APOCALYPTIC PROPAGANDA: HOW THE U.S. GOVERNMENT MANUFACTURED CONSENT ON THE WAR ON TERROR

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ABSTRACT

War and propaganda have been linked together for a long time because of a natural human inhibition against killing other humans. To get citizens to give their consent to go to war and kill, the leader(s) need to influence them. The aim of this study is to analyse the content and functions of the U.S. governments post 9/11 propaganda to find out how this where done. Coyne and Hall argue that propagandists need the publics enlighted consent to be able to influence them. This work will prove that the U.S. government used propagandistic tools, like the fear of our own and our civilizations annihilation through an apocalyptic language, to circumvent our rational thinking and talk unbridled to our emotions and thereby inhibit our higher cognitive functions. As method we use bricolage. Bricolage interpretations adapt different technical discourses to each other and move freely between different techniques and concepts. In this work it had an advancement over other methods because our field of investigation stretched over different fields of research and we were free to use the method that best suited our collected data. We demonstrate that the U.S. government functioned as fearmongers on their home audience to stir up emotions so the citizens would choose the path that best suited the leader(s), but that it was far from being enlighted.

Keywords: Propaganda; Totalism; Apocalypse; War on Terror

INTRODUCTION

Since the foundation of the United States of America in 1776, war and propaganda have been linked to shape the opinions of domestic audiences (Coyne & Hall 2021). In line with this statement Noam Chomsky claims "Usually the population is pacifist, just like they were during the First World War. The Public sees no reason to get involved in foreign adventures, killing, and torture. So you have to whip them up" (Chomsky 2002b: 30). This is

exactly what happened after the 9/11 attacks (2001).

In this article, we focus on the content of the (religiously and apocalyptically inspired) post-9/11 propaganda in George W. Bush and his governments speeches, how it was used by the government to manufacture consent for the war on terror, and its implications. The aim is to increase our understanding of how war propaganda can circumvent our rational thinking by talking exclusively to our emotions and thus make ordinary people vulnerable to governments choice of action.

Drawing on public statements, secondary literature, and theories of propaganda (Herman and Chomsky 1998/2002; Coyne and Hall 2021; Stanley 2016) and totalism (Lifton 2003), we argue that the post-9/11 propaganda was deliberately used by the U.S. government to circumvent their own citizens´ higher cognitive functions. By talking directly to our emotions by exaggerating the threats from outside through apocalyptic language, the President George W. Bush made the people of USA dependent on him and his government for survival.

As method of analysis, we use bricolage. With bricolage interpretation we adapt different technical discourses to each other and move freely between different techniques and concepts; this ad hoc approach allows us to find connections and structures that do not seem to belong together and notice patterns and themes, see plausibility, and juxtapose to see "what went with what" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014:282). Bricolage has an advantage over other methods in that our research stretched over many theories and we were free to use the method of analysis that best suited the collected data.

PROPAGANDA

Chomsky (2011) argue that propaganda is to a democracy what violence is to a dictatorship. Propaganda is a means of framing and transmitting information from the government to the population according to Coyne & Hall (2021). The ability to frame issues and to define how political controversies are presented to the public is the most useful tool political elites have at their disposal. This tool is invaluable in times of war. Propaganda is also used as a coordination tool. Thus, propaganda is a means to generate general knowledge. The key characteristic of public knowledge is that it is public–that is, widely distributed and known by the population. This creates an experience of shared expectations because everyone is convinced that everyone else has the same information. The final use of propaganda is to instil, or reinforce, collective fear in the home audience. It could be fear of terrorism, panic regarding crime

or concern about moral decay. Citizens' fear of external threats and their demands on governments to protect them, creates room for state actors to expand their power.

