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THE 'WAR AGAINST TERRORISM'
A Public Relations Challenge for the Pentagon

P. Eric Louw

Abstract / This article examines the relationship between warfare and the media, arguing that both terrorists and conventional warfare planners in the Pentagon factor communications and public relations into their planning. In this regard, the article sketches out how the Pentagon developed a new genre of 'public relations-ized' warfare – warfare planned, not only as a military exercise, but as a televisual media event. Similarly, it will be argued that those attacking the World Trade Center deployed an understanding of terrorism as a 'media event', and a grasp of how USA politics (and warfare) has been 'media-ized'. This understanding was used by al-Qaeda to provoke the USA into the 'War against Terrorism'. This war created a number of public relations problems for the Pentagon. The Pentagon's response to these problems is examined.

Keywords / al-Qaeda / military public relations / Pentagon / propaganda / terrorism

Following the September 11 (9/11) attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the USA declared a 'War against Terrorism'. This translated into warfare against the al-Qaeda organization and against the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan. This 'War against Terrorism', as well as the 9/11 terror-attacks, reveals much about the way in which warfare at the start of the 21st century has been substantively media-ized. At the risk of developing an overly media-centric view of warfare, this article, nonetheless, argues that the media figured centrally in the thinking of both al-Qaeda and the Pentagon. This is not surprising given the extent to which western political processes have become media-ized. Consequently, any competent political strategist wishing to make an impact upon the US political system would necessarily see the media as an important tool for conveying symbolism and for mobilizing political action. In this regard, the 9/11 attacks conformed to a long-standing tradition of terrorism as 'propaganda of the deed' – namely executing highly visible, violent acts designed for maximal symbolic impact. Al-Qaeda's aims were to intensify anti-American (and anti-western) feelings in the Muslim world, weaken the position of pro-western ruling elites in the Muslim world, and mobilize a (global) funda-mentalist-Muslim constituency for itself. The 9/11 attacks were designed to achieve these ends by provoking US military action in the Muslim world. So spectacular were al-Qaeda's terror-attacks that they were instantly beamed around the world by the global media system. This predictably provoked intense American (and global-Anglo) anger, which generated the polarization and resort

to US military action that al-Qaeda wanted. The resultant war created significant problems for the US military because the haste with which the war was launched undermined the Pentagon's 'public relations-ized' model of warfare. So for both the Pentagon and al-Qaeda the war became an important battle over symbolism. Understanding the unfolding of this battle over symbolism requires an unravelling of both al-Qaeda's deployment of 'terrorism as a communicative act' and of the Pentagon's 'public relations-ized model of warfare'.

Terrorism as Communication

Theories about terrorism abound. A common theme in many theories is that a communicative dimension and symbolism are key features of the terrorist act (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982; Thornton, 1964; Bassiouni, 1979).

The 9/11 attacks were classical acts of symbolic terror. Because New York is the heart of the US media machine it was predictable that crashing an aeroplane into a skyscraper would attract television cameras and so have them ready for the crash of another airliner into the second Twin Tower, hence guaranteeing a mass audience of North Americans to simultaneously 'terrorize' and provoke into anger. As acts of political communication, these terror-attacks were masterfully executed for maximal symbolic effect. It was violence choreographed with an American audience in mind – not as theatre, but as a televisual spectacular for a population that relies on television for its 'understanding' of the world. The attacks simultaneously achieved a number of ends.

- They created fear across the USA because the psychological impact of destroying two skyscrapers at the very heart of the US economy was profound. It was a form of psychological warfare (Kelly and Mitchell, 1981: 282) – with the psychological damage wrought going far beyond the actual physical damage inflicted on the USA. As Bassiouni notes, such violence is specifically designed to 'inspire terror' not as a byproduct, but as the central outcome of the terror act (Bassiouni, 1979: 752).
- They provoked anger and a desire for revenge. Because terrorism is the weapon of the weak, a key objective is to provoke the stronger party into lashing out at the terrorists' perceived support-base (Jenkins, 1981: 5). Such acts of reprisal, repression and counter-terrorism often turn the stronger party into a 'recruiting agent' for the terrorist cause (Bassiouni, 1979: 757; Thornton, 1964: 86). A key al-Qaeda objective would have been to provoke US retaliation so that the USA was seen as 'brutally repressive' (Kelly and Mitchell, 1981: 283).
- They served as a global advertising vehicle (Bassiouni, 1979: 757; Thornton, 1964: 82) to propagandize al-Qaeda's cause and grievances. As Crenshaw (1981: 386) notes: 'the most basic reason for terrorism is to gain recognition or attention'.
- They demonstrated the vulnerability of the USA. For the politically weak, shattering an opponent's image of strength and invincibility is important (Bassiouni, 1979: 757) as a device to give 'hope' to one's supporters, and to mobilize support for one's cause (Thornton, 1964: 73–4).

- They served as a recruiting agent (Crenshaw Hutchinson, 1978: 76) for al-Qaeda and for Muslim fundamentalist movements generally.
- They caused political polarization (Bassiouni, 1979: 757) in both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds.
- They boosted 'morale' (Thornton, 1964: 82) within Muslim fundamentalist groups (and other anti-American movements) and/or served to release tension and frustration within those groups (such as al-Qaeda) feeling helpless in the face of the USA's global hegemony.

Propaganda of the Deed

Al-Qaeda had a clear understanding of the symbolic function of their deeds. As Thornton notes: 'the terrorist act is intended and perceived as a symbol. . . . If the terrorist comprehends that he is seeking a demonstration effect, he will attack targets with a maximum symbolic value' (Thornton, 1964: 73–4). In this regard the 9/11 targets were masterful for signalling to al-Qaeda's constituency that it was possible to hit back at those inflicting 'economic' and 'cultural' pain on the Muslim world – i.e. Wall Street (as symbolic heart of global capitalism), and the Pentagon (as symbolic heart of the Pax Americana's global military machine). The 9/11 attacks were classic examples of 'propaganda of the deed'. This conceptualization of terrorism can be traced back to the theorizing of 19th-century French and Russian anarchists – Paul Brousse and Peter Kropotkin first used the term 'propaganda of the deed' in1877 to describe the idea that when the politically weak find themselves confronting an overwhelmingly powerful foe, they need to carry out a spectacularly courageous act to draw attention to their cause (Laqueur, 1977: 49). With the arrival of television the possibilities for successfully deploying 'propaganda of the deed' logic are dramatically enhanced.

