STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION
FOR
COMBATING TERRORISM
Strategic Communication
For
Combating Terrorism

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Preface

This study is the result of the “Strategic Communication for Combating Terrorism” workshop conducted by The NATO Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism on 12-13 May 2009 in Ankara, Turkey. The aim of the workshop was to bring together academics, experts, and military professionals to improve concepts for using strategic communications in combating terrorism within NATO.

The Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism was established in 2005 with the purpose of supporting NATO on defence issues relating to terrorism. In addition to the framework nation, Turkey, there are currently six other sponsoring nations, namely the United States, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Romania, the Netherlands and Germany, that contribute to the activities of the Centre by providing staff as well as funding. COE-DAT organizes numerous workshops, seminars, and courses every year with the goal of advancing academic, institutional and practical knowledge, expertise and information on terrorism for interested parties in NATO member states, Partnership for Peace (PiP), and Mediterranean Dialogue countries, as well as Non-Triple nations.

The merit of this volume is ultimately due to the arguments and insights of the authors whose essays are collected here. We are grateful to them for their contributions to this volume.
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Introduction

The COE-DAT conducted a workshop on “Strategic Communication for Combating Terrorism” from 12-13 May 2009 in Ankara, Turkey. The aim of the workshop was to bring together academics, experts, and military professionals to improve concepts for using strategic communications in combating terrorism within NATO.

This workshop added an important dimension to the Centre’s work in fighting terrorism. COE-DAT was able to bring together a participatory audience from NATO Countries, contemporary practical knowledge, and academic expertise on the use of strategic communications for countering terrorism. This, coupled with Turkey’s long experience in fighting terrorism, created a highly successful working group.

Significant reactions and comments based directly on concrete experience from all parts of the world enabled the creation of an environment of dialogue, increased transparency, and mutual confidence. In this respect, the Centre was seeking to reach a common understanding of the framework of this subject and to determine common themes that may form the guide for future policy development. COE-DAT plans to remain involved with SHAPE Strategic Communications through both continued participation in their working group and by providing DAT expertise and input in future Strategic Communications policy development.

The workshop itself brought together 40 participants from eight NATO Countries and 15 academicians and experts on terrorism. The workshop itself consisted of four panels. Each panel contained 3-4 presentations that lasted 30-45 minutes, to include a question and answer period. The last period of each day was reserved for a one-hour panel discussion among the speakers and participants.
1. Conclusions

Independent scholars, consultants, and military personnel provided the lectures for the COE-DAT workshop on Strategic Communication for Combating Terrorism. In both the lectures and the panel discussions a number of very strong themes were exhibited, each of which was common to several of the lectures. These themes, captured by Dr. Corman of Arizona State University, are listed below.

**Engagement**

The strongest theme had to do with engagement. Speakers stressed the importance of increased engagement with strategically important audiences and communication channels. The four aspects of this theme were:

- The need to view strategic communication as a two way process of communication. This contradicts the traditional view that communication is a one-way process of transmission and highlights the importance of strategic listening and dialog.
- The importance of personal contact between NATO personnel and target audiences and populations, so as to better understand their views, interpretations, and culture.
- The need for NATO communicators to improve familiarity and engagement with the ‘New Media.’
- The critical factor of engagement with policy formulation, treating policy as an aspect of strategic communication rather than how the traditional system treats strategic communication as a way to “sell” policy.

**Media Landscape**

Many speakers addressed the radical changes in the media landscape that have changed the role of the traditional media and created many new types of media over the last decade. These changes represent an increase in the overall importance of the media and a growing need for engagement with the full spectrum of media channels. Adapting to the new landscape is critical to the success of NATO strategic communication efforts.

**Complexity**

Numerous speakers noted the revolutionary increase in the complexity of 21st Century strategic communication systems due to factors like globalization and the burgeoning media landscape already mentioned. These changes not only make the strategic communication system more complicated, but also provide opponents with the ability to adopt more complex and agile organizational forms.
Control

In the past, the best strategic communication practices were concerned with control of messages; however, new realities create a system with levels of uncertainty that makes control impossible. Treating the 21st century systems as simple and controllable when they are not leads to negative outcomes and strategic communication failures. This presents a significant challenge for NATO communicators because their practices and systems were developed in the last century, when control-based communication was more practical, and are proving slow to change.

Narrative

Many speakers discussed the growing importance of narrative in strategic communication, which forms an important basis for interpretation of action by strategically important audiences. NATO nations are either doing a poor job of making their narratives clear or are taking actions that contradict their narratives, thus undermining their credibility. At the same time they must do a better job of understanding and countering the narratives of their opponents.

Organizational Inertia

Inertia in the command systems of NATO and its member nations inhibits the change mandated by the five foregoing themes. While there is widespread agreement among theorists and operators that strategic communication practices must evolve to meet new 21st Century challenges, political and organizational structures of the status quo work against these changes, keeping the alliance in an underperforming posture that reproduces outdated practices. This is perhaps the key problem in NATO strategic communication because it inhibits adaptation to the new realities discussed in the workshop.

2. Summaries of the Workshop Presentations

a. Key Note Speech

Mr. Mark Laity, the Chief of Strategic Communications at SHAPE, gave the speech. The premise of the keynote speech was that “Terrorism is a form of strategic communications, no more, no less. It is not kinetic. It is in the head, working on the mind to make people afraid.” The enemy practices information operations with kinetic effects while it is NATO forces that are playing ‘catch-up.’ We are behind. We need to not only think more, but differently. “Strategic Communication is about thinking differently.”

“Look at the effects our opponents have had with Strategic Communications. Look at 9/11, it was Strategic Communications and classic information operations. In another example, an Afghanistan suicide bombing against a tribal leader was filmed from 3 angles, edited, and placed on YouTube, and done in less than one day. They were not there to kill-they were there to send a
strategic message. Look at the Serena Hotel bombing. Within 30 seconds of the bombing the wire agencies had flash wire reports from the terrorists. Are we that good? No we are not.”

NATO is “beginning to get into the game, but way behind.” We have a directive from SHAPE, ACT 952, which is a move in the right direction. Now we need the people in SHAPE to know it and read it. “Policy may need to change to meet the needs of Strategic Communication,” not vice versa. Recognizing that information policy is vital to success, there is also now a vision statement that says Strategic Communications should be at the heart of all operations at all levels.

“Right now we spend too much time on coordination and process. We have now created organizations whose sum is less than the parts.” He concludes by telling us that the way we are currently conducting Strategic Communications is making us less effective. We need to look at this differently. “The enemy is fast, flexible, and more attuned to the cultures where they operate. We talk Narrative, but Narrative is where they beat us. We do messages and themes, and our opponents do Narrative and tap into cultures and religion.”

b. Panel One - Overviews and Models of Strategic Communications

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: GENERAL OVERVIEW – Steve Tatham

As Commander Tatham of the UK Defence Academy put it, we place “too much emphasis on communication versus the strategic, or strategy” in Strategic Communications. NATO needs to rethink the information effect and quit following a “linear push” fashion. “We are floundering on old ideas and simplicity” as he puts it. NATO needs to figure out its Strategy before it figures out the Communications part. We need to conduct better Target Audience Analysis and quite telling the enemy what we think they should hear from the message, instead of understanding what they actually hear from our words. As he puts it “we can’t use the kinetic to win.”

MARKETING APPROACH TO EARNING POPULAR SUPPORT – Todd Helmus

Dr. Todd Helmus of the Rand Corporation talked about conducting Strategic Communications using a marketing approach. Specifically, “Branding is a collection of perceptions in the mind.” If there was a “military brand” for the cold war, it would be “force and might.” “Is that suitable for today’s operations?” he asks. Dr. Helmus goes on to tell us that the military needs a new brand, one that can be communicated at all levels and shape operations. It must provide a message that is instilled across all contact points.

The military needs to follow the business industry and develop rules of interaction, not just rules of engagement. Like bad marketing, “Civil military leaders easily mistake population needs and wants.” Instead the military tends to ignore customer satisfaction, does not manage expectations, and overpromises while under-delivering. To sum it up, if the military had a brand name now it would be “occupier,” that is what we are selling.
MODELS FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION – Ian Tunnicliffe

COL(R) Tunnicliffe of StratCom Laboratories spoke on models of Strategic Communication. Currently one of our biggest problems is that no message is getting across because we do not have the credibility to reach our target audience. COL Tunnicliffe breaks it down, through various sales marketing examples, to our current process of Source, Message, Channel, and Audience. This is not effective if the target audience does not want the message and does not believe the source. For one, this does not define an objective first. It views the audience as just a receiver instead of taking into account their part in the message. It also does not take into account that the message is far less important than the source. We need to constantly evaluate our effectiveness and adjust the model accordingly. The model should be Objective, Audience, Channel, Source, Message, and then Evaluation.

c. Panel Two - NATO and US Strategic Communication

NATO and US STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION ORGANIZATION – Eric Campany

LTC Eric Campany, the Strategic Communications Planning Officer at SHAPE, gave a breakdown of current Strategic Communication organization in NATO. He explained that it was a new organization, minimally manned, and still developing its role in NATO command. The capabilities required by NATO to make Strategic Communications work are: Fused Information Analysis, Audience Analysis, Outreach (KLE, etc), Deployable Media Teams, and New Media (SHAPE will have a new media section, but what it will do is still undecided).

ACT has a huge role to play in developing Strategic Communications within HQ SHAPE, but currently there is a lack of agreement at the highest levels on the role of Strategic Communications. Right now, the StratCom section is developing policy, with the ACO 95-2 Directive 15 Sep 08 being the only approved NATO document and it provides over-arching guidance for planning. Also the Strategic Communications organization at SHAPE utilizes a working group construct and a community of interest that works well in assisting in the development of policies and ideas.

ISAF EXPERIENCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS – Martin Schellies

BG Martin Schellies of the German MoD spoke briefly about the information domain challenges in the 21st Century, posing the question ‘Is Strategic Communication the solution?’ As he put it, we already have the tools: PsyOps, Info Ops, Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, but there is a lot of friction between the idea of Strategic Communication and Information Operations. BG Schellies explained his difficulties in ISAF as the Chief of the Information Coordination Branch where these frictions, to some extent, limited capabilities. As he stated, the difficulty is that we
need coordination across everything - partners, higher, government, etc. and that we will never be able to do this. However, we must never stop trying to achieve this and improve this. To paraphrase his conclusion, we need to come up with an overarching story/narrative/plan, and we need vertical coordination within NATO and horizontal cooperation and coordination with partners at all levels.

**US STRAT COM POLICY AND A MODEL FOR THE 21st CENTURY – Steve Corman**

Dr. Steve Corman from Arizona State University’s Hugh Downs School of Communications discussed how most of our Strategic Communications for the last 50 years have been based on a the SMRC model from the 1950’s: Source, Message, Channel, and Receiver. Under this model the only things that prevented getting the right message across were sending errors, or interference. Under this model there is complete control by the sender and the receiver is not taken into account. This model was taught from the 60’s through the 80’s. This however does not fit in the modern world, is too simplistic, and does not work for a hostile audience. We have to stop stove piping messages, release control, and expect some failures. We also have to quite trying to segment audiences, the world is interconnected and media/messages are immediate and reach everyone.

d. Panel Three – Perception Management and Terrorism

**THE ROLE OF PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT IN TERRORISM – Abdulkadir Çevik**

Dr. Abdulkadir Çevik of Ankara University displayed an Islamic Crescent and asked what it meant. He said to him it was a positive symbol’ but that others may have suffered traumas and associate it with bad things. He discussed perception shaping and management and related this to terrorism. With the multimedia environment of the 21st Century it is hard to differentiate between reality and illusion. Humans are open to influence and some will distort reality for their own benefit. Dr. Çevik discussed human psychology and the difference between reality and perception. External artificial factors affect this, such as media. Our perception is managed by expectation; we often perceive what we expect to see. Every culture has a different expectation and way of perceiving events. Perception management is persuasion and skillful use of propaganda; this can be called the ‘spin effect.’ Perceptions of individuals are frequently influenced by external forces and are modified to fit desired attitudes. Terrorist organizations are large groups that use perception management techniques to modify the attitudes of their followers. Dr. Çevik gave a case study on ASALA and perception management and the Muslim experience post 9/11.

**LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES – Amy Zalman**

Dr. Amy Zalman from Science Applications International presented on self-perception and its formation in self-image. The opinions of the civil population have always had an effect on war.
The increase in media accessibility has amplified this. There has also been a change. In the 20th Century and before war was fought on a battlefield and only the population that was unfortunately in the way of the battle were directly caught up. In the 21st Century warfare is becoming more irregular and population, not geographic, gain is the measure. This measure is not geographically based as diasporas take the perception problem to a global level. Popular culture, imaging and the like play a role and make modern conflict complicated. Analysis has taken stock of perceptions and a macro-cultural dimension; communicators need to understand themselves and their own perceptions as well as understanding the target audience and their perceptions.

**WINNING THE WAR OF IDEAS: EFFECTIVE LISTENING** – Itamara Lochard

(Dr. Itamara Lochard from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy presented on the subject of effective listening. Her presentation is non-attributable.)

**HOW STRAT COMM CAN BE USED TO BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE** – Mr. Joshua Mora

Mr. Joshua Mora of the Behavioural Dynamics Institute of London used a model of stopping the spread of epidemic viruses to explain his message. These will be biological and also social in nature and can be mapped, the spread of an influenza virus would likely follow flight routes and spread along them. Viral communications will have a very similar property. Mr Mora mapped out the model for a virus to spread, as well as how medical services will deal with it by targeting susceptible populations and tackling the disease. He related this to terrorist propaganda and communication to highlight how a message was spread and the junctures at which it could be ‘tackled’. He showed that there would be those who would die of a disease, the radicals that no message could affect. Then there would be those who were curable and therefore the main target for STRATCOM as well as those not yet infected but who could be prevented from catching the disease.

e. **Panel Four – Strategic Communication in Combating Terrorism**

**MEDIA COVERAGE OF TERRORIST INCIDENTS** – Peter Busch

Dr. Peter Busch from King’s College, London, looked briefly at classical terrorism reporting and studied the Mumbai attacks of 2008. He looked at how reporting was changing and considered the easily accessible new media, such as Twitter, and how this could change reporting of terrorist events. Over the last 10 years the scope of reporting has changed as new technologies allow more immediate news. Immediacy is a growing trend.
There has also been a significant proliferation in news outlets on TV and the Internet. Citizen Journalists and “enemy” websites also provide an unregulated source of media output. Terror attacks bring these trends into sharp relief and create pressure on editors to make instant decisions without time to check facts fully. Looking at the Mumbai attacks, Dr Busch analyzed how they were reported. He considered the different media and the time and attention they devoted to the attacks and how this changed over a two-week period. It was noted how much coverage from local TV was used instead of the more expensive option of sending in foreign correspondents and crews.

He also considered the effect of the social information site Twitter which gives people the ability to publish short messages instantly via a mobile phone or computer. During the Mumbai attacks more than one message per second was sent with the word ‘Mumbai’ in the heading. Like all forms of unregulated reporting, this gave some good and accurate information as well as some spurious, inaccurate information and occasionally broke OPSEC. These new media have to be monitored and embraced as part of STRATCOM – if this is how people get and exchange information in the 21st Century it must be used to keep up to date.

SYNCHRONIZING INFORMATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA/PERCEPTIONS – Matt Armstrong

Mr. Matt Armstrong of Armstrong Strategic Insight Groups began with the idea that there is currently a Now Media rather than a New Media. Many journalists and some PIOs are using media such as Twitter. Terrorism is an attempt to influence an adversary; power and influence equal control. Terrorism is an information tool and you no longer need geographic proximity to influence people. Terrorists like an unstable environment and terrorism tries to destabilize. IEDs are not employed just to maim and kill; they influence TTPs and create propaganda. If a terrorist act is not known, it has little use.

Kinetic action does matter in an information world. There is a struggle for minds, to influence the will to act. The access to, dissemination and distribution of information has increased. Precision and mass media almost give the feeling of being there, but news is still reported word of mouth; a journalist on a sat-phone is still deciding what is said. It is now a global adventure, but one must not forget the message for the ‘home’ audience. Although the world is online more, there is still significance in TV, pamphlets and all traditional media. There is also a ‘wealth of information but a poverty of attention.’

Perception and worldview is important. If people like terrorists put out information, you must address it or somebody else will. Everyone is a communicator; actions change perceptions and how you act speaks. Soldiers may blog and communication must be internal as well as external. Mr Armstrong used a video to show how information can build from nothing to a full article on Wikipedia in a very short time. Perhaps the Twitter effect is replacing the CNN effect in communications.
CRY TERROR AND LET SLIP THE MEDIA DOGS – Randall Bowdish

CAPT (R) Randall Bowdish of the University of Nebraska presented on both ethical questions involving the media and that the media’s messages had a physical effect on the audience. The terrorist perspective is an army of a few facing a state and is therefore asymmetric. Terrorism is a tactical act against a strategic audience. Messages may have small lethality but a big effect and the media is the fulcrum for this. Free press is the soft underbelly of democracy, journalists provide free and accurate information to allow democratic choice and safeguard against tyranny. Terrorists can exploit this. Terrorism ignores the accepted limits of moral information. Terrorism needs to be newsworthy; it must reach a certain threshold to have an effect. It must also be meaningful enough for the press to report. There is an event and a message in terrorism. The terrorist has to look at the effect on the target. Reports of terrorism can do cognitive harm to the public. It can cause anxiety and stress to those not physically affected. Can this harm be stopped? An academic research model can be applied. In the 1950s there was no limit on psychological experiments involving humans and this was found to possibly cause harm. Now such tests require certification. There can be tension between the free press and the government. If limits are put on the press it may be hard to retract them and therefore be the first step to tyranny. Perhaps the answer is to only allow journalists who have had ethical training to have access to official sources.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INFORMATION FACTOR IN COIN OPS – Dirk Brodersen

Col Brodersen of the German Bundeswehr looked at a tactical level. Land forces are only one element of an orchestrated COIN campaign; it is a joint environment including non-military agencies such as NGOs. There is a campaign theme, and tactical activities may vary in precedence over time. There will be tactical tasks in a tactical toolbox, and COIN is an element in a stabilization campaign. Irregular forces may fall under many names where the choice of name is part of the information campaign. Insurgents are smaller but may choose limited battle and accept losses. Insurgents may be a diverse force and not all violent. Our information can affect these insurgents, either by reinforcing their views or pushing them away from the insurgency. However the message target is the population and not the insurgent. Operations send a message in the information environment. An event can hit many audiences in many ways. Terrorists will seek to make the population lose faith in the military and government. There needs to be a wedge driven between the population and the terrorists. The key is finding a leverage point. There is a holistic estimate of the situation, to look in detail at the adversary. An organized crime group may be benign towards or in support of the security forces if it is left alone but may become pro-insurgency if it is affected. The COA must be drawn after looking at all factors and their consequences. Knowledge is the key to making decisions. COIN is not conducted in isolation by the LAND component, it is part of a much wider campaign. Everything revolves around the population. Effort must be put into INFOPS as well as tactical operations.
3. Aims

This particular COE-DAT workshop aimed to contribute to the ongoing worldwide efforts in the defence against terrorism by focusing on the role of Strategic Communications. This book attempts to share the exchange of knowledge and expertise of the panel of world-renowned scholars and experts that participated in the two-days of deliberations with the wider world audience that was not able to participate in the workshop.

4. Acknowledgments

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the lecturers who submitted their articles for publication and to the COE – DAT personnel who assisted in producing the workshop. Without their efforts, this book would not exist.
Strategic Communication

Mark Laity
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Abstract: This paper comes from the keynote lecture of the Strategic Communications Workshop. Laity comments on how terrorism, as an act of communication, utilizes the transfer of information and therefore requires a response within the realm of communication itself. He explains that traditional kinetic operations can not always respond effectively to the messages sent out by terrorists and that the very way of thinking about operations in response to terrorist acts needs to continue to evolve.

Keywords: Terrorism, Internet, Strategic Communication.

Imagine if there had been no cameras rolling on 9/11. Imagine if we had not seen the airliners spear into the twin towers, the gush of flames, the victims leaping to their death, the towers collapsing in smoke and dust. Would 9/11 have been the iconic event that has dictated so much foreign policy ever since and dominated our mental landscape? Put bluntly, would it have mattered so much?

To some degree we can answer that question because there were two other terrorist outrages that day – and how much do people remember them? The World Trade Centre remains etched on our corporate memory while the airliner that hit the Pentagon and the airliner which crashed into the Pennsylvanian fields after passengers stormed the cockpit are – apart from the still grieving families – reduced to subtexts.

I do not believe there could be more graphic evidence that the core of terrorism is about publicity. The clue is even in the name - TERROR-ism, not KILL-ism. The impact and influence of terrorists is not that they kill but that they make people afraid of being killed. But to terrorize you must publicize – no-one can be terrorized when they are unaware of anything to fear.
Of course fear of violence, and its effect on decision-making, is not unique to terrorism, but the degree to which it is relied upon is of an entirely different order of magnitude. The point of terrorism is that actions which affect the few influence far more. On 9/11 just under 3,000 died, but more than 3 billion were influenced.

Terrorism is the purest form of information warfare there is.

While we instinctively practice kinetic action with information effects our opponents instinctively practice information operations with kinetic effects.

So when, in January 2008, an insurgent suicide squad attacked the Serena Hotel in Kabul, they chose it because it was an iconic symbol of normality and, outside, another insurgent was watching who, within seconds, had phoned the news agencies. The result was an atmosphere of fear within Kabul that lasted for months and a blow to the government’s credibility that lasted even longer.

The whole panoply of information effects surrounds the terrorists’ actions. The suicide bombers last message on video, the video of the IED destroying the vehicles, the night letters telling Afghan officials to quit their jobs, the lurid threats of Al Qaeda leaders dissected and discussed on the media. As I write this, German citizens are telling the German media that, following AQ warnings to Germany to pull-out of ISAF, they are worried about going to the local train stations.

Meanwhile we are playing catch-up, and as a result, change has been in the air, and in particular a focus on what’s become known as Strategic Communications (StratCom). Exactly what StratCom means is still something of a debating point, but what is clear is that it is a response to the fact our traditional structures have not proved equal to the task.

I use the term ‘our’ because as a former NATO spokesman and SHAPE Chief PAO I guess I should carry my share of the blame. Too often we have proved too slow, too bureaucratic, and too unimaginative, and in so fail to either explain what we do adequately or enthuse our audiences.

I do not want to be too hard on us, because compared to us the terrorist has it easy. His chain of command is simple, his message is usually even simpler, to make people afraid, and because it is he who plants the bomb, he all too often has the initiative. In contrast we have a complex, conditional, caveated tale which has to be told to scores of audiences via a multi-layered, multinational structure.

But, be that as it may, this is a reality we have to deal with, because confronting and defeating the terrorist in the information game is fundamental to defeating the overall threat. We must neutralize not just the bomber, but the person who videoed him; we must counter not just the violence but the opinions and beliefs that drive some to violence and cause others to support or tolerate it.

That is why the conference held at the COE-DAT was so valuable. Over just two few days an array of experts highlighted both the centrality of the topic, but more importantly provided valuable insights into the way forward.

It will come as no surprise that the way forward will not be easy. If it was, then the many dedicated people working in this field would already have put it in place. We are, however, in a
time of unprecedented complexity, where not only has terrorism assumed new and larger dimensions, but the tools of information have changed dramatically, posing both new problems for us and new opportunities for our opponents.

For, I would argue that we have entered an information revolution. The internet is not just an additional tool to supplement newspaper, television and radio, it is not just another club in the golf bag – it is a whole new game. If knowledge is power (and it is) then cheap, easy access to the ever-expanding internet ‘encyclopedia’ allied with connecting to each other and everyone else, changes almost everything.

The burgeoning democratization of knowledge and connectivity marks a transition of power. For all their differences, what newspapers, radio and TV had in common was that it was ‘us’ that were largely doing the writing and broadcasting and ‘them’ who were largely reading, listening, watching. Now it is an interaction where we have to listen as well as speak, an ever shifting marketplace where some of our customers may also sometimes be competitors or even collaborators. Our audiences no longer have to listen or to rely on us, and are no longer even audiences in the traditional way because they want a say.

But this new information democracy, in so many ways a marvelous empowerment of the individual, can also be exploited by the terrorist. The websites and DVD production houses are cheap and robust, the latest atrocity can be uploaded to YouTube by mobile phone within minutes, while social media like Facebook can find new recruits and develop networks. Now the extremist in Bradford or Düsseldorf can link to a like-minded believer in Gaza or Quetta or Kabul.

Even more we find it hard to cope with the inherent nature of how the new media is organized. Among the key society-changing features of the info revolution is its challenge to traditional forms of organization. Our beloved hierarchies, with their neat organigrams of solid lines, are being successfully challenged by interactive, informal and constantly shifting networks.

Responding to this is particularly challenging for organizations like the military which have hierarchy embedded in their DNA, or for government bureaucracies with their rules, regulations and reporting lines. For the essence of the information era is the loss of control. Our terrorist opponents are often better able to manage the free-wheeling, networked approach. Not for them a hierarchy of permissions – just get it out and take the rough with the smooth.

So the challenge for us is not just to speed up our existing processes but to challenge and change them. What are needed are less stratified layers of command and more networking, where all levels are part of an informal community of interest. A virtual community working together at every level would empower us all. It would also be a tool for the enabling of that ‘mission command’ that is so often talked about and so rarely allowed. It would help free up the creativity and imagination that is needed to connect.

