

## **Truth from These Podia**

### **Summary of a Study of Strategic Influence, Perception Management, Strategic Information Warfare and Strategic Psychological Operations in Gulf II**

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The study was not funded by any organization, and the author's arguments are not meant to represent those of any organization.

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## Preface

My intent was not to do this myself. The work had to be a combination of the kind of research I was doing and investigative journalism. I could do the outside part. Someone had to talk to those inside. After my return from an information warfare conference in London in July, I began looking for interest in one of the major newspapers. I found that interest in Mark Fineman at the *LA Times*.

Mark had covered the war and previously had been bureau chief for the paper in Philippines, India, Cyprus and Mexico City. Although he had covered some of the stories I examined in my research, he saw very early the point I was making about the implication of their being seen as a whole, the strategic picture. We continued to exchange e-mails, talk by phone and met four times after our initial session. He shared information he was uncovering. I shared my developing research.

Mark Fineman died of an apparent heart attack while on assignment in Baghdad on September 23, 2003.

It was not bad intelligence. It was much more. It was an orchestrated effort. It began before the war, was a major effort during the war and continues as post-conflict distortions.

The title of this study was difficult for me. When I began I thought it was going to be an analysis of Pentagon spin. I was going to call it, "Truth from this Podium." That was to be a play on promises we were given before the war. The more I did, the more it became clear that it was not just the Pentagon. It was the White House, and it was Number 10 Downing Street. It was more than spin.

I thought about calling it "Apparatus of Lies," connecting to a title the White House gave a paper on Iraq's decade of fabrication, mostly about weapons of destruction. Although lies were part of the effort, that title would have been off the mark because the story is more about aversion to truth rather than the open lie.

I also missed on the subject. I thought it was going to be about spinning the stories of the conflict. I was wrong. The real essence of what I found was a much broader problem. It is a problem about the future as much as the past. This problem became the story of the study.

This is one way of summarizing the study:

**The United States (and UK) conducted a strategic influence campaign that:**

- **...distorted perceptions of the situation both before and during the conflict.**
- **...caused misdirection of portions of the military operation.**
- **...was irresponsible in parts.**
- **...might have been illegal in some ways.**
- **...cost big bucks.**
- **...will be even more serious in the future.**

I know what I am suggesting is serious. I did not come to these conclusions lightly. Because my plea is for truth in war, I have tried to be very careful not to fall into a trap of describing exaggerations with exaggeration. I hope I've done that. I expect some will believe I have been guilty of the same sins. As long as we can have some discussion about truth in war, I accept the criticism.

You will see in my analysis and comments that I do not accept the notion that the first casualty of war is truth. I think we have to have a higher standard.

In the most basic sense, Washington and London did not trust the peoples of their democracies to come to right decisions. Truth became a casualty. When truth is a casualty, democracy receives collateral damage.

My plea is for truth. I believe we have to find ways to restore truth as currency of government in matters as serious as war. My story would be important if it were the last chapter of the book. It's not. There is more to come. As the United States struggles with a post-conflict Iraq, distortions continue. Probably of more concern, major players in the game are working on ways to do it "better" in future conflicts.

In other words, it appears as if the issues of this war will become even more important for future wars. We have reason to be concerned.

Another way to summarize the study:

## ***Summary***

- Clearly, the assumption of some in the government is the people of the United States and the United Kingdom will come to a wrong decision if they are the given truth.
- We probably have taken "Information Warfare" too far.
- We allowed strategic psychological operations to become part of public affairs.
- We failed to make adequate distinction between strategic influence stuff and intelligence.
- Message became more important than performance.

The concepts of warfare got all mixed up in this war. I'll come back to this subject later, but what has happened is that information warfare, strategic influence, strategic psychological operations pushed their way into the important process of informing the peoples of our two democracies. The United States and the UK got too good at the concepts they had been developing for future warfare.

The best way to describe my methodology is to use words that came from Admiral Poindexter's unfunded project, Total Information Awareness, later known as Terrorism Information Awareness. What I have done is look for "inconsistencies in open source data with regard to known facts...and goals."

Again to use the words from the Terrorism Information Awareness Program, by discovering linkages, it was possible to identify intent, methods of operations and organizational dynamics.

Through this methodology, it was possible to do what the Pentagon wanted to do, “to reduce vulnerability to open source information operations.”

## ***Methodology***

- **“The purpose...is to reduce vulnerability to open source information operations by developing the ability to detect inconsistencies in open source data with regard to known facts and...goals.”**
- **“One of the characteristics...is that their organizational structures are not well understood and are purposefully designed to conceal their connections and relationships. DARPA’s premise is that by discovering linkages among people, places, things and events...to recognize patterns of relationships that are representative..., it can help identify...intent, methods of operation, and organizational dynamics.”**

Report to Congress Regarding the Terrorism Information  
Awareness Program, May 20, 2003

My definitions are sloppy in this paper. Some would say I don’t know the definition of information warfare. It’s not because I don’t appreciate the clarity that comes from precise meaning. It’s because almost all of the pre-war definitions were violated in implementation. I was left with a couple questions, “What was true and who was affected by the non-truth?”

