Propaganda in the Global War on Terror

by

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Date: 15 December 2015

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counterterrorism
Abstract

This paper is based on independent research and explores conflicts of the past involving propaganda and compares them to the current Global War on Terror (GWOT). This paper examines Nazi and American propaganda during World War II, and Islamic State (ISIS), and U.S. propaganda during the current conflict in search of an explanation for the struggles of the Coalition. After over ten years in Iraq and Afghanistan with humble results in terms of progress, debate remains over the role that propaganda should play. Though negative connotations associated with propaganda abound, some would consider it an essential tactic in combating extremism. While the future is unclear, the past shows that propaganda is not a one-step solution to the Coalition’s troubles, who suffer a significant disadvantage in the GWOT. Instead, there are a variety of variables that interact with each other in order to determine the effectiveness of propaganda, and these variables continue to change.

*Keywords*: propaganda, Global War on Terror (GWOT), case study, World War II (WWII), Islamic State (ISIS), Nazis
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Diane Maye, Professor Gary Bowser, and Dean Barbara Burke, as well as the Henley-Putnam University Librarians, without whose assistance I would not have completed this assignment.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September of 2001 ushered in a new era of conflict for the U.S. and much of the world. The American way of life was suddenly under attack, robbing Americans of their sense of security and invulnerability. As a result, the Bush Administration set out to promote the security of the American homeland by eliminating foreign terrorist threats (The Institute, 2011). Bush primarily focused on Al Qaeda, led by the World Trade Center mastermind Osama bin Laden, and their affiliates, particularly the corrupt Afghan government known as the Taliban, marking the beginning of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) (Denning, 2005). After more than ten years of conflict, the Coalition has defeated Al Qaeda central but their influence remains persistent, meanwhile the Taliban retain their hold over a great deal of the Afghan countryside (Stratfor, 2011). Additionally, instability continues to grow across Iraq and Syria with the spread of ISIS (Lecher, 2014). In short, aside from keeping would be terrorist plotters occupied defending themselves, the GWOT can claim only humble results, all while much of the American public plead for a withdrawal from Afghanistan and Iraq, consistent with the intentions of the Obama Administration (Stratfor, 2011). Nonetheless, the opportunity for withdrawal remains elusive in both theaters, as fighting rages on and stability becomes less and less likely.

A Flawed Strategy

While the Coalition seeks to win hearts and minds on its way to victory in the GWOT, they often seem to act counterproductively (Vesely, 2012). Truly, the American will to fight and sacrifice seems increasingly fragile, easily diminished as evidenced by events such as the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal and civilian casualties (Karon, 2004). Furthermore, these events cast doubt among those whose hearts and minds the U.S. seeks to win. To make matters worse,
enemies of the U.S. are aware of this fact, prompting ISIS and Al Qaeda to construct various instruments of spreading information and propaganda in the form of websites, periodicals, and even social media (Theohary & Rollins, 2011). These advances combined with errors of execution during the operations phase of counterterrorist and counterinsurgent campaigns force leadership at all levels to tread very carefully. Otherwise, counterinsurgents risk provoking the ire of local populations and causing insurgents to multiply. As Riza Guler (2012) suggests, America’s misplaced priorities in the Iraq and Afghan Campaigns are proving most costly, as Coalition forces have spent over a decade in each country with modest results, in terms of stability, to show for it.

**Propaganda**

While the main weapon of terrorism appears to be violence, their true focus is information, seeking to impact an audience through their actions in order to mold behavior (Guler, 2012). Thus far, the Coalition has sought to combat terrorist violence with violence, largely neglecting the information domain of the conflict (Garfield, 2007). This inconsistency suggests that the Coalition should explore alternative tactics on which to base their strategy, such as propaganda. When one thinks of propaganda, one might picture totalitarian regimes bending the minds of their citizens. In the past, practices such as selective storytelling, presentation of partial facts, demonization of one’s enemies, narrowing the range of discourse, decontextualizing violence, dualism, and the inevitability of violence served as the common themes of propaganda campaigns (Shah, 2005). Merriam Webster defines propaganda as the spreading of information and ideas in order to help or hinder an institution, cause, or person, or the deliberate spreading of ideas, facts, or allegations intended to influence behavior.
Despite widespread bias, more benign definitions of propaganda exist, such as an attempt to influence the opinion and behavior of a society so that they adopt an opinion and specific behavior (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). In essence, almost any action aimed at persuasion could fall under the somewhat broad definition of propaganda. Propaganda even resembles much more palatable terms, such as information operations, or coordinated actions intended to impact enemy capabilities and information based processes while protecting one’s own (Roca, 2008).

Propaganda played a crucial role in conflicts of the past, mainly World War II (Marling & Wetenhall, 2002). The GWOT is no different, as terrorists continue to spread their extremist beliefs across a variety of mediums to an increasingly broad audience (Fisher, 2015). While the Coalition has not altogether neglected the information domain of the conflict, their efforts of persuasion seem to accomplish little (Garfield, 2007). Perhaps there are lessons from the past that the U.S. might apply to the GWOT to explain the frustrations of the Coalition and provide a way forward.

**Research Question**

The purpose of this paper is to ascertain the reasons for the failure of the Coalition on the information front of the GWOT. Why has the Coalition failed thus far? Were their efforts doomed from the start due to external factors influencing U.S. propaganda? Has the U.S. implemented ineffective mediums or tactics in their propaganda? Are there issues with the message conveyed in U.S. propaganda? By examining propaganda cases from WWII, this paper intends to determine if there are practices the U.S. implemented in the past that yielded results that might also be effective today. Furthermore, this research examines how propaganda has changed since WWII.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

An Overview of Propaganda

In order to effectively wield propaganda in the GWOT, one must first overcome a great deal of prejudice associated with that term. But by delving into the actual definition of propaganda, one learns that almost any act fits into the broad definition of propaganda, including enticement and persuasion rather than coercion or deception (Ujfalusi, 2013). Other definitions include communication intended to influence opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of a target audience to the benefit of the communicator (Denning, 2005). Truly, after events such as the rise of the Third Reich in Germany, one can see how such an instrument of communication can be misused for the benefit of a dictator to the detriment of humanity. However, simply because dictators and totalitarian governments have misused propaganda in the past does not mean that it cannot serve as an effective tool of influence in conflicts of the future. As Maurice Tugwell once said, “Propaganda and terrorism are identical since they both try to influence an audience in a way that benefits the speaker, except that terrorism’s sole purpose is inducing fear while propaganda can serve any imaginable purpose, religious, political, commercial, or otherwise” (The Institute, 2011, p. 4).

Fundamentals of Propaganda

Propagandists generally follow a certain set of guidelines in order to maximize the effectiveness of their efforts, some of which reveal the disagreeable nature of propaganda in the past. Above all else, information operations and propaganda must be simple and easy to understand, ensuring that the public gets the message and understands what the speaker intends. This often involves exaggerating the traits of an enemy in order to stain their image in the eye of the public (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). Many propagandists will argue that one must project their own faults on to the enemy, accusing them of committing acts that the
communicator might plan to commit. For instance, during WWII the Nazis regularly emphasized the perceived belligerence of the Allies (Stout, 2011). Meanwhile, the Nazis were clearly the aggressors, which they made clear through their conquest of Europe at the outset of WWII (Stout, 2011). This technique can serve as powerful motivation to support a war, as the audience comes to believe that the enemy wants a war and attacking them is the only means of defense (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). One might also turn current events in the news to their own advantage in order to sway public opinion by exaggerating facts, capitalizing on enthusiasm or hatred, distorting meaning, or remaining silent on contradictory issues (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). Propagandists will also use the repetition of themes, adapted to the characteristics of the public (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). While such actions by any government might seem repulsive, one need only look at the Post 9/11 Era, in which cries such as “Never Forget”, “Love It or Leave It”, “Freedom isn’t Free”, and “Support Our Troops” are commonplace in order to show support for the defense of freedom. These themes require new information in order to stay relevant in the minds of the population (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). Such slogans are most effective when they feed off of preexisting sentiments, such as historical prejudices or hatred and reassurance of popular opinions and beliefs (De La Brosse, Lajmi, & Ekelin, 2015). Eventually, agreement on these publicly professed opinions and beliefs creates a sense of unity and support for a government or regime.

