some sort of propaganda agency.”<sup>196</sup> He entered robust debate and consultation with Elmer Davis, the former OWI director, Truman’s press secretary, and the press chiefs from the State Department, Pentagon, and National Security Resource Board.

They ultimately decided that the earlier agencies—the CPI and OWI—had been needed to prosecute total war. Because Korea was shaping up as a limited war, the effort

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<sup>190</sup> Steven Casey, *Selling the Korean War: Propaganda, Politics, and Public Opinion in the United States, 1950-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 19, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10282218>.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 20–21.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

did not require its own propaganda agency.<sup>197</sup> Instead, Truman adopted a do-it-yourself approach to managing messaging and informational coherence. For example, he sought to rally support for the administration's mobilization policy by intoning: "All of us—whether we are farmers, or wage earners, or businessmen—must give up some of the things we would ordinarily expect to have for ourselves and our families."<sup>198</sup>

The provisional and sometimes improvised messages disappointed the public and its expectations. By February 1951, the State Department's Office of Public Affairs noted, "The American people are still demanding 'leadership' from the administration by which they mean clear, forceful enunciation of our policies."<sup>199</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson urged the president to articulate his policy goals more clearly and forcefully, lest the Republicans dominate the narrative and thereby influence public opinion against Korean involvement.<sup>200</sup> For Truman, however, only the outbreak of a new world war could necessitate a new OWI.<sup>201</sup>

The notorious Senator Joseph McCarthy was decidedly more successful at raising the necessary national ire against communism. Originally emanating from the "Senate's Internal Security Committee and the House of Representative's Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) . . . the sordid McCarthyite 'witch-hunts' of the early 1950s, this campaign created a climate of fear in which sympathy for the 'Enemy' was equated with sympathy for the Devil."<sup>202</sup> Unfortunately for Truman, McCarthy's endeavors scarred the domestic political landscape.<sup>203</sup> Subsequent political rhetoric evidences the damage done by McCarthyism. Senator William Jenner asked, "How can we get the Reds out of Korea if we cannot get them out of Washington?"<sup>204</sup> In the end, McCarthy's public hearings and

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 87–88. Davis's recollections of the difficulty of obtaining and processing information from so many agencies may have influenced this decision, as well.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>202</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 259.

<sup>203</sup> Casey, *Selling the Korean War*, 15.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 80.

search for communists in the State Department and Hollywood led President Dwight D. Eisenhower to establish the United States Information Agency.<sup>205</sup> David Guth explains,

Both Truman and Eisenhower were uneasy about using the propaganda tactics employed first by the Nazis and then by the Communists. At the same time, neither man did a particularly good job of articulating this view to either the public or to people within their administrations.<sup>206</sup>

The USIA therefore promoted “U.S. national interests through a variety of international information, education, and cultural programs.”<sup>207</sup>

### C. VIETNAM

Years before the Vietnam War, propaganda was repackaged. In the wake of the USIA’s emergence in 1953, they began referring to government mass persuasion campaigns as “public diplomacy”:

The United States government has backed away from that terminology since an initial flirtation with it at the outbreak of the First World War. In what is a common government tactic, officials have attached the label “public diplomacy” to the effort to influence foreign public opinion. However, few are fooled by the use of creative language. USIA veteran Fitzhugh Green acknowledged in his 1988 book *American Propaganda Abroad* that public diplomacy is “a euphemism for the word modern Americans abhor—propaganda.”<sup>208</sup>

The new terminology indicated a new—and increasingly fraught—relationship between the U.S. government and its citizens. Author and war analyst Harry G. Summers wrote, “The student draft deferments, along with the decision not to ask for a declaration of war

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<sup>205</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 55, 89.

<sup>206</sup> David W. Guth, “From OWI to USIA: The Jackson Committee’s Search for the Real ‘Voice’ of America,” *American Journalism* 19, no. 1 (2002): 30.

<sup>207</sup> Michael J. Zwiebel, “Why We Need to Reestablish the USIA,” *Military Review* 88 (2006): 138. The editor’s note explains, “It [USIA] ran a wide variety of programs aimed at promoting goodwill through respectful, culturally sensitive foreign engagement, as well as activities aimed at promoting among foreign peoples an understanding of US institutions, society, and culture. During times of military crisis, the USIA became part of the country-team, performing the very functions of public diplomacy and cultural engagement that the military now appears to be trying to develop. Overall, the USIA played a dominant role in winning the values dimension of the cold war. It did this not through propaganda and bombast, but by focusing on the contrast between communism and democracy and using a policy of openness and exposure to America with all its positive aspects as well as its flaws.”

<sup>208</sup> Guth, “From OWI to USIA,” 16.

and not to mobilize our reserve forces, were part of a deliberate Presidential policy not to arouse the passions of the American people.”<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, the limited nature of the Vietnam War was an intentional policy, an outgrowth of the limited war theories, which were “noteworthy for their lack of passion.”<sup>210</sup> This aspect of the war manifested itself in the official verbiage and trickled into the military mindset. Battlefield reports were cast in different terms. Instead of killing the enemy and destroying his means for making war, the military was “inflicting casualties” and “neutralizing targets.”<sup>211</sup> Steeped in a misunderstanding of the nature of warfare, the policy and propaganda produced to support U.S. involvement all were lacking. “The line between reporting the facts militarily and justifying the war politically became steadily more blurred, and the military increasingly began to symbolize a misguided policy,” according to one scholar.<sup>212</sup> As a result of these blurred justifications and misguided policies, the military and the efforts to propagandize were both weakened.

As Osgood explains, several domestic organizations, complemented foreign propaganda organizations like the USIA and the CIA. The Federal Civil Defense Administration conducted in depth propaganda operations directed at Americans; their primary imperative was to psychologically prepare Americans for a long term Cold War and arms race.<sup>213</sup> But the USIA and its Voice of America broadcasts loomed especially large in U.S. propaganda efforts.<sup>214</sup> Most notably, “[t]he USIA . . . released a large body of propaganda that took the form of news, but that was used in the service of persuasion.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 35.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations the U.S. Military and the Press from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Routledge, 2007), 54, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10167799>.

<sup>213</sup> Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 90.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 99.