To influence the population in the chosen direction, Coyne and Hall writes, the government of the United States used four common means of influence. First, appeal to authority - propaganda usually includes markings of government authority. The technology is intended to give the government credibility by reinforcing the message that the government is the one who can solve the threat. Second: the appeal to patriotism - propaganda tries to stir up widespread and powerful support for the government, which in turn represents the "Nation". This technique aims to link support for an activity for the "common good" and "the country". Support for the activity is associated with the advancement of "national interests" while, directly or indirectly, non-visible support of these interests suggests a lack of interest in the public good which equates to be unpatriotic or, worse, being a fifth columnist. The above means of influence are looking to rally national support for the nation's military and create a link for widespread acceptance of the relation between the government, the nation, and a war effort. Third: appeal to differences between "Us" and "Them" - the goal of propaganda at this stage is to create well-defined, black-and-white distinctions between "ingroups", the nation and their allies, and "outgroups", enemies, and their allies. The goal of the propagandist is to give the target audience a clear, distinct, and simple choice between two sides, without nuances or intricate details. This propaganda technique reinforces feelings of patriotism because the ingroup is the "nation" and the outgroup is "the others" who threaten the way of life and even life itself within the ingroup. Finally, is the appeal to simple slogans and images - the language of propaganda usually consists of simple images and slogans so that they are easily remembered and speaking unbridled to the emotions of the target group. By simplifying complex foreign affairs, patriotic themes and "us versus them", feelings are reinforced and amplified. Furthermore, the oversimplified slogans and imagery of the propaganda prevent any meaningful nuance in the complex issues they represent. The goal of propaganda in this case is to limit the debate about information and ideas in favour of the government's point of view, which gives them power over the citizens information gathering.

Jason Stanley (2015) put forward in *How propaganda works*, that it is inequality that results in anti-democratic flawed ideologies. In this article we use the inequality about knowledge between the elites (the U.S. government and military complex) who have the means – through fundings from big lobby groups like the weapon industry, media conglomerates (and Christian Zionist

groups, see Lampman 2004), to form the information reaching those without means. He also argues that the audience would not believe a liar, so the reason propaganda seems sincere to the audience is because the propagandists themselves believe in a flawed ideology and therefore could speak out of belief, therefore he continues, propaganda will always be invariably political.

TOTALISM

Drawing on intensive studies of POW´s, Robert J. Lifton distinguishes between eight steps of indoctrination in *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (2014). Later he added this knowledge to the shaping of U.S. response to Iraq after 9/11 through an apocalyptic propaganda in *Superpower Syndrome – America´s apocalyptic confrontation with the world* (2003). We use Lifton's eight steps theory and his thesis of the superpower syndrome to explain the psychological results of propaganda.

Milieu control. The foundation of all totalitarian milieus, according to Lifton, is the control over human communication, both external and internal. Those who practise milieu control experience a sovereign surge of power and are convinced that the perception of the reality they embrace is the right one - they "own reality".

Mysterious manipulation and planned spontaneity. The next step towards totalism is a comprehensive manipulation of the individual. This step is controlled and planned by the leader(s) to create behaviours and emotions that should seem to appear spontaneously in the environment. In this atmosphere, the image arises of having a higher purpose after an idea of a higher order in society and that it is they, the leaders, who are the vanguard of this change (Lifton 2003, see also: Klemperer 1975/2020 Chomsky 2002, Coyne & Hall 2021).

In this article we interpret the "sense of mystery", to the need for secrecy and a sense of a "noble deception" within the U.S. government, the latter is necessary because the public do not know what is best for them (Coyne & Hall 2021: 16, Stanley 2015). In opposition to Lifton claiming the leaders do not solely do this for the sake of power, Coyne and Hall (2021), and Stanley (2015) argue that the members of the security state have a strong incentive to protect their monopoly over information because of the power it gives them to control the policy and the benefits that come with that power. We agree with this interpretation.

The demand for purity. In milieus where thought control is involved, the world is divided into pure and impure, the inherent good and the inherent evil. The

good are the ideas, feelings and actions that are in line with the ideology and its policy; everything else is banished to that which is unclean and thus evil. By manipulating the definitions of what is "pure" and introducing full-scale war against all "unclean", the government creates a very narrow corridor of guilt and shame among its citizens where the individual constantly needs to try to adapt to the group norm (Are you with us or with the terrorists?).