Al-Qaeda World-View

To understand the 9/11 attacks as a form of 'propaganda of the deed', one needs to unpack al-Qaeda's world-view – in order to grasp what al-Qaeda believed themselves to be saying. Al-Qaeda's world-view is a hybridization of two (over-lapping) components – one is a hostility to US global hegemony, which they share with many other third world political movements; the other is a uniquely Muslim fundamentalist opposition to western cultural hegemony. Ali Shari'ati (1980) provides a succinct outline of this Muslim fundamentalist opposition to western (both Marxist and liberal) secularism, materialism and 'ungodliness'. Al-Qaeda share with many third world groups a sense of victimhood. Western hegemony is seen to have been imposed from without. Various manifestations of this hegemony are opposed – first, the imposition of western political forms, ideologies and since decolonization, (westernized) 'comprador' ruling elites. The West is seen as responsible for local minorities of westernized people becoming 'comprador' ruling elites. These third world ruling elites are seen to be in power (despite often being corrupt, incompetent and brutal) because the

West keeps them in power – because they serve the economic interests of the West, and because having become westernized, they are culturally proximate to those in power in the western heartland. The West is consequently blamed for the poor quality of third world governance because of a 'partnership' between (incompetent) third world elites and their 'partners' in the USA/Europe. The resultant sense of political and economic victimhood is also tied to concern about western 'cultural imperialism'. For al-Qaeda, opposition to cultural imperialism is enmeshed with a concern that Muslim godliness and morality are being undermined by western secularism (ungodliness and immorality) and materialism (born of western-style economic development).

Further, in many third world societies, political and economic instability, crime and warlordism have become rampant. (The context that gave birth to al-Qaeda, namely Afghanistan and Pakistan, epitomizes such unstable areas.) These phenomena are blamed on US political interference in local issues they do not comprehend; on the incompetence and corruption of the local 'comprador' governments allied to the West; and on the negative effects of western cultural imperialism. Economic and social instability, crime and warlordism have produced waves of third world migrants and refugees (many of whom now reside in the West), who often carry with them resentments about the instability in their former homelands. (This instability is often deemed to be the outcome of US foreign policy.) Al-Qaeda would regard sections of these exiled communities as potential recruits and so they would have been one of the target audiences of the 9/11 attacks.

The Three Audiences

The 9/11 attacks were born of the aforementioned grievances, and represent 'propaganda of the deed' designed to simultaneously communicate about these grievances with three different audiences.

First, a core audience were Americans. The US political system has been significantly media-ized. Television, in particular, substantively influences how Americans perceive their world. As Sadkovich has said of the impact of television within the USA:

> *Television seems able to portray only a limited range of emotions because it lacks linear development and nuance. It homogenizes and reduces complex situations, events and emotions to simple standard items that are almost mythic. . . . Television precludes careful exegesis in favour of simple explanations of group conflict and reality in general. It invokes and evokes, it does not inform or explain. If television is a dream, it also decides what is real. . . . As the tube creates and idealizes some groups and ideas by focusing on them, it makes others disappear by ignoring them. Because it is the key source of news for most Americans it has seriously distorted our view of reality. (Sadkovich, 1998: 60)*

What Americans see on television dramatically impacts on their political perspectives and behaviour. Al-Qaeda's terror-attack on the Twin Towers systematically exploited this. The attack was designed to provoke extreme anger such that Americans demanded immediate revenge. This drove US politicians to hit back without giving the US military the lead-in time required to

systematically prepare for the Pentagon's preferred model of a 'PR-ized' war. Further, hitting back in anger helped polarize public opinion in the Muslim and western worlds. For al-Qaeda, American reprisals anywhere in the Muslim world would be deemed beneficial because reprisals could be portrayed as another example of US 'bullying', 'aggression' and 'imperialism'. Further, provoking the US to attacking al-Qaeda bases in the Muslim world, effectively compelled US 'comprador' allies in the region to reveal their allegiance to Washington against the wishes of large numbers of their own citizens. So although the USA's rapid military success in the 2001 Afghan War greatly strengthened the Pax Americana as a global hegemony, this military success ironically served al-Qaeda's political purpose of increasing opposition to the Pax Americana among those perceiving themselves as (economically or culturally) 'marginalized' or 'victimized' within this US global hegemony. Hence the potential for future terrorism (directed against the US and its allies) would have actually been increased by the success of the Afghan War.

A second audience was al-Qaeda's own constituency. For this group, the 9/11 attacks would have served as a great moral booster by demonstrating that US power could be successfully challenged; in fact, America's hegemonic machinery was revealed to be vulnerable at its very heart. For al-Qaeda's supporters, destroying the Twin Towers would have been a cathartic experience of the sort that Frantz Fanon discusses – generating a restoration of self-respect as the outcome of successfully hitting back at those one perceives as one's tormentors (Fanon, 1965: 74).

A third audience were Muslims generally. Al-Qaeda would have seen the 9/11 attacks as a vehicle to place its ideology and grievances on the agenda of Muslims globally. And if (as happened) the USA and its allies could be provoked into retaliation (including harassing Muslims in western countries) al-Qaeda would have hoped such western actions would 'radicalize' many Muslims, and hence function as a 'recruiting mechanism' for al-Qaeda (or other Muslim fundamentalist groups). Further, al-Qaeda would have anticipated that US retaliation would (at best) generate hostility to those Middle Eastern governments seen as too closely allied to the USA, or (at very least) undermine some local support for westernized 'comprador' ruling elites.