**Stages of Propaganda**

A propaganda campaign normally follows a progression of four stages. The first is the preliminary stage, in which concern continues to grow over any number of issues. In the instance of September 11, 2001, the issue would be the emergence of international terrorism on a scale not seen before (Shah, 2005). The second stage is justification, during which the
propagandists present an urgent need for new legislation, military intervention, a regime change, or any other goal the communicators seek (Shah, 2005). The Bush administration, in the wake of the World Trade Center Attack, felt that action was needed in order to counter the emerging threat of Al Qaeda, which began the GWOT. The final stage of propaganda is aftermath, in which the communicator portrays a return to normality (Shah, 2005). In the case of the GWOT, this normality would mean that the U.S. has defeated Al Qaeda and their affiliates and the U.S. is safe from international terrorism.

**Why Propaganda Works**

It may seem puzzling that people would fall for seemingly rudimentary tricks and bend to the wishes of communicators of propaganda. However, the fact remains that people want to believe the best news about themselves and their country. In the instance of the GWOT, many Americans most likely believed that terrorists and insurgents could not stand up to the military might of the U.S. and the GWOT would be a short lived campaign (Shah, 2005). Additionally, fear mongering can feed the notion to believe communicators of propaganda through touting of threats to the values a society holds dear. This fear then necessitates whatever course of action propagandists propose. Propagandists present these claims in an apparently logical way, making them more believable and more effective. Hitler’s Third Reich presents a perfect example of the logical presentation of appeals to fear. The argument was simple, in that the Germans were descendants of a superior race, the Aryans, and the Jews, an inferior race, posed a threat to their heritage and their future, which necessitated their eradication. An additional factor contributing to the success of propaganda is media management and public relations, allowing the communicator to manage thought and narrow the range of discourse regarding an issue (Shah, 2005). This may consist of presenting only success stories while neglecting unforeseen
consequences or impediments to success. The Japanese applied this technique during World War II, assuring their soldiers that victory was inevitable and imminent; meanwhile their families were starving due to constant bombardment from the Allies. While many of these practices seem unethical or at least questionable, they can prove effective even in a democracy, since people want to believe that their cause is righteous and their nation is moral (Shah, 2005). As is the case in the GWOT, one need only declare a war necessary for one’s own defense and label any who oppose it as unpatriotic and willing to expose the country to danger (Shah, 2005). Thus, examining the mechanisms of propaganda makes clear the reasons for its effectiveness in various situations.

**Terrorist Propaganda**

Terrorists adhere to the principles of propaganda mentioned above with several individualities. First, they demonize their enemies as most propagandists do, but take it a step further in labeling them immoral and evil, along with the institutions their enemies adhere to, which frees them from obeying any laws other than their own. Several themes dominate their propaganda, including the inherent righteousness of their own cause, the fundamental evil of their enemy who cannot be saved or negotiated with, and the inevitability of their victory on account of their uprightness (Tugwell, 1986).

The goals of terrorist propaganda consist of creating a core group of supporters possessing unquestioning loyalty, and influencing the population to convert to the terrorist notion that all institutions are evil. Their ultimate goal is to either convert or eliminate all who oppose them (Tugwell, 1986). To this end they employ several tactics, the first is guilt transfer, meaning that terrorists blame everything bad that happens on the regime, to the point that they reject the terrorist label and consider themselves “freedom fighters” or “revolutionaries” (Tugwell, 1986).
The second is their own invulnerability, proclaiming the regime they fight is powerless to stop them, aided by the fact that time is always on the side of the terrorists in that the longer a campaign lasts, the more helpless the regime appears (Tugwell, 1986). Next, they will use spurious justification, citing injustices, real or not, as grounds for violent response, while confusing their ends with their means in order to garner approval or at least confuse the public (Tugwell, 1986). Lastly, they will employ disarming tactics in order to remove any efforts that threaten their integrity or freedom to act, usually done through conventional logic or morality (Tugwell, 1986).

**Response to Terrorism**

In response to terrorism, retaliation and “fighting fire with fire” using violence can be ineffective. Truly, the ultimate tool of terrorist propaganda is violence used to intimidate others, undermine authorities, and demonstrate their power all while provoking excessive military responses from their enemies. Inevitably, during the course of the military response, the counterterrorists will accidentally kill civilians and cause collateral damage. Such instances cause disapproval among target audiences and provide fertile ground for enemy communicators to peddle their own cause as righteous and benevolent. This communication can take a variety of forms, from graffiti around cities, to more sophisticated efforts such as DVDs and online videos (Guler, 2012). While counterterrorist violence may convince the public that authorities are protecting them, it can also encourage terrorists rather than deterring them (Post, 2005). Perhaps the priorities must be reversed, meaning that the target of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency should be the beliefs that motivate terrorists rather than the terrorists themselves.
Making matters worse, the internet only amplifies the potency and effectiveness of terrorist propaganda, a battlefield which the Coalition seems to pay little attention to. Terrorist online resources include efforts at recruitment, organization, training, fundraising, and cybercrime, all at minimal expense (Theohary & Rollins, 2011). Specifically, one popular tactic of insurgents is creating videos of successful attacks on the Coalition in order to instill in the minds of the populace their own potency and the defenselessness of their enemies. Such a DVD might cost $100, using equipment that most likely costs under $1,000, posted to a website that might cost approximately $1,500 to maintain. Meanwhile, the U.S. military information contract is $250,000 annually, and cannot post information nearly as rapidly or effectively as terrorist communicators can (Garfield, 2007). Coalition efforts focus on large scale national TV and radio broadcasts which do not reach the target audience, as well as compensating journalists for covering “planted”, but truthful, stories they felt had the potential to reach locals. While Coalition communicators may have the right idea, their execution is typically poor rendering their efforts fruitless (Garfield, 2007).

Combatting terrorist rhetoric would require communication not only with terrorists, but with one’s own population, neutral audiences, and the host nation if applicable (Guler, 2012). Crisis management is also crucial, in the event of successful attacks or unsuccessful action on the part of the authorities, as well as managing international relations in order to garner support for their cause (Guler, 2012). While cliché’s abound, none more prevalent than the need to win “hearts and minds”, current progress in Iraq and Afghanistan is thwarted by attempts to fight the people themselves instead of the ideas that persuade them to fight. In order to convince individuals to reject radicalism, propaganda under the broad spectrum of information operations may prove invaluable in its power of persuasion. Unfortunately, terrorists normally use
propaganda proficiently as opposed to the Coalition. Terrorists will frequently and rapidly release information which undermines the government they oppose and justifies their own actions (Garfield, 2007). Furthermore, if matters go awry, terrorists do a thorough job of shifting blame, or undermining progress made by the Coalition (Garfield, 2007). Thus, the Coalition seems at quite a disadvantage on the information front of the conflict.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Comparative Case Study

Terrorism is notoriously difficult to study. Truly, one could spend a lifetime just defining the word terrorism, which only adds to the complexity. Adding to the difficulty associated with researching terrorism is the lack of metrics to define changes in terrorism. One might argue that frequency of attacks or casualties over certain time periods might yield some measurable results but that leads into the trap of treating a counterterror campaign as a conventional conflict. Furthermore, experimental designs are rarely feasible, and context can play an enormous role. For this reason, a comparative case study seems to be the best method for determining the success or failure of propaganda campaigns. Comparative case study allows systematic comparison which can potentially set the stage for statistical analysis. Also, comparative case studies can answer questions of attribution and contribution of variables and explain how certain variables affect outcomes (Collier, 1993). Comparative case studies can also assess rival explanations of outcomes, examine covariation between cases, and demonstrate a model or concepts applicable to new cases (Collier, 1993). This method seems well suited for the study of propaganda due to its ability to analyze variables across multiple circumstances with limited ability to control variables and the opportunity to collect and analyze data over time (Collier, 1993). Thus, comparative studies of historical use of propaganda and its use today could provide insight into common themes and models the Coalition might apply in order to turn the tide in the war of ideas.

