“New wars“ and old strategies: 
From traditional propaganda to 
information warfare and psychological operations
–some notions on the Gulf War,
the Kosovo War and the War on Terrorism

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Abstract. This paper concerns propaganda, psychological operations and information warfare. The paper is divided into two main sections. The starting point of this paper is that the concept and the strategies of war have changed after the Cold War. In “new wars“, the representation of war in the media is more important to parties of war, which therefore employ more time and resources to control and manage the publicity of war. This may have also affected the methods of propaganda. However, neither the strategic objectives of propaganda nor the main propaganda strategies to employ these objectives have changed that much. Therefore, in the first section of this paper, Harold D. Lasswell’s analysis of First World War strategic objectives of propaganda and propaganda strategies will be shortly introduced. I’ll argue that even though Lasswell’s classic book was written 75 years ago, most of his analysis is still usable and valid today. Whereas the strategic objectives and the propaganda strategies have remained basically the same, the methods of propaganda have become somewhat more sophisticated –and/or at least the terminology related to propaganda has changed as “psychological operations“ have partly replaced propaganda in military terminology. Therefore, I will also try to make sense of some of the concepts related to propaganda by looking at the military (the U.S. and/or NATO) definitions. The second section examines how the U.S. and/or NATO, as the main “punishers“ of “new wars“, have used propaganda, information warfare and psychological operations in three different post-Cold War wars (the Gulf War, the Kosovo War and the War on Terrorism) and whether Lasswell’s propaganda strategies might help our understanding in that regard. The paper concludes with some remarks on the recognizability of the characteristics of “new wars“ in the War on Terrorism.

Key words. Propaganda, censorship, information warfare, psychological operations, “new wars”, the Gulf War, the Kosovo War, the War on Terrorism

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1. Introduction

The debate over the relationship of freedom of the press and national security in times of war has been vigorous in the U.S. and Britain after the Vietnam War. The U.S. has been criticized particularly for the Gulf War information pools. After the Gulf War, there has been a “boom” of media research. A great number of studies have been also published of the media’s role in the Kosovo War, the representations of the war by different national and international media, and particularly of the propaganda and media strategies of NATO. The post-Cold War era seems to be fruitful for this kind of media research since the use of propaganda seems to have settled to a different level than in the years of the superpower rivalry.

Some researchers have claimed that the Kosovo War, as a “humanitarian intervention” implied “the end of war”. However, as the end of the Cold War did not remove regional and ethnic conflicts nor did the Kosovo War remove war. War has not disappeared, but the concept of war is changing. According to e.g. Boni, now the world faces “new wars”, a concept used when referring to conflicts which are presented as operations of “international police” to punish national actors that threaten the international order.¹ The “War on Terrorism“ implies that those to be punished do not have to be national actors, but also terrorists will do. This suits also Boni’s argument that “new wars” are not fought against a paritarian, recognizable “enemy”. (Boni 2001, 2.)

Boni argues that there are three main characteristics of “new wars“ that are relevant in relation to the media and public opinion:

“…first, the conflicts must be brief and resolutive, not to involve losses –for the punishers –and not to test the political consensus –or, even better, not to lacerate the public opinion which could discover the “reality“ of war.
Second, the global military intervention has to be concentrated, fast and definitive. Third, in order to satisfy the strategic necessities of the first two points, every means of the war is legitimated, although it is not possible to admit it publicly“ (Boni 2001, 2.)²

“New wars“ are highly dependent on the support of public opinion. Thus, psychological warfare and managing the representation of war have become more important. In “new wars” media strategies are as important as military strategies, if not even more important. The parties of war e.g. hire “spin doctors“ to design better media strategies and more effective propaganda methods and psychological operations.

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¹ From the perspective of this paper it should be stated that the West and particularly the U.S. and/or NATO has taken the role of “international police” and “punisher” in the post-Cold War era.

² However, renaming war is not enough, because the concept of war needs to get rid of many limitations, which the modern project has equipped it with; war is not anymore so dependent on the concepts of sovereignty, statehood or traditional security definitions. Also, it would be better to talk about change instead of “old“ and new“ –however, this paper unfortunately does not escape the dilemmas of modernism.
The starting point of this paper is that the concept and strategies of war have changed after the Cold War, and this has made the representation of war in the media more important to parties of war, which therefore employ more time and resources to control and manage the publicity of war. This might have also affected the methods of propaganda as well as the terminology related to propaganda. However, neither the strategic objectives of propaganda nor the main propaganda strategies to employ these objectives have changed that much.

