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**U.S Propaganda and Media Performance in the 1991 Gulf War**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a  
Master Degree in English: Literature and Civilisation**

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## Dedication

*To my parents, **Mokhtar** and **Khadidja**, whom I feel abundantly beholden for their tireless support. You always picked me up on time and encouraged me to cross every river and to go on every adventure, especially this one.*

*With a warm heart, thank you.*

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*I would like to express my deepest thanks and gratitude to my supervisor*

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*for his tireless and inspiring guidance.*

## **Abstract**

The overall idea of the present dissertation revolves around the role of U.S propaganda and media during times of war. Using the 1991 Gulf War as a case of study, this paper attempts to demonstrate that the U.S relies so heavily on wartime propaganda to legitimise its military interventions, and that the media is a tool that U.S leaders make use of to reinforce propaganda and mobilise popular support. To this end, a qualitative, descriptive analytical approach is applied. Moreover, the 1991 Gulf War is discussed in its historical context as the first major conflict for the United States in the post-Cold War era. During the Cold War era, anti-communist propaganda was the vehicle through which many U.S military interventions were legitimised. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union, which ended the Cold War, resulted in a propaganda crisis for U.S leaders, who had to find new propaganda for selling the war in the Persian Gulf. Because it does not matter how credible propaganda rhetoric is as long as it effectively meets the desired objectives, U.S propaganda of the 1991 Gulf War was based on fabrications and exaggerations. Moreover, U.S leaders adapted the media to propaganda through imposing several restrictions on the journalists' content and their access to the battlefields. Consequently, the media and propaganda were inseparable war weapons that the U.S made use of during the 1991 Gulf War.

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## **General Introduction**

The United States is a young nation, but its history is replete with military adventures and warfare. From the War of Independence to the current wars on 'terror', the United States got involved in numerous declared and undeclared military conflicts in various parts of the world. In terms of such world events, American public opinion is important. Therefore, the primary objective of the U.S leaders before engaging in any war is to present it as worth fighting and to rally popular support for it. To meet this end, "[U.S] government leaders translate war aims into propaganda". (Brewer. 4)

Propaganda is a term which was first used by the Catholic Church in 1622. It is derived from Latin and accepts various definitions. Merriam-Webster Dictionary suggests that propaganda is a public action having certain effects. However, for many people, the term usually carries negative interpretations due to the long history of using propaganda as a war weapon. For the United States, wartime propaganda is as important as military weapons. It is the means by which U.S leaders fight the public opinion battle at the home front before engaging in military battles abroad. Propaganda provides domestic public with the official narrative of a given war and uses well-chosen messages to frame it as worth fighting. In other words, it provides a one-sided presentation of events to further the war cause. Moreover, U.S propagandists generally create an enemy, demonise them, and introduce them as a threat to America's future, principles, and interests. Such propaganda rhetoric generates patriotic sentiments and contributes to shaping a popular acceptance for war. (Zoschak)

In the United States, the media is regarded as a strong and independent institution that is protected by constitutional law from all governmental abuses or restrictions. This protection is guaranteed to enable media professionals to perform their traditional role. Theoretically speaking, the media is supposed to question, criticise, and objectively challenge the government policies. But at wartime, the media generally fails to fulfill this role. Rather, it becomes a vehicle of war propaganda as "Ruling elites use the mainstream media to promote their own agendas and to advance their own interests." (Kellner)

Among several examples, the First Gulf War is one of the military conflicts that represent the U.S reliance on propaganda as a war weapon and the media's role in furthering propaganda efforts. The First Gulf War broke out in 1991 in response to Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. It took place during the presidency of George. H. W. Bush whose administration launched massive propaganda campaigns to rally popular support for it. Moreover, the war

knew a large scale media manipulation of public opinion in favour of the administration's policies. Using propaganda and media by the U.S leaders to further the Gulf War cause was not novel. However, the historical period in which the war took place, the end of the Cold War, makes U.S propaganda messages of this war in particular and the then American media performance worth examining.

The 1991 Gulf War was the first major international conflict to take place in the post-Cold War era. The latter was a decades-long rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union for global leadership. During the Cold War, the United States got engaged in a large-scale propaganda production. Anti-communism was the core of U.S propaganda machine, and it negatively represented the Soviet Union and its communist allies as colonial powers, threatening the free world. For more than four decades, U.S leaders have used anti-communist propaganda extensively to serve American global interests, promote the Cold War policies, and justify several military interventions in different parts of the world. U.S propaganda was adopted by the American media, which contributed greatly to spreading anti-communist messages and swaying public opinion in favour of the Cold War efforts. The media justified its propaganda role as being a patriotic duty to defend national security threatened by communist powers.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, which formally ended the Cold War, the United States emerged victorious and immediately entered the First Gulf War as the world leader. However, the Soviets' demise resulted in a propaganda crisis for the United States as anti-communist propaganda would be no longer effective. It is for this that the First Gulf War is worth examining. It was the war in which U.S leaders engaged in a serious search for a new enemy and new propaganda to sell the military adventure in the Persian Gulf after more than four decades of reliance on anti-communism. Also, it was the war in which the American media performance would be under observation in light of Soviets' collapse and the then global changes. (Hammond)

Using the First Gulf War as a case of study, this research paper has two core objectives. First, it seeks to examine the United States' reliance on propaganda as a war weapon, and to demonstrate how the United States, one of the greatest democracies in the world, falsifies facts in a manner that serves its interests and legitimises its wars. Second, this study discusses,

through the case of the First Gulf War, how the media is used by the U.S leaders during times of war to serve propaganda objectives.

There is already an extensive body of literature about the American use of propaganda as a war weapon and the influential role that the media outlets play in the government propaganda campaigns. In his *Munitions of the Mind*, Philip M. Taylor traces back the history of propaganda from the ancient ages to the late twentieth century. He, accordingly, proves that “propaganda and war have always been inextricably connected” (5). The book reviews the role that propaganda played during conflicts of different historical eras and asserts that wartime propaganda has always been of no less importance than military weapons. For him, wartime propaganda “attacks a part of the body that other weapons cannot reach in an attempt to affect the way in which participants perform on the field of battle.” (9) The 1991 Gulf War is one of the conflicts reviewed in the book. In his discussion of the Gulf War, Taylor focuses on the relationship that existed between the media and the government and the latter’s interference in the war coverage. For him, the Bush administration had a firm belief that the defeat in the Vietnam War was the result of the uncontrolled media coverage, and therefore it engaged in the Gulf War with a firm determination that war in the Gulf would not be another Vietnam. Though he devoted an entire chapter for the Gulf War of 1991, and the government policy to effectively transmit its propaganda through media, Philip M. Taylor does not discuss propaganda messages and its influence on public opinion.

The U.S propaganda of the First Gulf War is well illustrated in Douglas Kellner's *The Persian Gulf TV War*. In his book, Kellner analyses propaganda campaigns that the Bush administration and the Pentagon carried out to justify and legitimise the First Gulf War. Likewise, he follows the role that the media played, particularly television, since the beginning of the crisis until the aftermath of the war. Kellner defines propaganda as “a mode of discourse intended to persuade, to manipulate, and to indoctrinate its audience into accepting policies and personnel that they might not otherwise support.” He asserts that what matters for any propagandist is to boost their own side. Therefore, propaganda is usually based on lies and exaggerations. In his analysis of the 1991 Gulf War propaganda, he asserts that the Bush administration’s propaganda first created the enemy and then negatively portrayed him. The enemy was Saddam Hussein. Media, he adds, largely contributed to selling the war as it “...helped the Bush administration by beating the war drums and

producing an atmosphere where it was all too likely that military force would be used to resolve the crisis in the Gulf.” In this context, he explains that the media reinforced a negative image for Saddam Hussein, which led to generating pro-war sentiments among the Americans.

David Hrycyszyn, in his part, criticises the media’s performance during the First Gulf War in his article “Nothing’s Shocking: Mainstream Media Manipulation and the Gulf War”. Hrycyszyn argues that the media was supposed to challenge the government decisions about the war and to ask questions. This, for him, is the role that the First Amendment to the U.S Constitution provides for media. However, the latter failed to fulfill its role and, instead, it accepted to follow the official line. In his article, Hrycyszyn did not only criticise the media performance, but he also explains the reasons of such a performance. One of the reasons he believes in was “the corporate, bureaucratic, and profit-oriented mindset of the major media organizations”. For this, the media accepted to support the government policies and did not question any. Censorship was another reason. Hrycyszyn says that the military imposed a tight control over the journalists’ reports. Reporters were not able to write or say anything unless it was filtered and accepted by the military: “With the commencement of the war, reporters found the restrictions on what they could print or say tightened to an extreme degree”. Moreover, most of the journalists had no access to the battlefields and consequently no access to the information. Therefore, they had no choice but to rely on the information and images that the military released to construct their reports.

This research paper argues that propaganda and media are inseparable tools of influence that the U.S governments make use of during times of war to serve their wars’ causes. Therefore, in light of the existing literature and in an attempt to achieve the mentioned objectives, this paper aims to answer the following questions: First, how can propaganda and media be dangerous inseparable war weapons for the United States? Second, to what extent does the U.S media performance during the 1991 Gulf War demonstrate that the media institution in the United States is nothing but a tool used by the ruling elites to serve certain interests and agendas?

Because of the several questions that are raised around the role the U.S media and propaganda during times of war, this research paper aims to contribute to providing more explanations and understanding of what role U.S propaganda and media play during times of

war. For this, it applies a qualitative, descriptive analytical methodology to answer them. And for a better understanding of the issue, it chooses the 1991 Gulf War as a case of study and relates it to its historical context as the first major international conflict taking place during the post-Cold War era. Moreover, the research made use of several primary and secondary sources such as speeches, books, and articles.

