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Review of the Range of Virtual Wars

Strategic comparison with the global war against terrorism

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Introduction

The legitimacy and honourable aspects of "war" have encouraged use of the term in framing metaphorically the struggle of society against a range of problematic conditions -- especially in politically motivated marketing campaigns. Curiously the strategic implications arising from the possibility of whether such warfare is "asymmetric" are not considered. Nor does the question arise as to whether the dynamics of the "enemy" resemble "terrorism" to a much higher degree than might be admitted or be acceptable -- given current attitudes to "terrorism". Here we are dealing with cases of "war on X" or "war against X", in contrast to Underhill's exploration of "war is X" or "X is war" (see James William Underhill (*The Switch: metaphorical representation of the war in Iraq from September 2002 - May 2003*)).

Official virtual wars

Other than the "war on terrorism" (and excluding "trade wars"), examples of "wars on X" declared by governments and international bodies include:

Table 1: "Official Virtual Wars"	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • war on want [more] • war on poverty [more] [more] [more] [more] • war on drugs [more] [more] [more] [more] [more] [more] • war on waste [more] [more] [more] • war on hate [more] [more] • war on weapons of mass destruction [more] • war on pornography [more] [more] • war on illiteracy [more] [more] • war on ignorance [more] • war on traffic [more] • war on noise [more] • war on corruption [more] [more] • war on forced labour [more] • war on slavery [more] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • war on crime [more] [more] • war on disease [more] [more] • war on malaria [more] • war on hunger [more] • war on landmines [more] • war against child labour [more] [more] • war against locusts [more] • war against racism [more] • war on homelessness [more] • war on desertification [more] • war on pollution [more] [more] • war on pests [more] • war on evil [more] [more] [more] • war on HIV/AIDS [more] [more]

Unofficial virtual wars

Other kinds of "wars on..." have been identified, or "declared", by groups of varying degrees of legitimacy (see Table 2). A contrast can be very usefully made between "wars" declared by protagonists (marked "P") and those "wars" noted by groups whose interests are targeted (marked "T"). Some "wars" may be acknowledged -- differently -- by both protagonists and targeted. Those in impoverished conditions would, for example, tend to perceive that "war" has been effectively engaged against them. Some may respond by declaring a "holy war" -- or a "crusade". This can give rise to what is labelled as "terrorism" -- against which "war" can in its turn be declared. "Evil" may be variously detected and itself result in the declaration of a "war" in response -- hence preferences for the "crusader" and "jihadi" terminology.

Table 2: "Unofficial Virtual Wars"	
(P="Wars" declared by protagonists; T="Wars" detected by those whose interests are targeted)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • war on pain [more] (P) • war on property rights [more] (T) • war on business [more] (P/T) • war on gays [more] (P/T) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • war on journalism [more] (T) • war on counterfeiting [more] (P) • war on global warming [more] (P/T) • war on climate change [more] (P/T)

- war on activists [more | more] (P/T)
- war on environment [more] (T)
- war against nature [more] (T)
- war on the automobile [more] (P/T)
- war on truth [more | more] (T)
- war of truth [more] (P)
- war against the weak [more] (T)
- war against the poor [more] (T)
- war on science [more] (P/T)
- war on children [more | more | more | more] (T)
- war on personal responsibility [more] (T)
- war on civil liberties [more] (P/T)
- war on human rights [more] (P/T)
- war on political dissent [more] (P/T)
- war on psychiatry [more | more] (P/T)
- war on diabetes [more] (P)
- war on junk food [more] (P)
- war on education [more] (T)
- war on fear [more] (P)
- war on bacteria [more] (P)
- war on guns [more] (P/T)
- war on religion [more] (P/T)
- war on tyranny [more] (P)
- war against sin (P)
- war on love [more] (T)
- war against trade unions [more | more] (P/T)
- war on liberal economic order [more] (T)
- war on abortion [more | more] (P/T)
- war on hope [more] (T)

- war on chronic illness [more] (P)
- war on weeds [more] (P)
- war on the family [more] (P/T)
- war on spam [more] [more] (P)
- war on freedom [more | more] (P/T)
- war on hierarchy [more] (P/T)
- war on fat [more] (P/T)
- war on the press [more] (P/T)
- war on choice [more | more] (P/T)
- war on women [more | more | more] (T)
- war on academic freedom [more] (P/T)
- war on child health [more] (T)
- war on rational discourse [more] (P/T)
- war on Christianity [more] (P/T)
- war on Islam [more | more | more] (P/T)
- war on Judaism [more | more | more | more] (P/T)
- war on youth [more] (T)
- war on the disabled [more] (T)
- war on sexual temptation [more] (P)
- war on cancer [more | more | more] (P)
- war on capitalism [more | more] (P/T)
- war against global crimes [more] (P)
- war on halitosis [more] (P/T)
- war on water wastage [more] (P)
- war against rising sea levels [more] (P)
- war against population [more | more] (T)
- war on imagination [more] (T)
- war on thought [more | more] (T)
- war on wisdom [more | more] (T)

Strategic lessons

With respect to the official "wars" (in Table 1 above), it is clear to all that they are not being won with the current strategies (as supported by the key members of the Coalition of the Willing):

