



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN COUNTER TERRORISM: Target Audience Analysis, Measures of Effect and Counter Narrative

04-05 June 2014



**CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
DEFENCE AGAINST TERRORISM**

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN COUNTER TERRORISM:

*Target Audience Analysis, Measures of Effect and
Counter Narrative*

Workshop-seminar: Expert's Paper

NATO COE DAT, Ankara Turkey, 04-05 June 2014

The Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism (COE DAT) in Ankara Turkey, is a NATO accredited international military organisation, coordinated by Allied Command Transformation (ACT) in Norfolk, Virginia. The Centre assists with transformation within NATO by contributing to the development of counter terrorism doctrine, capability and interoperability, subject matter expertise, and education. By providing a platform for expert academics and practitioners, and a conduit of observations, applications and recommendations to NATO, The Centre is best placed to positively influence the Alliance's critical work in the domain of counter terrorism. The Centre also collaborates with Partnership for Peace, Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries, amongst others.

Disclaimer

This workshop-seminar report is a product of the Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism (COE DAT). It is produced for NATO, NATO member countries, NATO partners and related private and public institutions. It does not represent the opinions or policies of NATO and is designed to provide an overview of the referent COE DAT directed workshop-seminar activity.

CONTENTS

Glossary of abbreviations	4
Preface	5
Overview	6
Expert Monographs	
Part A: Academic Theory and Hypothesis	
Communication and Counterterrorism in the Digital Age: Overcoming Outdated Approaches to the Information Environment, Dr. Cristina Archetti	9
The two 'New Blacks': Social Media and Narratives and the Challenge of Measurement, Mr. Thomas E. Nissen, M.Sc., MA	14
Part B: Applied Methodology and Case Study	
Comprehensive PSYOP Assessment and Evaluation in Counterterrorism Efforts, Major Greg Seese, Psy.D . . .	19
Case Study: Counter Terrorism Communications in Somalia, Mr. Stephen Harley	24
Expert Biographies	
Dr. Cristina Archetti	31
Mr. Thomas E. Nissen	32
Major Greg Seese (Psy.D)	33
Mr. Stephen Harley	34

Glossary of abbreviations

AIT	Advanced Individual Training (USA)
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
CN	Counter Narrative
COE DAT	Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism
COIN	Counter Insurgency
CT	Counter Terrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DoD	Department of Defence (USA)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IO	Information Operations
JISTF	Joint Information Support Task Force (USA)
MC	Military Concept
MENA	Middle East North Africa
MOE	Measures of Effectiveness
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
Psy.D	Doctor of Psychology
PSYOP	Psychological Operations
qEEG	Quantitative Electroencephalography
SC	Strategic Communication
SO	Special Operations (USA)
SOCOM	Special Operations Command (USA)
SPO	Supporting PSYOP Objective
SSDCO	Stability, Security and Development in Complex Operations (USA)
StratCom	Strategic Communication
TA(A)	Target Audience (Analysis)
USG	USA Government
USMC	United States Marine Corps
USSOCENT	United States Special Operations Command Central (USA)
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance

Preface

The chapters in this report were written by four volunteers who presented at the 'Strategic Communication in Counter Terrorism' workshop-seminar held at COE DAT in Ankara, Turkey, 04-05 June 2014. It is a stand-alone document, but can be read in conjunction with the baseline report of the same activity, which contains the executive summaries of all 10 presentations, and the biographies of the 11 speakers.¹ However the purpose of this document is to deliver deeper analysis and explanation than is afforded by an executive summary collection.

Methodology

The four individual chapters were written by the speakers in their own words, and refined through a process of group peer-review, only lightly edited by the workshop director. A coordination meeting was held at the end of the activity, on the second day (05 Jun), and formal guidance agreed then was released in written form by the workshop director on 06 Jun. The aim and overarching principle are duplicated here:

Aim: To add value to the Alliance, and its member countries, in the domain of Strategic Communication in Counter Terrorism by:

- producing a tailored product, focused on TAA, MOE and Counter Narrative
- representing those salient points, points of divergence, and recommendations for future research
- in a succinct, bespoke paper
- based on your presentation and executive summary, own area(s) of expertise, and critical input/observations from the workshop

Overarching principle: To produce a value-adding product by consensus.

Follow-up

Readers of this paper, who wish to engage deeper with its material, are encouraged to be in touch with the authors of the individual chapters of interest. Their biographies and preferred email addresses follow Part B. As the workshop director for this activity, I would also be glad to field any queries too, if not answering them, indicating in the appropriate direction.

Major Airey (British Army)

Workshop Director

NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism

coursedir@coedat.nato.int

¹ Two speakers co-presented

Overview

This document is arranged in two parts. Part A is primarily academic theory and hypothesis, and Part B applied methodology and case study. The consideration of placement - academics or application in Part A or B - is arbitrary. Each chapter can be read as a stand-alone monograph, and the design of this paper purposely pursued different areas of expertise, experience and explanation. Among other things, the workshop-seminar sought points of convergence, and areas of divergence, in the SC in CT arena. This paper does well to highlight these, and doesn't seek to combine all four monographs into one seamless entity to do so, but rather to present them here as is. The authors were bound only by the key focus areas of the subject, individual agreed content areas, and consensus of the group to academic freedom and rigour (not per se agreement of content).²

In Part A 'Academic Theory and Hypothesis', individual monographs are '**Communication and Counterterrorism in the Digital Age: Overcoming Outdated Approaches to the Information Environment**' by Dr. Cristina Archetti, and '**The two 'New Blacks': Social Media and Narratives, and the Challenge of Measurement**' by Mr. Thomas Elkjer Nissen.

Dr. Archetti proposes a contextual basis for insight into local narratives, and engagement with the networks of people who propagate them. Her paper examines incorrect assumptions made of the contemporary information environment, based on the shortcomings of outdated models used to understand it, which preclude the reality of its complexity. She describes the communication model she developed, to explain the evolution of individual narratives to the collective, and the configuration of networks. Dr. Archetti focuses on the non-radical networks that surround an extremist core, to challenge extremist identity. Dr. Archetti also argues that the counterterrorist's most effective tools against extremism are the congruency of narrative and policy.

Mr. Nissen examined the contest of narratives between Western liberal democracies and terrorist organisations with regards to the winning of strategic audiences, and explores issues of weaponisation with regards to social media. He comments on the bottom-up, user-generated-content approach to social network and internet mediums, equally cautioning against a top-down counter approach as he does the overstating of the technological threat. He identifies a lack of resonance of strategic and institutional narratives when disconnected from the schemas and normative behaviours of a target audience. Mr. Nissen is however sympathetic to the dilemmas of liberal democracies in this domain without absolving them of their responsibility to deal more effectively with the inherent complexity of the information environment, and their role in it.

In Part B 'Applied Methodology and Case Study', individual monographs are '**Comprehensive PSYOP Assessment and Evaluation in Counterterrorism Efforts**' by Major Gregory Seese (Psy.D), and '**Case Study: Counter Terrorism Communications in Somalia**' by Mr. Stephen Harley.

Dr. Seese's paper focuses on assessing and evaluating counterterrorism effects by analysing the construct and framework of a PSYOP programme. By identifying behavioural change as the referent meta-variable to be assessed in order to determine success, Dr. Seese works his way from Programme Goal, through Supporting- to Series- Objectives. His paper is replete with practical examples of precise and succinct objectives, notes and questions, supported by a robust and pragmatic PSYOP framework. Dr. Seese's paper is a no-nonsense practitioner's guide, which delivers a route to measuring effectiveness by systematic and rigorous development of measurable goals and objectives.

² According to the principle of '*in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*' (in necessary things unity, in doubtful things liberty, in all things charity).

Mr. Harley's case study on counter terrorism communication in Somalia describes that specific operational context, and highlights the challenges of it. Mr. Harley contends that the emphasis should be on the implementation of strategy over the design of it. He majors on 'out of the box thinking' and empowerment to risk-taking by grass-roots level operators. Mr. Harley's lucid analysis of the reality of the Somali context; his practical approach to determining and implementing a realistic communication strategy; and his emphasis on local-specific factors and measures; deliver a robust yet nuanced approach to the complexity of this case.

PART A

ACADEMIC THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

COMMUNICATION AND COUNTERTERRORISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE: OVERCOMING OUTDATED APPROACHES TO THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

Dr. Cristina Archetti

Introduction

There is a widespread realization that communication is a crucial aspect of counterterrorism. Beyond its military dimension the international fight against terrorism is, in fact, a confrontation of ideas - a struggle for the moral high ground and for the 'hearts and minds' of global audiences. While 'strategic communication' and 'narratives' are advocated by many as essential weapons in countering extremism, few seem to truly understand the reality of the digital-age information environment where such tools need to be deployed.

Limitations of current approaches

The main shortcoming of strategic communication approaches to countering terrorism lies in assuming that the information space in the digital age is far simpler and linear than it actually is. To start with, from reports on how to counter 'online radicalization' to governments' calls for 'taking radical videos off the internet', there is a strong focus on 'messaging'. Whether this means fighting the terrorists with the 'right' counter-message or removing 'their' extremist message, this reflects a woefully outdated model of public-media interactions. Such a model - often referred to as the 'hypodermic needle' model of communication - was developed in the aftermath of World War I, nearly a century ago, at a time when the winners of the conflict believed they had triumphed thanks to the persuasive powers of propaganda. The model was elaborated in the attempt to explain how propaganda messages had affected enemy soldiers. It assumes that the public is passive and that different members of an audience tend to change attitudes and behaviour in a similar way upon reception (or injection/inoculation, continuing with the hypodermic needle metaphor) of the same media message.

