

Essay

The Power of Propaganda and Muslim World

Outline

I. Introduction

Propaganda, an act of mutilating reality, has been used by those in power to gain certain objectives. In the same vein, it has been used against and within the Muslim world with unpalatable implications. However, propaganda can be neutralized and ^{even} superseded by truth.

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"The bigger the lie, the more likely it is for people to believe," said Adolf Hitler. Propaganda as a tool to manipulate reality and gain certain objectives is not new to the world. Tracing back to the sixteenth century when the church used it against the protestants, propaganda has since been used in multiple instances to achieve multiple goals throughout history. Similarly, it has been used by outsiders of the Muslim world ^{only} to harm the people of Islamic religion. It was because of propaganda that the Ottoman Empire stood isolated in the First Great War culminating into the implosion of the empire. Then, the Western powers used lies to curb the growing Muslim influence. Moreover, the event of 9/11 changed many perspectives around the world. Following this, the image of the Muslim world also changed solely because of prevailing anti-Muslim rhetoric. Even in contemporary times, the many populist leaders use lies against

Muslims to amass public support. However, the act of manipulating lies is not limited to non-Muslims. It has also been utilized by various extremist factions within the Muslim world to achieve selfish means. In the 1980s, it was used by two dissenting blocs to attract support on either side. It has also been used by the extremist religious clergy further increasing extremism within the Muslim world. In addition, propaganda has also been used by various leaders of Islamic sect to widen the existing gulf between those sects. Given the unpleasant implications of propaganda on Muslim world, propaganda can, still, be neutralized and even overshadowed by truth.

The term 'propaganda' was first used by the Anglican church in early 16th century. There existed a department by the name which aimed to limit Christianity to the orthodox Catholicism. Then, it gained popularity during the

dictatorship of History Hitler when he introduced Ministry of Propaganda aiming only to prevail the Nazi ideology. Propaganda, thus, can be defined as a mechanism of moulding truth to the extent that it becomes a lie. It, therefore, is used by those in power in order to gain the support of the people or propagate a certain ideology. The propagandists, however, do not call their statements as propaganda, instead they address them as the policy or official statements. The Muslim world refers to the Muslim population around the world. In particular, it directs towards the Muslim majority countries of South and South West Asia, and much of Africa.

Propaganda has been used, throughout history, in both religious and political contexts. Religiously, it has been used by the Christian church in early sixteenth century. That was a time when the Catholic priests

began to encounter those who deviated from the orthodox Christianity. Thus, in order to contain the change in religion, the church used sermons and writing to re-align the departing Christians. The speeches of the priests and pops included lies about the emerging Protestant sect. The aim of those sermons were to instigate the Catholics against the newer sect. The church was, to a great extent, successful as the sermons and the departmental mission became fruitful to instill intolerance against the new sect.

In the same vein, propaganda has been used as a tool to generate euphoria of war in a community. This weapon was institutionalized by Hitler in the events preceding World War II. He had officially opened a Ministry of Propaganda which had the only aim of creating and spreading propaganda. In his biography, Mein Kampf, Hitler openly accepted that

The bigger the lie, the more likely it was for the people to believe it. For that purpose, he used pamphlets, speeches and censorship to achieve his goal of German imperialism. He mutilated the reality and set the stage for war by manipulating the minds of the people. This resulted in a widespread excitement for war which eventually led to Hitler's continuation of attacks and the subsequent Second Great War.

Similarly, Propaganda was the only tool of Benito Mussolini to come to power. He used the existing socio-economic grievances of the Italian public to collect support. The people, having been manipulated by the propagandist motives, brought the Fascist to power. During the interwar period, Mussolini adopted this technique to consolidate his position. Through pamphlets, speeches, radio and newspapers, his charm as a populist leader attracted much of

The support of the people. This was a clear manifestation of the power of propaganda.

Building on this, propaganda has been used against and within the Muslim world for achieving certain motives. The implosion of the Ottoman Empire can be largely attributed to propaganda. Although the empire had become internally weak due to various factors, the weakening can still be attributed to the growing discontentment from limited truth and reality. By the first quarter of the twentieth century, the empire had been abandoned by the rest of the Muslim world. Moreover, the West had played a decisive role in weakening the Ottoman empire first through alienating it from the rest of the world by calling it 'The Sick Man of Europe' and then through colonization, countries like Britain had the Muslim colonies fight against the Muslim Empire,

Distanced from the truth, Muslim imperialism ended with the end of the Ottoman Empire.

Propaganda has also been used by the West to curb Muslim influence. An explicit example of this was the United States' claims action against the Saddam regime in Iraq. The West had no problem when monarchies existed around the world including the Great Britain. However, when the United States sensed the rise of a Muslim dictator and a ruler, the Dornier, in the words of Noam Chomsky began an all-offensive against the Saddam regime. It did so by amassing the support of the West. Thus, in 1991 when Saddam invade Kuwait, there emerged a UN-backed US-led attack on Iraq. The United States, through anti-imperialistic and anti-Muslim rhetoric had the backing of the West.

