

INFORMATION DOMINANCE

*The Philosophy of
Total Propaganda Control*

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Edited & designed by Tony Sutton

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The concept of ‘information dominance’ is the key to understanding US and UK propaganda strategy and a central component of the US aim of ‘total spectrum dominance’. It redefines our notions of spin and propaganda and the role of the media in capitalist society. To say that it is about total propaganda control is to force the English language into contortions that the term propaganda simply cannot handle. Information dominance is not about the success of propaganda in the conventional sense with which we are all familiar. It is not about all those phrases ‘winning hearts and minds’, about truth being ‘the first casualty’ about ‘media manipulation’ about ‘opinion control’ or about ‘information war’. Or, to be more exact - it is about these things but none of them can quite stretch to accommodate the integrated conception of media and communication encapsulated in the phrase *information dominance*.

Information dominance is a concept of elegant simplicity and at the same time complex interconnectedness. It plays a key role in US military strategy and foreign policy. The best statement of this is contained in the Pentagon’s Joint Vision 2020, where the key term is ‘full spectrum dominance’ which ‘implies that US forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained and synchronized operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains – space, sea, land, air and information’.¹

The inclusion of information on the list is not surprising, but it has not attracted much attention in public debate, even in the anti war

movement. The question is how central is information? The US Army regards it as important enough to issue a 314 page manual on it in November 2003. Titled *Information Operations: Doctrine, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, the first sentence states unambiguously: ‘information is an element of combat power’.² The Army defines Information Operations as: ‘the employment of the core capabilities of electronic warfare, computer network operations, psychological operations, military deception, and operations security, in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to affect or defend information and information systems, and to influence decision making’.

This already suggests a range of activities wider than those traditionally associated with propaganda. A suggestion reinforced by the aim of information operations, which is to secure ‘information dominance’. The US military are not terribly open about this agenda and tend not to speak about it in public. It doesn’t feature in the ‘approved for public release’ manual on *Information Operations*. But internally there has been a long term debate about information dominance.

To the outsider, discussions about how ‘information dominance’ differs from ‘information superiority’ might seem arcane, but they are revealing. For example, in a paper written back in 1997 Jim Winters and John Giffin of the US Space and Information Operations Directorate argued that information superiority was insufficient: ‘at some base point “superiority” means an advantage of 51-49, on some arbitrary metric scale. That is not enough of an advantage to give us the freedom of action required to establish “Full Spectrum dominance”’. Dominance implies ‘a mastery of the situation’ Superiority ‘only an edge’. According to Winters and Giffin ‘We think of dominance in terms of “having our way” – “Overmatch” over all operational possibilities. This connotation is “qualitative” rather than “quantitative”’. When dominance occurs, *nothing done, makes any difference*. We have sufficient knowledge to *stop anything we don’t want to occur, or do anything we want to do.*’ (my emphasis)³ This could hardly be any clearer about the agenda of the US military. There are two new elements to

information dominance compared to traditional conceptions of propaganda. The first is the integration of propaganda and psychological operations into a much wider conception of information war. The second is the integration of information war into the core of military strategy.

Traditional conceptions of propaganda involve crafting the message and distributing it via government media or independent news media. Current conceptions of information war go much further and incorporate the gathering, processing and deployment of information including via computers, intelligence and military information (command and control) systems. The key preoccupation for the military is 'interoperability' where information systems talk to and work with each other. Interoperability is a result of the computer revolution which has led to the 'Revolution in Military Affairs'. Now propaganda and psychological operations are simply part of a larger information armoury. As Col Kenneth Allard has written, the 2003 attack on Iraq 'will be remembered as a conflict in which information fully took its place as a weapon of war' Allard tells a familiar story in military writings on such matters: 'in the 1990s, the Joint Chiefs of Staff began to promote a vision of future warfare in which C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems would be forged into a new style of American warfare in which interoperability was the key to information dominance – and information dominance the key to victory.'⁴