The 'Success' of 9/11

Al-Qaeda would have hoped that their 9/11 attacks would radicalize sections of Muslim and western public opinion so as to create polarization – and hence generate the potential for a future ongoing Muslim fundamentalist struggle against western hegemonic influence (and secularism). So, from an al-Qaeda perspective, even if the USA successfully hit back and devastated al-Qaeda as an organization, this might not be perceived as a 'defeat', as long as polarization and radicalization had been generated – i.e. the seeds sown for an ongoing struggle against the Pax Americana. Hence, even though the 2001 Afghan War militarily entrenched the Pax Americana, al-Qaeda would not mind, as long as the war simultaneously generated political polarization/radicalization. The 2001 war achieved this for al-Qaeda by transforming the Pax Americana into

a hegemonic order that was more *visibly* militaristic and more *visibly* reliant upon using coercion to underpin the processes of globalization.

Ultimately, the 9/11 terror-attacks were highly successful 'propaganda of the deed' exercises – generating the sort of radicalization, polarization and conflict sought by al-Qaeda. Previous al-Qaeda attacks against US targets (for example, those in Nairobi and Aden) were unsuccessful precisely because they failed to cross the necessary media threshold required to provoke widespread American anger. On 9/11, al-Qaeda successfully set a new benchmark for how terrorists can use the media. In the process they provoked the USA into a war.

For the Pentagon's planners, the resultant 'War against Terrorism' must have caused some initial trepidation because American public opinion demanded immediate retaliation. However, over the previous two decades the Pentagon had been carefully crafting a new (and successful) genre of media-ized and PR-ized warfare – a genre that was premised upon careful choreo-graphy and long-term planning. The post-9/11 demand for an 'instant war' flew in the face of the Pentagon's preferred warfare model and threatened to plunge the USA into a dangerously unchoreographed and unplanned war. However, once forced into war in Afghanistan the Pentagon displayed con-siderable skill in deploying a recrafted version of its original PR-ized model of warfare. Before looking at this 'recrafting' let us first examine the Pentagon's pre-9/11 warfare model.

The Pentagon PR-izes Warfare

From the Vietnam War onwards, the US military grew increasingly concerned with television's impact on waging war. This resulted in warfare being sub-stantively media-ized and PR-ized (Louw, 2001: 174). Each war involving Anglo-Americans since Vietnam – the Falklands (1982), Grenada (1983), Panama (1989), the Persian Gulf (1990), Somalia (1992–3), Haiti (1994), Bosnia (1992–5), Kosovo (1999), Timor (1999) and Afghanistan (2001) – has seen the military become increasingly sophisticated as agents of hegemonic coercion; agents skilled not only at killing people, but at using the media (especially television) as a powerful tool of warfare.

The catalyst for developing the new media-ized genre of war was Vietnam (Young and Jesser, 1997: 275). The US military believed it learned two lessons from the Vietnam War. First, that if an anti-war consciousness develops among one's own civilians, the war will be lost because political pressure will grow to end the war. Second, television images have the capacity to promote an anti-war consciousness, and/or have the capacity to disrupt the legitimacy of using coercion and even the legitimacy of the government. The US military went as far as blaming television for losing the Vietnam War because television was unable to deal with the complexity of warfare. Instead, the immediacy of tele-vision left viewers with negative 'impressions' and 'emotions' (MacArthur, 1992: 82). Hallin (1986: 213) has pointed out that blaming television for losing the war is simplistic. Nonetheless, the new PR-ized genre of warfare did effec-tively grow as a strategic response to General Westmoreland's perception that television coverage of the war produced an inherently distorted perspective

because it emphasized the visually dramatic, violent and miserable (Westmoreland, 1980: 555).

Learning to PR-ize Warfare

The first step in learning to PR-ize warfare happened by accident in 1982. The British campaign to recapture the Falklands from Argentina involved dispatching a taskforce to a remote location substantively isolated from the rest of the world. To cover this war the British media sailed as part of the expeditionary force. They effectively became part of the British military's PR machine because they were within a 'closed' deployment, 'trapped' on naval ships and utterly dependent upon the military for getting information, dispatching their stories and indeed even for their survival. Although the resultant stories clearly lacked credibility, the military saw how the media could be corralled and hence controlled. Also during the 1980s, military PR witnessed South Africa's highly media-ized civil war, and the consequences of not containing negative images of conflict. The outcome was that highly emotive images of South African violence became a widespread feature of western television news, leading to public pressure on western governments to 'stop apartheid'. No similar pressure was mounted against other (often more) repressive third world governments because repression in these other societies was not televised. These lessons were not lost on the US military.

The Falklands became, by default, a testing ground for media control (Young and Jesser, 1997: 277). Hence when the USA invaded Grenada to overthrow its government in 1983, the military applied a media management policy derived from the Falklands lesson – they simply excluded the media from the island to be invaded; creating, in effect, a news blackout. When four western journalists managed to get onto the island they were arrested and removed (Young and Jesser, 1997: 129). The US military PR machine released televisual images of the Grenada War which, in absence of other material, were used. For the US military Grenada was a major PR coup, demonstrating they could block negative television images. But Grenada was a small, insignificant island that could be sealed off from the world. The question was – could such a media management strategy (to deprive the media of 'negative' images) be successfully applied to a larger and less isolated theatre of war? The campaign to change the Panamanian government in 1989 demonstrated the US military could successfully manage the media in non-island contexts. During this war the 'news was not actively censored, but passively censored by ensuring lack of access and delay' (Young and Jesser, 1997: 148). Towards the end of the conflict this management of the media unravelled because ex-president Noriega was not captured as quickly as had been planned. However, an important feature of the Panamanian campaign was that the US successfully demonized Noriega (a difficult task given that Noriega had previously been a US ally). This moved the PR-izing of war another step forward.

The 1990s Warfare Model

By 1990, the US military had developed a new model of media-ized warfare in which PR and psychological operations (psy-ops) were central features of the planning and execution of the war. As Engelhardt says of the 1990 Gulf War – it was 'the war to re-establish war' (Engelhardt, 1994: 92). War was once more going to be made to 'appear' acceptable, even in highly media-ized societies. Essentially, all the lessons learned since Vietnam were brought to bear on the Gulf War – war was to be organized differently now with a view to deliberately excluding negative television images; and carefully legitimating one's own coercive actions. As Young and Jesser (1997: 280) say, the Gulf War was constructed in accordance with the 'primacy of politics' – i.e. alliance and legitimacy considerations were as important as military issues.