They told us what they were going to do. The Department of Defense created a rather significant press storm early in 2002 when it was revealed that there were plans to create an office to do strategic influence. Efforts to create the office were brought to a halt with White House agreement. In November, the Secretary of Defense announced in a press conference on board an aircraft on the way to South America that he was just kidding when he said he would not do strategic influence.

The White House gave a similar warning. Andrew Card, the President’s Chief of Staff told us they would do a major campaign to sell the war. Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair’s just-resigned Strategy (and communications) Director, was orchestrating the same on the other side of the Atlantic.

The research then was to discover what they did and how they did what they said they were going to do.

I’m not going to address why they did it. That’s something I don’t understand even after all the research. I would like to ask them, “Why do it?” “Didn’t you know there would be consequences?” It was not necessary. You could have told the truth. You don’t defend democracy by making light of its most basic elements. The American people would have supported the war. Why do it?

## ***Announcing the Effort***

- “And then there was the Office of Strategic Influence. You may recall that. And ‘oh my goodness gracious isn’t that terrible, Henny Penny the sky is going to fall.’ I went down that next day and said fine, if you want to savage this thing fine I’ll give you the corpse. There’s the name. You can have the name, but I’m gonna keep doing every single thing that needs to be done and I have.” Rumsfeld, November 18, 2002
- From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August,” White House Chief of Staff Andrew H. Card Jr. told the *New York Times* in September. Card was explaining what the *Times* characterized as a “meticulously planned strategy to persuade the public, the Congress, and the allies of the need to confront the threat from Saddam Hussein.”
- It would cost over \$200 million. *Times of London*, 9/17/02

These two chart are the results of my investigation:

### ***The Stories of Strategic Influence (1)***

- Terrorism and 9/11
- Lt. Commander Speicher
- Drones
- Mohammad Atta meeting with Iraqi
- Ansar al-Salm
- Chemical and biological weapons
  - Quantities
  - Location
  - Delivery readiness
- Weapons labs
- WMD cluster bombs
- Scuds
- Cutting off ears
- Cyber war capability
- Nuclear materials from Niger
- Aluminum tubes
- Nuclear weapons development
- Dirty bombs
- Humanitarian operations
- Attacking the power grid
- Russian punishment
  - Signing long term oil contracts
  - Night-vision goggles
  - GPS Jamming equipment
  - Saddam in embassy
- German punishment
- Surrender of the 507th

## ***The Stories of Strategic Influence (2)***

- Red Zone
- 51st Iraqi Mechanized Division & commander
- Uprising in Basrah
- Liberations of Umm Qasr and Basrah
- Iraqi white flag incidents
- US and UK uniforms to commit atrocities
- Execution of prisoners
- Salman Pak training facility
- Private Lynch rescue
  - Language
  - Holding the story
- Children soldiers
- 1000 Vehicle attack from Baghdad
- Civilian casualties
- Woman hung for waving
- French punishment
  - High precision switches
  - Smallpox strains
  - Signing long term oil contracts
  - Spare parts for aircraft
  - Roland missiles
  - Passport for Iraqi leaders
- British Parliamentary punishment
- WMD location
  - Moved to Syria
  - Hidden
  - Just-in-time program
- The post-conflict enemy
- Status of infrastructure repairs

From my research, the most profound thread is that WMD was only a very small part of the strategic influence, information operations and marketing campaign conducted on both sides of the Atlantic.

These are the stories on which I ended up doing detailed research. In each case, I attempted to find when and where the story originated, which officials made statements related to the story and then look at how it came out. Obviously, I am reporting on those where the outcome differed from the story.

My research suggests there were over 50 stories manufactured or at least engineered that distorted the picture of Gulf II for the American and British people. I'll cover most in this report. At the end, I will also describe some stories that seem as if they were part of the strategic influence campaign although the evidence is only circumstantial.

What becomes important is not each story taken individually. If that were the case, it would probably seem only more of the same. If you were to look at them one at a time, you could conclude, "Okay we sort of knew that was happening." It is the pattern that becomes important. It's the summary of everything. To use a phrase often heard during the war, it's the mosaic.

Recognizing I said I wouldn't exaggerate, it would not be an exaggeration to say the people of the United States and UK can find out more about the contents of a can of soup they buy than the contents of the can of worms they bought with the 2003 war in the Gulf.

## ***The Theory***

In Strauss' view, liberal democracies such as the Weimar Republic are not viable in the long term, since they do not offer their citizens any religious and moral footings. The practical consequence of this philosophy is fatal. According to its tenets, the elites have the right and even the obligation to manipulate the truth. Just as Plato recommends, they can take refuge in "pious lies" and in selective use of the truth.

*Der Spiegel*

I'm not writing about a conspiracy. It is about a well run and networked organization. My basic argument is that very bright and even well intentioned officials found how to control the process of governance in ways never before possible.