News from a trusted source like the USIA can have an immediate effect on its audience, especially when perceived “as a neutral, objective activity.”<sup>216</sup> It is what communications expert Shawn J. Perry-Giles terms camouflaged propaganda. As such, its inherent believability divined from its trusted source makes it a particularly powerful force in a democratic society. Unlike foreign totalitarian propaganda, it is less likely to bring about critical response.<sup>217</sup> The problem is when black and otherwise misleading propaganda begins to look very similar to U.S. news reporting. Osgood writes:

The parallels between the stories generated by the Information Agency and those that appeared “spontaneously” in the American press are striking. It is difficult to identify precisely which stories were planted, which ones journalists derived from government press releases, and which ones arose independently of the administration’s efforts.<sup>218</sup>

During the Vietnam War, Americans were increasingly subject to these kinds of news stories. As Taylor explains, “Psychological operations were, then, no longer being confined to the traditional battlefield, for the battlefield had become the global information environment,” and in the Vietnam War “the major propaganda battle was not to be fought in theater itself but on the domestic front.”<sup>219</sup>

The Kennedy administration, 1961–1963, successfully managed domestic information and reduced public knowledge of the increasing American footprint in Vietnam, but as the death toll began to rise, this level of control could not last.<sup>220</sup> Strategic, domestic muddle in the Johnson years (1963–1968) exacerbated the problem. “Following President [John F.] Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, President [Lyndon] Johnson inherited a confusing situation as American policymakers struggled to define America’s purpose in Vietnam.”<sup>221</sup> Propagandists could have helped, but Johnson

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>219</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 267.

<sup>220</sup> P. Schlesinger, “From Production to Propaganda?,” *Media, Culture & Society* 11, no. 3 (1989): 288.

<sup>221</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 189.

waited until the 1964 election before announcing or enacting any big plans.<sup>222</sup> The Johnson administration's information strategy was "to pursue low-level, incremental announcements of the military build-up: the steps toward a major war were therefore difficult to discern."<sup>223</sup> The steps toward a categorical failure of "public diplomacy"—or any other kind of propaganda—were rather more prominent. Caroline Page explains,

Johnson's secrecy (and duplicity) over fashioning and implementing Vietnam policy, away from public scrutiny, followed by his attempt to wage war 'quietly'—in order to avoid both probable dissension over fighting a land war in Asia and the need to drum up public support with the attendant possibility of 'war hysteria' (either of which might result in public pressure on the Administration concerning its war policies), as well as to protect his 'Great Society' programme—had well and truly backfired.<sup>224</sup>

Historian Larry Schweikart, contends that Johnson's conscious decision to wage war quietly, so as not to detract from "ambitious social programs," led to a disastrous wartime strategy.<sup>225</sup> Johnson's stance—coupled with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's proclivity for numbers as the true measure of combat effectiveness—did not support a clear case that the country should attempt to prevent Communist expansion into Vietnam.<sup>226</sup> Schweikart writes, "By conceding that the administration did not even want the public to view the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong—who were killing American sons—as the enemy, McNamara ceded the entire propaganda campaign to the communists and their allies."<sup>227</sup>

As a result, individuals like Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann appeared. Vann was a U.S. military advisor to Saigon in 1963, who, following the Battle of Ap Bac, did not contain his drive to "convince the military and political leadership in Washington, that the only way the United States could avoid being beaten in Vietnam was to

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Schlesinger, "From Production to Propaganda?," 289.

<sup>224</sup> Caroline Page, *U.S. Official Propaganda during the Vietnam War, 1965-1973: The Limits of Persuasion* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 237.

<sup>225</sup> Schweikart, *A Patriot's History of the United States*, 689.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 690.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.



drastically change strategy and coerce the Saigon side into accepting direction from him and the other American officers in the field.”<sup>228</sup> In his attempt to change strategy, Vann’s avenue for disseminating information were *New York Times* reporters David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan, rather than the official chain of command. The media was highly critical of the commander of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), General Paul Harkins. Because he overstated successes in Vietnam, the press referred to him as General Blimp.<sup>229</sup> Reflecting on comments given by Harkins about the Viet Cong forces supposedly at Ap Bac, which Sheehan knew were not there, Sheehan explains, “[Harkins] was convinced of the truth of these assertions that angered us because we interpreted them as an insult to our intelligence.”<sup>230</sup> This dispute about the need and effects of propaganda in every sense marks the beginning of the credibility gap occurring at the operational, tactical levels of war.

General William Westmoreland, MACV commander from 1964–1968, saw the media as the enemy.<sup>231</sup> Westmoreland and many officers like him saw the media as deleterious and operating counter to military objectives by sapping public support with graphic images and sensational reporting from the front. It is notable though that Vann, an Army officer, viewed the problem as a result of policy and strategy—not the media. He arguably saw the media as a tool for forcing policy and strategy revision, not as the cause for reducing American public support. Author Thomas Rid explains the problem: “Because the hard facts on the wars progress were so hard to produce, the military became increasingly involved in the business of justifying and selling the war. The line between reporting the facts militarily and justifying the war politically became steadily more blurred, and the military increasingly began to symbolize a misguided policy.”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1988), 269.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>231</sup> Rid, *War and Media Operations*, 53.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

To be sure, nightly news coverage on American television played its role in the development of the conflict from military assistance, to engagement, to war.<sup>233</sup>

In Vietnam, the “five o’clock follies” were meant to inform much the way that television in the United States did. Official press briefings from MACV directed at reporters working in Vietnam, the follies were meant to convey the day’s military achievements. The problem arose when MACV reports did not align with firsthand recollections of combat events. For example, if a soldier went on combat patrol, and the enemy engaged suffered three killed in action, but the MACV reported twenty killed in action, the MACV lost its credibility and its relevance as a truthful news source. The credibility gap then necessarily widened between the public strategic narrative and the reality of actual ground combat, as seen by the reporters and troops alike.<sup>234</sup>