So the Gulf War was meticulously planned and organized as a media (and psy-ops) operation. Young and Jesser (1997: 292–4) describe the planning of these new media-ized wars as involving the following. Long-term forward planning now includes significant media and political/hegemonic strategizing. Warfare planning now builds into its core a media policy. Opposition leaderships are demonized in preparation for the war. In fact, such demonization is usually a good indication that war is coming. The PR-izing of war means that, before the war begins, the enemy needs to be demonized. And given the strong 'individualist strand' in Anglo-thinking, this demonization has tended to involve creating an identifiable villain, e.g. Saddam Hussein (Iraq), Slobodan Milosevic (Yugoslavia/Bosnia/Kosovo) and General Wiranto (Indonesia/ Timor). This process of villainization has often involved associating the person with Hitler as folk-devil – a trend initiated in the 1989 Panama operation to remove General Noriega from power. But in addition to vilifying the enemy, the logic of binary opposition necessitates also creating the 'victims' who are to be saved from the villain. Finding 'victims' to 'save' has become an important device for justifying the use of US/western violence against foreigners. Military PR has found it useful to 'piggy-back' upon discourses that already have widespread currency among key OECD intellectual gatekeepers (e.g. journalists, teachers and the university intelligentsia). There already exists a whole pool of idealistic discourses born of OECD affluence, and usually associated with the 'conscience mobilization' campaigns of 'social justice' NGOs like Amnesty International or Oxfam (Ignatieff, 1998: 21). Military PR and psy-ops personnel have found these 'idealisms' to be a great resource when mobilizing OECD populations for war, demonizing enemies, and justifying warfare to western audiences. Essentially, mobilizing 'victimhood' discourses that are already 'trendy' in journalistic circles, means that psy-ops stories, promoted by military PR personnel, tend to receive no critical scrutiny from journalists. Propaganda is easily 'placed' in the media if it confirms existing journalistic bias and/or fits their news 'frame'. Demonization is often accompanied by identifying refugees and exile groups and promoting them as future alternative governments. Demonization also involves the selective portrayal of history, especially where intervention is being made on one side of a civil conflict (as occurred in Kosovo). The target regime will be destabilized, embarrassed and made to look

unreasonable and irrational through political, economic and diplomatic manoeuvres. Much energy is expended to create public approval and declarations of support for action against the target – for example, 'flag nation' allies are enlisted, and legitimacy sought from the United Nations and regional political groupings. (These ends are achieved through diplomatic lobbying and economic inducements.) The media are targeted with a view to creating public approval for action. The deployment of troops involves building up overwhelming superiority in numbers and firepower so as to ensure quick victory. This deployment will include media exclusion from the deployment zone. The media will be corralled and managed throughout the actual war. Media manipulation and deception will be practised, with military PR providing good televisual images. As soon as possible after the war, the military withdraws and hands over to the UN, a regional grouping or a new government created from former opposition groups, exiles, etc.

The 1990 Gulf War

The Gulf War set the pattern for this new PR-ized genre of warfare. To begin with, Saddam Hussein (a former US ally) was demonized – the media being coopted into this demonizing process. 'Flag nation' allies were brought on board to legitimate US deployment – in particular Arab allies were sought, and induced to join the alliance through having their US debts written off. Once military deployment began, the media were corralled and managed. Journalists were formed into 'pools' far removed from the battlefront, where the military PR could feed them information. Pool journalists were only granted access to events that were strictly controlled. Censorship was achieved through denial of access to military engagement, and news blackouts at the start of the war. All interviews had to be conducted in the presence of military escorts, and all copy and images cleared by the military before transmission. Military PR personnel ensured a 'flow of favourable military sourced information to fill the vacuum created by media restrictions. Material ranged from information provided at carefully controlled briefings which bypassed journalists on the spot, all the way to carefully sanitized television coverage of high technology weaponry in action' (Young and Jesser, 1997: 280). Military spokespersons were auditioned and selected for their 'media presence'. The media were stagemanaged, manipulated and lied to, and they believed the lies (Taylor, 1992: 220–1). But the media were also used as an avenue for diplomatic signals and intelligence gathering. Extraordinarily, the media meekly went along with this. Effectively the media became a vehicle through which 'the government and the military made direct approaches to the public through the immediacy of television' (Young and Jesser, 1997: 191) – television became a direct tool of hegemonic labour; a tool for legitimating the use of violence against Iraq. For the US military the Gulf War was a tremendous success – they asserted western hegemony over the Gulf region; developed new networked ('coalition') command systems; and not only successfully turned the media into propaganda tools (through deploying PR/psy-ops), but seemingly got journalists to enjoy being coopted by the military (MacArthur, 1992: 227–9).

The Media as a Theatre of Conflict

Implicit in this new approach to war is the recognition that media coverage of conflict now directly affects state responses. Shaw (1996: 7) notes that western politics has been transformed by mass communication insofar as groups in conflict zones can now use the media to appeal to western electorates. Further, images of conflict impact on public opinion, and hence affect the room for manoeuvre western politicians have. So wars are now played out on a media-ized global stage, the implications of which no military planner can ignore. 'PR-ized' warfare is the military's response to this new theatre of conflict. Wars now have to be designed as media events which, if all goes according to plan, actually strengthens the dominance of the ruling hegemony by generating a 'feel good factor' and enhancing legitimacy for the ruling alliance.