The reality of communication, however, could not be more different. The fact that the model is simplistic and naïve at best is not only proved by the fact that, as we can all realize in the immediacy of our everyday lives, we do not buy every commodity advertising messages tell us to buy. As a range of subsequent communication theories have pointed out, audiences are active both in the selection of the information they pay attention to - they do not consume all the information that is 'out there' - and in the interpretation of media texts. This means that the *availability* of a message (for instance a jihadi video being online) does not necessarily equate *reach* - being accessed and consumed (the jihadi video, among the estimated 6 billion hours of footage watched on YouTube alone every month, actually being watched). This, in turn, does not at all mean *impact* - the message having the desired effect (i.e., getting any viewer radicalized, or terrorized, depending on the audience being targeted by the extremist). As a further demonstration of these points, most readers of this Expert's Paper will have been exposed to some form of radical message from extremists, yet not turned into radicals. In fact, watching a jihadi video might even increase a counterterrorist's resolve against extremism - an opposite effect than originally intended by the producer of that message.

In addition to this, strategic communication approaches to counterterrorism tend unnecessarily to demonize the internet and social media. For some the internet is the very reason al Qaeda has managed to survive for decades. For others the possibility this technology offers to extremists to lurk in the dark

alleys of cyberspace is even regarded as the main cause of radicalization. Not only are these views simplistic in their *technological determinism* - the belief that a technology, out of its mere existence, must produce certain effects. In reality, instead, it is always humans (citizens, governments, and extremists among them) who use technology as a tool to advance their own goals. Negative assessments of the role of the internet and social media are also based on a lack of historical perspective. What we might see as an unprecedented 'communication revolution' is barely the latest manifestation of those profound changes that the introduction of any communication technology, from the invention of parchment, to the printing press and the telegraph, has always contributed to across the centuries. The first instantaneous and global communication technology - the telegraph (not the internet!) - for example, supported the establishment of colonial empires by enabling the effective and timely administration of distant lands. The telegraph, like the internet of today, was associated in Victorian times with growing social ills, particularly with offering novel opportunities to criminals for fraud and deception. The alarmed attitudes towards the 'dangers' of the internet and social media - emerging platforms whose effects some appear not entirely to comprehend - is thus not new when we look at the reactions by those who witnessed advances in communications in the past. Besides, the internet might be 'new' to security experts, but its effects on politics and society have been studied and debated for over twenty years in the fields of Political Communication, International Communication, and Communication Studies. It is perhaps a matter for counterterrorism practitioners to look a bit further into multidisciplinary territory for advice. The not unjustified, but certainly disproportionate, focus on the Internet prevents us from seeing the wider social - and never online-only - space in which extremism is rooted. In this respect, rather than focusing on the technology alone, it is more helpful to look at the convergence of different platforms, both 'new' and 'old' media, and at how they are used by political actors (terrorists, citizens, NGOs, governments...) for their own agendas.

A last limitation of current strategic communication against extremism relates to the understanding of narratives as simple 'messages' or 'stories'. The idea here is that, if Western governments craft the 'right' narrative and this is received by extremists, they will stop committing acts of terrorism. Narratives, however, are much more than rhetorical devices. Far from being 'just stories', they have deep roots: they are *socially constructed*. In other words narratives arise from a specific constellation of relationships - a social network. It is possible, in fact, to say that where there is a narrative there must be a network. The reason is that a narrative does not exist in a void. If it exists it is because the story it embodies is told and continuously re-told by the people who belong to that network. Understanding this is important: sending a 'narrative' into the information environment (as current approaches in fact aim to do) without there being a network to convey it and re-convey it could be compared to sending a message into outer space. What should then be remembered is that narratives are not made by words, but by *social practices*. The next section, in this respect, examines the social construction of narratives, particularly how the connection between social networks, communication and extremism can be explained.

Narratives

In examining narratives a distinction should be made between *individual narratives* and *collective narratives*. An individual narrative consists of a person's understanding of the world and one's role in it. As illustrated in *Figure 1*, more specifically, an individual's identity (who we are) is shaped by the network of relationships one is enmeshed in at any given time. Communication technologies have a role in extending these relationships beyond the realm of face-to-face interactions. Relationships can also be *imagined*, as in the case of the feeling of admiration for a terrorist leader one has never met. Our sense of identity shapes the way we interpret incoming information - our knowledge of the world (what we know). Incoming information

- given we tend to live in relatively small bubbles made of work colleagues, friends and family - is most often provided by the media. We also come across other individuals' narratives and collective narratives. The latter are the narratives by groups and institutions, such as political parties, social movements, a bird-watchers' association, or a terrorist organization. Our unique engagement with and interpretation of such information will shape our behaviour (what we do).

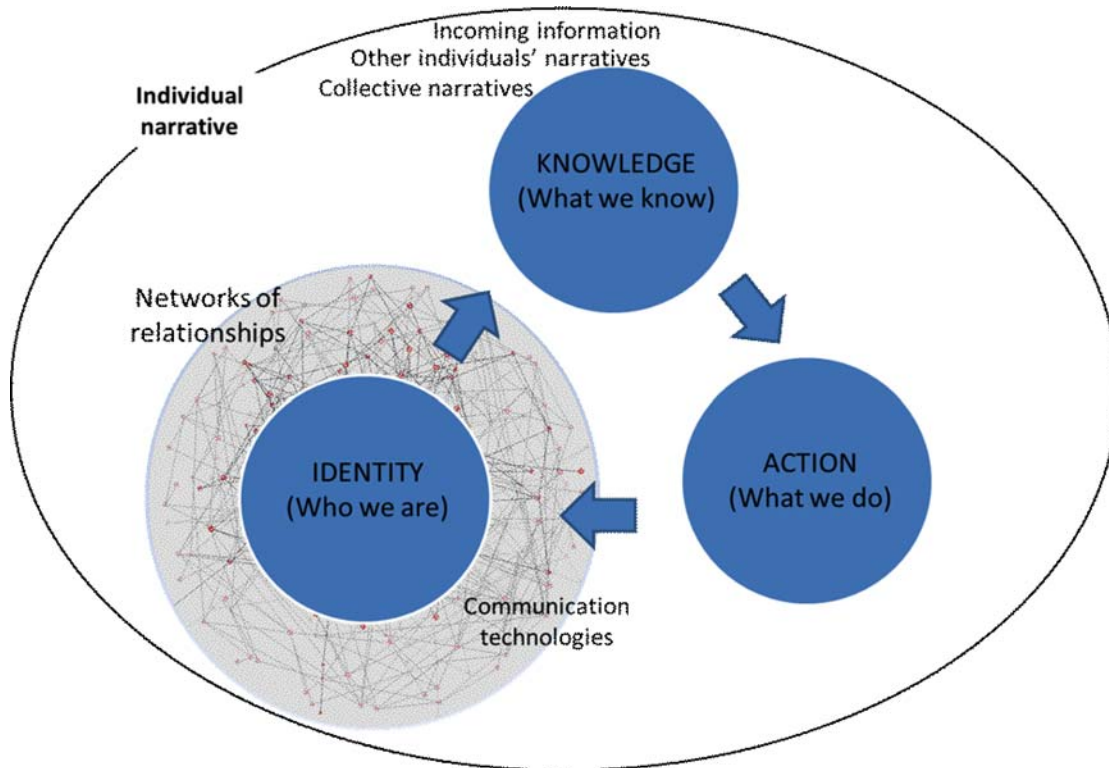


Figure 1: The social construction of the individual narrative.

Our behaviour, in turn, will affect our position within our constellation of relationships. This, by being reshaped, will affect our sense of identity, our understanding of the world, and again our behaviour, in a continuous dynamic cycle (Figure 2).