Here we start to deviate from Coyne and Halls belief that the government needs the recipient's consent to be able to influence and, if they do not receive this consent nor could influence it – rather it is at this step governments tighten their grip around that consent based on misleading propaganda and fear that impede our rational thinking in favour of emotions.

Confessions. In close relation to the requirement of purity above, is an obsession with personal confession. Confessions in this phase are, according to Lifton (2014) beyond the religious, legal, or therapeutic confessions we are used to and become in themselves a cult phenomenon.

This article originates in Lifton's theory, but here we take a slightly different perspective, namely that instead of confessing sins, the individual must confess his/her fidelity to American ideals and symbolism; for example, the flag, the constitution, the American exceptionalism and the "War on Terror" - all of which can be found under the word "patriotism".

Holy knowledge. The government maintains an aura of "holiness" about its dogma by pointing to the moral vision for the survival of human existence. That it is sacred is evident from the fact that it is forbidden, though not explicitly stated, to question the assumptions about reality that are made, as well as by those who represent it. The inner demand for clear answers and the avoidance of ambiguity will prevent the individual from gaining the insights necessary for individuality and creativity (Lifton, 2014). And if it prevents individuality and creativity, it also prevents enlightened consent, in line with our theory.

Loading the language. The language in a totalitarian environment is characterised by thought-terminating clichés. Complex problems shrink down to short, sharply reduced, definitive and easy-to-spread messages. In the American version of thought reforms after 9/11, the phrase "war on terrorism" was used to dismiss problematic questions about the terrorists as individuals, as well as a general search for perspective and balance in what happened. In addition to the fact that the thought-terminating clichés function as shortcuts, they also become, according to Richard Weavers (Lifton 2014:429), "absolute conditions" - either "God's" conditions, which represent the ultimate good, or "the Devil's" conditions representing the ultimate evil. The totalitarian

language is thus centred around an all-encompassing jargon that is simplified, categorised, and judgemental. Lionel Trilling (Lifton 2014:429) calls it "the language of non-thinking".

Doctrine over person. The sterility of language is reflected in another characteristic of ideological totalism, the subordination of the human experience under the ideology. The consequence of this mindset is that previous historical events are changed, rewritten, or ignored for them to be in line with the inner logic of the ideology. If I doubt, the leader(s) addresses this doubt by throwing it back at me, and accuses me of inner weaknesses, such as not being patriotic enough and producing thought-terminating clichés such as: "You are either with us, or with the terrorists."

Dispensing of existence. Totalist ideologues believe that they have the divine power to decide who has the right to exist and who does not. Those who have lost that right have also been degraded to "subhuman" and are thus relegated to the bottom of society and, in its most extreme form - death.

Once here, the individual in the totalitarian milieu experiences polarised emotional conflicts that are about the ultimate existence (Lifton, 2014). The totalitarian environment has evoked a fear of one's own annihilation that cannot be alleviated by other individuals, only from the source of all justification - the totalitarian organisation itself.

With the term *Superpower Syndrome* Lifton describes a national mindset which is strongly put forward by a tight-knit leadership group who takes on a sense of omnipotence, of a unique standing in the world, that grants them the right to hold sway over all other nations (Lifton 2003:3, see also *the indispensable Nation Syndrome* Stranne & Parsi 2023: 92 ff, Bacevich 2021). He also describes the apocalypse and the human nature psychologically as a need for us to understand how our death fits into the cosmic order. Individual death, Lifton says (2003:19), when associated with the death and rebirth of the world, can take on special significance and high nobility. He continues to explain that participation in an apocalyptic project offers expression for two primal human aspirations, the urge toward spiritual or ethical improvement. After 9/11, in the U.S., this was visualised through an embrace of what was perceived as radical good and the urge to become part of something larger than oneself but also sacred and eternal. If we set aside the apocalyptic theme in the propaganda, the theme of purifying resurrection of those who win fulfilled the needs of the audiences to be part of something larger than life.