A crucial dimension to the military's perception of waging media-ized warfare is the creation of media events that appear as bloodless as possible, so that war can again become 'acceptable'. This is based upon a belief that tele-vised images of blood (during the Vietnam War) caused American public opinion to swing against warfare. Consequently, military PR now aims to sanitize war, 'portraying it as a low risk Nintendo game. . . . Military PR also reflects the American penchant for the upbeat, the happy endings, with a minimum of groans, blood, and deaths' (Pinsdorf, 1994: 49). At heart, creating a Nintendo war means working to exclude images of dead bodies, blood and brutality. This type of warfare has also seen the development of a new mili-taristic language that aims to mystify and obscure as much as possible. Taylor (1992: 45) calls this the creation of a 'terminological fog', such as using 'col-lateral damage' for civilian deaths; and 'sorties' for bombing. Words like 'dead', 'enemy' and 'war' are avoided. Brivio (1999: 516) notes that a technical-military language is deployed which 'uses acronyms and euphemisms to steril-ize the horrors of war'. On the other hand, reports will be circulated of how the (now demonized) opposition uses brutality against their 'victims' (who are, of course, to be saved through the intervention).

Nintendo Warfare

Effectively, by the dawn of the 21st century, the Pentagon had created a new genre of war – namely, PR-ized Nintendo warfare – built upon an array of digitized communications and killing technologies. The beauty of the new dig-itized 'smart weapons' warfare is that it can make wars look clean and 'blood-less' if PR mobilizes it correctly. During the Vietnam War, high altitude aerial bombing lost its 'cleanness' when it became visually enmeshed with images of bloody ground combat. So although US aircrews were portrayed as skilled pro-fessionals, with no vindictiveness towards those they bombed (Hallin, 1986: 137), the overall impression of the war was of a bloody, dirty and messy affair. During the Gulf War this was not allowed to happen. Instead, military PR used aerial warfare to 'create the impression of a "clean" techno-war, almost devoid of human suffering and death, conducted with surgical precision by wondrous mechanisms' (Franklin, 1994: 42). In place of blood and dead bodies were

'weapons counts' and the blowing up of 'inanimate things' like buildings and bridges (Engelhardt, 1994: 88).

In the resultant media-ized 'hyperwar', what got lost was the physical effects of modern weapons on human beings (Taylor, 1992: 29). For those at the receiving end of the bombing the effects are brutal; but when PR does its job well, these new digitized techno-wars can be made to look like video-games for all the multiple audiences that military PR is targeting – i.e. the folks back home (who must not be allowed to become negative or pessimistic about the war); the various publics in allied or friendly states (who need to be kept on-side); and those publics inclined to support the enemy. The last mentioned groups must be denied images of war's brutality (which they can mobilize in oppositional PR campaigns). However, media-ized wars need to be quick wars if the discourse closures are to kept intact, hence US-led New World Order wars have involved troop and high-tech deployments that ensure absolute superiority over enemy forces – if PR closure is to be effective there must be no time for public protests to emerge, and no trickle of body bags back home (Taylor, 1992: 3). If the war cannot be brought to a speedy closure, controlling information flow becomes a problem, as was seen in Somalia (when withdrawal followed quickly on the heels of 'messy' war images reaching US television screens).

New information technology has facilitated the informationalization of war in four ways (Louw, 2001: 182–3). First, new digital technologies have produced 'smart' killing machines which can be deployed to deliver quick wars. This 'smart' technology is, at heart, informational, and converges seamlessly with the needs of PR trying to make war look like the deployment of 'clean' technology. It makes it possible to construct images of warfare as a video-game. Second, just as economies have been informationalized, so too have wars. One of the reasons digitized warfare can deliver speedy victory for those possessing the new technologies is the capacity it generates for gathering and processing huge volumes of information (intelligence), which improves decision-making over (physical and psychological) targets. Third, the global information network has necessarily become an effective conduit for disinformation and psy-ops campaigns aimed at destabilizing 'the enemy', or even for delivering real-time 'diplomatic' signals. Fourth, OECD populations are now effectively media-ized – they are heavily influenced by media images. Military planners cannot ignore this, because images of conflict can be especially 'emotional' and hence produce backlashes against their activities. Fortunately for these military planners, OECD television news has an insatiable appetite for quality 'action' images delivered more or less instantaneously. If military PR personnel can supply appropriate images and information, they will tend to be used, particularly if alternative sources are denied to them. This has become the basis for the PR-ization of war – the managing of information flows has become central to the conduct of US-led wars.

11 September 2001: A Challenge for the Pentagon's Warfare Model

The 9/11 attacks generated a widespread public demand in the USA (and the rest of the Anglo-world) for immediate retaliation. For the Pentagon this initially created a problem because the PR-ized model of war developed over the previous two decades was premised upon long-term planning and preparation for war – the need to build up absolute military superiority over enemy forces to ensure a quick, crushing victory; and a well-planned media strategy and a well-constructed PR machinery in place before the war began. Essentially, the Pentagon wants quick, well-planned wars so that there is no time for negative anti-war US public opposition to emerge, and no stream of body bags back home to unnerve civilian public opinion. Launching an immediate war in Afghanistan, without the necessary time for proper planning (and military and PR deployment), held out the prospect of a potential PR disaster by getting bogged down in an Afghan guerrilla war of the sort that had defeated the Soviets.

There was also the problem that the Pentagon's preferred 'villain/victim' discourse would not neatly fit the Afghan situation. Certainly it proved to be easy enough to demonize and 'criminalize' Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda in the West. It also proved to be relatively easy (in the West) to extend this process to the Taliban and Mullah Mohammed Omar. However, it was difficult to stretch the process far enough to justify carpet-bombing Afghanistan. To make matters more complex, the West needed to avoid the impression that the war was against 'Muslims' because that would have served the purposes of al-Qaeda (who would have welcomed the resultant Muslim–western polarization). The Pentagon PR machinery ultimately tried to deploy a 'villain/victim' dichotomy in which it was claimed the 'War against Terrorism' would not only destroy bin Laden and al-Qaeda but would simultaneously 'liberate' Afghanistan from the 'backward' Taliban, especially involving the liberation of Afghan women from gender discrimination. The problem for the Pentagon's PR machine was that this discourse was, even in the West, not entirely convincing, for a number of reasons. First, Afghan (Pashtun) refugees arriving in Pakistan (including women) did not appear to relish the prospect of the US and its allies liberating them. Second, Muslim hostility and demonstrations around the globe severely strained the Pentagon's villain/victim discourse. Third, Afghan civilian casualties looked like victims of the USA rather than the Taliban. Fourth, too many credible sources pointed out that Afghanistan might be worse off without a Taliban government because the US's Afghan allies had a poor record as criminal warlords. And there was the problem that the USA (and pro-western Pakistan) appeared in any case to have been complicit in giving birth to the Taliban and al-Qaeda as a result of their anti-Communist Cold War policies.