Such a change in approach would also go well beyond saying the same thing, only faster. It would allow us to address what we say, whether it is working, and if it is not what we do about it.

For instance, a constant weakness in our information campaigns is the weakness of our narratives. There is a lot of talk about narratives, but very often examination of supposed narratives reveals them to be little more than messages, or media response lines, or public affairs guidance. Put simply a narrative is a story, as expressed by counter-insurgency expert David
Kilcullen, “A simple unifying, easily-expressed story or explanation that organizes people’s experience and provides a framework for understanding events.”

Our opponents, terrorists, often do better at this than us. They tap into culture, national myths and prejudices, and differing value systems. Our systems-based approaches, our PowerPoint, our bullet points and sub-headings may work for presenting facts dealing with individual events, but they are poor at addressing perception and motivation. To succeed in the long-term we need to tap into narratives, to understand and respond to our audiences, even if – given their variety – it can seem dauntingly hard.

Hardest of all though can be recognizing, and dealing with, the fact that our messages are not working because our audience understands them and simply does not agree. It is said, and rightly, that a key to successful StratCom is that words and actions must align. There must be a clear linkage between action and words, and without that we have no credibility. That is hard enough in itself, however, what if the words and the actions do align, but our audiences do not like the actions?

A critical part of successful Strategic Communications is both to listen and to respond to our audiences. As the current Allied Command Operations Directive of StratCom says, “Such is the importance of information in mission success that, on occasion, policies and actions will even need to be adapted in response to the imperatives of Strategic Communications.”

That true engagement, to listen, understand, and respond, is, I believe, the major challenge we face. The terrorist is very, very rarely strongly supported, but he is often burrowed into his community, tapping into the cultural narratives, and intimidating those he cannot persuade or silence.

To succeed in defeating the terrorist in the information arena we need to challenge the way we work and think in order to adapt to this changing environment. To return to where we started, terrorism is a form of information warfare and our opponents understand that and operate accordingly. However, our inherent strengths are enormous, yet, we need to raise our game. I believe we can, and will – and indeed the process is underway. I hope COE-DAT can continue to make a contribution in this key area.
Understanding Strategic Communication: Towards A Definition

Steve Tatham
Director Communication Research, Research & Assessment Branch, UK Defence Academy

Abstract: This paper discusses the role and place of Strategic Communication as it fits in military strategy and operational planning. The paper outlines what Strategic Communication is, and is not, illustrating its potential uses and effects as well as the potential shortcomings. The author examines the idea of the 'asymmetry of communication', which occurs when senders fail to anticipate how a message will be interpreted or understood by a receiver. The author argues that in order for Strategic Communication to be more effective it must be placed 'at the heart' of anti-terror operations planning, not on its periphery.

Keywords: Terrorism, Strategic Communication, Model of communication, Media, Narrative.

We typically design physical operations first, then craft supporting information operations to explain our actions. This is the reverse of al-Qaida’s approach. For all our professionalism, compared to the enemy’s, our public information is an afterthought. In military terms, for al-Qaida the ‘main effort’ is information; for us, information is a ‘supporting effort.’

David Kilcullen,

Countering the Terrorist Mentality, New Paradigms for 21st Century Conflict

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1 Research & Assessment Branch documents do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of HM Government or the UK Ministry of Defence. They deliberately include opinions taken from many different quarters and are designed to stimulate debate and discussion.
Post 9/11, the armed forces of the United Kingdom and her NATO allies face difficult challenges. The state on state conflicts which typified the first half of the 20th century, and which in any future competition for resources cannot be ruled out, appear for now to have been replaced by the challenges of dealing with highly complex instabilities, invariably involving non-state actors, that will require a whole-of-government effort to resolve. In this environment, liberal democracies will face increasing difficulties in drawing such operations to a conclusion, unable as they are to utilize their full military capability without reverting to the myth of total war. Most are unwilling to make such a commitment, constrained by domestic and world opinion. Indeed history has shown that public perception can have long term and decisive effect upon the nature and success of foreign policy and military operations. Conveying information messages to specific audiences, in order to affect behavioral change for specific political objectives, may well prove more decisive in future battles than the placement of bullets and bombs upon a target. Neither civilian nor military leaders can afford to take a passive view of public opinion, for in foreign policy in particular it has been shown to constrain and limit action.

In this new security environment, governments in general and defence in particular find themselves called upon to undertake new and different tasks, such as post conflict reconstruction, capacity building and security sector reform – today bundled (in the UK) under the term MASD (Military Assistance to Stability and Development), whilst the overall reduction in defense spending and corresponding increase in capital costs present governments with hard choices. As we have seen, some countries, such as New Zealand (which deleted from its air inventory fighter jets, and which refocused its Navy to a mainly coast guard rather than expeditionary capability) simply cannot afford the armed forces they either desire or need.

Disturbingly, apparently weaker asymmetric actors seem to be performing increasingly well in their conflicts. Since 1800, stronger actors have defeated their weaker foes by a factor of 2:1. No surprise perhaps. Yet, between 1950 and 2001 weaker actors have significantly improved their performance.\(^2\) The wide availability of cheap weaponry, education and learning and, critically, the use of information as a weapon has empowered and emboldened weaker actors who increasingly seem able to win or at worse force concessions from apparently stronger forces. Thus, armed forces search for other mechanisms – particularly those of non-kinetic effect – to reduce the requirement for hard power engagement,\(^3\) to deter and to defend.

Our post 9/11 adversaries have proved adept at fusing information with new media, $100 cameras and remote internet connections, to shape global perceptions and to demoralize and intimidate.\(^4\) Information appears to move around the world in an instant, time and space seemingly collapsed by the speed of the internet. Today’s insurgents and terrorists know that opinions can be changed; it is this knowledge that empowers and enables them. It is a lesson that we might usefully


\(^3\) It is a concept well understood by our adversaries. ‘It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation of the battle,’ declared Osama Bin Laden in 2002.

\(^4\) The Taliban have provided the most compelling evidence of this. Since late 2006 their information campaign has grown enormously; where once before the media was seen to be apostate, today it is clearly regarded by the Taliban leadership as an invaluable weapon in their armoury.
learn. Information – its utility, effect and management - should be considered at the very core of future campaigns and operational planning, and done so not in isolation but as a coupled contribution to the whole plan.

Paradoxically, today people are saturated by raw data. Understanding who is the right audience, gaining and holding its attention are difficulties we share with our adversary. Recent operations have shown that some of the most influential opinion forming outlets fall at either end of a technology spectrum. In Iraq and Afghanistan centuries old mechanisms for discussion and discourse – Shuras, Loya Jirgas and honour codes such as Pashtunwali – carry great effect whilst at the other end of the spectrum new and emerging media outlets such as blogs and social networking sites can also prove highly effective. Yet opinion is formed not just by words but by perceptions. These are highly complex, conditioned as much by the environment as by the deeds and conduct of the UK, its representatives and its allies. Thus, when conveying information we must consider not just technology – but of greater importance – the culture, history and traditions of our intended audiences. We must recognize that in a globalized communication society, audience perceptions will be based not just upon the conduct of the armed forces but upon the conduct, attitudes and policies of the countries and organizations from which they emanate, and from the manner in which these are represented in the global information environment. In short, perception will very often equal reality.

**Strategic Communication**

A comparatively new term, Strategic Communication (not Communications) has yet to receive a standardized UK or NATO definition. A proposed definition for use in this document is:

> A systematic series of sustained and coherent activities, conducted across strategic, operational and tactical levels, that enables the understanding of target audiences, identifies effective conduits, and develops and promotes ideas and opinions through those conduits to promote and sustain particular types of behaviour.

This definition emphasizes Strategic Communication as a means of changing behavior and suggests a challenge in both devising means to accomplish it and measures of its success. A helpful way to consider Strategic Communication is as being analogous to an orchestra. The orchestra’s conductor is the government, the musical score is the Strategic Communication plan and the orchestra itself the various communities of practice and/or lines of operation. The music is the narrative. Depending on the effect you seek to achieve, different sections of the orchestra will be used at different times, or with different emphasis. The tempo of the music will also vary, depending on what effect the conductor desires. This model is used extensively by the US:

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5 A thematic and sequenced account that conveys meaning from authors to audiences about specific events.
Strategists often consider concepts in terms of 'ends, ways and means'. Strategic Communication is a 'way' to change behavior – which is a desired ‘end’. Strategic Communication employs multiple 'means' in that process. The means should be restricted only by the requirement to achieve the desired effect on the target audience. In the US, Strategic Communication is often regarded as being 80% actions and 20% words. A presumption exists that Strategic Communication is aimed at external audiences. This is incorrect; Strategic Communication is as important to internal audiences as it is to external ones. Strategic Communication is a cross governmental, strategic activity in which the military is but one participant. It should however be an intrinsic part of the overall campaign plan. It typically over-arches traditional civilian public diplomacy activities and traditional military effects. However, there is increasing blurring as the UK evolves its policy. In the operational environment civilian and military practitioners increasingly work together and Other Government Department (OGD) personnel (for example, from the Department for International Development, the Foreign Office etc) will as likely talk of the influence component of Public Diplomacy as military commanders will speak of their increasing diplomatic role. This is illustrated in the diagram below:

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6 *The Trouble with Strategic Communication(s)*, Dennis Murphy, IOSphere, Winter 2008.
7 Such as the British Council, educational and cultural exchanges and the BBC World Service.
8 Such as media, psychological and Information operations.
Examples of Strategic Communication include:

- The movement of troops to a particular state of readiness or geographical area
- Publications about the UK produced by The British Council
- Voice of America, the BBC World Service, etc.
- UK Counter-terrorism legislation
- The front page of a national newspaper
- The beheading of hostages, in orange jump suits, by Al-Qaeda

(Note: Some of these examples are orchestrated by governments, others are not. Depending on the audience a particular Sun newspaper headline, for example, may be construed as being representative or indicative of the UK and therefore seen by some pre-disposed audiences as Strategic Communication).

Strategic Communication is a term often abused. Since the late 1990s the term ‘spin’ has gained increasing popularity, often used with reference to the distortion, perhaps even manipulation (perceived or otherwise) of information, most infamously in the case (in the UK) of...
the ‘dodgy dossier’ upon which the British government’s case for the 2003 Iraq war was based. Yet its appearance highlights a real conundrum – what is the correct term for the tools of the new information battle? In the UK military environment we are confident with terms such as Information and Media Operations, whilst in military staff colleges Influence and Persuasion are debated. Civilian academics may speak of Soft Power and Public Diplomacy and cynics might prefer the use of Propaganda. There is a real danger that Strategic Communication is associated negatively with emotive and often inaccurate terms. Such obscuration is unhelpful and mires understanding of a complex and important issue.

The term ‘spin’ is particularly unhelpful for Strategic Communication should primarily be concerned with geopolitical issues not domestic party policies. Propaganda, however, is a harder accusation to rebut. Historically the word ‘propaganda’ might have been the term of choice, for in Latin its root ‘propagare’ means the pinning of fresh shoots of a plant into the earth to reproduce and take on a life of their own, a not unreasonable analogy for promoting and growing news ideas and values. Yet since 1622, when Pope Urban VIII established the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (a committee of cardinals dedicated to the spread of Catholicism, at the expense of Protestantism) the term has lost the neutrality of its original Latin meaning and developed into a pejorative term that implies a process that is intrinsically sinister, deceitful and based upon a desire to manipulate. This idea gained further traction from the exposure, in the inter-war years, of the orchestrated lies and political subterfuge that were deliberately employed, on both sides, to influence the outcome of the First World War. Although it was greeted with widespread revulsion, particularly in the popular press, it was also seen as a highly effective method for targeting the enemy. Indeed in his 1963 book ‘Techniques of Persuasion: From Propaganda to Brainwashing’ the then Director of the Institute of Psychiatry, Dr James Brown, suggested that the inter-war period was seminal to the recognition of the utility of propaganda. Brown wrote that: ‘certain fundamental changes in the nature of communication within technically advanced societies, and the methods employed during World War 1 were the effect rather than the cause of wholly new developments in the structure and techniques of the modern state’.9

In short, the widening architecture of popular information – press and wireless – played an increasingly important part in the spread of opinions and the creation of emotional attitudes, and concurrently stimulated the opportunity for and the development of propaganda. ‘Modern Communications [...] have opened up a new world of political processes.’ So wrote HG Wells in the New York Times.10 But what is propaganda? Definitions abound. Jowett and O’Donnell posit that propaganda is the: ‘deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perception, manipulate cognitions and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist’.11 Edward Bernays, in 1928, defined it as the: ‘consistent, enduring effort to create or shape events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group’.12 Regardless of the definition, in today’s contemporary conflicts the term tends to be one attached to the ‘enemy’ – never to the coalition. There are two fundamental reasons for this. Firstly, the term is uniformly pejorative and

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Understanding Strategic Communication: Towards A Definition

conjures up images of Goebbels’ Nazi Germany (who once famously declared that: ‘We have made the Reich by propaganda’); secondly, and of significantly more importance, by definition the propagandist does not engage in genuine argument and debate, rather their answers are determined at the outset. In the internet age, where anyone with a laptop can be a fact checker, such techniques seem doomed to fail. Strategic Communication must be transparent and both reactive and proactive13. Thus, propaganda is not a term that is either fulsome enough or historically palatable to carry wide utility today.

A presumption exists that Strategic Communication will be successful. This is incorrect. There will always be groups, normally those with deeply ingrained views, perhaps theological, who will resolutely resist alternative viewpoints. Strategic Communication can also fail because of the absence of either a professional and trained body of practitioners and/or the paucity of adequate training and educational material to support them; across governments and nations, Strategic Communication is still an interpretive function, often based on perceptions of best practice, and not an empirical one.

What Strategic Communication Is Not

Strategic Communication is not simply media interaction. Neither is it simply a new term for Information Operations. Such thinking actually limits the power of Strategic Communication to support military operations by over-simplifying its range and activities. Strategic communication is neither advertising nor marketing. The global market place means civilian advertising and marketing companies have incredible reach – increasingly in communities in the developing world14 with small disposable incomes. Whilst there is some correlation between the art of commercial persuasion (to purchase products or services) and Strategic Communication, the latter has to be far more sophisticated in its identification of both audience and message. It has to presume that audiences process and interpret messages whereas advertisers can and do assume a passive audience.15 Neither are the consequences of failed commercial advertising as serious as failed Strategic Communication. One less car sale may be a financial disappointment but the real world consequences of getting a Strategic Communication message wrong, of alienating an audience and possibly provoking them into violent action, far outweigh the largely financial risks of commercial advertising. The commercial sector is helpful in reminding us that the world exists within an environment where influence and persuasion are routine.

13 Authors Lasmar & Oliver assess Britain’s propaganda output in the Second World War. They noted that it tried to adhere to the truth and note that government insiders say that their emphasis on the mobilization of truth – so called grey propaganda – was more effective as a means of influencing public opinion than deception – so called black propaganda. Britain’s Secret Propaganda War, Sutton Press, 1998, Page 36.

14 The phenomenal growth of mobile phones in Afghanistan is an example.

15 A television advert for a car is inherently a scatter gun approach – the advert reaching a wide spectrum of society defined not by their interest in cars but by their ownership of a television or radio on which to receive the advert.
Understanding How To Communicate With Audiences

Across national and international definitions there exists an inherent belief that the process of Strategic Communication will be successful. Yet, academics and practitioners argue that the complexity of the task means that success should actually be considered the exception and not the rule. In part this is due to an immature understanding of the manner in which communication is undertaken. For strategic communication to have any chance of success, practitioners must understand the basic principle of communication. The simplest model of communication is the ‘message influence model’\(^{16}\) which for communication between two parties can be represented as:

![Diagram of message influence model]

This model suggests that a source (A) with ideas, intentions and information translates them into a message, which is transmitted via a channel to a receiver or audience (B). The purpose of the process is to influence the receiver (B) to understand the message in the same way as the source (A) and to subsequently act in a specific manner. This is a highly simplistic model which assumes no outside interference or conditioning of audience (B). A key underlying assumption of this model is that the process of communicating the message to the audience will be successful unless there is some interference in the transmission: the message is presumed to be right; it is only the communication’s method that might interfere with its effectiveness. Although simple to understand the model does not reflect reality, as the following example illustrates:

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\(^{16}\) This is based upon Shannon & Weaver’s The Mathematical Theory of Communication, 1949. It is used in this paper for illustrative purposes only; Shannon and Weaver’s model was not developed with Strategic Communication in mind but to examine interference in telephony. It has subsequently, and perhaps erroneously, become used as a useful illustrative model for Strategic Communication. The criticisms levelled at the model in the Strategic Communication environment do not detract from its original purpose, which remains extant.
Such were the headlines in 2004. Coalition forces in Sadr City, Baghdad were facing a daily barrage of rocks from young children. The problem for the Coalition was how to stop it. Patently violence or even the threat of violence against children was not an option yet the stone throwing needed to end. An army Psyops team believed that they had an answer and crafted a series of leaflets which demanded that the children stop throwing stones. The leaflet drop failed.

In this example the messages to stop were interpreted by the children not as a warning but as a sign of their success against the coalition. Thus the message source was self evidently ‘the enemy’. The Communications channel (the leaflets) did not resonate with the young children who either could not read or were not minded to read ‘adult’ leaflets. Indeed, in this example only the intended audience for the message was correctly identified by the Psyops team. Since the messages were received by the children without interference the presumption using the message influence model was that the plan would be successful; clearly a more sophisticated model is needed. A more nuanced understanding is provided by the ‘Pragmatic complexity model’ 17 which posits that communication is not a simple transmission of messages between two groups but rather is a much more complex system arrangement between the sender and the receiver. The model presumes that in any communication the success of A’s message depends not only on the message alone but upon what B thinks and does. And what B thinks and does is influenced by A’s behavior and B’s expectations, interpretations and attributions with respect to A. The model assumes that messages are always interpreted within a larger and ongoing communications system and that A and B are therefore locked into a relationship of simultaneous and mutual interdependence. This can be represented by the following diagram:

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17 A deliberately simplified derivative of Corman, Trethewey and Goodall’s model, A New Communication Model for the 21st Century. An understanding of the full model, beyond the scope of this paper, will be essential to the understanding of this process.
Here the success of A’s messages are dependent upon the wider external environment and, in particular, B’s perception of A’s role in that environment. It is against that role that A’s messages are processed; they may be dismissed out of hand or they may be accepted but in a contextualized manner. Rarely are they accepted tabula rasa. This model, which presents a much more realistic interpretation of society, suggests that there is no independent audience (B) waiting to be impacted by A. Instead, both parties are locked into a relationship of interdependence. This model is illustrated by the following example:

In April 2003 the UK Maritime Component Commander bemoaned the fact that the Arab media would not report the reopening of the Umm Qasr – Basra Express Train after the rebuilding of the railway by the 17th Port and Maritime Regiment. Despite widespread Western media coverage the Arab media refused to attend the facility. At the Commander’s request their refusal to attend was analysed. It was found that the Arab media did not regard the rebuilding of one rail line as news worthy, when compared to the collateral damage and loss of Iraqi lives that the invasion had wrought.

This example clearly illustrates that A’s message (which was ‘the coalition are rebuilding Iraq’) was contextualized by the recipient (and intended conduit) against the backdrop of the wider invasion and subsequently discarded. Unfortunately this model raises two further complex issues. The first is that the model presumes B is passive; however, in reality, B may itself be engaged in
attempting to influence A. Thus A’s messages themselves may be contextualized by its perceptions of B’s actions. This leads to an extremely complex relationship. The second consideration is that if A can understand B’s opinions and attitudes (2 in diagram above) in advance, A can prepare its messaging accordingly and thus attempt to mollify the effect of step 5, thus creating a stronger message. To address complexities such as this in the operational environment, the US has created Human Terrain Teams (HTT), composed of behavioral scientists and anthropologists – the kernel of a Strategic Communication capability for the command. At this time the UK has no such directly comparable resource although the UK Defence Academy is seeking to develop a Culture Institute that can assist pre-deployment preparation.

Narratives
An important component in ensuring the coherence of governmental communication themes within the campaign is the Narrative. Narratives may be defined as:

A thematic and sequenced account that conveys meaning from authors to participants about specific events.

Narratives are not merely a set of words but, and particularly since 9/11, a more holistic idea sweeping up not just the entire corpus of texts and speeches dealing with a specific event but all the supporting symbolism and imagery. An example is the War on Terror narrative used by the US Government.

This embraces the words and speeches of the US Government and its representatives, the policy documents, laws and legislation drawn up as a result and all the symbolic and emblematic representations of the counter-terrorist campaign, from Ground Zero to Iraq.

Narratives are the foundation of all strategy. They are the organizing framework for policy and the definitive reference for how events are to be argued and described. Their purpose is to bind together all of the actions of the government (possibly 'governments' when working in coalitions), and their representatives, under a common understanding. Narratives should provide structure and relevance to the meaning of a particular situation and messaging should never be disconnected from the overarching narrative stream. Narratives must be designed with flexibility in mind so that their essence is not destroyed as messages respond to contemporaneous events. They can be difficult to create since they must have utility not just for the internal and domestic participants, where we may wish to place different emphasis on issues, so called meta-narratives, but also for the adversary, particularly in the creation of counter-narratives. And it is important to remember that there is invariably a counter-narrative which is also competing for attention and resonance.

18 Traditional definitions of narratives refer to audiences, however this implicitly suggests passivity. The use of the word ‘participant’ recognizes the more complex communication model previously described.
The best and most successful narratives are those which embrace ideas and terminology that quickly gain resonance with intended audiences. This is known as ‘stickiness’ of messaging. An example would be the seemingly uninteresting issue of European farming subsidies, which can be enlivened (or made sticky) by the following fact:

You can fly an Australian cow, first class, from Sydney to Brussels and still sell it at below the cost of a cow in the European Union, such are the subsidies that Brussels offers European farmers.

We have seen that the message influence model of communication presumes that audiences are passive receptors who cannot doubt the veracity of the message, is of limited utility. Whilst it may work for die-hard supporters of Al-Qaeda, who have no wish to entertain any alternative point of view, it fails to work for audiences who may have alternative interpretations of events, nuances of history and cultures different to those of the sender, or simply those who are more questioning. If we subscribe to the more complex model, then communication is an ongoing narrative process of sense making. Commanders and civilian managers must therefore have an unambiguous understanding of the narrative that accompanies their activities, and the role they have in either supporting that narrative or undermining it, through their actions and words.

The narrative must be understood by all actors, military and civilian, and at all levels, so that their words and actions do not contradict its potency. In an ideal world commanders will be given clear political direction, however, more realistically, politicians may chose to defer direction (public or private) to create political space to maneuver. Accordingly, commanders must be aware of the tensions that narratives can create between organizations – be they UK government departments or international coalitions. Analysis of adversaries' narratives can greatly assist campaign planning in the determination of intent and the identification of individual factions and opinions. This is currently an extremely challenging area of campaign planning.

Narratives couple Strategic Communication and physical operations together; neither should be entertained without consideration of the other.

The Asymmetry of Communication

There is no more complete way to misunderstand a foreign civilization than to see it in terms of one’s own civilization.

Paul Bohannan, social anthropologist

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An urban legend exists that concerns the US car manufacturer Chevrolet. In the 1960s it developed a model that it named the Nova. It was extremely popular and sold widely in the US. Yet the urban legend has us believe that the car never sold in the Spanish speaking world – the reason, supposedly, was because Nova in Spanish sounds like no va, the term for 'does not go'. Thus the 'Chevrolet Does not Go' model did not sell well in South America. Except that it did, for the urban myth is just that – a myth. The myth’s storytellers display a key error in comprehension, for they presume that English words and phrases when translated literally carry the same meaning. Yet the Nova / no va story does not work, for whilst cars may well ‘go’ in the English language they do not do so in Spanish. Instead they may functionar (function) or marcher (march) – terms that in English, when applied to a car, sound faintly ridiculous. Words, it would seem, are important, and so too are their meanings. This is known as the science of pragmatics, or achieving meaning in context. In the Pashto language there is no direct equivalent word for reconciliation, consequently interpreters have to make a choice from different available words to establish context. Thus we refer to this problem as the asymmetry of communication and it is perhaps best illustrated in a comparative cognitive survey between Arab men and educated US males:

Although only a subset of some much wider research undertaken in the USA, the chart is illuminating for it shows that at no point do the cognitive attributes of poorly educated Arab males – whom for convenience we may choose to refer to as the Arab Street – match the attributes of educated Americans – whom for convenience we might refer to as Policy Makers. Thus, when Policy Makers articulate what they consider to be a reasoned policy for a particular action, their audiences are likely to be swayed more by feeling and emotion than the ‘irrefutable’ reasoning that we in the West might find so compelling. This in no way infers that Western culture is superior to that of Arab or Muslim culture; instead, it recognizes the concept of bounded rationality, irrespective of education. This concept posits that an individual’s actions are driven by a desire to rationalize and make logical decisions but recognizes that individuals do not have the capacity to understand everything and that decision making is often limited by time. Thus decisions may not be fully thought through and can be conceived as rational only within limits. Such determinations are normally made with the benefit of hindsight.

However, a granular understanding of audiences is important because it should directly affect the manner in which we communicate our message. For example, it is clear that in societies where there is no history or understanding of democracy, a message suggesting that terrorism is counter to democracy is unlikely to resonate. But, using the model above it can be seen that honor is of

great importance; therefore, a subtle readjustment of the message, to read that terrorism is dishonorable, may have more cognitive effect. An example from Iraq illustrates this point.  

