The Marketing of War in the Middle East:
The Revenge of History

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In the post-Cold War era, and particularly in the 21st Century, the West (USA/Allies) appears to employ ever more refined methods of marketing its wars to the American public and the global public opinion. The utilised mechanism adopts strategic marketing techniques in conjunction with propaganda means in order to achieve its ends: convincing the public about the necessity of war. A typical example pertains to the interference in Middle Eastern affairs under the cloak of security. Consequently, closing the now wide-open Pandora’s Box is next to implausible in view of the ongoing destabilization of the area in question. Moreover, history finds a way to avenge since the Islamic State (IS) appears to beat the West in its own game. Notwithstanding the current asymmetrical showdown, ISIS reaps the technological fruits advanced by the West by promoting itself through a plethora of social media channels so as to attract new recruits via radicalization, propaganda and the spread of terror; exacerbating the rhythm of the roller coaster of history...

Terrorist threats like the Islamic State’s in the Euro-Atlantic area, Africa and Asia, deriving from the civil war in Syria and the security vacuum in the aftermath of the Second Gulf War, comprise some of the new realities.¹ The jihadist networks in Europe target the US’s European Allies involved in Iraq as tactical backing, sympathizing with the so-called ‘brothers’ combatting in Iraq, in 2003.²

A comprehensive approach must be employed here to truly grasp the holistic mechanism that is at play and whose manifold operation has resulted in the current state of affairs; a militaristic apparatus that covers the entire spectrum of the public sphere, with the extended version of the


powerful 'military-industrial' complex encompassing oil companies, as well as the technology/energy sector,\textsuperscript{3} inciting the US into a particular type of warfare: wars of empire.\textsuperscript{4}

Modern times may be characterized as a media-savvy age,\textsuperscript{5} with the media paradigm through which one comprehends war comprising progressively more the video game.\textsuperscript{6} An exploration on how the economy of war-themed games rearranges the civic arena is quite revealing as, countless methods of killing exist apart from inexorably including someone pulling the trigger such as, the collective acceptance of state violence; 9/11 alongside the resultant wars in Afghanistan/Iraq led into a flourishing of war-themed, video-game sales destined for the commercial marketplace.\textsuperscript{7} However, one of the video-games that was based on the Iraqi war (2003) had even pushed an American father who lost his child in that war to state that, a worst case scenario may potentially involve an extreme young Muslim who, after having played the game, gets provoked to the point he/she starts to ponder on how to retaliate as well as revenge.\textsuperscript{8} In other words, showing how the marketing of this particular war can backfire its orchestrators in due time.

Further, Fisk\textsuperscript{9} highlights the pivotal role of the media by blaming the latter for being dishonest and shifting perspectives, by replacing words like war with invasion, liberation rather than occupation, in addition to secured in lieu of captured, when referring to the taking of cities within the context of the Iraq war.\textsuperscript{10}

The political leadership of the United States and the United Kingdom needed to sell the war locally and globally alike before entering Iraq. To this end, ample speeches that used rhetorical justifications like the security narrative, placing emphasis on the alleged Iraqi possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD),\textsuperscript{11} masqueraded any latent motives since their claim relied on false intelligence.\textsuperscript{12} The George W. Bush administration was in fact accused for having used propaganda (i.e., lies and political manipulation) of controversial justification in order to win public support concerning the Iraqi intervention.\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{3} Kostas Gouliamos, \textit{The Monstrous Idol of Europe} (Athens & Thessaloniki: Modern Horizons, 2014), 90.
\bibitem{7} Stahl, op. cit., 118.
\bibitem{13} Kutz, op. cit.
\end{thebibliography}
RAND Corporation, the research agency linked with the US military establishment,\textsuperscript{14} issued a report suggesting that the Pentagon focused on the significance of branding the war as a commodity and made use of social marketing as part of the military tool-box in Iraq.\textsuperscript{15} For example, RAND proposed the use of strategic marketing techniques and tactics to condition the civilian population, limit anti-war/opponent preferences while, synchronously, augment friendly or favor force decisions in the battlefield.\textsuperscript{16} Unsurprisingly, anti-Americanism comprises the linchpin of Radical Islamist – and indirectly of Political Islamist – ideology.\textsuperscript{17}

Although Twitter has removed 125,000+ terrorist-associated accounts since the middle of 2015,\textsuperscript{18} the IS continues to utilize such mediums against the West despite the deceleration of its electronic (internet) mechanism. Suffice to merely underline that Twitter,\textsuperscript{19} apart from being employed for recruitment and proselytization purposes, is also utilized to generate a global community of sympathizers and supporters that is embedded in violent extremism;\textsuperscript{20} with platforms like Twitter alongside WhatsApp using a recognizable language that prospective recruits understand.\textsuperscript{21}

Furthermore, Western intelligence faces a timing dilemma over the closing down of the implicated accounts and their access to online users: terminate at once the recruitment of new terrorist members by uncovering the significant electronic hide-outs or permit their usage till the terminal identification and destruction of terrorist cells.\textsuperscript{22}

The analysis of mass and social media influence on wars as well as wartime reporting have become influential as the media have developed ever more integral to the military strategy and the conduct of warfare.\textsuperscript{23} The media unit of IS looks for gaining control over its audience by constructing the message of expansion/utopia as the single constant.\textsuperscript{24} With respect to the social media propaganda, an increasingly typical component of the extremist movement consists of children utilized as advertisements vis-à-vis the IS life-style.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, given the sensitivity of children, the West employed toys to propagate the concept of Special Forces operations. When Iraqi children


\textsuperscript{17} Mirbagheri, \textit{op. cit.}, 76.