The paper is divided into three chapters. The first one, which is entitled “U.S Propaganda and Media performance during the Cold War Era”, is concerned with the American reliance on propaganda and media as war weapons during the Cold War, which was the last major international conflict before the 1991 Gulf War and whose consequences had direct impact on the Bush administration’s war policies in the Persian Gulf. It first clarifies the position of media in the U.S Constitution and its traditional role. Then, it provides a short review of the use of propaganda at wartime. The chapter, thereafter, reviews the important role that U.S propaganda played during the Cold War and explains how the media contributed to furthering propaganda efforts. It gives a special focus to the media coverage of the Vietnam War, which would subsequently influence the U.S government policies of the 1991 Gulf War.

The second chapter, “U.S Propaganda of the First Gulf War”, analyses propaganda messages that the Bush administration relied upon to sell the 1991 Gulf War. But first, it clarifies the historical significance of the war in light of the then global changes and the conditions that followed the Cold War era. Then, it states some of the main U.S interests in the war that the Bush administration sought to realise. The chapter, moreover, explains how the Gulf War propaganda was the first challenge the U.S leaders of the post-Cold War era faced, and how finding new propaganda type was critically important. Finally, the chapter analyses some of the main propaganda messages that the Bush administration promoted for legitimising the war.

The third chapter is "The Performance of the American Media during the First Gulf War" and focuses on the American media coverage of the Gulf crisis and then of the war. It explains how the experience of the Vietnam War overshadowed U.S government leaders' preparations for war and inspired them to impose certain restrictions on the media in order to avoid another Vietnam in the Persian Gulf. Then, the chapter explores how the biased media rhetoric during the Gulf Crisis contributed to promoting the military solution through adopting government propaganda and how it continued to be biased during the war.

## **Chapter One: U.S Propaganda and Media Performance during the Cold War Era**

## Introduction

During the Cold War rivalry, the United States launched huge anti-communist propaganda campaigns against the communist Soviet Union. U.S propaganda represented the Soviets and their communist allies as a threat to American national security and to the free world in general. It also promoted that fighting communism in the world was inevitable. Throughout the decades-long Cold War, this propaganda was massively used by the United States to achieve global interests and to sell several military interventions. Moreover, the American media appeared as an influential actor on the Cold War theatre and undertook a critical role. The collapse of the Soviet Union, which ended the Cold War, demonstrated the importance of wartime propaganda for the United States and had direct impact on U.S propaganda and media policies of the 1991 Gulf War.

This chapter seeks first to clarify the position of the media in the U.S Constitution and explain its traditional role. Then, it provides a short review of the use of propaganda at wartime. Next, the chapter reviews how propaganda achieved certain U.S Cold War objectives and how the media contributed to advancing propaganda efforts. Finally, this chapter discusses the media performance during the Vietnam War, one of the U.S military interventions of the Cold War that subsequently influenced the Gulf War politics.

### **I. Media in the U.S Constitution and its Traditional Role**

In general, the word 'media' refers to all print and non-print communication outlets, including books, magazines, newspapers, radio, television, internet, and even songs and movies. As an institution, the media represents one of the most powerful actors of the political arena in the United States. Therefore, it is usually referred to as the Fourth Estate, putting it on the same status as the three branches of the U.S government<sup>1</sup>. The American media has obtained this powerful position under the Constitutional law as early as the nation's birth. (The Media in the United States, Freedom of the Press).

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<sup>1</sup> Three branches of the United States government are the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial.

After the success of the Revolutionary War in the eighteenth century, it was time for the newly independent country to craft the Constitution that would guide and sustain the nation. Among the first principles that the framers of the U.S Constitution were adamant to include in their national document was freedom of the press. For them, it was a basic pillar of democracy that had to be legally protected. Therefore, freedom of the press is included in the Bill of Rights as one of the fundamental human rights and liberties and of no less importance than the right to life, work, and the freedom of religion and speech. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution, one of the ten amendments included in the Bill of Rights, states that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press" (qtd. in. *The Media in the United States, Freedom of the Press*).

Interpretations of the First Amendment, which became a law in 1791, agree that the United States Constitution, as the country's supreme law, protects the press from all sorts of censorship or repression. Thereby, the government, with all its agencies and officials, may not imprison or fine individuals or organizations for their opinions and writings because that will be a violation of the Constitutional law, with the exception of some cases. (Stone and Eugene) These powerful state of the U.S media was well summarised in the words of Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, who stated in 1971, "The government's power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of the government and inform the people." (qtd. in Lantis).

For many Americans, the media represents the primary source of entertainment, learning, and news. As the Fourth Estate, the media has undertaken the role of "watchdog" to the other branches of the U.S government to inform the public of their decisions and activities. It is thus an independent mediator between the public and the government. Moreover, it has the right to challenge and criticise the government's policies, raise debates, and ask questions. At times of election, the media is supposed to be a credible source of information for the electorates in order to help them choosing their representatives, and then it acts as a 'conduit of communication' between those electorates and their elected representatives. (Richard et al. 261). These media's roles are highly important for a healthy democratic environment. However, they acquired a strong independent media. It is for this, freedom of the media is a protected by the Constitution.

## II. Propaganda and War

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, propaganda can be defined as “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause.” In other words, it is a way of biased communication that aims to achieve certain objectives of the propagandist. Etymologically speaking, the term itself is derived from Latin. It was first used in the early Seventeenth-Century Europe by the Catholic Church, which launched the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, Congregation for Propagating the Faith, in 1622 to defend and spread faith in the non- catholic world. (Zoschak) As a technique of influence, propaganda is as old as human history. In *Munitions of the Mind*, Philip M. Taylor claims that the first use of organised propaganda could have originated in the Middle East, specifically in ancient Mesopotamia, the cradle of the first civilised societies in history, with the start of the Neolithic Age (20).

Throughout history, propaganda has been strongly linked to war. At wartime, leaders use propaganda to generate patriotic sentiments and mobilise popular support for war. The Greeks and Romans were among the first to use propaganda in wartime. In 480 BC, for example, propaganda contributed greatly to the victory of the ancient Greek commander Themistocles over his enemy Xerxes. Roman Emperor Julius Caesar was also famous for his heavy reliance on propaganda during his wars. In the Middle Ages Europe, propaganda was the means through which Catholic popes like Urban II mobilised huge numbers of people for the Crusades (1096-1271) to recover Christian holy lands such as Jerusalem from Islamic rule. Propaganda fed the religious conflict between Christians and Muslims for more than a century, causing human disasters. (Zoschak)

With the introduction of Gutenberg's printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, propaganda began a new chapter of its history. The production of written materials became faster and cheaper, which facilitated the spread of thoughts and opinions. Using this advanced print technology, sixteenth century thinkers widely spread anti-Catholic propaganda, which led to one of the landmarks of the European history, the Reformation. During the Reformation era, both Catholics and Protestants made use of propaganda against each other to mobilise people for several conflicts. (Zoschak)

In the eighteenth century, propaganda made a significant part of the American Revolutionary War. The Founding Fathers believed propaganda was important to advance their cause against the British Empire. Therefore, they adeptly used it to promote their cause globally and mobilise American people to fight. (Zoschak)

In the early years of the twentieth century, humanity experienced one of the most destructive wars in modern history, World War I (1914-1918), which represented the “modern propaganda’s launching pad” (Manning. et. al. xxviii). The Great War was the first in which entire governments from the Allies and the Central Powers publicly engaged in the propaganda production. In Germany, for instance, the government created the Central Office for Foreign Services in order to spread its views of war and generate pro-German sentiments in the world. The British government, for its part, created the War Propaganda Bureau in which skillful British writers were called upon to write the war influential propaganda messages. Among the main objectives of Great War propaganda was to influence neutral countries. As a matter of fact, British propaganda was effectively able to convince the United States of entering the war. Based on fabrication, misinformation, and exaggeration, propaganda could mobilise support for World War I then for World War II and fed the global conflicts for years, causing millions of casualties. (Zoschak)

### **III. U.S Propaganda of the Cold War**

As early in the aftermath of World War II, the United States got engaged in a decades-long conflict against the Soviet Union. The former war allies emerged from the Second Great War as the world superpowers, with nuclear capabilities, different ideologies, and different political and economic perceptions. Their ideological differences developed into long rivalry for domination and global leadership that divided the world into East and West in the framework of the Cold War. Throughout their rivalry, the United States and the Soviet Union got never engaged in a direct military confrontation, but proxy wars were another expression of their competition for the world leadership. (Day)

Proxy wars, also called limited wars, were usually civil wars in which each of the United States and the Soviet Union funded and militarily assisted one of the warring sides against the other in order to establish loyal governments and thereby expanding their spheres of dominance. Throughout the Cold War era, the United States engaged in various proxy wars

such as the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and other armed conflicts. In order to legitimise their military interventions in these conflicts, the U.S leaders heavily relied on propaganda, which was an integral part of all their war efforts. Anti-communism was the core of the American propaganda machine, which portrayed the Soviet Union and its allies as imperial and colonial powers that seriously threatened the free world. On the other hand, anti-communist propaganda represented the United States as a leader to the free world that was committed to unite it and defend its freedom against the threat of the Communist Red Colonialism.