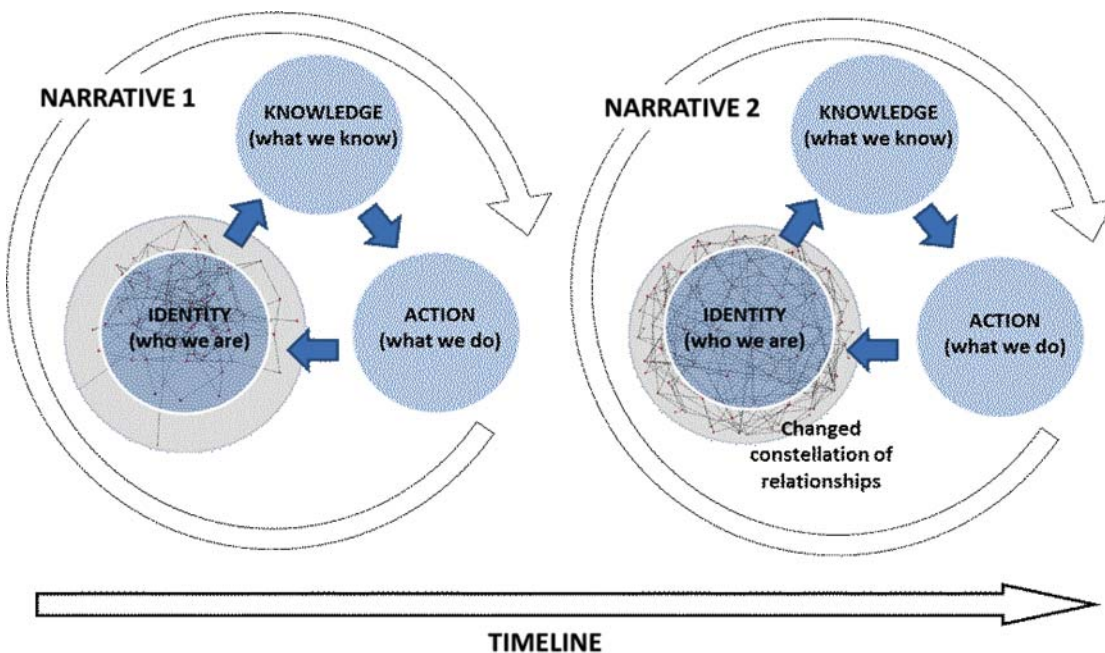


Figure 2: Evolution of the individual narrative over time.

Whether an individual will join an extremist group depends on the compatibility between the individual's own narrative and the group's. In Figure 3, for example, individuals 1 and 3, as a result of their specific and unique constellation of relationships at a given time, can see themselves as belonging to, and having a role in, an extremist group. They might be individuals living in completely different parts of the world. One might live in the Middle East and have a network of like-minded individuals he or she meets every day. The other might be a British citizen who, mainly through the internet, has developed contacts and imagined relationships with individuals he or she might have never met. In this sense it is interesting to note that this last individual, normally referred to as 'lone wolf', is not alone at all in his/her mind. Individual 2 (perhaps one of the readers of this monograph), due to his/her different network of relationships, cannot envisage a role within an extremist group. These configurations, however, given that networks of relationships continuously evolve, might change over time. Perhaps, as a result of a shift in his/her network of relationships, Individual 1 will leave the extremist group at a later stage.

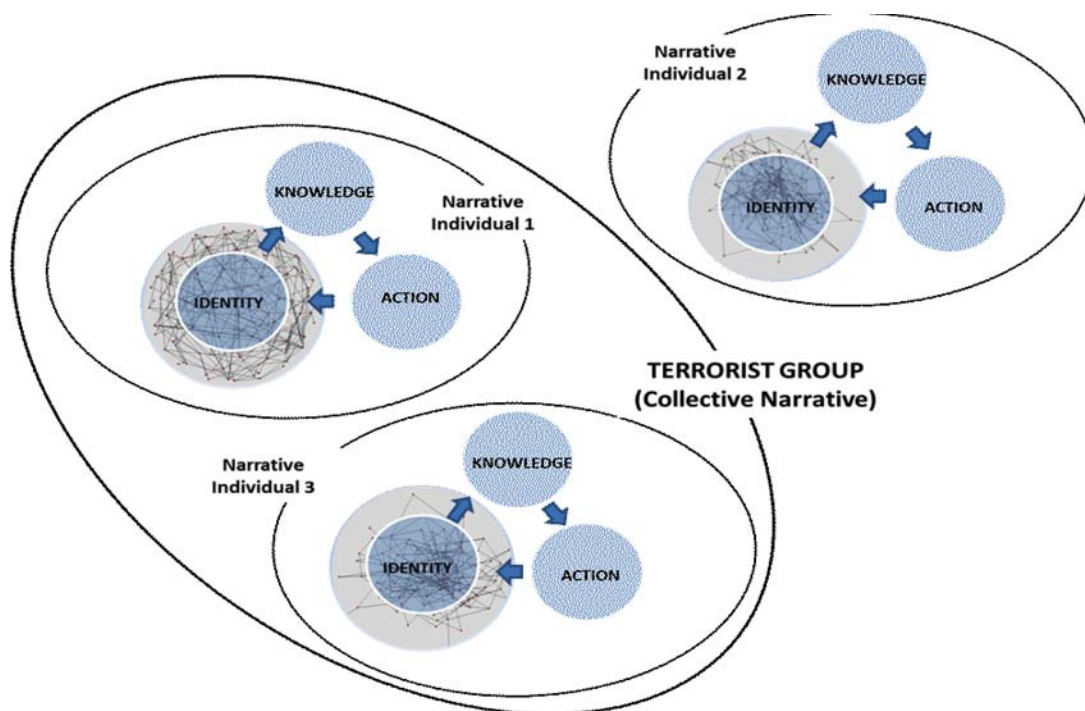


Figure 3: Changing membership of a group over time: compatibility/dissonance of individual narratives with a collective narrative.

Dispelling the myths

Once violent extremism is understood through such a relational framework it is easy to counter some widely-held beliefs in counterterrorism circles. Among them are: the notion that terrorism can be 'predicted', that there are technologies (such as the internet) that might be responsible for radicalization, and that there is a need to counter extremist messages. These notions are wrong because radicalization is a temporal- and context-specific outcome: it depends on an individual's unique position within a configuration of relationships at any given time. The role of the internet should not be dismissed: of course it has changed our society, the way politics work, and the dynamics of social mobilization. This technology offers the opportunity to reach out to potential supporters internationally and to fundraise more effectively, as social movements (Greenpeace, Amnesty International or Occupy, for instance), activists (like Anonymous), and charities (as Oxfam), know very well. However, the role of the internet in the extremism phenomenon - as in any political mobilization - is relative: in the mountains of Afghanistan - where there is no electricity and most of the population is illiterate - the terrorists' narrative is not conveyed through the Internet but rather *shabnamah*

(night letters) and leaflets affixed to walls and often handwritten. Counterintuitively, it is not necessary to be exposed to radical ideas to become a radical. The Norwegian Anders Breivik, for example, developed his extremist manifesto *2083: A European Declaration of Independence* on the basis of harmless sociology books that are available in any library. Ed Husain, a former British Islamist, became interested in political Islam by reading a religion textbook in school. These are good examples of the creativity of audiences in actively interpreting messages: both Breivik and Husain independently drew their own extremist conclusions from non-radical material that countless other individuals had been exposed to without becoming radicalized.

Assessment: Counterterrorism lessons

The implications for counterterrorism are that 'we' cannot re-write 'their' narrative. Instead, 'we' might want to learn from social movements' and charities' public communications campaigns - an example is the viral fundraising video by British teenager Stephen Sutton, who in the summer of 2014 raised over 4 million pounds for Teenage Cancer Trust. Charities, to continue with this example, are learning to operate in an increasingly unpredictable environment. While they cannot know what is going to be 'liked' by the public and 'go viral' in an increasingly message-saturated society, they understand that audiences do not 'buy' artificially-packaged top-down messages. Organizations have therefore adapted and transformed from broadcasters of messages to lose frameworks that facilitate the distribution of creative content by grassroots activists.

Ultimately, although communication is crucial, it is important to understand that the message is not all. 'We' can communicate as effectively as we like, but the consistency between words and deeds is paramount. Just to illustrate this with a couple of examples, could the very existence of Guantanamo Bay and the killing of civilians resulting from the increasing use of drones be undermining our own narrative? How credible, in the light of what is happening in Cuba and Afghanistan, is the claim that Western countries are democracies that value individual freedoms and human rights? Reality cannot be concealed behind rhetorical makeovers.

Again, because any individual interprets incoming information according to a personal narrative that is rooted in one's network of relationships at any given time, targeting extremists with the 'right' message is, to put it bluntly, a waste of time. I am not arguing that communicating with extremists is not useful or has no impact: receiving information (if one is listening, that is) always leads to some form of effect. Just do not expect to de-radicalize extremists by 'messaging' them. As political campaigners know, there is no point in trying to convince people who are very interested in politics about who to vote for: these individuals have already decided. The same applies to extremists: they have already decided, too. That is why messages, if at all used, should target not the extremists, but who is *around* them - the extremists' non-radical network of relationships. In other words: if you change an extremist's network (and the narrative that is embedded in it), then you change the extremist's identity - to a point perhaps at which the person is no longer an extremist.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is not possible to predict terrorism: there is no fixed formula that can tell when and where terrorism will arise. There are also no messages, however perfectly crafted, that can, alone, neutralise violent extremism. However, in each single local context, through community-based approaches and long-term engagement, it is possible to gain an insight into the local narratives and the networks such narratives arise from: What is the identity of the local community? How do its members see themselves? Who are the 'relevant others' of that community? The establishment over time of radical identities through ideas and discourses can be detected. By being part of a community it is also possible to engage with the non-radical networks that are around an extremist core. This, and the attention to the consistency between our narrative (words) and our policies (deeds), are the most effective tools against extremism.

THE TWO 'NEW BLACKS': SOCIAL MEDIA AND NARRATIVES, AND THE CHALLENGE OF MEASUREMENT

Thomas Elkjer Nissen, M.Sc., MA

Introduction

Terror-organisations today, to a greater and greater degree, use the internet; and most notably social media, for creating the effects they desire through a series of on-line activities such as: Information Collection (intelligence) Target Selection, Propaganda, Recruitment and Fundraising in support of their physical activities. This includes the dissemination of interlinked stories (words and images) that support their narrative, a narrative which is counter to most Western liberal democracies' narratives on terrorism in particular, but also more broadly these democracies' wider, 'institutional' narratives.