In 1968, the credibility gap came home to roost. Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings, chaired by J. William Fulbright, looked at American policy in Vietnam. The hearings came in response to the strategic narrative by the U.S. military and the onset of the Tet offensive by the Viet Cong. The strategic narrative touted U.S. military success, while downplaying Viet Cong effectiveness, yet the Viet Cong had actually launched an expansive, well-coordinated offensive operation all over Vietnam—something they were supposedly unable to do. While the offensive had ultimately been a defeat for the Viet Cong, it was an operational surprise for the U.S. Beginning with the legal justification for escalation, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, “Senator Albert Gore Sr. of Tennessee warned in an executive session: ‘If this country has been misled, if this committee, this Congress, has been misled by pretext into a war in which thousands of young men have died, and many more thousands have been crippled for life, and out of which their country has lost prestige, moral position in the world, the consequences are very great.’”<sup>235</sup> Though there may have been certain liberties taken with intelligence

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>235</sup> “Senate Foreign Relations Committee Releases Volumes Of Previously Classified Transcripts From Vietnam Era Hearings | United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations,” accessed May 13, 2014, <http://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/senate-foreign-relations-committee-releases-volumes-of-previously-classified-transcripts-from-vietnam-era-hearings>.

during the Tonkin incident, this testimony took place amid an air of skepticism over the war. Senator Fulbright exclaimed, “Give the country an opportunity to know what is going on.”<sup>236</sup>

The era culminated with Daniel Ellsberg releasing the Pentagon Papers in 1971. *The New York Times* published the official documents in which the Defense Department laid out its plan to deceive the American public about how badly the war was going. At this point, the black propaganda consumed the entire agenda.<sup>237</sup> Guenter Levy explains that selected excerpts from the Pentagon Papers, including those published in *The New York Times*, “have made it appear the while Johnson projected himself as the peace candidate, the administration in 1964 had decided to wage overt war in Vietnam and was merely holding back with the escalation until after the election in November.”<sup>238</sup> National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 328, which the *Pentagon Papers* referred to as a pivotal document, marked the President’s acceptance of U.S. offensive ground operations.<sup>239</sup> In 1965, the president had stated to reporters, “I know of no far-reaching strategy that is being suggested or promulgated.” The Pentagon Papers revealed that Johnson was not completely honest about the situation. He was then accused of “calculated deceit.”<sup>240</sup>

Levy explains, “The government in its pronouncements spoke of success and light at the end of the tunnel, but continued to dispatch additional troops while casualties mounted steadily,” to which Leslie Gelb adds, “[O]ptimism without results could only work for so long; after that, it had to produce a credibility gap.”<sup>241</sup> By the time Nixon arrived, propaganda—in fact, any kind of official information project—had now become exactly the thing that the progressives had feared.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> R. W. Apple Jr., “25 Years Later: Lessons From the Pentagon Papers,” *The New York Times*, June 23, 1996, sec. Week in Review, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/06/23/weekinreview/25-years-later-lessons-from-the-pentagon-papers.html>.

<sup>238</sup> Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 36–37.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 430.

## V. THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

*The way a nation wages war—the role allotted to the people in defending the country and the purposes for which it fights—testifies to the actual character of its political system.*

—Andrew Bacevich  
*Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed  
Their Soldiers and Their Country*

Following September 11, 2001, American foreign policy and military strategy took a decidedly ambiguous turn for the worse. The attacks on the continental United States started a counter-terror war that stirred up ideas, politics, society, culture, and military institutions. The policy strategy for this new war failed to rise to the rhetoric of total war from the twentieth century, given the country's neoliberal approach to policy at the time. Moreover, Americans remained generally confused about the character of political violence, as seen through the materialist, neoliberal worldview that had grown more common since the 1970s. As military historian Hew Strachan explains, "They [governments generally] may adapt and refine these policies in the light of circumstance and as they implement them. (In this respect, of course, war shapes policy, not the other way around.) But a policy, at least in its idealized form, remains a statement of one government's intent."<sup>242</sup>

Thus, propaganda derived from a non-policy is faulty because it is not synchronized with the political or strategic aims or plans of the government. The government cannot expect mass media to communicate sound, effective propaganda if they are not presented with a coherent message in the first place. Strachan further explains, "The 'global war on terror' was astrategic (if such a word exists). That is, it was un-strategic or non-strategic. Its declared objective was to eliminate a means of fighting and a form of political violence of a generalized sort, not to achieve a political goal."<sup>243</sup> Military strategy especially in its limited form and in its twenty-first-century guise

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<sup>242</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 13.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

therefore, “has to rest on an understanding of war and war’s nature because it will shape policy.”<sup>244</sup> This issue has been the problem of policy and strategy with the war on terror. “Terrorism was not invented on 9/11. It is a means to wage war not an objective of war: this is why the ‘global war on terror’ was so strategically illiterate.”<sup>245</sup> Finally, as Strachan explains, “By confusing strategy with policy, and by calling what were in reality political effects strategic effects, governments denied themselves the intellectual tool to manage war for political purposes, and so allowed themselves to project their daily political concerns back onto strategy.”<sup>246</sup>

#### **A. THE PROBLEM OF THE ENEMY**

As Der Derian explains, the only missing piece was an enemy, so the “virtual enemy” had to suffice in the interim.<sup>247</sup> Propagandists still needed an enemy to vilify for their messages to be effective. This enigmatic enemy was not easily identified. The understanding of the underlying propagandist methodology for dehumanizing the enemy is not the problem, but it does relate to the hatred side of the Clausewitzian trinity.

The United States faced a nearly insurmountable problem in trying to characterize the Islamists as enemies of the past would have been characterized. Communism, fascism, authoritarianism, and even totalitarianism are not religious “isms.” (Susan Carruthers asks how a country conducts war on a tactic and how such an open-ended, rhetorically imprecise conflict can be directed at an individual, organization, idea, or entire religion.<sup>248</sup>) Given the American value of religious freedom, the government struggles to frame the Islamic terrorists in religious terms, though they are not driven by political means per se and clearly employ their religious beliefs to bring harm. The present enemy is motivated by religious means directed toward a political end.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> James Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 211.

<sup>248</sup> Susan L. Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communication and Conflict in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 200.

In the case of the global war on terror, Steuter and Wells further posit that the inflammatory language was directed at all Muslims. “This dehumanization of an entire group or race encourages an unconscious transformation, the imaginative transference that is metaphor’s chief function . . . and by which entire populations are collectively stripped of their humanity.” This approach is no more helpful than it is accurate. The actual enemy remains an inchoate and scattered group of Islamist terrorists. They are essentially stateless, though they rely on other countries to host training. The states harboring them, knowingly or unknowingly, risk reprisal actions by Western powers. In addition, radical Islamists present a further challenge in the context of war in that they are bound by and motivated by their religion.