Therefore, in the first section of this paper, Harold D. Lasswell’s analysis of First World War strategic objectives of propaganda and propaganda strategies will be shortly introduced. I’ll argue that even though Lasswell’s classic book was written already 75 years ago, most of his analysis is usable and valid even today. However, as the strategic objectives and the propaganda strategies have remained basically the same, the methods of propaganda have become somewhat more sophisticated —and/or at least the terminology related to propaganda has changed as “psychological operations” have partly substituted propaganda in the military terminology. Therefore, I will also try to make sense of some of the concepts related to propaganda by looking at the military (the U.S. and/or NATO) definitions.

The second section examines how the U.S. and/or NATO, as the main “punishers” of “new wars”, have used propaganda, censorship and psychological operations in three different post-Cold War wars (the Gulf War, the Kosovo War and the “War on Terrorism”) and see if Lasswell’s propaganda strategies might help our understanding in that regard. The paper concludes with some remarks on the recognizability of the characteristics of “new wars” in the War on Terrorism.

2. Propaganda, information warfare and psychological operations

2.1 Propaganda: strategic objectives of and strategies

Term “propaganda” has still often a negative connotation. It can be regarded as “a ‘dirty trick’, utilized by ‘hidden persuaders’, ‘mind manipulators’ and ‘brainwashers’ — Orwellian ‘Big Brothers’ who somehow subliminally control our thoughts in order to control our behaviour to serve their interests rather than our own” (Taylor 1995, 1). In this view, propaganda is regarded as an enemy of free thought and a manipulator of free flow of information. However, when states are in war, the parties of war always struggle for rhetorical credibility and impressiveness and similar rhetorical or physical acts are interpreted differently according to which party is conducting them. The enemy is regarded as force-feeding the public with propaganda, manipulating and lying, whereas “we” are only “informing” the public.³

³ When considering war propaganda, it is impossible to ignore the concept of censorship. Whereas war propaganda aims at producing material that would serve the propagandist’s objectives, censorship aims at limiting the quantity, quality and reception of information. In wartime, censorship is justified by operational security; the information that might serve the interest of the enemy and thus jeopardize the operational security of “our” soldiers, must be withheld.
Defining propaganda as a “dirty trick” does not make the concept very useful. To define propaganda too broadly can also be a problem. If propaganda is e.g. defined as communication, which purpose is to persuade somebody to think or act in a certain way, in that sense, there has been propaganda as long as there have been human beings and communication between them. If the concept was to be useful in academic research, it must be defined in a neutral and not too broad manner. A good definition could be that of Taylor’s. He defines propaganda as “the conscious, methodical and planned decisions to employ techniques of persuasion designed to achieve specific goals that are intended to benefit those organizing the process” (Taylor 1995, 6.). The point here is to regard propaganda as a process, and as such, propaganda is neither a “good” of a “bad” thing; it is merely a means to an end.4

In relation to war, propaganda is one of the three most important fronts of warfare along with financial and military fronts, argued Harold D. Lasswell 75 years ago in his classic book Propaganda technique in the World War (1927). Lasswell’s book is of course bound up in its time of writing, but his analysis contains surprisingly many elements that can be used when studying modern wars and contemporary propaganda. He e.g. introduces different audiences that have to be influenced by different arguments; enemy, home, allies and neutrals, which all have to be approached by different strategies. Home is to be convinced of the necessity of war and of the means selected; propaganda is used for legitimizing the use of force. The objectives of propaganda in relation to allies and neutrals are quite similar, but the methods are different. The propaganda aimed at the enemy tries to weaken its troops’ will to fight. (Lasswell 1927, 193; 201-202, 210.) The four major propaganda strategies are:

1. To mobilize hatred against the enemy.
2. To preserve the friendship of allies.
3. To preserve the friendship, and if possible, to produce the co-operation of neutrals.
4. To demoralize the enemy.

(Lasswell, 1927, 195.)

When trying to influence the homeland, the most effective propaganda strategy is simple: to create enmity. This can be implemented by representing the enemy as “a menacing, murderous aggressor“. The enemy nation should be represented as a violator of all our moral standards. To put it into modern language: to portray the enemy as the “Other“, who threatens “our morals” and our way of living“. Lasswell also suggests that the enemy should be represented as an obstacle to the realization of the cherished ideals and dreams of the nation as a whole. This juxtaposition when representing “us“ and the “enemy“ results in killing of the enemy becoming legitimized in the battle between “the good“ and “the evil“ (see also Harle 2000, 12.). (Lasswell 1927, 195.)

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4 However, in theories propaganda is often divided into white, gray and black propaganda. The difference between these three is that the source of white propaganda is known whereas gray propaganda does not specifically identify any source; black propaganda “purports to emanate from a source other than the true one“. In the information age this division in three is not in practice as clear-cut as it used to be. On the Internet, for example, it is difficult to identify the sources of information and/or propaganda (Rantapelkonen 2002, 24; see also Huhtinen and Rantapelkonen 2001.)
Propaganda aimed at allies should not include anything that criticizes them. According to Lasswell, allies will have to be convinced of “our strenuous exertion in the prosecution of the war, and our hearty assent to the cherished war aims of the ally”. All the themes of domestic propaganda can be also used in regard to allies. (Lasswell 1927, 196.)