Key MoD Information strategy messages included reference to ideas of liberation, democracy and freedom. However a telegram from the British Embassy in Damascus noted that such rhetoric was not working, and 'that Syrians say the Iraqi people do not want to be liberated by foreign soldiers'. Reviewing these strategic messages after the conflict a respected (and US based) Imam noted that: 'The US should explain that they are followers of Jesus Christ and that they are the sons of Abraham, like all Muslims. They came to the Holy Land, from where Abraham came, to rid the world of Lucifer – Saddam Hussein.'

**Target Audience Analysis**

As has been highlighted by the Pragmatic Complexity Model, understanding the prospective audience is a sine qua non of the Strategic Communication process. This preparatory phase, which is generically referred to as Target Audience Analysis (TAA), is a highly complex process for which the traditional J1-J8 structure of western armed forces may be ill-equipped. An illustrative example of the complexity of the task is the UK’s Behavioural Dynamics Institute (BDi) which models the process – in military terms this would be recognized as the estimate – in six component parts:

- **Stage 1. Strategic Campaign Planning (SCP),** involves the clarification of the project objectives, the initial research and analysis of the population, its constituent groups, and their relationship to the problem (for instance, violence or extremism). It is the process of identifying

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24 © UK Behavioural Dynamics Institute / Strategic Communications Laboratories Ltd.
which behavior needs to change in which group of people to yield results that measurably contribute to achieving the strategic objectives (a reduction in non-desired behavior, for example). Additionally, it is at this stage that one begins to identify specific baseline measures and behavioral foci to comprise the measurement of effectiveness (MOE).

Stage 2: Target Audience Identification. This is the process whereby from the many groups within a given population related to a problem behavior, one is selected as the most accessible, amenable to influence, and most closely related to the survival of the non-desired behavior. It is towards this audience that the strategic communication campaign will be directed. An example may be a particular individual – a religious leader, a tribal elder, or a group with particular influence – mothers, police officers, etc.

Stage 3: Target Audience Analysis. This is the deep analysis of the identified target audience – those that we believe can affect change – using quantitative and qualitative measures – to develop an intimate understanding of the audience’s various characteristics.

Stage 4: Campaign Design. This stage involves the construction of the message. The campaign design stage specifies the breadth and size of a campaign. It identifies the proper design of a campaign as it pertains to that campaign’s channel, source and, importantly, message.

Stage 5: Campaign Execution. The campaign execution stage benefits from the previous stages of analysis, development and design, and involves executing the campaign through the appropriate channel, with the appropriate source, using the correct message.

Evaluation: Following execution of the campaign is the evaluation and MOE Stage, which involves assessment of the effectiveness of the campaign as a whole in bringing about the desired change in behavior on the part of the target audience and particularly establishing its MOE. This process seeks to establish the characteristics and qualities of an audience and its relationship to any identified problem behavior before developing and implementing a communication campaign. The underlying communication assumption is that a message stands a better chance of receipt and effect if it has been shaped and delivered in line with a researched and evidence-based analysis of the intended target audience.

As can been seen, this is a simplification of a long and extremely technical process. The single key point to observe is that the execution phase is the very last action in a long and careful process. The essential failing for the UK and her allies is that all too often the execution phase is leaped on with premature enthusiasm, without considering what it is that will actually connect with the audiences. And the key question is: does it work? The evidence is that it does, and consistently so. A recent US government funded project sought to deter radicalization in parts of SE Asia. The project deployed the methodology prescribed by the BDi and the result was the identification of audience-based trends and tendencies towards extremism and the development of data-driven Strategic Communication programs to bring about measurable behavioral change in those audiences. There are others, past and ongoing, which again support this process. The issue for UK forces is how such expertise can be harnessed. The reality is the current ad hoc arrangement for selecting and retaining officers in information appointments, such as media, psychological and information operations, does not allow the generation of the expertise necessary to build such skill sets. Nor does the paucity of educational material that exists at present, and the confusion of Strategic Communication with Influence and Media Operations, assist.
Target Conduit Analysis

Target Conduit Analysis is defined as the evaluation and utilization of trusted and credible transmission conduits, ones that carry resonance with the intended audience, for the transmission of messages. Conduits can be traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio), emerging media (the internet, blogs, text messaging), or other communication mechanisms (such as individuals with particular resonance in specific communities). An example of each is shown:

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<th>Emerging Media</th>
<th>Traditional Media</th>
<th>Other mechanisms</th>
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<td>A 2008 study of Iran’s blogosphere reveals that political discussion about the ruling regime is dwarfed in comparison to discussion about Persian poetry. Thus if the West wished to communicate with huge swathes of an educated population this might present a mechanism to do so.</td>
<td>The Al-Jazeera TV station’s most popular show, the discussion program ‘The Opposite Direction’ regularly commands audiences in excess of 30 million Arabs and its host has become an international star. Compare this with BBC Radio 4 Today program that reaches an average of 6 million.</td>
<td>Islamic cleric Sheikh Yusef Qaradawi carries huge credibility in the Muslim world. In 2004 he was invited to London by the Mayor to preach to British Muslims of the dangers of terrorism – even though he himself supports suicide bombings in the occupied Palestinian territories.</td>
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Of key importance is establishing the credibility of the conduit. In the case of example 3, a decision may have to be taken that the credibility of the conduit outweighs other concerns, in this case support for Palestinian suicide operations. In example 2 we see that the conduit may be entirely unexpected and the messages will need very careful and nuanced crafting to fit the conduit – in this case, messaging that presents an alternative narrative to that of the ruling theocracy but does so in the context of Persian poetry. Target conduit analysis is vital to the process since the most carefully and well constructed messages in the world will not be heard if they are transmitted across an in appropriate medium.

Placing Strategic Communication At The Heart Of Operations

‘No act of force will ever be decisive: winning the trial of strength will not deliver the will of the people, and at base that is the only true aim of any use of force in our modern conflicts.’

General Sir Rupert Smith, The Utility of Force

25 http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=41784
At its core Strategic Communication seeks to communicate information that will attract support and influence opinion in specific groups. The term influence has gained increasing traction in military audiences over the last few years. The current UK military doctrine (JWP3-80) contains a rather elderly definition, one that fails to recognize that the success of non-kinetic effect is amplified by threats of kinetic activity – the carrot and stick analogy. An example from Operation Palliser (Sierra Leone 2000) illustrate this point:

A difficult diplomatic environment, in which the UK was accused of colonial empire-type activities, prevented Royal Navy (RN) Harriers from carrying, let alone deploying, munitions in May 2000. Thus air missions relied on presence and noise to intimidate Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. A request by the RN to drop bombs on mudflats outside the capital Freetown, for greater effect, was refused by the UK government. Although the flights were initially successful, the RUF soon learned that the ‘threat’ was actually empty and gradually gained in military confidence until OP Silkman presented a more tangible demonstration of power in Oct 2000.

Thus Influence does not mean the exclusion of hard power, nor is influence focused solely at an enemy. For the purpose of this paper, influence is defined as:

the application of the correct balance of kinetic and non-kinetic effect to influence the will and ultimately positively affect the behavior of a target group.

The application of this balance will vary as the campaign progresses but will range from the power of attraction, encouraging actions based on a willingness to engage, and therefore needing no hard power, through to coercion, the persuasion by use of force or threat. The latter requires careful communication to ensure that the audience understands that the threat is conditional on the target’s behavior. For influence to be successful it has to be placed at the heart of the commander’s operational intent – not as a supporting or contributing issue. The following example illustrates this point:

In 2003 the US 4th Infantry Division were conducting search and destroy operations in Al-Anbar province, Iraq. The intrusive house searches, which were not based on specific intelligence, were seeking weaponry and munitions. In the Operational Order the commander tasked his Information Operations (IO) cell to write a mitigating IO strategy for why the operation was necessary. However, senior US Officers in the Coalition Provisional Authority recognized that no sophisticated or clever IO campaign would make these searches palatable to the local population and that the most successful IO would actually be for the Brigade to not conduct the operations at that particular time.

26 ‘An activity whose primary purpose is to influence the will of the enemy through the promotion of targeted messages at specific audiences'.
Changing group behavior is extremely challenging – especially when it is motivated by deeply held, particularly religious, beliefs. The group’s interpretation of their historical, cultural and religious values plays a significant part in determining attitudes and resulting behavior. In societies where literacy levels are low (and religious adherence high) communities can be highly vulnerable to narratives that are based upon specific interpretations of historical or theological texts. Military forces will face increasingly ideologically motivated adversaries whose value-systems do not readily compare with our own views on the sanctity of life and human rights. These will present considerable challenges to commanders. However, Influence campaigns stand the best chance of success when target audience analysis has been properly undertaken.

The success of influence activities is greatly enhanced when they enjoy the personal involvement of the command since they should be regarded as being integral to military operations, not subsidiary.

Measurements
Throughout the Strategic Communication process measurements must be taken. Measurements of effectiveness (MOE) have a number of definitions, however, it is important to understand that MOE is a scientific process and thus best defined in scientific terms. For the purposes of this paper, MOE can be defined as:

- the difference, or conceptual difference, from a given system state to a desired end state.

MOE is an important part of the Strategic Communication process and should be undertaken regularly and with great care such that ongoing activities can be recalibrated as circumstances change. MOE can be extremely complex and requires not just an understanding of the desired end state but a clear familiarity with the societal norms for the environment in which operations are being conducted.

In recent years polling has become increasingly important to the determination of attitudes and, subsequently, to the formulation of policy. Chiefly this is because polling is perceived as being the easiest technique for accessing audience information and as a consequence an entire industry has grown up to support its use. Whilst polling is undeniably useful it should not be considered perfect. Polling is a particularly normal western construct, yet in certain societies, where the expression of a personal opinion is either dangerous (for, say, women in Afghanistan) or actually anathema to individuals who traditionally would accede to the views of elders or tribal / group leaders, it is regarded with suspicion and so should its results. Polls can provide an immediate indication of opinion but opinions can change very quickly. The results of polls may therefore not be indicative of the future – particularly in highly dynamic environments.
An August 2008 poll showed that 80% of Basrans professed confidence in the Iraqi security forces to protect them. Yet one major bomb attack would almost certainly reverse that figure. However, the poll was supported by additional evidence that lent greater weight to its findings. Basra had been able to hold its annual poetry festival for the first time in some years, the Basra diaspora were slowly returning to the city and house prices had doubled in just five months.

Thus it is incumbent upon commanders to be circumspect, particularly if the underlying methodology of the poll is not presented alongside the poll results or the results are offered without supporting collateral evidence. It is necessary, therefore, to develop more nuanced measurements of effectiveness, which may often be very local in nature. Although examples of past MOE can be helpful, doctrine must not be too prescriptive since MOE must emerge from the communication process and is entirely focused upon the specific audience. MOE can be nominal, such as High, Medium or Low, or it may be more precise such as Yes or No. Regardless, it must be based upon a baseline measurement – the audience’s behavior (or attitude) before the strategic communication process and then again afterwards – how long afterwards itself being an important consideration.

**Measurements Through Time**

Strategic Communication is time sensitive. The presumption is that a strategic communication campaign will permanently alter behavior; however empirical evidence shows that messages normally decay over time. Commanders will therefore need to consider the time period in which their communications are designed to function and, if it is not to become institutionalized (see below) what, if any, campaign would need to be run again.

Very few campaigns do become self-perpetuating, which is the desired end state of Strategic Communication, and the messages and themes of the campaign become institutionalized within
the existing societal structure. These campaigns are typically ones with no external signature on them.

Summary

_We must be prepared to pass over to the offensive and not to leave the initiative to the enemy,
but to make them defend themselves._

Christopher Mayhew

Address to Cabinet on combating Soviet propaganda, Jan 1948²⁷

Strategic Communication is widely misunderstood. At best it is seen by the military as a developing term for media and information operations. At worst it is seen as spin and propaganda. The inarticulacy of both ignore what it is – an extremely powerful tool that may hold the key to the dilemma of 21st century conflict, the power of information and opinion and its ability to enable behavioral change. What prompted, for example, 12m people to watch a 3 minute video from a former US soldier on YouTube stating Barack Obama’s plans for Iraq? And what was its effect? Why has Al-Qaeda invested such time and resource in its media campaign and how would the war against extremism look if they had not? What role did that information campaign play in prompting educated young British Muslims to strap rucksacks of explosives to their backs and descend to the London Underground? A less directed example of Strategic Communication is the apparent bounce in global polls measuring the popularity of the United States. With no change in policies and the same incumbent US president, the success of Barack Obama in the election campaign saw an almost instantaneous rise in US popularity – based not on tangible policy declarations, and certainly on no orchestrated global information campaign, but on a vague belief, or hope, for change to come.

And yet for all the sophistication of the current information environment, paradoxically these are not new skills, merely ones that we must relearn. The Political Warfare Executive (PWE) of World War 2 employed academics, journalists, scientists, housewives, misfits and reprobates – all possessing a common thread of innovation and an ability to think – to harness their eclectic skills and personalities to fight the Allies' information battle against Nazi Germany. Was it because it was a war of national survival that PWE was accepted, even congratulated whilst the 2007 announcement by the British government of the establishment of the Research, Information and Communication Unit (RICU) was met with such public derision and scorn? RICU, a trilateral organization, funded and staffed by the Home Office, CLG (Communities & Local Government) and the FCO – the absence of MOD is noteworthy – is engaged in countering the messages put out by violent extremists and strengthening the government’s communication with communities and organizations that partner in tackling terrorism. Such initiative should be welcomed. However, its remit may actually not be wide enough, for it pre-supposes that all threats are posed by violent extremists – they are not. Who deals with those that seek to change our society and advance their goals by subtlety and guile?

Civilian companies' marketing fast moving consumer items typically spend around 15% of their operating budget on their marketing operation. If we subscribe to Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s oft quoted phrase that our current conflicts against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are ‘battles of ideas’, and if we accept the premise that the future will see increasing need for innovative techniques not just of engagement but pre-eminently of prevention, then governments may wish to maximize their application of Strategic Communication with a commensurate investment in its resource, education and training.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5416268.stm
The importance of the information factor at the tactical level in COIN operations

Dirk Brodersen
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Abstract: If one considers the tasks to be accomplished in a stabilization operation in its entirety, they comprise, in accordance with the comprehensive approach, a sum of political, diplomatic, social, economic and military tasks. Within the scope of the military tasks, stabilization is one subset. Within the scope of the stabilization operations, it is important to counter insurgencies. It cannot be stressed too often that COIN (counterinsurgency) operations are not conducted in isolation by land forces at the tactical level. But land forces are well suited to support COIN operations, in concert with other military components such as sea, air, Special Forces, and psychological operations and to act side by side with civil departments and organizations, which in the long run have to bear the brunt of the effort.

Key to success is knowledge and time. It takes time to create knowledge, but without a good knowledge database it will not be possible, using a military decision-making process, to identify actions in order to create desired effects. Everything revolves around the population. It needs to be convinced that better times lie ahead. Such a change of mind may be achieved through hard actions – and many hard actions are necessary to achieve a successful COIN campaign. But many of these hard actions may only be regarded as successful if they are perceived as a success in the information environment. To achieve that, as much effort has to be put into the information operations as into the action itself.

Keywords: Terrorism, COIN Operations, Bundeswehr, Strategic Communication.

Introduction
Recent experiences, in particular the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, have shown for German land forces an increasing need for the ability to operate successfully in an environment characterized by insurgency and terror. In line with experiences gained by the major partners and
within the Alliance, the question was raised if specific doctrine is needed to deal with the new threat. As the Americans have published their FM 3-24 and NATO has drafted the new AJP-3.4.4, it seems necessary to scrutinize where the German land forces have gaps in their doctrine that need to be closed.

The question of the need for a German counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine is of course legitimate and needs to be addressed. However, the question will not have the same answer for the various levels of command. It is not the intention to consider the doctrine from an operational or strategic perspective, as that would be well beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to describe where German land forces stand doctrinally at the tactical level in order to cope with insurgency situations, to look into what is already available to the military commander and to make suggestions where additional work is to be done. The important element of media operations at the tactical level needs to be addressed as well, as the methods and procedures of working with information in today’s operations require a totally different approach than in the times of the Cold War.

The intention of this paper is not to outline a new German concept for COIN operations. It is an attempt to display which guiding principles the new German Army Field Manual (HDv) 100/100 and the current draft of the HDv 100/200 already offer today to higher commanders of land forces with regard to COIN and counter-terrorism operations, but at their particular level and for their part of the campaign.

In this context, the subject of COIN will be addressed in a broader sense, since German land forces simply do not conduct COIN operations. They may be part of a COIN campaign, they may, sometimes or in some regions, even play the most vital role within this campaign, but to become successful, this campaign must be orchestrated at a level far above the tactical one. Land forces need tactical abilities to be part of such a campaign – this includes tactical doctrine, well derived from operational level doctrine and tailored to the demands of land forces. Additionally, German land forces tactical doctrine must not only be well suited to serve operational level requirements but also be compatible with partners’ doctrines, as there is no intention for German land forces to conduct operations on their own, but always as part of a joint and multinational force. If, in the course of this paper, reference is made to requirements or capabilities of the force, then what is meant is always a multinational coalition force.

**COIN in a broader context**

For a long time, COIN was only of minor importance for the Bundeswehr. COIN had a somewhat colonial touch, and it was considered a military special case which was deemed to be applicable mainly to expeditionary forces and certainly not to the Bundeswehr, which saw its main (and at that time only) task in collective defense within NATO.

This changed when initially the Americans with FM 3-24 and now NATO, too, with the draft of AJP-3.4.4 “rediscovered” COIN as one of five Predominant Campaign Themes within the scope of “Full Scale Operations”, since many of the guiding principles for COIN campaigns were identified as the key to situation awareness and as an approach to conflict management in the ongoing operations. However, in contrast to the HDv 100 series, both regulations are not merely
tactical command and control regulations. Both manuals have a distinct focus on the integration of military actions into the actions of other departments; accordingly, they are strongly oriented towards the strategic and operational level and thus describe the integration of tactical level actions into the greater plan.

Looking at the actual meaning of the term insurgency and all its different senses such as uproar, rebellion, riot, outrage, insurrection, coup d’état, civil war, mass uprising, unrest and revolution, it becomes clear that the engagement of an insurgency, the COIN operation, is bound to vary depending on the identified or assumed character of the phenomenon. This is also illustrated by a military-historical consideration of insurgencies, which in terms of their individual character and their wide range may comprise events as different as the American Civil War, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, the Congo and the Tamil insurrection in Sri Lanka; it is also confirmed by an analysis of current operations such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. All insurrections differ, for instance, in terms of geography, culture, economic parameters, the goals or the purpose of the insurrection, the means that are employed or the degree of willingness of all parties involved to use force.

If general lessons could be learned from this conglomerate of different insurgencies, the first one would be that the characteristic element of all insurgencies is their uniqueness, that there are no hard and fast rules for counter operations, and that a recipe for success in one COIN operation may be completely ineffective or even counterproductive in a different situation.

Secondly, successful COIN operations have to be applied at the roots of the conflict. If these roots, the causes for the insurgency, are not analyzed precisely and then changed, the COIN operation is doomed to fail in the long run. While this analysis is often also difficult for the actual parties to the conflict, it is even more problematic for outsiders, and this is what coalition forces often are.

And finally - almost a truism in the field of the Comprehensive Approach - conflicts and causes cannot be resolved exclusively with military means; they require a holistic approach involving different national and international government departments.

Even if insurgency and terror are not the dominant contents of the chapter on “Stabilization Operations” of HDv 100/100, one task area of stabilization nevertheless is the establishment of safety and security. The principles of command and control that form the basis of COIN and counter-terrorism operations also belong in this task area.

The adversary
The question may be raised whether all insurgents, as a rule, can be classified as irregular forces. That can definitely be answered with a no. What is characteristic of irregular forces is the fact that they are militarily organized in some form and that there is a certain degree of willingness to use force - up to the willingness to apply methods of irregular warfare. The group of insurgents, on the other hand, may well be far more diversified. They may combine elements prepared to use force who actively take warfare action and then would definitely have to be classified as irregular forces. But, insurgents may also refuse force, for instance, Mahatma Ghandi in India, who quite clearly
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was an insurgent, at least from the British perspective, but certainly cannot be classified as an irregular fighter.

In this context, it has to be kept in mind that the supporters of non-violent resistance and irregular forces represent the extremes and that there is a vast variety of groupings in between – for instance those who support the goals of the irregular forces but refuse the active use of force or the methods to achieve these goals, or those which do not want themselves to fight, but support the fighters in various ways.

Many of these groupings are not as clearly defined as the above-mentioned extremes. However, and this makes them different from the extremes, they may be influenced in some cases. Coalition forces’ and the host nation’s actions and the perception of these actions by the various players can influence these groupings to some extent, either confirming them in their moderateness or driving them into the arms of the irregular forces. This is a key factor not only in the way to operate, but even more in the way to “sell” actions in the information domain.

Irregular forces may appear under a variety of names, for example, guerrillas, rebels, franc-tireurs, partisans, terrorists or members of organized crime or warlord forces. Usually the designations and their definitions are rather vague. Irregular forces usually define themselves through their goals and the means they are prepared to employ.

Regarding the manifold possibilities of designating irregular forces, two additional remarks need to be made at this point:

Firstly, the exact designation may be quite subjective and may depend on the individual observer. ‘One man’s terrorist may be another man’s freedom fighter.’ The selection of the particular designation is never an arbitrary act, the user always intends to create an effect in the wide virtual and physical area where information is shared, exchanged, processed and passed on. This area is called the information environment, and the choice of the designation of irregular forces may already be a purposeful operation in that environment.

Secondly, irregular forces may fall into several categories at the same time. Accordingly, insurgents quite well may also be members of organized crime or pirates. In such cases, they may have access to considerable funds, which again enable them to acquire high technology equipment through specific fields. The same applies to groupings, which are backed by financially strong supporters, usually abroad.

An essential characteristic of irregular forces is their inclination towards asymmetric warfare. Usually they have no hierarchical structures and procedures that are comparable with those of regular forces, they do not feel bound to international humanitarian law, and they neither claim nor accept a combatant status. As well, they are difficult to identify, as they may try to hide among the population.

Military superiority or inferiority is not a criterion for them – they will always be inferior to regular armed forces in open battlefield combat; however, they may be able to establish locally and temporarily superior force ratios due to their superior familiarity with the locations and the predictability of the friendly force.

Usually, they are inferior in technological terms, but depending on access to money, they may be able to establish an equal balance or even superiority, particularly in the field of niche
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technologies. On the other hand, current experiences with the Hezbollah in South Lebanon and with the Taliban in South Afghanistan have shown that under certain conditions they are quite well prepared to accept open battlefield combat. Obviously, the signal of having inflicted a defeat on the superior occupation power is so important for them both externally and internally that they are prepared to take risks and to accept losses.

Regarding the action against irregular forces, the HDv 100/100 defines two terms:

According to regulation, “passive operations against irregular forces” is an approach of force within the scope of general military tasks – mainly for the purpose of force protection. It is self-evident that force protection always also includes the struggle for information. The HDv 100/100 also refers to “active operations against irregular forces” as actions against irregular forces with the declared goal to eliminate them. This approach, for the Bundeswehr, is subject to political approval and requires capabilities, which only Special Forces and specialized forces have.

The population in stabilization operations

The purpose of all efforts within a stabilization operation has to be the self-sustaining stability of the host nation, which enables it to exercise legitimate government authority and to act autonomously and with sovereignty. Military measures essentially contribute as a foundation to a safe and secure environment, in which this order can be established. To achieve this goal, it might be necessary to combat violent resistance with all available means, including the use of military force.

Basically, it would be important to isolate the irregular forces, to deprive them of their mobility, to cut them off from supply and support, to then destroy their structures and hand over individual perpetrators to criminal prosecution authorities, while, simultaneously, preventing one’s own force, to the greatest extent possible, from being jeopardized.

To achieve a successful force protection, military commanders have to operate within the framework of a protection concept. In doing so, the force commander has to accept compromises.

The force will enjoy the highest level of protection if it withdraws into a well-fortified camp and does not leave it. Thus, however, it would leave the region and in particular the population in it to the adversary. Accordingly, it would have little hope of being able to come even close to accomplishing the stabilization mission. Only if you can get the people, the population on your side, your COIN efforts will be successful.

If the core issue is to win the hearts and minds of the population, the coalition force has to act among and with the population, thereby accepting calculated risks. The population, the thinking and the action of the people, the local residents, are the key to success in the course of stabilization. In this context, it would be important to influence the needs and the sentiments of the people on a short-term basis, but also in the long run in accordance with the mandate.

To some extent, the improvement of the basic needs of the population can be easily measured, for example:

- medical support ensured or not,
- shelter provided – yes or no,
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- quantity of calories per person per day.

Other things, which reach into the subjective domain, are less distinctly identifiable and subject to influence, such as the feeling of safety and security or long-term perspective.

Many of these long-term sentiments can only be changed at the political or strategic levels; for instance, the question of political representation of ethnic minority groups in the host nation’s parliament must be politically resolved by the government of the host nation. However, it must be a continuous task of the commanders to address problems that can only be solved by others (which were referred to as the roots of the problem in the first part of the analysis).

Information operations

What is also important in an environment that is determined by insurgency and terror is the strict observation of the principles of stabilization in order to win the trust and confidence of the population and the parties to the conflict in the long run. The principles of stabilization are defined almost identically in the doctrines of many countries and within NATO doctrine. For German land forces in particular, freedom of movement, transparency, impartiality, consensus, restraint, respect and, probably most importantly, credibility are the governing principles.

Of course, these principles have to be applied pragmatically. Obviously, it will rarely be possible to take action against irregular forces based on consensus with them. Demands for transparency will have to be balanced against requirements for operational security, and restraint in conflict with irregular forces may be inappropriate.