According to Lt Gen Keith B. Alexander, the US Army deputy chief of staff for intelligence, the way forward for integrating intelligence and information across the military is the creation of 'Information Dominance Centers'. There are already 15 of these in the US and in Kuwait and Baghdad.⁵ Information dominance is not something dreamt up by the Bush gang in the White House – or even by their ideologues in the Project for a New American Century; it is mainstream US military doctrine. In fact it is even used by the Democrats in pronouncements on 'progressive internationalism'.⁶ Although it originates

in the US, information dominance is also embraced in the UK. Given the close integration of US and UK global propaganda during the attack on Iraq, it could hardly be otherwise.⁷ However the thinking underlying UK propaganda operations has transformed in the past decade and both the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have staff assigned to 'information operations'. In future conflicts, according to the British Army, 'maintaining moral as well as information dominance will rank as important as physical protection'.⁸ Or as John Spellar MP, the Minister for the Armed Forces put it in a speech in January 2000 'we shall depend increasingly, not on simple numerical superiority in firepower, but on information dominance'.⁹

The interoperability of the various types of 'weaponized information'¹⁰ has far reaching, if little noticed, implications for the integration of propaganda and media institutions into the war machine. The experience of Iraq in 2003 shows how the planned integration of the media into instruments of war fighting is developing. It also shows the increased role for the private sector in information dominance, a role which reflects wider changes in the armed services in the US and the UK.¹¹ Information dominance provides the underpinning rationale for all information related work. As applied to traditional media management activities, the key to dominance is that 'nothing done makes any difference'. In practice, this means that the US and UK can tolerate dissent in the media and alternative accounts on the internet. Dissent only matters if it interferes with their plans. As US military authors Winters and Giffin put it: 'Achieving ID involves two components: 1) building up and protecting friendly information; and 2) degrading information received by your adversary.' Both of these refer not simply to military information systems but also to propaganda and the news media.

Integrating the media: 1. The system of embedding

Seen in the context of information dominance embedding is a clear means of building up and protecting 'friendly' information. The

Faustian pact allows journalists better access to the fighting than in any conflict since Vietnam. But the access is on military terms and can be rescinded if it does not meet the interests of the military. Although rarely highlighted in discussions of embedding, the Pentagon issued a fifty point document titled Public Affairs Guidance listing what could and could not be reported.¹² They also insisted that all embeds sign a contract which does not mince its words, noting that reporters must: 'follow the direction and orders of the Government'.¹³ In fact the tendency was for reporters to become fully integrated into military command structures as this comment from embedded reporter Richard Gaisford, on BBC News 24 confirms: 'We have to check each story we have with them [the military]. And if they're not sure at the immediate level above us – that's the Captain who's our media liaison officer - he will check with the Colonel who is obviously above him and then they will check with Brigade headquarters as well.'¹⁴ 'The key phrase here is 'the level above us'.

Furthermore the system of embedding made the journalists dependent on the military for transport, food and crucially physical protection. BBC reporter Ben Brown relates his experience:

There was an Iraqi who ... jumped up with an RPG and he was about to fire it at us because we were just standing there and this other Warrior just shot him with their big machine gun and there was a big hole in his chest. That was the closest I felt to being almost too close to the troops ... because if he hadn't been there he would have killed us and...afterwards I sought out the gunner who had done that and shook his hand.¹⁵

Other journalists got closer and crossed the line from reporting to engaging in combat. Clive Myrie of the BBC has admitted:

There was bullets flying everywhere. We get out of the, out of the Land Rover and we hide in a ditch. One of the marines said; why don't you make yourself useful? And he's throwing these flares at me. And he's throwing the flares at me and I'm throwing them at

the guy who's got to light them and send them off into the sky, and I'm thinking, why, what am I doing here?¹⁶

Perhaps most strikingly, Gavin Hewitt of the BBC has admitted picking out targets for the military:

I shouted across to the Captain 'that truck over there - I think these guys are going to attack us'... Within seconds a Bradley fighting vehicle was opening up - tracers were flying across the field... eventually the truck went up - boom - like this... And of course all the unit were delighted. From then on the bonding grew tighter.¹⁷

By all official accounts on both sides of the Atlantic embedding was a great success.¹⁸ The Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, D Notice committee in the UK reported that

despite the hundreds of embedded journalists and unilaterals in theatre, there had not been a single serious breach of security by any part of the UK media. The system and the advice in the five standing DA-Notices had proved entirely adequate, and as able to fulfil their role in such operations as in other conflicts and in peace.¹⁹