Those who are not engaged in the war, the neutrals, in other words, should be allowed to identify their own interests with the defeat of the enemy. However, the neutrals should be convinced of the benefits that the defeat of the enemy would bring. Lasswell also suggest that if no co-operation with a neutral is possible, one should “re-enforce pacifism, by portraying the horrors of war, and the unwillingness of the enemy to make peace, and stir up trouble between two neutrals”. (Lasswell 1927, 196.)

To demoralize the enemy, one should substitute “new hates for old”. The enemy should be depressed, discouraged and galvanized to defeatism by all means possible. The unity of the enemy should also be discouraged e.g. by causing conflict between the minorities and the governing class. (Lasswell 1927, 196.)

2.2 From traditional propaganda to information warfare and psychological operations

As the strategic objectives and the propaganda strategies have remained basically the same, the methods of propaganda have become more sophisticated. Simultaneously the terminology related to propaganda has changed. At least in military terminology “psychological operations” has partly replaced it. Whereas e.g. the Joint Publication defines propaganda as “any form of communication in support of national objectives designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly”, psychological operations are regarded as “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.” (DOD 2001.)

In other words, the purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives. The link between propaganda and psychological operations is psychological warfare, which is defined as “the planned use of propaganda and other psychological actions having the primary purpose of influencing the opinions, emotions, attitudes, and behavior of hostile foreign groups in such a way as to support the achievement of national objectives” (DOD 2001).

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5 However, the U.S. and NATO define psychological operations somewhat differently. In contrast to NATO, the home audience is not a direct target of psychological operations of the U.S. However, the U.S uses some methods of consolidation or reinforcement to safeguard the home audience’s support for the military objectives and operations. (Rantapelkonen 2002, 22.)
As these definitions demonstrate, propaganda and psychological operations are obviously very closely related and the difference between them is not very big. By using the term psychological operations instead of propaganda, the negative connotation of the term propaganda is thereby avoided. However, the term psychological operations have nowadays as well a somewhat negative connotation. This can, at least partly, explain the usage of still another new terminology; e.g. when trying to acquire support for the SFOR-operation in Bosnia, NATO introduced the concept of the “information campaign”.

In addition, the U.S. has introduced the term “information operations”, which are defined as “actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems” (DOD 2001). This particular definition does not necessarily imply propaganda or psychological operations, but information operations are also defined as operations conducted “during time of crisis or conflict to achieve or promote specific objectives over a specific adversary or adversaries” under the umbrella of information warfare.

Information warfare, for its part, is a debated concept, since it also has come closer to the concept of propaganda. This can be because the term information warfare is often used quite differently by the media and by the military specialists. When military experts talk about information warfare, they usually refer to it from the perspective of arms technology and strategies whereas the media uses this term as a synonym for “propaganda war”, “virtual war” and “media war” to describe the battle for opinions and the representation of war in the media. Another reason can be that different states and actors also define information warfare differently.

In this sense, information warfare can be regarded as a new dimension of war, which can be conducted along with a conventional military operation. It can be a digital attack towards an information system but it can also include information manipulation. Therefore, it can be argued that the transformation from traditional propaganda to psychological operations and information warfare is not as earth shaking as the military would like us to believe. Renaming and re-defining the terminology can also be regarded as a political act.

In the next section, it will be examined how the U.S. and/or NATO, as the main “punishers” of “new wars”, have used propaganda, censorship, information warfare and psychological operations in three different post-Cold War wars (the Gulf War, the Kosovo War and the War on Terrorism) and whether Lasswell’s propaganda strategies might help our understanding in that regard.

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6 From the perspective of media representation of wars, defining the terms “virtual war”, “propaganda war” and “media war” would be interesting. These terms are not covered in this paper.

7 NATO, for example, uses the concept of command and control warfare for similar purposes. Command and control warfare includes “the integrated use of operations security, military deception, psychological operations, electronic warfare, and physical destruction, mutually supported by intelligence”. The objective is “to deny information to, influence, degrade, or destroy adversary command and control capabilities, while protecting friendly command and control capabilities against such actions”. Command and control warfare is an application of information operations in military operations. It is also called C2W, and it is both offensive and defensive. (Rantapelsken 2002, 21-22; DOD 2001.)
3. Propaganda, information warfare and psychological operations – Some notions on the Gulf War, the Kosovo War and the War on Terrorism

3.1 The Gulf War

In the beginning of the Gulf War the Pentagon was particularly worried over how to control the media in a situation where reality was (re)produced in real time. However, nearly six months preparation period before going into war gave a quite good precondition for controlling the media. By the time that the United States attacked Iraq, a system through which the media was provided with information that was controlled by the government, was already established. This resulted in highly effective propaganda. (Luostarinen 1999.) It has been argued that the mainstream media in the U.S. adopted the methods of the Bush government and Pentagon from the very beginning. The media texts that were produced constructed certain war-related images and discourses, which developed support for the military intervention. (Kellner 1998, 223-224.)