Narratives

A 'institutional narrative' can be understood as a nation's or organisation's (like NATO) basic story about itself. It is defined by NATO as, '[t]he translation of an organization's mandate and vision into a fundamental, persistent story of who the organization is, what its guiding principles are, and what it aspires to achieve'.³ It is a narrative that should be both supported by, and inform, individual 'theatre or mission narratives' for operations (like Afghanistan), or general policy issues (like terrorism). A theatre (strategic) narrative can be defined as 'a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of international politics, and shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour of domestic and international actors'.⁴ Essentially then, Western liberal democracies create and project narratives to tell a story about themselves to others and themselves, and these narratives work as the framework (informed by values and norms) for understanding and making sense of a nation or organisation's foreign- and security policy (or the 'how' and 'why' for specific issues within these policies). This includes the nation or organisation's view on and responses to terrorism.

The terror organisation's narratives, on the other hand, draw on the very same Western democracy's history, contemporary policies, behaviours and proscribed future aspirations as evidence of their narrative and its inherent claim - 'the West is at war with Islam'. By singling out values and normative principles proclaimed by Western democracies and their behaviour concerning specific topics and issues, often trying to link the two where it supports the terror-organisation's claims, and in other instances pointing out where the two do not match, they seek to 'prove' the hypocrisy and double standards of the West. This includes constantly drawing on existing and well known conflicts, such as Israel and the Palestinians/Arab neighbours, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Danish Cartoon controversy and similar, as cases for evidence - thereby drawing on existing 'truths' that are deeply rooted within the psyche of the strategic audiences.

An Islamist narrative example;

"Their narrative is based on an interpretation of historical events and theological references, but at its heart is the idea that Islam is the last revelation of God - for it post-dated Christ by over 600 years. Since it is the last revelation, so the narrative goes, it must therefore be the final and absolute word of God, and derivation from it is heretical.

³ NATO Military Committee (MC) policy 422/4 on Information Operations.

⁴ Alister Miskimmon, Ben O'Loughlin and Laura Roselle., Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations (October 2011), p. 3 [<http://newpolcom.rhul.ac.uk/npcu-blog/2012/1/17/strategic-narratives-working-paper-published.html>] (Accessed 25 Jun 14).

The narrative's authors have long memories. They note, for example, that Pope Urban II (1042-1099) launched the Crusades in 1095, and the Crusaders besieged and slaughtered the population of Jerusalem, which remained captive until Sala-ad Din's triumphal return in 1187. The colonial period is portrayed as the enslavement of Muslim people by Western oppressors - specifically the UK - whilst the discovery of oil in 1932 is portrayed as Western exploitation - specifically by the US - so too the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire - the last Caliphate. The Sykes-Picot agreement, the Balfour declaration, the Suez crisis - all are seen, not as discreet moments in history, but as a continuum of a pre-mediated war against Islam. Wrapped around the narrative is the claim that Christianity and Judaism seek to destroy Islam, for which selective interpretations of Koranic verses help strengthen the argument. The West, so the narrative runs, proclaims values of fairness, justness, democracy and equality and it undermines them whenever Muslims aspire to the self-same values. Hamas, for example, is democratically elected in the Gaza strip and yet the West refuses to recognise it and issue (*sic*) sanctions against the Palestinian people; the West supports Arab regimes in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Jordan, et al., where free speech is denied, where elections are rigged and where torture is a natural consequence of speaking out. The West facilitated the creation of an illegal state, Israel, by Zionist terrorists, yet refuses the creation of the state of Palestine. The European Union opens its doors to Greeks but refuses Muslim Turks. In the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, Christian Croatia is allowed by the West to break away but when Muslim Bosnia does so it is savagely attacked by Serbia. Refusing to allow armaments to enter Bosnia, the West stands by whilst Muslims are ethnically cleansed by Christians. In Iraq the West uses White Phosphorous; in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo it systematically abuses human rights; whilst in Britain Salman Rushdie's book, *The Satanic Verses*, in Denmark the cartoons of the Prophet Mohamed and in France the banning of the veil all vilify Islam, all being justified by so-called rights of free speech. These are the modern crusades and even the US President has admitted as much".⁵

There exists therefore, a competition between narratives and strategic audiences, for both Western liberal democracies and terror-organisations. This is a competition that is inherently asymmetric, as most Western liberal democracies' narratives are incoherent and contextualised, depending on the issue at hand; compared with the terror-organisation's narrative that is relatively straight forward - 'The West is at War with Islam' - and where much of the West's behaviour can be referenced in support of this narrative's basic claim.

With regard to strategic audiences, the West has to reassure its constituencies and minimise the perception of threat, while at the same time find a balance between spending on counter-terrorism and protecting civil rights - and explain this in the narrative. It also has to message vulnerable groups to prevent them from becoming radicalised by the terror-organisation's narrative, including activities on social media, while at the same time trying to address and influence the members and supporters of terror-organisations themselves. Doing so should undermine their credibility, and reduce their ability to attract new members. Western liberal democracies therefore have to strike a balance between managing and reducing the complexity, in order to be persuasive, and managing the associated risks of re-enforcing the terrorist organisation's message by giving them attention and publicity.

The terror-organisations on the other hand, have to maintain support from their support base, attract new members (recruitment), and mobilise new kinds of supporters. It is preferable for them to adapt an existing behaviour (of supporting their narrative on-line or verbally) to a new behaviour such as rendering financial support or becoming 'lone wolves' in Western countries; or alternatively travel to conflict areas and become 'foreign fighters' which in turn can be used to substantiate the narrative through propaganda on-line. Internal support however, is only one aspect. The other aspects of their activities are aimed at general

⁵ Andrew MacKay and Steve Tatham., *Behavioural Conflict - Why understanding people and their behaviour will prove decisive in future conflicts* (2011), Military Studies Press, UK., pp. 87 - 88.

constituencies in Western countries - trying to maintain the continuing perception of a terrorist attack being imminent, and enhancing and multiplying the effect of actual physical attacks. These lines of operation can equally be targeted at local audiences in conflict areas, like the Islamic State's (IS) in Iraq (formerly ISIS) activities towards Iraqis.⁶

In this way narratives function as competition for the perception and behaviour of strategic audiences, where they are used as organising frameworks. They are also a competition that is played out, in particular, on social network media.

Social Network Media

As pointed out in the beginning of this article, terror-organisations utilise social media for everything from intelligence collection, targeting, influence, command and control, to recruitment, education, and operational direction. Western liberal democracies however, also use social network media for creating 'military' effects in the information environment, in support of policy objectives tied to counter-terrorism activities. Western countries though are challenged by this development.

One recent and very clear example of a terror-organisation's advanced use of social network media for creating effects is the 'Islamic State' organisation in Syria and Iraq. IS has employed a social media-strategy to inflate and control its messaging in support of its narrative, to recruit and radicalize followers, and raise funds. This strategy, amongst other things, included the creation of a Twitter application (The Dawn of Glad Tidings) to promote its messages and images, and the use of hashtags and links.⁷ It was later closed down by Android and iTunes stores.

It is in no way a trivial task for Western militaries, intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, to deal with this effectively. Achieving and maintaining situational awareness, collecting intelligence, targeting and conducting operations, in and through social media, in order to combat terrorist organisations and their narratives, is important but also very challenging; not least from a policy perspective. Furthermore, activities need to be supportive of the Western countries' narrative (institutional and mission), and the effect needs to be measurable. The latter being a particular challenge.

Assessment

When it comes to measurement or assessment of on-line activities, and in particular how effective one's narrative is in competing with that of terror organisations in social network media, there are some significant challenges for Western liberal democracies. Not least for political reasons, as parliaments and their intelligence and defence committees would like to have clear indications of effect for the appropriated funds for these kinds of activities. The assessment of success of the activities is also challenging due to the many confounding variables that are constantly presenting themselves in social media, adding to the complexity.

It is therefore a challenging, but essential task for Western liberal democracies to create and project a coherent counter-radicalisation or counter-terrorism narrative, where a clear statement of what success looks like is most likely absent, and where operations are conducted in and through social network media, where the dynamics are constantly changing. Measurement of the effectiveness of these on-line activities is furthermore at best a challenging task.

⁶ For more on the IS narrative and use of social network media see: Thomas Elkjer Nissen (2014): Terror.com - IS's Social Media Warfare in Syria and Iraq. In Contemporary Conflicts (RDDC Web Military Studies Magazine) September 2014 volume. <http://forsvaret.dk/FAK/eng/news/magazine/Pages/default.aspx> (Forthcoming)

⁷ J.M. Berger., How ISIS Games Twitter, The Atlantic (16 Jun 2014). [Accessed 25 Jun 2014]. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/>

Conclusion

An on-line 'competition' exists between Western liberal democracies and terror-organisations in and through social media, over the narrative, attention, and buy-in of strategic audiences.