- The **"war on drugs"** provides the most striking example [more | more]. Labelled a "tragic failure", in the USA it has lasted over 30 years [more | more] -- gradually evoking new thinking from those who engage in it [more | more | more]. The same is true in the UK (cf Alan Travis, *Revealed: how drugs war failed*, *The Guardian*, 5 July 2005). One curious side effect of the "successful" USA-UK attack on Afghanistan was that drug production, constrained by the Taliban, began to flourish anew. Given the continuing military operations there, it might be argued that both "wars" have proven to be a failure.
- With respect to the **"war on cancer"**, one report indicates "30 years ago, the United States declared war on cancer. Three decades later, we're still fighting and dying" [more] Another report asks why access to alternative cancer treatment is so vigorously prevented [more]
- With respect to the **"war on poverty"** launched in the USA by Lyndon Johnson in 1964: "Since then, the federal government has created vast new bureaucracies and raised taxes to a staggering level not seen since World War Two. L.B.J. helped create welfare..., Medicare, Head Start, the Job Corps, and Medicaid. Worst of all, most of L.B.J.'s War on Poverty was a failure". [more | more]. There is also criticism of the World Bank's approach to the "war on poverty" [more]
- With respect to the **"war against hunger"**, one FAO report indicates: "Given the rate at which hunger has declined since 1990 on average, the World Food Summit goal of reducing the number of undernourished people by half by 2015 cannot be reached. After falling by 37 million during the first half of the 1990s, the number of hungry people in developing countries increased by 18 million in the second half of the decade". [more]

The "war on drugs" also provides a very concrete insight into the incapacity of governments to stop the smuggling of explosives by terrorists. Given the market value of drugs, significant quantities are now transported by "drug mules" [more | more] -- namely people who swallow a large number of wrapped balls of drugs to take them undetected through customs on behalf of other parties, prior to excreting them. High quality explosives can be similarly transported. Again, just as drugs can be planted in the luggage of innocent passengers, explosives can be similarly planted to be detonated from a distance -- thus providing a means of manufacturing a "suicide bomber" from any suitable passenger. It is notable that in the "war on drugs" the reasons for the huge demand -- even amongst elites -- are never addressed. Possession may be declared illegal, but to little effect.

The "war on terrorism" is being framed in a similar way to the "war on drugs" and other "official wars", possibly mistakenly (cf Marc O. Hedahl, *Stop calling it the War on Terrorism: an argument for moral clarity* US Joint Services Conference on Professional Ethics: *Anti-Terrorist Operations and Homeland Defense*, 2003). It has already been announced that the "war on terrorism" may last for decades. There is therefore every reason to believe that it may continue for many decades without being "won". It is therefore legitimate to ask whether catching occasional "mules", or taking out some supply chains, will effectively address the underlying issue. *Who benefits* from the reallocation of resources to engage in the "war"?

It is interesting that two "wars" that might be said to have been won are the "war against communism" and the "war against colonialism". This conclusion would be disputed.

For Lev Navrozov (*What Does This Buzz-Phrase 'War on Terrorism' Mean?* *NewsMax.com*, 17 December 2002):

We can now see what the buzz-phrase "war on terrorism" means. It means invading small and technologically backward

countries that have nothing to do with terrorism and provoking thereby hatred for the West, and especially the United States, in the Islamic world, China, Russia and India. A possible result is terrorism in the United States as intense as it is in Israel despite Prime Minister Sharon's "war on terrorism" before and ever since his invasion of the West Bank. In short, the "war on terrorism" is a possible conversion of the West into Israel as far as the intensity of suicidal terrorism is concerned.

There is a curious irony to the challenge of the "war on terrorism", when compared with climate change and the future "[war against rising sea level](#)" -- a phenomenon currently denied by the Bush administration. It evokes the curious image of George Bush acting like King Canute of yore in bidding the tide to go back. However, in the case of George Bush, it is his faith-based sense of reality that convinces him that the sea level will not rise unbidden -- until his faith convinces him otherwise. In Canute's case, history records that he only wished to demonstrate the limitations of his power to his sycophantic courtiers. History will presumably record otherwise in Bush's case.

Who benefits from the use of war psychology to pursue virtual wars expected to be never-ending?

Renunciation of "war" in favour of "struggle"

Curiously, in July 2005, US officials indicated that the phrase "global war on terror" (known by the acronym GWOT), used by the Coalition of the Willing for four years and predicted to last one or more decades, was to be "phased out in favor of more nuanced language". The newly preferred phrase was indicated as being "struggle against violent extremism" [[more](#)] -- presumably to be known by the acronym SAVE as a natural reflection of "faith-based" strategic thinking.

More curiously, in the light of the commercial metaphor whereby terrorism is described as having been "franchised", this change has also been described using a commercial metaphor (cf Tom Regan, *The 'rebranding' of the war on terror*, *Christian Science Monitor*, 28 July 2005). Whereas the Bush regime argues that this reflects a recognition that subtler language is necessary to reflect recognition of a subtler challenge, critics have argued that the change actually reflects a recognition that the "war" was failing [[more more](#)]. Should the terrorized worldwide now coopt the term "global war on terrorism" to refer to the many actions, notably by the Coalition of the Willing, contributing to their terror?



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