Anti-communist propaganda played an important role in the Korean War (1950-1953) and served in achieving several objectives. Using anti-communist rhetoric, the United States succeeded in influencing international community and convincing the majority of the United Nations' (UN) members that the war was an act of colonialism by the communist government of North Korea, backed by the Soviet Union and China, against peaceful South Korea. Then, in order to legitimise deployment of U.S forces into the Korean Peninsula, American propagandists asserted their country's commitment to assist the free people in their struggle against colonialism, to protect and defend them against the dangers of Communism, and to contain Communism wherever it existed to promote freedom and peace (policy of containment). Such propaganda themes proved effective; the United States succeeded to lead a UN military coalition to roll the communist forces back from anti-communist South Korean soil. (The Korean War)

Moreover, the United States relied on propaganda to advance the psychological warfare that the U.S administration of President Truman waged against the North Korean communists. As an example, propaganda leaflets, designed and produced by the U.S army, were dropped from aircrafts over the combat areas to sway North Korean opinion against the communists. Such propaganda efforts sowed doubt and fear among North Korean troops and consequently affected stability within the enemy's camps and affected its military performance in the battlefields. (Hoh)

Similar to the Korean War, propaganda had a vital role in the Vietnam War, too. The latter was a military conflict between the communist North Vietnam and the non-communist South Vietnam. Under fear of the fall of South Vietnam into communism, which would expand the Soviets' zones of influence and damage American Cold War interests, the United States found

it necessary to back and fund the Southern Vietnamese. Using the same anti-communist propaganda rhetoric, the United States portrayed the Northern leaders as a communist colonial threat that was strongly backed by the Soviets. Moreover, it asserted that the fall of Vietnam into communism would strengthen the Soviets' colonialism in the world and inevitably lead to the fall of other areas into colonial control, which would seriously threaten the free world. This propaganda enabled the United States to legitimise sending military advisors and financial and military aids to the South. (John Cull et al. 417,419)

In 1964, the American leaders thought that providing financial and military aids for the Southern Vietnamese government was insufficient and that they had to get a full scale involvement in Vietnam. Therefore, they claimed that North Vietnamese attacked two American naval destroyers that were in the Coast of Vietnam. This fictional story was used in the propaganda campaign against communism to legitimise U.S military involvement in the country. Using this fabricated story, anti-communist propaganda became more effective and enabled the United States to justify the deployment of American soldiers into Vietnam. (John Cull et al. 417,419)

Before going to any of these wars, U.S leaders directed anti-communist propaganda to the home front first. At home, it was greatly necessary to rally popular support for military interventions to give them a perception of legitimacy. In this context, anti-communist propaganda was of a great impact on American public opinion. It succeeded in convincing the Americans that communism was a threat to their national security, way of life, principles, interests, and future. This created a national consensus among Americans that the Soviet Union was a national enemy. Propaganda also convinced Americans that their country was the leader of the free world against colonial communism, and it was its duty to defend and protect it. Consequently, the United States succeeded in mobilising popular support for the Cold War policies and importantly for military interventions in Korea, Vietnam, and other parts of the world.

The United States also relied on propaganda to justify its participation in the foundation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). As a military alliance, the NATO would strengthen the U.S defense strategy of the Cold War and thereby advance American efforts of confronting the Soviets' expansion in the world. Yet, according to American propaganda rhetoric, the U.S participation in the NATO was to further American efforts of confronting the

communist aggressive colonialism and to better defend and protect the free world. Such propaganda discourse was repeatedly reproduced by the American leaders, including President Truman who stated: “by this treaty, we are not only seeking to establish freedom from aggression and from the use of force in the North Atlantic community, but we are also actively striving to promote and preserve peace throughout the world.”(qtd, in, North Atlantic Organization Treaty). Anti-communist propaganda discourse, moreover, played a major role at the home front to persuade isolationists, whether senators or citizens, that signing the treaty and engaging in world affairs was to promote American national security from the communist colonial threat. Later, American propaganda themes effectively persuaded many countries, especially neutrals, to join the NATO and thereby strengthen and enlarge the anti- communist military alliance. (The United States and NATO)

Attracting global allies is a core objective during any international conflict. During the Cold War rivalry, having more allies meant more domination in the world. For the United States, attracting allies was achieved through propaganda. In this context, anti-communist propaganda served as a tool of U.S foreign policy. Negatively depicting the Communist ideology and demonising communist leaders, the United States was able to enlarge the global anti-communist camp and thereby expand U.S spheres of dominance in the world. In the European continent, which knew a growing communist predominance in the Eastern part, following the conclusion of World War II, the United States’ propaganda promoted that the communists were the new enemy that would destroy the European continent just as Nazi Germany did. Also, it promised that America would spare no effort to contain communist expansion and defend the free world against the Soviets colonial power. Under these propaganda themes, several policies (policy of containment) and financial aids (European Recovery Program) were approved to demonstrate the American commitment towards Europe. As a result, American anti-communist propaganda in Europe enabled the United States to confront the Soviets’ expansion in the continent and recruit more European countries in the global alliance against the Soviet Union to achieve the Cold War objectives. (The United States and NATO)

The same propaganda messages were used to recruit allies in regions like the Middle East, the oil-rich region. The strategic location of the Middle East made it perfect for establishing American military bases for any confrontation against communist powers. Therefore, U.S

leaders widely invested in anti-communist propaganda and provided military and financial assistance under the same justifications; “to protect the free people against armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism.” (qtd. in. *The Middle East: United States Policy and Relations in the Latter Half of the 20th Century*). Again, American propaganda proved working. It reinforced the U.S military presence in the Middle East and incorporated countries such as Lebanon and Saudi Arabia into the global alliance against the Soviets. (*The Middle East: United States Policy and Relations in the Latter Half of the 20th Century*).

Throughout the Cold War, anti-communist propaganda efforts played important roles and contributed to achieving the U.S victory by the end. At home, propaganda swayed public opinion in favour of the government policies and rallied popular support for military interventions. In global level, it enabled the United States to legitimise its activities in the world, strengthen its military presence, and recruit more allies into the anti-communist camp as many communist regimes collapsed in favour of democracies, leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

#### **IV. U.S Media as an Instrument of Cold War Propaganda**

In the United States, the media is a powerful institution that plays a vital role in the American political and social life. For millions of Americans, the media represents the primary source of news, learning, and entertainment, which makes it of a great influence over people's beliefs and views of domestic and international affairs. During the Cold War, the United States made use of the media power of influence and used it to advance the U.S Cold War propaganda efforts. Consequently, American media became one of the very important propaganda instruments that were conscripted to achieve four principal objectives: “generating confidence in American leadership of the free world, countering the misrepresentations of the United States in communist propaganda, asserting that American desired peace, but was nevertheless prepared for war, and undermining the confidence of communists in the Soviet Union while encouraging non-communist forces throughout the Eastern bloc.” (Dijk. et. al.722)

In order to effectively advance propaganda efforts through the media, the American leaders imposed a strict censorship over the media news to control the media discourse. The United

States justified the media censorship as an emergency measure of the Cold War to prevent reporting any news that might be useful to the enemy or harmful to the country. The American media professionals accepted the government restrictions and censorship, without any challenge or criticism. Moreover, they gave up their traditional role as a watchdog to the government and became a mouthpiece for the American leaders, dutifully conveying their propaganda messages. They deliberately framed and reported the news in a way that served the government's interests. Subsequently, journalists justified their biased, unobjective performance as being a patriotic duty to confront the communist threat of the Cold War and promote national security. (Blanchard. 352)

Accordingly, the American media, mainly radio and then television, largely contributed to the Cold War victory. At the home front, the media rhetoric negatively reported the Soviet Union, its allies, and their communist ideology. It portrayed them as inhuman, evil, bloodthirsty colonial powers that threatened the Americans' principles of freedom and democracy, and thereby it threatened their future. This rhetoric shaped popular acceptance for the Cold War policies and rallied support for the American policies of containment that legitimised several military interventions. The media not only mobilised support for the United States' involvements in Korea and Vietnam, for instance, but it also convinced the Americans that increasing the defense spending was necessary for promoting national security. In 1970, the media played an important role in maintaining public support for Western governments' weapon modernisation programmes, although they had heavy effects on the economic life of people. Moreover, the media marginalised all opposing voices to the government policies and prevented them from performing their democratic right of speaking their opinions. (Linda)

During the Cold War crises, the American media worked to promote American views and generate pro-American sentiments among international public opinion. In 1962, for instance, the United States discovered that the Soviet Union built bases for ballistic nuclear missiles in Cuba. This resulted in the Cuban Missile Crisis in which the world was on the brink of a destructive nuclear war. The American leaders made use of the crisis to support the propaganda campaigns against communism and to promote that communist powers were a serious threat to the entire world. Thus, instead of dealing with the crisis using private diplomacy, President Kennedy chose to use television, the most popular and influential

medium then, to address international public opinion and to globalise what he called an ‘offensive’, ‘provocative’ and ‘unacceptable buildup’ in Cuba. Television immediately adopted the government's viewpoint and provided daily coverage for the crisis, leaving no room for opposite opinions. This was the stance of the U.S media in general, which “acted as a willing partner in the administration’s strategy” (qtd. in Watson, 79).

