



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

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¹ Panayiotis Hadjipavlis, "The Geopolitical Importance of the Eastern Mediterranean Airspace," in *Eastern Mediterranean Geopolitical Review*, 1:1 (Fall 2015), 44-60 (59), <http://www.emgr.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/EMGR-1.pdf> [accessed 29 July 2016].

² Petter Nesser, "Jihadism in Western Europe After the Invasion of Iraq: Tracing Motivational Influences from the Iraq War on Jihadist Terrorism in Western Europe," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29:4 (2006), 323-342, (338).

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

Modern times may be characterized as a media-savvy age,⁵ with the media paradigm through which one comprehends war comprising progressively more the video game.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.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.⁸ In other words, showing how the marketing of this particular war can backfire its orchestrators in due time.

Further, Fisk⁹ 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.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),¹¹ masqueraded any latent motives since their claim relied on false intelligence.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.¹³

³ Kostas Gouliamos, *The Monstrous Idol of Europe* (Athens & Thessaloniki: Modern Horizons, 2014), 90.

⁴ Kostas Gouliamos, *The Biopolitics of Totalitarianism: Essays on the Pathology of Capitalism* (Athens: Taxideftis, 2008), 130-131, 135.

⁵ Sherrie A. Madia, *The Social Media Survival Guide for Political Campaigns: Everything You Need to Know to Get Your Candidate Elected Using Social Media* (New Jersey: Full Court Press, 2011), 54.

⁶ Roger Stahl, "Have You Played the War on Terror?," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 23: 2 (2006), 112-130 (112).

⁷ Stahl, *op. cit.*, 118.

⁸ "Iraq War video game branded 'crass and insensitive' by father of Red Cap killed in action," *Daily Mail*, 7 April 2009, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1168235/Iraq-War-video-game-branded-crass-insensitive-father-Red-Cap-killed-action.html#ixzz4I4LaCLbN> [accessed 22 August 2016].

⁹ Robert Fisk, "Robert Fisk in Baghdad: The twisted language of war that is used to justify the unjustifiable," *Independent*, 7 April 2003, <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-in-baghdad-the-twisted-language-of-war-that-is-used-to-justify-the-unjustifiable-114034.html> [accessed 30 May 2016].

¹⁰ Rūta Marcinkevičienė, "A Dangerous Language," in *The Marketing of War in the Age of Neo-Militarism*, ed. Kostas Gouliamos and Christos Kassimeris, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 23-41 (31).

¹¹ Jeremy Moses, Babak Bahador and Tessa Wright, "The Iraq War and the Responsibility to Protect: Uses, Abuses and Consequences for the Future of Humanitarian Intervention," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 5:4 (2011), 347-367 (347-348).

¹² Magnus-Sebastian Kutz, "Just Wars and Persuasive Communication: Analyzing Public Relations in Military Conflicts," in *Selling War: The Role of the Mass Media in Hostile Conflicts from World War I to the "War on Terror,"* ed. Josef Seethaler et al., (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), 107-133 (109); Moses et al., *op. cit.*, 348. See e.g., Farid S.M. Mirbagheri, *War and Peace in Islam: A Critique of Islamic/ist Political Discourses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 142-143, for the favorite conspiracy theory in the Middle East with regards to the plans of big players to partition Iraq into different sects.

¹³ Kutz, *op. cit.*

RAND Corporation, the research agency linked with the US military establishment,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;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.¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, anti-Americanism comprises the linchpin of Radical Islamist – and indirectly of Political Islamist – ideology.¹⁷

Although Twitter has removed 125,000+ terrorist-associated accounts since the middle of 2015,¹⁸ the IS continues to utilize such mediums against the West despite the deceleration of its electronic (internet) mechanism. Suffice to merely underline that Twitter,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;²⁰ with platforms like Twitter alongside WhatsApp using a recognizable language that prospective recruits understand.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.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.²³ The media unit of IS looks for gaining control over its audience by constructing the message of expansion/utopia as the single constant.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.²⁵ Similarly, given the sensitivity of children, the West employed toys to propagate the concept of Special Forces operations. When Iraqi children

¹⁴ Noam Chomsky, *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2002), 80.

¹⁵ Regarding the USA/Allies, NATO assisted Iraq develop a democratically-led security sector via the setting out of the 2004 NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I); see “NATO’s assistance to Iraq,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, 11 November 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_51978.htm [accessed 22 July 2015].

¹⁶ Gouliamos and Kassimeris, “Stratocracy: The Growing Hypertrophy of the LifeWorld Militarization,” *op. cit.*, 9-22 (16); Kostas Gouliamos and Antonis L. Theocharous, “Harming Democracy in Mediolatry Societies: Decoding the Marketing of War and Animositities through Photo Images,” *Journal of Political Marketing*, 7:3-4 (2008), 338-362 (342).

¹⁷ Mirbagheri, *op. cit.*, 76.

¹⁸ Danny Yadron, “Twitter deletes 125,000 Isis accounts and expands anti-terror teams,” *The Guardian*, 5 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/05/twitter-deletes-isis-accounts-terrorism-online> [accessed 9 July 2016].