PROPAGANDA AND TOTALISATION IN THE WAR ON TERROR

The U.S-citizen has inherited their Christian worldview from their approximately fifty million European descendants who emigrated to the United States between 1820-1930. Most of them where puritans fleeing from the Catholic church purgatory of Europe of protestants, with them came a black and white worldview. Through Christian Zionism they also gained a receptivity to a medieval view of villains, and a cosmology based on fear of death where the devil is an eternal adversary: "To kill the foreign devil-enemy is to reaffirm the nation's special virtue as a chosen people destined to overcome malevolence so that civilization may prevail" (Ivie & Giner 2007: 581; Lampman 2004). Lasswell argued about propaganda that the enemy should be described as demoralised and arrogant and the enemy nation should be described as contemptuous, scornful, and cruel (Mral 2004). In today's propaganda we do not look down upon a nation´s people, but their leaders are described in Satanic terms.

Further, the U.S. citizen has, from Thomas Jefferson and forward, been spoon fed with the notion of being an "Empire of Liberty", "Last Best Hope of Earth" (A. Lincoln), a "Shining Capitol on a Hill" (USA compared to a new Jerusalem by Ronald Reagan), an "Indispensable Nation" (Albright on the Tonight Show) and a "Beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world" (G. W. Bush). Through those lenses, the citizens of the U.S. look upon themselves as an enlightened and pacifically inclined nation, chosen by God, to be a beacon of justice and democracy in a dark diabolic landscape, not as an imperial beast praying on the world, because "We are on the side of Light, they on the side of Darkness" (Ivie & Giner 2007: 585).

President George W. Bush government fostered another part of this exceptionalism through the role they saw for the U.S. in a post-cold-war world. Dick Cheney, defence secretary from Bush senior's presidency, later G. W. Bush junior's adviser, secretary of State Collin Powell, national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and the new Defence secretary David Rumsfeld where the staff closest to the president. Rumsfeld took as his deputy Paul Wolfowitz who worked under Cheney earlier. In 1992 Wolfowitz and Zalmay Khalilzad (of the NSC staff) completed a task initiated by Cheney a couple of years earlier. The task was to create America´s political and military mission in the post-cold-war world – the Defence Planning Guidance (DPG). The policy in the DPG asserted that America´s mission was to ensure that no rival superpower rose to challenge the power of the United States of America (Wolfowitz DGP, Armstrong, 2002). These were the flawed ideologies that imbued the group closest to President G. W. Bush. It is in line with Lifton's definition of the close-

knit group with superpower syndrome on his first and second step to totalism, milieu control and mysterious manipulation and planned spontaneity, where the leaders indulge the feeling of a higher purpose and therefore need to keep their monopoly of the narrative just because it gave them power.

Bush's religious beliefs have been associated with a dogmatic approach with a tendency towards both personal and political fundamentalism, and he characterised himself as a person who wants reality to be clear and unambiguous - without nuances and without legal figurative language. Bush's leadership style bordered on the rushed; he wanted "action" and quick solutions. He says about himself: "I know it is hard for you to believe, but I have not doubted what we are doing… There is no doubt in my mind we're doing the right thing. No doubt." (Lifton 2003: 67, Woodward 2002: 256). If he did not doubt what he was doing, there were no reflection over right or wrong because the ends justify the means. This is particularly true when you believe your actions are supported by a divine power.

Lifton believes that the personality traits above can be part of a larger picture, an overall religious one, within which he polarised issues of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, good and evil (See also Teehan 2010). Bob Woodward, journalist at the *Washington Post*, wrote that Bush wanted to convey to the American people that "this is what my presidency is all about" and to capture his newly awakened insight into his mission, he used phrases such as: "I'm in the Lord Hands" and "there is a reason why I'm here". If he considered himself having a divine mission, everything he did was part of a greater truth and this, in turn, was part of an overall struggle between good and evil, with him as Saint George against the terrorist Dragon.