In this spirit, the U.S media was supportive for the military intervention against communism in Vietnam. It applauded the deployment of American forces into Vietnam, without questioning the necessity of such a war. The media dutifully promoted the American presentation of the conflict and presented it as inevitable to confront the Red Colonialism of the Soviets. Through the daily coverage of the conflict, the Vietnamese were depicted as aggressor while the American soldiers as victims to generate popular sympathy and support. (Alter)

Until 1964, the U.S military intervention in Vietnam enjoyed a great popular support. But by late 1964, the escalated involvement of the United States in Vietnam led to a growing interest in the war by the global news media. Correspondents of different nationalities had stationed in Vietnam to cover the war, which made controlling media difficult for the government. Consequently, correspondents enjoyed an unprecedented freedom of access to the battlefields and cover stories there without following any official guidelines. Moreover, the technological advancement and the introduction of television made censorship problematic. Television changed the nature and intensity of coverage, providing another dimension of war. It provided a plethora of news programs about the war. Thus, the Vietnam War has been accessible to the public as no war has done before. People in the United States witnessed clear images of violence, destruction, massacres committed by American soldiers, villages being destroyed, and children and women being burned. (Beamish)

The uncensored coverage of the Cold War military intervention in Vietnam turned public opinion against the government policies and led eventually to the withdrawal of the American forces. However, the media primarily served as a propaganda tool that manipulated American public opinion and shaped its acceptance and support for the military intervention at first. This unforeseen situation subsequently had direct effects on the American leaders’ policies towards media during the first major international conflict in the post-Cold War era, the 1991 Gulf War. The latter would be overshadowed by the Cold War experiences, mainly the

Vietnam War, and would witness the American leaders adopting new approach towards media in particular. (Leahey. 78)

## **Conclusion**

The Cold War rivalry demonstrates to what extent propaganda is an important weapon of war for the United States and how the American media becomes, during times of wars and crises, a tool that the U.S leaders make use of to advance their propaganda efforts. During the Cold War, U.S leaders heavily relied on propaganda to sell their military interventions in different parts of the world, including Korea and Vietnam, and to justify their military policies, including the participation in the NATO, increasing the defense spending, and approving weapon modernisation programmes. The American media played a major role as a propaganda vehicle to advance these policies and efforts. Consequently, propaganda and the media served as strongly linked weapons and contributed to the American victory over the communist Soviet Union, bringing the United States into global leadership after a decades-long struggle. However, the consequences of the cold war had direct effects on the 1991 Gulf War, the first major military conflict for the United States in the Post-Cold War era.

## **Chapter Two: U.S Propaganda of the First Gulf War.**

## **Introduction**

The East-West ‘long twilight struggle’<sup>2</sup> demonstrated the important roles U.S propaganda and media play during times of war. Thereafter, the dissolution of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War rivalry and brought the United States into global leadership. The United States immediately engaged in the 1991 Gulf War to defend U.S interests in the region. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a propaganda crisis for the U.S leaders of the new era who had to find new propaganda type to sell the war in the Persian Gulf. The U.S search for new propaganda rhetoric for the new military adventure asserted that wartime propaganda was indispensable for the United States.

This chapter focuses on American propaganda of the 1991 Gulf War. It first clarifies the historical importance of the war as the first international military conflict in the post-Cold War era. Then, it discusses American interests that the Bush administration sought to defend through the first war on Iraq. Moreover, the chapter explains how the demise of the Soviet Union and communism in general made it necessary for the United States to find a new propaganda type for selling the War in the Gulf. Finally, based on several speeches of President George. H. W. Bush, the chapter analyses American propaganda messages that the Bush administration relied upon to legitimise the U.S military intervention in the Persian Gulf.

### **I. The Historical Significance of the First Gulf War**

According to U.S President George H. W. Bush, the demise of Communism gave birth to a new era in the world’s affairs<sup>3</sup>. On January 31, 1990, Bush confirmed that the United States and its Allies triumphed over their communist enemy and brought the Cold War into end. He asserted that democracy, freedom, and peace would be the dominant aspects of the international relations, and that maintaining these aspects would be the objective of the new world under American leadership; a “leadership that only the United States can provide.” (H.

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<sup>2</sup> A name that President John Kennedy gave to the Cold War.

<sup>3</sup> Bush’s States of Union Address ( January 29, 1990) <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/january-31-1990-state-union-address>

W. Bush) Few months after Bush's speech, and in light of these global changes, Iraq invaded Kuwait.

From 1980 to 1989, Iraq fought a bitter war against Iran and prevented its expansion into the Arabian Peninsula. Iraqi funding for the war depended on loans. By the end of the war, President Saddam Hussein called on the Gulf countries to cancel Iraq's debts because he defended the region's security and protected it from the danger of Iranian expansion, but they refused. Saddam also accused Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates of excessive oil production, which led to lower oil prices and harmed the Iraqi economy. Not only that, Saddam Hussein claimed that Kuwait was stealing oil from Iraqi fields. For all these reasons combined, Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied Kuwait on August 2nd, 1990. Six days later, the United States condemned Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and President Bush considered it 'a threat to the new age of freedom and peace'<sup>4</sup>. For its part, the United Nations (UN) imposed mandatory economic sanctions to isolate Iraq and oblige it to withdraw from Kuwait. However, on January 17, 1991, the United States claimed that diplomatic efforts failed to resolve the crisis and led a multinational military coalition to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, announcing the beginning of the First Gulf War under the legitimacy of the United Nations.

The war in the Gulf was historically important in terms of the critical time in which it took place and in terms of the global changes that preceded the war. It broke out at a time when the world had recently emerged from a long and exhausting era of East-West conflict and was preparing to welcome a new era of peaceful relations under a new world order. As a result, several countries have reduced their military spending under peace dividend expectations. At that time, the war posed a new military challenge and indicated that the new era would not be as stable as it was expected. (Kettle)

Moreover, in light of the American post-Cold War rhetoric, which was full of peace promises for the new era, the United States, as leader of the new world, was expected to deal with the Gulf crisis with more diplomatic tools to find peaceful resolution. But declaring war on Iraq and mobilising several countries to do so made it clear that the United States' promises

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<sup>4</sup> Bush's Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait ( August 8, 1990) <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-8-1990-address-iraqs-invasion-kuwait>

of a peaceful world could fall apart at any time in favour of American interests. In this context, the military intervention in the Gulf region demonstrated that It was not about liberating ‘one small nation’ , as Bush called it, but it was about defending and securing U.S interests in the region, especially that America “had the very concrete possibility of a just peace and...chose war” (qtd. in. Chomsky).

## **II. U.S Interests in the First Gulf War**

The 1991 Gulf war was necessary for the United States’ interests in the region, which were mainly about oil. The Gulf countries, including Iraq and Iran, have controlled more than sixty percent (60%) of the world's oil reserves, which made the region an important player in the international energy market. (Fandy) On the other hand, the American economy relied heavily on oil, which made it among its primary imports. In 1990, for instance, the United States imported nearly half the oil it consumed. (Bush)<sup>5</sup> For this, it was necessary for the United States to secure affordable oil supply. The thing that some Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait provided. Those countries’ regimes played a major role to maintain price stability in oil markets and became important allies to the United States. Therefore, the protection of the region was among the U.S priorities to secure its vital national interests, ignoring that the region’s regimes were not democratic and their human rights reports were not bright. (Fandy)

Low oil prices served the U.S economic interests. But on the other hand, it affected third world nation's economies, including Iraq, which were basically relied on oil exportation revenues. Iraqi invasion of Kuwait would have enabled Saddam Hussein, whose country already possessed the world's second largest reserves of oil (Bush)<sup>6</sup>, to control a vast part of the region's oil reserves. Thus, he would have been able to wage a price war and boost his economy. Under these conditions, the United States’ oil interests and economic independence were at stake. Thus, the United States found it necessary to defend its economic independence and believed that nothing could have better defended it as the force of arms. Going to war in

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<sup>5</sup> Bush’s Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait ( August 8, 1990) <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-8-1990-address-iraqs-invasion-kuwait>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

the Gulf not only secured the oil flow to the United States, but it also enabled the Bush administration to achieve further objectives in the region. It was an opportunity to maintain American naval and military presence, which already existed in the region, and justify it by the necessity of preventing any future threat.

Moreover, the war was the means by which the United States demonstrated that it was the only superpower in the world after the fall of the Soviet Union. It also represented an opportunity for the Bush administration to test new American weapons in real war conditions and to assert the U.S military superiority over its competitors. (Kellner) Additionally, the United States sought to use the 1991 Gulf War to kick the Vietnam syndrome of the Cold War era and create a new sense of victory and pride, as Bush stated<sup>7</sup>.

### **III. The Need for New War Propaganda Type**

Going to war in the Persian Gulf was necessary to sever vital U.S interests. However, defending economic interests abroad has not always been a strong reason for people to sacrifice lives. For this, how to sell the new military adventure to public opinion was the first challenge for the United States. During the Cold War era, anti-communist propaganda was a successful tool that U.S leaders relied upon to legitimise American military interventions for more than four decades. However, when President George H. W. Bush came to office, the end of the Cold War would have begun looming. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, and many communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed in favour of democracies, leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet Union enabled the United States to emerge victorious. But on the other hand, it placed the Bush administration in an unprecedented situation. Now, the containment policy, which has been the basis of U.S foreign policy since Truman's days, was no longer relevant to the new era. As a result, anti-communist propaganda became ineffective for new conflicts. Therefore, the Bush administration had to search for a new propaganda type.

Finding new propaganda or creating a new project to rally the nation around was not the problem of Bush alone. Rather, it was a challenge that all Western powers confronted after

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<sup>7</sup> Bush's speech on March 1, 1991 <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/html/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg195-2.htm>

the fall of the Soviet Union. In *Media, War and Postmodernity*, Philip Hammond explains that the presence of the Soviet Union as an adversary in the international arena has enabled the United States and Western powers to give a meaning to their policies and a justification to their military adventures. Moreover, it gave them the opportunity to rally their societies around a national project, which at the time was to contain the Soviet Union and its communist threat. When the Soviet Union fell, Western societies and their ruling elites lost those meanings and justifications, and they became in front of what he called ‘a crisis of meaning’ (Hammond, 14).