The U.S. founded also a planning group for psychological operations. The group recommended that the psychological campaign should acquire support for the operation especially in the U.S. (to legitimize the use of force at home, in Lasswell’s terms). In addition, the Iraqi soldiers should be encouraged to disintegration, alienation, defecting and losing their faith; the political leaders of Iraq should be made skeptical over their ability to win the war and the Iraqi soldiers should be encouraged to have confrontations with their leaders (to weaken the enemy’s will to fight by demoralizing the enemy by depressing, discouraging, galvanizing to defeatism and by causing conflict); also the deterrent effect of the U.S army should be improved (to weaken the enemy’s will to fight) and the U.S. troops’ trust and their resistance of aggression should also be strengthened. (Koponen 1999; quoted in Rantapelkonen 2002, 78.)

Psychological operations were implemented in three phases according to the strategy. The first phase was to demonstrate the support that the U.S. gave the operation and that the allies were integrated (to legitimize the use of force and to preserve the friendship with allies). Also the other states in the area were to be convinced that there was no reason to support Iraq (to legitimize the use of force and to produce co-operation with neutrals). The second phase was to try to get Iraq to stop the hostilities (to weaken the enemy’s will to fight). The third phase was to support the operation of the allies (to legitimize the use of force and to preserve the friendship with allies). In the third phase, psychological operations were conducted in every level of the warfare. (Rantapelkonen 2002, 79.)

To preserve the support of public opinion (home, allies, neutrals), it was emphasized that the war would be short and own losses would be kept at minimum. To demoralize the enemy, different strategies were used. The first themes aimed at reassuring Iraqi civilians that peace was under way. Thereafter the themes emphasized the sanctions of the UN that would take effect. The themes also emphasized that the target of the military campaign were the Iraqi soldiers and troops, not the civilians. The enemy troops were warned that they would be bombed with a world’s largest conventional bombs. The themes were simple, encouraging the opponent to surrender, because it
would lose the war in any case. Saddam’s quilt was emphasized as well as the superior military might of the U.S and the Coalition. (Rantapelkonen 2002, 79.)

As psychological operations and propaganda are not allowed to be targeted at the home audience in the U.S., it is interesting to see that the methods that are allowed, e.g. “consolidation and reinforcement” together with censorship resulted in the U.S mainstream media representing the war as the government wanted. The report of the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting group shows that only a fraction (1 %) of the media coverage of the Gulf War in the U.S. dealt with the anti-military solutions and resistance to the war. No footage was shown of the anti-war demonstrations; neither the presses concerned with the growing anti-war movement nor the experts related to the peace movement were interviewed in the news. The reports and discussions emphasized the necessity of the military solution. No other but military solutions nor the reasons and procedures were discussed extensively. (Kellner 1998, 223-226, 236-239.)

However, according to Kellner, the media should not be regarded only as an instrument of government’s propaganda, because also the TV-companies, striving for big audiences and profits, have an influence on the content of the communication. It has been argued that this “money-making machinery“ eliminates the discordant notes and represents a favorable image of wars to increase ratings. American TV-companies also have close ties with the arms industry, thus benefiting from war e.g. the army’s important suppliers, General Electric (GE) and RCA, which own the NBC-channel. (Kellner 1998, 241-243.)

The role of the advertisers should be taken into account as well, since usually advertisers do not want to advertise their products in situations that are connected with controversial or depressing events, such as wars. However, during the Gulf War many advertisers tailored their ads to be more patriotic, e.g. flags and patriotic slogans were used. Also the language changed, often "you“ was replaced by “us“. (Kellner 1998, 241-243.)

As Lasswell’s propaganda strategies suggest, dichotomizing “us“ and “them“ is a good strategy. The war is legitimized by conceptualizing it as a battle between “the good“ and “the evil“. (see also Harle, 2000.) This often furthers the alienation from the reality of the war. When the enemy is regarded as the evil, even inhuman “Other“, it becomes easier to justify the killing of the enemy, even the civilians of the enemy camp. It is easier to maintain the justification if the suffering of the opponent is not represented in the media. Martin Shaw has claimed that the Iraqi soldiers were victims of a “conspiracy of silence“, in which both the allied and Iraqi government took part. The plight of Iraqi soldiers was covered neither in Iraqi nor the western media, which suited the objectives of propaganda of both Iraq and the allied. The war seemed almost bloodless, since only about 300 American soldiers were killed and the killing of tens, even hundreds of thousands Iraqi soldiers happened out of sight. (Shaw 1996, 73-74, 75, 77.)