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The most drastic influence of propaganda against the Muslim world is the spread of Islamophobia. Following the unfortunate 9/11 incident where an al Qaeda-led group attacked the World Trade centers, the United States and the rest of the West, instead of blaming the group began to blame the religion of the group. They targeted Islamic principles which are originally much more peaceful than any other religion. When president Bush used the term "rats" he meant it for Muslims and not perpetrators. Following the lead, various leaders of the West have resorted to hate speech against the Muslims. This has resulted into hatred against the followers of Islam. One example, in recent times is when a Britisher stabbed few people, the news spread that a Muslim had done it without prior knowledge. Islamophobia, a child of propaganda has, therefore,

brought much harm to the Muslim world.

The power of Propaganda is also illustrated by the way many populist leaders have come to power in the contemporary world.

Take, for example, Narendra Modi, the incumbent leader of India. His third consecutive term was only possible through the Hindu nationalist support he had collected over the years. Modi had, often times, called the Muslims a threat to India. The changing of the name of Allahabad to Prayagraj and construction of Ram Mandir over Babri Masjid has only worked in his favor. Similarly, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), recently, had remarked that where Muslim population exceeded 30 per cent, the country was under threat. Such anti-Muslim rhetoric have brought support to BJP in a country like India majorly populated by Hindu nationalists.

As much as it has worked against the Muslim world by the non-Muslims, propaganda has also wreaked havoc within the Muslim world. It has been used by various extremist entities to achieve selfish means. Resultantly, extremism has emerged within the community. The stories of Mullah Radio are very common in the tribal belt of Pakistan, for instance. Extremist scholars used speeches through radio in the 2000s, peaking in 2006 to influence the minds of people and attract them towards Holy War. Similarly, propaganda has been adopted by various extremist organizations such as the Islamic State Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP). These Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), in a quest to establish pan-Islamism, often resort to extremist speeches in order to attract young recruits. In this way, propaganda has bred extremism within the Muslim world.

Another manifestation of the power of propaganda has been the use of this tool in widening the gulf between various sects of Islam. Multiple leaders of different Islamic factions use manipulated truths to propagate their own ideology. They do so by raising the sect they follow and degrading other sects. Many go to the extent of calling other followers as 'kafirs' or disbelievers. This generates hatred against each other. The incidents of attacks on other sects is a manifest reality of the harmful impacts of propaganda with the Muslim world. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, although pacified at the moment, and their proxy wars are a few examples among many where propaganda has divided the Muslims from within.

Despite the challenges posed by

propaganda to the Muslim world. The silver lining is that the works of propaganda can be undone. Firstly, the true scholars of Islam are to be brought to the forefront. This means that only those learned Muslim actors are to be supported who portray the true, the peaceful image of Islam. Islam is a religion of peace and the Muslims are its peaceful followers. Instead of airing, supporting and dealing with extremist clergy, many welcoming scholars exist who portray the true image of Islam. Their drives and initiatives are often impeded by existing extremist clergy with no tolerance for others. However, establishing those in power who truly know Islam will work only in the favor of the Muslim world.

Another means of countering propaganda against and within the Muslim world is by pushing

The Muslims into fields other than religion only. Islam is a complete code of life. Its contours are not limited to spiritual awakening only. In fact, Islam supports participation in the mundane life more than any other religion. It was the Muslims who kept the Greek works of science and art alive during eighth century. When maximum number of Muslims participate in the field of science and technology, an alternative image, the true side of Islam shall be generated. Islam is a progressive religion. Encouraging Muslim engagement in this field will counter the prevailing propaganda against the Muslim world.

Finally, a stronger Muslim bloc will undo much of the existing propaganda that target the people of Islam. Although supranational organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation exist, the

redundant and inefficient nature of the entity has been of little help in supporting the Muslim world.

Alternatively, the organization should be restructured and its objectives revised. This bloc of more than fifty states is one of the largest organizations in the world. It can be of most implications if the objectives are more targeting and explicit. The group, with the collaboration of all the Muslim countries, can work proactively to not only counter the prevailing propaganda but only establish the truth about the Muslim world.

In conclusion, propaganda has long been used by various actors throughout history, in a quest to achieve selfish objectives. Beginning from the ecclesiastical organ of England in the sixteenth century up to 1930s, propaganda has been institutionalized for both ~~to~~ religious and political motives. It has also been used against

the Muslim world to weaken, limit and even suppress the influence of Islam. One of the biggest implications of the use is the spread of Islamophobia by altering ^{the} reality. Moreover, it has also created a substantial divide within the Muslim world by fostering hate and extremism among different factions. ~~It~~ Nonetheless, propaganda can also be countered.

By promoting the true image of Islam through academics and international organizations will counter the lies aimed at Muslims. Truth is the only way to neutralize or even overshadow propaganda.