In the global war on terror, the methodology of how propaganda dehumanizes the enemy continues to hold up, but the enemy itself is not one that can be effectively dehumanized. By its very nature, Islamic terrorism exists as an exceptional example, a religious group seeking a political end. In cases where the enemy represents a divergent and abhorrent political ideology, rather than a religious ideology, they are far more easily targeted. America cannot countenance religious persecution, even if members of that particular persuasion employ terrorist acts against innocents. Given the complicated problems with characterizing the enemy for destruction, Americans find themselves asking, “What is it that this war actually seeks to achieve?”

## **B. WAR AIMS**

On October 7, 2001, President George W. Bush announced in an address to the nation strikes against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. He said: “Initially, the terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places. Our military action is also designed to clear the way for sustained, comprehensive, and relentless operations to drive them out and bring them to justice.”<sup>249</sup> Steuter and Wells state that media framing in the months after the attack took on a distinctly propagandist nature, “This framing

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<sup>249</sup> George W. Bush, “Address to the Nation Announcing Strikes Against Al Qaida Training Camps and Taliban Military Installations in Afghanistan, October 7, 2001,” *The American Presidency Project*, April 18, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=65088&st=address+to+the+nation&st1=>.

uncritically replicated the model proposed by the Bush administration and the American military, in which the September 11 attacks were depicted as initiating a retaliatory war on terror.”<sup>250</sup>

The war aims within the broader global war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq changed over the course of the war. The aims in Afghanistan were as follows: the desire to kill the terrorists responsible for September 11 and disrupt their training camps in Afghanistan; to unseat the Taliban; to install a western-friendly government (Karzai); to build a stable democracy in Afghanistan; to man, train, and equip security forces to maintain the sovereignty of the newly formed Afghan government; and to continue fighting an active insurgency. Operation Iraqi Freedom’s evolving war aims were: the desire to remove weapons of mass destruction WMDs and the inherent national security threat they pose to the United States; to unseat and bring to justice Saddam Hussein and key figures in the Baath party; to build a new coalition government; to man, train, and equip a new Iraqi security force to help maintain the newly formed government; and to continue fighting an active insurgency in the country. The war aims, as Strachan posits, necessarily affected the policy that sought these ends. Propaganda and the media fell in line with these aims and supported them as well.

National security analyst Anthony Cordesman explains that the United States did not focus on terrorism once it had forced the Taliban from Afghanistan.<sup>251</sup> Approximately three months after 9/11, when the CIA and Special Operations Forces had driven Osama Bin Laden and the last vestiges of Al Qaeda from Afghanistan, the United States subsequently decided to seek international coalition directed at developing a democratic Afghanistan.<sup>252</sup> Aside from the problem of the Taliban and Al Qaeda not being defeated, the official focus was no longer on war and terrorism as the enemy. Cordesman explains, “They were nation-building efforts whose failures forced them to

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<sup>250</sup> E. Steuter and D. Wills, “‘The Vermin Have Struck Again’: Dehumanizing the Enemy in Post 9/11 Media Representations,” *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 2 (August 1, 2010): 153, doi:10.1177/1750635210360082.

<sup>251</sup> Cordesman, *Changing US Security Strategy*, 2.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

include major counterinsurgency campaigns.”<sup>253</sup> Brown explains, “Although the literature tends to place weight on the ability of military and governmental actors to shape the news media’s access to information, it should be recognized that these efforts at management are happening in an environment where technology is working against that control.”<sup>254</sup>

Colonel Thomas Cioppa explains that in 2004 the Defense Science Board (DSB) reported on military strategic communications.

The DSB report highlighted that strategic communication is an important component of U.S. national security and required transformation. In addition, the DSB report states that: strategic communication requires a sophisticated method that maps perceptions and influence networks, identifies policy priorities, formulates objectives, focuses on ‘doable tasks,’ develops themes and messages, employs relevant channels, leverages new strategic and tactical dynamics, and monitors success.<sup>255</sup>

This statement from the DSB specifically addressed Multi-Nation Force-Iraq (MNF-I) operations, but carried a similar intent, form, and function as propaganda conducted by the CPI and the OWI did in an earlier era. The CPI and OWI conducted all of the methodology advocated by the DSB on a national level, as well as a theater level. The goal of this methodology was to synchronize the strategic narrative from all reporting sources to further national policy goals and direct that strategic narrative to domestic, allied, and neutral foreign audiences. It did not take the onus for military information management away from the military; it simply synchronized and supported their efforts. Military and domestic reporting became largely congruent, and CPI and OWI made every effort to prevent conflict in their intent.

Such an alignment of messaging in the United States did not take place throughout the global war on terror, but an alignment remains possible. One occurred from 2008 to 2009 in the surge and process of disengagement from Iraq. As Cioppa

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Robin Brown, “Clausewitz in the Age of CNN: Rethinking the Military-Media Relationship,” in *Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public*, ed. Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion R Just (New York: Routledge, 2003), 47.

<sup>255</sup> T. M. Cioppa, “Operation Iraqi Freedom Strategic Communication Analysis and Assessment,” *Media, War & Conflict* 2, no. 1 (April 1, 2009): 26, doi:10.1177/1750635208101353.



explains, the alignment of key messages, “or coordination, coupled with the requirement for accuracy, was central to the shaping of the media information environment.”<sup>256</sup> The focal point was the “pace of progress and security conditions,” and the means for message discipline and synchronization was guidance provided by General David Petraeus and supported by the hierarchical structure of the military.<sup>257</sup>

Still as Cioppa explains, “During August and September 2007, the Western media similarly had a larger percentage of OIF security-related stories, vice diplomatic, economic, or political OIF-related stories.”<sup>258</sup> Stories developed by the media tended to veer from the desired focus of ground commanders regarding war progress to security conditions. While journalists aspire to impart truthful information, their sense of news judgment also requires a consideration of certain factors in selecting what stories to report. An amount of sensationalization drives viewership and ratings, and in the end, journalists are held accountable by editorial management, and ultimately their shareholders and advertisers. The carnage caused by improvised explosive devices receives more media attention than the many wells dug, schools built, and roads made passable. Such is a normal part of how the press works and a reflection of human nature and human interest. These factors exist as impediments to the goals of propaganda and mass persuasion. Cioppa contends, “This does not imply that MNF–I considered the media wrong for covering these stories since they were an important element of OIF, but instead reflected its desire that the media agenda incorporate more stories highlighting progress and stability in Iraq.”<sup>259</sup>

### **C. THE REALITY GAP**

In contemplating the role of the American public during the GWOT, Bacevich argues that Americans accepted three axioms:

- First, we will not change.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 30–31.