Challenges

One primary difficulty inherent in comparative studies is selecting the appropriate number of cases. Specifically, selecting too many cases produces results that are too vague to be useful. On the other hand, studying too few cases leads to a great deal of extrapolation and
assumption which is equally problematic (Collier, 1993). Additionally, comparative case studies typically have a weak capacity to rule out rival explanations for outcomes. Lastly, generating hypotheses from comparative studies is particularly challenging due to a lack of experimental data (Collier, 1993). The most effective method of overcoming these obstacles is careful selection of the number of cases as well as the number of variables to study, allowing researchers to hone in on specific factors that influence outcomes across cases (Collier, 1993).

**Conducting a Comparative Case Study**

Once it becomes clear that a comparative case study is well suited to the research question, one must determine the purpose of the study, whether the intent is description of differences between cases or finding comparisons that can test exploratory propositions, and then confine the study by time and place, time and activity, or definition and context (Goodrick, 2014). Next, one must carefully select the cases to study and how they will conduct the study. This requires a clear rationale of why to include a case rather than picking randomly or conveniently. In terms of the number of cases to study, the general rule favors limiting the number of cases allowing the researcher to go further in depth. Next, one must determine how to collect, analyze and synthesize evidence across cases in the hopes of identifying patterns, not to mention what causes the patterns and explanations for similar or different patterns (Goodrick, 2014).
Comparative Case Study of Propaganda

Research Question

The purpose of this case study is to determine if there are any patterns from past use of propaganda that can be applied to the GWOT. Are there any similarities or differences in circumstances or execution that explain the Coalition’s disadvantage in the war of ideas?

Case Selection

This research will focus on four different cases dispersed across two different conflicts: Nazi propaganda, U.S. and Allied propaganda, Coalition propaganda, and ISIS propaganda. One should consider these cases significant for several reasons. First, the Nazis constructed one of the most persuasive and robust propaganda machines in history. Truly, German support for the Nazis was overwhelming, and Adolf Hitler earned almost unquestioningly loyalty. With this fact in mind, what made German propaganda so effective? Was it the set of circumstances surrounding the conflict that played to the Nazis strengths, or was their success a product of their own doing?

Countering the efforts of the Nazis, World War II is arguably the most popular war in American history. While opposition existed, support for the conflict was widespread, unlike the current conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. It seems America used propaganda effectively in the past, yet current efforts seem unsuccessful. What’s the difference between now and then? Has the U.S. neglected certain practices? Have the circumstances set the U.S. up for failure?

Lastly, this study seeks to ascertain what ISIS has done to make their propaganda so potent as to recruit not only fellow Arabs but Westerners as well, even some Americans. Furthermore, this is the enemy the U.S. now fights, and understanding their message and their methods might provide insight into effective means to fight them
Variable Selection

The first variable to analyze is the medium used by communicators of propaganda in order to determine if there is a particular medium or mediums that are more effective than others, whether it be film, print, public broadcasts, or other such methods. Next, the case study will focus on target audiences, to determine if certain people are more prone to accept propaganda than others, including foreign, native, general, or specific groups of people. The next variable under analysis is the message of propaganda, in order to determine whether there are certain themes common among successful attempts at propaganda that communicators can apply today. Historical context is another important variable that may or may not influence the effectiveness of propaganda. Specifically, events such as military victories or defeats, as well as foreign policy can create bias in the minds of target audiences that can impact the outcome of propaganda campaigns. Tactics of propaganda may also play an important part in the realization of effective propaganda. Are there tactics that consistently work? Are there other tactics that do not? Lastly, consistency between actions and the message of propaganda could be of paramount importance. Does the behavior of the communicators match their message? If their message is peaceful are their actions peaceful? If they tout their own superiority are they able to achieve military victories? After analysis of these variables, one should be able to ascertain the reasons for the success of U.S. and Nazi propaganda in the Second World War, and the reasons Coalition propaganda has struggled to take effect in the GWOT.

Data Collection

Data collection will focus on the material distributed from communicators to target audiences across these four cases in order to analyze the aforementioned variables and their effect on the outcome of the various propaganda campaigns. Hopefully, patterns will emerge
that can explain reasons for the success of WWII propaganda, and the limited effectiveness of U.S. GWOT propaganda.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Nazi Propaganda

Medium

The Nazi Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, under the direction of Dr. Joseph Goebbels, relied heavily on film to spread their propaganda. The most famous of their productions was “Triumph des Willens” or “Triumph of the Will.” Another mode of communication Goebbels used was public speaking, which was prominent in “Triumph des Willens”, taking full advantage of Adolf Hitler’s prowess as an orator (Riefenstahl, 1935). Truly, when one thinks of Nazi propaganda, images of Nazis parading through the streets paying homage to Hitler come to mind, which also feature heavily in the film.

Audience

The Nazi Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda did a thorough job of accommodating the entire German population in their communication. “Triumph des Willens” makes Goebbels efforts at catering to all walks of life within Germany apparent, as mothers and children, working class men, and soldiers all show their rabid support for Hitler and the Nazi party (Riefenstahl, 1935). Thus, the Nazi message is very specific, showing that no matter who you are, all Germans should support Hitler, rather than a more general approach to the German population as a whole.

Message

The Nazi message emphasized several points in order to overcome several weaknesses they attributed to their defeat in World War I. Specifically, the Nazis considered their defeat in World War I devastating to the morale of both the German leadership and the German public. Not only that, they saw cracked morale as the main cause for Germany’s defeat, and reasoned that the Allies would expect the war to be short lived due to the erosion of German morale.
similar to World War I (Kris, 1941). Truly, German general staff cited morale as the primary reason for Germany’s defeat, claiming the outcome resulted from “the brave who were conquered by the clever” (Kris, 1941). Specifically, they believed that Germany fell victim to Allied and socialist propaganda along with the promises of President Woodrow Wilson. Furthermore, they believed the Allies never conquered the German Army, neglecting the damage Allied blockades caused which effectively strangled Germany into shortages of supplies, not to mention the defeats the German army suffered (Kris, 1941). As a result, the German high command made a point of not letting poor morale contribute to another defeat and embarrassment by setting out to fully prepare the public and addressing the weaknesses the Allies exploited in the First World War. The Nazis identified these weaknesses as widespread lack of enthusiasm for the war among civilians, dissatisfaction with living conditions caused or exacerbated by the war, and apprehension regarding the future. This anxiety decreased with German victories but increased in the face of defeats, stalemates, and postponement of decisions (Kris, 1941). The Nazis then wasted no time in addressing these cracks in their armor.

