

Arendt on Language and Lying in Politics: Her Insights Applied to the ‘War on Terror’ and the U.S. Occupation of Iraq

Gail M. Presbey¹

The recent U.S.-led military incursion in Iraq and the subsequent occupation has been filled with myriad examples of the Bush Administration using misleading statements in an effort to win the support of American citizens, and in a secondary sense, the international community and the Iraqis. This situation provides many opportunities to analyze the use of sophistry and linguistic sleight of hand. Over the years, philosophers, journalists, political theorists, and military analysts have noticed the same problems with Bush Administration arguments, and have been vocal in their criticisms. But this has not resulted to the Bush Administration abandoning its methods of deceitful propaganda; a sizeable part of the population appears to be convinced by it—‘everybody does it’ to some extent.

In this paper, I will draw upon the insights offered by Hannah Arendt in the earlier context of her critiques of totalitarianism during the 1930s and 1940s, and her later critique of the United States upon the publication of the *Pentagon Papers* in the midst of the U.S. war in Vietnam. Her insights regarding truth and lying in politics shed light on what is wrong with U.S. approaches today. I do not intend to argue that propaganda under the Bush Administration is the same as, or as bad as that practiced by Nazi Germany. I hold the more humble view that similar (but not identical) methods have been used by governments on both sides of the World Wars and continue to be used today since people have continued to be gullible to these methods.

¹ Dr. Gail M. Presbey, Philosophy, University of Detroit Mercy, CLAE 4001 W. McNichols Rd. Detroit, MI 48221 U.S.A. Phone # (313) 993-1124 Email: presbegm@udmercy.edu
<http://presbegm.faculty.udmercy.edu/>

Arendt, as a kind of prophet, admonishes that the methods are dangerous because they distort politics badly: we must learn to inoculate ourselves against these methods.

As a preamble to my analysis, let me begin by briefly surveying the history of the term 'propaganda.' The earliest use of the term dates to 1622 when Pope Gregory XV founded the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, or *Propaganda Fide*. Its goal was the dissemination of ideas as related to the Roman Catholic Church's overseas missions. Here, the word propaganda involves convincing people of the veracity of ideas articles of faith. During the late nineteenth century, two books appeared that analyzed how propaganda could be used for political goals: Gabriel Tarde's *Laws of Imitation* (1890) and Gustave Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1897). Adolf Hitler acknowledged that *The Crowd* was one of his references.

Newspaperman William Randolph Hearst was involved in encouraging war between the United States and Spain. He had sent his reporter, Frederick Remington, to Cuba, asking him to find a rationale for a U.S. war there. Remington said he saw no reason for the war. When the U.S.S. Maine exploded and sank in Havana harbor in February 1898, probably due to an accident, Hearst popularized the idea that Spain was at fault. Edison Company created movies with simulations of the Maine sinking (Sharratt, pp. 126–127).

Former U.S. President Woodrow Wilson hired propagandists Walter Lippman and Edward Bernays to bolster citizen support for entering World War I. Lippman considered the American public to be bewildered, prejudiced, and unable to see its best own interests. When the *Lusitania* sank on May 7, 1915, Lippman saw his opportunity to galvanize the American public to support the war. He conveniently neglected to mention

that the ship was indeed loaded with weapons for the war. (Silverstein, 1987; Sharrett, 2004, pp. 127–128). Bernays (1947) described his efforts as engineering consent in a democratic society. He explained that not all people can understand the facts, since the average American adult, at the time, had an average of six years of schooling. A leader facing a crisis of national security cannot wait for people to gain understanding. Through the Creel Committee (the popular name for the Committee of Public Information), they created four-minute speeches to stir up fervor. The British supplied the Americans with a list of 1200 atrocities committed by the Germans during the war. These atrocities were never referenced, but they were repeated by American news media without questions. The Creel Committee censored the press and created fabrications such as films of Germans hoisting babies on their bayonets. They told people to look out for internal enemies also. They read mail, tapped phones, and spied on anyone who called for peace, criticized the government, or suggested that the Allies were not doing well in the war. Victories were magnified and losses under-reported, to keep the American people cheerful and confident.

Hitler said that he learned the lessons of propaganda's effectiveness during World War I. In *Mein Kampf*, he outlined simple rules for success: (1) endless repetition of a few simple points in slogan form; (2) appealing to groups; and (3) avoiding rational argument, instead manipulating instinctive reactions such as fear. He boasted that through propaganda, he could make people think heaven is hell, and vice versa. R.W. Jepson (1948) noted that propaganda did not end with the end of the World War II, but became a way of life, even in Britain, since nations realized that it was more efficient than compulsion and repression.

While the Nazis engaged in their World War II propaganda, so did the Americans. Authors like Robert B. Stinnett, who served with distinction in the U.S. Navy during World War II, has used recently declassified U.S. government documents to demonstrate that U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been warned of the attack on Pearl Harbor, but thought that allowing the attack would help him to gain support for entering the war (Stinnett, 2001; Sharratt, 2004, p. 15, note). After the war, the Cold War was promoted with articles like the one in *Look Magazine* in 1948, which asked, “Could the Reds Seize Detroit?” The article includes statements like: “Detroit . . . is the industrial heart of America. Today, a sickle is being sharpened to plunge into that heart” (Silverstein, 1987, p. 56). Schlesinger and Kinzer, in their book *Bitter Fruit*, used archives to prove that the CIA and United Fruit had a deliberate campaign to mislead the U.S. public about the U.S. role in a coup to overthrow Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 (ibid.).