There also exists a tension between the more traditional top-down politically dominated approach to construction, projection and assessment of strategic narratives, and the more networked or bottom-up approach used by terrorist-organisations. The bottom-up approach is currently dominating how narratives are created and projected in the social media sphere. This tension gives rise to several words of caution when it comes to counter-terrorism strategic communication, strategic narratives and social media as well as assessment of effectiveness. Firstly, a neatly constructed political strategic narrative might not resonate with the intended audiences as it does not necessarily fit into existing frameworks and belief-sets. Any narrative or social media-strategy in counter-terrorism therefore needs to be target audience analysis-based in order to resonate with - or tap into - what the strategic audiences already holds as being true; but at the same time the strategic narrative must still articulate the political intent and strategy. In relation to the strategic narrative, there is therefore also a need for Western politicians and governments to become more honest in their communication with their populations, and display a greater degree of self-critique.

Second, governments and institutions must not be blinded by the technology of social media. Social media does provide a series of new - and to some extent game-changing features - but it is still based around traditional approaches to communication, content creation and attention to the immediate context, that at the end of the day will deliver the effect. However, the special characteristics of social network media do need to be acknowledged and adapted to.

Thirdly, when it comes to the assessment of counter-terrorism communication and the projection of strategic narratives you should not believe that you can identify a linear cause-and-effect due to the enormous amount of confounding variables affecting your messaging and its effect in the social media sphere. It is a sphere where there is a lot of uncertainty (for example due to deception and misinformation), and ambiguity which hinders such a causality. This is especially the case when messages and images are re-tweeted and/or transferred to other social network media platforms for further redistribution (as with Twitter, Facebook and YouTube in particular). By this process, the content is also likely to be altered and subject to the creation of user generated content, further complicating the direct assessment of the effect of on-line activities.

Despite these challenges, not engaging in this contested 'battle-space' - which social network media is in a counter-terrorism context - will mean leaving it to the terrorist-organisations to do as they please.

PART B

APPLIED METHODOLOGY AND CASE STUDY

COMPREHENSIVE PSYOP ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION IN COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS

Gregory S. Seese, Psy.D

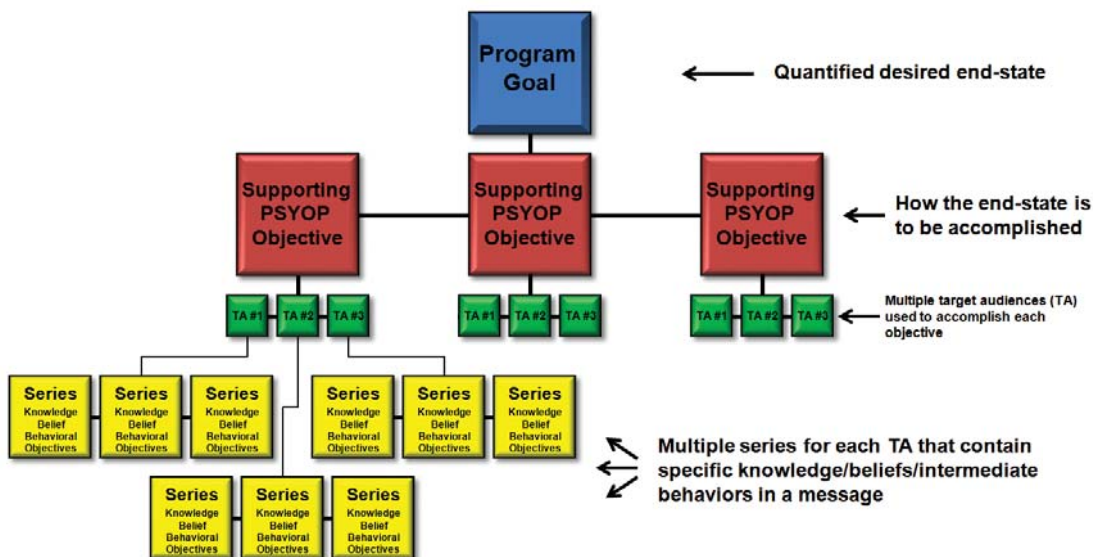
Introduction

This paper focuses on current trends and methodologies in developing a comprehensive qualitative/quantitative assessment and evaluation plan for a behavior focused counterterrorism Psychological Operations (PSYOP) program.

The mission of PSYOP is to influence behavior. Behavioral change is at the root of the PSYOP mission. Although concerned with the mental processes, it is the observable modification of behavior that determines mission success.⁸ Therefore, any counterterrorism influence effort must have clearly defined and measurable behavior focused goals and objectives.

The comprehensive PSYOP assessment and evaluation framework presented here consists of measurable program goals, supporting objectives, and series-level message objectives that when properly nested provide detailed measures of effectiveness (MOE).

Comprehensive Goal/Objective Framework



While overarching counterterrorism goals such as those found in the 'US National Strategy for Counterterrorism'⁹ provide guidance and general direction, they are not meant to be measurable end-states. A PSYOP program goal is a statement of measurable response that reflects the desired behavior change, and describes future expected outcomes or states. Program goals are written as measurable 'end states' and reflect the 'impact' the program is intended to have. They focus on the ends rather than the means, and are developed based upon a detailed analysis of specific quantified problems at the tactical, regional, and strategic levels.

⁸ Psychological Operations Process Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures: Field manual 3-05.301 (2007), Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, United States.

⁹ National Strategy for Counterterrorism. US., The Whitehouse [Online], The White House (2011). http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf [Accessed: 20 July 2014]

Program goal examples:

- Increase the # of illegal weapons, drugs, insurgents, and kidnap victims found during clearing/search operations.
- Increase the # of communities who rise up/rebel and force out insurgent's presence.
- Decrease the # of civilian injuries and deaths resulting from combat operations.
- Increase the # of enlistees into the National Army from 500 a month to 700 a month by December 2015.
- Decrease the # of IEDs emplaced along US travelled routes.
- Decrease the # of people in attendance at radical/extremist schools/mosques.
- Increase the # of insurgents who participate in the reconciliation program.
- Increase the # of businesses to foster economic stability.

Notes:

1. Format for program goals are as follows: increase/decrease, # of, amount of, ratio of, etc. Time quantifiers may also be added but should be done with caution, e.g., from 500 a month to 700 a month by December.
2. While Program goals are behavioral objectives, they can also be attitudinal objectives by measuring the specific attitude towards the behaviors with polls, surveys, and focus groups. It is important to be aware that 100+ years of social/behavioral science peer reviewed research clearly documents a weak relationship between attitudes and behavior.

In addition to measuring Program impact, the specific behavioral responses each target audience (TA) is to engage in, are written as Supporting PSYOP Objectives (SPOs). Unlike Program goals that focus on the ends, SPOs focus on the means. Developing well-written SPOs is the critical step in the planning process that will enable commanders to evaluate progress, manage resources, and make adjustments to the plan as needed. Well-written SPOs target specific, measurable and observable behavior. 'Specific' refers to criteria such as the setting, frequency and intensity of the behavior; 'measurable' means it can be counted; 'observable' means it can be seen or heard. Without clearly defined SPOs, it will be difficult to develop the metrics or baseline data needed for measuring change, and in the worst case, the entire PSYOP plan may be ineffective or unmanageable.¹⁰ In developing measurable SPOs, planners must understand that 'behavior' means a specific, observable action. Terms such as 'participation', 'support' or 'violence' are far too broad, and they must be broken down into their underlying behaviors. SPOs are written using a 'subject - verb - object' structure. The subject is always 'TA'. TAs are not specified in the SPO because often multiple TAs must be targeted to accomplish the desired behavioral change.

Supporting PSYOP Objectives examples:

- TA surrenders to coalition forces.
- TA joins the guerilla resistance movement.
- TA reports human trafficking recruitment attempts.
- TA evacuates the area using recommended travel routes.
- TA attends secular educational institutions.
- TA stays in designated safe areas until told by authorities it safe to leave.
- TA votes in local and federal elections.
- TA applies for a microloan.

¹⁰ Seese, G., & Smith, P., Measuring Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Effectiveness., Special Warfare Magazine, JFK Special Warfare Center and School, Ft. Bragg, NC (2008, November - December).

Note:

Just like Program goals, while SPO's are behavioral objectives, they can also be attitudinal objectives by measuring the specific attitude towards the behaviors with polls, surveys, and focus groups to gather further insight into them.

While the PSYOP Program goals were developed to solve or prevent the identified problem behaviors and conditions, SPOs are the specific behavioral responses desired from each TA to accomplish a given Program goal. The following examples illustrate the linkage between the two:

Program Goal A: Increase the # of legitimate businesses to foster economic stability.

- SPO 1: TA registers businesses with the appropriate government agency.
- SPO 2: TA applies for small business micro-loan.
- SPO 3: TA uses local currency for purchases and transactions.
- SPO 4: TA reports illegal economic activity to authorities.
- SPO 5: TA arrests black-market operators and smugglers.
- SPO 6: TA stages public protests against black-markets.
- SPO 7: TA attends local jobs fair.
- SPO 8: TA setups job fairs in various neighborhoods.

Program Goal B: Increase the # of voter turn-out for federal elections.

- SPO 1: TA registers to vote at UN voting sites.
- SPO 2: TA nominates political candidates for local elections.
- SPO 3: TA joins a political party.

Program Goal C: Decrease the # of civilian injuries and deaths resulting from combat operations.