The Nazis sought to create enthusiasm by overcoming peaceful protest to the war. Adolf Hitler did this by invading Austria and then pursuing peace, which he then followed by invading Poland and making another peace offer. The Allies rejected these peace offers, which gave Hitler the opportunity to attribute the continuation of the war to the belligerence of the Allies rather than his own. At this point, Hitler proclaimed that the goal of the conflict was to prevent the Allied occupation of neutral countries, such as Yugoslavia and Norway. Despite the ridiculous nature of Hitler’s claims of seeking peace, he never made the mistake of backing away from this claim, and continually cited the aggression of the Allies as the reason for the conflict, while labeling each action of his as defense (Kris, 1941).
The Nazis supplemented these efforts with a mass communication system, delivering messages from the high command and flash news from the front lines including the cries of dying soldiers during hardships and restlessness during idle times. These messages, portraying the thrills of battle combined with defensive justification, did their job of inspiring enthusiasm for the war among the German public.

Next, the Nazis set out to overcome dissatisfaction with living conditions brought on by the war through rationalization and even glorification of them. Unlike World War I, the Nazis claimed rationing and shortage were a part of planned action rather than scarcity. As the war progressed, the rationing became easier to vindicate, as each country conquered translated into lifted restrictions. Meanwhile, the Nazis constantly compared the German quality of life with that of their enemies, making the German living standard seem more acceptable, while all along blaming the British for their troubles in a viscous campaign of hate (Kris, 1941).

The Nazis sought to overcome anxiety regarding the outcome of the war by stressing that World War II was nothing but an extension of World War I, claiming that they were still fighting the same conflict. However, the Germans argued that this time, they enjoyed a great deal more popularity among the international community than Imperial Germany had. Also, instead of a war on two fronts, German communicators presented only the struggle against Britain, which they considered much more manageable. Furthermore, the Germans considered their leadership in World War I incompetent when compared to Hitler and the Third Reich, which they argued would make all the difference. To this end, the Nazis touted Hitler endlessly as the heroic leader of their country, professing his devotion, the success of his initiatives, and his victories against Germany’s enemies. Phrases such as “Whatever Hitler does is well done” capture the esteem the German public held him in, bestowing on Hitler a protective and paternal image (Kris, 1941).
Context

As mentioned above, defeat in World War I was devastating to German morale which Hitler and Goebbels sought to remedy. The prosperity of Germany under Hitler and the perceived oppression of the Allies in the form of reparations following the war primed the German population to support and follow the Nazis. Germany’s economy continued to grow, along with their military strength as the Allied policy of appeasement only encouraged Hitler’s aggression. Nazi popularity increased as they conquered Poland, Holland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, and eventually forced the British out of France at Dunkirk. Truly, in light of all they had done, it seemed they owed Hitler and his party allegiance, which only amplified the potency of Nazi propaganda.

Tactics

One of the primary tactics used by the Nazi Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was reinforcement of motivations. Specifically, they never wavered from their claim that World War II was nothing but a continuation of World War I, and that their fight was purely a defensive campaign (Kris, 1941). “Triump des Willens” even begins with a timeline of events, starting with “16 years after the beginning of German suffering” (Riefenstahl, 1935). The reinforcement of the defensive nature of the conflict ties directly into an additional tactic used by the Nazis, spurious justification. All along, the Nazis neglected the fact that they were soundly defeated on the battlefield in a war they were responsible for starting, not to mention the fact that they were on the verge of starting another major conflict. The Nazis took this a step further as a means of rationalizing any hardships Germans encountered as a result of the war. In the event shortages occurred, Nazi leadership professed it was a part of planned action rather than scarcity, which was all on account of the aggression of the Allies (Kris, 1941).
This notion of a defensive campaign reveals another tactic Goebbels and his Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda depended on, guilt transfer. By uncompromisingly professing the innocence of Germany and the belligerence of the Allies, Goebbels absolved the Nazis of any responsibility for beginning the conflict, despite their aggression across Europe.

Among the most prevalent and potent devices the Nazis used were the notion of their own invulnerability and the glorification of their cause. “Triumph des Willens” asserts that the German strength of will is invincible, and cannot be conquered. Images of the German military, working force, and even women and children reinforce the notion that their unity and devotion are the source of their strength which no enemy can ever quell (Riefenstahl, 1935). Furthermore, the film portrays Hitler in god-like status as the savior and protector of Germany. Throughout the film, the architecture, oration, and cinematography all serve to instill a sense of superiority.

All along, the Nazis applied another method of persuasion by narrowing the scope of discourse. Goebbels made the conflict into the Nazis defending themselves from the Allies and their continuing aggression from World War I, and refused to make any mention of Hitler’s aggression in Europe, Germany’s responsibility for the outbreak of World War I, or any justification of the reparations Germany faced. Goebbels dictated what the discussion was about and that was the end of the conversation.

**Consistency between Message and Actions**

While the Germans were clearly the aggressors waging anything but a defensive campaign, they overcame this discrepancy through the power of their propaganda machine. Furthermore, the idea of Germany’s strength and determination took hold across the country thanks to Germany’s prosperity and conquest of Europe. However, this faith in Nazi determination proved rather fragile, in that as soon as Allied bombings began destroying German
homes, it seemed to shatter the idea of German invincibility. After receiving promises of safety from Hitler and Goebbels, there was no rationalizing the hardship Germany now faced, which continued to erode the German will to fight as defeats began to accumulate (Stout, 2011).

**Effectiveness**

Overall, German propaganda was an incredible unifying force that mobilized an entire country despite facing hardships that were largely their own doing. The Nazis achieved such popularity through the adept use of several propaganda techniques, but their impact lasted only as long as the war was going Germany’s way. Even one of the most powerful propaganda machines in history could not stand up to the reality of their own military defeats.

**U.S. Propaganda**

**Medium**

Like the Nazis, American propaganda relied heavily on film, parades, and public gatherings to garner support for the war, along with posters, and pictures in particular. Among the two most notorious pieces of American propaganda from WWII are the film “Why We Fight” directed by Frank Capra, and the image of the U.S. Marines raising the American flag on Mt. Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima.

**Audience**

American propaganda targeted the population as a whole, particularly those who preferred that the U.S. stay out of the conflict in Europe. “Why We Fight” at times seemed to reach out to the sentiments of everyday Americans, including women and working class men, but the message did not focus on any specific demographic but the entire American population.
Message

In “Why We Fight” Frank Capra took a page out of the Nazi Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda’s book and largely mimicked the film’s style. The film begins with print on screen reading “The purpose of these films is to give factual information as to the causes, the events leading up to our entry into the war and the principles for which we are fighting” (Capra, 1943). Throughout the film, Capra stresses the threat that the Axis powers pose not only to America but to the entire free world, presenting images of war torn Pearl Harbor, Britain, and France thanks to Nazi aggression. Capra speaks of two worlds, one of the free that America and the Allies represent, where all men are equal according to the Constitution as well as religious faiths. The other world is the slave world, which the Axis powers fight for as they strive to set humanity itself back in their opposition to freedom. Dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini seek to deceive and betray their citizens, who willingly gave up their individual rights (Capra, 1943). The film portrays the rise of dictators as the result of brutal campaigns of violence and coercion as they remove or silence all who oppose them, including symbols of faith and god as mandated by Hitler and Mussolini. Capra argues that dictators take the place of god in their countries as they are fanatically worshipped by their citizens (Capra, 1943). To make matters worse, the U.S. continues to grow weak in pursuit of peace and isolationism, lulled into a sense of security thinking that affairs in Europe have no effect on the American way of life. All the while, the Axis powers grow bolder and progress in their plan to conquer the entire free world unless the U.S. intervenes (Capra, 1943). For this reason, Capra argues that the U.S. must fight, transforming the American flag into a symbol of freedom on one hand, and overwhelming power on the other.
Other films, such as “Education for Death: The Making of a Nazi” portray the Nazis in a particularly evil light. The film follows the journey of a young boy, named Hans, from birth to full indoctrination as a German soldier. The film makes clear the complete Nazi dominance of every facet of life in Germany, from approved names of children, to birth passports, to threatening to “step in” when Hans gets sick (Geronimi, 1943). All along, teachers and government officials crush differing opinions, while teaching Hans and his classmates to suppress all weakness and compassion. In their eyes, the world belongs to the strong and the brutal; meanwhile they show unquestioning loyalty to Hitler (Geronimi, 1943). Eventually, Hans’ education is complete, making him a full blooded Nazi, which can only lead to his death.