Another problem faced by the Pentagon was creating a 'flag nations' coalition so that the war would not look like US aggression. Despite the best diplomatic efforts of Tony Blair and Donald Rumsfeld, the US was unable to muster Muslim countries into its alliance as full participants. The problem faced by the USA was that al-Qaeda's 'propaganda of the deed' attacks had successfully

polarized public opinion – the majority of westerners were outraged by their terrorism, while in the Muslim world there was a widespread perception that the US was the villain. Hence, even America's most important Middle Eastern allies (such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt) kept a comfortable distance due to internal political pressures and widespread anti-American sentiment in the Middle East. Even Pervaz Musharraf's announcement that Pakistan would help the USA was not good PR for the Pentagon because the Pakistan leader looked 'concerned' and 'bullied' rather than a willing ally. Demonstrations in Pakistan against the US only served to reinforce this bad PR. Ultimately, the 'War against Terrorism' was a PR failure when measured against the need for 'flag nation' allies, because it gained the appearance of a war driven by the West (especially the USA and Britain). For al-Qaeda this would have been a pleasing outcome because, for al-Qaeda sympathizers, it would have served to confirm the dichotomy of 'secularism, materialism and ungodliness' of the West and its Middle Eastern Allies vs the 'godliness' and anti-secularism of fundamentalist Islam.

Corralling the Media: Successes and Failures

A key requirement of the Pentagon's PR-ized warfare model is the need to keep media corralled in order to black out news of 'blood' (especially of dead civilians). In this regard the Pentagon has had both successes and failures. In general, there was no need to corral US journalists because the US media 'patriotically' fell into line behind the war effort, accepted Pentagon and State Department and White House briefings as 'true' and applied self-censorship. The US media disseminated images of awesome high-tech US firepower driven by clean-cut young Americans calmly avenging the 9/11 terrorist acts. However, the Pentagon found it simultaneously faced a PR problem not encountered in its wars in the Persian Gulf, Bosnia or Kosovo, namely bad PR images kept emerging from Pakistan. This was largely due to Pakistan's strong cultural links to the Anglo world as a result of its British Empire heritage. As a result British journalists were comfortable reporting from Pakistan, and their cultural proximity to the Pakistan elite (including journalists) facilitated the ready flow of information out of Pakistan. Unfortunately for the Pentagon, Pashtuns live in both Afghanistan (where they are the largest ethnic group, and generally support the Taliban) and in Pakistan. This gave journalists access to a large pro-Taliban population within Pakistan, which was constantly being bolstered by the flow of refugees into Pakistan. To make matters worse for the Pentagon, it is easy for journalists to drive to Pakistan's Pashtun areas (and the refugee camps) around Peshawar from Islamabad – this facilitated western journalists easily accessing a range of negative images. The result was a stream of television images of angry people protesting against US aggression and of Afghan refugees undermining the Pentagon's villain/victim discourse. Furthermore, Peshawar's proximity to Jalalabad (a Taliban stronghold near the Pakistan border) occasionally facilitated precisely the sort of negative images of Afghan civilian distress and blood that the Pentagon did not want reaching western audiences. However, the potential 'PR threat' that Pakistan's proximity posed

for generating negative images never developed into a really major PR problem for the Pentagon, in part because the military were so successful in gaining the compliance of most of the western media in applying self-censorship. Overall, remarkably few images of dead bodies and blood reached western audiences. This is made more extraordinary by the fact that the US relied so heavily on carpet-bombing Afghanistan in 2001 – yet the consequences of using cluster bombs and daisy-cutter bombs in Afghanistan were successfully kept off the West's television screens. In fact, the only occasion when western audiences saw large numbers of dead bodies (although still not much blood) was when Taliban prisoners of war were massacred at Mazar-e Sharif at the end of November 2001. Presumably these dead-body scenes only emerged because America's first war casualty (a CIA interrogator at Mazar-e Sharif, Mike Spann) needed to be explained. The Mazar-e Sharif massacre in fact served to demonstrate how effective the Pentagon PR machine had become, because at the time the western media avoided critically investigating the massacre of prisoners (where not one prisoner survived). Instead, the western media focused their energies onto turning Spann into a hero.

The 'War against Terrorism' initially put some strains upon the Pentagon's preferred modus operandi for conducting warfare. But ultimately, the Pentagon planners succeeded in prosecuting a successful Afghan War. And given the limited lead-in time (about four weeks) for planning and deployment, the Pentagon actually displayed an extraordinary capacity for rolling out its coercive and media-management machinery. The Pentagon not only success-fully projected its coercive capacities to the other side of the world, but, most interestingly, has – despite problems – once again demonstrated the skill of its PR machine to manage potential communication crises so as to keep the US public 'on-side'. The 2001 Afghan War served not only to confirm the Pax Americana, but served to place the Pentagon (and its PR-ized variety of warfare) at the heart of this global hegemonic order.