Arendt’s Analysis

Arendt’s experiences with propaganda came as she, a German Jew, became involved in exposing her own country’s anti-Semitism. Early in 1933, Hannah Arendt took on a dangerous task of collecting examples of what her Zionist friends called ‘horror propaganda’—anti-Semitic remarks and actions of the Nazis in the early 1930s. They wanted to expose the extent of German anti-Semitism at the Zionist Congress in Prague that summer. She did her work in the Prussian State Library where she had access to materials of the nongovernmental organizations, business associations, and professional societies. But in the midst of her assembling a ‘beautiful collection’ of materials, she was arrested. She was kept in detention and questioned for eight days, during which time she

told lies to protect her organization. As soon as she was released, she left Germany for Prague, never to return until after the war had ended (Young-Breuehl, 1982, pp. 105–106). A few years later, in 1937, living in Paris and working with German refugees there, she noticed the weekly newspapers there were filled with anti-Semitic remarks. Copies of the famous forgery, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were sold on street corners. Arendt dedicated much of her energy working with children at the Youth Aliyah training center to “protecting the children from the psychological damage that such an atmosphere inflicts” (ibid., p. 143).

In a book review essay published in *Commentary* in 1946, Arendt commented on how well Hitler had studied propaganda. He knew that he wanted to insist on “scientific” arguments for anti-Semitism. He didn’t want real science, but he wanted to find scholars who could speak seemingly authoritatively – what Arendt calls a destructive power “dressed in the clothes of some superior, super-human sanction (Arendt, 1946, p. 294).” In the review she compared and contrasted two books that chronicled the Nazi crimes of genocide. While insisting that the German slaughter of Jews in the camps was a reality so monstrous that it almost destroys history (that is, greatly challenges our capacity to comprehend an event), she nevertheless approved of Max Weinreich’s book, *Hitler’s Professors*, which she calls an honest presentation of the facts, soberly written.

On the other hand, she thinks that *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime Against The Jewish People*, edited by the World Jewish Congress and other Jewish organizations, presents itself as propaganda and publicity, to the point that even if the facts are true, they don’t sound true because of the way in which they are presented. She also commented on how the Nazis had power to make their phony world of propaganda look real. Germans

had found a way to make Jews look guilty, like criminals, while the Jews don't have the power to make the Germans look as guilty as they really are. She seems worried that a book, by itself, won't convince people. The extent of the crimes might breed incredulity. Arendt seems to be concerned that people will be taken in by appearances. Here one can't help but notice the harsh criticism she dispenses to a book with an agreeable message but a format she finds unsuitable. One might be surprised that a book put together by so many Jewish groups, with Albert Einstein as its honorary Chairman and Sholem Asch as its President, would get such short shrift from Arendt. But as Henry Srebrink explains, the book had been put together during the Cold War by pro-Soviet Jews, who made use of their factual sources about deaths of Eastern European and Soviet Jews for pro-Soviet ends (Srebrink, 2008). Early in her career Arendt was finding propaganda, on whichever side of an issue, an inappropriate medium.

In her academic work, Arendt addressed the issue of propaganda in 1950 in her lecture, entitled *Ideology and Propaganda*, given at University of Notre Dame. There she argued that the ideological propaganda of totalitarianism creates “covers of seeming normality when it embarks upon its greatest crimes.” By creating a pretense of legality, Nazi rulers meant to dull the consciousness of elite forces so that they would not realize the extent to which the ‘normal’ world would judge their acts as crimes (Arendt, 1950). Arendt learned about the possibilities of systemic lying first from the Nazis. One way of lying is to rename and or use euphemisms. Arendt noticed that the Nazis realized that by changing the words used to signify a certain reality, the truth could be masked or evaded. For example, they referred to gassing as ‘granting a mercy death’; they named the plan for exterminating the Jews, ‘The Final Solution.’ Even the memos crossing the desks of

leaders ordering them to change the words used to refer to a particular act were called ‘language rules’ —which is an example of itself, for Arendt points out that language rule is a euphemism for ‘lie’ (Arendt, 1965/1984, pp. 85–86, 108, 161).

By these subtle controls of language, the reality of what transpiring was kept beyond the reach of consciousness. Arendt cynically notes that lies were so widespread throughout Germany that it became part of the national character. The Nazis were able to keep up the morale of the people and prepare them for war by use of speech. The biggest lie, Arendt claims, was the slogan for the war, “the battle of destiny for the German people.” This slogan made self-deception easier for three reasons. It suggested: (1) that the war was no war; (2) that the war was started by destiny, not Germany; (3) that the war was a matter of life and death for the Germans (ibid. pp. 52, 105–106).

Arendt makes distinctions among different kinds and ‘sizes’ of lies. David Luban holds that Arendt defended the use of manipulation and lies in politics, while Ana Maria Martinez de la Escuelra argues that Arendt asserts that the political realm needs lying (Luban, 1979, pp. 86–87; Martinez de la Escalera, 2005). I think these analyses are faulty. While Arendt admits that lying has often been a part of the political scene, and that the liar is engaged in acting, that is, using freedom to change the world, which does not imply a sanguine acceptance of the role of lying. The only thing Arendt says in favor of lying refers to a limited lie, meant to fool one’s enemy. She states that since this is often done to avoid violence, people usually do not view it as morally reprehensible. On this topic, she engages in a thought experiment—one of those extreme cases, where she asks, if one could save the world from being obliterated by lying, wouldn’t it be justified to lie? Preserving the world’s existence would help the greater cause of establishing truth in the

long run. One should not generalize from such an extreme thought experiment to conclude that lying, particularly systemic lying, should be accepted as normative. Part of her acceptance of this limited lie comes from her confidence that all lies of this limited sort will eventually be found out and truth restored. But as for the widespread lying and self-deception that goes on in today's politics, she has harsh words of condemnation. Limited lies of an earlier time could have mitigating circumstances. But the lies of today are so big, even those who create the lies get caught up in their own fabrications and begin to believe them (Arendt, 1968/1985, pp. 228–229, 253–254; 1975/1976, p. 69).