Despite the clout of these films, the most powerful piece of propaganda from WWII, possibly even in U.S. history, is the image of the U.S. Marines raising the American flag on Mt. Suribachi. The image still serves as an emblem of American pride, power, resilience, willingness to sacrifice, determination, and courage. To this day Americans continue to reflect on the significance of that image, claiming that:

It's important that our children and grandchildren know these stories. If it weren't for the Marines who faced these horrific battles and enduring times in the Pacific, things could be a lot different today - a lot different…We have to let people know what the [those] young men did to honor our country (Cifuentes, 2010).

**Context**

Prior to the release of “Why We Fight” and “Education for Death”, the Nazis had conquered Europe and the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, solidifying both the prowess and the danger the Axis powers posed. In the wake of these events, the U.S. joined the war and won resounding victories at the Battle of Midway and Guadalcanal, which may have confirmed the
belief that American courage and military might could prevail against the Axis powers. By the
time the U.S. won the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Allies had successfully landed on Normandy and
won other major engagements in the Philippines. These victories reinforced the idea that the
Allies could defeat the Axis powers, and that the fight was noble and worthwhile.

**Tactics**

While Capra claims that his films avoided any tactics of persuasion other than the
presentation of facts, upon closer examination, his efforts rely heavily on the reinforcement of
motivations. As with the Nazis, Capra claims the U.S. must get involved in the conflict in the
interest of her own self-preservation, in that the Nazis will seek to conquer America along with
the rest of the world (Capra, 1943). At the same time, Capra narrows the scope of discourse on
the subject of America joining the war. All the while, he claims the Axis powers will eventually
conquer the U.S. if left unchallenged, yet he never mentions how. Truly, besides the Japanese
attack on Pearl Harbor, no enemies in WWI or WWII managed to attack the American
homeland. Skeptics might wonder if America could not simply defend her own borders rather
than bringing the fight to the Axis powers across the world. Capra even takes this notion a step
further, as he demonizes the Axis powers while glorifying the cause of the Allies. Capra does
this as he literally divides the world in two, speaking of the world of the free, and the world of
slaves, allowing no middle ground that the U.S. might occupy (Capra, 1943). This idea
simultaneously narrows the range of discourse, simplifying the conflict into black and white,
while underscoring the fundamental evil of the Axis powers.

“Education for Death” takes the smearing of the Nazis a step further. All along, the film
portrays Germans as lazy, foolish, and cooperative citizens who erroneously label Hitler as their
savior after yielding their freedoms. Hitler’s inherent evil, combined with Germany’s blind and
fanatic allegiance to him, form a dangerous combination that the Allies must put an end to (Geronimi, 1943).

One might argue that these films employed disarming themes as well, seeking to discredit the Axis powers by labelling them evil and claiming that they seek to set all of humanity back into a world of enslavement. Yet, while “Education for Death” takes a more fantastical approach, “Why We Fight” presents a much more factual argument, true to Capra’s words in the opening of the film. However, moving on to the example of Iwo Jima, one cannot say the same of American propagandists. The most glaring ploy at work in this instance is the presentation of partial facts, as well as facts out of context. Specifically, the American media presented the image as the victorious end to a long and costly battle by a group of battle weary Marines, signifying American might and constitution. In reality, the photographers staged the photograph as the Marines replaced the original flag with a much larger one deemed more appropriate (Marling & Wetenhall, 2002). Furthermore, this was not the end of a heroic battle as the fighting raged on for several more days (Marling & Wetenhall, 2002). Additionally, those paraded as the heroes who actually hoisted the flag bent the truth as to their involvement, as it was never evident who actually raised the flag (Marling & Wetenhall, 2002). In the course of distorting facts, the photograph also implements the technique of professing one’s invulnerability, in that with the bravery and skill of the Marines and the rest of the American and Allied fighting men and women, the Axis cannot stand and victory is only a matter of time.

Consistency between Message and Actions

Overall, despite the inaccuracies incorporated into the Battle of Iwo Jima, the message of American propagandists did indeed corresponded with actions on battlefields around the world. While Capra may have exaggerated the threat of the Axis powers, they had no doubt trampled
the freedoms of a great many Asian and European nations while thoroughly oppressing their own citizens. Moreover, the Axis set their sights on the entire world rather than stopping with Europe and Asia. In the face of such aggression, the U.S. military did their part in achieving resounding victories in Normandy, Midway, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, and the Battle of the Bulge, which only reinforced the glorification instilled by propagandists such as Capra and Geronimi.

**Effectiveness**

In all honesty, it is difficult to tell whether U.S. propaganda fueled American success on the battlefield, or whether American victories validated U.S. propaganda and enhanced its effectiveness. Chronologically, one might argue that events such as the Zimmerman telegram and the attack on Pearl Harbor aroused significant antagonism towards the Axis powers. This resentment may have reached the point that the American populace would ascribe to any message condemning the Axis powers and calling for their eradication. However, speculation remains as to how the war might have ended without the efforts of American communicators. Perhaps the war would have lasted longer; perhaps the American will to fight would have suffered leading to diminished recruitment or less enthusiasm on the battlefield. In either case, the fact remains that WWII marks a monumental U.S. victory and one of the most popular and glorified conflicts in American history.

**ISIS Propaganda**

**Medium**

ISIS has taken full advantage of the technology of the day as they primarily rely on the internet to disseminate their message. Truly, the internet is rife with the work of ISIS in the form of videos and images of successful attacks, lists and biographies of martyrs killed in battle, and discussions of their ideology as well as methods and instructions for radicals to carry out attacks
(Theohary & Rollins, 2011). One successful ploy enabling ISIS to maintain a persistent and effective presence online is known as swarmcast. Swarmcast consists of spreading information to supporters who then disperse the material to other accounts, thus blurring the lines between content, producer, and audience (Fisher, 2015). Using swarm tactics, ISIS propagandists, under the direction of the Alhayat Media Center, can post information from various origins and then disperse rapidly in order to avoid detection, largely without centralized leadership (Fisher, 2015). They also proliferate their message using social media through “mujatweets,” which are short videos consisting of updates of underway attacks, urging ISIS supporters to join in (Military.com, 2015). One such tweet states “This Syrian guy next to me (AbuUbaydah) is so stoked for our op he almost shot his foot off. Come on bro – safety first. :p” (Talbot, 2015). But among the most notable pieces of ISIS propaganda is the hour long video entitled “The Flames of War.” The film already has over 750,000 views online on a variety of websites including Google+, Vimeo, and Liveleak (Fisher, 2015). As Dr. Nico Prucha so astutely states:

> The internet is a battlefield for jihad, a place for missionary work, a field of confronting the enemies of God. It is upon any individual to consider himself as a media-mujahid, dedicating himself, his wealth and his time for God (Fisher, 2015).