Being the supreme leader of United States and its military complex Bush confirmed his mission from God in an Israeli-Palestinian summit in 2003 four months after the US-led invasion of Iraq:

> 'I am driven with a mission from God'. God would tell me, 'George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan'. And I did. And then God would tell me 'George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq'. And I did. " (McAskill, Oct 2005, the Guardian)

For G. W. Bush and his staff to be able to "own the reality" (with Lifton's words) after 9/11, they needed cooperation from the media (see also Froula et al 2010). DoD´s involvement with military assistance in the movie industry made possible by President Wilson´s Executive Order (EO) 2594 in 1917. The Order established the Committee on Public Information with the goal of shaping

the public opinion in support of WWI (Coyne & Hall 2021). William Bradley, head of the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, stated that: "The motion picture can be the most wonderful system for spreading national propaganda at little or no cost."

The cooperation between DOD and Hollywood continued. In June 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed EO 9182 authorizing the creation of the Office of War Information (OWI). The order´s mission was to gain support for the government's wartime activities through media, including film. OWI in turn created the GIMMPI, Government Information Manual for the Motion Picture Industry that stated that participating in government war programs is "American" and patriotic (Coyne & Hall 2021: 146). It also states that questioning the programs or the nature of the threat from abroad is un-American and aligns the dissenter with the enemy – a point of view that President G. W. Bush emphasized in his thought stopping cliché: "You are either with us, or with the terrorists." After 9/11 the emphasis for DOD was to picture the Iraqi war as a just and righteous war, and the message was that "The position of the U.S. government is good, noble, and serves the broader public interest, and supporting these ends requires supporting the government´s policies." (Coyne & Hall 2021: 154; see also Jackson et al 2011/2019; Steuter & Wills 2008). As icing on the cake, the DoD´s propaganda activities were out of congressional reach and not under the laws of U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act (Public Law 80-402), which prohibits the domestic influence of propaganda. Cut from the leash of congressional restraints, the propagandists in the government were free to work their magic on the domestic audience.

We also need to anchor our knowledge in Herman and Chomsky and Coyne and Halls Propaganda theories to understand the inequalities in information gathering between those who own the media and those who consume it. The twenty-four top tier media companies in the U.S. after WWII, among them CBS, NBC (through its parent firm the General Electric, GE), *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were all profit seeking corporations owned by wealthy people most of whom had assets exceeding $1 billion, three-quarters of these media firms earned a median of $183 million after tax (Herman & Chomsky 1988/2002). These media families had an obvious reason to have a good relation to the political elite to keep the status quo, and they exercised their power by establishing the aims of the company.

It is understandable that members of the media faced a strong incentive to avoid being overly critical of the national security state afraid of losing key access to policymakers (Herman & Chomsky 1988/2002; Coyne & Hall 2021

and 2018). Dan Rather, news anchor at CBS, confirmed to a British journalist the pressure to adapt to the propaganda and not ask the tough questions:

> […] but you know there was a time in South Africa that people would put flaming tyres around people's necks if they dissented. And in some ways the fear is that you will be necklaced here, you will have a flaming tyre of lack of patriotism put around your neck" he said. (bbc.co.uk 2002)

Here Coyne and Halls theory of propaganda as a coordination tool fits when the U.S. government used media as a foundation to form general knowledge in the public of the government's narrative of choice. It also fits well with Lifton's first and second step toward totalism, milieu control and mysterious manipulation.

It is easy to imagine the feelings of shock and disbelief in U.S. citizens when the planes hit the Twin Towers on Manhattan and Pentagon in the morning on the 11:th September 2001. Rumsfeld and his staff on the other hand almost immediately started to work at the president's speech and when Rumsfeld entered his office he said, "This is the defining moment […] What does the President need to address?" (Woodward 2002: 25). Already in the first paragraph Bush used the term evil about the terrorists: "… ended by evil, despicable acts of terror." Just days later, on the 16:th of September Bush elaborated the evil theme: "We've been warned there are evil people in this world. We've been warned so vividly and we'll be alert. Your government is alert." And a month later at a press conference: "I think it's essential that all moms and dads and citizens tell their children we love them and there is love in the world, but also remind them there are evil people." (Mral 2004: 22). There was also the dichotomy of good "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world" versus evil "Today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature" and so was the concept of "War on Terror" and the apocalyptic theme "our way of life, our very freedom came under attack".