The UK Ministry of Defence even engaged a private firm to assess how successfully embedding had worked to manipulate coverage. According to the results of the exercise: 'commercial analysis of the print output... produced during the combat phase shows that 90% of embedded correspondents' reporting was either positive or neutral'²⁰

Integrating the media: 2. 'deny, degrade, destroy'

The second part of achieving information Dominance is the 'ability to deny, degrade, destroy and/or effectively blind' enemy capabilities'.²¹ Enemy or adversary capabilities in the philosophy of information dominance do not distinguish between actions of declared adversaries and

those of independent media. The 'unfriendly' information must be destroyed wherever it comes from. This is perhaps best illustrated by the attack on the Al Jazeera office in Kabul in 2001 which the Pentagon justified by claiming al Qaeda activity in the al Jazeera office. As it turned out, this referred to broadcast interviews conducted by al Jazeera with Taliban officials.²²

The various attacks on Al Jazeera in Kabul, Basra and Baghdad should be seen in this context.²³ As should as the killings of unilateral journalists and the attempt to discredit other critics. For example the British Minister of Defence attempted to discredit the leading independent reporter Robert Fisk, when he uncovered missile fragments fired by the US into a crowded marketplace in Baghdad, killing more than 60 civilians. These efforts are consistent with the doctrine of degrading or destroying enemy information capability. It is not critical information and commentary that is feared by the US and UK, rather it is information that might hamper their ability to 'do anything we want to do'. If anything the evidence is that the targeting of independent media and critics of the US is widening. The Pentagon is reportedly co-ordinating the production of an Information Operations Roadmap drafted by the Information Operations office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Captain Gerald Mauer, the Assistant Deputy Director of the office, the roadmap noted that information operations would be directed against an 'adversary'.

He went on to say that when the paper got to the office of the Under Secretary of Defence for Policy (Douglas Feith), it was changed to say that information operations will attempt to 'disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial decision making'

'In other words', notes retired US Army Colonel Sam Gardiner, 'we will even go after friends if they are against what we are doing or want to do'.²⁴ No doubt the misinformation campaign against the French government in the US press in 2003, is the result of such decisions. In the UK according to Major Nigel Smith of the 15 Psychological Operations Group based at Chicksands, staffing is to be expanded and

‘strategic information operations will take on a new importance’.²⁵

Integrating the media: 3. Towards freedom

Interoperability is central to the post conflict phase of ‘reconstruction’ in Iraq, too. Here we also note the integration of the media into the propaganda apparatus of the US. The collapse of distinctions between independent news media, public affairs (PR) work and psychological operations is striking. The ‘reconstruction’ of Iraqi media began on April 10, 2003, with the first broadcast of Towards Freedom a joint US/UK television project broadcast on the same frequency as the former Iraqi state television service. The service included programming supplied by ABC, CBS, Fox and PBS networks in the US. The UK element was produced by the private company already contracted by the foreign Office to provide satellite propaganda around the world. CBS president Andrew Heyward reportedly became convinced that ‘this is a good thing to do... a patriotic thing to do’ after conversations with ‘some of the most traditional minded colleagues’ at CBS.²⁶ Only CNN refused to join in, a spokesperson noting ‘we didn’t think that as an independent, global news organisation it was appropriate to participate in a United States government video transmission’.²⁷ And of course that is what it was, transmitted into Iraq by means of Commando Solo, the psyops aircraft used to broadcast propaganda by the US psyops operation.

But Towards Freedom was a stopgap to be replaced by a new television service for Iraq. In keeping with the philosophy of information dominance, this was paid for by the Pentagon and supplied, not by an independent news organisation, but by a defence contractor, Scientific Applications International Corporation (SAIC). Its expertise in the area – according to its website – is in ‘information operations’ and ‘information dominance’.²⁸ The SAIC effort quickly ran into trouble, however, for its Iraq Media Network, which cost \$20million over three months, was not obsequious enough for the Coalition Provisional Authority. Within weeks, ‘occupying authority chief L. Paul Bremer III placed con-

trols on IMN content and clamped down on the independent media in Iraq, closing down some Iraqi-run newspapers and radio and television stations.²⁹ According to *Index on Censorship*, ‘Managers were told to drop the readings from the Koran, the “vox-pop” man-in-the-street interviews (usually critical of the US invasion) and even to run their content past the wife of a US-friendly Iraqi Kurdish leader for a pre-broadcast check. The station rejected the demands and dug in their heels.’³⁰ But this did not stop Bremer and further incidents have shown the preoccupation with control, culminating in a nine-point list of ‘prohibited activity, issued by Bremer in June 2003.

