



Propaganda GAME

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Saddam Hussein

Propaganda has been an old school technique in war games, and its significance in the age of social media has only grown – in a massive way. Today, it occupies centre stage within the war front.

Propaganda is the dissemination of information — facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies – to influence public opinion. Deliberateness and a relatively heavy emphasis on manipulation distinguish propaganda from casual conversation or the free and easy exchange of ideas.

Among all the countries, US convincingly comes at the top of the table in terms of the propaganda game. The most effective tool it uses is media; and within media, it gels in with Hollywood to ascertain its objectives on a global front.

Have you ever observed the manner in which certain Hollywood films are obsessed with war-mongering and threats emanating from Iran, China, Middle East and 'Islamic Jihadists'? And the manner in which Hollywood movies that are based on Mexico always seem to depict drugs, crimes, gangs, etc.? Is that really all Mexico has to offer? And why are Russians always portrayed as gangsters?

After watching these sorts of movies, Americans naturally develop an apprehension towards going out on the street, especially in fear of being shot by a Muslim Jihadist, Arab conservative or a terrorist from a South Asian country. Likewise, a feeling of danger in workplaces is born: Americans using their fancy computer systems now fear Chinese

hackers infiltrating these and stealing data or compromising confidentiality.

This is undoubtedly a sensitivity that the US establishment intends to create in the minds of the people, in order to play with their emotions and churn out justifications for waging wars across the world. This, in turn, also keeps their defence and arms industry operational which keeps generating ever increasing profits.

Previously, this perception was created tacitly, using subliminal techniques, especially through the medium of movies. However, in the year 2019, the American propaganda machine established a proper office in the form of the Global Engagement Center (GEC) – and huge funds were allocated for the purpose.

Apparently, the GEC had been set-up to 'counter propaganda'. But supervises the supervision body? Who would ascertain if the Center itself was instigating propaganda? Who is to define propaganda?

Would this Center also look inwards and counter its own propaganda instruments that are undermining the interests of the American people?

Only time will tell!

To remind our readers, the US' Global Engagement Center was originally created to counter Russian and ISIS

disinformation and propaganda. Yet, it now seems to be syphoning money off to further the propaganda against Tehran, the US-Iran nuclear deal and China for the obvious reasons, especially because Beijing's rise has many in Washington unsettled.

In February 2019, the GEC hired Lea Gabrielle – former navy intelligence officer and Fox News journalist – to head the organisation. Gabrielle views China, Russia, Iran and prominent global terrorist organizations as 'top threats' that use propaganda to undercut US interests.

After taking over, Gabrielle enunciated that she will prioritize ensuring the Center was properly staffed and funded. The GEC back then requested USD 55 million in funding for fiscal year 2019, with legislation introduced to eventually raise that amount to USD 115 million. These numbers suggest why 'propaganda' centres like the GEC play a key role in Washington's foreign policy and global media narrative building.

It is pertinent to note that information warfare has taken top priority for many administrations around the world, and the Trump administration in Washington was no exception. The GEC, therefore, was treated as an important instrument by the Trump administration for political ventures. This face of propaganda might seem new but the mechanism is time tested.

Recall Iraq, when the United States launched a propaganda assault on Saddam Hussein? Weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were ultimately never found. Although US war propagandists projected the attack on Iraq as an extension of the war on terror, it is quite well known that the Bush administration had drawn up plans to use military force with the intention of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime long before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. September 11 simply presented an opportunity for stampeding public opinion to accept US military intervention.

The same was the case with Libya, with the Obama administration claiming it was just trying to 'protect civilians'. Nevertheless, the actions of the US revealed it was looking for regime change. In fact, the US and NATO intervention actually functioned to fuel unrest across Libya by employing propaganda to exaggerate Gaddafi's crackdown against protesters. However, the American objective was achieved; they eliminated the leader who defied them and left Libya in a mess.

Regarding war, there are two good options for the United States.

The first is regime change with a viable plan to win the peace.

The second is not to go to war at all.

There is no point in toppling a tyrant if the result is anarchy. But who cares?

The objective was not to save the people and the region but rather safeguard American interests which could not be materialized in the absence of the wars. For waging wars, the need for propaganda was paramount in order to legitimize the actions of the US leadership in the eyes of its people.

A similar situation has been transpiring between Iran and the US since 2019. America accused Iran of conducting the attack on Japanese oil-tankers in the Gulf of Oman, a claim that Tehran refused to accept and labelled as yet another Irano-phobic tactic to escalate tensions by the Trump administration.

The US was also quick to send a thousand or so troops to the Middle East to counter the Iranian threat; clearly showing who was 'excited for war'. Looking for details, one wonders why Tehran would attack Japanese oil tankers around the time when they were hosting the Japanese Prime Minister to negotiate trade and sanctions.

In the most recent move, Time Magazine – based in New York – named Volodymyr Zelenskyy 'Person of the Year'. The magazine hailed Ukraine's president for his courage in leading his country's resistance against Moscow's brutal aggression. Zelenskyy also got a spotlight on Vogue's cover page with the first lady, Olena Zelenska. This may be a good strategy in war time, but it also undermines the severity of war – creating a void between the leadership and its people, where people are suffering on the ground yet the President and the first lady are occupied in glamorous photo-ops.

What's more important is that US in general, and West in particular, seems to have supported such ventures to garner sentiments and harness international support. This was all to heat things up, setting up another stage of war for the military-industrial complex of the US to thrive on. After all, there are always some winners in war.

In order to understand global propaganda, one needs to study the American modus operandi on how global opinions are shaped. It is the best in the world at it: much smarter and shrewder than any other country.

American propaganda relies entirely on emotional appeals. It does not depend on a rational theory that can be disproved: it appeals to things no one can object to. This also helps the US in fulfilling its Messiah or 'Global Policeman' complex, where the western audience is told that only the US and US-led alliances can make the world a safer place.

This brings us to the latest recapitulation of masterful American Propaganda: The War on Terror. Any attempt to explain why the terrorists (irrational as they visibly were) felt motivated to attack the Twin Towers is instantly put down and argued as 'siding with the terrorists'. Indeed, American leadership has enunciated, on several occasions, that if you are not with them, you are against them – i.e. with the terrorists).

Hence, before criticizing other states for disseminating propaganda, the US government needs to first put its own house in order and abandon its global propaganda campaigns. Information warfare is a dangerous game and it is time we developed updated rules of the game.

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