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].

²⁰ Jytte Klausen, “Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 38:1 (2015), 1-22 (17).

²¹ Jethro Mullen, “What is ISIS’ appeal for young people?” *CNN*, 25 February 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/25/middleeast/isis-kids-propaganda/> [accessed 5 July 2016].

²² Ryan J. Reilly, “If you’re trying to join ISIS through Twitter, the FBI probably knows about it,” *The Huffington Post*, 9 July 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/07/09/isis-twitter-fbi-islamic-state_n_7763992.html [accessed 26 July 2016].

²³ Gerd Horten, “*The Mediatization of War: A Comparison of the American and German Media Coverage of the Vietnam and Iraq Wars*,” *American Journalism*, 28:4 (2011), 29-53 (31).

²⁴ Charlie Winter, “ISIS’ offline propaganda strategy,” *Brookings Institution*, 31 March 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2016/03/31-isis-propaganda-strategy-winter> [accessed 23 April 2016].

²⁵ Klausen, *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.²⁶

In view of the holistic apparatus stated at the beginning of the analysis, the entertainment industry partially serves its *modus operandi* as a rise of threats against Muslims in the US became evident in the wake of the screening of the movie *American Sniper*.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.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.²⁹ Otherwise, history shall corroborate the clash of civilizations as suggested by Samuel Huntington.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.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.³²

Turning the heed to the East to evade polarizing syndromes emanating from terms like the 'West versus the rest' manifested in contemporary civilizational discourse³³ – hybrid wars are innately transnational,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.³⁵ Therefore, Putin shall capitalize on the

²⁶ David Machin and Theo Van Leeuwen, "Toys as discourse: children's war toys and the war on terror," *Critical Discourse Studies*, 6:1 (2009), 51-63 (51, 59).

²⁷ BBC News, "American Sniper film 'behind rise in anti-Muslim threats'", 25 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-30972690> [accessed 25 May 2016]. Shockingly, US control of the international movie, TV and video industries even surpasses its preeminence of the aircraft industry according to Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: The Free Press, 2002), 58.

²⁸ History.com Staff, "Britain and France conclude Sykes-Picot agreement." History, 2009, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/britain-and-france-conclude-sykes-picot-agreement> [accessed 25 May 2016].

²⁹ Francois Heisbourg, "Financial Times: France is falling into the trap set by Isis," *IJSS*, 10 May 2016, <http://www.ijss.org/en/Topics/islamic-state/the-jihadis-cyber-capacity-and-aspiration-4042> [accessed 31 May 2016].

³⁰ Huntington, *op. cit.*, 2002.

³¹ Andreas Theophanous, *E Diakyvernisi kai e Politiki Economia mias Omospondis Kyprou* [The Governance and Political Economy of a Federal Cyprus], (Athens: I.Sideris, 2016), 162; "Jihad at the heart of Europe," *The Economist*, 21 November 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21678840-brussels-not-just-europes-political-and-military-capitalit-also-centre-its> [accessed 31 June 2016].

³² Theophanous, *ibid.*

³³ Mirbagheri, *op. cit.*, 5.

³⁴ Josef Schroefl and Stuart J. Kaufman, "Hybrid Actors, Tactical Variety: Rethinking Asymmetric and Hybrid War," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37:10 (2014), 862-880 (863).

³⁵ Maxim Trudolyubov, "Russia's Hybrid War," *The New York Times*, 24 February 2016, <http://nyti.ms/1XM4dEc> [accessed 3 June 2016].

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

To conclude with a remark on the pretext of war, security comprises the prevailing *casus belli* in the post-9/11 world,³⁹ with language having the power to affect the minds of people.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,⁴¹ to prevent the expounded vicious circle of history for the betterment of humanity as a whole.

³⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Russia in Syria: Hybrid Political Warfare,” CSIS, 23 September 2015, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-syria-hybrid-political-warfare> [accessed 23 July 2016].

³⁷ Andreas Theophanous, “To Neo Diethnes Perivallon meta tis 11 Septemvriou 2001 kai oi Proklisois gia tin Kypro” [The new international landscape in the wake of 9/11 and the challenges for Cyprus], *Politis*, 25 November 2001, in Andreas Theophanous, *H Kypros Enopion Dilimaton: Skepseis kai Provlitismoι* [Cyprus in view of dilemmas: Thoughts and reflections], (Athens: Livanis, 2011), 169-180 (178).

³⁸ Damien Sharkov, “ISIS Threatens 'Apostate Putin' in New Propaganda Video”, *Newsweek*, 7 March 2016, <http://europe.newsweek.com/isis-threaten-apostate-putin-new-propaganda-video-434053?rm=eu> [accessed 31 July 2016].

³⁹ Moses et al., *op. cit.*, 347.

⁴⁰ Marcinkevičienė, *op. cit.*, 39.

⁴¹ Mirbagheri, *op. cit.*, 42, 83, 91, 116, 126.