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The NDAA Legalizes The Use Of Propaganda On The US Public

Michael B Kelley May 21, 2012, 4:11 PM



The newest version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes an amendment that would [legalize the use of propaganda on the American public](#), reports [Michael Hastings of BuzzFeed](#).



1948 propaganda Santa Flickr/x-ray delta one

The amendment — proposed by Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) and Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and passed in the House last Friday afternoon — would effectively nullify the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, which explicitly forbids information and psychological operations aimed at influencing U.S. public opinion.

Thornberry said that the current law “ties the hands of America’s diplomatic officials, military, and others by inhibiting our ability to effectively communicate in a credible way,” according to BuzzFeed.

The vote came two days after [a federal judge ruled](#) that an indefinite detention provision in the annual defense bill was unconstitutional.

Lt. Col. Daniel Davis, who released a [highly critical report regarding the distortion of truth by senior military officials in Iraq and Afghanistan](#), dedicated a section of his report to Information Operations (IO) and states that after Desert Storm the military wanted to transform IO "into a core military competency on a par with air, ground, maritime and special operations."

Davis defines IO as "the integrated employment of electronic warfare (EW), computer network operations (CNO), psychological operations (PSYOP), military deception (MILDEC), and operations security (OPSEC), in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt, corrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own."

IO are primarily used to target foreign audiences, but Davis cites numerous senior leaders who want to (in the words of Colonel Richard B. Leap) "**protect a key friendly center of gravity, to wit**

US national will" by repealing the Smith-Mundt Act to allow the direct deployment of these tactics on the American public.

Davis quotes Brigadier General Ralph O. Baker — the Pentagon officer responsible for the Department of Defense's Joint Force Development (i.e. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines) — who defines IO as activities undertaken to "shape the essential narrative of a conflict or situation and thus affect the attitudes and behaviors of the targeted audience" and **equates descriptions of combat operations with standard marketing strategies:**

For years, commercial advertisers have based their advertisement strategies on the premise that there is a positive correlation between the number of times a consumer is exposed to product advertisement and that consumer's inclination to sample the new product. The very same principle applies to how we influence our target audiences when we conduct COIN.

Davis subsequently explains the "cumulative failure of our nation's major media in every category" as they continually interviewed only those senior U.S. officials who had top-level access, even as the officials given that clearance were required to stick to "talking points" given to them by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

If the NDAA goes into effect in its current form, the State Department and Pentagon can go beyond manipulating mainstream media outlets and **directly disseminate campaigns of misinformation to the U.S. public.**

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