Notably, when Arendt speaks of lies in politics, she contrasts them with factual truth, making a distinction between factual truth and the 'absolute' truth of the philosophers, made popular by Plato. I am not here referring to the problem of knowing the absolute truth (Arendt, 1968/1985, p. 229). Arendt argues that the opposite of factual truth is deliberate lying. But she also contrasts facts, which she says are apolitical (although they are the ground of pursuit of politics) with opinion, which is in the realm of politics and is perspectival. John S. Nelson has pointed out that Arendt's account of factual truth is overly simplistic, and seems to be influenced by the empiricists and logical positivists. As such it can fall prey to an oversimplified fact-value dichotomy, as debunked by W.V.O. Quine and described by Hilary Putnam (Nelson, 1978, pp. 282–284). According to Putnam, our considering something to be a 'fact' relies upon a host of value judgments such as the epistemic values of coherence, plausibility, reasonableness, and simplicity. We have no way of telling we have arrived at the truth, Putnam says, without consulting our epistemic values. Valuation and description are interdependent any time we say that someone is courageous, foolhardy, or cruel (Putnam, 2002, pp. 30–

32, 62). Arendt was ready to admit that perspectives and values were introduced when people formed their opinions based on factual truth, but she did not (like many of her contemporaries) take stock of how observation itself involves presuppositions.

Arendt did realize that it is sometimes hard to draw a line between hard fact and hypothesis or opinion. She wanted to simplify her appeal to the importance of facts by giving what she considered unproblematic examples. She stated, for example, that on August 4, 1914, German troops crossed over into Belgium. She cites a story told about Clemenceau, who asserts that no matter what historians say about the war, they will not say that Belgium invaded Germany. Arendt argues that for this fact to be denied, a government would have to have a power monopoly over all the world. While not inconceivable, the dauntingness of this task illustrates the general indestructibility of facts (Arendt, 1968/1985, p. 239).

Arendt decried the “total contempt for reality and factuality” that she saw in totalitarian regimes, where leaders consider veracity no restraint on their pronouncements. Jeffrey Isaac (1992, p. 59) sees a link between Arendt’s insight and the character of the interrogator O’Brien in George Orwell’s *1984*, when O’Brien asserts that reality “exists in the mind an nowhere else . . . only in the mind of the Party.” Today’s liars engage in systemic lying. The lies are far-reaching and the government targets not only the ‘enemy’ but also, or especially, its own people with their lies.

Lying is not restricted to totalitarian governments Western European and the United States government also engage in it. Arendt warns that even in ‘the free world,’ where government has not yet monopolized the power to decide what is or is not, gigantic interest organizations take liberties with truth that previously were reserved only for

governments in emergency situations. Most recently, tables have turned; the government follows civil society, learning tricks from Madison Avenue (Arendt, 1968/1985, p. 255; 1976, p. 69). Reflecting on the sweep of Arendt's critique, Nelson says, "Arendt's examinations of totalitarianism, the big lie, the displacement of politics by Madison Avenue public relations, and the like reveal that the premier political problem of our day may well be the creation of conditions for truth and the reassertion of its moral and political claims upon us. I think that Arendt would have agreed with Aleksander Zinoviev that 'the basis for a genuinely human existence is truth' and that from now on the degree of development of a society will be defined 'by the degree of truthfulness that society allows'" (Nelson, p. 294).

Arendt thought that from the time of Plato, those uncomfortable with democracy's need to persuade people (ideally with rational arguments), decided to win people's consent through myth making, as in Plato's myth of the metals in *The Republic*. Since only the few are coerced by reason, one can only reach the many with a myth. But Arendt does not agree with that cynical view of people's abilities. In contrast to myth-making, Arendt holds up a paradigm of speech as self-revelation, communication, attempt at understanding others, and reaching agreement. Her model of a political community is not one of rulers figuring out ways to rule others, but of a community of equals engaging in self-rule. Arendt insists that truth and politics should never have to clash; truth is a 'problem' only for the low level of interest politics, where manipulation of others is the goal. For healthy politics, truth is indispensable (Arendt, 1968/1985, pp. 108, 263–264).

Arendt describes the fragility and the stubbornness of facts. As for the fragility, Arendt says:

The deliberate falsehood deals with contingent facts; that is, with matters that carry no inherent truth within themselves, no necessity to be as they are. Factual truths are never compellingly true. The historian knows how vulnerable is the whole texture of facts in which we spend our daily life; it is always in danger of being perforated by single lies or torn to shreds by the organized lying of groups, nations, or classes, or denied and distorted, often carefully covered up by reams of falsehoods or simply allowed to fall into oblivion. Facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established in order to find a secure dwelling place in the domain of human affairs. (Ibid., p. 6)

Because of the fragility of truth she has harsh words of condemnation for liars. Witnesses are crucial.

As truth has a fragility about it, so also has it a stubbornness. Powerful governments will never be powerful enough to change the facts of history altogether. We can see this point emphasized in literature by Winston Smith, in George Orwell's *1984*, who saved pieces of history from destruction while working at his job to rewrite history at the Ministry of Truth. Arendt explains:

Power, by its very nature, can never produce a substitute for the secure stability of factual reality, which, because it is past, has grown into a dimension beyond our reach. Facts assert themselves by being stubborn, and their fragility is oddly combined with a great resiliency—the same irreversibility that is the hallmark of all human action. In their stubbornness, facts are superior to power. (Arendt, 1968/1985, pp. 258–259)

Facts do not change but lies always need revision. One lie leads to another. A great danger lurks in treating the past as if it were the future with the potential to be anything, which is what the liar does. Arendt notes that if we indulge in such lying, “What then begins is the constant shifting and shuffling in utter sterility” (ibid., p. 258). Many nations

engaging in propaganda, suffer this misfortune. They have no solid starting point in reality from which action can begin.

Although a fabricated story may enjoy an immediate advantage in that it appeals to reason and often appeals to the wishes of the audience and so sounds more probable than the actual case, eventually people discover the discrepancy with reality. Says Arendt, “Under normal circumstances the liar is defeated by reality.” Usually witnesses can attest to the truth. Nazi Germany’s persecution of the Jews is a good example. Although the Nazis went to great lengths to hide the traces of their concentration camps, the story surfaced (Arendt, 1972, pp. 6–7; 1965/1984, pp. 232–233).

When Arendt first arrived in the United States after fleeing the Nazis during World War II, she was enamored of American democracy and wrote with admiration for the American Revolution and founding Fathers such as Thomas Jefferson. But when the *Pentagon Papers* were published during the Vietnam War, she revisited the theme of lying in politics.