**Audience**

ISIS spread their message to a truly broad audience as they seek to intimidate and provoke their enemies, while also garnering support from Muslims around the world, even in the West. Additionally, a great deal of propaganda caters to their supporters and active members in the Middle East.
The Message of ISIS propaganda focuses on several themes depending on their target audience. Toward their enemies in both the West and the Middle East, they stress their own prowess and commitment, warning them of the damage their organization is prepared to unleash. Specifically, statements such as “We love death as you love life” and “I have never met brothers who want death so badly as much as these brothers.” solidify their own fearlessness and dedication, while shocking their enemies and appealing to potential recruits (Talbot, 2015).

Furthermore, despite the damage they have inflicted, they warn that the violence will only grow around the world, summed up at the end of “Flames of War” as the speaker states “The flames of war are only beginning to intensify” (Conflict Studies, 2014). Other images play to their desire to intimidate and frighten their opposition around the world, making clear that no one should feel safe. “Flames of War” ends with a scene of ISIS executioners killing enemy prisoners after showing them digging their own graves, warning that their enemies will suffer the same fate. Other scenes show successful attacks and the aftermath of their violence (Conflict Studies, 2014). Images also consist of ISIS supporters holding the black flag near prominent landmarks around the world, making clear that there operatives are everywhere, and their reach is indeed global (CNN, 2014).

While the violent images and rhetoric may appeal to potential recruits, ISIS communicators take a different tone with those they seek to join their ranks. To this audience, ISIS rhetoric harps on themes of sacrifice, honor, and nobility, along with their intent to establish an Islamic caliphate in accordance with Muslim tradition (Talbot, 2015). They consider the violent actions preparation to meet their maker, enabling them to enter the afterlife with pride due to their sacrifices on earth. Statements include “Come feel the happiness we are feeling” and
“Look around at the comfort you live in and ask yourself if this is how you want to die” (CNN, 2014). Their message is indeed specific, displaying their knowledge of cultural nuances, as shown by tweets such as “Put the chicken wings down n come to jihad bro” (Talbot, 2015). Thus, they desire to seduce potential members with the honor of sacrificing one’s life for a greater cause, to the eventual benefit of the members, along with the desire for excitement and purpose in one’s life. Besides their emotional argument, ISIS also reasons that Muslims suffer around the world at the hands of the West, and that their violence is the solution to end the West’s tyranny (Subsaeng, 2015).

**Context**

The message of ISIS comes at a time when America and her Coalition partners seem increasingly war weary, seeking to draw down forces in Afghanistan and conclude operations in Iraq while pursuing stability in Syria. However, ISIS strives to expand their strongholds in Iraq and Syria, as they destabilize both countries much to the dismay of the Coalition. This comes in the aftermath of over ten years of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, all in pursuit of peace and stability, meanwhile ISIS continues to create more violence, much to the dismay of the Coalition.

**Tactics**

ISIS constantly stresses their motivations for fighting and dying for the organization. Truly, they consider nothing one might do with their life more honorable and meaningful than martyrdom, made evident by slogans such as “YODO-you only die once” (Lecher, 2014). Tied directly in with this tactic is the demonization of one’s enemies, and glorification of one’s self. ISIS labels the West as corrupt and cowardly, citing civilian casualties resulting from Coalition actions, and the suffering of Muslims at the hands of the West (CNN, 2014). In contrast, ISIS presents martyrs’ actions as noble and responses to the devastation the West is responsible for.
But possibly the most blatant tactic ISIS propagandists implement is stressing their own invulnerability. While they make obvious individual members’ willingness to die and sacrifice, ISIS messages consistently focuses on their fearlessness in the face of Western aggression, and their belief that no one can stop them. With such virulent beliefs, it is indeed puzzling how ISIS has managed to attract so much support. It seems the reason for their popularity is the combination of such hateful messages with emotions of honor and righteousness, which legitimizes any actions they take. Truly, their justification of preparing for the afterlife and realizing the meaning of their own lives validates the atrocities they commit.

**Consistency between Message and Actions**

Thus far, one might reason that ISIS has kept their word, largely contributing to their success. They maintain their strongholds in Iraq and Syria while expanding their influence into Europe. Meanwhile, their ranks continue to grow, including Westerners who join and carry out attacks. Thus, not only do they still exist, but they continue to maintain their operational potency.

**Effectiveness**

There seems little doubt as to the effectiveness of ISIS propaganda under the Alhayat Media Center. ISIS has attracted 25,000 foreign fighters to their ranks in Syria and Iraq, including 4,500 members from Europe and North America according to a U.S. government report (Talbot, 2015). Experts freely admit that ISIS have mastered propaganda, even comparing them to the Nazi Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, stating that their extremist rhetoric is becoming a virus, infecting the entire world (CNN, 2014).
US GWOT Propaganda

Medium

With the success of propaganda in WWII, the U.S. sought to again take advantage of the information front of a struggle. Coalition efforts include leaflets, slogans, and once again film, along with social media, and cable TV in order to fight jihadist propaganda in the war of ideas (Subsaeng, 2015). Truly, a June 2015 summit held by the U.S. State Department included Mark Boal, the academy award winning screenwriter of “The Hurt Locker” and “Zero Dark Thirty.” The U.S. also strives to bolster their presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. (Subsaeng, 2015). Other websites post peaceful Quran interpretations in order to retort the violent rhetoric from jihadist sites. Furthermore, applications, such as “QuickFiqh” provide 60 second answers from Islamic scholars to 60 second questions regarding Islamic law in the hopes of shedding light on the distortions of ISIS propaganda in (Talbot, 2015). The State Department also plans to host counterterrorist summits for the U.N. General Assembly, including organizations and citizens from various countries to discuss initiatives on the topics of terrorism and homeland security (Subsaeng, 2015).

Audience

The intended audience of Coalition propaganda is indeed quite broad, primarily targeting Muslims in general, comprising both ISIS members and potential members. Truly, the message does not delineate between Muslims who are members of ISIS, moderates at risk of joining, and those who are already too radical for propaganda to have any effect (Talbot, 2015).

Message

American communicators spend a great deal of their time condemning the violence and brutality of ISIS with less focus on the message behind their violence. Specifically, when ISIS
posted a video of a captured Jordanian pilot who they locked in a cage and then burned to death, the Coalition was quick to denounce such a horrid act of inhumanity. Meanwhile, the video lasted over 18 minutes, during which masked men made clear their justification for such viciousness. In this video, ISIS blames the Jordanian government for the destruction taking place in Raqqa, Syria. Moreover, they make clear the connection between the Jordanian government and President Obama, who supplies Jordan with weapons used to inflict suffering on Muslims across the Middle East (Talbot, 2015). The U.S. retorts these sentiments, readily coming to their own defense. They label ISIS as the enemy of peace and prosperity in the Muslim world while accusing them of perverting Islam to justify their atrocities (Subsaeng, 2015). Likewise, the U.S. makes clear that terrorism is a global epidemic that affects everyone, requiring the entire world to join together in order to eradicate its evil and stressing that Muslims should not join ISIS (Subsaeng, 2015).

Context

These efforts come during trying times for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. Specifically, the issues of Palestine, U.S. support for Israel, anti-colonialism with regard to U.S. presence in the Middle East, and questionable progress in Iraq and Afghanistan in the GWOT make the U.S. quite unpopular in the region (Denning, 2005). Truly, target audiences in the Middle East are quite disillusioned with U.S. foreign policy, significantly impeding the effectiveness of any efforts at persuasion.