It decreed that publishing material that ‘is patently false and is calculated to provoke opposition to the CPA or undermine legitimate processes towards self government’ would henceforth be prohibited. This is not too dissimilar to the Nazi press law introduced in Germany in 1933, which stated that journalists must ‘regulate their work in accordance with National socialism as a philosophy of life and as a conception of government’.³¹

As *Index on Censorship* notes: ‘Bremer will “reserve the power to advise” the IMN on any aspect of its performance, “including any matter of content” and the power to hire and fire IMN staff. Thus the man in absolute authority over the country’s largest, richest and best equipped media network is also his own regulator and regulator of his rivals, with recourse to the US Army to enforce his rulings.’

In particular, the assault on Al Jazeera continues. In September, the Iraq governing council voted to ban reports from al Jazeera and Al-Arabiya on the grounds that they incite violence. As evidence of this, one member of the Iraqi National Congress (INC – set up by the PR agency the Rendon group funded by the US government) who voted for the ban, noted that the television stations describe the opposition to the occupation as “the resistance”. They’re not the resistance, they are thugs and criminals’ he said.³² This is a statement pregnant with irony, since Ahmed Chalabi, the head of the INC, is a convicted fraudster. In November, as casualties mounted, 30 media organizations, led

by the Associated Press, complained to the Pentagon that they had 'documented numerous examples of U.S. troops physically harassing journalists'. The letter was signed by representatives from CNN, ABC and The Boston Globe, amongst others.³³

Information dominance achieved?

It is evident that the US and its UK ally are intent on ruling the world and that information control has become central to that effort. The key to understanding information dominance is to be clear that it is not dissent in itself that the US planners object to. Rather it is dissent that hampers their ability to do whatever they want that matters. As the military themselves put it: 'When dominance occurs, nothing done, makes any difference' In other words, it is not the expression of dissent that is a problem, but the expression of dissent which is part of a movement which challenges US dominance. As the experience of the Iraqi Media Network shows, dominance does not always occur where there is resistance. Resistance from journalists, resistance from nation states, direct resistance to occupation and resistance in the form of the anti-war movement. All of these are obstacles in the way of information dominance. Although the US and UK regimes have massive resources at their disposal to pursue information dominance they are faced at every turn by resistance and that in the end is the only thing which can stop the US achieving final information or full spectrum dominance.

*David Miller is editor of **Tell Me Lies: Propaganda & Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq** published by Pluto Press. Download an excerpt, titled **The Lying Game**, in pdf format, at <http://www.coldtype.net>*

FOOTNOTES

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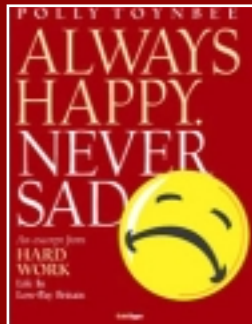
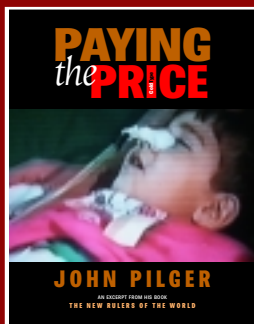
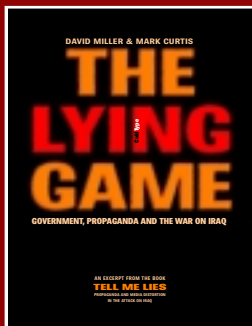
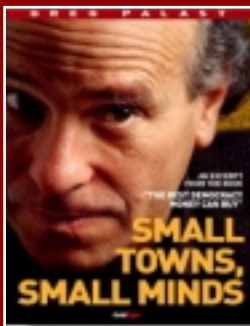
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