- SPO 1: TA stays in their homes during combat operations.
- SPO 2: TA complies with coalition troops during cordon searches.
- SPO 3: TA travels only along designed routes.
- SPO 4: TA obeys local curfew statutes.

In addition to measurable goals and objectives, comprehensive strategies need to be identified for each PSYOP series. A series consists of all the products and actions concurrently developed in support of a SPO. To facilitate this, additional objectives tailored for each series can be developed. This then lends itself to even more detailed and refined measures of effectiveness. A PSYOP series can have behavioral, knowledge, and/or belief objectives. A behavioral objective is what the TA is to do or not do, a knowledge objective is what the TA needs to know, and a belief objective is what the TA needs to feel or believe.¹¹ Behavioral, knowledge, and belief objectives provide direction for developing strategies during series development. A behavioral objective is written similar to the program objectives as it is a specific, measurable, and observable behavior. It describes the action or intermediate action (behaviors can be shaped over time through a series of intermediate behaviors) a TA is to take to finally achieve the desired behavior change. It is directly measured by observing a change in a TA's behavior over time in response to exposure to the series. Knowledge objectives are the information and facts the TA is to know in regards to the desired behavior (statistics, facts, and other information the TA would find motivating or important), and belief objectives are the associated attitudes, values, and beliefs (what the TA needs to feel or believe). These are indirectly

¹¹ Kotler & Lee., *Social marketing: Influencing behaviors for good* (4th ed.), Thousand Oaks: Sage (2011).

measured through the use of polls, surveys, and interviews/focus groups, and are an excellent source of qualitative data. A PSYOP series may consist of any combination of the three types of objectives. Some products may just be informational in nature and only require knowledge objectives, while others may raise awareness of an issue and require both knowledge and beliefs. Other products in the series may utilize all three types. Furthermore, series level objectives can be used to guide the development of specific messages, and can help facilitate the design of survey instruments to be used for pre and post-testing of individual products.

Series level objectives examples:

Knowledge Objectives	Belief Objectives	Behavior Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death for children age 4-8. • 65% of household garbage is recyclable. • 90% of insurgent attacks hurt fellow tribe members. • Only 4-5% of Afghan children had access to primary education under the Taliban. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wearing a seatbelt is the single most important thing you can do to protect against injury. • Voting in elections results in local representation in new government. • Cleaning up the trash in the streets will make the town more attractive to small businesses. • I will receive food, water, shelter, and fair treatment if I surrender now. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink less than five drinks in one sitting. • Store handguns in a lockbox or safe. • Register to vote. • Place a support sticker on your vehicle bumper. • Throw trash in coalition provided receptacles. • Report to the enlistment center on Tuesday morning with two changes of clothes.

Measures of Effectiveness (MOE) are easy to craft when goals and objectives are well written. MOE are written as questions and initially developed during planning, refined during target audience analysis, and further refined during series development. The answers to MOE questions, collected on a periodic basis, form trends that can be analyzed in relation to the dissemination of messages. The analysis of these trends gives insight into the impact a particular PSYOP series and program is having. The following illustrates a program goal, a supporting PSYOP objective, and series objectives with their associated MOE questions. The metrics were refined to include both quantitative and qualitative information by including more specific dimensions of behavior, such as setting, frequency, and intensity. The setting could include the city, town, or area. The frequency would describe how often a behavior occurs. The intensity measures the consequences or severity of the behavior.

PSYOP Program Goal: Decrease the # of injuries and deaths resulting from mines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs).

MOE: How many people were injured and killed last month from mines and UXOs, where at, and what were their ages and gender?

Supporting PSYOP Objective: TA reports the location of landmines and UXOs to local authorities.

MOE: How many people reported the location of landmines and UXOs in the referent Municipality last month, where at, and through what means (phone, in person, text)?

Knowledge Objective: Text (SMS) landmine/UXO locations to 1-800-blowdup.

Knowledge MOE: What percentage of Teenage TA polled, know the # to report mines/UXOs?

Belief Objective: Reporting landmines/UXOs will keep me and my friends safe.

Belief MOE: What percentage of Teenage TA polled believe that reporting mines will keep them safe?

Behavior Objective: Teenage TA text the location of landmines/UXOs to local authorities.

Behavior MOE: How many teenage TA texted the location of landmines/UXOs in the referent Municipality last month, and how many reports turned out to be credible?

Conclusion

Evaluating the effectiveness of a PSYOP program can be a daunting task, but if measurable goals and objectives are developed, MOE questions are relatively straight forward to write. Properly crafted MOEs are much easier to integrate into a supported unit's intelligence collection plan, and lend credence to the credibility of influence programs.

Measuring the effectiveness of counterterrorism efforts requires detailed problem analysis to quantify the specific behavioral problem sets and to identify the enablers (i.e., conditions, who is doing what, etc.) The goal is to gain a better understanding of the problem, so precise solutions (both preventions and interventions) can be developed for implementation. Program goals that are measurable end-states help assess the impact the program is intended to have, while supporting PSYOP objectives focus on the measurable means to attain them. Series objectives provide the comprehensive strategies necessary to achieve the goals and objectives by focusing on the knowledge, belief and intermediate behaviors required from each of the identified target audiences.

The pragmatic framework presented here demonstrates that it is possible to not only measure changes in behavior and associated knowledge and beliefs, but also determine whether the program is having any impact on the problem itself.

CASE STUDY: COUNTER TERRORISM COMMUNICATIONS IN SOMALIA

Mr. Stephen Harley

A Madman is not without wisdom - Somali proverb

Much effort has gone into discussing possible solutions to the challenges of Target Audience Analysis (TAA), the battle of Narrative & Counter Narrative and Measurement of Effectiveness: areas that focus on research and academic studies, planning and methodology. However, it is one proposition of this case study that the real challenge in Strategic Communications in Counter Terrorism is the challenge of operationalising the intent and that neglect of this area is consistently thwarting our efforts. Using the Somali operating environment as an example, the case study provides brief contextualisation (essential in a dynamic and often deceptive space like Somalia), then examines some of the recent approaches that have been adopted (and why), and concludes with some Lessons Learned about Strategic Communications in Counter Terrorism. The driver behind the approach taken in Somalia has been the need to select achievable goals within a complex, challenging and constantly shifting environment: not what we WANT to achieve, but what we CAN achieve (and which amongst those 'can's' most closely match our own objectives). That said, this is not a swipe by 'the doers' at either academia or even the Operations-and-Plans staff, and one of the intentions behind this case study is to create a bridge between theoreticians and practitioners, between the latest thinking and the current challenges.¹²



The Somali Operating Environment

Somalia is an extreme operating environment. In the 24 years since the fall of President Said Barre, Somalia has suffered long-term lawlessness, meaning much of its population knows nothing of basic concepts such as government, the rule of law and democracy. The only consistently functional elements in Somalia have been business, religion, and armed groups. Nationalist, clan and religious narratives drive behaviour at every level from the governmental level to day-to-day individual interactions. Consumption of media, often using the latest technology, is voracious (but

permeated by rumour and cynicism). While the traditional business acumen and work ethic of the Somalis has often made them popular and useful guests abroad, other elements of the Somali Diaspora have remained distant from their host nations and vulnerable to targeting by extremist elements. And, as if Somalia's propensity to engage in self-destructive activity was not enough, its vulnerability has left it open to ruthless exploitation by its immediate neighbours and others further afield.

At the time of writing (June 2014), Somalia is more than 12 months into the 'New Deal for Fragile States', the first country in the world to adopt the programme: the African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and, increasingly, the Somali National Army, are pushing further into the hinterland in pursuit of al-Shabaab; the

¹² Postscript: as a result of this Case Study, two academics who attended the NATO SC in CT workshop in July 2014 subsequently travelled to Mogadishu and participated in a Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) Counter al-Shabaab Communications workshop at the invitation of the FGS. The bridge has been formed.

government is committed to a path that leads through Constitutional ratification to the national elections in 2016; in Mogadishu business is booming, flights are packed on the way into Somalia and empty on the way out, the seaport is bustling; and amongst the population there is a cautious feeling of optimism.

However, at the same time, there is cause for concern: security remains precarious with 'recovered areas' often being held only tentatively and in isolation (many recovered towns are essentially under siege and survive only with air-delivered sustenance); the cities are 'booming' in another way, as they are still subject to periodic high profile attacks; the government is often viewed alternatively with either distrust or disinterest; the security crackdown in Kenya riles Somalis everywhere; accusations of endemic corruption against the FGS means the government has yet to convince the international community to honour its pledges of \$3 billion made at the Brussels conference in 2013; the country is fracturing into sub-states and some of those fractures, such as that of Somaliland, are nigh on irreparable; and, underlying everyone's specific-to-the-time concerns, there is a feeling that the continuing chaos suits some elements and that, if the threat from al-Shabaab were to be neutralised, an older, deeper menace to the state of Somalia will reappear - self-consuming clan-centric corruption, nepotism and violence. That said, al-Shabaab are undoubtedly losing, in the physical element of the campaign in Somalia at least. As a result, undermining support for al-Shabaab should be achievable.