Arendt noted that the United States government officials had a preoccupation with how they American citizens perceived them. In an effort to look as good as possible, the officials used words to create an image of a strong and moral country—image was so critical that lives could be sacrificed to it. The *Pentagon Papers* revealed a government more concerned with its image than whether it had valid reasons for conducting the war. In the document, John T. McNaughton weighs up the reasons for fighting the war in 1965:

70% - to avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to a reputation as a guarantor). 20% - To keep SVN (South Vietnam) (and the adjacent) territory from Chinese hands.

10% - To permit the people of SVN to enjoy a better, freer way of life.
(McNaughton, 1971, p. 432, as quoted in Arendt, 1965/1984, pp. 16–17)

Today's 'Worship of the Image' is very dangerous. Propagandists can deny even established facts to preserve an image. Arendt's example is Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer's assertion that France was one of the victors of World War II and is therefore one of the Great Powers (when Arendt considers it a fact that the Nazis had defeated France, and that France was rescued by other Allied nations), and that National Socialism had only affected a small portion of France. Modern political lies, Arendt notes, "deal efficiently with things that are not secrets at all but are known to practically everybody." She continues:

in image making of all sorts . . . every known and established fact can be denied or neglected if it is likely to hurt the image; for an image, unlike an old-fashioned portrait, is supposed not to flatter reality but to offer a full-fledged substitute for it. And this substitute, because of modern techniques and the mass media, is, of course, much more in the public eye than the original ever was. (Arendt, 1968/1985, p. 252)

Now governments and interest groups engage in the mass manipulation of fact and opinion to an extent unknown in prior history. Arendt quotes a *Pentagon Papers* analyst who notes that during the Vietnam War, "the goals pursued by the United States Government were almost exclusively psychological." The purpose of the Pentagon was to win the minds of the American people over to an image of America, and for that reason, the war was fought (ibid.; Barnett, et al., 1971, p. 209, as quoted in Arendt, 1965/1984, p. 37).

In systemic lying, our whole view of reality is colored, so that one lie cannot be distinguished from the background for easy detection. Our sense of reality depends that much on the witness of others. If the lying were limited, say, to only the enemy, one would minimally have a peer group that knew the truth and which could give a person his bearings. But if all of society is deceived, soon one can't help but believe one's own lies (Arendt, 1968/1985, p. 253; 1972, p. 34).

Arendt holds that self-deception is the biggest danger for a liar. Yet that is exactly what the Pentagon officials engaged in during the Vietnam era. Because they wanted to believe a Communist takeover had occurred, they fabricated it. Once they fabricated the story, they began to believe in it because believing made their world so simple and straightforward. Arendt points to passages in the *Pentagon Papers* showing that despite the Pentagon having received evidence from the United States Intelligence community that 80–90 percent of the Viet Cong were local, indigenous people, who had no outside supplies, the Pentagon still insisted on believing in a monolithic Communist conspiracy directed from a nonexistent Sino-Soviet bloc, with its resultant domino theory (Arendt, 1972, pp. 25–26, referring to the *Pentagon Papers*, pp. 98, 242).

The main problem that the Pentagon faced is that they believed their lies more than the American people did. Arendt:

they were so convinced of overwhelming success, not on the battlefield, but in the public-relations arena, and so certain of the soundness of their psychological promises about the unlimited possibilities in manipulating people, that they anticipated general belief and victory in the battle for people's minds. (Arendt, 1972, p. 35).

Arendt notes that luckily much of their audience “refused to be convinced” (Arendt, 1972, p. 35). She explains that in most ‘normal’ contexts, the act of telling the truth, stating the facts, is apolitical. It is not persuasion or self-revelation. But in a context of widespread deception and organized lying, stating the truth becomes a political act. The truth-teller becomes a political actor, who begins to change the world and the future of action by stating the truth (Arendt, 1968/1985, p. 251). Arendt explains that a ‘free press,’ which speaks the truth when lies surround it, is a more dangerous enemy to image-makers than are foreign conspiracies. Around the world, people who speak the truth are killed or imprisoned or banished from speaking in public (Arendt, 1975/1976)

Arendt explains further that the truth-teller often joins with an interest group whose interest would be served by the truth. The unfortunate consequence of this alliance is that association with interest groups often invalidates the truth-teller in the eyes of others. They begin to judge the truth-teller as biased; they reduce fact to opinion. This reducing of fact to opinion is often a convenient excuse.

Another complicating factor is that because people are constantly bombarded by lies, they become jaded, unwilling to believe anything. Often if people discover that someone has lied to them, instead of becoming angry, they merely resolve not to believe anything again. This feeling permeated much of United States society in the wake of Watergate. The problem is that after becoming so jaded, people will not take the truth seriously either. People in this situation are incapable of political action because they have no firm sense of reality, an idea of the present world that can serve as a launching point for action in the future (Arendt, 1968/1985, pp. 247–248, 257).

Parallels to the U.S. Occupation of Iraq and the 'War on terrorism'

People who have been following the news regarding President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, and their declared war on terrorism have probably found the above accounts of Hannah Arendt, who died in 1975, all too familiar. The techniques of propaganda, well known and used during the twentieth century, have continued to be used in the twenty-first century.

Before continuing, let us look at a brief history of the use of the phrase war on terrorism (variously called 'war on terror' or 'Global War on Terror'), and then survey the debates about what constitutes 'terrorism' or who are terrorists. I will then focus on examples from the post-9/11 presentation of the war on terrorism. Presidents before Bush used the phrasing 'war on' coupled with the major problem of the day). In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson declared a 'war on poverty.' In 1971, Richard M. Nixon declared a 'war on drugs.' Later, Ronald Reagan revived that war (Kramer, 2008).