To successfully achieve their post-Cold War objectives, U.S leaders engaged in a serious and continuous search for strong justifications to their new wars. Eventually, they found a new meaning to convince the world that the use of force was inevitable. By analysing the reasons the United States mentioned for its interventions during the 1990s, one can notice that they share the same basic justification; ‘Humanitarian reasons’. Humanitarianism was the umbrella by which they intervened in several countries, and it also proved successful in convincing American and foreign public that those wars were just and worth fighting. In April 1990, the United States sent military forces into northern Iraq. According to American rhetoric, the intervention was to defend Kurdish civilians that President Saddam Hussein oppressed and to provide safe havens for them (Henderson, 101). The operation was called Operation Provide Comfort. Under the same ‘humanitarian concerns’ and using the same justification of providing a safe environment for people within their own countries, the United States intervened in Somalia (1992), Haiti (1994), Rwanda (1994), and other regions. In short, “American military muscle was thus to be given a new meaning in the post-Cold War era, no longer as a guarantor of the West’s freedoms against the menace of communism but as the steel fist inside a humanitarian velvet glove” (Hammond, 38)

Before the nineties, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) had never legitimised wars under humanitarian concerns. Issues related to human rights were regarded inappropriate for the council discussion. However, when the Gulf crisis broke out, the United States, along with its allies, could frame the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait as an aggression against a sovereign country and a violation of the UN Articles. Consequently, they succeeded, for the first time, to push the council to authorise a war under humanitarian concerns.

Accordingly, the 1991 Gulf War was the starting point of Humanitarian interventions, which became afterward the justification of the following wars of the decade (Walling, 35).

#### **IV. Pillars of U.S Propaganda of the First Gulf War**

During the build-up to the First Gulf War, the Bush administration carried out a massive propaganda campaign to prepare Americans and the world for the war against Iraq. The propagandists' objective was to rally public support for war. To this end, they created an atmosphere in which the use of force seemed to be the only solution to solve the crisis in the Persian Gulf. The 1991 Gulf War was justified on a variety of grounds. Through his speeches, President Bush provided multiple reasons about why Americans and their allies had to fight in the Persian Gulf. For many historians, those reasons that Bush provided to justify the American-led military intervention in the region were nothing but 'myths', and U.S propaganda of the first Gulf war was based on lies.

##### **IV 1. Defending Principles**

In a meeting between President Saddam Hussein and the U.S ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, held a week before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Glaspie conveyed the American opinion about the dispute between the two neighboring countries. She informed President Hussein that the United States had no opinion in Arab-Arab conflicts. However, a few days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, President George H.W. Bush made a speech condemning what he called Iraqi aggression. (Kellner)

Bush's speech was a translation of U.S propaganda against Iraq. The latter was portrayed as an aggressor that brutally 'raped' its peaceful, small, and weak neighbour (Kuwait). The Bush propaganda machine, moreover, sought to globalise the conflict and promoted that Iraqi forces in Kuwait committed war crimes, abused peaceful civilians, and violated human rights and international law. This propaganda distracted public opinion from thinking that the war was about American oil interests in the Persian Gulf and promoted the idea that it was for standing against aggression and defending a set of principles: "If history teaches us anything, it is that we must resist aggression or it will destroy our freedoms" (H.W. Bush). Accordingly, the U.S propagandists succeeded in presenting the First Gulf War as a just war and to drum up

domestic and international popular support for the military intervention of the US-led coalition in the Persian Gulf. (Kellner)

Going to war in the Persian Gulf to defend human rights of freedom and peace and to promote international law was for many reasons a myth. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was not the first act of aggression of its kind. History is full of examples of powerful nations invading their small neighbours and seizing their lands; Morocco invaded Western Sahara, Turkey occupied the northern third of Cyprus, Indonesia invaded East Timor, and Israel committed horrific crimes against the Palestinian people in full view of the international community. The four countries violated international law and the UN articles of human rights. However, no actual measures were taken to stop this aggression and defend the people's right to freedom and self-determination simply because these four countries were, at the time of their aggression, American allies. The United States itself was an ally for Iraq during the Iraq-Iran War. It secretly supported Saddam Hussein during its war against Iran. Moreover, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf countries were not democratic and their human rights records were not bright. (Zunes)

## **IV 2. Iraq's Expansionist Intentions**

To exaggerate the Iraqi threat, the United States claimed that the Iraqi regime was an expansionist. It promoted the idea that Iraq had intentions to invade Saudi Arabia and had already imposed military forces on the border with the kingdom; “Iraq has massed an enormous war machine on the Saudi border capable of initiating hostilities with little or no additional preparation” (H. W. Bush)<sup>8</sup>. In this context, and in order to convince public opinion that Iraq was capable of invading Saudi Arabia, U.S propaganda represented the Iraqi army as a powerful military force, perhaps more than it was in reality. Bush claimed that Iraq possessed the fourth largest military in the world with over a million men under arms<sup>9</sup>. These claims contributed to reinforce the idea that Iraqi regime was an aggressor that represented a

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<sup>8</sup> Bush's Address on Iraq's Invasion of Kuwait <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/august-8-1990-address-iraqs-invasion-kuwait>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

threat to its neighbours. Moreover, the United States claimed that the government of the Saudi Arabia demanded an American military assistance to defend its land.

Expansionist Iraq was another myth that American propaganda created and based upon to justify the deployment of military troops into the Persian Gulf. Iraq repeatedly asserted via its ambassador to the United States that it had no intentions to invade Saudi Arabia, and such claims were nothing but a 'big lie'. Nevertheless, in a speech he gave on September 11, 1990, Bush claimed that "Within 3 days, 120,000 Iraqi troops with 850 tanks had poured into Kuwait and moved south to threaten Saudi Arabia". About two days after Bush's speech, satellite pictures, taken by the former Soviet Union, showed literally nothing on the Iraq-Saudi border except the vast empty desert. These pictures were a compelling evident that Bush lied. Yet, the United States insisted on its propaganda disinformation and sent military troops to the region in a 'defensive mission' against aggressive Iraq. ( Hrycyszyn)

### **IV 3. Another Hitler**

In order to rally more support for its first war against Iraq, the United States needed to create an enemy and represent it as a threat to the entire world. That enemy was Saddam Hussein. The propaganda machine of the Bush administration provided an inhuman and demonised picture for Saddam Hussein, who was portrayed as a brutal dictator, a liar, and a cruel aggressor that committed crimes against innocent civilians. In his speech to the nation about the invasion of Iraq, Bush stated: "Saddam Hussein systematically raped, pillaged, and plundered a tiny nation, no threat to his own. He subjected the people of Kuwait to unspeakable atrocities—and among those maimed and murdered, innocent children." Moreover, in an attempt to exaggerate the Threat that Saddam Hussein supposedly posed to his neighbours in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, Bush implicitly compared him to Hitler who threatened his neighbours and waged unprovoked wars against them, saying: "As was the case in the 1930's, we see in Saddam Hussein an aggressive dictator threatening his neighbors." On other occasions, Bush explicitly asserted that Hussein was a new Hitler and even worse: "Brutality that... I don't believe Adolf Hitler ever participated in anything of that nature" (qtd.in. Brands and Suri, 80)

By any standard, Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was wrong. However, establishing a strong link between Saddam Hussein and Hitler was for many critics overrated. In 1939, Hitler

invaded Poland for no reason. In 1940, he attacked Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France. In 1941, he moved to invade Yugoslavia and Greece. In the afterward, he attempted to invade Great Britain and the Soviet Union. All of these wars were waged for no reason, which made them literally unnecessary but to satisfy Hitler's expansionist aspirations. On his expansionist journey, Hitler murdered millions of people, including six million Jews. Given such an aggressive history, equating Saddam Hussein with Hitler makes no sense. On the contrary, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was the result of oil disputes with neighbouring countries. Hussein made several complaints in which he repeatedly accused Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates of producing above the OPEC quota oil. He claimed that they deliberately did so to lower oil prices and damage Iraqi economy. Also, Hussein accused Kuwait of stealing oil from Iraqi fields. (Zunes)

#### **IV 4. Iraqi Nuclear Threat**

During the entire period of the build-up to the First Gulf War until the first hours of the war itself, President George H. W. Bush was each time backing up the already mentioned reasons of the war with new other ones. Two hours after the Allies forces officially joined the battlefields, Bush claimed that President Saddam Hussein not only possessed chemical weapons, but he sought to possess a nuclear weapon, too; "Saddam sought to add to the chemical weapons arsenal he now possesses, an infinitely more dangerous weapon of mass destruction—a nuclear weapon"(Bush). This, according to him, represented a threat to global security and not to the Gulf region alone. Therefore, he added, the allies' objective was to destroy the Iraqi chemical weapons facilities and to prevent Saddam Hussein from owning any nuclear weapons.

Bush's claims were another propaganda myth that the United States widely used to justify the first war against Iraq. Americans were told in 1990 that Iraq would be able to produce a nuclear weapon within five to seven years. Then, to promote the war option, they were told that the Iraqi nuclear weapon would be reality in a matter of months. Such claims were nothing but a propaganda exaggerations that the United States had already used during the Cold War to spread fear among the public. At the time, it used the red scare propaganda and claimed that the Soviet Union would, at any time, use its nuclear power. What happened was that the Soviet Union had never done, and Iraq had not as well. Iraq was located in a critical region and surrounded by nations owning nuclear weapons, such as Israel and Pakistan. They

both represented a threat to the entire Middle-East. Egypt had repeatedly called for nuclear-free zones in the region, claiming that Israel was a threat to other neighbouring countries that did not have the right to produce such weapons. However, Egyptian calls were ignored, and the United States itself was developing a nuclear arsenal. Under these conditions, Iraq believed that it had the right to develop nuclear programmes for defensive reasons. (zunes)

## **Conclusion**

The first Gulf War, according to critics and historians, could have been avoided via peaceful diplomatic means. However, the military solution was the option for the Bush administration because it would serve certain American interests in the Persian Gulf. But selling this particular war via propaganda represented a challenge for the U.S leaders. In light of the Soviet Union collapse, the Cold War anti-communist propaganda that the U.S governments heavily relied on to legitimise their military actions would no longer work. Consequently, Bush had to find alternative enemy and new propaganda rhetoric, and he did. Since the inception of the Gulf Crisis, massive propaganda campaigns were launched against Saddam Hussein. The latter was negatively portrayed by the U.S leaders, accusing him of violating international law and representing a serious threat to human rights, peace, and democracy. American propaganda was based on lies, exaggerations, and fabrications to rally popular support for the Gulf War.