Rescripting the PR-ized Warfare Model in Afghanistan

During the 2001 Afghan War, the Pentagon was not as successful in managing the flow of negative images as seen in earlier PR-ized wars. This was largely due to negative (external) images flowing from Peshawar. However, ultimately the Pentagon has still managed to project the image of a sanitized Nintendo war – and this despite the fact that high-level aerial carpet-bombing was the main feature of this war. (The use of carpet-bombing began three weeks into the war, and continued even after the Taliban government capitulated in early December 2001.) The impression of a bloodless Nintendo war was successfully portrayed in the West because television images from *inside* Afghanistan overwhelmingly conformed to the sort of images the Pentagon's PR machine wished western audiences to see. There seem to be two key reasons this has happened. First, the Pentagon naturally worked to create a news blackout of television images sympathetic to the Taliban and images showing the bloody effects of their bombing within Afghanistan – in this regard the Taliban were of great assist-ance to the Pentagon because they were highly unskilled at playing the western

PR game. The Taliban virtually created an 'island' of cultural difference, as cut off from western television audiences as Grenada was in 1983. This gave the Pentagon PR almost a free hand in scripting the images the western world saw of war conditions inside Afghanistan (with only the external Peshawar images proving to be a problem). On the other hand, when it came to the Arab media (for example, the satellite news station al-Jessera, with its 35 million viewers), the Taliban and al-Qaeda were able to project favourable PR images (precisely where the US spin doctors were less successful). So it would appear that 'cultural proximity' to journalists is an important issue in the game of PR-izing warfare. But the outcome was clear – the Pentagon's PR personnel must have been well satisfied with the western media coverage of the war *inside* Afghanistan.

A second reason western television audiences generally saw a Pentagon-centric perspective on the war appears to be related to the mood generated by the 9/11 terror-attacks. Al-Qaeda's 'propaganda of the deed' was almost too successful in inspiring 'terror' and 'anger' within the US population (and to a lesser extent the West generally). Western journalists appeared to imbibe the siege-psychology that the wider western population experienced following the Twin Towers terror-attack. Essentially, these journalists were part of a population feeling themselves to be the targets of a war of terror and so they 'identified' with those 'protecting' them and/or hitting back at those 'terrorizing' them – i.e. they identified with the US security apparatus. A similar siege-psychology surfaced among Israelis and white South Africans when they perceived themselves to be facing a terrorist threat. For the Pentagon's PR machine, this siege-psychology was useful because it meant they did not have to work as hard at 'corralling' and 'managing' western journalists since they could rely on media 'collaboration' born of a hostility to 'the terrorists' and their allies (in this case al-Qaeda and the Taliban). Essentially, the Pentagon realized they could count on the western media to help them. In fact, within four days of the Afghan War being launched, US national security advisor, Condoleezza Rice, openly asked the US media to engage in self-censorship when asking them not to carry al-Qaeda 'propaganda'. The US media simply fell into line and became compliant – in fact, Walter Isaacson, chair of CNN, was to tell his staff that showing the misery of Afghans ran the risk of promoting enemy propaganda. Essentially, the US media simply helped the Pentagon rescript the way in which PR-ized wars were conducted – this time the US media did not have to be managed by Pentagon PR minders because most of the western media were prepared to manage themselves for the Pentagon. In this regard, constant media reminders of the Twin Towers terror-attacks (such as monthly anniversaries; visits to the site by heads of state; and reports of New Yorkers getting back to normal *despite the terror threat*) proved useful to the Pentagon PR agenda by serving to maintain a state of siege-psychology. These reminders, plus endlessly replayed file-footage of the Twin Tower explosions, served as useful icons of 'terrorist evil', which could be (and were) used to justify carpet-bombing Afghanistan, massacring prisoners of war, and the authorization (by a 13 November 2001 military order) of the detention of Middle Eastern looking men in the USA, and their trial by military tribunals if suspected of being

complicit in 'terrorism'. The Pentagon must have been well pleased that conducting warfare in 2001 was once again deemed a respectable activity by the US public, with the anti-war sentiments of the Vietnam era an unpleasant, distant memory.

Keeping Western Publics 'On-Side'

But even if the Pentagon no longer had to deal with an anti-war sentiment within its civilian population during 2001, politics and warfare still remained a substantively 'media-ized' phenomenon in the USA. Hence, there remained a need for the Pentagon to produce and disseminate good televisual images designed to keep its public 'on-side'. Consequently, we still saw high-quality PR images of aircraft carriers, clean-cut young American aircrews and smart 'clean' weapons. Television images of high-altitude bombers and the *distant* billowing of smoke and dust caused by huge explosions became the staple fare of the Afghan War. No civilian bodies, no blood; no images of the devastation caused by the cluster or daisy-cutter bombs, and no unhappy civilians *inside* Afghanistan. However, an interesting new component of the Pentagon's script was 'low-tech' (humanized) images of Afghan Northern Alliance tanks, soldiers and cavalry (occasionally accompanied by US special forces) against the backdrop of exotic-looking mountains and deserts. Significantly, the Northern Alliance personnel were often shown in prayer. But still no images of blood – no hand-to-hand fighting, tank battles or images of Northern Alliance atrocities. (The Mazar-e Sharif massacre was the only exception to this, and 'good PR', in any case, succeeded in 'justifying' this massacre to western audiences.) Generally, instead of bloody fighting, the West saw images of tanks driving around – which almost made war look like fun. And, of course, the carefully crafted images of Northern Alliance ground forces had the added bonus of serving the purpose of disguising the failure to enlist Muslim 'flag nation' allies. It also helped create the image of the Northern Alliance as professionalized soldiers rather than as warlord militias. The televisual images deployed from inside Afghanistan were examples of brilliantly scripted PR.

    The failure to enlist Muslim 'flag nations' into anything resembling a UN-type alliance was a serious blow to the Pentagon's PR-ized warfare model. To make matters worse, the few successes at cobbling together a 'flag nations' alliance (which provided some PR in the West) were a PR disaster in the Muslim world – for example, Russia's rapprochement with NATO would have looked like the cementing of 'western' solidarity in the face of Russia's 'Muslim problem' (e.g. Chechnya). Even China's cooperation with the USA would have simply confirmed the Muslim/fundamentalist world-view that Marxists were part of the same western/secularist threat to Islam (which would be deemed to underpin the Chinese–Muslim conflict in China's Sinkiang-Uighur Autonomous Region). Similarly, success in enlisting support from authoritarian counties like Uzbekistan and Oman would have simply served to confirm the picture that organizations like al-Qaeda are tying to promote, of a certain genre of ruling elite siding with the West against their own Muslim populations.