Nevertheless, the force has to remain impartial, which does not necessarily mean neutral. If it has to act against groups of the population, it must be entirely clear and evident that the force acts because guidelines and constraints were violated and laws were not obeyed – and that the force will proceed against anybody who violates them – completely irrespective of the perpetrators’ affiliation to an ethnic or population group.

This is the only way to defend credibility. And the adversary will use every opportunity to challenge the credibility of the force and of the host nation. This part of the conflict is basically carried out in the information environment. Every party will try to establish superiority in the information environment using information as a weapon. Exemplarily, this was observable recently in the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

In this context, it must be clear that any operation in the information environment sends messages. The picture of an obviously successful attack against the coalition force with smoking wreckage and casualties sends a clear message to several target groups in theatre. These target groups will receive the message in different ways; some may regard it as a positive signal, others as an act of barbarism. But, in any case, it will provoke some kind of reaction. In some cases it may cause a physical reaction. In other cases it may influence thinking, perception and long-term reaction. The same is true for the home country. There, it is perceived by the population, the political sector and the media, and will again cause reaction at various levels with possible short, medium or long term effects. In the worst case, a number of similar actions in the information environment may decrease public support of the force in the home country or the credibility in the host nation and ultimately lead to its withdrawal prior to mission accomplishment.
Therefore, every military leader must be aware that he has to use every opportunity to actively operate in the information environment. He must not hesitate but has to seek every opportunity to explain his actions, to clarify his point of view and to seek the necessary support. He must be fully aware that he also acts in the information environment through passivity and inactivity. Passivity and inactivity are, in the information environment, actions and will most certainly create effects.

One thing should be perfectly clear: If the coalition force does not fill the information environment, the adversary will. And the adversary is getting better and better at doing this.

However, the principle of credibility is paramount also and may be particularly so in the information environment. With actions in the information environment, the military leader commits himself; it becomes possible to measure him against his statements. Therefore, the congruence of words and deeds is the prime message for credibility and reliability.

However, in this context not only the force commander is measured. Even lowest levels of command, the teams and patrols, send messages – hopefully positive ones. However, they will only be able to transmit positive messages if they know the intention and objective of their superiors and are able, even in unexpected situations, to act in accordance with their task and can explain why they are doing it.

A particularly suitable means for bringing messages to the civilian community is through Civil-Military Cooperation. The CIMIC elements contribute to the interagency approach and function in two respects. For one thing, they can quickly contribute to identifying and meeting the needs of the population by means of organization of relief measures – but what is more important is the fact that they, for the accomplishment of their primary mission, can establish close contacts with civilian organizations, the local administration and the population. Therefore, they are excellently suited to convey the ideas and messages of the force commander and to help create understanding and support of the commander’s actions.

**Actions against insurgents**

In an insurgency situation there will always be a group of the population that supports the government, a group that adopts a neutral or passive attitude towards it, and a group that takes action against it. The purpose of all measures taken within the scope of COIN operations must be to increase the group’s share of positively and neutrally minded people to such an extent that only a small remaining group of insurgents remains. This group, which will reject even a reformed government, would then be so small and have so little notable support that ultimately it could be engaged through police measures.

In order to achieve this goal, military measures would be necessary particularly in the initial phase. But the majority of all necessary measures would be of a non-military nature.

However, particularly in the initial phase of an operation there will also be another category of measures within the scope of non-military measures, which could be called support measures. These measures would also have to be taken by military forces since other resources of the responsible departments may not yet be available. The conduct of these measures may not be within the scope of the military forces’ core capabilities and would therefore be inherently risky.
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It is essential that all these measures, be they of a military or non-military nature, are co-ordinated and that all these measures are supported by information operations. Particularly in the early phase of an operation, many simultaneous actions by military forces, but also by civil organizations can happen and cause effects within the various target groups. In order to direct the perception of these actions and to create understanding and support, all actions in the physical domain need to be supported by actions in the information environment. Metaphorically speaking, every physical action needs a bodyguard in the information environment.

New challenges is the assessment at the tactical level

In simple words, the point is to drive a wedge between the population and the insurgents in order to be able to purposefully support the population on the one hand, and on the other hand be able to resolve the trouble with the insurgents by other means.

The problem is that it may be difficult to identify and to isolate the insurgents in the population, since the insurgents enjoy the highest level of operational effectiveness when they act directly from within the population. This is all easier if the insurgents come directly from the local population and will be more difficult if they are “immigrants”. Therefore, the crucial question is how, where the application of military and non-military actions makes sense, the pivot and leverage points can be identified.

The way to accomplish that is to develop a profound, detailed situational awareness and understanding. The role of the G2 as the spider in the web of intelligence and reconnaissance cannot be emphasized strongly enough. His role in military staff procedures has changed most significantly since the end of the Cold War, as has the demand for the results of his work. He is no longer only an expert on the establishment and doctrine of a purely military adversary, but is rather required to be able to analyze a set of military, para-military and civil networks in the area of operation, and sometimes even around it. These networks are difficult to understand – and even more difficult to penetrate, infiltrate and access – for outsiders. Nevertheless, every effort must be made to understand in detail the situation in which the coalition force has to operate. This is the only possible way to assess, in advance, which actions generate which effects, which actions, therefore, can be selected and executed and which should not be taken because in the overall consideration the undesired effects may prevail.

It will be of decisive importance to use and co-ordinate all means that can contribute to an understanding of the situation. In addition to the intelligence and reconnaissance means in theatre and those that can be employed from a distance, the HUMINT and CIMIC assets may be named as examples.

The results of the intelligence and reconnaissance efforts are continuously taken into account in all phases of the military decision-making process. In this context, it is important to always assess whether the available information is sufficient to make a decision or whether more information needs to be obtained. It is also possible that the cycle must be restarted if the incoming information suggests that a fundamental change in the situation has occurred. Particularly in an insurgency situation, it would be important to quickly react and adjust, since the adversary would learn not only from his own successes and failures but also from our reaction. Here it becomes
evident that command and control superiority also depends on learning and adjusting faster than the adversary.

The central element of the decision-making process for COIN and counter-terrorism operations is the holistic estimate of the situation. In this context, information about the adversary’s situation and intent must be assessed in detail. It may well be extremely difficult to define who the adversary actually is. For example, a certain group of organized criminals may be perfectly compliant, even supportive towards the military force, as long as there is no interference with its business. However, it may become a deadly enemy as soon as it sees its vital interests jeopardized. Mostly, a whole range of potentially hostile groups has to be analyzed with regard to their intentions, capabilities, weaknesses and so on. The same is true for the capabilities of the friendly force, in particular within the framework of a joint, combined and multinational environment. It may be necessary to not only assess friendly forces from the perspective of their military capabilities, but also to estimate politically imposed restrictions and caveats.

Usually, the civilian situation and other influencing factors relevant to the execution of a COIN mission will be diverse and can comprise almost all levels of society and the operational environment.

This holistic approach makes military decision-making more difficult and more time-consuming. It must, however, not be confused with decision-making in combat, where an enemy is clearly defined and the prime target is his defeat. From a decision-maker’s point of view, such a situation becomes simple again when the relevant factors to be considered are limited in number and complexity. The real complexity problems arise at a higher formation level and in the need for medium and long-term solutions. To be able to gain an understanding as to what actions, often executed by lower level military units, cause what medium and long term effects in an open society, a deep and comprehensive understanding of the society that the coalition force is operating in is required. The need to orchestrate actions to have an impact on the roots of the conflict and so to change the situation for the better in the long run makes stability operations and COIN operations so lengthy.

Usually the estimate of the situation will result in a number of possible courses of action. HDv 100/100 offers five fundamental categories for courses of action and tasks for COIN and counter-terrorism operations: negotiations, corrective actions, demonstration of military strength, containment of hotspots and offensive actions. They usually vary in terms of their intensity. The boundaries between them depend on the situation and are fluid, but it is certainly clear that negotiations will usually be less intensive than show of force or offensive measures and, accordingly, may also require other capabilities within the deployed force.

In the context of the comprehensive approach, it is important that all measures are coordinated considering the effects created by other departments. It is also paramount that they are supported by purposeful actions in the information environment.

Conclusions
If one considers in their entirety the tasks to be accomplished in a stabilization operation, they comprise, in accordance with the comprehensive approach, a sum of political, diplomatic, social,
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The importance of the information factor at the tactical level in COIN operations is significant for economic and military tasks. Within the scope of the military tasks, stabilization is one subset. Within the scope of the stabilization operations, it is important to counter insurgencies.

It cannot be stressed too often that COIN operations are not conducted in isolation by land forces at the tactical level. However, land forces are well suited to support COIN operations, in concert with other military components such as sea, air, Special Forces, and psychological operations, and to act side by side with civil departments and organizations, which in the long run have to bear the brunt of the effort.

Key to success is knowledge and time. It takes time to create knowledge, but without a good knowledge database it will not be possible, using a military decision-making process, to identify actions in order to create desired effects.

Everything revolves around the population. It needs to be convinced that better times lie ahead. Such a change of mind may be achieved by hard actions – and many hard actions will be necessary to achieve a successful COIN campaign. But many of these hard actions will only be regarded as successful if they are perceived as a success in the information environment. To achieve that, as much effort has to be put into the information operations as into the action itself.
Cry Terror and Let Slip the Media Dogs\textsuperscript{1}

Randall G. Bowdish

Abstract: In this essay I provide a detailed look at the relationship between terrorism and the media in a liberal democracy. I argue that the media must take a more active, formal role in guarding the people against the cognitive harm and unwitting complicity toward terrorists’ ends associated with news of terrorism. Long a watchdog against governmental abuse of power, the media must also stand sentinel against the tyranny of extremists who attempt to manipulate the media and society to their own malevolent ends. Terrorism strikes at the soft underbelly of democracy by bypassing a nation’s means of resistance and attacking its will to resist through the media. While censorship is one option to defend media vulnerability, it is a bad one compared to self-regulation through media codes. Although the “cry of terror” is newsworthy and reason to “let slip the media dogs,” it does not mean, however, that the news must be reported in a manner conducive to terrorists. Leveraging off of fear appeal research, I provide recommendations as to how the media can limit damage to individuals and national interests while still reporting the news of terrorism.

Keywords: terrorism, media, newsworthiness, fear appeals, propaganda.

And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war;

\textit{Julius Caesar}, William Shakespeare

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Julius Caesar, legendary as a brilliant politician and military genius, was also the father of the Roman daily newssheet. His very first enactment after becoming consul was that the day-to-day proceedings of both of the senate and the people should be compiled and published. On the Ides of March, 44 BC, Caesar was killed by a band of conspirators bent on protecting the people from a tyrant. While historians can only guess at the newssheet headlines following his assassination, Caesar’s death was the news.

In one of history’s great twists, Caesar’s progeny, the media, has evolved into the role of watchdog against tyrants. However, while the media understands its modern societal role to cry “Tyrant!” when appropriate, its role in protecting the people against cries of terror is less understood.

The focus of this paper is the role of the media in a liberal democracy as it pertains to terrorism. The case is made that the media must take a more active, formal role in guarding the people against the cognitive harm and unwitting complicity towards terrorist’s ends associated with news of terrorism. Long a watchdog against governmental abuse of power, the media must also stand sentinel against the tyranny of extremists who would manipulate the media and society to their own malevolent ends. Decoupling “propaganda of the deed” from propaganda proper, is critical in minimizing terrorism as a viable means to an end. As Margaret Thatcher so eloquently stated, “Democratic nations must try to find ways to starve the terrorist and the hijacker of the oxygen of publicity on which they depend.” While this objective is simply stated and well understood, the mechanics of it are problematic in the extreme given the media’s role in a liberal democracy.

Freedom to Inform Against a Need to Protect

The role of the journalist in a liberal democracy is to “provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to function in a free society.” Citizens of liberal democracies depend upon timely, truthful information in order to make informed decisions about self-governance. Paradoxically, while journalists are free to inform the public on just about any topic, two boundary conditions exist that on one extreme, protect the right of people to information while at the other extreme protect them from information.

The first boundary is the right to free speech and a legal system that safeguards it. It serves to protect public discourse from government censorship. In the case of the United States, free speech is protected by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights and upheld by the judicial branch. On its own, a constitutionally mandated right to free speech is not enough. For example, as pointed out in a Freedom House study, “Although the Russian constitution provides for freedom of speech and

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4 Liberal freedoms are the distinguishing criteria that make a democracy a liberal democracy.
of the press, authorities were still able to use the judicial system to harass and prosecute journalists for independent reporting.\(^5\)

Perhaps surprising to some, there are liberal democracies that do not constitutionally protect free speech, yet still enjoy it. A shining example of this exists in Australia. The Australian constitution does not address free speech. Over time, there have been attempts to include freedom of speech into the Australian constitution, but all have failed. Nonetheless, freedom of the press has been upheld and respected in Australian high court cases to such a degree that Australia was recently rated higher in press freedom than the United States.\(^6\)

Internationally, the right to free speech was addressed in article 19 of the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.\(^7\) Born of the horrors of World War II atrocities, the UN declaration continues to this day to act as a beacon of hope for freedom and rights advocacy groups across the globe. However, it has no legally binding status in international law. Internationally, only 73 of 194 nations surveyed in 2005 were rated as having a truly free press.\(^8\)

As important as free speech is to a liberal democracy, some controls are necessary. A society also requires a boundary against some types of information. Put simply, words (and images) can hurt. The nebulous equilibrium between free speech and words that hurt were perhaps best encapsulated in article 11 of the French National Assembly’s Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen:9

> The free communication of ideas and opinions is one of the most precious of the rights of man. Every citizen may, accordingly, speak, write, and print with freedom, but shall be responsible for such abuses of this freedom as shall be defined by law.

From personally damaging words of obscenity, libel, defamation and slander, to society damaging expressions of hate and sedition, people and the government that serves them require protection under law from words that hurt. Cunningly woven words of deceit and half-truth have the power to incite otherwise rational men and women to nefarious acts of dark passion. Protection in the form of censorship against such words is considered necessary by most people as a practical measure. Laws that protect people and the government, however, also act to suppress free speech in the form of censorship. Censorship is defined as:

> Official prohibition or restriction of any type of expression believed to threaten the political, social, or moral order. It may be imposed by governmental authority, local or national, by a


\(^9\) National Assembly of France, August 26, 1789.
Censorship may be either preventive or punitive, according to whether it is exercised before or after the expression has been made public.  

The problem, of course, is that the line between protection of the people and their right to speak and know is often subjective and a matter of perspective. Logically, to at once protect people from information while also protecting their right to information eventually breaks down as a paradox. Censorship strikes against the very ideals and safeguards that make democracies attractive and allow them to thrive in the first place. Even with the damage that dark words and images can generate, democracies must look at any and all efforts to censor, no matter how noble the pretense, with great suspicion and an eye to the potential consequences, both intended and unintended. Of course, this must be evaluated against the harm imposed by unfettered malicious speech and images. Pragmatically, a balance must be struck.

This raises a number of key questions that must be answered before a democratic media’s role in reporting terrorism can be defined. Where does news of terrorism lie within the bounds of free speech and censorship? Is the news of terrorism actually harmful to society? If so, why do media report it? Is it bad enough to warrant forfeiting society’s right to know? Who would make that determination? What alternatives exist? A rational policy regarding the media’s role concerning terrorism must address these issues.

**News of Terrorism Can Harm**

Terrorism can harm on three levels. First order harm from terrorism results from the physical violence done against the victims. Second order harm from terrorism is the cognitive injury done through fear and anxiety producing stimuli to those that observe the physical violence. Third order damage from terrorism consists of the negative policy and societal changes wrought to cope with it.

First order harm from terrorism is obvious, does not involve the media and subsequently, is not the focus of this chapter. The media is instrumental, however, in the propagation of second order effects of terrorism. A local act of violence against tens to thousands of people is vicariously shared by millions to billions of people across the globe. While the damage is greatly diminished as the violence crosses the physical to the psychological threshold through the media, the range and number of people reached increases by orders of magnitude. While this leverage is imposing, the effects are not pervasive. For example, in a survey conducted after 9/11, only a minority of Americans expressed considerable levels of fear and depression. Still, while the majority of Americans claimed they were not psychologically disturbed by the attacks, “almost a half reported feeling anxious or worried at least sometimes, “with … just under a third feeling scared or

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frightened sometimes or very often.\textsuperscript{11} The ability to have an effect on millions of people who weren’t even at the scene of the terrorist act is largely a consequence of media reporting.

The major media culprit of harm from terrorism is television news, a key second order stimulus. Television and film media are unique as communication means in that the viewers vicariously share two of the same sensory inputs—sight and sound—as the participants and eyewitnesses. As one might expect, fear inducing television visuals and sounds together produce more fear than more static forms of media. A study of psychological reactions to 9/11 showed that “Individuals who reported watching a great deal of TV news were more likely to report being afraid, depressed, and viewed the future risk of terrorism as high.”\textsuperscript{12} Furthermore, although newspaper coverage provided the same amount of knowledge about terrorism as TV coverage, only TV increased fear and anxiety and perceptions of risk.\textsuperscript{13}

Threatening television images and sounds can exploit evolutionary hard-wired survival mechanisms meant for coping with a clear and present danger. Vision and hearing are the two most dominant of the five major senses when it comes to danger. Viewers see and hear the same danger stressors that initiate the “Fight, Flight or Freeze in Fright” behavior of participants. Danger sensory input processing is instinctually biased towards action. In the fight or flight response, sensory inputs are first sent from the thalamus to the amygdala. A rough-cut evaluation of the threat is done in the amygdala, known as the warehouse of fear. If the amygdala determines it might be a threat, physiological mobilization of the body begins when it signals the hypothalamus to activate the sympathetic nervous system and the adrenal-cortical system. All the while, higher level processing in the sensory cortex continues to refine the threat, but at the cost of more time. The sensory cortex sends the signal to the hippocampus, to compare the threat to what it has in memory. The result of this more deliberate evaluation of the sensory inputs is either a confirmation or invalidation of the threat. If the sensory cortex refinements invalidate the threat, then physiological demobilization begins.

While the fight or flight response is a handy short term instinct to have when facing a clear and present danger, chronic fear, stress and anxiety can actually have devastating long-term effects. Even small levels of prolonged stress can cause the release of hormones that, over time, can result in a shrunken hippocampus and an enlarged and overactive amygdala. A shrunken hippocampus impairs the ability to evaluate the nature of a stressor. An enlarged amygdala causes anxiety and fear out of proportion to even small stimuli.

Millions of years of finely honed survival instinct can be problematic for the 21st century man inundated with electronic stimuli that have only been around for an evolutionary snap of the fingers. Swift, instinctual reactions that made the difference between life and death in the primitive world are often false alarms in the modern one. In 2005, over 14 million American adults suffered

\textsuperscript{11} Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion Just, eds., \textit{Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 259.

\textsuperscript{12} Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion Just, eds., \textit{Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 264.

\textsuperscript{13} Pippa Norris, Montague Kern, and Marion Just, eds., \textit{Framing Terrorism: The News Media, the Government, and the Public} (New York: Routledge, 2003), 267.
from Post-Traumatic Stress or Generalized Anxiety Disorders. News of terrorism was a contributor.

Fear Appeals and Cognitive Dissonance: The Bridge to Third Order Effects

Two psychological constructs, cognitive dissonance and fear appeals, help to describe how second order effects transform into third order effects. Cognitive dissonance is a psychological state of discomfort felt as a result of a discrepancy between what one already knows or believes and new information or interpretation. Within this construct, an act of terror first works to get people to pay attention to the terrorist’s policy message. Terrorists seek to install cognitive dissonance as a result of anxiety producing conflict between their self-professed “reasonable” demands and the “unjust” or questionable existing policy of their oppressors. Their aim is to get people to adopt their policy in order to alleviate the anxiety of cognitive dissonance. For example, Al Qaeda has a stated goal of ridding Muslim states of westerners. A constant barrage of news of deaths of Westerners in Muslim states through acts of terror might install cognitive dissonance regarding the value of a Western presence in Muslim states. In order to resolve the dissonance, people might come to the conclusion that a Western presence is not worth American lives and seek a policy change against the US presence in Muslim states. In this construct, second order effects of terrorism initiate third order policy effects.

Another psychological construct, the fear appeal, also helps to explain the transition from second order to third order effects. A fear appeal is a persuasive message “designed to scare people by describing the terrible things that will happen to them if they do not do what the message recommends.” Fear appeals consist of a threat and a recommended response.

A threat is an expression of an intention to inflict pain, injury, or punishment. In the words of Thomas Schelling:

It is the threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply. It is the latent violence that can influence someone’s choice—violence that can still be withheld or inflicted. The threat of pain tries to structure one’s motives, while brute force tries to overcome his strength. Whether it is sheer terrorist violence to induce an irrational response, or cool premeditated violence to persuade somebody that you mean it and you may do it again, it is not the pain and damage itself but its influence on somebody’s behavior that matters.

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According to Witte’s Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM), the first thing a person does when presented with a fear appeal is to appraise the threat. If the threat is deemed irrelevant or insignificant, there is no need for further processing and the fear appeal is ignored. On the other hand, if the threat is evaluated as severe and relevant, then another appraisal of the efficacy—that is, the power or capacity of the recommendation to yield a desired outcome—of the recommended response is required.

Serious, relevant fear appeals are handled in one of two ways. An individual can choose to deal with the danger of the threat (danger control) or choose to deal with his fear of the threat (fear control). In the case of danger control, a person will concentrate on the fear appeal and look to neutralize or minimize the threat through either accepting the recommended response or by deriving an alternative response. In the case of fear control, a person will focus on how frightened he feels and attempt to reduce it through denial, avoidance, or reactance, resulting in rejection of the recommended response.

The choice between danger or fear control is a function of the message efficacy. If the recommended response is relatively easy, feasible and effective, then a person is more likely to engage in danger control and comply with the recommended action. If the fear appeal contains a serious threat but the message is ambiguous, too difficult, or ineffective, then she will try to control her fear.

Fear appeals and cognitive dissonance contribute to third order effects of policy and societal changes through the media. News reports and disturbing images of terrorism impart various degrees of fear and anxiety in some people, while having little or no effect on others. Over time, news reports without a message may contribute to anxiety disorders in a small percentage of people, while others may control their fear through denial, avoidance or reactance. Negative societal results of heightened fear in society may include a breakdown in trust, loss of civil rights for security or repression against own citizens. News reports with a high efficacy message may actually push some to seek a change in policy, in line with the terrorist’s demands. On the other hand, news with low efficacy messages may incite people to go after the threat in the form of counterterrorism. Similarly, threat induced cognitive dissonance will drive people to either choose the new information in terrorist’s messages or stick with their old beliefs.

Based upon the previous discussion of fear, fear appeals and cognitive dissonance, a hierarchy of damage (from highest to lowest) from TV and newspaper terrorism news might look like the following:

- Film and television stories with dynamic images and high efficacy messages.
  - Dynamic images of terror cause fear levels that initiate an efficacy check of the message. Fear appeals with high fear and high efficacy are most likely to result in message compliance.

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18 Witte, “Putting the Fear Back into Fear Appeals,” *Communication Monographs* 59, December 1992, 329-349
• Film and television stories with dynamic images and low efficacy messages.
  o Dynamic images of terror cause high fear levels. Over time, high levels of anxiety are damaging. Additionally, new information may confuse current policy understanding, resulting in cognitive dissonance and a shift in mindset toward the terrorist’s policy.

• Film and television stories with dynamic images and no message.
  o Same as above.

• Film and television stories with static images and high efficacy messages.
  o A static image is less likely to instill as much fear as a dynamic image. However, if it is enough to induce an efficacy check, then it is likely to result in message compliance

• Film and television stories with static images and lower efficacy messages.
  o Likely to result in low levels of anxiety. Over time, even low levels of anxiety can be damaging to some.

• Film and television stories with static images and no message.
  o Likely to result in low levels of anxiety. Over time, even low levels of anxiety can be damaging to some.

• Printed stories with images and high efficacy messages.
  o Not likely to cause fear. However, viewing dynamic images of terror on TV or film with high efficacy knowledge from print may result in message acceptance.

• Printed stories with images and no message.
  o Not like to cause fear, but may be subject to media cross-connections discussed above.

While the above is purely hypothetical based upon the logic of fear appeals, empirical evidence supporting such a hierarchy would provide beneficial guidance to journalists. More practical guidance would include guidelines on what to avoid in order to minimize harm. These guidelines could be added to existing journalistic standards.

Clearly, the media plays a significant role in the second and third order effects of terrorism. In a liberal democracy, with a free and independent media, this can be problematic if the press is: 1) complicit with the terrorist cause or unwitting dupes; 2) just doing their jobs; or 3) professional at journalism but naive about fear appeals. One might think that a complicit media would be the worst case, but it is so transparent and obvious that people, looking for the truth, see it for what it is. Naiveté about fear appeals isn’t much of a problem either, as once it is identified as an issue; it can easily be addressed through training, education and editorial policy. Far worse is a media doing harm in the name of the job.
Newsworthiness and Terrorism

As discussed previously, the role of the media in a liberal democracy is to provide citizens with accurate and reliable information they need to make informed decisions about self-governance and function in a free society. With this role in mind, terrorism must present a significant threat to the American way of life to garner so much attention. A look at a few statistics indicates otherwise. The worst ever year for terrorist violence against Americans was 2001, with 3,166 deaths—of those, 2,926 deaths19 were from the 9/11 attacks. Contrast this with another measure of violence against Americans, homicides. There were 17,382 homicides in 2001. Six times more people were murdered than killed in terrorist attacks. In 2005, only 56 US citizens worldwide were killed as a result of incidents of terrorism, with 85% of those occurring in Iraq.20 Given that the homicide rate21 remained relatively the same for 2005 as it was between 1999 and 2004, then approximately 17,000 US homicides22 occurred in 2005. That means that over 300 times more Americans were murdered than killed by terrorists. Yet, the United States pursued a war on terrorism but only maintained a status quo policing effort against homicide, a much deadlier threat. While homicides at least make the news, many more Americans die from non-violent traffic accidents (43,340 deaths), poisonings (28,700 deaths), or falls (18,044), which are seldom covered in consonance with their occurrences.23

Both terrorism and murder are newsworthy, yet news of terrorism grabs headlines out of proportion to its harm of the citizenry. What is it about terrorism that makes it so newsworthy?