The feeling of un-just treatment is understandable if we are led to believe that all we do and stand for is good and we will not only seek justice for this maltreatment, but we also want revenge. To instill fear and get allies and those who doubted the chosen path in the pen, the hardly disguised threat from an overwhelming superpower "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbour (*sic*) them" and "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists", did the trick. By emphasising all he, G. W. Bush, already done to secure that the state would

function, and the military was ready to defend its country Coyne and Hall´s means, plea for authority was in place.

Underlying G. W. Bush foreign policy was his belief of United States manifest destiny as sanctioned by God: "there is a *value system that cannot be compromised*, and that is the values that *we praise*. And if the values are good enough for our people, they ought to be good enough for others, not in a way to impose because these are *God-given* values." (Woodward, Washington Post 19 Nov. 2002, our italics).

Initially the government had the possibility of self-reflection over the past decade's politics in the Middle east; it was not inevitable that it would be interpreted as an act of war, or that those who conducted the attack would be called terrorists (Sontag 2002, Lifton 2003; Mral 2004; Chomsky 2016, Stranne & Parsi 2023), but already in the early afternoon on 9/11 Usama bin Laden and al Qaeda was on the agenda. And at a NSC meeting in 4 P.M. the day after, Iraq and Saddam Hussein were brought up as a target by Rumsfeld (Woodward 2002: 49). By displacing aggression instead of turning the gaze inwards, the U.S. government had created a common enemy. It fits nicely in with Lifton's third step, the demand for purity by not questioning the narrative. G. W. Bush inner circle nurtured, through their flawed ideology of American exceptionalism and their mission of an U.S.-led post-cold war world, a "Hawkish" hard-line authoritarianism with organisations like DoD and radical Christian Zionist movements supporting their cause.

Making the "war on terrorism" a morally just war, is to manufacture it as black and white without nuances, which we saw was already in place in G. W. Bush speech on the evening of 9/11 above. In the government led propaganda it was contrasting all the good of the "American way of life" to the destructive way "of the terrorist", where all "we" did was inherently good, and the way of the "others" inherently evil, "we" were civilised, but "they" were barbarians and ultimately it was about God versus Satan (see also Silberstein 2004, Stanley 2018, Zimbardo 2007; Ivie & Giner 2007).

When Bush, the born-again evangelical Christian president of the United States, a country where over 75% were Christians, spoke to the most powerful constituency - the American Christian right, it was not enough that the war against Iraq was for a noble cause, it also needed to be sanctioned by God (Jackson 2005, Cartledge et al 2015, Rogers 2005). By initially calling the war against terror a "Crusade," ending his first speech with a Bible verse, Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me." and calling Usama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein for demons, and the reverend pastor Jerry Vines juxtaposing Islam and its

founder for "a demon-possessed paedophile" on a Baptist Convention and claiming that only the Christian God is: "not going to turn you in to a terrorist that′ll try to bomb people" (Steuter & Wills 2008: 192) – the war against terrorist after 9/11 became a religious war. David Frum, one of Bush's speech writers defined the religious theme in the presidents' speeches like this: "In a country where almost two thirds of the population believes in the existence of the devil, Bush was identifying Osama bin Laden and his gang as literally satanic." (Mral 2004). With the apocalyptic cleansing of the world from all evil a new beginning for the victors with a Christian U.S. led world would rise, and thus the war became morally right (see also Smith 2007 and Haidt 2016).

Media soon followed suite, the *New York Times* had the following headlines: "Yes, this is about Islam", "This is a religious war", "Diffusing the holy bomb", "Barbarians at the gate" (Esch, 2010: 381). Other major media outlets repeatedly had the headline: "Why do they hate us?" and answered the questions themselves in terms of values and culture instead of politics and economics. This pair with Lifton′s step four, five and six: confession, holy knowledge and loading the language. When you think your life and your way of living is at stake, your thinking is severely damaged, and you act on instinct (Haidt 2016, Smith 2021). In line with our theory.