    If the 'flag nations' issue proved to be a seemingly irresolvable PR problem,

the Pentagon pushed ahead with a range of other PR activities. The most expensive was the use of air force cargo planes to drop pouches of food into Afghanistan (each stamped with the US flag and the words, 'This food is a gift from the United States of America'). This PR exercise seems to have had two audiences. First, the food drops were targeted at Muslim audiences – an attempt to soften the American image and deflect attention away from the bombing campaign. Second, it was a PR exercise targeted at a western audience as part of the old PR binary opposition 'villain/victim' strategy – i.e. the Afghan population was to be seen as divided into two camps, in part, to sell the war in Afghanistan as an exercise in rescuing 'good' Afghans victimized by 'bad' Afghans (the Taliban). In this regard enormous energy was expended in trying to engineer into existence an alternative government for Afghanistan and to make the gerrymandered alliance of squabbling Afghan warlords appear to be potentially superior rulers to the Taliban. The western media uncritically went along with this process. The PR underpinning this exercise was sophisticated enough to ensure that when Kabul fell, the 'new government' had consuls in place in western capitals to lend credibility to the idea that they were a credible government-in-waiting. But, because the squabbling warlords' alliance was not a credible government, a western military occupation of post-Taliban Afghanistan was necessary. Consequently (in accordance with new PR-ized genre of Pentagon warfare), a 'United Nations' peacekeeping occupation was deployed. Significantly, this 'UN' force was led, in the first instance, by Britain. Public relations considerations dictated that the US military were not conspicuous in this occupation force so as to try and minimize any appearance that the USA was deploying an 'imperialist' or 'occupation' army.

The PR Game: Burkas, Food Drops and 'Good Muslims'

Another important theme of the PR drive in the West was mobilizing the issue of liberating women in Afghanistan. The women's liberation discourse was a useful issue to 'piggy-back' upon because it has widespread currency and resonated well with many western intellectual gatekeepers (e.g. journalists, teachers and the university intelligentsia). Hence, the Pentagon PR would have understood its propaganda value in getting anti-Taliban stories picked up with little critical scrutiny from many western journalists. Not surprisingly, when the Taliban were driven from Kabul, the first PR images released were of a woman television-newsreader. Understanding how much the 'liberation of victimized women' theme would resonate in the West, the PR package stressed that she was 'back at work' and had thrown off her burka. The Northern Alliance forces also learned to make use of this western discourse of 'liberating Afghan women' – for example, when a western television crew captured images of Northern Alliance forces severely beating up a Taliban supporter (just after the collapse of the Taliban regime), this was quickly 'justified' to the camera crew as punishment for what he had done to women. That this was uncritically accepted by the camera crew (despite the poor Northern Alliance record regarding women's rights) demonstrated the power of this discourse to deflect critical scrutiny. However, the discourse of 'liberating Afghan women' became somewhat

strained after the collapse of the Taliban regime because Afghan women continued to wear burkas. The problem was that for westerners, burkas were (simplistically) promoted as icons of gender repression. When Pentagon PR personnel were originally trying to invent Afghan 'victims' for the US to rescue, burkas must have appeared as wonderfully iconic material for a televisual war. However, what was useful at one stage in the war, became a problem at another stage – indeed the expectations built up around the post-'liberation' removal of burkas became a PR problem when they were not taken off when Taliban rule ended. At that point the 'victim discourse' became somewhat strained – and the western media began trying to explain their way out of the discursive trap into which they had fallen by arguing Afghan women were waiting to make sure the repression was really over. Despite these attempts to rescue the discourse, the women-as-victims-to-be-rescued notion was damaged enough to be thereafter pushed to the margins.

Another important component of the PR repertoire was the attempt to avoid the appearance of a West–Muslim conflict. President Bush's visit to the Islamic Center of Washington on 17 September was an early PR gesture in this regard. This strategy also underpinned US efforts to cobble together an alternative government for Afghanistan with impeccable Muslim credentials; the mobilization of images of Northern Alliance forces praying as devout Muslims; and the food drops into Afghanistan. However, attempts to avoid the impression of a Muslim–western cleavage constantly had the hallmarks of 'contrived' PR – images of Muslim demonstrations around the globe; reported incidents of harassment of Muslims in the West (e.g. the bombing of a Brisbane Mosque); the impression that men of Middle Eastern appearance were the targets of western security surveillance; and the impression that US intervention in Afghanistan was generating political instability, all served to undermine the PR messages from resonating as desired. In part, the problem faced by Pentagon PR personnel was that unlike their earlier PR-ized wars, the 'War against Terrorism' spilled over into western countries themselves and touched Muslims globally, which made drawing the 'us/them' dichotomy much more problematic. Ultimately, the question of 'good' vs 'bad' Muslims was to remain a PR problem throughout the war – the PR attempts to promote the idea that not all Muslims were the enemy was constantly undermined by the general 'mood' in the West that seemed to place Muslims into 'the other' camp. This was made apparent in many subtle ways. For example, whereas Australians are usually very forthcoming in donating money to foreign welfare appeals, calls during the Afghan War to donate money to help refugees in Pakistan and Afghanistan failed to elicit the usual levels of support.

But overall, even if the Pentagon had difficulties with the West's image in the Muslim world, they could nonetheless be relatively satisfied with the way the 'War against Terrorism' played in the West. In general, they succeeded in maintaining the integrity of their PR-ized model of warfare (even if the model had to be slightly rescripted) – they maintained broad public support for the war; kept bloody images out of the media; and successfully demonized their enemy. And such was the success of the war, that it appeared to actually bolster the popularity of western governments. In general terms, it appears that the

Pentagon had built up considerable expertise in the techniques of running a media-ized war over the two decades prior to the 2001 Afghan War. This expertise was to pay handsome dividends, even when an unanticipated war was sprung at short notice. In the resultant 'War against Terrorism', the Pentagon demonstrated a tremendous capacity not only to project massive levels of coercive power to even the remotest parts of the globe, but simultaneously demonstrated it has at its disposal highly attuned (PR) media-scripting expertise which can ensure that televisually Pentagon-run wars are portrayed in ways that keep western publics on-side.

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