**Chapter Three: The U.S Media Performance during the First Gulf  
War**

## **Introduction**

During the Cold War era, the American media significantly contributed to the victory of the United States over communism. It gave up its traditional role as a watchdog and became a propaganda tool. This unconstitutional role has been justified as a patriotic duty imposed by the extraordinary conditions of the Cold War era on journalists to defend the national security of their nation. In light of the Soviets' demise, the U.S media was supposed to get rid of propaganda performance and fulfill its traditional role as the Fourth Estate and watchdog during the 1991 Gulf War. The U.S military intervention in Vietnam during the Cold War era influenced the Bush administration's policies towards media and largely affected the media coverage of the crisis and the war.

This chapter discusses the U.S media performance during the Gulf Crisis and then the Gulf War as the first international conflict that the United States involved in after the end of the Cold War. But first, it highlights the restriction strategies that the Bush administration and the Department of Defense adopted in order to control the media rhetoric in favour of the official propaganda line. Then, it discusses the role of the U.S media during the build up to the First Gulf War and then during the war, focusing on some of the main characteristics of the then media performance.

### **I. Adapting Media to Government Propaganda**

The Vietnam War was one of the Cold War military interventions that firmly stuck in American memory as a syndrome<sup>10</sup> that had to be kicked. During the Cold War era, the U.S government was able to make use of the media power of influence and used it effectively to mobilise popular support for the U.S military involvement in the Vietnam War. But, the unprecedented conditions that accompanied the war (technological advancement and global media interest in the war) made controlling the media impossible, which resulted in unforeseen consequences.

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<sup>10</sup> The Vietnam Syndrome refers to America's wariness to engage in any foreign conflicts after the Vietnam War. Vietnam Syndrome: Definition, Causes & Impact <https://study.com/academy/lesson/vietnam-syndrome-definition-causes-impact.html>

The Vietnam War showed the extent to which public opinion at home could influence the course of events on the battlefields. It also showed how public opinion, under the influence of the news media, could turn against government decisions at any time. These facts seemed to have been lessons the Bush administration learned from the Vietnam War and had a great impact on its policies of the First Gulf War. In the very first hours of operation desert storm, Bush promised: "this will not be another Vietnam...our troops will have the best possible support in the entire world". Then, when the allies returned home victorious from the Persian Gulf, he declared that the United States had kicked the Vietnam syndrome.

In order to kick the Vietnam syndrome and avoid any unforeseen circumstances that might shuffle the First Gulf War cards, the Bush administration sought to adapt the media to the government propaganda. For this, a completely different approach was taken towards the media, and new restrictions were imposed on journalist's reports. Two days before the war against Iraq broke out, the Department of Defense (DOD) issued The Operation Desert Shield and Supplementary Guidelines. This was a set of guidelines in which various types of information were banned, including information about military plans and tactics, details of military operations, and even information about both friendly and enemy forces. Moreover, everything about the activities of the special operations forces was considered sensitive information that journalists were not allowed to report. Thus, the news that American public could see or hear about operations in the Persian Gulf was only those that fit military standards. Additionally, for further control over the news media coverage, the DOD implemented a strategy to restrict reporters' access to the war hotspots using the pool system and subjected their gathered news to censorship through a review system. (Smyth)

The media pool system was a strategy that the military adopted in the First Gulf War to restrict the news media access to areas of battles. The DOD organised "pools" in which a limited number of journalists, accompanied by military personnel, were allowed to access and exclusively gather the war news. On the other hand, journalists who did not participate in the "pool" groups were prevented from traveling to zones of operations and conducting individual reports. Worth noting, joining a pool group was not available to any journalist, but only to selected ones that enjoy some criteria determined by the military. This way, the DOD succeeded in preventing a large portion of journalists from performing their function of

gathering news and reporting events, knowing that even the pools' journalists were prevented from covering some operations' events. (Smyth)

On the other hand, censorship through a review system was another strategy to restrict the function of news media personnel. Reporters who obtained access to some areas of operations had to submit all the information and news they gathered to public affairs officers from the Department of Defense before dissemination. The officers subjected the information to a strict content security review in order to check whether or not the reporters respected the recommendations of Operation Desert Shield and Supplementary Guidelines. The review process cost correspondents days, waiting for final decisions of the officers. (Smyth)

The American media showed no challenge or criticism of either the pool system or the review system. (Kellner)

## **II. The U.S Media Coverage of the Gulf Crisis**

At the very inception of the Gulf Crisis, the United States deployed military forces into Saudi Arabia on a "defensive" mission to protect the kingdom from any Iraqi aggression. The American military deployment in the Gulf region created an intense division in the American social and political arena and projected a climate of debate over the wisdom of such a move. As an independent institution, the role of the American media in such times of crisis is to reflect the existing debate, challenge the government propaganda, and question the wisdom of war. However, the U.S media failed to fulfill this role. Instead, it accepted the official U.S line and served as a propaganda vehicle, repeating the same lies and applauding the military solution to the crisis. (Kellner)

### **II 1. The Media Promotion of the Military Solution**

From the early days of the Gulf Crisis, the American media contributed to promoting the military solution through reinforcing the disinformation propaganda campaign of the Bush administration. Stories about Saddam Hussein's expansionist aspirations, his potential weapons of destruction, and Iraqi regime human rights abuses and atrocities were consistently reported during the period leading up to the First Gulf War. Most of these stories were fabricated to manipulate public opinion and sway it in favour of the war. Right after the

invasion of Kuwait, American print and non-print media widely propagated government officials' claims about Iraqi designs to invade Saudi Arabia. Although there was no evidence supporting their claims, the media blindly reproduced them as an absolute truth. Moreover, figures about Iraqi forces on the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia were daily repeated by the media, exaggerating the strength of Iraqi army. For instance, on August 3, one day after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, ABC, one of the dominant television stations in the United States, reported that: "Tens of thousands of Iraqi troops are reportedly massed along the Saudi Arabian border, and there is still fear that Saddam Hussein will carry his blitzkrieg across Saudi territory. .... Iraq's million-man battle-seasoned army...., 5,500 Iraqi tanks, 10 times as many as Saudi Arabia." (qtd. in. Kellner) Iraqi plans of invading neighbouring Saudi Arabia occupied the U.S newspapers headlines, too. *The New York Times*, for example, reported on August 4 that:

Pentagon officials said that more than 60,000 Iraqi troops were massing in the southern part of Kuwait, not far from a major oilfield in Saudi Arabia. A State Department spokesman, Richard A. Boucher, said Iraqi troops were within five to ten miles of the frontier. The British foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd, said that Iraqi troops were massing on the border....There were conflicting reports about the size of the Iraqi military force in Kuwait, but one Pentagon official estimated late today that it was approaching 100,000 troops, or more than Iraq needs to pacify and occupy Kuwait. (qtd. in. Kellner)

On September 11 and 13, satellite images taken by a Soviet company revealed the lies of American propaganda. The photos showed nothing on the Iraqi-Saudi border except for an empty desert and proved that American media reports, which were mostly based on administration officials' statements, were nothing but disinformation campaign. The photos were widely distributed in the American media. However, the latter chose not to pursue the story and preferred to hide the truth, ignoring the right of the American people to be informed of these developments. (Hrycyszyn)

Throughout the five-month period before the war broke out, projecting a negative image for Saddam Hussein and Iraqi regime was a continuous process by the U.S media in order to promote the military solution to the Gulf Crisis. Few months after reporting the fabricated news about Iraqi troops massing on the Saudi border, the U.S media came up with another

nonexistent event. On October 10, 1990, a fifteen-year old Kuwaiti girl called Nayirah, who presented herself as a volunteer in a Kuwaiti hospital, gave a testimony before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus. The girl, who provided nothing about her identity except her first name, claimed that Iraqi soldiers stormed the hospital, took about 300 newborn babies out of their incubators, and threw them on the ground to die. Nayirah's testimony was widely propagated by the American media to show the world Iraqi soldiers' brutality, without the slightest suspicion about the girl's true identity or the veracity of her story. The emotional 'incubator story' has had a strong impact on public opinion that has turned in favour of the military intervention in the Persian Gulf. Months later, after the war has already broke out, it was discovered that Nayirah was a Kuwaiti Princess from Al-Sabah Royal family. She was the Daughter of Kuwaiti Ambassador to the United States, Saud Nassir al-Sabah, and the whole story she told was fictional. (Kellner)

Moreover, the American media played a pivotal role in the Bush administration's anti-Saddam campaign. Demonising Iraqi leader was a basic pillar of the administration's propaganda to legitimise the war. Therefore, the American media, which turned a blind eye to Saddam Hussein's practices before, suddenly dehumanised him and highlighted his regime's abuses and atrocities. The media has portrayed Saddam Hussein as a brutal dictator, a liar, and a cruel aggressor. It accused him of violating human rights in his country and committing crimes against his own people. In this context, a special focus was given to Saddam's abuses against Kurds people in north Iraq, and reports about his regime persecution of the Kurdish people were widely propagated. Moreover, American media sought to represent Saddam Hussein as a threat to the entire region and the world, not just to his people. Therefore, it deliberately overstated the Gulf Crisis. (Kellner)

