Pro-war propaganda:
are we doing it by accident?

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Scientists for Global Responsibility

http://www.sgr.org.uk/

Presentation at 'Teaching Peace in Higher Education' conference, at Portsmouth University, 11 April 2024
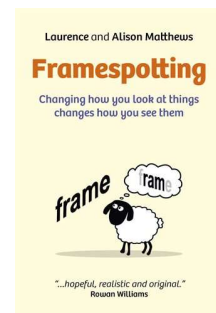References listed in the final slides

Military-friendly language

"Gentlemen, you can't fight in here. This is the War Room!"
Dr Strangelove (1964)

Framespotting

- Our view on an issue is strongly affected by the 'frame' we view it through
- Example:
  - 'Inheritance tax' v 'Death tax'
  - Inheritance tax
    - Tax on assets that are inherited, i.e. unearned wealth – 'good'
  - Death tax
    - Tax imposed following death – 'bad'
  - But they are the same thing! It depends which 'frame' you use…

Laurence and Alison Matthews

Framespotting

Changing how you look at things changes how you see them

frame

"…hopeful, realistic and original."
Rowan Williams

- For more discussion of the concept and examples, see: Matthews and Matthews (2014); Lakoff (2014)

[image credit: Matthews and Matthews]

Military-friendly language: **Defence**

- After World War II, governments starting renaming their 'Ministry of War' to 'Ministry of Defence'
- Now broadly used to describe all military-related activities:
  - e.g. defence policies, defence forces, defence industry, defence technologies
- Defence is widely viewed as positive:
  - e.g. flood defence, legal defence, defence against aversity
- Implications:
  - Opposition to defence is irrational
  - Peace campaigners are irrational – and are not concerned with keeping us safe

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- Dictionary definitions of defence use words like 'protection'
- Image is seal of US War Office (Dept of War) up until 1947

[image credit: United States Dept of War, 1880]

Alternative language

- Military activities occur across a spectrum
  - From more defensive to more offensive
- Were these military actions 'defensive' as their supporters argue?
  - US/UK-led invasion of Iraq
  - Russian invasion of Ukraine
  - Israeli invasion of Gaza
  - Arms exports to Saudi Arabia/Israel
  - US/UK military operations in South China Sea
- Implications:
  - Using 'defence' to cover all military situations is inaccurate
  - Using 'defence' is political framing intended to undermine criticism
- Alternative terms:
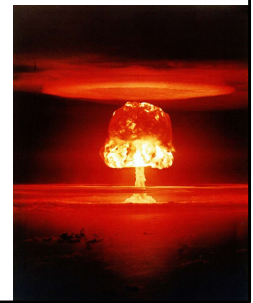 - **military; armed forces; military technology industry; arms industry**

- In general, pacifists argue that even 'defensive' military operations are violent – as they cause death and injury

[image: Typhoon strike plane; credit: MOD]

Military-friendly language: Deterrent

- Weapons/ armed forces often described as 'deterrents'
  - Key example: nuclear deterrent
- Used to hide threat of large-scale violence
- Used to disguise high risk of failure
  - Especially involving threats against/ attacks on civilians
- Motivation again to undermine criticism of weapons/ armed forces
- Alternative terms (nuclear case):
  - **nuclear weapons; weapons of mass destruction**

[image credit: Gerd Altmann]

Military-friendly language: Smart weapons

- Introduction of computer-based guidance systems into missiles, bombs etc have led to terms like 'smart weapons' and 'precision weapons'
- Implication: only 'bad guys' will be hit by them
- A (typical) 1000-pound bomb cannot be used with 'precision'!
  - Casualties still occur in surrounding area
  - Always potential for target to be mis-identified
  - Military temptation for more frequent use of these weapons
- Alternative terms: **guided weapons, missiles, bombs**

- For more examples of war-related terminology, see: Parkinson (2022)
[image credit: Don White via Pixabay]

Military-friendly associations

FAIR-TRADE LANDMINES

[Image credit: https://www.spellingmistakescostlives.com/]

Military-sponsored careers events

- Aimed at school children and/or university students
- Focused on STEM subjects
  - Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
- Careers fairs/ days/ visits/ talks
  - Sponsorship/ branding used to generate 'social license'
- Military sponsorship justified as providing support for STEM skills
- Example: The Big Bang Fair
  - UK's largest STEM education/ careers event
  - 2024 corporate supporters include:
    Leonardo; Rolls-Royce

- For many years, The Big Bang's lead sponsor was BAE Systems.
- Source: The Big Bang Fair (2024)

Arms industry funding of university R&D

- Purposes: new tech; recruitment of STEM professionals; social license
- Main NGO studies since 2000:

Year published	Number of universities	Coverage	Lead research organisations
2005	29	4 MOD/ industry programmes	SGR
2007	26	Mainly elite 'Russell Group'	CAAT & FOR
2008	16	Random sample	SGR
2014	53	Funding from Atomic Weapons Establishment	Nuclear Information Service
2018	12	Researching autonomous systems	Drone Wars UK
2021	48	Wide sample	AOAV
2022	13	Researching autonomous systems	UK-CSKR
2019-present	64	Online database of any financial links + 2024 report	dED

- All references listed in final slide

Science-fiction TV and film

- Often strong focus on military/ war situations
- Military orgs often involved in production activities – social license
- Examples
  - Star Wars – clue in the title; became nickname of 1980s US weapons programme
  - Transformers – high-tech war stories
  - Stargate – real-life military organisation (US Air Force) part of storyline
  - Star Trek – Starfleet described as 'non-military' organisation, but many naval/ military elements
  - Doctor Who – common theme: 'alien invasion of Earth'; protagonist often allies with Earth military force 'UNIT'; one story filmed at HM Portsmouth!

- 1980s US military R&D programme – Strategic Defense Initiative – was nicknamed 'Star Wars'. It was intended to develop several layers of weapons technologies – including lasers – to destroy any and all nuclear missiles which might be launched at the US. The programme was widely regarded as a failure, and most elements were abandoned.
- Doctor Who story filmed at HM Portsmouth including using Royal Navy vessels – 'The Sea Devils' in 1972; British Army and Royal Air Force also appeared in stories in late 1960s/ early 1970s

Build associations with alternatives

- STEM (and other) partnerships with:
  - Renewable energy industries
  - Energy efficiency industries
  - Health sector
  - International development agencies
  - Community organisations
- Organisations should have high environmental/ social/ governance standards
  - Numerous rating systems to help judge
- Beware of 'greenwash' etc
- Radical scholar organisations:
  - Scientists for Global Responsibility, Scientist XR etc

[image credit: iStock]

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