

Recognizing and Resisting the “Hasbara Pandemic”

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Global Research, March 27, 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

Steady media reports on the rising number of the novel Coronavirus infections and its human toll have contributed to a global psychology of fear where entire populations are succumbing their free will to those in positions of authority, elected and otherwise. But while we try to keep ourselves safe during this pandemic, a deadlier and more destructive virus creeping in the shadows for years is also reaching its peak. The virus is called hasbara or better understood as propaganda.

Lest you think it is not contagious or deadly, think Iraq. The Iraq war alone cost the American taxpayers [trillions of Dollars](#) but the Iraqi population bore the brunt of the pain and suffering from America's sanctioned terror attack and invasion with over one million souls lost and counting. Just like COVID-19 which may be dismissed as a cold, the hasbara virus may be taken for the truth – and therein lies the threat. As we surrender our will to the officials so that we can survive this pandemic, the spinners have upped their hasbara in order to coax us into embracing their terrorism, their wars, and their genocide.

Abandon your will, if you must, but not your common sense. As someone who has studied propaganda for fifteen years, I have never seen it so prevalent and so dangerous at a time when we are distracted by a viral disease. Having allowed the hasbara virus to spread and go undetected for such a long time, we've lost all ability to recognize it. The spinners know this and are taking full advantage of it. Let me give you two examples from the last 24 hours alone.

First one is a heartwarming 'news item' – even benign.

Man In Coronavirus Lockdown Sends Dog To Store To Get Bag Of Cheetos



How can the picture of this cute dog not touch your heart? More so when you [read on](#) that his owner is in quarantine in Mexico with the coronavirus. His chips cravings prompt him to tie a note to the dog, send him to the store with a \$20 bill and instructions to the shopkeeper to give the dog a bag of "Cheetos". Now didn't that give you the warm fuzzies? The story is shared over and over and the 'news reporter' gets a kudos from his boss for writing this sweet story which would no doubt increase circulation. I loved it.

But then I had to ask myself why a man in Mexico would tie a 20 Dollar bill to his dog and not Pesos. That is a lot of Mexican Pesos, and no change was returned. I mean where would the poor dog keep the change, a lot of change, in Mexican Pesos.

I shared the story with many friends, some of whom included university professors. None noted the oddness of the Dollar bill. Even when I asked if they noted something strange about the story, they did not point to it until I told them. The story was heartwarming and the incident was something they all wanted to accept - a feel good story. Nothing else was noted. We want to believe a story that appeals to our sense of reality, our values, no matter how unrealistic.

On the opposite side is the news story about a former FBI agent Robert Levinson. Levinson disappeared in 2007 and the United States had accused Iran of holding him hostage. Iran has no information about him. Yesterday, out of nowhere, [various hasbara outlets](#) cited Levinson's family releasing a statement citing that they recently received information from US officials that led them to conclude that "our wonderful husband and father died while in Iranian custody."

Iran denied having held him in custody and the news of his death was news to them. Why was this unbelievable? After all, I have no way of knowing who is lying, the US or Iran. Though one certainly may question the timing of this report.

But it was not just the timing that was odd. It was the orange prison uniform. Orange prison

uniform is easy to process for Americans, and the West. Images of prisoners wearing orange jumpsuit in Guantanamo is embedded in our minds. More disturbing still are the images of prisoners captured by ISIS and wearing orange jump suits as they are being executed. I always wondered where did ISIS get all the orange jump suits their prisoner wore. But that is beside the point. In Iran, prisoners do not wear orange. The uniforms are different shades of blue depending on their status. Ordinary prisoners wear the striped while political prisoners the plain blue uniforms.



Photos courtesy of Iran-based journalist

Aside from the wrong color uniform, I was struck by Levinson's appearance as portrayed in Western media. It was hard to process the tanned face which contrasted so sharply with his pale hands. It didn't make sense. It is not clear to me as to why America would choose this moment to stage this death. I can only imagine that it is to present an image of a ruthless Iran in order to justify its terrorism by way of sanctions at a time when Iran, like the rest of the world, is fighting this pandemic. But even the lies will not hide the shameless stain of America's cruel madness. Hence, we must resist and fight the propaganda.



For decades, we have been victims of propaganda to the point that we are no longer aware of it. In spite of it, we have not managed to build an immunity to the lies. Quite the opposite — we have become more vulnerable as our resistance erodes with every shot of hasbara. But we are not broken – not yet. It can only affect us if left undetected. Like COVID-19, the hasbara virus goes undetected until it's tested for and discovered. We must therefore learn to test for, detect, and reject it. We can do this by refusing to abandon our critical thinking. Pleasant or not, we cannot allow our underlying bias guide us and use commonsense. Don't let the hasbara virus infect you — it is deadlier than you can imagine.

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