By any standards, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was unacceptable, but the U.S media reported it in an exaggerated light as if it was an unprecedented case, ignoring that Iraq, with U.S support, had already waged war against Iran during the 1980s. Thus, while remaining silent during the Iran-Iraq war, American media used the invasion of Kuwait to reinforce a negative image of the Iraqi leader and represent him as a "brash and brutal leader, whose tactics have terrorised his neighbors, incited the Israelis with threats of chemical retaliation and made the superpowers look like helpless giants." (qtd. in. Kellner) The media demonisation process of Iraqi leader helped the American government to legitimise the

deployment of American troops to Saudi Arabia. However, some journalists went even further when they prodded President Bush to take a military action against Baghdad and eliminate Saddam Hussein. For example, On August 7, Mary McGrory, a Washington Post journalist, referred to Saddam Hussein as ‘the beast of Baghdad’ and recommended Bush to bomb Iraq. Then, on August 19, columnist Henry Kissinger preferred directing what he called a “surgical strike” against Iraq and promoted his view throughout the entire period leading up to the war. Following the lead of Kissinger, New York Times’ William Safire, the Wall Street Journal, National Review, and many others urged the military action against Baghdad. (Kellner)

While the American media have been involved in a consistent process of demonising the Iraqi leader, it has also engaged in pro-Bush propaganda. Unlike Saddam Hussein, who was usually referred to as Hitler, beast, monster, and other dehumanized epithets, Bush was represented in purely positive terms, without criticising his administration's war policies. Instead of questioning the necessity of war or wisdom of sending military troops to Saudi Arabia, media applauded Bush’s ‘brilliant’ diplomacy and praised his way of dealing with the crisis. It also criticized countries that seemed reserved about the military solution to the crisis. (Kellner)

Additionally, the media coverage of the Gulf Crisis has placed a heavy emphasis on Iraq's alleged possession of chemical weapons. From the early days of the crisis to the outbreak of the war, there were endless detailed press reports about those weapons and Iraq's intention to use them against neighbouring countries. On August 8, for instance, American television networks spoke of Iraqi planes loaded with chemical weapons heading towards Kuwait. As a matter of fact, Iraq has never used chemical weapons in Kuwait, but such reports misled public opinion and made people believe that war would be the only way to stop Iraqi aggression. The U.S media, moreover, exaggerated the Iraqi weapons’ danger and accused Iraq of possessing internationally banned weapons such as the Fuel Air Explosive (FAE). On 5 October 1990, the *Los Angeles Times* relied on Pentagon misinformation and provided a detailed description of the Iraqi FAE bombs, which have the effect of a small nuclear weapon. Eventually, when the war broke out, it was the United States that used FAE bombs, not Iraq. (Hrycyszyn)

Besides focusing on Iraqi weapons, stories about the atrocities that Iraqis committed against foreign hostages have made a large part of American media coverage of the crisis. The

U.S print and broadcasting media provided a daily coverage, discussing everything related to the foreign hostages held in Kuwait; the inhuman conditions they lived, their relatives' suffering, methods of their release, etc. Every night, American audience could watch the testimonies of returning hostages on Talk TV Shows. Returned hostages, who were referred to as innocent victims, told terrifying stories about 'savage', 'barbaric', and 'evil' Iraqis. The media overdramatised representation of the hostages stories contributed to intensifying anti-Iraq sentiments and swaying public opinion in favour of the war path. (Kellner)

## **II 2. The Media Marginalisation of Anti-War Voices**

At the outset of the Gulf Crisis, several criticising voices to the U.S military intervention rose in the American press. Some journalists such as Conservative Roland Evans and Robert Novak attacked the overstated anti-Saddam Hussein campaign, while radical Alexander Cockburn and conservative Tom Bethell criticised the Bush administration's war policy. But, those voices and other voices that have criticised the deployment of U.S military forces in Saudi Arabia have rarely been heard on television networks. (Kellner)

According to a study by FAIR, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, the entire time devoted for everything related to anti-war opinions did not surpass 29 minutes throughout five months of the crisis coverage. That is, during the buildup of the First Gulf War, the mainstream media, particularly television, provided no room for such voices. In general, all dissent or criticising opinions to the Bush administration's policy concerning the Gulf Crisis were marginalised from the media debates. Anti-war journalists, politicians, and even foreign policy experts such as Noam Chomsky and Edward Said were not allowed to appear on television and speak their opinions on public. Media tendency of ignoring and marginalising experts like Chomsky and Said was because both of them bucked the trend and tended to a peaceful settlement to the crisis. Moreover, the period leading up to the war in the Gulf was marked by numerous protests by anti-war movements, raising the slogan "No blood for oil." Those movements were also ignored by the mainstream media, and the very few images of those manifestations that appeared on the media represented anti-war demonstrators in a negative light, using negative terms. (Kellner)

### **III. The U.S Media Coverage of the War**

Five months after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, U.S President George. H. W. Bush announced the outbreak of the First Gulf War, or Operation Desert Storm, on January 17, 1991, blaming Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for the failure of diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis peacefully. The First Gulf War was the largest offensive since World War II. The US-led coalition forces launched systematic air and ground strikes that targeted and relentlessly destroyed military and civilian infrastructure in Iraq, causing heavy economic losses and terrorising the Iraqi population. (Kellner)

The war has received large scale international media coverage. In the United States, there has been a wall-to-wall press and television coverage since the first night the military operations began. The media coverage of the conflict in the Gulf differentiated from the coverage of any previous war due to several factors. Perhaps the most important factor was that American media, for the first time in war history, was able to provide a live coverage for a military conflict. Thanks to technological advancement, American public at home was able to follow the ongoing events of the Gulf War instantaneously. Similar to the crisis coverage, the U.S media continued its biased and supportive performance to the Bush administration's policies during the war, too. Throughout the period leading up to the First Gulf War, the U.S media urged the military solution to the crisis and considered it a normal response to Iraqi aggression. But once the war started, it laid all blame on Saddam Hussein alone, painting a positive image for the coalition forces' performance and leading another propaganda campaign against Iraqis and their leader. (Kellner)

#### **III 1. Constructing a Positive Image for the War in the Persian Gulf**

For the United States, the First Gulf War was militarily winnable as the coalition forces were more powerful and advanced than the Iraqi forces. American concerns, however, were mainly related to public opinion. With the Vietnam War in mind, it was extremely important for the United States to ensure steady and continuous support for the Gulf War efforts in order to avoid any unforeseen circumstances. This created a general consensus among the U.S ruling elite about the necessity of presenting a positive image of the war and avoiding any undesirable scenes that might turn public opinion against the military option. In this context, the ruling elite believed that media, if used well, was the best means through which they

would be able to construct the required positive image and thereby mobilise public opinion in favour of the war. Consequently, heavy restriction policies and censorship rules such as the pool system and the review system were imposed over the journalists' work, with an unprecedented news management to control the news flow and the media rhetoric. Worth noting, "the war started and finished without any real challenge [by the major media outlets] to the pool system" (Kellner) or any objective criticism for those unprecedented restrictions. Instead, the media fell into the official line, followed the rules, and sought to paint a bright image for the war. (Kellner)

The war began in the early hours of January 17th with an intense aerial offensive on Baghdad, causing massacres in which thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed. However, the image that the American public at home received via the mainstream media about the war was different. From the first night of the war coverage, the media, particularly television, focused on promoting the idea of a 'clean war' to demonstrate that the First Gulf War was not the Vietnam War. Therefore, all the photos and videos that the Americans watched were of destroyed military targets, avoiding any terrifying scenes like the public watched in Vietnam. Although these photos and videos were basically coming from military sources after being subjected to an extreme degree of censorship, the media repeatedly presented them without questioning their reliability. Moreover, journalists who gained access to areas of military operations under the pool system witnessed the U.S massacres against the Iraqi civilians and were aware of the horror of the military practices, but they generally chose not to 'buck the predominant trend'. Thus, not only did they cover the truth, but they even praised the military performance of the U.S-led coalition forces. (Kellner)

The statements of military figures were considered a reliable source of information, without a modicum of skepticism. So, based on those statements, the American media tainted reality and claimed that the First Gulf War was a clean war and was the first war in history in which soldiers were keen to avoid casualties among the enemy. For example, in January 27, American major television networks reported the statement of General Schwarzkopf, who claimed that the multinational forces in the Persian Gulf were "doing everything possible and with great success to minimize collateral damage.... I'd like to say that we are going to extraordinary, and I would venture to say, unprecedented length, to avoid damage to civilians and holy places." (qtd. in. Kellner) Such claims were blindly reproduced and circulated as an

absolute truth by the mainstream media, which, was 'compliant' with the Bush administration and the Pentagon to secure the public support they needed. (Kellner)

In the context of American efforts to present the Gulf War in a positive light, there has been a great focus on the new American weapons. From the early days of the war, the mainstream media in the United States had been telling the public that the war was under control and that victory would be within days thanks to new high-tech American weapons. In a way, the focus on weapons was a propaganda strategy to demonstrate the superiority of the U.S military industry over its global competitors. However, it was also a way to back up American claims that the war was clean. Throughout the war, there were countless reports about the advanced weapons capabilities of the United States. Media reports, always based on the allegations of military figures, confirmed that those weapons were highly accurate and effective, and that they only hit military targets, thus greatly reducing losses and casualties, especially among civilians. Additionally, in order to lend credence to the "clean war" claims, television networks, such as the CNN, have replayed videos of smart bombs accurately and successfully hitting Iraqi military objectives. Broadcasting such videos was usually accompanied by the journalists' euphoric comments about how great and astonishing the 'clean' bombings were. John McWethy of ABC, for instance, described the bombing of Baghdad on January 17th as "truly an awesome display of ground fire" (qtd, in, Kellner), ignoring that the bombing left civilian dead and injuries. (Kellner)