Tactics

One method U.S. communicators depend on is selective coverage, promoting good news and success stories while downplaying failures. This is evident when communicators publish and praise successful aide drops, or exaggerate their effectiveness, while neglecting the fact that
the U.S. trained the mujahedeen in Afghanistan (Garfield, 2007). The U.S. also glorifies itself while demonizing their enemies frequently. Phrases such as “Never Forget” remind Americans of the atrocity committed during the World Trade Center attack. Moreover, the U.S. proclaims the barbarism of the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and ISIS who oppress women, enlist children into their schemes, and regularly target civilians (Garfield, 2007). Other examples include the various films spawned from the GWOT, portraying heroic acts of bravery on the part of American forces, such as “Act of Valor” and “American Sniper.” The U.S. also seeks to narrow the range of discourse on several issues to their own benefit, hoping their efforts will appear more effective as a result. One such instance is polls, where the authors tailor and limit responses in order to reflect more favorably on U.S. foreign policy (Garfield, 2007). Communicators also rely heavily on spurious justification at the foundation of their propaganda. Specifically, in the aftermath of the World Trade Center Attack, policymakers considered the attack an act of war rather than an international crime, which gave the U.S. much more flexibility in their response to the threat of terrorism. This leeway comes in the form of the amount of force permitted, along with the treatment of detainees in Guantanamo Bay, whom the U.S. considers prisoners of war. This interpretation of terrorist violence feeds the notion that the GWOT is a defensive struggle, intended to protect the American homeland and the entire world from terrorist violence (Garfield, 2007).

Consistency between Message and Actions

**Abu Ghraib**

Despite the peaceful and noble rhetoric of American communicators, the U.S. has often acted counterproductively in the GWOT. No case is more obvious than the abuse which occurred in Abu Ghraib. Truly, the images of U.S. soldiers torturing detainees did unspeakable
damage to America’s reputation. As Vice President Joe Biden states “Those Americans who mistreated the prisoners may not have realized it, but they acted in the direct interests of al-Qaeda, the insurgents, and the enemies of the U.S.” (Karon, 2004). Others argue that the damage this incident caused may prove to be irreparable:

Abu Ghraib images make a visceral connection with an Arab audience, that no amount of contextualizing, apologies, reprimands or school-painting can reverse. No ad agency could have produced a more effective al-Qaeda recruitment tool: Bin Laden's movement presents its goal as the redemption of Muslim honor which has been "prostituted" before the West by "apostate" pro-U.S. regimes. Scenes of graphic humiliation of Muslims by American soldiers — women mocking the genitalia of naked men — will reinforce the appeal among the shamed young men of the Arab world of the extremists' message that violence against America is the path of Muslim redemption. And it's worth noting that even before the pictures — and the fighting at Fallujah — some 52 percent of Iraqis told Gallup's pollsters that attacks on U.S. forces could sometimes be justified.” (Karon, 2004).

Unfortunately, the negative impact of this event does not stop there, as the entire Muslim world, along with some Coalition allies, now question American motives in the GWOT. The far reaching impact of this event is evident in the death of Nick Berg, a civilian decapitated in 2004, whose executioners cited Abu Ghraib as motivation for his abduction and murder, who warn Americans of their impending slaughter, and call for violent action among Muslims around the world (Denning, 2005).
Civilian Casualties

During a counterinsurgency, civilian casualties and collateral damage can prove devastating to a counterinsurgent force, undoing a great deal of progress if not dooming a campaign altogether. For this reason, the actions of Staff Sargent Robert Bales continue to haunt American forces around the world. Staff Sargent Bales killed 16 Afghan civilians after wandering off base in Panjwai district, gunning down entire families in their homes, including nine children. His actions mark the deadliest attack on civilians by a U.S. soldier in ten years of combat in Afghanistan (Londono, 2012). His actions, similar to Abu Ghraib, did a great deal to delegitimize the efforts of the Coalition, as Afghan President Hamid Karzai labeled the attack an “assassination” (Londono, 2012). As a U.S. Army officer stationed in Kandahar states, “My fear is that those Afghans in the region that were indifferent to either side of this conflict will now, at least as a temporary emotional reaction, become active insurgents” (Londono, 2012). Public outrage abounded in the wake of this incident, made evident by statements from family members of the victims, declaring “You have asked the Americans again and again to avoid civilian casualties, but again the Americans are killing innocent people” (Londono, 2012). This presented the opportunity for the Taliban to jump on the bandwagon of condemning the U.S., making a statement that “The so-called American peace keepers have once again quenched their thirst with the blood of innocent Afghan civilians” (Londono, 2012). Some even called for the immediate withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, showing the profound negative affect this incident created.

Quran Burnings

Unfortunately, the missteps by Coalition forces do not end with the actions of Sargent Bales. Rather than reconciling with the Afghan populace and the Muslim world, American
forces made matters worse by improperly disposing of Qurans on Bagram Airfield, which were discovered on February 21, 2012 (Stratfor, 2012). In the days that followed, protests raged across Afghanistan, leading to ten deaths, and 21 injuries, prompting the U.S. to lockdown their embassy in Kabul (Stratfor, 2012). President Barrack Obama made a personal apology to President Karzai but the damage was done, as Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid condemned the burnings and urged Afghans to target foreigners and their bases (Stratfor, 2012).

Sadly, the incident was not the first time Americans disrespected the Muslim holy book as Pastor Terry Jones held public events in the U.S. to burn Qurans and send a message to the enemies of the U.S. on March 20, 2011. In the following days, the mayhem began as protestors in Mazar-i-Sharif overran a United Nations compound killing three U.N. staffers and four guards (Stratfor, 2011). In Kandahar and Jalalabad, protests resulted in ten killed and 80 injured, as the incident seemed to have “galvanized a wide swath of largely rural, conservative, and decidedly non-secular society against the liberal, secular, and Western countries that constitute the International Security Assistance Force” (ISAF) (Stout, 2011). Truly, Pastor Jones’ actions were so offensive as to cause disapproval to swell even amongst those who oppose the Taliban. In the wake of these incidents, rather than reconciling with the Afghan populace, U.S. Ambassador Ryan Cocker made matters worse by pleading that things needed to “calm down and return to a more normal atmosphere. We should all then get on with business” (Vesely, 2012, p. 29). Ambassador’s Cocker’s words only further infuriated the Afghan public, by implying that everyone needed to just forget about the incident and move on. Instead of easing tensions, violence only escalated leading to seven U.S. soldiers wounded the following day (Vesely, 2012).
Some argue that these incidents have brought Afghanistan to a tipping point, meaning that the U.S. has the option to either escalate the conflict, or conduct a hasty and disorganized withdrawal, eliminating the option for a managed withdrawal. Moreover, Afghan officials may even lose faith in the Coalition and begin to make deals with the Taliban in order to ensure their own survival, as France and other Coalition partners remove their forces with haste (Vesely, 2012). Even some Afghan police stated, in the midst of protests across the country, that “We should burn all foreigners alive” (Vesely, 2012, p. 29). These events have only increased the confidence of the Taliban, as the U.S. attempts to hand over the conflict to a seemingly less capable and less loyal Afghan military. It remains to be seen whether the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan are still salvageable, however, there is no question that the U.S. seems to have done more harm than good in terms of propaganda and supporting their own cause.

**Effectiveness**

In short, the U.S. has enjoyed little success resulting from their propaganda and information operations. Despite their efforts online, using forums such as Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook, communication directed towards foreigners show as little as 4% positive views of American foreign policy (Talbot, 2015). Furthermore, the American public grows weary of bearing the financial burden of the conflict, as their support for the conflict has waned significantly. While ISIS has mastered propaganda in today’s technological age, the Coalition is clearly playing catch up.