- Second, we will not pay.
- Third, we will not bleed.<sup>260</sup>

The first premise related to the stance of the president's remarks in the wake of September 11. Terrorist attacks should not deter the American people from living their normal lives. To do otherwise would be to fall victim to terrorism and render it successful. Hence, Americans should refuse to accept a reordering of national security priorities.<sup>261</sup>The second point referenced the economic restrictions and cost of going to war. In this war, Americans would not be forced to make a decision between guns and butter. That dichotomy was neither necessary nor acceptable.<sup>262</sup> Finally, participation in the war was based solely on volunteerism. Essentially, sacrifice and civic duty became the realm of individual conscience. Participation was neither expected nor required.<sup>263</sup> Bacevich states, "As a consequence, war became exclusively the province of the state rather than the country as a whole."<sup>264</sup>

These axioms limited Americans' physical and emotional investment in the outcome of war, thereby shaping their perception of information and propaganda at the time. Gil Merom explains, "Democracies 'fail in small wars,' he maintains, 'because they find it extremely difficult to escalate the level of violence and brutality to that which can secure victory.'"<sup>265</sup>Moreover he states, "In a nutshell, then, the profound answer to the puzzle involves the nature of the domestic structure of democracies and the ways by which it interacts with ground military conflict in insurgency situations."<sup>266</sup>The American public played a role in the global war on terror, though it was being actively

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<sup>260</sup> Andrew J. Bacevich, *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed Their Soldiers and Their Country* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 31.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Gil Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15, quoted in Larry Schweikart, *America's Victories: Why the U.S. Wins Wars and Will Win the War on Terror* (New York: Sentinel, 2006), 260.

<sup>266</sup> Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars*, 15.

fought far from their borders. The relationships between democracy and war, and between domestic and foreign policy, pose an issue.<sup>267</sup> Furthermore, he explains, “democratic failure in small wars can be seen as reflecting a two-level game in which the ‘win set’—exceeds what a critical domestic constituency accepts. Because of the preferences of this constituency and its capacity to effectively exercise political power at home . . . the state’s foreign policy is not ‘ratified’ and the war effort becomes unsustainable.”<sup>268</sup>

If the domestic center of gravity, the public, is not brought into the fold to invest in the decision, prosecution, and sacrifice war entails, it is then unlikely to yield victory. Brewer explains that, “The consequences of such a ‘reality gap’ between the staged war and the actual war were severe. The administration put more effort into producing the staged war than planning and carrying out the real one . . . Officials, like the best salesmen who believe in their product, fooled themselves with their own lies and exaggerations.”<sup>269</sup> A strained military struggling to accomplish flawed war aims, a diminished U.S. reputation worldwide, and a deleterious wartime policy affecting civil liberties and democratic process loomed large.<sup>270</sup> In the wake of diminished public support for the GWOT, government-contracted strategic publicist John Rendon explained, “We lost control of the context . . . That has to be fixed for the next war.”<sup>271</sup> Others corroborate his conclusion. “In short, until policy-makers, militaries, the media and their publics ask of politically motivated violence ‘publicity to *what end?*,’ wars on terror will continually flounder,” said Carruthers.<sup>272</sup>

#### **D. THE WAR OF IDEAS**

Mass morale, propaganda, and mobilization relate to underlying tensions between policy and strategy. Both must be lucidly developed to leverage propaganda and to bring

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 275.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 208.

the media to play a role in selling the resulting strategic narrative. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba explain:

If a political system is to be effective . . . there must be mechanisms whereby governmental officials are endowed with the power to make authoritative decisions . . . Wars, for instance (hot or cold), have often shifted the balance so far in the direction of governmental power and authority as to cause concern about the preservation of democratic responsiveness. Yet if the balance is not so shifted, it is argued that democratic governments may succumb to external challenges.<sup>273</sup>

Essentially, Almond and Verba maintain that “the ordinary citizen must turn power over to elites and let them rule.”<sup>274</sup> The case for global war on terror is one such example in which the elites and the mass inflated the threat, limited the means of resistance, and overstated aims. Before September 11, James Der Derian claims, “Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld early on signaled their intention to fully operationalize virtuous war . . . they viewed virtuous war as the ultimate means by which the United States would re-secure its borders, maintain its hegemony, and bring order and justice to international politics.”<sup>275</sup> Prior to open conflict, military strategy is developed according to this policy.

After the September 11 attacks, in a time of conflict, as Steuter and Wells contend, “language assumes a role of heightened importance.”<sup>276</sup> While they see the importance of language in conflict to arouse the public to support war, they fail to recognize the inherent nature of the media and the public to accept the government’s framing of events in the wake of a national tragedy. As the public becomes aware of governmental policy by means of information release—whether in the form of official press releases or by media reports largely derived from governmental and military sources—all these sources can be considered propaganda, as they seek to bring about a certain behavior.

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<sup>273</sup> Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 341.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>275</sup> Der Derian, *Virtuous War*, 211.

<sup>276</sup> Steuter and Wills, “The Vermin Have Struck Again,” 152.

The framing of war chronology and enemies evolves over time as propaganda develops. Steuter and Wells contend, “As theorists of enemy-construction . . . agree, what is reflected in and created by language is not reality but construct, something conditioned and assembled, put together from fragments of information and observation and shaped by the contexts of their assembly.”<sup>277</sup> The majority of mainstream media content during times of conflict is developed in concert with governmental and military sources, which explains why initial reporting on the war took on this propagandist approach.<sup>278</sup>

The citizens who understand the need for their nation to enter into open conflict with another nation, especially when their nation finds itself in a dire struggle for existence, typically understand the need to drive public perception in the furtherance of national war aims. Essentially propaganda serves not only a useful purpose, but also a necessary one.

