

The Use of Propaganda in Wars: A Comparison Between the Propaganda Used in WWII and the
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2007

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Propaganda is a technique which is used in all wars, although the method and means in which it is used varies from war to war. It is thought that the use of propaganda in wars is both positive and negative in various ways, however over the past forty years or so, the term propaganda has suffered the same fate that has overtaken many other related words as well, with a more or less innocent connotation, as “it has acquired a derogatory sense; and although it is still used as a neutral term with an objective reference, it is common to find it used as a vague term of abuse”.¹ In order to be able to understand this matter there are various different issues that need to be discussed, and the aim of this paper is to do just this, as well as to specifically compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the propaganda that was used in World War II and the propaganda that is used today in the war against Iraq. By doing this and as well by addressing and discussing any and all other key and related issues, we will be able to attain a much more informed and knowledgeable understanding on the subject matter at hand overall. This is what will be dissertated in the following.

The actual use of propaganda by the dictators can perhaps best be studied in the case of Germany, as Hitler in fact left many details of his principles and his methods in his book *Mein Kampf*. There he states that “he learnt of the secrets of successful propaganda from the British in World War I. How far this statement was itself an ingenious bit of propaganda I do not profess to know, but wherever he learnt his lesson, there is little doubt that he profited by it and proceeded to apply it with characteristic thoroughness to welding together the German people into a

¹ R.W. Jepson, *The History of Propaganda*, online article retrieved May 9, 2007 from <http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/jepsonrw/chap14.htm>

powerful instrument for war and aggrandizement”.² Propaganda is basically a type of message that is aimed at influencing the opinions and behaviors of people, and often times, rather than impartially providing information, propaganda will instead be used by being deliberately misleading, or by using fallacies, which although sometimes very convincing, at the same time are not necessarily valid. “Propaganda techniques include: patriotic flag-waving, glittering generalities, intentional vagueness, oversimplification of complex issues, rationalization, introducing unrelated red herring issues, using appealing, simple slogans, stereotyping, testimonials from authority figures or celebrities, unstated assumptions, and encouraging readers or viewers to ‘jump on the bandwagon’ of a particular ideology”.³

What really separates propagandism from more normal forms of communication is the way in which the message itself attempts to shape a person’s opinion and behavior, as they are typically much more hidden and subtle, and for example, “propagandism is often presented in a way that attempts to deliberately evoke a strong emotion, especially by suggesting illogical (or non-intuitive) relationships between concepts or objects (for instance between a ‘good’ car and an attractive woman or sex symbol)”.⁴ There are different types of propaganda as well, as propaganda itself shares certain techniques with the advertising and public relations fields, and as well propaganda is something which was used in order to influence thoughts and beliefs regarding the church, however overall propaganda is something which has been much more popular in political contexts, in particular to refer to that of certain and specific efforts that are sponsored by governments and political groups, but also covert interests.

² R.W. Jepson, *The History of Propaganda*, online article retrieved May 9, 2007 from <http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/jepsonrw/chap14.htm>

³ Wikipedia, *Propaganda*, online article retrieved May 9, 2007 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda>

⁴ Wikipedia, *Propaganda*, online article retrieved May 9, 2007 from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda>

Propaganda was very well and alive in World War I, but even more so in World War II, as the flood of propaganda was released once the war began, both for home and foreign consumptions. Images were one of the most widely used forms of propaganda here, particularly on posters, but there were also movies and cartoons which were quite popular forms as well. The films that were produced for the army by Frank Capra were (and still are) considered as being the most memorable propaganda of all that was used by the government during World War II, as many of the films focused on the dehumanization of the enemy and it was thought that “Capra accomplished this by using film and other materials captured from the enemy. He would take these images and edit them so that an ‘anti-Axis’ would appear clear to the audience”.⁵ Not only that, but as well, the use of propaganda did not end after the war was finished, and it is considered that “indeed the political and social repercussions of the war appear to have made propaganda an almost inescapable feature of our national life and international relations. In the international field, the way of life of the western democracies is being aggressively challenged. In the ‘cold war’ and in face of the ‘iron curtain’, the democracies are very much on the defensive; and, if they really believe in the superiority of their own way of life, they cannot be blamed if they use some of the resources of propaganda to advertise as widely as possible what that way of life stands for; or if they try to re-convert some of those countries where it has been discarded, and to break down the barrier these countries have erected to prevent ‘contamination’ from the western world”.⁶

When we look at how propaganda is used today in the war in Iraq, we see various different examples as well, such as how during the invasion of Iraq in the year 2003, the Iraqi

⁵ UCSS, *World War Two*, online article retrieved May 9, 2007 from http://web.uccs.edu/history/student%20presentations/heidi/world_war_two.htm

⁶ Anthony Richard Ewart Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion, World War II*. New York: Wellfleet Press, 1987.

Information Minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf repeatedly claimed that Iraqi forces were decisively winning every single battle, and he continued to state that the United States were close to being defeated, making the Iraqis believe that this was so, and the Iraqis, who were misled by this propaganda were incredibly shocked then when instead Iraq was defeated. Another example took place in November of 2005, when *The Chicago Tribune* and the *Los Angeles Times* alleged that “the United States military had manipulated news reported in Iraqi media in an effort to cast a favorable light on its actions while demoralizing the insurgency. Lt. Col. Barry Johnson, a military spokesman in Iraq, said the program is ‘an important part of countering misinformation in the news by insurgents’, while a spokesman for former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said the allegations of manipulation were troubling if true. The Department of Defense has confirmed the existence of the program...and...*The New York Times* published an article about how the Pentagon has started to use contractors with little experience in journalism or public relations to plant articles in the Iraqi press”⁷

Children have been one of the most targeted groups with propaganda during the war in Iraq, as of all the potential targets they are clearly the most vulnerable and thus the most taken advantage of. This is the way it has always been, yet with the current war in Iraq the use of propaganda has increased that much more on children in particular, and namely the propaganda is used in order to convince the children to enlist in the army once they are old enough.

And so when we compare the propaganda that was present in World War II to that of today, we can see how many similarities and differences there are, with one of the most major similarities being in regards to the forms of propaganda, as images on televisions and posters were and still are the most commonly used, however one of the most major differences being the

⁷ Anthony Richard Ewart Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion, World War II*. New York: Wellfleet Press, 1987.

actual amount of propaganda used, as the amount that has been used in the war today has already significantly surpassed the amount that was used in World War I and II combined.

From this review we can conclude a number of different things, several which are of particular importance, and namely the fact of how majorly propaganda is used in wars, not only in World War II and the present day war in Iraq, but wars in general. It is important to know that many say that it is inevitable that people will die in wars, and yet for the most part, war is not inevitable, and “propaganda is often employed to go closer to war, if that is the preferred foreign policy option. Indeed, once war starts, civilian casualties are unfortunately almost a guaranteed certainty”.⁸ Thus, overall it is quite easy to see just how significant the matter of propaganda is in terms of wars in general, as well as how important it is for everyone to take more serious note of propaganda and the different forms in which it comes, in order to not be overwhelmed by misleading information when it comes to something as serious as a war.

⁸ Anthony Richard Ewart Rhodes. *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion, World War II*. New York: Wellfleet Press, 1987.

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