As a matter of fact, the bright image reported by the American media of a clean war in the Persian Gulf was far from reality. In the ground, neither the war was clean, nor were the weapons accurate. "Rather it was a high-tech slaughter, a massacre." (qtd. in, Kellner) The daily repetitive news about the accurate bombings and avoiding civilian casualties were just but a big lie. Throughout the war, seventy percent (70 %) of the "high-tech smart" bombs missed their targets. Moreover, by the end of the war, it could be seen that Iraq has been subjected to a systematic campaign of destruction. Unlike the American claims, the coalition attacks targeted civilian and non-military infrastructure, including electrical power, water, sewage, industrial facilities, and communications, leaving thousands of Iraqi civilian dead and injuries. These recorded facts, which appeared after the end of the war, demonstrated that the U.S media was compliant with the Bush administration and the Pentagon's disinformation campaign and succeeded, through the positive and euphoric presentation of war events, in

deceiving the American public and generating strong popular support for the war efforts. (Kellner)

### **III 2. Renewing anti-Iraq Propaganda**

With the onset of the Gulf Crisis, there was a massive campaign against Saddam Hussein among the American media. Once the war began, the campaign significantly backed out in favour of the "clean high-tech war" campaign. But when the war escalated, it became clear that victory was not as easy as the media euphorically promoted, and therefore repeated reports of an easy and well-controlled war would not be effective in rallying popular support, especially with the leaked news about the failure of some American weapons and the success of the Iraqi forces in inflicting damage to some coalition aircrafts. Thus, the American media found it necessary to renew the anti-Iraq propaganda, which had already proved successful in rallying support for the military solution five months earlier. Therefore, the media rhetoric returned soon after to lead another line of propaganda to demonise the Iraqi regime and Iraqi people. This time, however, the media focused on Iraq's treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). (Kellner)

In the early days of the war, Iraqi television broadcasted interview videos with American POWs captured after the shot down of coalition aircrafts by Iraqi Air Forces. Since then, the POWs' issue has become the main topic of the American media coverage and the fuel of anti-Iraq propaganda. The mainstream television networks, such as CNN, NBC, and ABC, which devoted the lion's share of their discussions to the POWs' issue, replayed the videos frequently throughout the day, assuming that American POWs were treated inhumanly by the Iraqis. In order to assert these assumptions, television networks drew on "shady characters" such as John McCain, a former Vietnam POW who "served as the Bush administration 'point man', slickly conveying the administration line" (Kellner), introduced as military experts. McCain and others repeatedly appeared on television screens, accusing Iraq of violating Geneva Conventions and committing war crimes against the POWs. They supported their claims by referring to the POWs' bandaged hands and bruised faces. CBC News, moreover, went even further and stated that Iraq would use the POWs as 'human shields'. By the end of the war, prisoners of war acknowledged the good treatment of the Iraqis when they returned home. They confirmed that they had been injured after their ejection from the downed planes, denying media claims that they had been ill-treated and tortured. The returning POWs'

statements revealed the American media lies, but that was late because the media had already mobilised popular support for the war efforts through generating feeling of hatred against Saddam Hussein and Iraqis among the American public. (Kellner)

## **Conclusion**

The American military experience in Vietnam during the Cold War era had a major impact on the Bush administration's build-up to the First Gulf War. It prompted the Bush administration to adopt a different approach towards media and impose more control over the flow of information to ensure a steady and continuous public support for the war efforts in the Persian Gulf. Consequently, certain severe restrictions were imposed on the journalists' work (the pool and the review systems). Without any real challenge or objective criticism, the media accepted the restrictions and followed the rules. Throughout the Gulf Crisis, the U.S media repeated the same outrageous propaganda lies of the government and deliberately marginalised the anti-war voices. It therefore contributed to promoting the military solution to the crisis and mobilising popular support for the U.S military intervention in the Persian Gulf. Then during the war itself, it gave an unrealistic picture of a techno-clean war and continued its propaganda campaigns against Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

## **General Conclusion**

Throughout the military history of the United States, propaganda has been an integral part of U.S major conflicts. Given the importance of public opinion, propaganda plays a significant role in giving an aura of legitimacy to U.S military conflicts. Therefore, during times of war, U.S government leaders engage in large-scale propaganda production to explain the war motives in a way that makes it just and worth fighting. Propaganda consequently generates popular acceptance for war. For this reason, among others, the United States relies so heavily on wartime propaganda.

The 1991 Gulf War clearly demonstrates the importance of wartime propaganda for the United States. The war was preceded by major global changes as a result of the Cold War era conclusion. During the Cold War, the United States fought several military conflicts in countries like Korea and Vietnam, increased defense spending, approved weapon modernisation programmes, and participated in military alliances like the NATO. These and other military activities were justified and legitimised through anti-communist propaganda. For more than forty years, anti-communism made the basis of U.S propaganda machine, which promoted that the United States was in a just war of principles against communist colonial powers, under the leadership of the Soviet Union. Anti-communist propaganda proved effective. It served America's war objectives and contributed to the U.S victory over the Soviet Union, whose collapse ended the long tumultuous Cold War era.

The end of the Cold War allowed the United States to begin the new era as the only superpower in the world, with no real rivals. These global changes created a propaganda crisis for the Bush administration during the 1991 Gulf War. The war was the first major international conflict the United States involved in during the post-Cold War era, and was of critical importance for vital U.S interests in the Persian Gulf. But the collapse of the Soviet Union made anti-communist propaganda inappropriate for selling the war to public opinion. This put the Bush administration in an unprecedented crisis, 'crisis of propaganda'.

Being in a state of crisis because of propaganda is sufficient to realise how important wartime propaganda is for the United States. The Bush administration engaged in a journey of research for new propaganda rhetoric to sell the First Gulf War. Eventually, it managed to legitimise the war upon humanitarian basis and to push the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to authorise the first war on Iraq. That was the first time the UNSC authorised war under humanitarian concerns.

For the United States, one of the greatest democracies in the world, it does not matter how credible propaganda messages are as long as they meet the desired objectives. According to critics and historians, U.S propaganda machine of the 1991 Gulf War was built-upon a set of myths. The war was basically about oil. But because ‘no blood for oil’, the Bush administration’s propaganda framed it as a just war to defend a just cause of good against evil. U.S propaganda promoted that the Gulf Crisis was an act of aggression by Iraq against sovereign, weak, and peaceful Kuwait. It represented Iraq as a strong military power, with dangerous nuclear capabilities, and represented Saddam Hussein as a dictator leader whose expansionist aspirations seriously threatened his neighbours the way Adolf Hitler did in the thirties. Much of the American propaganda was devoted to demonising Saddam Hussein, who was accused of violating international law and human rights.

It was too late when it has been discovered that U.S propaganda against Iraq and Saddam Hussein was based on fabrications and exaggerations. At the time, propaganda has already generated sympathy for Kuwait, hatred toward Iraq and Saddam Hussein, and support for the US-led military coalition.

During times of war, the American media, or the ‘Fourth Estate’, is as important as propaganda to further the war efforts. The media is the vehicle that carries, reinforces, and disseminates government propaganda among the public. This wartime role of the media is inconsistent with its traditional role as a watchdog to the government that objectively informs citizens, with no bias.

During the 1991 Gulf War, a major concern for the Bush administration was to ensure continued popular support for the war efforts. Therefore, it adapted the media to the government propaganda and made use of its power of influence over public opinion to serve the war objectives. The Bush administration, along with the Department of Defense, issued The Operation Desert Shield and Supplementary Guidelines and imposed restrictions over the journalists’ content and access to battlefields through the ‘pool system’ and the ‘review system’ in order to control the flow of information.

As the ‘Fourth Estate’ and watchdog to the government, the media was supposed to challenge these restrictions or at least criticise them. The American media in the Cold War era played an important propaganda role and contributed greatly to spreading anti-communism

around the world. However, this role was justified as the patriotic duty of the journalists, who claimed to be Americans above all and it was their duty to enhance their national security against the communist colonial threat. But in light of no danger threatening the United States' national security during the 1991 Gulf War, the media was expected to get rid of propaganda role and fulfill its traditional roles. However, with no challenge or criticism to the government restrictions, the US media accepted the rules, praised the U.S military intervention in the Persian Gulf, and never questioned the necessity of the war.

During the Gulf Crisis and the Gulf war, the American media provided a wall-to-wall coverage for the events in the Persian Gulf. However, the coverage was extremely biased. The American media outlets, mainly television, adopted propaganda rhetoric of the Bush administration and worked to promote the military solution for the crisis. Moreover, the media marginalised all opposing opinions to the military solution and silenced their voices. It also dutifully reproduced the exaggerated and the non-happened stories about Iraq. The 'incubator story', told by a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl called Nayirah, was a famous story that U.S media widely propagated, without even questioning the girl's true identity. The story, which described the atrocities of Iraqi forces in Kuwait and contributed to swaying American public opinion in favour of the war, had never happened, and Nayirah was a Kuwaiti princess from the ruling family.

The statements of U.S government leaders about Iraqi military power and Iraqi designs to invade Saudi Arabia were reproduced by the media as absolute truths. The media, based on those statements, provided endless reports about Iraqi nuclear weapons and Saddam Hussein's intentions to use them against Kuwaiti people. Moreover, throughout the crisis and the war, the media led huge propaganda offensive against Saddam Hussein and portrayed him as a dangerous dictator that abused human rights and committed war crimes. Once the war began, the media promoted that the United States was fighting a techno-clean war, in which only military targets were destroyed and civilian casualties were avoided.

This biased performance of the US media during the Gulf Crisis and War, which manipulated public opinion on a large scale, made American propaganda messages effective and shaped popular acceptance of the war on Iraq.

To recapitulate based on the research conducted, American propaganda and media have emerged as dangerous weapons during many of the major American conflicts. They were inseparable tools through which the leaders of the U.S government were able to falsify facts, manipulate public opinion, and legitimise many U.S military interventions in the world. The propaganda role played by the American media in several conflicts leads to skepticism about media freedom in the United States and the assumption that it is largely a tool used by the ruling elites to serve specific interests and agendas.

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