On the one hand, the U.S. strategy was to control the media, and on the other hand, to minimize the losses. Shaw argues that the U.S. military strategy, which still seems to prefer air strikes instead of using land forces, has also some relation to media
conventions. If the government wants to restrict the media, air raids and especially missiles are a perfect solution, since the media will face difficulties when trying to verify the accuracy of the information given. This became obvious in the Gulf; the media could not act as a watchdog, since the army dictated the representation of the events. (Shaw 1996, 73, 75-76.) As argued in the introduction, this can be regarded as a characteristic of "new wars". The next quotation will "transmit" us from the Gulf War to the Kosovo War:

Safe from any risk of consequences of a traditional war (bombings, destruction of civil structures, rationing, death of the soldiers etc.), Western public opinion tends to consider war as a remote event ...and as a stylised event, without real consequences ...made possible by the so-called "human-zero-cost war". During the Kosovo war the objective to have no casualty at all has been reached. All the most sophisticated products of modern technology ...are mobilised to hit anywhere without any risk of counterattack and without any need to intervene on the ground. (Boni 2001, 3.)

3.2 The Kosovo War

NATO had been propagandizing in Kosovo for years before the actual war broke out. The information strategy was designed alongside the operation. The military phase of the war, the bombngs, were called an "air campaign" of the Operation Allied Force. Western leaders emphasized that Milosevic was conducting an illegal war against the Kosovo-Albanians. In the rhetoric of western leaders the conflict was regarded as a threat to the stability and security of the whole of Europe as the crisis had turned into a humanitarian catastrophe, which endangered western democratic values as well as humanitarian values and human rights. (Rantapelkonen 2002, 99.) The Lasswellian propaganda strategies are evident here: the enemy is to be portrayed as an aggressor who threatens our morals and our way of living and as an obstacle to the realization of the cherished ideals and dreams of the nation (in this case, the Europe or the West) as a whole.

Some researchers claim that the press policy of NATO in Kosovo was constrained by the memories and critique of the Gulf War and the bombing of Iraq in December 1998, which was speculated to be an attempt to direct attention away from the embarrassing sex-scandal of president Clinton. On the other hand, the escalation period preceding the Kosovo War was long enough for preparing a careful press policy plan. NATO emphasized the responsibility of its actions and the shortage of options available in the Kosovo War. NATO even admitted some of its flaws. On the one hand, NATO had learnt from the critique, and on the other hand, journalists and a part of the public had become more critical. (Luostarinen 1999; 46-47; HS (17.4.99); see also Visuri 2000, 85-87.)

When it comes to psychological operations, even though NATO had more time to prepare for the war than the U.S. in the Gulf War, they were not as carefully designed. The problem was a lack of personnel. In Kosovo, NATO talked no more about pure
psychological operations in the sense the U.S. had in the Gulf. In Kosovo the psychological operations were integrated as a part of the whole operation and its information operations. This means that information operations were ever more politically controlled. (Rantapelkonen 2002, 101.)

NATO used psychological operations as a part of information warfare at all levels of the war. On the strategic level the target were the political leaders; on the operative level the Serb soldiers and local population. The themes were the following: 1. NATO’s operation is legitimized (to legitimize the use of force at home; also aimed at allies and neutrals). 2. NATO is militarily superior (to weaken the enemy’s will to fight by discouraging and galvanizing defeatism). 3. NATO is in an overpowering situation (same as above). 3. Milosevic is to blame for the situation, not e.g. the people or NATO (legitimizing the use of force by representing the enemy as a menacing, murderous aggressor and by emphasizing the enemy’s unwillingness to make peace). 4. Innocent civilians are being murdered (to legitimize the use of force). 5. Serbs, surrender (to demoralize the enemy). (themes presented in Rantapelkonen 2002, 102.)