Bush's use of war on terrorism fits into this overall pattern. But he was not the first to use the phrase. A 1977 issue of *Time Magazine* had a cover story entitled, War on Terrorism. The story reported on Germany's attempts to fight its own homegrown terrorists of the Baader-Meinhof Gang and the Red Army Faction, as well as a group ("apparently Palestinians," the article says) that hijacked a Lufthansa flight and held 82 passengers hostage. The hijacking was only the most recent in a series that had wanted ransom money and release of prisoners from Japan and Israel. The article surveys the problem of skyjacking, which began as early as 1931. It cites studies that show that most terrorists are from the middle classes, educated, and they take advantage of freedoms

provided in democracies. The article ends with an ominous prediction: “The one certainty is that civilization’s ‘war on terrorism’ will go on” (*Time*, October 31, 1977, p. 41).

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the term ‘war’ to describe efforts to stop or ameliorate terrorism? Claudia Card argues that using a phrase like war on terrorism confers a sense of legitimacy to the project, since people are familiar with arguments that decide that war can be a legitimate response to an attack. But how can a country declare a war on terrorism? This is not just a metaphorical use of the term war, because U.S. armed forces have gone into Afghanistan and other places to fight terrorists who are said to have attacked the United States on September 11, 2001 on their own soil. More metaphorical phrases such as war on poverty do not entail the use of armed forces to attack poverty (Card, 2003, pp. 174). Yet, the Bush Administration’s response was not only or wholly military. A White House press release explained, “The President fired the first shot in the war on terrorism with the stroke of his pen to seize terrorist financial assets and disrupt their fundraising pipelines” (Bush, 2001). This is using language metaphorically. Card’s point still holds. While the ‘war on terrorism’ entails a mix of metaphor and actual war, the earlier war on poverty was purely metaphorical. However, the earlier and ongoing war on drugs contained the same mix of metaphorical and actual war tactics, as funds directed to Colombia in the war on drugs has funded military and paramilitary operations.

Card questions the attempt to justify attacking Afghanistan as part of this war. She opines:

global hunts (with international cooperation) for responsible survivors: those complicit in planning and supporting the attacks, including provision of training, financial backing, and safe harbors . . . persons apprehended under suspicion of complicity in the 9/11 attacks should then, if evidence warrants a trial, be duly charged and tried in international tribunals. (p. 175)

Such actions would not constitute a war, but an attempt to bring perpetrators to justice, using a paradigm of international crime rather than war.

Crucial to this discussion is the acknowledgment that real terrorists exist, who set bombs and plan to harm governments and innocent civilians. To say that the war on terrorism is a fabricated idea is not to say no real danger exists. But framing the danger as a war may be counterproductive if inaccurate. Recently Ken McDonald, Senior Criminal Prosecutor in Great Britain, rejected the terminology and metaphors of war on terrorism when describing the London bombings of 2005, saying, “London is not a battlefield. Those innocents who were murdered on July 7th, 2005 were not victims of war” (DPP Rejects ‘War on Terror,’ 2007). He considered the threat real, but held a view similar to Card’s in rejecting the terminology used to describe it. Reporters noted that McDonald’s position was not reiterated by then Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair.

Card also comments on the use of the term ‘terrorism’ in the phrase war on terrorism. Terrorism is political violence that often has two targets. The direct targets of the harm are often the secondary targets of an action. The purpose of the action goes beyond their harm. The primary targets may be the indirect targets, those who will hopefully be intimidated or changed by the acts aimed directly at others. Terrorism uses people for ulterior motives and does not respect them as humans (Card, 2003, p. 173). Not all people agree on exactly the same definition or description of terrorism. Some apply it only to insurgents; others insist that governments can and do engage in acts of

terror against their own people as well as against their enemies. Some insist that terrorists by definition attack innocent civilians, others would broaden this definition to include attacks on the military. But many commentators notice a widespread double-standard regarding who is called a terrorist. Often, governments call their opponents 'terrorists' even if their own governments or its allies engage in the same tactics. But they would not call themselves terrorists. (Kapitan, 2003, pp.47–66; Imamkhodjaeva, 2007, pp. 255–288, Chomsky, 2001; 2003, pp. 69–87). Also, part of the colonial heritage is for colonizers to consider those who attack them terrorists, without admitting that they, the colonizers, hold the land and run the government through illegitimate use of force. (H. Odera Oruka, 1985, pp. 42–47; Elkins, 2005; Johns and Davies, 1991, p. 157).

The above survey of debate surrounding application of the term terrorist shows just how far the government has gone in creating an image of a good America defending the world against terrorists and spreading democracy. This image, in Arendt's terms, is intended to replace the reality of a superpower, which, according to its perceived self-interest, names its enemies terrorists and fights them, but itself engages in the same kinds of terrorist acts when expedient. Then the superpower deems its actions to be self-defense, spreading freedom and democracy, and the like.

The U.S. government uses 'propaganda'; its targets are the American people and the Iraqis. Despite espionage, detentions without trial, and reduction of people's rights under the PATRIOT Act, the Bush administration continues to paint the United States as the bastion of freedom. If only they repeat the mantra often enough, they might succeed in convincing many Americans of its veracity:

The Bush administration's public relations team had a strategy in spinning the war against Iraq. The first involves repeated use of phrases that reinforce the Bush administration's point of view. They grappled with the question of how to present an American occupation as 'liberation.' The phrase 'regime change,' begun during the Clinton administration, was based on the idea that Saddam Hussein's government should always be called a 'regime,' since 'government' was too neutral a term (Elisabeth Bumiller, Even Critics of War Say the White House Spun it with Skill, *New York Times*, April 20, 2003).

A key concept in the public relations approach was to associate the United States with freedom. Bush continues to repeat in his speeches that the U.S. occupation is liberation. While asking other European countries to not withdraw their troops as did the new President of Spain, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, Bush said "think about the Iraqi citizens, who don't want people to withdraw, because they want to be free." Bush then explained that Al Qaeda wants to target Iraq because "they fear the spread of freedom and democracy in places like the greater Middle East" (Lizette Alvarez, Spain Grapples with Notion that Terrorism Trumped Democracy, *New York Times*, March 17, 2004).