#### **E. MISUNDERSTANDING THE MISUNDERSTANDING**

Propaganda, information management, strategic communication, and the broader enterprise tasked with explaining government policy to the public during time of war is never easy. Even with clearly delineated guidance from the president, it is difficult. Fraught with political pitfalls, propaganda is often seen by the party not in power as a potential threat and can be charged with spreading falsehoods and mistruths. Aspects evidenced in the historic case studies can, in all likelihood, produce desired results. As was noted in the Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis report on the *Enduring Lessons from the Past Decades of War*, the battle for the strategic narrative is paramount to success.<sup>279</sup> A lack of understanding of the actual enemy affects policy and strategy, according to Emile Simpson. “This is what happens when an operational approach is up scaled to the level of strategy, or policy: when operational ideas, which demand a political context, are not adequately provided with one, they move to fill the vacuum.”<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>278</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 8, 278; Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 32–33.

<sup>279</sup> Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, *Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations*, June 15, 2012, 11.

<sup>280</sup> Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 228.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In major combat operations, the U.S. was successful in employing military power; however, other instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, and economic) became more important as operations shifted away from major combat.

—Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis,  
*Decade of War, Volume I: Enduring Lessons from the Past Decade of Operations*

Propaganda relies on the ability to define the enemy. In WWI, the enemy was Germany. In WWII, the enemy was fascism, Nazism, and eventually the German people. In the Cold War, the enemy was the Communism. The global war on terror in the twenty-first century lacks a clearly defined enemy. Is it the fundamentalist Islamist or terrorists generally? If it is the latter, how will they be identified and brought to justice? And is this possible on a global scale? Is terrorism a policing problem or a problem for the military?

Regardless of propaganda's efficacy in delivering its message and affecting behavior, it fails to deliver the desired strategic effect without corresponding policy and strategy. Strategy as an extension of policy is critical. Until open hostilities occur and the force of military conflict begins to have an affect on further political policy development, initial non-abstract policy is critical. Additionally, technology is not a catch-all solution. It is part of the solution, but demographic factors, such as religion, culture, and gender, also comprise part of the solution. Technology does not ensure warfare's success, nor does properly constructed propaganda. But either, done right, certainly can help.

### A. POLICY, STRATEGY, AND PROPAGANDA

Understanding the relationship between policy, strategy, and propaganda is the key. An understanding of this relationship allows the government to determine strategy in close consultation with policy makers, the military, and propagandists. Underlying strategy must be able to be directed and explained in concrete, easy-to-understand terms. Otherwise, the government risks abstraction and likely misinterpretation by the American public. Misinterpretation brings about a negative strategic effect—as was the case with

the Goetz medal around the time of WWI and the Abu Ghraib torture videos during the Iraq War. Moreover, strategic narrative, which explains the conduct of war, needs to be infallible in the eyes of allies and neutrals. Taylor explains:

Wars are not caused solely, or even mainly, by propaganda. They are caused by people in power who have to balance possible risks against potential gains in order to achieve their aims by means other than peaceful ones. Once they have balanced the risks, then the propaganda comes into play. Propaganda can escalate a conflict but it usually comes after policy has been decided.<sup>281</sup>

Despite the range of terms and forms—strategic communication, public affairs, public relations, advertising, and so on—analysis of wartime communication can recognize all as propaganda. It is, as Lasswell states, “a mere tool . . . no more moral or immoral than a pump handle.”<sup>282</sup> Propaganda is not inherently evil. It proves a pervasive vehicle for the public to receive information from a variety of sources. Propaganda offers a way to inform, explain, and convince a target audience to act according to its message. That message could be aimed to prevent chaos, spur product sales, or support a cause or a candidate. In terms of warfare, propaganda brings the masses in line to support a conflict. During war, the most effective, sustainable propaganda came generated through a centrally managed and independent government agency, as in World War I and World War II.

The levels of war intertwine to operate in furtherance of military strategy and national policy, or grand strategy. As indicated previously, even exceptionally well-crafted propaganda based on a faulty premise falls short of meeting its goal. Emile Simpson has taken great steps in understanding this problem of strategic narrative within the context of the Afghanistan War. Specifically, he focused on the need for an agreed-upon strategic narrative derived from grand strategy to provide the framework for ground commanders to develop military strategy.<sup>283</sup> This strategic narrative would influence civilian propaganda, which mobilizes domestic audiences while bolstering international

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<sup>281</sup> Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind*, 268.

<sup>282</sup> Sproule, *Propaganda and Democracy*, 69; Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 26.

<sup>283</sup> Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 233.

support for military action in furtherance of policy and military strategy. Propaganda levied domestically and abroad during the war on terror cannot be implemented effectively, because current policy is subject to abstraction and lacks a coherent strategic narrative. A proper, understandable strategic narrative would provide the basis for explaining combat operations, while deterring from would-be terrorists the support they have enjoyed to this point.

Because effective propaganda relates directly to the strategic narrative and policy at a given time, it has a shelf life and cannot be expected to remain successful as those factors evolve or once a credibility gap emerges. Since the Korean War, policymakers and the military have run the business of domestic war propaganda without an independent government agency tasked with propaganda development. Policy and strategy can shift from defeating an enemy and reducing the enemy's desire or ability to fight into a case for sustainment operations and nation-building. Sustainment operations and nation-building are long undertakings. As insurgency develops and costs rise, they also can be difficult and dragging, with only a chance of succeeding when national mobilization, and not solely military mobilization, occurs. Effective propaganda has the potential for periodic rebranding. America will not spend blood and treasure indefinitely.

In the twenty-first century, the military has become increasingly divorced from broader society, a result of perceptions of various conflicts over the past several decades. While the military was not divorced from society during the Vietnam War, it did suffer from a lack of credibility gap in its final years, which brought the war to an inglorious end. While not elucidated in this paper, the first Gulf War demonstrated how policy makers and the military can run a successful short-term propaganda campaign during short-lived military conflict. To contrast, the war in Iraq was essentially the replay of the first Gulf War. As the credibility gap opened with the revelation that weapons of mass destruction did not exist, public opinion suffered, much like post-Tet Vietnam. No independent propagandist agency existed to advise policy makers and the military. In the end, the shift from all-out war into sustainment and regime change followed by nation building could not be sold to the American people in the long term. The conflict had



reached the end of its shelf life, and President Bush lost the initiative, no matter how morally it was originally conceived.