The strategy of legitimizing the use of force by creating enmity (aimed at home, allies and even neutrals) was implemented by western war rhetoric and propaganda emphasizing the sorting of “us” from “them”, demonizing Milosevic and proclaiming that NATO was warring for the rescue of democracy and liberty when trying to save the Kosovo-Albanians from the ethnic cleansing. 8

Riikka Kuusisto, who has been studying the western war rhetoric in the Bosnian War and the Gulf War, states that the parties of war always struggle for rhetorical credibility and impressiveness. Similar rhetorical or physical acts are interpreted differently according to which party is conducting them. In this sense, in the Kosovo War there were some evident similarities with the Gulf War: the opponent was considered to be trying to mystify history, but the West was believed to have learnt from the experiences in Balkan and other crises. The opponent was regarded as force-feeding the public with propaganda, manipulating and lying, whereas the western press officers were “informing” the public about the newest developments and answering even the most awkward questions. The people of the opponent were regarded as being in war psychosis, but the public of the West had, because of rational judgment, decided to support the official policy. The peace and cease-fire initiatives of the opponent were regarded as bluff, whereas the West was seen to be negotiating in good faith. (Kuusisto 1999, 53-54, 58.)

It is interesting also to see how these things were regarded from NATO’s side. Jamie Shea, who conducted most of the briefings during the war, participated in the International Symposium on Humanitarian Law, Under Fire: the Media in Armed Conflict, in Helsinki in November 2000. When Shea was asked about the press policy of NATO, he argued that an armed conflict is the most unlikely cause of death nowadays, and had statistics to prove it: war kills less people than car accidents, cancer or cardiovascular diseases. The U.S. congress can accept a death of an ambassador or a president, but the death of a single soldier can put an entire military operation in danger, 8

8 Later on it was revealed that the air strikes did not stop the ethnic cleansing but escalated it.
argued Shea thereby emphasizing the importance of public opinion. He referred to the case of Somalia when TV-images of the violation of an American soldier caused the (U.S) public opinion to turn from supporting the intervention to opposing it. (Under Fire 2000.)

Shea argued that even though modern wars are unpopular when public opinion is concerned, it is necessary to defend human rights. The argument reminds us of the New World Order, introduced by president George Bush in the beginning of the 1990’s, referring to a new era of international law and politics emphasizing the protection of human rights. This argument was in accordance with the concept of “humanitarian intervention” which NATO introduced in Kosovo. However, Shea admitted that Kosovo was a special case, since the rationale behind intervention was also due to the existing engagements of NATO in the area. (Under Fire 2000.)

According to Shea, the greatest challenge in the Kosovo War was to keep up the interest of the media. Shea held an hour-long press conference every day during the war. He claimed that if the press conference had not been held daily, the reporters would not have bothered to come at all. There was not much to tell usually, and therefore the reporters occasionally were given “extra facts to keep them happy”. (Under Fire 2000.) This is in accordance with a statement made by war correspondent Jake Lynch: "We were given lots of material but no information" (quoted in Knightley 2000).

3.3 The War on Terrorism

To move forward, from Kosovo War to the War on Terrorism and Afghanistan, one can note that Jamie Shea’s lessons during the Kosovo War have been obviously regarded valuable. A briefing a day keeps the investigative journalist away? The reporting of the War in Afghanistan has been very dependent on Pentagon briefings. Another reason is that the Talebans did not let journalists into the country in the beginning of the operation in Afghanistan.

The discussion about propaganda was quite slow to start after the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, but when the number of reports on civilian victims started to grow, discussion become livelier. In Finland, for example, the foreign minister Erkki Tuomioja, well-known for his outspokenness, demanded criticality in the media and warned the western media not to become an extension of the propaganda machinery as happened during the Gulf War and the Kosovo War.

The tip-off was in order, since a “war on terrorism” was declared in the U.S. war rhetoric immediately and it was emphasized that those who are not on “our side“ are in fact “against us“. This juxtaposition can also in Lasswell’s terms be regarded as creating enmity: the enemy is anyone who is not at the U.S. side. The purpose of this kind of rhetoric is also to legitimize the forth-coming use of force in advance.

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9 President Bush used also religious terms, e.g. “crusade”, which was probably due to lack of consideration, since he later apologized for using this term. The U.S. also declared it wanted Osama bin Laden “dead or alive”. In Finland the frequency of the words “dead” and “alive” was debated, since in the Finnish language, the words in this phrase are in revised order, “alive or dead”.

Since the War on Terrorism is still going on, the overall themes and strategies cannot be examined very comprehensively, but introducing some concrete examples of propaganda, psychological operations and information warfare can be a starting point:

*Examples of information warfare and psychological operations*

The bombings of the TV- and radio stations can be regarded as direct, physical strikes against communication. In Kosovo NATO had bombed the Serbian radio and TV-station, for which it had been criticized. In Kabul, the U.S. missiles silenced the *Voice of Shariat* radio station of the Talebans. Soon after the air strike the *Information Radio* of the U.S. started its broadcast at the same radio frequency. Some of this propaganda, or psychological operations in other words, was sent from an airplane circling above Afghanistan. The *Information Radio* told that the Talebans were doomed and that the U.S. wants justice for the victims of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The simultaneous dropping of food relief packages labeled with an American flag alongside mini-radios locked to the frequency of the propaganda radio channel and leaflets stating e.g. that the U.S. is a friend of Afghanistan and Islam can be also regarded as psychological operations.