Journalists select news through an informal set of criteria established by an editorial hierarchy. While one would be hard pressed to derive consensus from the media on newsworthy factors as they vary by medium, institution and individuals, Galtung and Ruge identified 12 factors,24 well accepted and identified below, that play in the decision-making process:

**Frequency**: the time span needed for the event to unfold itself and acquire meaning.

**Threshold**: the level an event must pass to be recorded. Amplitude is the magnitude of the event.

**Clarity**: one or a limited number of meanings in what is received.

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21 The latest data available was data from 2003, *Deaths: Final Data for 2003*, National Final Statistics Report, Volume 54, Number 13, April 19, 2006. It takes almost three years for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, to compile and release the data.

22 The homicide rate since 1999 has remained between 5.5 and 5.7 homicides per 100,000 population.


Meaningfulness: some measure of ethnocentrism will be operative; there has to be cultural proximity and relevance.

Consonance: the ‘expectation,’ cognitive interpretation in terms of what one ‘predicts’ and what one ‘wants.’ More commonly understood today as “Cognitive Dissonance” —the psychological discomfort felt as a discrepancy between what one knows/believes, and new information.

Unexpectedness: events must be unexpected or rare, within the context of meaningfulness and consonance (above), to receive attention.

Continuity: the event has been covered and continues to be covered partly to justify its being covered in the first place, partly because of inertia in the system and partly because what was unexpected has now also become familiar.

Composition: changes in thresholds occur for new events in order to ‘balance’ coverage.

Elite nations: the actions of elite nations are more consequential than the activities of others.

Elite persons: the actions of elite persons are more consequential than the activities of others.

Personification: news has a tendency to present events as sentences where there is a subject, a named person or collectively consisting of people, and the event is then seen as a consequence of this person or these persons.

Negativity: negative news will be preferred to positive news.

When terrorism is looked at through the prism of newsworthiness, the symbiotic relationship between terror and the media is clear. As a story of fear, death and destruction, terrorism meets the criteria of negativity. Personification exists in the names of terrorists, victims groups and elite persons. Terrorism against elite nations, such as European countries and the United States, is meaningful (meaningfulness) to their citizenry. Terrorist acts against large numbers or acts that are unexpected in their audacity (such as suicide bombers) meet threshold, unexpectedness and consonance requirements. Subsequent acts of terrorism (continuity) are reported in the war on terror (clarity), but over time, higher threshold or unexpected events are required (composition) to make the headlines. From the perspective of a journalist, terrorism is newsworthy, and it is the job of the journalist to report it.

Attack on the Soft Underbelly of Democracy

It is not the job of a journalist to harm the public. Through the media, terrorists are able to strike at the soft underbelly of democracy—by bypassing a democracy’s means of resistance, its military, and instead assaulting its will to resist, residing in the people and government. It is an attack inside the walls, with every newspaper, television, or radio a weapon in the homes of a nation’s citizenry.

News of terrorism can be harmful to individuals and society, but nonetheless, it is a newsworthy event of worldwide significance. This places a liberal democracy on the horns of a dilemma. If controlling news of terrorism requires censoring free speech, then democracy loses one of its most precious and protective tools against tyranny and denies its citizenry of news of
important events. On the other hand, unfettered news of terrorism is an attack that bypasses a nation’s means of resistance and strikes indirectly into the homes of its citizenry.

This also confronts journalists with a dilemma. Terrorism is newsworthy, so it should be reported. But if terrorism is harmful to viewers, it should not be reported. What is needed is an option that neuters the harmful elements of terrorism news while still allowing information of terrorism to flow without censor.

**Leashing the Dogs: Journalism Standards on News of Terrorism**

The media, in a liberal democracy, has a role in protecting its people from harmful news of terrorism. In order to preserve the precious gift of freedom, every effort must be made to keep government out of a censorship role. The truth of the matter is that the media can and has self-censored some harmful aspects of terrorism news. For example, in a study of editor gatekeeping, Renee and Brian Kratzer found that 16 of 20 newspapers with circulations greater than 75,000 chose of their own accord not to publish disturbing 9/11 pictures of people jumping to their deaths from the Twin Towers.25 The editors still reported the 9/11 attack, but most censored harmful images from their stories. However, the decisions were not easy ones, with a great bit of soul-searching done between an obligation to report happenings accurately against upsetting their readers.

Editors are the gatekeepers to the news. Their numbers and titles vary, with some editors acting as sole gatekeeper, while other news organizations may use many editors, management and ownership in a gatekeeping role. Regardless, with gatekeeping already a function of editors, it makes sense that they should be at the hub of any effort to filter harmful news of terrorism. Providing editors with guidelines on terrorism, news reporting will help educate those most able to do something about it.

Unfortunately, a universal set of journalistic standards does not exist. While almost all journalistic standards include a responsibility to report truthfully and accurately, surprisingly few contain much guidance helpful in minimizing the harm from terrorism news. For example, the American Society of Newspaper Editors Statement of Principles,26 include six articles that address Responsibility, Freedom of the Press, Independence, Truth and Accuracy, Impartiality and Fair Play. Only the Fair Play principle even obliquely addresses harm by exhorting observation of “the common standards of decency.” Similarly, the Washington Post’s closest principle against doing harm includes the goal that, “As a disseminator of the news, the paper shall observe the decencies that are obligatory upon a private gentleman.”27 With regard to photo and graphic principles, the Los Angeles Times is representative of most in that they disallow images that confuse,

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misrepresent events, are staged or altered, yet mention nothing about psychologically harmful photos. Some journalistic standards are actually harmful when applied to news of terrorism. For example, the Orlando Sentinel contains a principle they will “seek to give a voice to the voiceless.” Terrorists would likely argue they are driven to violence for this very reason.

The Society of Professional Journalists has one of the few codes that advocates a principle to minimize harm. This principle includes the following specific guidance:

Journalists should:

• Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.

• Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief.

• Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.

• Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone’s privacy.

• Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.

• Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of sex crimes.

• Be judicious about naming criminal suspects before the formal filing of charges.

• Balance a criminal suspect’s fair trial rights with the public’s right to be informed. 28

While the principle to minimize harm acknowledges “reporting information may cause harm or discomfort,” it doesn’t provide much guidance on specifics.

Radio and television standards overtly contain provisions against harm. It was realized early on that television and radio personalities were very influential as “guests in one’s home.” Initially, the industry created its own Code of Broadcasting to deal with the harmful effects of commercialization and fraudulent, deceptive and obscene material. However, since the industry was self-regulated, enforcement of penalties was a problem. After a period (1982-1990) with no code of professional ethics, the National Association of Broadcasters issued a “New Statement of Principles and Broadcasting,” recommending caution in dealing with violence, drugs abuse and sex. 29 Specifically, the guidance on violence consisted of the following:

• Violence, physical or psychological, should only be portrayed in a responsible manner and should not be used exploitatively. Where consistent with the creative intent, 28 See the Society of Professional Engineers website at: http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp.

programs involving violence should present the consequences of violence to its victims and perpetrators.

- Presentation of the details of violence should avoid the excessive, the gratuitous, and the instructional.
- The use of violence for its own sake and the detailed dwelling upon brutality or physical agony, by sight or by sound, should be avoided.
- Particular care should be exercised where children are involved in the depiction of violent behavior.  

However, in keeping with First Amendment protections, this guidance remains advisory. While the National Association of Broadcasters encouraged broadcasters to write principles and policies of their own, no other recommendations were offered.

The 2000 Radio-Television News Director’s Association Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct contains many of the same principles found in newspaper ethics: truth, fairness, integrity, independence and accountability. Although it also contains a principle of public trust, it does not address harm.

Recommendations

The media can maintain free speech and still prevent harm from terrorism news by adopting a few additional guiding principles. Principles such as the National Association of Broadcasters’ guidance on violence and the Society of Professional Journalists’ direction to minimize harm provide good starting points. Yet, they are not enough. Television, which does the most damage, has the farthest to go. Even with the National Association of Broadcasters’ guidance on violence, drugs and sex, TV programming contains a lot of the very content it seeks to avoid. Confronting broadcasters with the harm of terrorism news and the potential for government regulation if it is not addressed may be enough to illicit interest in a more robust set of codes. A few additional principle recommendations for both television and broadcaster codes include:

- **Avoid fear appeals.** Fear appeals consist of stories with fear-inducing graphic images coupled to terrorist demands. Threatening images are bad enough on their own in that they increase fear and anxiety levels in viewers and can contribute to anxiety disorders. When fearful images are coupled to terrorists demands that are relatively easy to perform, feasible, and effective, people tend to comply with terrorist aims more so than when the images and demands are decoupled.

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• **Avoid threatening images and sounds.** Threatening images and sounds induce fear and anxiety into viewers and can contribute to anxiety disorders.

• **Avoid unwitting complicity with terrorists.** Seemingly innocuous terrorist footage can contain messages for their operatives in the field.

• **Use technically correct identifiers.** Belligerents will want their adversary described in negative terms, such as bloody murderers, and themselves in positive terms, such as freedom fighters. Positive identifiers promote legitimacy.

• **Avoid promoting terrorist’s objectives.** Publicizing terrorist objectives can give them legitimacy.

**Conclusion**

The media, in a liberal democracy, has a critical role in protecting society from the tyranny of extremists just as it does against the tyranny of government. Terrorism strikes at the soft underbelly of democracy by bypassing a nation’s means of resistance and attacking its will to resist through the media. While censorship is one option to defend media vulnerability, it is a bad one compared to self-regulation through media codes. Yes, the cry of terror is newsworthy and reason to let slip the media dogs. It does not mean the news must be reported in a manner conducive to terrorists.
The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation

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Abstract: This paper utilizes the concept of “brand” as it is used in marketing to discuss the perceptions populations have of the US military and how recognizing what elements go into creating those perceptions. Outlining concepts, strategies and synergies, this paper discusses how the US military could represent itself more effectively through the use of branding.

Keywords: Terrorism, Brand, Strategic Communication, US military.

Militaries have used fires, maneuvers, and even information to shape adversary behavior and their will to fight since the dawn of warfare. In 2002, The United States Military’s Joint Urban Operations doctrine expanded this “shaping” concept to include civilian populations. This newfound focus on the population is particularly relevant to today’s stability and support operational environment. Like Mao Tse Tung’s proverbial pond, the population, if so willing, provides adversaries with material and financial support, intelligence, and a source of new recruits and part-time adherents. Military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan have taught U.S. and coalition forces alike that earning the support of indigenous populations is fundamental to success.

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1 This chapter is a modified excerpt from the RAND Corporation publication by the same authors entitled, Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2007 (MG-607-JFCOM). It is republished here with permission.

The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation

Previous RAND research has argued for the expansion of the shaping concept by highlighting that every action, message, and decision of a force shapes the operational environment. So, too, can actions not taken and decisions not made influence the environment. Strategic communications, meeting or failing to meet expectations, treatment of civilians at vehicle checkpoints, and the accuracy of air bombardment are among the components of an operation that send a message to a civilian population. Communication themes of American good will mean little if actions convey otherwise. Consequently, unity of message via word and deed is fundamental to success.

Shaping operations should, in part, seek to create positive indigenous attitudes toward U.S. and coalition forces. Attitudes in this respect are learned predispositions that influence how the population behaves. Psychological research would suggest these attitudes would help achieve the following objectives: increase popular support for intervening forces; reduce the likelihood of violent attacks; make coalition forces more approachable; increase persuasiveness of friendly force communications campaigns.

It is an oft-cited lament that a nation with the vast skills and resources of America’s commercial marketing sector should not have such difficulty in effectively influencing the populations that reside in U.S. operational theaters. Despite considerable differences between military operational venues and the commercial marketplace, U.S. and coalition forces may benefit from the study and application of proven techniques adopted from the realm of commercial marketing. This study considers industry best practices in the service of assisting U.S. service men and women in achieving their objectives. Those practices suitable to shaping civilian populations in theaters of operation were identified and summarized. The chapter addresses branding, achieving customer satisfaction, and the use of influencers.

Developing and managing the U.S. Force “brand”

A “brand” can refer to two different things. It can refer to a product name. For example, Lexus is the name of a product. More importantly, a brand can be construed as a collection of perceptions

3 Russell W. Glenn, Christopher Paul, Todd C. Helmus, and Paul Steinberg, People Make the City: Joint Urban Operations Observations and Insights from Afghanistan and Iraq (Executive Summary), Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, MG-428/2, forthcoming. This document is not available to the public.

4 It should not be assumed however that only attitudes related to U.S. and coalition forces matter. An assisting international force is only one of several key players. Even positive views toward this force will be insufficient if the population do not accept coalition force end states or their manifestation in the indigenous government. In addition, positive attitudes held by foreign populations more expansive than those in U.S. operational environments facilitate broader U.S. foreign policy objectives. While “liking” is not a goal in and of itself it does facilitate acceptance of U.S. foreign policy.

5 Commercial businesses rarely operate in environments as complex and dangerous as operational theaters. Their research access to target audiences is relatively straightforward and in all but the most rare cases they do not worry about falling prey to the very customer base they are attempting to serve. In addition, businesses obviously do not need to address complications arising from collateral damage and the use of force.

6 Lexus®, a registered trademark, is a division of Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.
in the mind of consumers. Lexus might mean different things to different people. To some it might mean “Japanese,” to others “expensive,” “reliable,” or “luxurious.” These different perceptions represent the brand identity, an identity the manufacturer wants to influence in ways favorable to its product line. In this sense a brand identity is simply a reputation.

Brand identities or reputations are formed through every interaction a customer has with the brand to include advertisements, product features, and customer service representatives. These different interfaces between the brand and customer are called touchpoints. Northwestern University marketing professor Tim Calkins, aptly quotes a marketing executive who observes: “A brand is...the employee who doesn’t help a customer... the package that’s almost impossible to open, an over-long wait at the cash register, the instructions that are too hard to follow... The brand is every touchpoint and every thought the customer has about the brand.”

Properly managed brands have a unique and clear brand identity. Volvo for example, has built a clear and strong identity based on safety. How do businesses go about creating such a unique and clear identity? Businesses first develop what is called an intended brand identity. Once a business knows how it want customers to think about its products; it can then implant this identity by conveying a unified brand message across its products, services, interactions with customer service representatives, and via communications such as advertising.

Apple provides an excellent example of this process. Its intended brand identity is “style and simplicity.” This message is conveyed in a unified manner across its advertisements, in-store experience, and products.

Virtually any organization or entity in the public eye has a brand identity. The U.S. military is no different. During stability operations the indigenous population will form perceptions of the U.S. military. These perceptions will constitute the U.S. military brand identity and will heavily influence how the population aligns their support. A force that is perceived as helpful and serving the best interests of the population will be far more accepted than a force perceived as hostile, insensitive, and rude. Importantly, branding provides solid backing for our shaping concept. That is, every action, decision, and message from a military force shapes civilian population perceptions.

Two choices confront the military in its approach to managing these perceptions. The military can leave these associations and their corresponding reputation to chance or it can guide them along a focused path. This is the value of the intended brand identity. The intended brand articulates the core meaning and purpose of a brand, and when properly inculcated into the organization, guides all organizational behaviors (to include product development and customer service) and communications. If the U.S. military cares about instilling positive indigenous audience attitudes toward U.S. operating forces in theater, then all members of the U.S. force must

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8 Calkins, 2005, p. 6.
9 Volvo® is a registered trademark of Volvo Cars AB and Volvo Cars North America.
10 Apple® is a registered trademark of Apple Computers, Inc.
carry that mindset and be properly aligned to that goal. The concept of the intended brand identity simply teaches that the military must anticipate the type of message it wishes to send with its actions and communications and then properly align and train the organization to convey that message in a synchronized fashion.

**A new brand for the U.S. military**

Since before World War II, the U.S. military has developed a brand identity based on force of might. Like all good consumer brands it was incredibly focused and clear. It served the strategic purpose of consumer brands in imprinting a clear identity on the minds of its intended target, the nation’s adversaries. It similarly served as a guiding light for training and corporate behavior and as a reassurance for a second audience, the U.S. public.

More recently however, the military has been embroiled in numerous smaller conflicts, from Somalia to Iraq, Afghanistan and the broader war on terror. U.S. adversaries now retreat into complex terrain, don a civilian cloak, and steadily inflict losses that weaken American public resolve. Deftness of touch in interacting with civilians, applying focused combat power, and the collection of human intelligence have become the requirements for a new generation of warriors.

The U.S. armed forces should create an intended brand identity that is suitable to today’s complex operating environment. This identity will need to incorporate the new civilian focused shaping mission into its war fighting role. Once it knows how it wants others to think about the American armed forces, soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen can begin the task of communicating this message through every facet of operations, every soldier-civilian interaction, and every communication with the target population.

One potential example is “No better friend, no worse enemy.” This was a component of Major General James Mattis’ commander’s intent during his marines’ first two deployments to Iraq. While not intended as a brand identity per se, it does provide an example of the type of message units might want to communicate.11

Another possible message is “We will help you.” It provides an intent for U.S. forces that covers the application of combat power while also meeting the test for a range of other operations. It serves as a message of inspiration for indigenous audiences and one that encompasses - and thus

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11 Interviewed marketing experts made the following comments in reference to the “No better friend – No worse enemy” branding strategy. “Brilliant, but do you have standards that hold yourself to that promise? What is it that supports that? Do you train differently, message differently, act differently?... Completely doable.” David Coronna, Senior Counselor, Burson-Marsteller, interview with Todd C. Helmus, Chicago, IL, February 24, 2006. “It is a double promise... it would be a lot easier in bifurcated units [akin to that recommended by Thomas Barnett] because it then becomes clear what I’m supposed to do. There would be overall unifying goals in terms of what do I value, what do I fight for.... [In ‘No better friend – no worse enemy’], what do I do? Seems to be I do both.” Keith Reinhard, Chairman, DDB Advertising, interview with Todd C. Helmus, New York, NY, February 28, 2006. “The front side neutralizes the end. It is threatening, you typically don’t win people over with threats. It is better to be focused and single minded than to have multiple messages. The message can’t be crafted around what we have to say but something that the people care about.” Anonymous, Chief Marketing Officer, interview with Todd C. Helmus, New York, NY, March 1, 2006.
does not conflict with - a wide variety of potential end states. It is a promise that can be kept and, because it positions the U.S. in a partnership with the indigenous population, it does not usurp their authority, dignity, or responsibilities.

**Synchronizing the U.S. military brand workforce**

Brands are most effective when they communicate a single and clear message to their target audience. They communicate this message by synchronizing brand related actions (the character of products and customer service personnel) and communications. It is the proverbial, “one message, many voices.” A critical ingredient to brand synchronization is ensuring that the interactions between brand representatives or frontline service personnel and customers properly reinforce the intended brand image. In the same way, the conduct of U.S. and coalition forces to include the interactions soldiers have with locals while on patrol, the conduct of cordon and search operations and the engagement decisions soldiers make when confronted with a threat all reflect on the force. Business brand-workforce synchronization efforts can help the U.S. military synchronize actions of its personnel.

First, in a process called “internal branding,” businesses seek to re-orient their workforce culture to match the intended brand message. On and off brand behaviors are clarified for all personnel. Employees, especially those on the front lines of customer service, are educated to understand, feel passionately about, and live the brand. In addition, individual acts that exemplify the brand and deliver customer satisfaction are properly rewarded. Ritz Carlton exemplifies an internally branded organization. Employees who are ultimately responsible for delivering the brand undergo intensive “Gold Standard” training when first hired and receive further instruction throughout their tenure. Regularly held award dinners celebrate employee feats of customer satisfaction. At Ritz Carlton, an internal embodiment of the intended brand seeks to ensure a consistent and accurate brand perception for all its customers.

Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster of the British Army observed how the U.S. Army’s Soldier’s creed calls on soldiers to “Stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States in close combat.” This focus on “destroy” rules out a host of other actions to include shaping the civilian populace.

The U.S. military should build an internal culture that is suitable to their shaping duties. Its leaders should imbue personnel from the very first day of basic training with an understanding that befriending local populations and using force discriminately is just as desirable a military behavior as employing overwhelming firepower.

Second, business managers frequently take inventory and assess all the points at which customers interact with a brand and its representatives. They clarify “all the steps in the service

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12 Ritz Carlton® is a registered trademark of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C.
delivery process from the customer’s point of view.” Business managers then craft specific guidelines and educate frontline personnel on brand appropriate customer service interactions.

The military would benefit from a similar audit. The end goal is the development of “rules of interaction” that guide U.S. force behavior during all interactions with an indigenous population from manning a vehicle control point (VCP), conducting cordon and search operations, and participating in dismounted patrols.

Achieve civilian satisfaction: meet expectations, make informed decisions, measure success
Customer satisfaction refers to the level of contentment consumers experience after consuming a business product or service. At its most basic level it is how a customer feels about doing business with a company. It is the bridge between what the company or retailer does (processes, policies, products) and the behavior of consumers. When consumers feel good about doing business with a company, that company experiences a number of key benefits. These include increased loyalty, positive word of mouth exposure, and a willingness to pay higher price premiums. Most importantly, customer satisfaction increases business profit margins.

Customer satisfaction also applies to the U.S. military’s efforts to prevent or quench an insurgency. Civilians who live in areas where U.S. and coalition forces are conducting stability operations will consciously decide whether to support the coalition, its foes, or maintain neutrality. The degree to which they are satisfied with the various aspects of force presence will be a critical determinant in their decision-making.

The previous discussion on internally branding the U.S. force for customer service speaks directly to aligning U.S. force-civilian interactions for achieving customer satisfaction. It is worth addressing three other aspects critical to customer satisfaction: managing expectations, making informed decisions, and monitoring campaign success.

Manage Expectations
Customer satisfaction is partly a function of two separate entities: 1) expectations that customers have going into a business encounter; 2) the actual experience. When customer expectations are high, the bar for meeting them is high. Customer expectations are directly proportional to the

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17 Denove, 2007, pp. 2-3. In one study, J.D. Power and Associates reviewed Nissan dealership close rates, the percentage of shoppers who closed an automobile sale. They categorized the close rates for dealers with low, mid, and high customer satisfaction ratings. High satisfaction dealers sold a Nissan to 79% customers versus only low satisfaction dealers who closed on only 56% of sales. Given that the actual product being sold is held constant across all dealers these differences in sales were purely a result of the interactions customers have with sales staff.
promises a business makes. The best-case scenario is for businesses to under promise and over deliver.\textsuperscript{18}

At the start of the campaign for Iraq, civilian expectations were unusually high. This was partly a result of the information campaign to gain international support for the war. These expectations helped set the stage for subsequent Iraqi disappointment.

Managing indigenous expectations should become a hallmark of coalition force actions and messages. Where expectations of the civilian populace are not reflective of reality, coalition force IO campaigns must place them in proper perspective. From the strategic to the tactical, U.S. and coalition forces should not promise more than they can actually deliver. When expectations are the result of messages emanating from Washington, then mistaken or misinterpreted promises should be amended. When coordinating civil affairs follow-on visits, unit commanders should simply forward recommendations to civil affairs units rather than promising visits to members of the population. An alternative course of action is to ensure that there is a single military point of contact with province leaders and other key indigenous personnel. That way promises made for a particular AO are made by a single person who can ultimately be held responsible…and deliver.

\textbf{Make Informed Decisions}

Businesses frequently fail when they employ a “build it and they will come” approach. The fundamental principle of commercial marketing is that businesses must first learn the wants and needs of its customers. Only then is an organization empowered to deliver products or services that satisfy. For example, Starwood Hotels and Resorts introduced its Heavenly Bed® in its Westin® hotels only after research showed that a comfortable bed was a motivating feature.\textsuperscript{19}

Every aspect of operations offers a counterinsurgent force shaping opportunities, to include the identification of end states, assistance in developing governance capabilities, and -of course - the employment of lethal force. Problems ensue when military personnel make decisions based on assumptions. Marines in Anbar province, for example, noticed that U.S. forces were building schools that were not needed by the population. Many sat empty.\textsuperscript{20} It was a wasted shaping opportunity, perhaps a counterproductive one as it reflected a lack of American understanding and squandering of resources despite the good intentions.

Civil-military leaders should first attempt to determine the wishes and needs of the local populace before making critical decisions, perhaps incorporating them in the decision-making processes that influence their welfare. Do not limit indigenous input to governmental entities only; incorporate surveys of the local populace and tribal and religious authorities if appropriate. Local U.S. communities provide a useful model in this regard. Zoning boards often combine government, expert and local opinions in their decision making process.