A media project lacking subtlety was an American government-sponsored satellite television station, which broadcasts in Arabic to the Arabic world. The station is called *Al Hurra*, meaning 'the free,' a word whose opposite is *Al Abda*, 'the slave.' They have hired 'modern' and 'hip' looking news anchors and the pace is fast. Shows called *Hot Topics* and *Cool Stuff* are broadcast several times per day. A *New York Times* news article notes:

Between programs *Al Hurra* presents unsubtle promotional spots. Heavy orchestral music surges behind images of horses running free, or men walking against the crowd, or eye after eye opening wide. "You think, you aspire, you chose, you express, you are free, Al Hurra, just the way you are," read the text on one. (Neil McFarquhar, Washington's Arabic TV Effort Gets Mixed Reviews, *New York Times*, February 20, 2004)

Such advertisements do not necessarily work in a context of great skepticism (Marwan Bishara, Washington's New Channel: Propaganda TV Won't Help the U.S., *New York Times*, February 23, 2004; America, Spare Arabs the Spin, *International Herald Tribune*, June 9, 2005).

Perceptions of the United States have been at an all time low in Arab countries and around the world. Recent polls note that countries like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Indonesia have very low ratings for 'favorable image of America' among their populations despite official government allegiance with the United States. A recent bipartisan study sponsored by a House Appropriations subcommittee noted, "America's standing abroad had deteriorated to such an extent that it will take us many years of hard, focused work to restore it" (Christopher Marquis, U.S. Image Abroad Will Take Years to Repair, Official Testifies, *New York Times*, February 5, 2004; see also Brian Knowlton, Anti-U.S. Anger Spreading in Islamic States, Survey Finds, *International Herald Tribune*, May 19, 2005). The new television station seems to be seen as part of the 'favorable image' solution, from the perspective of Edward Djerejian and Margaret D. Tutwiler, the two former ambassadors who presented their study to the subcommittee.

While I would suspect that U.S. foreign policy played a major role in the negative perception of America abroad, Djerejian and Tutwiler did not mention that possibility in their study. Instead, they proposed that the State Department needed more diplomats fluent in Arabic, and that American private sector media companies should help by creating programs that could reach out to Arab youth (ibid.).

Tutwiler had been given a leading role in the public relations campaign regarding how to 'spin' the U.S. war against Iraq in a way that makes it more acceptable to Arab television viewers. Her position as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs includes two jobs. 'Public diplomacy' is focused on 'engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences,' while 'public affairs' involves 'outreach' to Americans. Her job is related to 'psychological operations' insofar as it suggests that military victory is helped by the shaping of ideas and winning the 'hearts and minds' of adversaries and convincing Americans that the war effort is worthwhile.

The Bush administration's public relations campaign during the war was found to be 'extraordinarily successful' for American audiences, while they 'floundered' in the Arab world, necessitating Tutwiler's mission (Bumiller, 2003).

The 'image' portrayed by *Al Hurra* is not intended to stay as a fantasy on a television screen. The Pentagon has backed a \$5 billion plan to fill the five square miles of the Green Zone, the area immediately surrounding the \$700 million newly constructed United States embassy in Baghdad, with luxury hotels, condos, and shopping areas. This project, which appears to have a hidden agenda as making Americans comfortable in the Iraqi capital, has the expressed goal to create a 'zone of influence' around the United States embassy.

A Los Angeles based company, C3, has been given a \$500 million contract to build an amusement park with a skateboard park in the zone. Mr. Llewellyn Werner has hired the same company who constructed Disneyland to construct the park. Werner has said that 200,000 skateboards and kneepads will be distributed at no cost to Iraqi children during July 2008. Critics have noted that the United States is doing something similar to

what Saddam Hussein had done in his *Tashri* project of surrounding his capital headquarters with sycophants (Brooks and Abdul-Zahra, 2008; Verma, 2008).

In *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco noted how Americans, in projects like Disneyworld, appear content to replace real history with an ersatz history—something that looked like history, with no attention to the difference, or a bold acknowledgment that the fake is better. Reality is filled with pitfalls and imperfections. Disneyworld, which creates theatrical gunfights in a simulated Wild West, pretend voyages to the bottom of the sea, new shops and streets that mimic the old shops and streets of foreign lands, and contemporary ‘medieval’ castles, creates a world that is better than real (Eco, 1990). Jean Baudrillard had discussed these same tendencies toward hyperreality in his book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. In the work, he explained that the first Gulf War of 1991, which he calls a one-sided slaughter, and not a war in any conventional sense, happened mostly in the air (with radar seeking its targets) and on television screens. Americans were fed an edited version of the war that was far from facts on the ground and masqueraded its harshness (Baudrillard, 1995).

In a strategy seeming to mirror the earlier creation of Disneyworld, the U.S. government has proclaimed that it has liberated the Iraqis. Now, they will attempt to build a beautiful downtown center for Baghdad, where children will play and have fun, to create the illusion of liberation. But will they achieve such harmony so easily? Disneyland may ‘work’ in America, but can it successfully be placed in the heart of Baghdad, given the current political context?

Even in 2006, Bush repeated his hackneyed argument about why we were attacked on 9-11. Presuming to know who the terrorists are and what motivates them, he

says, “They are at war against us because they hate everything we stand for and we stand for freedom. Freedom bothers them because their ideology is the opposite of liberty” (Bush, 2006). In this understanding of terrorism’s causality, the United States has done nothing wrong. The presence of over 700 U.S. bases around the world, its spending of billions of dollars on military might while others have little to eat, and its repeated protection of Israel from U.N. sanctions are not mentioned as background to why terrorists may have attacked the United States. The history of doctored evidence regarding ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (WMDs) in Iraq, the side-stepping of U.N. Security Council clearance, and *Project for a New American Century* documents that pre-date the invasion but suggest need for regime change in Iraq are all missing in this discussion (Presbey, 2005; 2006).

In his September 2006 speech, Bush stated that the terrorists ideology is “a form of totalitarianism following in the path of fascism and Nazism,” thereby making reference to World War II: all Americans know fighting the Nazis was essential. In earlier speeches, Bush had used a term popularized by some academics, ‘Islamofascism,’ to describe conservative religious Islamic clerics in Iraq and Iran. But Katha Pollitt was concerned that the phrase was misleading. No good parallels exist between today’s terrorists and earlier Italian fascism or German Nazism. The term conflates disparate groups. Is it intended to describe Baathists loyal to Saddam Hussein (enemies of the United States) and the rulers of Saudi Arabia (allies of the United States)? Also, these dictators do not share much in common with stateless terrorists. Pollitt concludes that the purpose of using this rhetoric is not to be analytic but to appeal to emotion, another way of calling the terrorists ‘evil madmen’ (Pollitt, 2006).