**Results**

Upon examination of the GWOT in light of conflicts of the past, it is evident that propaganda has changed in several ways. The most obvious change is the medium used to communicate with target audiences. During the Second World War, propaganda consisted of
posters, films, and public speeches. While such efforts remain in use today, the dawn of the technological age has made social media ideally suited for communicators. Truly, the bulk of ISIS propaganda flows through online mediums, proving quite successful to date. However, it is unlikely that the wrong medium causes the frustrations of the Coalition in the war of ideas against terrorism.

The audience of propaganda plays an important role as well. It appears that specific propaganda is more effective than broader efforts at persuasion. Furthermore, in the past, propaganda consisted of a great deal of broadcasting, in the form of speeches and films to masses of people, sometimes catering in smaller ways to particular samples of a population. ISIS, on the other hand, focuses a great deal of effort on individual engagement through conversation and anecdotes, catering their message to make it more potent. The fact that both ISIS and the U.S. are communicating with foreign audiences is also of note. The Americans and Nazis enjoyed noteworthy success with their native population; however, ISIS and the U.S. today fight an uphill battle in attempting to persuade foreign audiences, whose cultural individualities communicators must take into consideration. Nevertheless, ISIS has managed to recruit followers around the world, while the U.S. remains frustrated both at home and abroad, meaning that propaganda is effective in targeting foreigners. As a result, one cannot ascribe the failure of Coalition propaganda to the fact that their audience is foreign.

Regarding the message of propaganda, it seems that peaceful messages are the most effective. Specifically, molding one’s message to seem peace loving and blaming the conflict on one’s enemies is a staple of WWII propaganda. However, ISIS has broken the mold in this case, making clear that they suffer no qualms with the death and destruction they unleash around the world, and their intent at provocation and escalation. While they sometimes bring up instances
of the destruction and death caused by the Coalition in Arab nations, their message is fundamentally violent, meaning that peaceful messages are not the only successful themes of propaganda. Clearly, no communicators have created successful propaganda by touting their own humility and admitting their own faults. Instead, the Nazis, the Allies, ISIS, and the U.S. make clear their belief in their own righteousness and the superiority of their own cause as opposed to that of their enemies. The Nazis took this notion to the extreme which made their propaganda rather fragile once defeats began to mount, but the power of this idea on a native population is clear, both during WWII and today.

Ideally, a specific tactic of propaganda would prove effective under any circumstances, which could then explain the failure of Coalition propaganda in the GWOT. Once again, this is not the case, in that propagandists employed a variety of tactics in order to achieve their objectives. One common theme is the demonization of one’s enemy along with the glorification of one’s own cause. While partial facts, selective coverage, and narrowing the range of discourse proved successful during WWII, the prevalence of the modern media combined with the availability of information available online, makes these tactics less likely to succeed today. On the contrary, employing any of these tactics could lead to a loss of credibility if the truth comes to light, which can significantly impede the success of further efforts at persuasion.

The most obvious revelation this research brings to light is that in a war of ideas, actions speak louder than words. Truly, both historical context and tangible success can fuel a propaganda campaign, while inconsistencies can spell doom. The Nazis made this clear, in that despite creating the most powerful and effective propaganda machine in WWII, once German defeats began to mount, the propaganda lost its effectiveness. One might also argue that the success of Allied propaganda was due mainly to Allied victories rather than the efforts of
communicators, or, that the propaganda complimented the headlines in a way that validated their message. Moreover, it seems that American propaganda may have lost its potency in the face of the costly and prolonged occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan with little success to show for it. One might even speculate that should Coalition efforts thwart ISIS attacks, eliminate their leadership, or seize their safe havens, American propaganda might find fertile ground for success. These efforts go hand in hand with the context of a conflict, such as the prosperity of Nazi Germany and their conquest of Europe, Allied victories in WWII, ISIS violence and recruitment of foreigners, and the issues of Abu Ghraib, Quran mistreatment, civilian casualties, Palestine, and American colonialism. It may very well be that propaganda is not the answer in the GWOT, but merely a tool that can complement an effective counterinsurgent strategy.

Interestingly, American communicators imitated Nazi propaganda somewhat at the outset of WWII with admirable results. Truly, Capra created “Why We Fight” with “Triumph des Willens” as his example, even using images from the film itself. Up to this point in the GWOT, American propaganda has followed the example from WWII, mostly broadcasting information in a similar manner. ISIS, on the other hand, has taken a much more personal approach at persuasion, favoring direct engagement in online forums and social media, which has proved effective. At the moment, it seems American propagandists, led by the Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communication (CSCC), are beginning to realize the power of propaganda online catered to the individual. While it is tempting to claim this adjustment signals the turning of the tide, until American propaganda is consistent with actions at home and abroad, the social media campaign is likely to fail.
Limitations of the Research

Several problems exist in studying the effectiveness of propaganda. First of all, during a military campaign accompanying propaganda, how does one discern persuasion from coercion? Which came first, effective propaganda, or military success? Additionally, this research enjoys the benefit of hindsight in evaluating the effectiveness of WWII propaganda, in that the Allies...
were victorious. Success in a counterterrorist or counterinsurgent campaign is hideously difficult to measure. To this day, there is no effective metric for terrorism. Furthermore, even a successful propaganda strategy can take time to yield results, which begs the question, when should communicators let a strategy run its course? When is the right time to abandon a strategy and start over? Compounding this problem is the unpredictability of human nature. Truly, one might make the perfect argument under the perfect circumstances, validated by consistent actions, yet this is no guarantee that propaganda will succeed. In essence, just because a group of people should respond favorably to propaganda, does not mean that they will. In addition, the reason for the success or failure of propaganda involves a great deal of speculation. Once an audience responds a certain way, one cannot determine why they did so. This leads to debate whether it was the propaganda, the military campaign, the historical context, or the cultural nuances of the target audience.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

All in all, propaganda has played an important role in several conflicts of the past, especially WWII, and continues to influence the GWOT. Still, a great deal of qualms exist regarding the use of propaganda, largely due to bias and misunderstanding associated with the term. In reality, propaganda is nothing more than information intended to persuade and influence behavior, which the majority of people employ every day. Some would even go so far as to claim that propaganda must serve as the foundation of a strategy as opposed to military force. While examination of the history of propaganda makes clear its power, it fails to reveal an easy approach to waging a campaign of information warfare. The results of this research show that there is no one medium, tactic, message, context, or audience that will ensure the success of propaganda. Furthermore, the results show that consistency between the message of propaganda and the actions of the communicator are of paramount importance. With the amount of information available to target audiences today, one cannot get away with acting in a manner contradictory to the message they seek to instill. If one claims to be peaceful, their actions must correspond. If one claims to be invincible and guaranteed to achieve victory, they must prove it on the battlefield. Furthermore, the results show that propaganda is changing. In WWII, it seemed every successful instance of propaganda professed a peace loving message, placing the blame for the devastation of warfare on the enemy. ISIS, however, has shown that even violent and brutal rhetoric can take hold. It seems that successful propaganda must take the form of the correct message to the right audience, using the right medium and tactics, within the right historical context. Likewise, propaganda continues to change, in that the tactics, message, and medium that produced results in the past are by no means the same that will do so in the future.
As of now, questions abound. Who will be next to successfully wield propaganda and under what set of circumstances? What medium will they use? Who will their audience be? What tactics will they employ? Will new tactics emerge? Will their message agree with their actions? Are there other variables that will factor into the success or failure of propaganda which communicators have yet to consider? The most immediate question, however, is can the U.S. and her Coalition partners turn the tide in the GWOT using information, or is it too late? More importantly, will the U.S. learn the lessons of events such as Abu Ghraib and take more care to understand the strategic impact of such actions on a counterterror campaign? One can only speculate as to the answers to these questions, but the fact remains that the power of propaganda is clear, meaning that it will continue to play a large part in conflicts of the future.
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