\textsuperscript{19} Ironically, jihadists employ US online social networking sites/services to aid them strike against the West (e.g., Twitter is headquartered in California); see https://about.twitter.com/company [accessed 25 July 2016].


\textsuperscript{25} Klausen, \textit{op. cit.}, 17.
were asked whether the foreign soldiers were well trained, the children-interviewees in the study responded positively; and when they were asked whether the local population needed their presence they replied that in their absence there would be no one to protect them.\textsuperscript{26}

In view of the holistic apparatus stated at the beginning of the analysis, the entertainment industry partially serves its \textit{modus operandi} as a rise of threats against Muslims in the US became evident in the wake of the screening of the movie \textit{American Sniper}.\textsuperscript{27} The Sykes-Picot secret agreement meant that the Syrian coast went to France and a large area that covered extant Syria plus Mosul in northern Iraq would have included local Arab rulers under French (north)/British (south) supervision.\textsuperscript{28} The above-mentioned chronological flashback projects how IS today focuses its efforts on engendering a civil war in Europe and enforcing at the same time, for instance, the obligation of France to deter the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric and the alienation of French Muslims.\textsuperscript{29} Otherwise, history shall corroborate the clash of civilizations as suggested by Samuel Huntington.\textsuperscript{30} The late terrorist attacks alert the West in view of how many European Muslim citizens may be related with Islamic organizations and are participating in terrorist episodes; for example, Brahim Abdeslam, a French citizen, was one of the Paris suicide-bombers.\textsuperscript{31}

The superficiality and ideological exaggerations of George Bush opened Pandora’s Box with detrimental consequences; Iraq fell short of being democratized as the American President preached and a broader destabilization occurred.\textsuperscript{32}

Turning the heed to the East to evade polarizing syndromes emanating from terms like the ‘West versus the rest’ manifested in contemporary civilizational discourse\textsuperscript{33} – hybrid wars are innately transnational,\textsuperscript{34} from Ukraine to Syria – Kremlin follows the following pattern: utilizing its overarching control over the Russian news media to disseminate confusion to the West, Vladimir Putin ‘weaponizes’ information with his gift for disorder parallel to the “Midas touch”, making him a hard antagonist in Russia’s hybrid war of force and disinformation; media manipulation, to further Kremlin’s own ends, forms a quintessential phenomenon, with Moscow being extensively perceived to have ‘weaponized’ the refugee/migrant crisis as aggravating, it translates to a divisive weapon vis-à-vis NATO whilst, damaging the European project.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore, Putin shall capitalize on the


\textsuperscript{30} Huntington, \textit{op. cit.}, 2002.


\textsuperscript{32} Theophanous, \textit{ibid.}

\textsuperscript{33} Mirbagheri, \textit{op. cit.}, 5.


usage of military forces as political weapons in hybrid/asymmetric political warfare.\textsuperscript{36} However, especially in view of how today there is the globalization of terrorism,\textsuperscript{37} IS turns its attention towards Putin in revenge for his Assad-regime support.\textsuperscript{38}

To conclude with a remark on the pretext of war, security comprises the prevailing \textit{casus belli} in the post-9/11 world,\textsuperscript{39} with language having the power to affect the minds of people.\textsuperscript{40} One realizes what unconsciousness may digest at times unknowingly – that is, the normalization of violence through the playing of fun video-games or the viewing of a Hollywood action movie that can nonetheless breed yet more violence in a boomerang fashion. The instantaneity and global outreach that the social media provide today are certainly useful in the hands of media-savvy terrorist groups and, in turn, force the West to contemplate on its so far selected (failed) methods in view of the current aggrandizement of terrorist incidents. Finally, wars start in the minds of people (i.e., initial theater of war wherein somatic inter-community battles ensue, attested by UNESCO Charter) thereby peace should also (be situated and) shaped from within,\textsuperscript{41} to prevent the expounded vicious circle of history for the betterment of humanity as a whole.


\textsuperscript{39} Moses et al., \textit{op. cit.}, 347.

\textsuperscript{40} Marcinkevičienė, \textit{op. cit.}, 39.

\textsuperscript{41} Mirbagheri, \textit{op. cit.}, 42, 83, 91, 116, 126.