This defensive and apolitical posture can be found as well in the September 2006 document, 'National Strategy for Combating Terrorism' released by the White House. The document reads, in a tone only slightly less apolitical than the President's speech, that terrorism "is not simply the result of hostility to U.S. policy in Iraq," and it is "not simply a result of Israeli-Palestinian issues" ("National Strategy for Combating Terrorism," 2006). In this wording, the government is agreeing that foreign policy issues may play some role in the terrorist=s motivations. But addressing these issues does not appear to be the goal of the document. The document states, "the hard core of our terrorist enemies cannot be reformed or deterred", and so it suggests that U.S. forces should focus on preventing attacks, attacking terrorists "and their capacity to operate," denying terrorists entry to the U.S. or movement in between other countries, and defending potential targets of attack. It also states as goals denying terrorists access to materials needed to create WMDs, and denying them sanctuary within other rogue states. These are not necessarily bad goals. But the question of whether U.S. foreign policy is exacerbating the problem is not even mentioned in the practical suggestions of the document. The document ends on a note of triumphalism: "We have liberated more than 50 million Afghans and Iraqis from despotism, terrorism, and oppression" (ibid.). Yet clearly, more Afghans and Iraqis die daily from terror attacks than do Americans, and more Iraqis die daily since the U.S. invasion than prior to the U.S. invasion. Our newspapers are often riddled with headline stories of the ten, twenty, fifty and one hundred Afghans or Iraqis dead from roadside bombs. Can we realistically say, therefore, that our 'war on terrorism' has liberated Afghans and Iraqis from terrorism?

According to the 2007 Failed States Index (compiled by *Foreign Policy* magazine and the Fund for Peace), Iraq is second on the list of failed states (behind Sudan) (Morgan, 2007).

It is, however, important to note that many sides to this 'war on terror' are resorting to propaganda techniques. Many Salafi-Jihadis (Arab fighters promoting Islamic States) who had come from the Middle East to fight in Chechnya had been recruited through the use of videotapes which portrayed the fight in a certain way. As Murad Batal al-Shishani explains, videos like "Russian Hell" and "Aced Victories" implored their viewers to give up their luxurious lives for the sake of religion. The tapes portray Islamic societies as idyllic and without corruption. The tapes show mujahideen chanting and praying and smiling martyrs (al-Shishani, 2006). While some may argue that if the other side is using propaganda, one's own side is justified in 'fighting fire with fire.' But in such a contest, all sides lose.

Conclusion

Arendt insisted on the importance of keeping facts straight. Facts are the bedrock upon which political action can then continue. But the basic facts about the Iraq war and the 'war on terrorism' are not yet known by the American people. In an insightful argument by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. on the topic of manipulation of citizens by the media, Kennedy argues that there is not a split in our country (along the lines of 'red' and 'blue' states) regarding values. Rather, there is a split in our country regarding facts. A survey undertaken by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (University of Maryland) right after the 2004 elections said that most Bush supporters were convinced that Iraq played a role in the al Qaeda attacks of 9-11, and therefore they supported the

U.S.-led war in Iraq. Most respondents who held this view listened to Fox News. Most Kerry supporters did not think that Iraq played a role in the al Qaeda attacks of 9-11, and so they were against the plan to invade Iraq. Those who thought so got their news from sources other than Fox News. Kennedy therefore argues that the debate in the U.S. is really over the facts, and not the differing conclusions people may come to over the same set of facts. As proof of his distinction, he says the same pollsters followed up with another poll of the people who say they support the U.S. invasion of Iraq whether their position would change if they were to find out, in the future, that Iraq did not play a role in the 9-11 attacks. Eighty per cent of the Bush supporters interviewed agreed that under such circumstances, they would withdraw their support for the war (Democracy in Crisis, 2007).

Fox News had even played video footage of U.S. troops finding the WMDs in Iraq. They showed some tubes being pulled up out of the ground. They said they were rocket to propel WMDs. The other news stations later reported that the weapons found were not WMDs. But those who watched Fox News continue to believe that they saw the WMDs with their own eyes. When Colin Powell presented his 'evidence' to the United Nations, I remember being completely unconvinced by his aerial photographs of two trucks parked somewhere in the middle of nowhere in Iraq. He was arguing that they were mobile labs for chemical and biological weapons. I remember being completely unconvinced. But a friend of mine who watched the same presentation was thoroughly convinced by Powell's presentation. News media of Powell's presentation around the world mirrored our two views, with the U.S. press being convinced and foreign press

skeptical. I think this illustrates Putnam and Nelson's points, that we evaluate sense data in contexts, according to familiar narratives as well as our criteria for believability.

Historian Howard Zinn (2006) argues that if the American public only knew more about United States history, they would not be so vulnerable to the war propaganda of their leaders. Zinn cites speeches of former U.S. President William McKinley, who suggested that U.S. wars against Spain, fought in Puerto Rico and the Philippines, were intended to help give the people there 'freedom.' But the United States stayed as occupiers.

Education on history is an important skill to help one detect propaganda. But the way in which Americans are taught history is highly framed by myths. Sometimes facts are distorted; sometimes they are brushed over to give a misimpression. Nelson sees an affinity between Arendt's own position and that of Aleksander Zinoviev. He says that for both thinkers, "the basic for a genuinely human existence is truth" and that from now on the degree of development of a society will be defined "by the degree of truthfulness that society allows (Nelson, p. 294)."

The United States is not the only country that presents their history in a mythical way. Since human beings have fertile imaginations and since the image is often clearer and more comforting than messy reality, people of good as well as ill will are often tempted to weave such narratives. But as Arendt insists, we have to return to the witnesses to truth and break through the myths, to find a more accurate picture of reality. Such realism is a prerequisite for effective action.

