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# 'Mein Kampf' and New Trends in Information Warfare

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**Abstract.** This article explores how on-line commercial enterprises may have significant consequences for what people think, feel, and desire and how they act.

Call it information warfare, perception management, or psychological operations. For thousands of years, political conflict--including conflict contested through military means--has significantly comprised the control of data to which people are exposed. Why is this? The data are thought--by those with power and by those who seek it--to affect and effect what people think, feel, and desire and how they act. For this reason, deliverers of the wrong speech, writers of the wrong words, doers of the wrong deed, and creators of the wrong creations are threatened, tortured, and killed. Here "wrong" is associated with a real, perceived, or potential threat to those in power or those seeking it.

One might posit that the opportunity to speak one's mind and to challenge political power might be growing as the technical sophistication of telecommunications continues to grow. Meanwhile, political power's countering of such warfare might be ever more difficult. In this last case, banning Internet infrastructures, fax machines, and cellular phones or developing and employing filters impeding access to threatening websites would likely be logistically prohibitive. Even if the logistics could be worked out, this success might engender a loss in power for the political authorities through a loss in the political and economic benefits and opportunities that telecommunications could otherwise have provided.

On the other hand, there appears to be an ironic ally to the most oppressive of political authorities who feel threatened by telecommunications--viz., opponents of "oppressive" literature. For example, the on-line bookstore BOL--owned by the German entity, Bertelsmann--has stopped selling Hitler's *Mein Kampf* to anyone throughout the world. This is because it is illegal to sell hate literature in Germany and *Mein Kampf*--at least in unannotated form--is considered to be hate literature in Germany.

Yet, it is legal to sell the book in the United Kingdom and France. Until now, BOL had been selling the book in English and French, not in German. BOL chose to stop selling the book entirely, because the Internet crosses national boundaries and because Germans could still buy English or French versions. BOL was also influenced in this decision by a complaint with the German Justice Ministry by the Simon Wiesenthal Center against Barnesandnoble.com and Amazon.com of violating German law by selling books such as *Mein Kampf*.

The relevance of BOL's decision to opponents of political authorities is as follows. Opponents often transmit data (via fax and Internet) to third countries for dissemination throughout the world and re-transmittal back to their own countries. Those who re-transmit such data must now worry about legal action against them in countries other than their own. The opponents of totalitarianism are in essence setting precedents for impeding information warfare against totalitarians--hoisted on their own petards. (See Bartlett, F.C. (1940). *Political propaganda*. NY: Macmillan; Firm ends web sales for 'Mein Kampf.' (August 21, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A5; Lasswell, H. (1971). *Propaganda Technique in World War I*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Schwartz, B. (1996). *Memory as a cultural system*. American Sociological

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Review, 61, 908-927; Whittaker, J.O. (1997). Psychological warfare in Vietnam. *Political Psychology*, 18, 165-179.) (Keywords: Information Warfare, Perception Management, Psychological Operations.)