



The Violent Image

Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries

Neville Bolt

AN UNCONVENTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE UNCONVENTIONAL WEAPON NOW CRITICAL TO THE ARSENAL OF ANY MODERN GLOBAL REBEL.

Fast-moving, self-perpetuating images of violence have radically changed the nature of insurgency in modern times, and the global media trafficking in these images have fundamentally transformed the act and speed of the exchange among populations. First satellite TV, then laptops and the Internet, and now cellphones and social media, new technologies have revolutionized the act of communication and have collapsed the impediments of time and distance. Rebels who hope to overthrow states and revolutionaries who aim to establish transnational, ideological communities have only to utilize these dynamic technologies to advance their goals. Yet trial and error has also taught a key lesson: in a visual world, the pull of the violent image is more powerful and resonant than the draw of the carefully-crafted word.

Neville Bolt dives headfirst into the innovative strategies of today's revolutionaries and their fascinating appropriation of the nineteenth-century practice of "propaganda of the deed," or the political act of violence. No longer is the terrorist act simply a means to push governments to overreact, therefore shredding their legitimacy and credibility. The deed has instead become an efficient tool to initiate a campaign of shock and awe, exposing and exploiting the grievances that underlie communities' fragile ties. Images of 9/11, 7/7, Abu Ghraib, and "collateral damage" are the contemporary weapons of choice. *The Violent Image* explores the emotional and psychological components of this visual "moment of shock," or the binding of emotive pictures to messages causing popular uprisings. From terrorist groups such as the Fenians and the Taliban to the architects of the ongoing Arab Spring, this study follows insurgents and their manipulation of violent imagery to build narratives and bring social change. Taking advantage of the "war of ideas," new revolutionaries generate surges of support that spread virally through global networks, often so quickly that states are unable to respond in time and kind. This book ultimately asks whether the world has reached a point in which insurgents and populations are driving images and ideas so rapidly that we are already in the grip of a new era of revolutionary politics.

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"Elegantly written and a pleasure to read, *The Violent Image* invites the reader on a fairly wild ride, from the Fenians to the Taliban, from print media to social media and back. Carefully and logically organized, Bolt's work is scholarly in the best sense. He makes a big argument in a small package, densely researched yet readable. Most important, he says something new in a field that desperately needs it."

—David J. Betz, King's College London

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