

War Propaganda: The Cult of Militarism

Part 15a of 'Elephants in the Room' series

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Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [Intelligence](#)

This is the second of two posts about war propaganda, and the last of four posts about propaganda more generally.

“War will exist until the distant day when the conscientious objector enjoys the same reputation and prestige as the warrior does today” (John F.Kennedy(1))

War Propaganda Runs Through Our Culture

Hollywood movies about war or spying tend to portray the US military, or James Bond, as the ‘good guys’ involved in ‘goodies vs baddies’ conflicts, with little discussion of the crimes of the US and British militaries and their spy agencies. The US military cooperates closely with these productions provided that they have final script approval, and can change scripts or scenes that they do not like. Where movies have tried to say anything negative about the US military, cooperation has been refused. They expect to have a generally patriotic view of the US, with the military portrayed as heroes, always with good intentions. These films actually help to recruit people for the military. The US navy provided planes, pilots and warships for the 1986 movie ‘Top Gun’. This led to a big rise in applications for people to become US fighter pilots. A more recent development has been the use of internet adverts for Hollywood movies, which deceptively take people to disguised army recruitment websites.(2)

One of the best examples of CIA propaganda is their manipulation of the film version of George Orwell’s book ‘Animal Farm.’ The book highlights the fact that politicians in both capitalist and communist countries can be corrupted by power. The CIA bought the film rights, knowing that it could be used as a propaganda tool. The CIA’s film version omits the most important part of the ending (which criticises capitalism) creating the impression that it is only a criticism of communism.(3)

The developers of many computer video games work closely with the US military. There is increasing use of drones in the military, piloted by soldiers thousands of miles away. What they see on their control screens is indistinguishable from a video game. The content of some games involves overthrowing governments in countries such as Venezuela.(4) Evidence from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq indicates that US soldiers participate in war as if they are playing a video game, and therefore they can convince themselves that their actions have no consequences.

Never Question The Soldiers

One of the strongest parts of any pro-war propaganda system is convincing everyone that whatever criticisms they make, they must always support the troops. But the job of a British

or American soldier has nothing to do with freedom or democracy. They are trained killers whose job is to invade and occupy other countries, and kill anyone who gets in the way. Britain's military is much smaller than that of the US, but British propaganda plays an important role in generating support for war.(5) Military veterans are always praised on television when they appear at public events. When large numbers of people are being slaughtered in Iraq, there is a big difference between saying 'The valiant British and American soldiers in Iraq were viciously attacked by terrorists, but successfully defended themselves' and 'The British and American occupation forces murdered large numbers of Iraqi people'. Variations of the first comment appear in US and British media regularly, but the second is a more honest way of describing what is going on.

Groups of former soldiers, such as 'Veterans for Peace', are now coming forward to explain that basic training is a form of brainwashing, and that the version of war that they experience, which is the mass slaughter of innocent people, is completely different from the propaganda.(6)

Brainwashing Begins In Childhood

Children's comic books about World War 2, such as Commando and War Picture Library, were very popular for decades after the war. They had a strong focus on patriotism and heroism. They stereotyped people from enemy countries as cruel or cowardly, and used derogatory terms such as jerries, hunks or krauts for German people, eyeties for Italian people, or nips for Japanese people.(7) A generation of children grew up with a very distorted view of the war and people in other countries.

Astute readers will have realised that the materials in these blogs are not taught in schools. Most young people reach adulthood with no understanding of how the world really works. This is because governments do not want citizens to understand the crimes they commit.

In 2007 the British government decided to increase its military propaganda in schools and society more generally. It is encouraging more schools to have cadet forces. Sports competitions for injured soldiers, such as the Invictus games in the UK, and the Warrior games in the US, are intended to present former soldiers as heroes.(8) The link between the military and the British Royal family also plays a propaganda role. More recently, Britain's cybersecurity agency, GCHQ, started running courses in schools teaching hacking skills, and inviting young children to visit them.(9) One campaign group noted:

"Armed Forces Day, Remembrance Day, Uniform to Work Day, Camo Day [where people wear camouflage], in the streets, on television, on the web, at sports events, in schools, advertising and fashion – the military presence in UK civilian life is increasing daily"(10)