But there are dynamics that constrain what can be achieved: al-Shabaab still has sympathy amongst elements of the population, including the Diaspora. Al-Shabaab's campaign has become more regional in operations and global in ideology, so less directly focussed on Somalia.¹³ This means there is less reason to despise the group - if al-Shabaab isn't bringing its reign of terror to your doorstep then al-Shabaab isn't so much of a problem. Those in recently recovered areas who have had direct experience of life under al-Shabaab, like the residents of the recently recovered town of Qoryooley, are ambivalent about being 'recovered' because al-Shabaab at least brought security and services (at a price, which even they recognise).¹⁴

More worryingly, factional elements, even in the apparatus of government, may well be using the continued presence of al-Shabaab for their own gain, potentially even to the extent of cooperating with al-Shabaab. Finally, and of most relevance to the strategic communications element of the campaign, al-Shabaab still maintains its presence and a perceived dominance of the information space. And it is in the information space that much of the campaign in Somalia is now being fought, a space where perceptions are reality. While the number of attacks by al-Shabaab and their 'yield' in terms of killed and wounded are decreasing (as is al-Shabaab's direct, physical influence on the population) the perceived influence of al-Shabaab is as strong as ever: this is the key terrain in the campaign to counter al-Shabaab.

¹³ Al-Shabaab's July 2014 Ramadan campaign was a textbook example of asymmetric campaigning which almost exclusively targeted the institutions and individuals of the government rather than the population - although it did terrify them to a standstill.

¹⁴ NATIVE PROSPECTOR Conditions in Qoryooley (23 Jun 2014).

Frequency of Key Themes (note: some articles contain more than one theme)

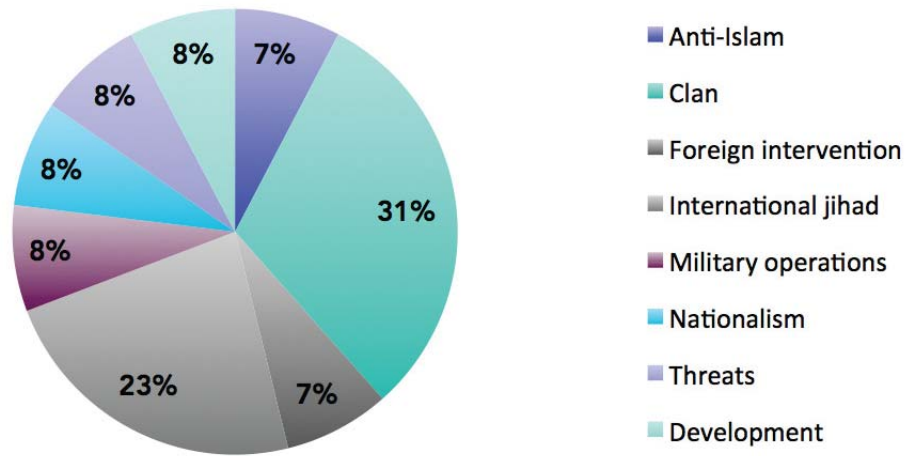


Figure 1: NP Pro-al-Shabaab Bi-Weekly media Tracker 16-30APR14.

Analysis of al-Shabaab’s media outputs over a period of time, as part of the Native Prospector programme,¹⁵ indicate clear strands to al-Shabaab’s information operations (although it is unclear if al-Shabaab are slaves to MS Excel and PowerPoint based planning in the way we are, or whether their approach is perhaps more instinctive - although the resulting balance of focus is the same, regardless). Two apparently jarring priorities dominate messaging, Clan Dynamics and International Jihad. This is of interest because these areas are both strengths and vulnerabilities for al-Shabaab. In fact, al-Shabaab’s original appeal was the fact that the movement was not clan based and messaging related to the Global Jihad is very carefully handled to avoid damaging claims to being a ‘Somali’ movement. The irony, and the opportunity, is that al-Shabaab uses those same themes to criticise the FGS: that it is clan-biased and that it is the pawn of an international agenda and ‘un-Somali’.

26

Frequency of Key Themes (note: some articles contain more than one theme)

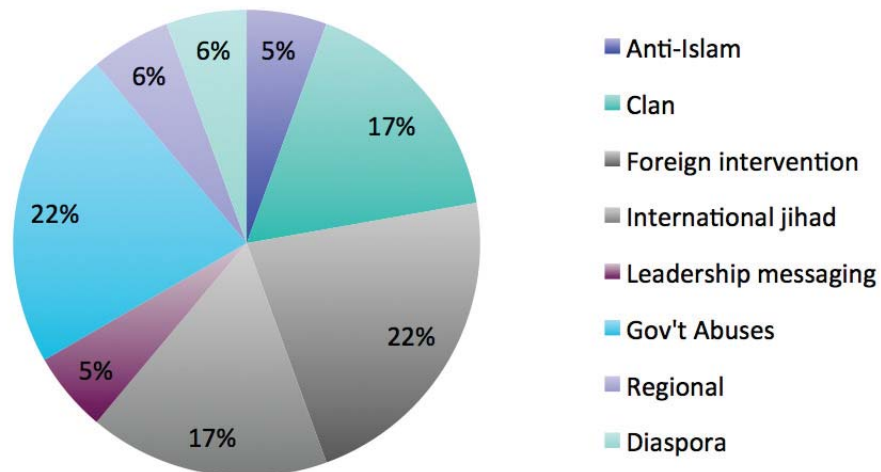


Figure 2: NP Pro-al-Shabaab Bi-Weekly media Tracker 1-15 May 2014.

This leads into the heart of the challenge: that ‘the battle of narratives’ in Somalia is not really about opposing ideologies, but is about claims to the same ‘territory’ in the information space: claims to be the

¹⁵ NATIVE PROSPECTOR Pro-al-Shabaab Bi-Weekly Media Tracker 16-30APR14 & 1-15MAY14

most Somali, the most Islamic, the most capable of providing security, services, jobs and a future. And at the moment, since the battle is over the same spoils, the conflict is reduced in many ways to sheer volume: and many in Somalia perceive al-Shabaab to be winning that battle (although the reality - in many instances untold and generally unknown - is actually very different).

Local, Effective & Measurable

This paints a depressing picture, a seemingly insoluble conundrum. But that does not mean that nothing can be achieved in Somalia. It simply means very focused activities: if the activity is Somali-driven, if that activity can be measured, if the activity can have an effect, and if that activity is in line with strategic objectives, then it is a worthwhile investment of time and resource.

So what Somali projects can be measured and might be effective in countering al-Shabaab, then? The 'bread and butter' messaging of improving government and security forces performance provides the longer term, overarching answer to the myriad faux-government/Islamo-nationalist credibility claims of al-Shabaab. Targeting for kinetic operations continues and successes are exploited. In terms of specifically countering al-Shabaab through communications, a number of campaigns have been identified as being worthy of exploitation, one example of which is an 'Empowering Religious Authorities' scheme. These projects are often only loosely linked to strategic communications or are wider activities that have a communications component. These programmes are the work of the FGS, implemented with external assistance where required (often minimal), and are achievable and measurable.

A critical factor in the religious credibility of al-Shabaab (and its ilk elsewhere) is ignorance amongst the population of the true tenets of Islam. An illiterate, media-starved but nonetheless deeply pious population is therefore easy prey. This is not to say that the existing religious authorities in Somalia do not want to challenge what they knew to be a perverse, un-Somali form of Islam: they do. But the all too tangible threat from al-Shabaab has deterred them. The solution in this instance came jointly from the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Defence, who agreed to provide the amplification of the condemnation of the message in the case of the former and the security in the case of the latter. The practical challenge was funding and this was where external support was required and delivered because the proposition was Somali-generated, stood a good chance of success and could be measured in a number of different ways: the number of clerics willing to speak out increasing, the response to the broadcasts (which are usually interactive), and the response from al-Shabaab. Funding security provision is not conventional Information Operations by any means but the adaptive, exploitative approach proved successful, and the end result is that a challenge is now being mounted to the authority of al-Shabaab's religious rhetoric.¹⁶

Despite the challenges, there are numerous opportunities: exploiting high-level defections from al-Shabaab; exploiting low-level defectors, too, as a means to encourage further defections and to provide material for longer term campaigns to counter radicalisation, to prevent rather than cure; exacerbating the numerous rifts within al-Shabaab and publicising those rifts; and challenging al-Shabaab's claims to providing security and services (and posing again the question: at what cost?). The sensitivities of ongoing operations preclude elaboration but there are opportunities.

¹⁶ The roots of this project lay in the offer of a lifeline, some years before and through the same key players in the Somali government and the international community, to local radio stations that were then based in areas of Mogadishu under al-Shabaab's control. Immediately after it moved, one station, Radio Shabelle, began to air openly anti-al-Shabaab material to an audience who were still 'tuned' to a channel they thought was under al-Shabaab control. Perhaps this activity, a form of Media Sector Development, should be an additional discipline within Information Operations? It certainly is to the UN.

Thoughts: Strategic Communication in Counter Terrorism

In an environment as complex as Somalia, simple conditions must be met if anything is to be achieved. The concept must be Somali; it must be achievable; and it must be measurable. These have become the guiding factors in counter terrorism communications in Somalia. Would we be delivering and succeeding if we were following doctrine though? Too often, it seems, the 'strategy' we apply is a strategy composed far from the reality on the ground and in a language, both literal and metaphorical, that isn't going to be understood locally by those who will ultimately send and receive the message. It should be, and there is no reason why it shouldn't. It just requires a bit of effort and bit of free thinking.