Propagandist involvement at the highest levels of government had the potential to change the conversation over the war on terror. With such consultation regarding strategic narrative, the government could have been confronted by the unlikelihood of their success and the debacle of a decade of war in Iraq may have been avoided. Essentially, propagandists not only work to build techniques for propaganda implementation, but they can also act as balancing agents in the development of political and military strategy. While pol-mil relations should exist to prevent both policymakers and military strategists alike from misstep, propagandists must weigh-in to explain the likelihood or unlikelihood of being able to effectively present a given conflict and imply its corresponding strategic effects. They ensure that strategic narrative and policy are congruent. They further ensure that such a narrative avoids abstraction and seeks to further strengthen civilian belief in the rightness of government policy. During WWII, but prior to the OWI, Winkler explains, “It all seemed to boil down to three complaints. First there was too much information; second, there wasn’t enough of it; and third, that in any event it was confusing and inconsistent.”<sup>284</sup>

Modern military, government, and policy makers benefit from a review of the image of the paradoxical trinity, which reflects the energy of the people and democracy in the epoch of total war. During WWI, the muckrakers gave Woodrow Wilson the means to fight the propaganda war. This strategy was then somewhat duplicated in the Second World War on a much greater scale, and in the Cold War until the end of the 1960s. At that point, by 1966, the skepticism about the Cold War had become tangible. America has had periods of great debate and dissent followed by unity and focus. The Vietnam War reached its height in 1966–1968, culminating in the Tet offensive, which showed on television the North Vietnamese coming from all directions. As General Westmoreland insisted that their strategy had been working amid the disheartening coverage, the Cold War consensus began its decline.

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<sup>284</sup> Winkler, *Politics and Propaganda*, 34.

The decline led to the “stab in the back” legend about Vietnam. The press and the counterculture were believed to have lost the war, that it had nothing to do with the military, which tried to fight a conventional war but faced political hurdles. The distillate of that era is, in the all-volunteer force, among professional officers the suspicion of the press and fundamentally forgetting that the real energy in war of anger, hatred, and purpose or the fuel for the purpose comes from the people. The result after Vietnam is a disconnect and the real symbol of it is arguably Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s attempt at manipulation of public opinion through the DOD.

## **B. AN OLD IDEA AND A NEW AGENCY?**

Why didn’t GWOT develop an institution like the CPI or OWI? The Rendon Group and the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) play notable roles in the war, but never really produce a successful campaign fruition. Arguably, without these institutions the management of propaganda and adherence to strategic narrative doesn’t occur. Positive strategic effect did not come about in propaganda to the America people, who questioned the purpose, policy, and players in the war. As the war continued, they pushed the Bush administration and Congress over the reasons for fighting, the continued presence in the region, and the use of military contractors, among other concerns.

Major General Anthony Cucolo, Chief of Public Affairs for the United States Army, described how the U.S. Army communicates. “I would describe us in rashly, almost unfair and classic Army-hard-on-ourselves general terms as: slow, reactive, not very creative, unable to speak in easily understood language, and poor at giving context,” he said. “At times, we are too focused on operational security and give a perception of, at best, being defensive and, at worst, obstructionist.”<sup>285</sup> As the head of Army public affairs, the general should be considered highly informed and cognizant of Army information shortcomings.

During time of war, an independent propaganda agency could supplement these shortcomings, by supporting the strategic narrative at home and abroad. This agency,

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<sup>285</sup> Anthony Cucolo, “The Military and the Media: Shotgun Wedding, Rocky Marriage, Committed Relationship,” *Media, War & Conflict* 1, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 87, doi:10.1177/1750635207087628.

constructed on a solid basis in pluralistic politics, could employ best past propaganda strategies in the modern age. The problem of being slow and reactive poses a dilemma. In some cases, it may have been better to contemplate information release for fear of producing negative strategic effect. The Army's reactivity and timeliness issues could be resolved through restructuring. A system to categorize, prioritize, and assign a certain value of relevance to each piece of information would help ensure communication is addressed at the appropriate time. Cucolo also pointed out that we are "not very creative." The CPI and OWI hired thousands of writers, cartoonists, and artists. In each medium, they hired some of the best creators in their respective fields. Some of the most creative minds were leveraged with widely accepted success. In a contemporary context, this strategy could involve well-known creatives like Steven Spielberg directing governmental movies and Seth MacFarlane directing war cartoons. When civilian propagandists produce the communication, they overcome some of the awkward weaknesses of the Army, as described by Cucolo. With their outside perspective, civilian creatives could ensure that military vernacular gets translated into easily understood civilian terms and places the broader propaganda campaign in a relevant context for American audiences.

Analysis of wartime propaganda, whether historic examples or in the current landscape of the global war on terror, cannot definitively determine their success. Yet, war after war, research shows the use of mass persuasion has a significant impact and relationship with outcomes and perceptions. Propaganda affects the paradoxical trinity, the animating factors behind why countries go to war in the first place and how they fight best. Propaganda's reach extends across the military and the general public, influencing mobilization and morale.

In 1918, Secretary of War Newton Baker declared the importance of an informed American public and mass mobilization for war, "It was necessary to have somebody who understood why we are at war, and in saying that I speak not of a who could comprehend merely the difficult international problems with regard to it, but the spirit

that made us go into this war, and the things we were fighting for.”<sup>286</sup> As it has been shown, propaganda derived and implemented systematically, honestly, and completely coincided with overall military success. All levels of war require a greater effort to train strategists to recognize the need for propaganda’s inclusion in planning. In addition, reexamining this training paradox of the political level is necessary too. The utilization of highly effective twenty-first century ad-men and publicists does not offer adequate consideration of the use and impact of propaganda and its relation to policy and military strategy. With little understanding of military strategy, operation, or tactics, coupled with foreign relations and policy they may be ill-equipped to comprehend the entire problem set of war and how involved and abstract it can be.

