INTRODUCTION

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Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon—the numbers of lives lost and people displaced runs into the hundreds of thousands. The 'War on Terror' is, for the people affected directly by this imperial enterprise, a war of terror. As the human cost escalates, the savage brutality unleashed by the United States and its allies is hard to conceal. The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the unbridled support for Israel's wanton destruction of the Lebanon have been re-presented to citizens of the United Kingdom and the United States as necessary responses to the growth of extreme Islamist movements around the world. However the 'War on Terror', rebranded and remarketed as the 'long war' by US officials, has produced a civilian death toll far in excess of anything that al-Qaeda or its allies could boast and the 'benefits' for citizens of the Middle East and Central Asia, where this war is for the most part being fought, appear thin indeed. Certainly, greater democracy and security are not among them. Closer to home, the curtailment of civil liberties, increased surveillance and an elevated risk of terrorist attack hardly provides anything to cheer about. So if we are to understand the origins and consequences of the War on Terror and the Iraq War we must seek an alternative narrative to that provided by official sources.

Considerable evidence exists that both the US and UK have nurtured the growth of extremist movements in areas of strategic interest (Ahmed, 2006), which could provide apparent justification for the huge military presence in these regions. But besides clear identification of the economic and political motives underpinning military action, this 'alternative' narrative involves a profound reframing of the psychology that accompanies acculturation into Western society—in particular how and why people internalise the motives of Western governing elites. To those people on the planet living outside this sphere of cultural conditioning, and here we are talking about most of the world's people, the vindictiveness and aggression

of the US–UK alliance (aided and abetted by the US's principal client state, Israel), and its single-minded pursuit of energy, wealth and power has been obvious for some time. To citizens of the US and UK however, it has not. What does this tell us about our own psychology? This book utilises the invasion of Iraq and the 'War on Terror' to deconstruct the psychological and cultural processes which shadow these actions, and which prepare citizens (children and adults alike) to not only accept the state's actions but to assume benevolence in its intentions. A further purpose here is to explore the possibilities that such a deconstruction may open our eyes to. These include a new postmodern variant of totalitarian rule fashioned by the security state to safeguard elite interests at home and abroad, as well as the idea, unspeakable in our own media, that 'we', i.e. the above tripartite alliance of Britain, the US and Israel, do not want peace in the Middle East. Implanted deep in the American and British psyche is the product of a grand deception—the notion that we are continually exploring all means to bring peace, stability, justice, human rights and democracy to the world. The opposite in fact appears more likely to be true: that all available avenues are followed to avoid peace, to wage war, to solicit evidence from torture and to antagonise people around the world toward positions of hatred and violence. All of this in 'the national interest'. This reality somehow survives outside of any critical scrutiny even in the face of widespread scepticism about the motives of individual politicians. As the window on this hypocrisy opens ever wider, people in the West face the loss of the moral legitimacy of their culture in the wider world. These events however also present people with new opportunities to organise, protest and make visible their challenge to the incumbent war 'fever' and suppression of civil liberties. The psychological factors that hinder or promote effective recognition and action are examined throughout the book—particularly in the chapters by John Sloboda and Brian Doherty. A common theme in this analysis is the power of social representations: of warfare, terrorism, and political action to shape our culture (a culture, which has been regularly engaged in military action abroad) and the actions of individuals within it. The theory of social representations makes possible a different kind of critique than that afforded by the experimental social psychology of the 1960s and 70s. It is not that the work of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo is no longer relevant to any understanding of the events unfolding in Iraq—particularly with respect to the commission of war crimes and torture at Abu Ghraib (see Bruner, 2004), but in the 2000s there is a need to look beyond these situationist accounts and direct our gaze at the wider culture within which the meaning of these actions are to be found—for actors and interpreters alike. In examining social representations the contributors have adopted a largely UK perspective—though representations of war and terrorism from outside these shores, chiefly from parts of the Muslim world—are an important counterpoint to these.

As well as describing the psychology of the population, one that simultaneously reflects and contributes to the goals of the military industrial

complex and the security state, this book is primarily concerned with the relationship between the psychological community and those who wield power. In different ways many of the contributors to this book consider what exactly our responsibilities as psychologists are and how psychological knowledge can be used constructively in the present climate. Ian Robbins, Nimisha Patel and David Harper in particular—all of them with considerable experience in providing psychological services to people who have undergone torture and inhuman treatment have made important and powerful statements here concerning our individual and collective responsibility as psychologists. The ‘War on Terror’ and events in Iraq are perhaps a watershed for the discipline, posing uncomfortable questions for the psychological community regarding the stance adopted towards the powerful and the privileged. The unfolding of this nightmare offers an opportunity to know ourselves a little better and to explore and develop psychological perspectives on peace and conflict, which may not only provide an intellectual defence against the fog of official lies but also permit a platform for action to be constructed that places human rights firmly at the centre of the discipline. This will not be possible without examining the politics of the discipline. In short we need a more socially responsible psychology in the twenty-first century, one unshackled from state interests, that contributes in some small way to a more positive and just world.

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London, October 2006