Unravelling the Tangled Web of Pretext Stratagems

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For more than a year now the U.S. has seemed on the verge of attacking Iraq. All that is stopping them is their inability to find a credible pretext for war.

Throughout history, war planners have used many forms of deception to trick their enemies. Because public support is so crucial to the process of initiating and waging war, the home population is also subject to deceitful stratagems. Creating false pretenses to justify war is often a major step in gaining public support for such deadly ventures.

Like schoolyard bullies who shout 'He hit me first!', war planners know that it is irrelevant whether their rival really did 'throw the first punch.' As long as the attack can be made to appear unprovoked, the aggressor can 're-spond' with force. Bullies and war planners are experts in the art of taunting, teasing and threatening. If enemies cannot be goaded into 'firing the first shot,' it is easy enough to fabricate lies about what happened. Such lies are used to rationalize schoolyard beatings or genocidal wars.

Such expedient artifice has no doubt been used by every military power in history. Roman emperors had their *cassus belli* to conceal real reasons for waging war. Over the millenia, although weapons and battle strategies have changed greatly, the deceitful stratagem of using pretext incidents to ignite war has remained remarkably consistent. In examining this history, certain patterns repeatedly emerge, a distinct *modus operandi* is detected, and the institutionalized, criminal ploys of war planners can be seen.

Perhaps the most commonly used war pretext device is an apparently unprovoked enemy attack. Through history, such "attacks" have been deliberately incited, completely fabricated, allowed to occur, or engineered and then blamed on the desired enemy. The event is then exploited to arouse widespread public sympathy for the victims, to demonise the attackers and to build widespread support for military "retaliation" among the general population, as well as among politicians and other leaders of public opinion.

War pretext incidents, in themselves, are not sufficient to spark wars. Rumours and allegations about the tragic events must also spread throughout the target population. Constant repetition of the official version of what happened, helps to spawn dramatic narratives that are lodged into public consciousness. The stories then become accepted without question and legends are fostered. The corporate media is central to the success of such war propaganda. Politicians rally people around the flag, lending their special oratory skills to the call for a military "response." Demands for "retaliation" then ring out across the land, war hysteria mounts and, finally, a war is born.

Every time the U.S. has gone to war, pretext incidents have been used as triggers to justify military action. Later, the conventional views of these controversial events have been challenged and exposed as untrue. Historians, investigative journalists and others, have cited eyewitness accounts, declassified documents and statements made by

"Oh what a tangled web we weave, When first we practise to deceive!"
Sir Walter Scott, Canto vi, Stanza 17, *Marmion*.

Pretext *n.* [Latin *praetextum*, to weave before, pretend, disguise; *prae-*, before + *texere*, to weave], a false reason or motive put forth to hide the real one; excuse.

Stratagem [Gr. *Strategema*, device or act of a general; *stratos*, army + *agein*, to lead], a trick or scheme used to deceive an enemy in war.

the perpetrators themselves to demonstrate that provocative incidents were used to stage manage the march to war.

There are dozens of other examples from U.S. history besides those exposed in these pages. During the Cold War, dozens of covert and overt wars were promoted using specific pretext episodes. However, the crusade against communism was the generic backdrop for all rationales.

As the Cold War wound down, the "War on Drugs" was developed as a new cover story. Lurking behind U.S. lies about wanting to squash illicit drug production and trafficking, are the actual reasons for financing and training so many right-wing, military governments. The "War on Drugs" pretext has been used to boost counter-insurgency operations aimed at destroying those opposed to U.S. corporate profiteering. The CIA has not only used drugs as a pretext to arm regimes that themselves profit from illegal drug sales, it has also financed many of its own covert wars using the highly lucrative trade in heroine and cocaine.

The latest thematic pretext for war is the so-called "War Against Terrorism." It is vitally important to expose this latest attempt to fraudulently conceal the largely economic and geostrategic purposes of war. By unraveling the intricate web of pretenses woven to deceive the public, we can begin to reveal how corporations are the main benefactors of war. By throwing light on repeated historical patterns of deception, we can promote a healthy skepticism about government and corporate media yarns that are now being spun to promote wars of the future.

If asked to support wars so that wealthy elites can safely plunder the natural and human resources of foreign lands, people would likely 'just say no.' Therefore, over the millennia, war planners have developed a special martial art – the creation of war pretext incidents. These elaborate webs of deceit are woven to create the appearance that wars are fought for just, moral and humanitarian reasons.

The knowledge of how people have been repeatedly tricked into going to war, is like a vaccine. It can be used to inoculate the public with healthy doses of distrust for official, war pretext narratives and other deceptive stratagems. Through such immunization programs we can help to counter our society's susceptibility to "war fever" and, hopefully, prevent the next bout of war from infecting us.