By solidification of the categorical thinking by endless repetitions of an us versus them theme based on good versus evil and a Christian apocalyptic language, the U.S. government functioned as fearmongers to their own citizens. A categorical us-versus-them thinking are hallmarks for terrorist organisations, writes Moghaddam (2005) and confirm that this is one trait of American Right-Wing authoritarianism.

By amplifying the threats posed by al Qaida and add the apocalyptic weapon of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of "the satanic" Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein – the U.S. government with President G. W. Bush used the fear of annihilation in the American citizens to mobilize them to support a new Iraq war. The threat of WMD in the hands of a demon makes people extremely sensitive and increases their fear, insecurity, resentment, and xenophobia and, because we humans are extremely sensitive to the emotions of others - especially those who signal danger, these feelings are strengthened and magnified as they are passed on. The effect of using these words is that the more fear people experience, the more willingly they sacrifice civil rights for order and security (Jackson et al 2019, Stellmacher & Petzel 2005).

By now the governments propaganda had essentialised all Muslims as terrorists, which could be seen in this report from July 24, 2003:

> The new nationwide survey of 2,002 adults, conducted June 24-July 8 by the Pew Research Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, shows that there has been an important shift in public perceptions of Islam. Fully 44% now believe that Islam is more likely than other religions "to encourage violence among its believers." As recently as March 2002, just 25% expressed this view. (www.pewresearch.org)

By exaggerating differences and using pejorative words such as barbarians, evil-doers, spiders, demons and so forth they dehumanised everyone that did not share their point of view and the thought stopping cliché; "You are either with us, or with the terrorists", prevented opposition and reflective thinking. By now Lifton's step seven and eight: doctrine over person and dispensing of existence were in place and the war against Iraq could begin.

CONCLUSION

USA is market red today, as a land moving in an authoritarian direction according to V-Dem institute (2021), the world's leading democracy research foundation. And it all started with believing in a flawed ideology about American exceptionalism and continued with the refusal from the leader(s) to take a good look in the mirror about past political and economic shortcomings in the middle east. Because of this the U.S. citizens, the close-knit group surrounding President G. W. Bush, and even the president himself, became victimized on 9/11. A victimized superpower brings on both the sense of humiliation but also an angry determination to restore or extend their borders, says Lifton (2003). An angry superpower is a dangerous superpower – because when angered and humiliated, the ability to access our whole cognitive capacity is badly severed, a sad thing in an ordinary citizen, devastating in a leadership. When that leadership are the only ones with access to the truth, it also gives them the opportunity to choose what truth to share to keep the power. The media in turn is owned by a small elite eager to stay in favour of them in power, so they will not scrutinize them afraid of losing access. The narrative shared with the people is therefore the chosen narrative of the political elite, they "own reality" with Lifton's words. The reality they owned (among other interpretations) was a Christian apocalyptic one and by using the media as a coordination tool to create a common enemy, the U.S. government saw to it that everyone had the same information; that the United States of America was a beacon of enlightenment and democracy, unjust attacked by the evil forces of Muslim terror who´s mission was to annihilate everything "we" stand for. People who did not agree with this narrative was either silenced with a thought stopping cliché like: "You are ether with us, or with the terrorist,"

or made suspicious as a fifth columnist. By using an apocalyptic language of us versus them, enlightenment versus barbarism, exaggerating differences (we are noble and righteous, they are pure evil) and putting (unconfirmed until this day) weapons of mass destruction in the hands of the "Iraqi Satan" Saddam Hussein, the U.S. government functioned as fearmongers on their own citizens. They did this deliberately because fear make us dependent on strong leaders and the more fear we experience, the more power to those who lead and restrictions in our own freedom we tolerate to feel safe. And as we stated in the beginning of this article, fear circumvent our rational thinking, and if we lose our rational thinking, we cannot give our enlightened consent.

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