\textsuperscript{18} Denove, 2007.
\textsuperscript{19} Denove, 2007, p. 240.
Measure campaign success
As previously mentioned, a fundamental goal in marketing is satisfied customers. Why are satisfied customers important? Satisfied customers are loyal; they spread positive word of mouth and increase profits. Consequently, businesses measure customer satisfaction. One significant goal is to identify and fix problems early. Organizations measure their success in this regard via surveys, phone complaint lines, email communications, and in-store complaints.²¹

It seems plausible that civilians who are satisfied with different aspects of U.S. force presence will be more receptive to that force. We consequently recommend that U.S. forces use surveys, town hall meetings, and individual soldier-civilian interactions in order to determine popular satisfaction. The ultimate goal is to find out what U.S. forces are doing right and wrong so that leaders can make adjustments as necessary.

Harness the power of influencers
Beyond broadcasting messages on a mass scale, a number of marketers are starting to see the value in harnessing the power of influencers who speak and write about their product observations. These influencers include social nodes or those whose position in society affords them a megaphone and the respect and admiration of key population segments. Examples of these social nodes include authors, academics, celebrities and researchers.²² Influencers are also regular individuals who speak to friends and family about their likes and dislikes.

Ultimately, fostering customer satisfaction is the most critical ingredient to getting social nodes and everyday influencers to speak well of a business' products and services. However businesses employ several tactics to increase positive word of mouth. Delta Air Lines²³ asked its executives to write customized letters to a list of social nodes from media outlets who cover e-commerce related industries. The social nodes were strategically addressed as key sources of “information and expertise.” The campaign was highly successful with Delta receiving significant and positive attention in the e-business industry.²⁴

Many companies foster customer evangelism. According to James Pethokoukis, companies should “find and identify those customers who are already crazy about your product or service…who then spread the word to others.”²⁵ Recommendations include flying evangelists to corporate headquarters where they can receive a tour of the plant, learn new product information (which they can then pass on to their audiences), and speak with executives regarding, “what they’re doing well and how they’re screwing up.”²⁶ This feedback provides the company with

²³ Delta Air Lines® is a registered trademark of Delta Air Lines, Inc.
²⁶ Pethokoukis, 2005.
important market observations while also empowering the individual influencer with new sources for content.

Cultivating relationships with customers is another approach to customer evangelism. Betsy Weber is the chief evangelist of software developer TechSmith. She says, “[m]y job is about relationships.” She corresponds with upwards of 400 customer evangelists several times a month through “E-mail, instant messaging, phone, private forums, and meet-ups on the road. … She tries to reply to each and every e-mail, forwards problems or complaints to product specialists, and invites the customer evangelists to groups beta-testing new products.” Observes one of her contacts, Tim Fahlberg, who uses TechSmith software for his business, “I’d say that there are a few people—outside of my family—on our planet who I appreciate more than Betsy Weber.”

Bloggers also function as important influencers. Several years ago a man named Jeff Jarvis blogged about his negative experiences with a Dell computer. His complaints were visited 10,000 times daily and proved to be a public relations disaster for Dell Computers. Businesses want to be included in these web-based conversations about their products, but they are challenged because bloggers are highly suspicious of overt marketing efforts. This suspiciousness demands authenticity from marketers. Some organizations respond by enlisting fans and employees to blog on their behalf. This approach is premised on a recently proven notion that people trust those who are similar to themselves. In fact, a typical employee of a company is more trusted than either the CEO or spokesperson. In undertaking employee blog campaigns, businesses allow employees the freedom to criticize the firm and its products but do stipulate rules to ensure trade secrets are not divulged and that employee blogs are respectful of clients and competition.

For the U.S. military, social nodes in present and future day theaters of operation might include tribal, religious, civic, and other leaders. Coalition forces should seek to develop and sustain personal relationships with these and other social nodes and cull their opinions on policy and operations. Observed one chief marketing officer,

I would try to bring together more of the clerics…. The way to engage them is dialogue. Talk about the violence. … “What are positive steps we can take?” “We really took to heart what you said and here are the action steps from our conversation” that has to happen because they control so much of society.

The extent these individuals can come to view coalition forces as partners rather than overlords and the extent that they see their ideas taken seriously will influence how they speak of U.S. initiatives.

27 Pethokoukis, 2005.
Similar advice holds for those social nodes who appear friendlier to U.S. forces, but the coalition should take these individuals one step further. Like customer evangelists, relationships between coalition forces and selected social nodes should be strengthened with access and information. Two Iraqi dentists began writing a blog on behalf of the new Iraq several years ago. The non-profit organization, Spirit of America, whose efforts helped give these individuals Arabic blogging tools, brought them to America where they held an audience with President George W. Bush. This meeting and their overall trip no doubt left these individuals better educated regarding America’s efforts and it likely gave them many new insights that could be included in future blog entries. While meetings with the President of the United States are beyond the general reach of most individuals, the U.S. military may give unusually resourceful and positive influencers access to higher echelon commanders or other U.S. and indigenous leaders.

The U.S. military may also be able to harness the power of local and credible bloggers. We recommend that the U.S. military empower willing influencers, in particularly indigenous government employees and soldiers, to blog on behalf of coalition objectives. Soldier blogs are very popular here at home; they might well be equally popular abroad. Of course, adequate internet penetration in the host environment is a must for success and should be evaluated prior to program initiation.

It is worth noting that businesses strive to control their message and properly synchronize corporate actions and messages. Influencers present a challenge as they are not beholden to corporate message platforms. They will find their own product attributes to praise and they may advocate product uses unanticipated by corporate executives. Businesses have learned through the years to not fight these efforts and to proverbially “let go” of the message. The United States will have to take a similar approach, allowing social nodes and every day influencers to reach their own conclusions and find their own voice.

Summary
This paper has reviewed various business marketing tactics that may guide U.S. military efforts to shape the attitudes and behavior of indigenous populations. Branding concepts are especially important to the military as they seek to mold indigenous opinions of a U.S. force and create a synchronized approach to shaping operations and soldier-civilian interactions. While businesses strive to create satisfied customers, so should the military understand the importance of satisfaction in inculcating positive civilian attitudes. Management of expectations, basing operational and reconstruction decisions on the civilian voice (at least to an extent) and monitoring outcomes through measures of satisfaction are three critical approaches. Because U.S. forces often lack the requisite credibility among a host nation populace, it is critically important that they harness the power of indigenous influencers.
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Media Coverage of the 2008 Mumbai Attacks: Active Audience and Strategic Communication

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Abstract: This paper looks at the media coverage of the 2008 Mumbai attacks with a specific focus on situating Strategic Communication against the background of the transforming news media industry. It looks at news media using examples of ‘new media’ and communication via the internet on platforms such as Twitter, examining the changes speed of communication, timing, quality of information and audience awareness.

Keywords: Terrorism, Internet, Media, Strategic Communication, Twitter.

This paper focuses on the mediated representation of the attacks on Mumbai in November 2008. My aim is to situate Strategic Communication against the background of the transforming news media industry – and transformation in communication in general. While the term Strategic Communication is frequently used, NATO has not yet elaborated what it really means. I will therefore turn to the American military and take the 2006 US Joint Chiefs of Staff doctrine on information operations as my point of departure. It states that Strategic Communication ‘constitutes focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives’ (JP 13-1, 2006).

Understanding and engaging ‘key audiences’ takes a prominent place in this definition based on the obvious reasoning that ‘strategic communicators’ have to comprehend as best they can who they want to – or should – address. However, the Joint Chief of Staff’s publication does not discuss ‘the audience’ in any detail. Therefore, this paper’s analysis of the 2008 Mumbai attacks aims to contribute to a better understanding of ‘audiences’ and how they could be engaged.

I broke the discussion up into three parts. In the first part, I will give a brief overview of the main aspects of media coverage of terrorist activity post 9/11, and I will mainly focus on the impact of recent innovations in media communication and television. Secondly, I shall move on to
my case study and look at how the recent developments in social networking, in this case Twitter, affected the reporting of the Mumbai attacks, or at least how we think it affected reporting. The availability of this new service made the pressure on media outlets to keep up with latest events (‘immediacy’) even more pronounced. I will show that the ‘dangers’ often attributed to Twitter are exaggerated. A look at the discourse on Twitter shows that users of this service are much more aware of the problems of reliability and accuracy inherent in the tweeting phenomenon than many people think. I argue that the use of Twitter during the Mumbai attacks demonstrates the existence of an active and sophisticated audience – not just in NATO countries, but also in communication spaces outside Europe and North America. Recognizing this is key to the practice of Strategic Communication.

Thirdly, I will briefly assess mass communication models and how they relate to Strategic Communication. I will put particular emphasis on the fact that ‘New Media’ have made it even more difficult to model audience behavior and to analyze how individuals read a given media message. Indeed, I will show that it is important to recognize that media texts have become fluent.

Finally, I will conclude by reflecting on what I term the conversational information space and the place of Strategic Communication in it.

**Reporting Terrorism**

Over the last decade the scope of terrorist attacks as well as their representation in the media has changed. New information technologies have enabled news organisations worldwide to provide instantaneous news. Apart from following market imperatives and socially constructed news values, immediacy is one of the highest values in the news business (Zelizer & Allan 2002, Cottle 2006, Seib 2006). It might be worth debating to what extent the global news environment facilitated the emergence of what is often referred to as ‘international terrorism’. Do the global media provide the oxygen for global terrorism, to use Margaret Thatcher’s oft-quoted analogy?

Immediacy and speed put particular pressure on editors at TV headquarters, especially in 24-hour news channels. Editors have to decide within seconds if it is worth covering an event live. There is very limited, if any, time to check facts and analyze the situation. This immediacy can also put pressure on politicians and might under certain circumstances even influence their policies – this is often referred to as ‘CNN effect’ (Robinson 2002). Instantaneous reporting of a terror attack, for instance, requires a very fast public response from decision makers, even if they do not know details of the situation. Moreover, 24-hour news channels have plenty of broadcast time to fill and are geared to providing blanket coverage of major news events, and this includes terrorist attacks in major cities.

The speed of reporting makes journalists often fall back on ‘frames’, well-known explanations of events. Frames organize the world for journalists who report it and also for the individual news consumers who rely on their reports. Frames enable journalists to process large amounts of information quickly and routinely. They help journalists recognize valuable information and assign it to categories. Frames enable them to produce reports quickly that then can be consumed by the audience. In a pressurized, fast-moving and industrialized media market frames seem hardly avoidable, and journalism as such is constituted to regulate the production of frames (Gitlin 1980). Political elites tend to take the lead in defining these frames. Well-established terrorism frames
are, for example: good vs. evil, civilization vs. barbarians, the humanitarian frame, and explaining any terrorist act in a ‘global terrorism’ frame. We can see this particularly after the attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001 (Hoskins 2006).

Yet framing and gatekeeping are no longer exclusively in the realm of journalists. The arrival of citizen journalism on the internet and the emergence of terrorist websites demonstrate that traditional journalists have lost their monopoly on deciding ‘what is news’. One important aspect of citizen journalism has been the growth of the ‘blogosphere’, a community of citizens running their own weblogs. An estimated 50,000 new weblogs are created every day (Hachten & Scotton, 2007). For journalists blogs can serve as an important source. They are at the same time a corrective: information disseminated by mainstream media is relentlessly checked and debated in the blogosphere. Blogs also ‘demassify’ the communication process. They show its individualization, increasing reflexivity and function as a new interactive filter, blurring the line between information producers and consumers.

Times of crisis and terror attacks bring this new trend into sharp relief. ‘Citizen journalists’ proved a major source of the BBC in its coverage of the 7/7 attacks in London in 2005. On that day the BBC received 1,000 pictures, 20 pieces of amateur video, 4,000 text messages and 20,000 emails. It received the photo of the destroyed bus at Tavistock Square 45 minutes after the incident (Day & Johnson 2005).

Twitter and the Mumbai attacks

The Mumbai attacks in November 2008, and particularly the duration of the incident, received significant media attention in the Western world. If we look at the US news market, statistics compiled by the Project for Excellence in Journalism show that 24-hour news channels and online news focused on the live reporting of the events. Their coverage fell significantly a few days after the attacks. Newspapers, television and radio stations, on the other hand, devoted the same space to the analysis of the aftermath of the attacks as they had to the unfolding events (PEJ News Coverage Index, November 2008).

Before turning to Twitter, it is worth noting that US and Western European coverage of the Mumbai attacks relied heavily on television imagery provided by Indian channels. This shows two trends in the reporting of international crises. First, 24-hour news channels have now been firmly established in many countries outside Western Europe and the US. They have the capacity to provide extensive coverage of terrorist attacks and their footage is shared worldwide. As the Qatar-based news channel Al Jazeera shot to fame during the 2001 Afghanistan campaign (Miles 2005), Indian news channels like NDTV became known to a global audience during the Mumbai attacks.

Second, increasingly European and American media have to rely on local coverage, particularly in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist attack. Financial pressure led major TV networks to scale down their foreign operations. While CNN had a crew in Mumbai by accident, other channels flew in reporters from Europe or China. Most of them arrived only 24 hours after the start of the attack (Guthrie 2008). It is worth noting that the financial pressure that made many TV channels reduce their foreign bureaus was directly related to the rise of the internet and the challenge to traditional business models in the news industry.
While it might be worth looking more closely into the TV coverage of Mumbai (see Thussu 2009), I focus my discussion here on the microblogging site Twitter. Mumbai was ‘Twitter’s moment’ (Caulfield & Karmali 2008) as some observers claimed and I aim to assess what this means for Strategic Communication.

Twitter is a social networking site that allows members to post short messages to the world (or each other) and follow other people tweeting. This can be done on your computer but also very easily by text message from mobile phones. Twitter is three years old and has gained popularity very quickly indeed. It is easy to use and gives anybody with a twitter account and a mobile phone the opportunity to send messages to the World Wide Web from wherever they are. Not surprisingly, those caught up in the Mumbai attacks made extensive use of the service to describe what was happening. And so did the millions following the events worldwide, by following the story (usually #tagged #Mumbai) and commenting or re-tweeting. More than one message per second containing the word Mumbai was posted during the attacks (Stelter & Cohen 2008).

During and after the Mumbai attacks, the use of Twitter was frequently criticized. The charges usually fall into three categories. The first and most vociferous criticism focuses on the unreliability of the information available on Twitter. Many tweets are seen as ‘rambling’, the spreading of rumors and an obsession with sensationalism. In short, Twitter is regarded as a prime example of trading off accuracy for immediacy (Leggio 2008).

Second, Twitter does not help people understand what is going on in the world. Twitter threats fail to offer context. A large number of tweets repeat information disseminated by traditional media like the BBC or CNN. Moreover, many users ‘re-tweet’ information without adding any additional value (Malik 2008).

Third, Twitter could be outright ‘dangerous’. As events – like the Mumbai attacks – unfold, tweets could unintentionally disclose operational information on ongoing operation to the attackers. Worse, Twitter could even become a terrorist tool (Gamel 2009, Leggio 2008).

While there is some truth to these allegations, we tend to overlook the positive aspects of Twitter. To begin with, the charge that Twitter does not provide ‘context’, can easily be refuted as one of the major services of tweets is to provide links to web sites or blogs that offer in-depth analysis and discussions of the events. Apart from this function as a filter and navigational platform, I would even go so far as to say that during the Mumbai attacks Twitter helped to undermine the messages of fear and destruction the attackers would have liked to spread. It also demonstrated that media literacy and critical engagement with media messages was far more common than often assumed.

First, those who became caught up in the attacks clearly felt a need to communicate their experience. They sent tweets to reassure their relatives. Mumbai Twitter users like ‘Ankeshk’ communicated to their loved one’s that they were safe. There were also calls for solidarity and assistance, as messages like ‘Blood needed at JJ Hospital Please Retweet’ were communicated via Twitter.

Others posted photos on their personal blogs. Professor Arun Shanbhag of Harvard University was one of them. He happened to be near the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower hotel. Shanbhag had

1 For detailed Twitter addresses see reference section.
never heard of the term ‘citizen journalist’ before, but, interviewed by the New York Times, he said: ‘I felt I had a responsibility to share my view with the outside world’ (quoted in Stelter & Cohen 2008). It seems psychologically important for the victims of the attack to talk, to share their experience. And for us, close by or far away, it is also important to join the conversation and find out more – particularly in the early phase when there is an information vacuum. In this situation ‘a little info is better than no info’ as media scholar Sreenath Sreenivasan of Columbia University put it (quoted in Stelter & Cohen 2008).

Victims’ communications as well as the comments in the Twitter world also demonstrate the resilience of the local community in the face of terror attacks. Not a single tweet in the sample analyzed for this article expressed sympathy or support for the attackers. Twitter user ‘Mehulved’ for instance called the attackers ‘monsters’, others used even more drastic terms. It seems obvious that ‘rants’ as they are often described as functioned as an outlet for anger during and after the attacks. Condemnation was widespread. Not just politicians issued (their fairly predictable) statements, Twitter allowed thousands to speak out against terrorism – immediately and unprompted.

Third, and most importantly, Mumbai Twitter timelines show that users reflected on their practice in this communication space. They commented on other tweets, questioned them, told fellow Twitter users to consider carefully what information to include in tweets and urged them not to give away operational information (Gandelman 2008). In short, Twitterers showed an acute awareness of what they and others were doing. They were aware of the limited reliability of some information and they were aware of the potential impact their communication could have on others. Consequently, Twitter user ‘Netra’ urged the microblogging community not to spread rumors: ‘so i agree with @dina please stop spreading this [sic] rumours .. its [sic] request to everyone!'

Fourth, Mumbai tweets filtered and evaluated information available in traditional and online media. They also pointed to discrepancies. ‘Girishmallya’ complained about ‘contradictory reports’ that Indian and international TV were providing. Twitter user ‘B50’ suggested the discontinuation of TV coverage of the attack to prevent the gunmen from gaining valuable information from the media. Twitterers also demonstrated that they held traditional media to higher principles in their coverage than fellow Twitter users. They expected editorial action when, for example, a man who claimed to be one of the attackers was interviewed on TV. Twitter user ‘Awtaney’ vented his outrage: ‘that bastard cut him off, the indiatv assholes did not stop sucking up to him till the end.’

Fifth, the clear distinction media and particularly internet users make between traditionally edited news media like TV, radio, newspapers on the one hand and social media and blogs on the other hand also becomes clear when we look at the comments made on a blog piece that BBC editor Steve Herrmann published in the wake of the attacks. One of the most visible effects of the emergence of Twitter in the established media was the adoption of timelines that resembled twitter updates. Like SkyNews and the Guardian’s web site, the BBC posted information from tweets (clearly marked) in their timeline of events. Steve Herrmann admitted that the BBC had to make

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2 Sample included public timeline tweets from 10-12am on 27 November 2008.
quick judgments during the Mumbai attacks and that BBC journalists were ‘still finding out how best to process and relay such information in a fast-moving account’ (Herrmann 2008).

BBC customers debated Herrmann’s piece extensively. Some spoke of deep concerns that Twitter was used, that reliability was more important than speed, that ‘genuine’ reporting should be the BBC’s priority and that tweets were not verifiable. Others found it an ‘excellent idea’ to use Twitter as an ‘external source’ and they saw live updates as an excellent service. The consensus, however, seemed to be that transparency was wanted (Herrmann 2008). The BBC audience expressed a desire to be told if a piece of information came from a tweet. In other words, they felt in a position to make their own judgments about Twitter’s reliability.

Against this background, it is interesting to discuss the ‘Twitter advice’ Amy Gahran’s online column for journalism institute Poynter gave fellow journalists during the crisis. Most of the advice could be described as rather obvious, and as we have seen, Twitter users themselves were aware of it.

1. Check the source BEFORE you share info.
2. Include key hashtags when making queries or corrections.
3. Encourage people spreading a rumor to correct or update.
4. Accept that not everyone thinks like a journalist – or wants to.

Gahran stressed that there was no point in ignoring or condemning Twitter. Instead, education was needed to make Twitter a useful tool. ‘Just accept that they [the Twitter users, PB] are playing a growing role in the media landscape, and help them be responsible’ (Gahran 2008).

When I lectured ‘user generated contents’ a couple of years ago I usually stressed the resulting pressure on the editor – ensuring clips depict the events claimed and refraining from publishing graphic photos amidst the chaos of a breaking news story. I also emphasized that the individual citizen needed to be more and more media literate in order to assess sources and to critically engage with the information he or she received. Analyzing some of the tweets sent during the Mumbai attacks makes me confident that media literacy is growing. Many users of internet based communication services have learned some of the skills that were previously the domain of journalists. When it comes to new and social media, it is safe to say that many know more about this new communication space than journalists.

A direct consequence is that multiple perspectives of a terrorist attack will be even more readily available. Different political views will be aired as well as perspectives from diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnic minorities. Traditional media will be consumed in addition to new media like blogs, YouTube, Twitter or other social networking sites. Victims of attacks can give their point of view, as can terrorist networks.

Mass Communication and New Media

One of the key aspects of the growing recognition of the potentially vital role of Strategic Communication is that the audience is taken seriously. The defense community’s strategic communicators want to know more about readers, listeners and viewers, particularly about those residing in the Middle East and Asia. This is a partly a response to the failings that became
apparent after the initially successful campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. These failings, I argue, point to the fact that governments’ basic understanding of mediated communication has been mired in an early 20th century mindset. This mindset is closely related to the initial findings of scholars who became interested in mass communication in the wake of World War I. Initially the field was very closely related to, one could even say born out of, propaganda studies. Looking back at the past 100 years of media and communication studies, various schools have developed between two opposite poles, between those who see media as ‘all powerful’ and those who see media as less influential (Bussem 2005).

The communication process is more complicated and dynamic than early researchers who were interested in mass media and persuasion believed. After decades of research the consensus is that there is no simple ‘cause-and-effect’ relationship between a mediated message and the way the audience receive it. It seems more useful to keep in mind that whoever is communicating – the journalist, the politician, the terrorist – is creating a message that reflects their social, cultural and educational background as much as his or her intentions and objectives. Stuart Hall calls this ‘preferential encoding’. Similarly, individuals who watch TV news, do not interpret what they see and hear in exactly the same way. The effect of TV news – if there is a measurable effect – is dependent on the individuals’ experience, the context of the viewing situation and, again, the social, educational and cultural background. In short, messages are decoded ‘differentially’ (Hall 1980).

Although Strategic Communication as envisaged by the US Joint Chiefs does take audience research more seriously, it still adheres to a positivist, scientific paradigm. The underlying belief of the endeavor is that the ‘right message’ is out there, that it can be found in order to push the right buttons that make the ‘target audience’ behave in a certain way.

Mediated communication does not work this way and ‘new media’ play an important part in educating strategic communicators about this. The internet and the arrival of hypertext demonstrate that studying audience behavior and assessing the potential effects of media texts are even more difficult than in the TV and radio age. It is not clear how an internet user will navigate the net, which parts of a web site he will read, which links he will follow, in other words, what ‘individual text’ he creates himself (Howard 2008). Studying the impact of the media has always been difficult. With the advent of the internet and hypertextuality it does seem impossible. However, the encouraging aspect of this development is that it simply must be apparent to everybody looking at media consumption that the individual is actively receiving messages. There is no passive ‘mass’ that can be easily reached and manipulated – or ‘influenced’ as many now prefer to say.

Many people find the individualization of media use unsettling. This is particularly true for those who used to be in a position to influence the discourse on traditional media and the framing of events, in other words traditional economic, political and scientific elites. Yet as the Poynter Institutes advises journalists to accept that the public will play a growing role in the information space, political and other elites need to do the same and refrain from adhering to obsolete communication practices.
Conclusion

While the microblogging site Twitter is still in its infancy, its impact on the global media landscape is already considerable. Yet the fluid and fast-moving information space that the spread of internet and mobile phone technology has created makes it impossible to predict the role Twitter or similar services will play in the mediated representation of terrorist attacks in the future.

For many who were either caught up in or actively following the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, Twitter provided a communication tool that allowed them to exchange information and express opinions on the unfolding events. Those participating in the conversations unfolding in the ‘Twitter-Sphere’ belonged in their majority to a group previously described as ‘audience’.

As I pointed out at the beginning of this paper, ‘audience’ is regarded as a key parameter in conceptualizing Strategic Communication. Shifting the focus from the communicator (the government or the military) towards the ‘audience’ marks an important – if belated – step in the right direction. However, the tweets analyzed for this paper demonstrate that a growing part of the public cannot simply be described as ‘audience’. Their active and deliberate participation in the global information space empowers them to shape the representation of a terrorist attack. Internet and mobile phones enable them to join a wider conversation and to contest as well as to disseminate information. In so doing, they display a growing level of media literacy that sometimes seems to surpass the understanding of the new media space that traditional media professionals display.

In an increasingly interactive, or what I would term ‘conversational information space’, Strategic Communication needs to re-conceptualize the ‘audience’. A large part of the public, at home and abroad, expects to be engaged in a conversation. This will neither render traditional media organization obsolete nor will they lose their voice. Indeed, the public’s increased media literacy leads to heightened expectations regarding the accuracy and integrity of reports produced by main-stream media. BBC and CNN & Co. face continuous scrutiny from a public that can and does respond to their broadcasts instantly. This trend began with the growth of the blogosphere and is now entering new levels. In this conversational information space the wisest course for strategic communicators seems to engage in the conversations the active public is demanding (Brouns 2009). This engagement demands long-term commitment and very different approaches to traditional media campaigns.

It might sound disheartening, but the multiplication of voices and perspectives in the conversational information space is only one aspect of the growing complexity that challenges strategic communicators. The hypertextuality of the Internet lets every single user create a new text. It seems hardly possible to predict which parts of a message – or which tweet – an internet user might read, listen to or watch and which of the links offered he or she decides to follow after the consumption of the first ‘chunk’ of information.