Another example of information warfare: Quatar’s TV-channel al-Jazeera, located in Kabul, commonly referred as the CNN of the Arab World, was also destroyed in a bombing by the U.S. in November. Al-Jazeera was convinced that the U.S. bombed its station on purpose. However, the U.S. has denied allegations. Al-Jazeera is the only TV-company located in the Afghanistan capital. The western media, e.g. BBC and CNN, have been dependent on material bought from it.

*Examples of propaganda and censorship*

In the U.S. and Britain the governments asked already in the beginning of the military operation that the media would not use bin Laden’s videos transmitted through al-Jazeera, because they could contain coded messages to terrorists. This appeal was criticized in the media since its arguments were regarded as made-up. The real reason was speculated to be the fear of Bush and Blair for losing the propaganda war on bin Laden. The U.S. in fact tried later to utilize the power of al-Jazeera by starting to give it statements. It was also revealed that the U.S. government had considered buying some advertisement time from the channel for propaganda purposes of its own.

Soon after the beginning of the military operation in Afghanistan started, an order was given stating that for every piece of news reporting on the civilian casualties on CNN, it was to be mentioned that those responsible for the casualties were the terrorists, not the

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10 In a way, al-Jazeera was like a red rag to the leaders of both the western and Arabic world. It had antagonized the Arab countries by accusing them of corruption and by publishing statements of Israel. The irritation of the western countries was due to the channel’s close ties with Osama bin Laden and the Talebans.
U.S. which was bombing the country. Even though the director of CNN gave the order, the possibility of imposition cannot be excluded, since the U.S. government is known to have tried to put pressure on the media to help its fatherland in the war against terrorism.  

A new method of censoring and controlling the representation of the war in the media was introduced when the Pentagon made a deal with a company that owns the commercial Ikonos satellite. It was told that Ikonos satellite included images e.g. of a line of terrorist marching between training camps. This means that the resolution is so precise that it would be possible to see e.g. bodies lying on the ground after the bombings. 

The Pentagon bought exclusive rights to all satellite images of Afghanistan at a price of 1.9 million dollars per month. The deal was made retrospectively dating from the beginning of the Afghanistan operation. The Pentagon is able to prevent the publication of images forever, because once bought, the images can never be released without the permission of the Pentagon. The U.S military has seven imaging satellites in orbit, and four of those take 6-10 times better images than the Ikonos satellite, so the Pentagon does not need the pictures for its own purposes. Therefore, according to the Guardian (17.10.01), the purpose of the Pentagon was to prevent the western media from seeing highly accurate civilian satellite pictures of the effects of bombing in Afghanistan. 

When at war, the Pentagon has a legal right to exercise “shutter control” over civilian satellites launched from the U.S. if the images might put American soldiers or the military operation in danger. However, the Pentagon did not use this right. It tried to prevent the use the satellite pictures only when the international media had reported of heavy civilian casualties from the bombings. The Pentagon and the news media have traditionally had vigorous disputes over the images on terra firma, but now their disputes concern also the images collected from space. 

Propaganda became also an issue of debate when the new Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) was put down after its couple of month’s existence in February. The office had been established after the terrorist attacks to gain publicity for U.S. government views 

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11 On the other hand, the U.S media has not reported extensively about the civilian casualties of the military campaign. Internet publication Working for Peace (22.10.01) counted the civilian casualties until then and noted that most of them were not covered in the U.S. media. On some occasions, it had been even stated that the Afghan people do not mind the civilian casualties (!). According to the Fair and Accuracy in Reporting –group (12.12.02), the big networks had systematically ignored the growing number of civilian casualties in their reports. FAIR criticized foreign affairs commentator Thomas Friedman who had written in the New York Times that many Afghans “were praying for missiles” to free them from the rule of the Taleban, no matter if there were civilian casualties or not.

12 News agencies usually use satellite images to report from the areas to which they do not have an access. Ikonos is not the only commercial satellite, e.g. Israel, France and India have such, but for a commercial satellite, Ikonos has an extraordinary precise resolution.

13 Some U.S. intelligence specialists criticized the decision to use commercial rather legal powers to bar access to satellite images. Why on earth, one might ask. The deal was an ingenious solution; if the use of the images had been barred on a legal basis, the media could have complained that a restraint of usage of the images was a violation of the First Amendment.
in Islamic countries and to provide support for the U.S. war on terrorism. The role of the OSI became an object of revaluation after the New York Times (19.2.02) reported about its plans to provide the foreign news media with consciously misleading information. The purpose of the disinformation campaign was to “influence public sentiment and policy makers in both friendly and unfriendly countries”.