Creel and the professional muckrakers, or the OWI staffers offered a relevant sense of reality through remaining directly in touch with the civilian American public. Unlike the propagandist working for independent agencies, DOD staffers maintain an “inside the beltway” mentality. Rather than reaching out to the citizens in an accessible way, their communication tends to devolve into PSYOPS and manipulation. Creel and Irwin, left-wingers by today’s standards—remained in touch with everyday Americans. Their success at aggressively disseminating effective war propaganda recalls the potential and purpose of mass persuasion. Comparatively, the later Vietnam period and the recent global war on terror have both fallen far short and missed out on this impact. To bring back successful propaganda, and to seamlessly incorporate it into the high-tech, constantly connected twenty-first century world, America must take a more expansive view of war, across segments of the government, media, and society. They must see the importance of a grand narrative and overarching strategy—the historic underpinnings of the best examples of propaganda in the country’s past.

Brewer writes, “In recent years the officials charged with constructing and delivering persuasive messages were more likely to have backgrounds in politics, public relations and marketing, media, and entertainment than to have expertise in foreign relations.”<sup>287</sup> This may be so, but who else should be charged with propaganda’s

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<sup>286</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, xv.

<sup>287</sup> Brewer, *Why America Fights*, 283.

construction? More importantly, she explains, “Their concern was the successful selling of war aims rather than the quality of the policy being sold. This phenomenon was not altogether new, but the trend has led to a greater disconnect between the war aims being promoted and the policy being conducted.”<sup>288</sup>

In 2001, Washington realized the need for a new informational apparatus.<sup>289</sup> By 2002, the DOD had implemented the OSI, but within a short period of time, due to media outcry, it was disestablished.<sup>290</sup> There were three immediate problems. First, the DOD was the wrong enterprise for a “clandestine” domestic propaganda agency, as it could conceivably produce both white and black propaganda. Its dissemination to domestic audiences was tainted with the pejorative “propaganda,” and confusion over its level of truthfulness. Second, the agency needed to be civilian-run, and specifically identified as an overtly truthful endeavor to inform the American people. While the average person does not understand the amount of propaganda he or she consumes every day, the perception persists that propaganda is bad. Any effort to communicate information to the public at wartime must be made to focus on the inherent truthfulness of its content. Third, for those who resist increased levels of government bureaucracy, the agency disbands as soon as the conflict is complete, as Presidents Wilson and Truman did in the past. The purpose of the agency is to support and manage public information for the duration of the war, and not to be used as a tool for public manipulation in other circumstances. Information needs to be centrally managed during war, especially in the information proliferated world of the twenty-first century.

Historically, officials had recognized the specific scope of these propaganda agencies. Bacevich explains that, “Senior military and civilian officials who managed World War II had viewed public support for the war as both critical and finite, an essential asset to be carefully nurtured and no less carefully expanded.”<sup>291</sup> Their approach resulted in pervasive propaganda, which sought to maintain and increase morale while

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Carruthers, *The Media at War*, 202.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Bacevich, *Breach of Trust*, 31.

illustrating the light at the end of the tunnel.<sup>292</sup> This light is conspicuously missing as the GWOT draws to some sort of close.

### C. WHY WE FIGHT

In the twenty-first century, many Americans have lost the fundamental understanding of why their country goes to war in the face of the inchoate challenges and threats beyond the physical destruction wrought on television in the capital cities of the nation in peacetime. To them, the means no longer corresponded to the ends. During the years of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, they did not remember how the whole endeavor works—from the initial decision to enter into conflict, to how and why it should be concluded. Propaganda and the media have played a central role, once again, in the country’s understanding of war and its critique. As Strachan clearly states, the problem began long before propaganda and the media have come into play, but an independent governmental propaganda agency may reduce the governmental credibility gap, as it had in the past.

Unlike total war in the past, the United States and its allies are not fighting a war for national survival.<sup>293</sup> Strachan explains, “After 9/11 Bush and Blair tried to overcome the divergence by using the rhetoric of ‘total war,’ or rather of the ‘global war on terror.’ But in doing so, they failed to understand the nature of the war on which they had embarked, which seemed far from ‘total’ to the societies which they sought to mobilize.”<sup>294</sup>

No matter the propaganda or media attention received, total mobilization and a subsequent win in the war on terror were never likely due to the situation of the war in the first place. The global war on terror has had diffuse strategic goals; limited means; overreaching scope; and religious dimensions, which tend to escalate conflict and nullifies a policy of limited engagement. In this case, it is unlikely that propagandists could have averted the strategic missteps. Yet, propagandists involved at the uppermost

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Strachan, *The Direction of War*, 16.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

levels of policy and strategy development could have weighed in to explain the lack of correlation between policy, strategy, and propaganda. Even though the war in Iraq has been concluded and conflict in Afghanistan nearly so, the overarching terrorism that led to their necessity in the first place has not been eliminated.

There is still a chance to rectify the propaganda, policy, strategy mismatch needed to successfully win the overarching war on terrorism. The most important step is to understand that there are three sides to the trinity—not just the military and the policy it supports, but the public as well. The public is the center of gravity, in fact. It determines what is acceptable and not acceptable in warfare, and it should be informed to allow for necessary critique of policy, war aims, and the decision to engage in war's ferocity. There also needs to be a greater understanding of the relationship between policy, strategy, and propaganda development. It is simply not enough for two sides of the trinity to manage during protracted limited war. Determine who the enemy is. If the enemy is not state based, a lower level of military involvement is needed.

The problem then is more one of a police nature more correctly served from the diplomatic realm of the united states government. To be sure terrorism is an dangerous threat, but limited blood and treasure does not allow for global “whack-a-mole.” A worldwide military operation arguable creates more insurgency and enemies than it purports to kill.

Lastly, if all of these criteria are met, then an independent governmental propaganda agency, with a well-known, well respected, and non-partisan head, should lead the effort to inform and energize the American public to win at war. Their goals should be synchronization of messaging from the DOD, Washington, and all other governmental agencies. In addition, they will work to develop easily understood messaging that embodies policy and frames the strategic narrative for all involved. America has done it in the past and won its wars, and it could—and should—do it again.

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