This complexity and fluidity ultimately point to the limits of measuring ‘successful’ Strategic Communication in the conversational information space. However, there are also opportunities. The skillful analysis of the ‘Twitter-Sphere’ (or whichever conversational tool will follow) will equip governments and militaries with a new tool to assess the public’s response to events as well as to Strategic Communication messages. Simultaneously, the conversational information space
provides ‘oxygen’ for the public’s own anti-terror messages. It also offers space for self-help and possibly self-healing, thereby mitigating the short-term impact of terrorist attacks.

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Strategic Communications in Irregular Wars

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Abstract: Effective communication and strategic messaging in irregular warfare and counterterrorism require that analysts become aware of the cognitive and cultural frameworks of not only their adversaries, but also of themselves. Despite the attention paid to appreciations of culture in recent years, many analysts continue to work without knowing what they mean by “self” and by “other.” This article argues that analysts must take into account the overall, or “macro,” cultural environment in which they work, and supplies ground rules to put forward more effective communications with foreign audiences.

Keywords: Terrorism, counterterrorism, strategic communication, public diplomacy, cross-cultural communication, irregular warfare.

Unlike the conventional wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, which were expected to be fought by regular armies on clearly delimited battlefields (whether they actually were or not), recent conflicts in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, the Horn of Africa and elsewhere have been marked by the more ambiguous characteristics of irregular warfare: the “violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over … relevant populations.” If, to put it somewhat simply, conventional armies won wars by gaining territory on the map, irregular wars’ combatants win by gaining the “hearts and minds” of civilian populations. While counterinsurgency theorists debate the fine points of achieving this aim, they generally agree it demands privileging political activity over military force, demonstrably providing resources and security, and winning some degree of emotional support from the population by influencing their subjective perceptions. They must persuade civilians to accept the legitimacy of counterinsurgents’ aims and the supremacy of their values or, at the least, their superior ability to safeguard and provide for civilian needs. From the perspective of evolving counterinsurgency theory, civilian perceptions are indispensable to victory and failure to win them spells defeat.

As a result, irregular conflicts, with their unforeseen and shifting organs of propaganda and their unpredictable audience fidelity, pose challenges for analysts ranging from the tactical situations on the battlefield to strategic intelligence. US analysts have developed new tools designed to meet these challenges by taking stock of the audiences for their communications efforts. They focus on the cultural and linguistic characteristics of potential audiences; experiment in the application of ethnographic data, such as the Human Terrain Teams, which embed social scientists in military units; and have arrived at the fuzzy idea that “listening” is a crucial communication activity. Although no expert can say with complete certainty how communications in irregular conflict works, culture and the human sentiments are now a given in the analyses of what, how and to whom to direct communication efforts. However, as this article will argue, there is room for improvement. Despite the strides made in outlining a new theoretical basis for communication, current practices continue to rely heavily on mirror imaging from analysts’ own socio-historical heritage. In practice, the concept of “culture,” for example, is often applied mechanically as an explanatory model for understanding how national and religious groups behave (Afghan culture, Swedish culture, Islamic culture etc.); these groups are presumed to be monolithic and ahistorical, rather than being flexible in response to internal and external developments.

This article suggests that communication efforts will be improved by what might be called, to borrow an economic concept, the “macro-cultural” dimension. In short, it argues that analysts need to be aware of their own cultural perspectives and preoccupations as well as be able to place themselves in the skins of the people under observation. Much lip service is paid to this approach. Nonetheless, in practical terms, much analysis fails to achieve self-awareness and awareness of others. This article sets out three goals to address this deficiency, with the hope that broader terms of culture can illuminate the current set of conflicts. They are:

1. Respect your Audience
2. Communicate through Narrative
3. Understand the Technology Environment

While the insights here have been drawn largely from recent US experience, they can offer concrete successes, and bywords for failure, for other national and supranational institutions seeking to communicate across cultural divides.

The Current Context

Current concerns about the role of culture in irregular war arose in the context of the 2003 US-led war in Iraq, the US and NATO-led war to defeat Al Qaeda following the group’s attack on US
landmarks in September, 2001, as well as military and civilian efforts in Asia, Africa and Europe to deter the spread of globally-minded militant Islamism.

When the United States first embarked on a “global war on terror,” as the Bush Administration called these engagements collectively, government officials treated related communications as a straightforward affair. The White House believed that disseminating positive information about the United States, its positive attitude toward Islam and Muslims, and its goals in the war would be enough to sway world opinion. US information campaigns for several years following the September 11, 2001 attacks included US State Department products from television advertisements to *Hi Magazine*, for Arabic speaking young adults, to a television station, *Al Hurra*, which announced by its name—the free one—its intention to promote a value system associated with US and universal ideals. However, US efforts to persuade the public about the virtues of its actions were a manifest failure, as plummeting approval numbers in global poll after global poll revealed. The United States was met with a worldwide swell of negative opinion about its values and integrity, global dislike of military actions in Iraq that the US justified as preventing global terrorism and promoting democracy, and a surge of radical sentiment among a subset of British and European Muslim youth. In the view of the US administration, these attitudes translated into tangible losses by depriving it of support from foreign militaries and publics, fortifying the moral claims of its enemies and, moreover, fueling precisely the radical views it sought to defeat.

These information defeats were matched on the ground by a military unschooled in the challenges of face-to-face intercultural communication. The consequences of this deficiency became especially apparent following the collapse of the Iraqi regime in the spring of 2003, when US and the coalition of multinational forces were suddenly put in the role of occupiers of an unstable country with a civilian population often openly hostile to the foreign militaries’ role, and a burgeoning insurgency. Civilian encounters became fraught testimonies to the importance of local knowledge when cross-cultural misunderstanding produced lethal consequences for military members and civilians alike. These mistakes took place both in face-to-face and mediated communications. There were basic failures of etiquette knowledge among military personnel, such as how to signal civilian drivers to stop at checkpoints and appropriate behavior related to women, as well as more profound forms of ignorance of either distant or recent history. These latter failures made it nearly impossible to interpret the behavior of Iraqis, such as reprisal killings between formerly suppressed Shi’a and Sunni populations, or to grasp the likelihood of hostility to foreign occupation by different segments of Iraqi society, or to make good governance decisions in the wake of formal hostilities.3

Developments in information technology further complicated the role of communications by dramatically altering how authoritative communications are established and disseminated. The low cost and relative ease of access to the means of communication, coupled with nearly instantaneous dissemination on a global scale, have democratized the communications landscape

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in areas with a highly developed information infrastructure. In these areas, governments cannot expect control of either the means or content of communication: they must compete with their non-state adversaries, as well as other organizations, for authority. These changed circumstances have heightened the stakes in the contest to dominate the information space. According to a study by US Institute of Peace analyst Gabriel Weimann, groups such as Al Qaeda have distinct ways of leveraging the Internet: psychological warfare; publicity and propaganda; data mining; fundraising; recruitment and mobilization; networking, and planning and coordination. To this list may be added the ability of technologically savvy groups to reach civilians without directly visible ties to a conflict and effectively globalize local or regional battles. Globally disseminated news about the 2006 Hizballah-Israel war, for example, elicited deeply partisan feelings among people with no direct ties to it in Europe and the United States. Hizballah’s facility for exploiting communications is widely viewed as having helped the group command global sympathy on humanitarian grounds.

The United States military learned from the sophisticated media tactics of its adversaries. It changed its approach to the application of information in asymmetric conflict. The military recognized the importance that national, ethnic and religious cultures play in shaping public understanding of events, and created new foreign language and regional cultural requirements for its personnel to raise the overall knowledge level of the Armed Forces. Doctrinal documents such as the 2006 *US Army Field Manual on Counterinsurgency* incorporated nuanced definitions of culture, society, identity, beliefs, values and other concepts that clarify how meaning is created and shared among people:

Culture might also be described as an “operational code” that is valid for an entire group of people. Culture conditions the individual’s range of action and ideas, including what to do and not do, how to do or not do it, and whom to do it with or not to do it with. Culture also includes under what circumstances the “rules” shift and change. Culture influences how people make judgments about what is right and wrong, assess what is important and unimportant, categorize things, and deal with things that do not fit into existing categories. Cultural rules are flexible in practice. For example, the kinship system of a certain Amazonian Indian tribe requires that individuals marry a cousin. However, the definition of cousin is often changed to make people eligible for marriage.

The Counterinsurgency Field Manual definition improved the widespread notion of culture as a static set of group characteristics by making note of how culture contains the rules about the rules, or meta-rules, for creating collective meaning. Moreover, these meta-rules are frequently adapted to produce outcomes that are in keeping with conventional expectations of the group, as the example of cousin marriage [itself a legal practice in Europe and nearly half of the United States] suggests.

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5 For more insight into the ways that political organizations and violent groups engage global public sympathies to win resources, see *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* by Clifford Bob (Cambridge UP, 2005).
Military communicators further recognized that audience members’ outlooks and behavior arise from the roles audience members play, whether they are innocent bystanders and victims of violent struggle, or combatants and partisans to one or another warring side, or professionals with a stake in the conflict, such as politicians, journalists, and non-governmental organization (NGO) workers. Within these broad groupings, individuals may play multiple, even apparently contradictory, roles at once. A professional with a disinterested role by day (such as reporter, or translator) may play a more partisan role by night. A combatant may also be a victim. Stakeholders, moreover, may be distant from the battlefield; national liberation struggles and ethnic conflicts often engage diaspora populations whose direct ties to communities in conflict can shape local outcomes. These circumstances set the stage for the US to reinvigorate its approach to regional knowledge and intercultural understanding in the context of irregular warfare.

The Goals

1. Respect Your Audience

Sun Tzu urged us to “know thy enemy,” and he also meant us to respect them. Successful military or political strategy usually relies on respect for an adversary’s capacity for complexity. Respecting the enemy has been little discussed in the conflict between NATO countries and Al Qaeda and its partners. Yet it is one worth broaching, given the lethal effects of disrespect, whether it is toward the enemy or his audiences. This section looks at how failing to know one’s enemy and respect him have created an even more powerful result, namely failing to understand target audiences and their circumstances. Particularly in the context of counterinsurgency, that target audience is crucial: boundaries are fluid between adversaries and the populations who can choose, every day, whether to support the terrorists or not.

The central issue is confusing the enemy with his audience. Negative attributes attributed to an enemy easily bleed into similar attitudes toward the entire population, which in the current conflict are Arab Muslims and Muslim populations in Central and Southeast Asia. Although individual troops can and do exhibit deep appreciation of the characteristics, capabilities, and motivations of their various civilian audiences, these efforts are often drowned out by the deeply ingrained institutional attitudes found in military culture more broadly, such as oversimplification, lack of differentiation and excessive demonization of their audiences. These specific deficiencies in understanding often arise in the persistent view of the Middle East and Central Asia, and Islam, as irrevocably different and less advanced than their Western counterparts. This historical sense of conflict is also alive and well in Europe, as revealed by ongoing debates about and fear of Muslim integration in the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, France, and Austria. In the United States, the lack of historical contact with the Middle East has fueled enduring fantasies of deserts, camels, oil, veils and technological deprivation. These broadly held cultural attitudes historically have been pervasive in the military and intelligence community. In the mid-1990s, when theorizing low intensity conflict began to come into its own, analysts tended to categorize Western methods of warfare as uniquely modern, and non-Western irregular forms of combat as, in contrast, primitive, tribal or low-tech. These contrasts encouraged analysts to trivialize irregular combatants. A Defense Intelligence Agency analyst opened a 1996 analysis of irregular warfare with the claim that “Westerners, with their superior technology and organization, have been killed...
for a long time by primitives or “savages” whose style of war the Westerners misunderstood and whose skills exceeded those of the West in irregular wars.” This faint praise is followed by the recommendation that Westerners must learn the psychology, history and culture of their irregular adversaries. Yet White, whose views are far from anomalous in the national security community, returns repeatedly to the premise that there is little to learn, since irregulars are incapable of strategy or reasoned thought: In contrast with the “clear doctrine for the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war... Irregular forces do not have highly articulated doctrine.” The author grants that they may, however, be “adept at the tactical level.” Ultimately, rational analysis contemporary theoretical frameworks are rejected in favor of the romantic imperialists T.E. Lawrence and Rudyard Kipling to explain current irregular wars. Although official language has become more politically correct in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the distinction between the modern West and the primitive East shaped the analytic community’s understanding of Usama bin Laden and Al Qaeda following the September 11, 2001 attacks. A 2006 issue by the Institute for National Strategic Studies replicated this logic whereby West and East inhabit two different worlds when it argued that American intelligence gathering is at a disadvantage because it is “optimized for the modern world only” and has few skills to gather intelligence, let alone make sense of terrorists’ “traditional, non-technical world of family and tribe.”

Populist outrage following the attacks contributed to heightened anti-Arab and anti-Muslim feeling in the United States, including among members of its military. Such an environment of US xenophobia is not conducive to taking seriously the ability of Middle Eastern audiences to respond to terrorism, war, and globalization with reason and subtlety—even though it should. Crucially, this lack of esteem extended to adversaries’ communications abilities. Even as bin Laden and Al Qaeda were acknowledged as masters of the new media, no one in the US military admitted that it was because bin Laden was capable of higher reasoning. In 2001, former ambassador to the United Nations (and special envoy to Afghanistan in the Obama administration) Richard Holbrooke asked how “a man in a cave [can] out-communicate the world’s leading communication society?” One of the answers lay in the persistent incredulity of the defense establishment that its “overwhelming supremacy in modern communications” could be matched by the primitively dressed, cave-dwelling head of Al Qaeda. In the ensuing years, the defense community reiterated Holbrooke’s query many times, primarily to note bin Laden’s facility with new media, such as his ability to exploit video and the Internet to reach a global audience. Yet, at the end of 2008, leaders in the defense community were still baffled at its audiences’ technological and cultural modernity. As US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates narrated to a Balad Air Force Base Town Hall meeting:

I was in Afghanistan a few months ago, and I flew out to a post province on the Pakistani border. And I’m sitting there with a group of village elders. And here's this old guy in a long, white beard who says, I

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10 Ibid.
read your -- (inaudible) -- lecture at Kansas State on the Internet about balance of power. And I'm thinking, holy cow! Where did he even get electricity much less a computer?

And so that's the world we live in. And so we look at these underdeveloped countries and their poverty and the lack of electric power and reliable water and so on, but they are on the Internet, they watch television, they communicate.11

Gates’ admission suggested that the US defense community is not fully accustomed to the potential of its audience to grasp the complexities of the world around them, to connect with events beyond their borders, or to understand US and NATO motivations. For many members of the military coming from the developed world, the combination of unfamiliar social structures (such as village elders), anachronistic clothing and lower living standards are likely to serve as visual cues that their audiences are themselves simple and ‘undeveloped.’ This theme has multiple variants, for example, in the idea that Middle East populations ‘only understand force’ or in the association of tribes with primitive social forms.

Analysts’ dismissal of others’ complexity, dynamism, and rationalism skews their ability to understand them. Aiding the development of a more respectful attitude is likely to lead to a better understanding of the motivations and capabilities of adversaries, and more constructive engagements with others.

Temper Narcissism

Just as they will gain advantage from becoming aware of their predisposition to see their audience in particular ways, analysts will benefit by accurately grasping their predispositions when it comes to viewing themselves. In 2004, the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication issued a report that sought to explain and rectify a precipitous decline in the US reputation abroad. Among the board’s insights was the recognition (based on polls conducted for the study) that Muslims “see Americans as strangely narcissistic” in their approach to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: “As the Muslims see it, everything about the war is — for Americans — really no more than an extension of American domestic politics and its great game.”12 In its psychoanalytic context, narcissism means self-centeredness arising from a failure to distinguish oneself from external objects. In the initial years of the post 9/11 military effort, US strategic communications efforts generally reflected this narcissistic pose, failing to acknowledge the views of audiences it hoped to reach. To be certain, the US demeanor before a global audience currently tends toward a tone of relative humility, reflecting the temperament of the Obama administration. On the ground, Western forces have made substantial strides developing empathic relations with civilian counterparts. These can be easily undone, however, as an ISAF Command Sergeant Major Michael T. Hall describes:

things had been going relatively well.... But [then] our troops were having a hard time maneuvering their large vehicles down one tree-lined road. To improve their mobility, and ostensibly to make themselves a bit safer, they cut the trees down.

What the troops didn’t know - they hadn’t bothered to ask - is that they’d cut down fruit trees. Many of the locals saw their livelihoods destroyed when the trees fell. Rather than gain their support, our troops alienated a village. It wasn’t long before the trees were replaced by roadside bombs.

In essence, the troops treated the locals as potential enemies, and took action to protect themselves. By failing to understand the impact of this seemingly reasonable act of self-protection, they made the environment far more dangerous.13

These sorts of events can be described as mirror imaging in action–behaving as if the landscape of conflict reflects nothing more than the ambitions of Western militaries.

The challenges that NATO has faced grappling with civilian deaths in Afghanistan arguably have arisen because of a failure to grasp the impact from the point of view of their victims. NATO has had difficulty quelling rising anger over the number of casualties, especially since their increase in 2008 and 2009.14 Although different NATO countries have apologized and paid compensation to victims of collateral damage in Afghanistan since the beginning of the war, there is no standardized response mechanism to investigate deaths and compensate victims.15 This was because civilian death was addressed from the point of view of the war’s strategic aims—in terms of numbers alone—rather than from the point of view of the emotional and material needs of victims’ survivors. Had Western militaries viewed collateral damage in human and relational terms, as well as in broad strategic terms, it may have been easier to grasp that people who have lost family or community members to attacks do not calculate their loss in collective numbers of civilian death, but in terms of their own single, immeasurable loss, nor do they have precisely the same interest as NATO in understanding whether the military or Taliban were responsible for the death, at least at the time of the casualty. It is a well documented fact that Taliban fighters make false claims that NATO caused fatalities when they did not, that they deliberately draw the military into attacks in which civilians will be killed and that their own attacks cause civilian casualties.

Nevertheless, the lack of a standardized response communicates to Afghans that their lives are of little importance to the armies supposedly battling on their behalf. Instead, in Afghanistan, rising death tolls demonstrably decreased civilian support for NATO forces in 2008 and 2009. It

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14 According to the United Nations, there were 684 civilian deaths from January to June 2007. In the same period in 2008, there were 818, and 1,013 were recorded in the same period in 2009. (From International Council on Security and Development [ICOS], Press Statement, August 2009. http://www.icosgroup.net/modules/press_releases/ICOS_calls_for_new_response).

was not until the spring of 2009 that Western military personnel restricted air strikes that led to unintended fatalities and began acknowledging and apologizing more swiftly. Reducing and responding to civilian casualties has evolved to become an important platform in NATO prosecution of the war.

Obviously, there is no simple fix for a situation in which foreign policy, military strategy and communications at multiple levels are deeply entwined. Even the best communications strategy cannot rectify the problem of civilian deaths. But structuring the approach to civilians in terms of a competition between international forces and insurgents moves the focus away from civilians—whose goodwill is considered to be at the heart of defeating an insurgency. When military members question why there is “more ink spent on casualties from air attacks than there is on the criminality … of Taliban actions,” they shift focus from civilians to the Taliban. A better communication strategy would begin with the acceptance that recognizing civilian harm and acknowledging Taliban wrongdoing are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, from the point of view of civilians, these issues compound each other, for example, in the case of a family that has lost a breadwinner and is subsequently dependent on surviving in a corrupt economy held hostage in some areas by militants.16

The Difficulties in Overcoming Narcissism

Viewing reality through the eyes of others is easier said than done. This may be especially so among military personnel and supporting analysts, whose professional identities and ability to do their jobs well depend on having a focused and partisan view of events. If the battlefield is likely not the place to begin to unlearn narcissism, preparatory cross-cultural training may be, and such programs already exist to prepare recruits for face-to-face communications. At present, however, these programs tend not to go far enough to counter mirror imaging but, rather, stop short at presenting information that civilians in other cultures are “like us.” As one trainer has explained:

Cultural awareness training lets them know the true facts about the Iraqis they are going to be dealing with . . . . We teach them that we are the same in some ways – if you cut us, we all bleed – and we teach them that being an Iraqi is not synonymous with being a terrorist.17

Another standard instruction in such classes is that Islam is intrinsically a peaceful religion, potentially by way of comparison to Christianity; one class attendant noted that he was “surprised… when he learned how similar the Islamic holy book was to the Bible.”18 It is difficult to find objection to such teaching, especially when course attendees confirm that cross-cultural instruction goes some distance toward humanizing cultures they associate purely with aggression

or terrorism – a necessity for dealing reasonably with civilians. However, in their effort to humanize by demonstrating that “they” are like “us,” such courses, at present, represent only a partial step out of a narcissistic worldview. The next obvious step might be to point out that “we” are like “them,” as leading theorists of intercultural communication contend, and ultimately to characterize “us” and “them” on their own respective terms. Unless we take that step, cultural awareness classes are simply a “complex strategy for avoiding cultural difference [in which] the attribution of similar needs, desires and values to others in fact moves simplification to a higher level of abstraction. Now it is not the people who are simplified but cultural difference itself that is subsumed into familiarity of one’s own world view.” Rather than receive foreign audiences into one’s own local perspective, real cultural training might venture out of that perspective altogether—a move that military training quite understandably does not countenance.

Narcissism, or excessive self-absorption, can insert itself almost imperceptibly in the communications context. But even in small doses, it can damage the necessary ability to see others as others, while impairing the ability to evaluate issues and actors independently of their position within NATO’s strategy.

2. Communicate through Narrative

Since 2001, the terms “story” and “narrative” have played prominent roles in the US discourse about strategic communication, and they are increasingly an element of the NATO communication lexicon as well. This section explains the development of the concept for military application to date, and suggests a refined understanding of narrative as a dialogic process between communicators and listeners. That understanding rests on the recognition that narratives are inherently social. They are meaningful when both those who tell them and by those who listen to them share pre-existing ideas about the events, characters, symbols and values the narrative relates, at least to some degree. It is more accurate, in fact, to think of narratives as jointly authored creations by all who have a stake in their outcomes.

In 2001, the idea of “telling our story” typically referred to the US intention to communicate its goals and achievements in the military clash with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. US officials sought the ear of foreign news outlets in order to “tell our story in the war against terrorism.” In time, the concept of story broadened to include the idea that the United States should tell its history as a country steeped in ideals of democracy and individual liberties. These efforts were viewed by much of the world as an American monologue that offered little opportunity for foreign listeners to identify their own values and aspirations in the US story of its war. The US reputation plummeted. In response to communication failures, several years later, it became the military vogue to claim that, “It’s not what you say, but what they hear.” This well intended aphorism alerted communicators of the need to be more aware of the people they were seeking to reach,

since they were trained to begin their work by asking the question, “what is our message?” This starting point betrayed an implicit expectation that their message would be delivered uncorrupted to its intended audience. Yet, because narrative is an inherently dialogic event, requiring both teller and listener to exist, it does matter “what you say.” Without a clear understanding of their own intentions, narrators are in a poor position to help author the story they wish to tell. Communicators seeking to influence the others will, therefore, pay close attention not only to the stories of those they wish to reach, but to their own, since it is their own values and behaviors they seek to persuade others to incorporate. These values and behaviors will be found in the general history of one’s country and culture; in diplomatic history; and in the broader global history in which both teller and listener are actors.

The elements of narrative

A story is a simple thing: It is a way of telling events in a particular order. Stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. Individuals tell stories in order to make sense of their experiences; so do groups and societies. Narrative is closely related to culture, and it is one of the cultural practices through which group ideals and values are debated and reaffirmed:

...[H]uman beings need to organize the inchoate sensations amid which we pass our days—pain, desire, pleasure, fear—into a story. When that story leads somewhere and helps us navigate through life to its inevitable terminus in death, it gives us hope. And if such a sustaining narrative establishes itself over time in the minds of a substantial number of people, we call it culture.21

History is of no use to culture unless its events become part of larger narratives of that culture. A culture absorbs a historical event, such as September 11, by awarding it meaning, and by allowing various members of the culture to have authority over what that meaning is. September 11 gained iconic meaning for Americans through a process of negotiation among different subpopulations of the country, through legislative actions, various modes of memorializing the event, and media retellings. In the world beyond US borders, September 11 also has various meanings to different populations. The story of the war against terrorism is neither a static fact for analysts to detect, a tale for storytellers, nor the accepted truth of NATO, Al Qaeda, or the Taliban. Even the civilian populations surrounding these institutions cannot command the narrative. Rather, it emerges from a contest by each to fix the meaning of events.

The effort to appropriate the meaning of events has a heightened role in the context of counterinsurgency; meaning is the disputed territory itself. It is won or lost on the basis of narrators’ ability to forge a common story with their audience. In practical terms, this means much more than identifying shared antipathy toward Al Qaeda or the Taliban. In Afghanistan, for example, the skeleton of a story—with beginning, middle, and end—is fleshed out by memorializing and attaching symbolic meaning to events that serve the larger narrative intended to serve jointly both the Afghans and Western forces. These events may be simple and everyday, and take place in the course of training security forces or during steps in reconstruction projects; they

may take elements from recorded responses to events on the ground by different community members; they may be woven from official statements by stakeholder governments about their intentions. In order to create these stories, good communicators have solid grasp of their own history and an understanding of their listeners’ culture and history. They also have an understanding of the communications space. This communications space—the place between teller and listener, what happens in transmission—is never a tabula rasa. It is crowded by origin myths of the local population and the news of the day, and much in between. Listeners know these “back stories” as well as the storytellers do. At any given moment in a particular community, there are a number of stronger narratives in play. Some will correspond to the hard political and economic news stories as they appear on television and in newspapers or in other dominant media. But often even the twenty-four-hour news cycle is unequal to longstanding social narratives, which can transform breaking news into utter trivia.