The offer (disguised as a gauntlet) was thrown down at the NATO Centre of Excellence's working group on Strategic Communications in Counter Terrorism in June 2014: the 'Academics on the Front Line' concept. There is a real need to cut down the loop between the realms of research and analysis and the direct operational experience. Despite the risks, Dr Neville Bolt of King's College London, and Dr Cristina Archetti of the University of Salford in Manchester, nonetheless travelled to Mogadishu later in June to participate in a workshop with members of the FGS (security, intelligence, information and members of the Somali media) and the international community (UN, AU, EU and others). This created the opportunity for an exchange: the latest thinking on strategic communications in counter terrorism to the most up-to-date and nuanced understanding of the situation in Somalia. It created impetus.

In many ways, the Somali approach is refreshing, in that the institutions of government are still in relatively nascent form and as yet unhindered by overly developed procedures, and that applied to the approaches that individuals took in the Mogadishu workshop as well. There was an uncommon degree of flexibility in the discussions.

This brings us back to the Somali proverb that begins this case study: 'A madman is not without wisdom'. In a society like that of the Somalis, that is permeated by a deeply held cynicism about the institutions of the state (Islamic anarcho-capitalism, for want of a better description), maybe the way to succeed is not to expect to impose order on chaos but to embrace a bit of chaos ourselves. What does this mean in practice? Andy Warhol does Information Operations? Absurd as that sounds, perhaps that is something we need to consider: that while the operationalising of the intent undoubtedly requires the skills of military and government professionals who are familiar with the processes of the institutions they serve, at the same time there is a requirement for unfettered thinking too. On the UK's Joint Information Operations course, directing staff give a warning prior to the practical exercise in the Deception component of the course. As bemused as many were, some participants found themselves raging at the inability of their colleagues to 'think out of the box': the allegedly 'deceptive' solutions were still contained within a slightly larger 'box', the box of the military/government mind-set.

The government or the military, the institutionalised mind-set might be right for managing the process side of strategic communications. But this case study proposes that it is not right for delivering strategic communications. Maybe it requires a different mind-set, one that is more akin to that of the enemy, maybe even one that is even less ordered and conventional than the enemy (think Bletchley Park: highly successful, but hardly a conventional cast of government and military practitioners). Maybe we need to flatten ourselves out a bit and give Lance Corporals (and Lieutenants) more important roles in delivery, before they become 'institutionalised'. Maybe our ideal practitioners are people who wouldn't mind being insurgents themselves. Constraints (primarily word count and the author being occupied working and trying

to stay alive in Mogadishu) mean that a more developed proposition is not possible at this juncture but the intention is to develop this concept in the not too distant future.

Dr Neville Bolt references an un-named civil servant in a discussion about the future of institutional communications: 'the state will need to learn to be more comfortable with taking risks, empower and trust individuals to act and react, and accept to a much larger degree things going wrong.'¹⁷ The fact that the unnamed civil servant declined to be named because of the 'radical' (i.e., job threatening) nature of his ideas tells us a lot. If we are to succeed in our efforts to defeat threatening, rival ideologies, which is what strategic communications in counter terrorism is all about, then we will need to get a little more 'mad', like the man in the Somali proverb, both in the people we use (and that includes placing considerably more trust in our local partners) and the risks we are willing to accept.

¹⁷ Dr Neville Bolt, *'The Evolution of Insurgency and Strategic Communications'*, presentation at NATO Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism Workshop on SC in CT (05-06 Jun 2014).

BIOGRAPHIES

(ordered as the monographs)

Dr. Cristina Archetti

Associate Professor in Politics and Media

University of Salford

c.archetti@salford.ac.uk

Dr. Cristina Archetti is Associate Professor in Politics and Media at the University of Salford, UK. She is author of *Understanding Terrorism in the Age of Global Media: A Communication Approach* (2012, Palgrave). Her research interests cover the intersection between security, politics, and strategic communication. Apart from having written extensively on the role of strategic communication in terrorism and counterterrorism, her publications also cover public diplomacy 2.0, the media coverage of war and conflict, the impact of new media on diplomatic practice, and the effect of digital technologies on international journalism. She serves on the editorial board of the journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism* and has over a decade experience in teaching strategic communication at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Among the rest, she has been teaching the Master's level course *Terrorism and the Media* since 2008.

Dr. Archetti has won several prizes for her work, including the 2010 Top Faculty Paper in Political Communication from the International Communication Association (ICA) and the 2008 Denis McQuail Best Article of the Year for Advancing Communication Theory. She has also submitted written evidence to support the House of Lords Select Committee on "Soft Power and the UK's Influence" in September 2013. Dr. Archetti has a BA in Politics, an MA in International Communication, and a PhD.



Mr. Thomas Elkjer Nissen

Lecturer and researcher

Royal Danish Defence College

IMO-07@fak.dk

Thomas Elkjer Nissen, M.Sc., has worked at the Royal Danish Defence College (RDDC) since 2001 as an analyst and subject matter expert. He is responsible to research, teaching and advising on: Strategic Communication (StratCom), Public and Defence Diplomacy, Cyber Warfare, Information Operations (Info Ops) and Psychological Operations (PsyOps). He has directed and developed courses and seminars in these subject areas, and is a high level advisor on them both nationally and within NATO. Thomas has also published a series of journal articles, book chapters and research papers on his field of expertise too, including recent work on *“Strategy and Strategic Communication,” “Narrative Led Operations”* and *“The Weaponization of Social Media”*.

Thomas regularly lectures at the NATO School in Oberammergau, Cranfield University, the University of Copenhagen, and University of Southern Denmark; as well as at various military academies and colleges, and at international conferences in Europe and the US. He is a standing member of several NATO Working Groups within the field, and a member of the UK based “Influence Advisory Panel”. Thomas is also used by the media as an expert on strategic communication and related cyber issues in crisis and conflict situations, interviewing frequently for television, radio, and print- and internet- based news outlets. Prior to joining the Defence College in Denmark, he served in the Danish Army from 1992 to 2001 in Light Recce units, operations and intelligence staff functions, and as an instructor at the Army School of Intelligence, and within tactical PSYOPS.

Major Greg Seese (Psy.D)

J5 Director of Plans

Joint Information Support Task Force - Special Operations

gregory.seese@gmail.com



Gregory Seese is a US Army Psychological Operations Officer (PSYOP) currently serving as the J5 Director of Plans at the Joint Information Support Task Force-Special Operations (JISTF-SO), United States Special Operations Command Central (USSOCCENT). Prior to his present assignment, he spent several years at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. During his tenure there, he served as the PSYOP Advanced Individual Training (AIT) Company Commander, Course Manager of the PSYOP Officer Qualification Course, and as the Chief of the PSYOP Training Branch. Major Seese served in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Operation Enduring Freedom with the 3rd and 19th Special Forces Groups. His research interests include attitude and behavior change, motivation, deception, behavioral prediction/modeling, and bio & neurofeedback/qEEG.

Major Seese is a licensed psychologist and has a Bachelor of Arts, Master of Science, and Doctorate in Psychology. He also earned a graduate certificate in Stability, Security, and Development in Complex Operations (SSDCO) from the Naval Post Graduate School. Relevant publications include: Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Targeting Active Support Networks. (Seese, G. (2014)) In-press; Deconstructing Narratives: Using Primal Branding To Design Oppositional Narratives (Hanlon, P., & Seese, G. (2013)); Measuring Psychological Operations (PSYOP): It's all about the SPO. (Seese, G. (2009)); Measuring Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Effectiveness. (Seese, G., & Smith, P. (2008)).



Mr. Stephen Harley
Communications Advisor
stephenharley@me.com

Stephen Harley is an experienced strategic communications management professional. He is a former soldier (British Army infantry, media and psychological operations officer including two operational tours of Iraq) and, in a brief sojourn from soldiering, taught English & Drama to the academically challenged children of financially gifted parents. For the last 10 years he has worked continuously on counter insurgency/counter terrorism strategic communications campaigns. A worrying artistic streak runs through his work (and occasionally even in synch with it) and, like Harry in Hemingway's 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro', he worries that he has spent too much timing doing it and has forgotten to write about it.

After his second operational tour of Iraq, Harley joined a leading British communications company, Bell Pottinger, exploiting his recent experience of operational media and psychological operations. He led IO/Psyops projects in Baghdad, Iraq (2006-2007) and across the pan-Arab region (2008) on behalf the US government: in Afghanistan (2009) he embedded with a local media group in a capacity building role; led a UN project to provide support to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), based in Nairobi and Mogadishu; worked as a consultant with an East African security provider, Halliday Finch, countering piracy off the Somali coast, and as an communications advisor to the British Army Training Unit in Kenya; and most recently was a NATO civilian in Afghanistan, firstly embedded with the British Task Force in Helmand province and latterly in Kabul. He is currently the Communications Advisor to the President of Somalia under the auspices of the UK FCO.



Terörizmle Mücadele Mükemmeliyet Merkezi
PK.57 Bakanlıklar 06582 Ankara-TURKEY
Phone : +90 312 425 82 15 PBX
Fax : +90 312 425 64 89
info@coedat.nato.int
www.coedat.nato.int