I have no way of knowing intent. Those who believe the Administration influenced by a small group could point out that manipulating the truth is an important and even necessary dimension of governance.

Standing back from the details of the stories, the strategy of strategic influence and marketing emerges.

## ***Gulf II Influence Strategy***

- **This is a struggle between good and evil.**
  - Major theme of the war on terrorism as well as Gulf II.
  - The mirror of this in the Muslim world is when the U.S. is often called the "Great Satan."
- **Iraq was behind the attack on the World Trade center.**
  - The subtle theme throughout Gulf II.
  - The mirror of this is the rumor that Israel was behind the World Trade Center bombing to embarrass the Arabs.

The major thrust was to make a conflict with Iraq seem part of a struggle between good and evil. Terrorism is evil. We are good. The axis is evil, and we are the good guys.

The second thrust is what propaganda theorists would call the "big lie." The plan was to connect Iraq with the 9/11 attacks. Make the American people believe that Saddam Hussein was behind those attacks. The effort followed the basic framework of effective propaganda.

## ***Gulf II Influence Strategy***

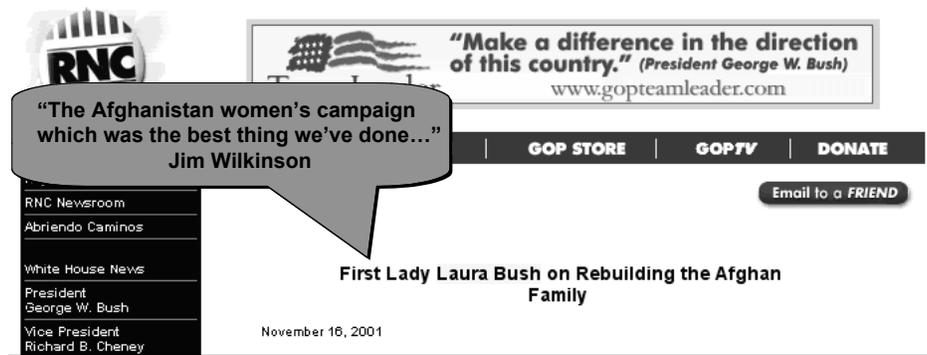
- **24/7 News require different techniques**
  - Saturate the media time and space.
  - Stay on message and stay ahead of the news cycle.
  - Manage expectations.
  - No matter how bad the story, it tends to level; accelerate the process as much as possible.
- **Keep the message consistent daily: Qatar, Pentagon, White House, London**
- **Use information to attack and punish critics.**

Beyond the themes we can see these strategic techniques. One of the media organizations hired by the Department of Defense, the Rendon Group, was deeply involved in selling the first Gulf War as well as this one.<sup>2</sup> The first two points on this chart came from John Rendon. The last seems to have come from others within the Administration.

It's possible to get a sense of how strategic influence and the organization for combat came together by looking at a pattern from before Gulf II campaign.

In November 2001, the White House Coalition Information Center initiated an effort to highlight the plight of women in Afghanistan. Jim Wilkinson, who was working with the Center at the time, called this effort "the best thing we've done."

### ***Earlier Stuff***



**Source: The White House Coalition Information Center**

When he said it was the best thing they've done, it was not about something they did. It was about a story they created. It was about story. It was story. Story was most

<sup>2</sup> Four or five contracted media groups were probably involved in one way or another in the Gulf II effort. John Rendon call himself an information warrior.

important.

The White House Coalition Information Center became the Office of Global Communications officially in January 2003. It was in full operation, however, by the time the White House began its marketing campaign in September 2002.

What we saw in the Afghanistan effort were patterns that would continue through Gulf II. It was designed to “build support.” It was not a program with specific steps or funding to improve the conditions of women.

## ***Earlier Stuff***

- **“Women’s campaign was designed to build support in countries in which there is heavy skepticism of the anti-terrorism coalition.” *Washington Post*, November 16, 2002**
- **“Only the terrorist and the Taliban threaten to pull out women’s fingernails for wearing nail polish.” Laura Bush, November 17, 2001**
- **“In Afghanistan if you wear nail polish, you could have your nails torn out.” Cherie Blair, November 20, 2001**
- **Human Rights Watch, 2003 report: Situation still bad for women.**

The other pattern in the Afghanistan family campaign that is important is the close coordination between the White House and Number 10 Downing Street. The coordination was so close that Laura Bush and Cherie Blair used almost the same phrase in speeches only separated by three days. The message was coordinated in the Afghanistan campaign. It would be coordinated for Gulf II.

Make the humanitarian dimension of the operation part of marketing, another pattern I’ve done some work with relief organizations. When these professionals talk about Afghanistan, I very often hear their disdain for the U.S. effort to air drop food packets into Afghanistan. There was almost no real benefit from that part of the operation, We would have expect the same in Gulf II.

Another pattern emerged that we would see in the run up to the war. One might even say they followed the concept that if you don’t know the truth, fill the vacuum with speculation that would support policy. That certainly was true during the period of anthrax uncertainty; US and UK “intelligence sources” told the press that everything pointed to Iraq.