References

- Al-Shishani, Murad Batal (2006, 14 September), "The Rise and Fall of Arab Fighters in Chechnya." *Jamestown Foundation*, <http://jamestown.org/docs/Al-Shishani-14Sep06.pdf>
- Arendt, Hannah (1946) "The Image of Hell," *Commentary* 2, pp. 291-95.
- Arendt, Hannah (1950) "Ideology and Propaganda," lecture given at University of Notre Dame, Indiana, *Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress*, Speech and Writings file.
- Arendt, Hannah. (1965) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Revised and enlarged edition. New York: Viking Compass Edition; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1984.
- . (1968) *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. Enlarged edition. New York: Viking Compass Edition; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1985.
- . (1972) *Crises of the Republic: Lying in Politics, Civil Disobedience on Violence, Thoughts on Politics, and Revolution*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- . (1975, June 26) *Home to Roost*. *New York Review of Books*, reprinted in S. B. Warner (Ed.) (1976), *The American Experiment* (pp. 61–77). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Bernays, Edward L. (1947) The Engineering of Consent. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 250, Communication and Social Action (March), 113–120.
- Brooks, Bradley, and Qassim Abdul-Zahra. (2008, May 4) U.S.-Backed Plan Sees Shiny Future for Green Zone in Iraq. Associated Press. Retrieved May 12, 2008 from http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gb8nF0_C6HnqM-bkkiZ151CG4XwgD90F00IO2
- Bush, George W. (2001) "The Global War on Terrorism: The First 100 Days," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/12/print/100dayreport.html>
- Bush, George W (2006, Sept. 2)..@President Bush Discusses Global War on Terror,@ Wardman Park, Marriott Hotel, Washington D.C. Accessed July 17, 2007: <Http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/print/20060929-3.html>
- Card, Claudia. (2003) Making War on Terrorism in Response to 9/11. In James P. Sterba (Ed.), *Terrorism and International Justice* (pp. 173–185). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Chomsky, Noam. (2001, October 24) The New War against Terror. *Counterpunch*.
- . (2003) Terror and Just Response. In James P. Sterba (Ed.), *Terrorism and International Justice* (pp. 69–87). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Democracy in Crisis—Interview with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. *Truthout*. Retrieved July 17, 2007 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/>
- DPP Rejects ‘War on Terror.’ (2007, January 24) *Politics.co.uk*. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from [http://www.politics.co.uk/News/domestic-policy/legal/crown-prosecution-service/dpp-rejects-war-on-terror-\\$464171.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/News/domestic-policy/legal/crown-prosecution-service/dpp-rejects-war-on-terror-$464171.htm)
- Eco, Umberto. (1990) *Travels in Hyperreality*. San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Elkins, Caroline. (2005) *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain’s Gulag in Kenya*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Howard Zinn on the Uses of History and the War on Terrorism. (2006, November 24) Democracy Now. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from http://www.democracynow.org/2006/11/24/howard_zinn_on_the_uses_of
- Imamkhodjaeva, Oidinposha. (2007) Russia, Chechnya, and the Global War against Terrorism. In Gail M. Presbey (Ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives on the ‘War on Terrorism’* (pp. 255–288). New York: Rodopi.
- Isaac, Jeffrey. (1992) *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Jepson, R. W. (1948) *Clear Thinking: An Elementary Course of Preparation for Citizenship*, 4th edition. New York: Longmans, Green.
- Kapitan, Tomis. (2003) The Terrorism of ‘Terrorism.’ In James P. Sterba (Ed.), *Terrorism and International Justice* (pp. 47–66). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kramer, Melody Joy. (2006, November 1) War on (insert here). NPR.org. Retrieved May 15, 2008 from <http://mustv.com/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6416780>
- Luban, David. (1979) Habermas on Arendt on Power. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 6.
- McNaughton, John T. (1971) *Pentagon Papers* (p. 432). New York: Bantam Books, quoted in Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*, pp. 16–17.

- Morgan, David. (2007, June 18) Iraq Now Ranked Second among World's Failed States. Reuters.
- National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. (2006, September). Retrieved July 17, 2007 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/>
- Nelson, John S. (1978, May) Politics and Truth: Arendt's Problematic. *American Journal of Political Science*, 22(2).
- Odera Oruka, H. (1985) Punishment and Terrorism in Africa, Second edition (pp. 42–47). Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.
- Pollitt, Katha. (2006, August 26) The Trouble with Bush=s 'Islamofascism.' *The Nation*.
- Presbey, Gail M. (2005, December) Challenges of Founding a New Government in Iraq. *Constellations : an International Journal of Critical and Democratic Theory*, 12:4 (pp. 521–541.
- Presbey, Gail M. (2007) Is the United States-Led Occupation of Iraq Part of the 'War on Terror'? (pp. 161–197). In Presbey. (Ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives on the 'War on Terrorism.'* Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Sharrett, Christopher. (2004, Summer) 9/11, the Useful Incident, and the Legacy of the Creel Committee. *Cinema Journal*, 43(4), 125–131.
- Sheridan Johns, Sheridan, and R. Hunt Davies. (1991) *Mandela, Tambo, and the African National Congress: The Struggle against Apartheid, 1948–1990, A Documentary Survey* (p. 157). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Silverstein, Brett. (1987, March) Toward a Science of Propaganda. *Political Psychology*, 8(1), 49–59.
- Srebrink, Henry (2008, May 6) "The Delayed Reaction to the Holocaust," *Jewish Tribune.*, <http://www.jewishtribune.ca/TribuneV2/content/view/573/35/>
- Stavins, Ralph L., Richard J. Barnet, and Marcus G. Raskin. (1971) *Washington Plans an Aggressive War* (p. 209). New York: Vintage Books; quoted in Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*, p. 37.
- Verma, Sonia. (2008, April 24) 'Disneyland' Comes to Baghdad with Multi-Million Pound Entertainment Park. *TimesOnline* (UK). Retrieved May 12, 2008 from <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article3802051.ece>