The plan was strictly criticized. The critics regarded the plan undemocratic, even illegal, because it would have committed to misleading the audience by feeding them lies. The U.S. government is barred from propagandizing within the U.S. by law. Even though the target for the OSI plan was the foreign media, it would have likely led to disinformation planned for foreign news reporting being picked up by U.S. outlets. The war in Afghanistan has shown, according to the Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting – group, that the 24-hour news cycle, combined with cuts in foreign news budgets across the U.S. have made the U.S. media more and more dependent on overseas outlets like al-Jazeera and Reuters.

Even if the OSI had already been granted a budget of millions of dollars and a mandate to spread propaganda in the Middle-East, Asia and even Europe, not many of the senior officials in the Pentagon nor the advisers of the congress knew much about its purpose and plans. When the new plan became public, it generated also some disagreement within the Defense Department. According to the Washington Post (20.2.02), those regarding the plan critically in the Pentagon were especially worried that manipulating information and knowingly dispensing false information would backfire and discredit official Pentagon statements. It was also feared to blur the difference between the intelligence and the information services (public affairs). The plan was to be carried out by the Pentagon’s office that is responsible for psychological operations.

As the War on Terrorism is still going on, it is impossible to conclude anything very comprehensive. We still get new information even from the Vietnam War and a part of the information will be left in the dark forever. However, by examining these already public cases from a broader perspective, it would be easy to state that the media strategy has not been very surprising; the U.S. has tried to legitimize its military campaign by every means possible and also to cut down all damaging information. The main objectives and strategies to employ propaganda are basically the same as the were already in the First World War.

Nonetheless, something has changed also. It seems that the U.S. has learnt its lesson from the critique it confronted in the Gulf and NATO in Kosovo. In Kosovo, the press policy of NATO was more open than the U.S had in the Gulf, and the media was not controlled as vigorously. However, now after “the come-back of reality”, the U.S. government has resorted to some stronger, and even new methods as the Pentagon’s commercial deal and the propaganda plan seem to imply.

To legitimize the use of force the U.S. has had to direct its propaganda, psychological operations and information warfare on many different fronts: home, allied, international community, the Arab and Muslim World and Afghanistan. This vast information space has been a great challenge for the U.S. but it has managed quite well so far. On the other hand, compared with the Gulf War and the Kosovo War, now the U.S. does not need to
worry so much about convincing the home audience of the need to wage a war, since the terrorist attacks took place in the very continent of the Americas.

4. Some concluding remarks

In the introduction of this paper, it was stated that a term “new wars” is used when referring to conflicts which are presented as operations of “international police” to punish national actors that threaten the international order. The War on Terrorism implies that those to be punished do not have to be national actors, but also terrorists will do. This task is more demanding than in the “new wars” in general, which share one obvious characteristic with the War on Terrorism: they do not have a paritarian, easily recognizable enemy. The War on Terrorism wages a war against terrorists who are most of the time invisible, hiding in the shadows; far from being an obvious enemy within sight.

Except for the invisibility of terrorists and the “policing” dimension, the other aspects of “new wars” are not as easily recognizable in the War on Terrorism: the War is not believed to be “brief and resolutive” nor “concentrated, fast and definitive”; on the contrary, the U.S. has emphasized that it will be a long battle. Also some losses are regarded possible even from the “punisher’s” side. The war also tests political consensus, since there are differing opinions concerning whether it is even possible to root out terrorism by bombing the countries protecting the terrorists “to ground level”. Justifying the war and its means has been of great importance especially in the Arabic World.¹⁴

There has been well-founded concern in the Bush administration that when the war on terrorism faces its second level, perhaps “the axis of evil”, the support for U.S. actions could be lost. Many of the U.S. allies, e.g. Canada and some European countries, have made it clear that they will not take part in the intervention to Iraq, which has been speculated to be the next target.

Finally, neither is the third characteristic of “new wars” (every means of the war is legitimated, although it is not possible to admit it publicly) clear in this case; the U.S. has in fact emphasized publicly that in the War on Terrorism, every means of war is justified. On the other hand, however, in many occasions the U.S. has tried to manage in many ways the (media) representation of the reality of war in Afghanistan as the concrete examples of propaganda, censorship, and information warfare presented in this paper imply.

¹⁴ According to research conducted in nine Muslim countries, the respondents had a very negative attitude towards the U.S. Attitudes were measured in. The outcome of the research was published in the Financial Times, which also reported that the outcome was a shock to U.S. authorities. Muslims had condemned the war in Afghanistan widely. Three out of four of the respondents said they believed that the only reason for the U.S. to start a military operation in Afghanistan is to increase its influence in Asia and the Middle East.
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