All of the activities described above are forms of militarism, where people are encouraged to see the military, and spying, in positive terms; to think of violent, military solutions as the best way to solve international disagreements; and to ignore peaceful alternatives. There is no discussion of British and US war crimes, or the illegal spying activities of GCHQ(11) and its US equivalent, the NSA. Encouraging children to play with military vehicles and weapons, and to watch military parachutists or airshows, is intended to indoctrinate them. School trips to war museums have a similar effect. Ideas learned at a young age come to seem like common sense, as opposed to propaganda intended to serve the interests of rich and

powerful people. These activities play a direct role in recruiting soldiers, but just as importantly, they recruit a large number of people to support militarism unquestioningly.(12)

The Power of Patriotism

The military activities mentioned above also indoctrinate people into thinking about patriotism and nationalism, which are incredibly powerful propaganda tools.(13) Putting the head of a Monarch or an Emperor onto coins was one of the earliest forms of propaganda, and stamps with the Queen on them have a similar purpose. Royal pageants and processions are celebrated as major national events. We are encouraged to think of our country as a single entity, to be proud of it, and to forget, ignore, or be unaware of the crimes of our government, and the fact that most people have little in common with the billionaires and millionaires who dominate political decision-making. It makes it easy for decision-makers to generate support for foreign wars, and to describe others as 'the enemy'.

Propaganda Works on Politicians Too

It is important to realise that some government propaganda is targeted at politicians. This is where the intelligence services come in. Most people think that intelligence services exist to provide accurate information. This is only partly true. Some parts of the intelligence services have a secondary role, which is to present information that supports policy. The US decided to invade Iraq a long time before the invasion actually happened. From that point onwards, they were trying to find intelligence that would give them a good excuse to invade. Intelligence officers in Britain were told that if they did not sign up to a dossier on Weapons of Mass Destruction, that they knew was untrue, that would be the end of their careers. In the US, whole new departments were set up. The Office of Strategic Influence was set up in 2001 to support the war on terror through psychological operations (PSYOPs), which includes creating fake stories and propaganda. The Office of Special Plans was set up in 2002 specifically to 're-interpret' data to create a case for war. If the data did not support war, officers would be told that this was not what their superiors wanted to hear, and they should try again until they came up with the 'right' result.(14)

Anti-war opinions are being censored – Manipulating Information on the Internet

The internet is becoming increasingly important as a source of information, particularly for young people. Wikipedia began as an online encyclopedia that could be edited by anyone. On some non-political topics, it is a useful source of information. Unfortunately, most edits are now made by a small number of people. There is strong evidence that some of these people are not honest, independent researchers. They work to protect the establishment against its critics.(15) Critical websites such as The Grayzone have been blacklisted by Wikipedia, even though it has an outstanding track record of investigative journalism.(16) Many anti-war activists, including the former ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, discovered that their Wikipedia entries had all been changed hundreds of times in very negative ways by a single individual (or, more likely, a group of people operating under a single username).

Critical writers have noted that Facebook and Twitter censor their output, and Google manipulates search results so that critical work does not appear on the first page of results.

This means that it is becoming more and more difficult for people to find information that challenges the mainstream view.

Some Propaganda is More Subtle – Newspeak and Euphemisms

Most of the war propaganda discussed so far is reasonably obvious, once people have been made aware that it is propaganda. However, as with other forms of propaganda, war propaganda actually permeates our society.

We saw in an earlier post about the weapons industry that the word **defence** is actually a euphemism for invasions, occupations, mass murder and maiming. There are many other words that are intentionally used to give a misleading impression of what's going on. The following is just a short selection of the more obvious ones:

- **National interest** means the interests of the biggest corporations, and the rich and powerful more generally
- **International community** means the US government and any country that can be bribed or threatened to support the US
- **Rogue state** is a country that the US does not like. In reality, the biggest rogue state is the US, with Britain also having a global reputation for ignoring international law and committing war crimes.
- **Official secrets** and **national security** are mechanisms to help the most powerful people cover up their crimes.

George Orwell, the author of '1984', used the term 'Newspeak' to describe how the government and the media use language as a weapon to limit the range of ideas that people consider reasonable, and to distort our understanding of important issues. For example, politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn, who object to invasions or drone assassinations, are labeled as 'soft-on-defence' or 'soft-on-terror',(17) when in fact they are objecting to serious crimes by our government. If you watch any mainstream news program, particularly on the BBC, you eventually realise that Newspeak is being used all the time.

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Rod Driver is a part-time academic who is particularly interested in de-bunking modern-day US and British propaganda. This is the fifteenth in a series entitled Elephants In The Room, which attempts to provide a beginners guide to understanding what's really going on in relation to war, terrorism, economics and poverty, without the nonsense in the mainstream media.

Notes

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