For example, consider the ongoing use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to attack suspected extremist targets in Pakistan. For the United States, the attacks serve as plot turns in the narrative of the war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, but also as an element in a longer tale of the U.S. as a superior technological power, especially in war. Pakistanis read it differently. As civilian casualties mounted, the drone attacks began to be seen as a war against Pakistanis and Muslims in general. The attacks also stirred up a broad cultural narrative of the Pashtuns. These include values related to masculinity, honor, and responsibility among Pashtuns. They see Americans as too cowardly to send their own men into “real” battle, preferring to let machines fight. The attacks are also reminders of British aerial attacks in the 1920s, “and regional memory of that past ensures that the strategy raises the specter of ruthless Western imperial ambition – no matter how much U.S. officials protest their altruism.” Unmanned aerial attacks are an apt symbol of the communications problem itself, where a missive or event that the US creates without specific narrative intention (“unmanned,” “drone”) is taken over by its recipients, who can range from credible commentators to conspiracy theorists, but who have, all of them, the upper hand in telling audiences what to think. Grasping how current events fit into existing historical narratives will help communicators make sense of responses and develop good, or sometimes, less bad, communications.

3. Take Account of the Communication Environment

In an earlier era of mass media largely controlled by governments or powerful media magnates, audiences were often passive recipients of communication through a limited number of media channels, such as television, radio, and the press. Communicating with civilian audiences (at least in theory) was a matter of promoting or restricting audience access to particular messages. And, while information and propaganda might be seen as playing important roles in political conflict,

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the limited numbers of channels and those who had access to them made the process – if not the content – of communication a relatively straightforward matter.

The expanded availability of satellite television in the 1990s began a process of eroding governments’ abilities to control the flow of information across their borders. The World Wide Web has sped that erosion further by enabling real-time global dissemination of text, images, and video across national and linguistic borders. This weakening of government control is matched by a strengthening of individuals’ ability to shape the communications environment. The terms of influence in such an environment are clearly much changed from those of earlier eras when states could simply shut down a television station or in which populations with a limited number of information sources could be isolated from competing opinions. Today, such forms of censorship or control are effectively impossible, raising the costs of being caught lying or even giving accounts that don’t resonate among constituencies that demand transparency. Governments must, therefore, seek solutions largely from within the evolving parameters of the communications environment.

Communicators in the context of irregular war now take into account the powerful transformations wrought by the Internet and wireless technology in the global context, as well as the wide variety of communication modalities of which new media is only one. Television remains the most dominant communication technology worldwide, and radio, print newspapers and magazines, and face-to-face communication, as well as forms such as film, theater, poetry and dance also relay information in many communities. The global digital divide remains wide as developing countries continue to lag behind wealthier ones in broadband Internet use. Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that Internet usage may reinforce, rather than transform, existing social behaviors: Internet and email use, for example, has been demonstrated to increase users’ connections to family members.24 However, in Europe, young Muslims who develop militant political views do so primarily through close cultivation by recruiters who spend face-to-face time with them, despite claims of the Internet’s power to radicalize.25

Different communities, and different subsets of these communities (e.g. young and old, rich and poor), gather and distribute information in a variety of ways. When forging campaigns, communicators should assess not only the means through which people get information, but how they evaluate and share it:

- What are the dominant means of communication among this group?
- How do members of this group rank the credibility of different sources of information?
- What are the standards of credibility for this group? Apparent veracity? A particular source? A particular style of telling?
- Does information perceived as credible tend to flow from within or beyond the community? Does it come from a satellite television channel based elsewhere, from a local radio program, from blogs?

Strategic Communications in Irregular Wars

- How does information flow within a community? How does news move and who / what are the primary points of distribution?
- What are the methods, or logic, by which group members interpret information? When members of the group receive information, what steps do they take to evaluate it?

Answering these questions can help reveal the diverse roles that civilians play in the process of collective meaning making, as producers, editors, packagers and consumers. These are useful when discrete communications are developed as chapters in an unfolding narrative.

Cultural Identity in the Internet Age

Although Internet use may be sparse in specific combat theaters in Central Asia and elsewhere, its impact on the trajectory of irregular wars cannot be discounted, especially when conflict stakeholders may be far from the site of violent struggle. A generation ago, Benedict Anderson persuasively argued that the nineteenth century spread of newspapers and books in vernacular languages contributed to nationalism’s development by enabling people who did not know each other personally, nevertheless, to belong to an “imagined community,” bound by language and common concerns.26 Although research on the relationships between Internet and cultural identity is incipient, it suggests strongly that the opportunities to communicate across time and space, coupled with the opportunity for individual users to produce as well as consume content, can have powerful effects, especially on diaspora communities. Indeed, militant Islamists were early adaptors of the Internet as a means to encourage a supranational Muslim identity among a highly dispersed population; a New York Times survey of militant websites in 1997 found that “the common denominator among these polemical sites is a call to stand up to what the Muslims perceive as oppression and slights against their fellow adherents in Bosnia, in Chechnya, in the West and, above all, in Israel.”27

The unifying effects of the Internet on ethnic populations have been demonstrated elsewhere, even to the point of reconstructing a fragmented community, as a group of Sarajevans discovering each other on Facebook reveal. Scattered globally by war nearly a generation ago, they are recreating a virtual Sarajevo in the cosmopolitan style of earlier generations. As one participant explains, the Facebook community consists of “an entire lost generation of all possible nationalities – Serbs, Muslims, Croats, Jews and, of course, assorted mixtures of all of the above, as was the custom with our parents.” People who were on opposite sides in the war now find themselves “friending” each other.28 Paradoxically, the leveling effect of the Internet can also produce “a powerful segmenting … force” which means that, because no one interpretation of national or other identity can dominate others in multi-vocal cyberspace, there is no unified, dominant narrative reflecting either the attitudes of the host society or the identities promulgated

28 Personal correspondence with a participant who prefers to remain anonymous, April 12 2009.
by the home country.\textsuperscript{29} The implications of the changes wrought by the Internet for strategic communication are still unfolding. Clearly, the Internet offers users opportunities to create communities that transcend national and other borders, and thus to conceive of themselves—and their values and aspirations—in terms that do not rely on their national origins. At the same time, these identities are not forged in a vacuum, but in complex relationship to pre-existent national identities.

\textit{Let Context Generate Lexicon}

In parallel to the macro-cultural dimension of strategic communication, recent struggles among communicators over which words to use in communications with Muslim majority populations demonstrate the problems of operating from a “micro-cultural” perspective.

By 2008, after several years of using clumsy nomenclature to characterize counterterrorism efforts, both the British and U.S. governments issued directives, of varying levels of conceptual sophistication, regarding proper word usage.\textsuperscript{30} These documents were most successful when they began with a nuanced grasp of the degree to which reality and language shape each other. From this understanding, it becomes clear that a meaningful and strategic use of language originates with an effort to understand realities on the ground and to represent them accurately. Efforts to be accurate, in turn, have a greater chance of appearing credible. Conversely, efforts to fix language at the level of word choice, rather than worldview, do not provide the strategic depth or flexibility to go far. They are little more than band-aids to be applied once or twice at a particular moment in time.

More useful language arises from context, as a document prepared by American Muslims for the Department of Homeland Security in 2008 demonstrates. This useful document provided nuanced explanations grounded in specific evaluations of the geopolitical, social, and religious ground on which political violence takes place. These led to equally specific recommendations rooted in a general call for “accurate and descriptive” language related to terrorism and for a consciousness of “history, culture and context,” equal to communications in a highly globalized era.\textsuperscript{31} Specific notes on terminology, such as the recommendation that communicators should make clear distinctions between different terrorist actors (such as Al Qaeda and Hamas) were founded in the knowledge that these groups have different goals, motivations, and tactics. Such


accuracy also serves a strategic purpose by denying Al Qaeda the ability to lay claim to broader influence and scope of operations than it actually has. While words do indeed matter, they do so to the extent that they are grounded in a social environment and have meaning to contemporary communities. Grasping that, social environment is the key to proper language usage. Second, the integrity of one’s own message matters more than avoiding certain words that might accidentally legitimize an adversary.

Conclusion

It will be evident from the foregoing that the field of strategic communication is both complicated and fast evolving. It is also immensely important, given that, as set out above, the nature of modern warfare and other forms of inter-state competition take place as much in the marketplace of public opinion as on the battlefield. This fact has meant that the field has attracted many distinguished practitioners. Yet it may also be seen that there is plenty of room for improvement. As explained, there is no simple solution, fix, or patch available. But there are two keys: awareness of self and respect for the adversary. Any combination of these two qualities will improve the effectiveness of strategic messaging.
Strategic Communication on a Rugged Landscape
Principles for Finding the Right Message¹

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Abstract: This paper considers how a control-oriented approach to strategic communication means that the optimal message or combination of messages will probably never be found in the “war of ideas” with terrorist groups and hostile governments. By applying the concept of rugged landscapes to the problem of finding the right message(s) in strategic communication, this paper discusses how operations can be rethought to improve on effective communication by understanding the ‘landscape’ of a communications environment.

Keywords: Terrorism, Strategic Communication, Rugged landscape model.

Introduction

For approximately the last decade, the United States has been moving to centralize and more tightly control its messages. Accelerating this trend, U.S. strategic communication efforts under the current administration follow the dictum that effectiveness equals control of a singular message. The problems with this approach were described in a previous CSC white paper; however, there is also a more basic issue: How do we know when we have the best message? Is there only one best message? A control-oriented approach to these questions means that the optimal message or combination of messages will probably never be found in the “war of ideas” with terrorist groups and hostile governments.

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This paper addresses this issue by applying the concept of rugged landscapes to the problem of finding the right message(s) in strategic communication. The current U.S. approach assumes that the landscape is simple, consisting of a single, modular solution that can be optimized by a controlled, systematic search. However, the situation is more accurately described as a complex, rugged landscape, with multiple integral solutions. This means the optimal solution can only be found by an evolutionary approach using multiple, diverse search methods.

Treating a rugged landscape as a simple one leads to inappropriate search strategies that virtually guarantee suboptimal performance. To improve its chances of success in the search for the right message(s), we recommend that the United States reform its current control oriented strategies by applying four principles:

1. **Leap before You Look**: Abandon systematic search methods in favor of techniques based on random jumps and multi-variable optimization.

2. **Use the Force**: Accept, expect, and seek to exploit interdependencies in the communication system.

3. **Simplify Structure**: Take steps to reduce legal and organizational interdependencies that make the landscape more complex.

4. **Accept Downside Risk**: Promote changes in an organizational culture that is reluctant to tolerate the temporary performance decreases that are inherent in complex landscape searches.

**Message Control in U.S. Strategic Communication**

An earlier CSC white paper argued that U.S. strategic communication efforts are based on an outdated, 20th century model of communication. This message influence model, which uses an underlying metaphor of telephone systems, had its heyday during the Eisenhower Administration. Subsequently its fundamental assumptions became the conventional wisdom of political campaigns, of the business domains of public relations and marketing, and of the government/military domains of public diplomacy, public affairs, information operations, and international broadcasting. Chief among these assumptions is that control of the message is paramount.

For approximately the last decade, the United States has been moving to centralize and more tightly control its messages in the context of strategic communication. A clear manifestation of this is passage of the Foreign Affairs and Restructuring Act of 1999, which abolished the U.S. Information Agency and absorbed its public diplomacy functions into the State Department’s Bureau of Public Affairs. This transformed what was largely a decentralized, field directed

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3 Available at http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdoc.cfm?index=490&type=0&sequence=0
communication effort into a more centrally coordinated one, with message activities controlled by
the “home office.”

This trend shifted into high-gear when the Bush administration came to office. During the
2000 election the Bush campaign had great success with message control strategies. One of the
defining features of modern political communication is control of the message\(^4\) and the
Republicans raised it to an art form by deploying carefully coordinated issues positions and talking
points into a group of sympathetic media outlets. The objective was to create an “echo chamber”\(^5\)
that repeated a tightly controlled message through a large number of channels.

After the campaign, these techniques became standard operating procedure for the Bush
administration. “Bush's presidential campaign team was known for disciplined ‘message
management’ in the 2000 campaign and brought the same skills and priorities to Washington.”\(^6\)
This was due in significant part to the influence of Karen Hughes, a former journalist and advisor
to the Bush campaign who held several advisory positions in the Bush administration. Hughes was
well known for her desire to control messages about the United States that were destined for
foreign audiences.\(^7\)

In 2005 Hughes was appointed Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, bringing her
“message discipline” principles to that job as well. Mimicking the Republican campaign tactic, she
instituted a regular dispatch to U.S. embassies called “The Echo Chamber” that contained talking
points for use in contacts with foreign publics and media. In the first such dispatch she said

After only one day on the job, I have realized that you are inundated with vast amounts of
information. My hope is that my office can help you synthesize and provide a quick and easily
absorbed summary of information that you can feel confident using on major issues. This will be
updated periodically, as events warrant.\(^8\)

In the more recent U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication\(^9\) (NSPDSC) the quest for control of the message is plainly evident. The report
begins by setting out a group of themes—essentially broad talking points—that are designed to
promote American values and support national security objectives. A separate section of the
report, entitled “Interagency Coordination,” establishes a framework for imposing message
discipline on the government, with the State Department implementing the communication
strategies. It creates an “interagency crisis communication team” with members from the White
House, National Security Council, State Department, and Department of Defense whose job is to
“coordinate message points.”

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\(^8\) Phil Taylor, Institute of Communication Studies, University of Leeds, UK, [http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outlit=pms&folder=2053&paper=2438](http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outlit=pms&folder=2053&paper=2438)

\(^9\) [http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87427.pdf](http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87427.pdf)
Following the response decision, a conference call will be conducted with public affairs and communication representatives from relevant agencies to refine and coordinate unified messaging. The resulting message from the Counterterrorism Communications Center and appropriate official statements will be relayed to Cabinet secretaries, ambassadors and the military chain of command through the Rapid Response Unit at the State Department. (p. 8, emphasis original).

Clearly then, U.S. strategic communication efforts, under the current administration, follow the dictum that effectiveness equals control of a singular message. This idea has its own problems, but there is an even more basic issue: How do we know when we have the best message? Is there only one best message? In this paper we argue that a control-oriented approach to answering these questions is also inappropriate. It is unrealistic, and virtually guarantees that the best message(s) will never be found, leading to suboptimal performance in the “war of ideas.”

The explanatory model we use to examine strategic communication is that of simple and rugged “landscapes.” Real strategic communication takes place on a rugged landscape, but the signs are that U.S. decision-makers use a mental model of a simple landscape when they try to optimize strategic communication. In a nutshell, the disconnect is this: A control-oriented approach to message selection and delivery is akin to thinking that if you were dropped inside a mountain range and told to find the highest peak in the range, you would assume that the nearest mountain is the tallest. You might reach the top of that mountain, but you would never find the highest peak in the range. Next we explain the details of the landscape model.

Improvement as a Landscape

We can think of an optimal message as one that has maximum positive influence on the listener, according to overall strategic goals. The optimal message consists of many things: the right words, conveying the correct sentiment and themes, delivery in the right manner by the best messenger, in the most appropriate medium, and at the right time. In a control-oriented framework, each of these aspects of an optimal message is considered an independent component of the overall message system, in the same way that computers have components like an operating system and a microprocessor. Just as the quality of the computer is determined by the quality of its operating system and microprocessor and how well they interact, the quality of a message is determined by the quality of its component parts and how well they interact. Finding the optimal message thus consists of finding the message components that collectively yield the most influence.

But is this the correct picture of the search for the right message in U.S. strategic communication? To answer this question, we turn to the ideas of Stuart Kauffman, an evolutionary biologist. Kauffman invented the NK, or rugged landscape model, an elegant and far-reaching formulation that explains how a system of components continuously improves by evolving over time. The NK model has been used to examine evolution in both biological and

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economic\textsuperscript{12} systems. The model gets its heuristic value from a strong visual metaphor: Evolving an optimal solution is analogous to finding the highest peak in a mountain range.

In Figure 1,\textsuperscript{13} two different plots are shown, a simple landscape with a single peak (A), and a rugged landscape with multiple peaks (B). Think of the height (z-axis) as the performance or effectiveness of a given solution: the higher the peak the better the solution. The lateral directions (x- and y-axes) represent a field of many potential solutions.

The shape of the landscape depends on the two parameters of the NK model:

- **The number of components in the system (N).** In our strategic communication example, components would include things like themes, audience segments, messages, interpretations of messages, media channels, and so on. A given solution consists of a configuration of \( N \) of these. As \( N \) increases, the peaks tend to become shorter. In other words, the greater the number of components, the lower the performance tends to be for any given solution.

- **The average number of components that interact with each other (K).** In our strategic communication example, components would interact if, for example, audience segment X interprets a message differently than audience segment Y, or if a theme in one message contradicts a theme in another message. When \( K \) is zero or one, there are few of these interactions and each component tends to contribute independently to the goodness of the solution. This leads to a smooth, simple landscape with a single peak, as in Figure 1A. But when \( K \) is greater, i.e. when there are many interactions between components, they tend to contribute interdependently to the goodness of the solution. This leads to a rugged landscape with multiple peaks, as in Figure 1B.

In a simple landscape the search for the optimal solution (highest peak) is uncomplicated: Move across the landscape in a systematic way, looking for any path that leads uphill. If you use multiple search parties, they can all apply this same strategy because moving uphill always gets you closer to the optimal solution, and moving downhill always gets you farther from it. This

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Adapted from http://cairnarvon.rotahall.org/2007/01/02/on-fitness-landscapes by Koen Crolla. Used by permission.
\end{itemize}
A straightforward search procedure works because the independent components of the simple landscape represent a modular system. To improve a modular system all you need to do is improve each component—indpendently—and you will eventually find the best overall solution.

A good example of a modular system is a high-performance bicycle. Each of its components (e.g. frame, seat, tires, brakes, gears) contributes independently to the quality of the bicycle. The selection of a seat does not depend upon (or affect) the selection of tires, or brakes, or gears. To make the best bike, you try different seats, tires, brakes, and so on, looking for the ultimate combination. In fact, this is exactly how elite cyclists put together their bikes today—constructing their own custom designs by purchasing from the highest quality (and most trendy) component suppliers. On this smooth landscape, there is one “optimal” bike design which consists of the combination of the optimal individual components.

On a rugged landscape, on the other hand, the search for the optimal solution is complex. The search does not just involve looking for an uphill direction because uphill might lead to a suboptimal solution (one of the lower peaks). If you are standing on a low peak, you might have to actually go downhill (for a time) to get to the optimal solution. When you find what seems to be a good solution, it might not be optimal—it could just be the highest peak near you. So having a good solution does not imply that you have the best solution. You can use multiple search parties—in fact rugged landscapes require it—but they cannot engage in a systematic, coordinated search using a unified strategy. Rugged landscapes are integral systems in which performance results from interdependencies and nonlinearities that exist between components in the system. This means you cannot change one variable in a patterned search without changing other variables at the same time.

A great painting is an example of an integral system. Each component of the painting only has meaning in reference to all the other components: A tree alone in a desert conveys a different meaning than a tree alongside many others in a forest. Likewise, our eyes draw contrasts between the both adjacent and non-adjacent colors, so the impact of any color on the overall impression depends on what other colors are present. At a grander level, we recognize that the taste and experience of the viewer will greatly shape the impression that is made, so much so that the painter cannot predict exactly how a viewer will react. So unlike the bicycle, a great painting is not just a matter of selecting the best colors, then painting the best tree, then painting the best background, and so on. Everything has to be optimized jointly.

The Current View: A Simple Landscape

How we view the landscape of strategic communication is crucial because the shape of the landscape has definite implications for how to best conduct the search for the right message. The modular system of a simple landscape emphasizes incremental improvement through exploitation of existing knowledge. The most efficient way to the top of the peak is to gain experience about what works and what does not, and then fine-tune the solution until there is no more improvement to be had. Once the optimal solution is found, a modular system demands tight control, so one does not stray from the optimal design.
While it does not say so explicitly, the NSPDSC conceives of the search in these terms. The very idea that they can use a control-based strategy probably signals communicators’ belief that they have already found an optimal message. At the very least, it indicates a belief that they can restrict the $K$ value of the landscape through their actions, insuring a simple search. The assumption is that if everyone is “on message” and transmits the message reliably, it will not be altered by the receivers, eliminating a possible source of interdependence. The performance of a message today will be the same as it was yesterday and the same tomorrow, insuring that we can get consistent results and make rational adjustments by using a single message (or small number) targeted at the average listener.

The NSPDSC also views the communicator, medium and message as independent components that can be optimized individually. For example, it states a general need to have optimal spokespersons delivering the U.S. message, whatever it is: “United States Ambassadors should be the ‘voice’ of America as well as its official representative and should make regular appearances on major foreign media, explaining U.S. policies, values and views.” (p. 6). There is a similar view of channels, with an admonishment that “all agencies and embassies must also increase use of new technologies” (p. 6), independent of the message being delivered or the audience that is targeted.

Proposed evaluation procedures similarly imply that if we listen to the average audience response to a message, we can use simple feedback to fine-tune the message to an optimal state. Thus, “participants in our exchange and education programs can and should be interviewed to find out what aspects were most effective; speakers should be evaluated for quality and effectiveness in presenting American values and beliefs.” (p. 33). As well, “evaluation should measure progress toward the achievement of goals, allowing managers to adjust methods and means, and make informed decisions about resources,” (p. 33). In other words, if the message is not getting through, the problem is with the delivery methods rather than the strategy or the overall package of communication practices.

**Table 1: Some Interdependencies in U.S. Strategic Communication**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Message</th>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Multiple agencies have responsibility for strategic communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Sources have differential credibility with respect to messages</td>
<td>Different messages contradict or reinforce one another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Sources are differentially engaged/skilled with particular media</td>
<td>Messages are differentially suited for different media</td>
<td>Mass media is being subsumed in “new” media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>Sources have differential access to different audiences</td>
<td>Messages intended for one audience “leak” to others</td>
<td>Different age groups &amp; regions consume different media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Correct View: A Rugged Landscape

The primary cause of ruggedness in a landscape is interdependence between system components. Do significant interdependencies exist in U.S. strategic communication? If we do even a crude breakdown of system elements in terms of source, message, channel, and audience, then it is simple to identify interdependences between every pair of components. Table 1 lists some examples, but there are many more examples than are listed. For instance, messages and audiences are interdependent not just because messages leak, but also because messages are targeted at particular audience segments. Audiences are interdependent not just because U.S. opinions affect audiences abroad, but also because audience segments themselves are interdependent: “Girls,” one of the NSPESC target audiences, are also “youth,” another of its target audiences. Furthermore, Table 1 only considers simple two-way interdependencies, whereas more complex relationships, in fact, exist. For example, a key problem for the United States is countering ideological messages being delivered via the internet to a particular audience of Muslim youth in Europe.

The integral system of a complex landscape demands exploration for creating new knowledge. The most efficient way to find the highest peak is to have multiple, concurrent experiments, each exploring very different solutions. Once a good solution is found, an integral system demands continual adaptation, acknowledging that still-better solutions, radically different from the current design, may exist. Integral systems often demand many solutions, each customized for its own unique niche.

If a rugged landscape is treated as simple—as we believe is the case with the current U.S. approach—then suboptimal performance is virtually assured. Communicators will use a common search strategy in place of the varied, experimental, evolutionary approach that is needed. Once they find a somewhat good solution they will stick with it because of an assumption that downhill movement is always bad. They will tune individual components of a solution, but this will also change other interdependent components and have unintended (and often unexplainable) impacts on performance.

Recommendations: Adapting to a Rugged Landscape

Abandoning a control-based simple landscape orientation would bring U.S. strategic communication efforts more closely into line with the realities of its situation; but, doing this requires a new set of principles for conducting the search for the best message. Here we explain four of the most important of these.

Leap before you Look

On simple landscapes, the search for the right message is a systematic process of looking for the uphill slope and following it. One variable can be optimized at a time in a trial-and-error fashion using feedback to make small adjustments in course. Over time, plodding progress leads to an optimal solution.
But on a complex landscape this strategy fails. A systematic search based on small incremental changes does not cover very much territory. It is as likely to lead downhill as uphill, and even in the ascending case it may lead to a local peak that is not the optimum one. Searches on a rugged landscape need to cover large amounts of territory to locate the high peaks, and this requires large leaps.

The situation is illustrated in Figure 2. The dots in Figure 2A represent nine trials using a systematic grid search that starts from a center point on a minor hill. The search remains on this one hillside and five of the trials represent either a decrease in performance or no change.

The dots in Figure 2B represent nine trials whose positions on the grid were determined by a random number generator. While three points occur on the floor, two of them actually land on the optimal peak, one very near the top. Another one lands atop the second highest peak. The average performance of all nine trials is much higher than those in Figure 2A.

What would substitute for the random number generator in the real-life situation? On a rugged landscape it is impossible to change one thing at a time because of interdependencies in the system. So making the leaps of Figure 2B requires a multi-variable optimization approach of changing many elements of the solutions at the same time in a fashion similar to random variations in an evolutionary process. In our strategic communication example, this would mean creative configurations of source, message, channel, audience, timing, and so on.

The fitness of the trials must be assessed in absolute terms, not in terms of incremental improvement over previous trials. Solutions with high fitness are retained and re-combined with features of other high-fitness trials in new experiments. It is also very important to institutionalize this variation and selection process, continually probing for new and better solutions even when a high-fitness solution has been found. Otherwise, competency traps can occur. These happen when organizations learn that particular behaviors lead to success, so they focus on and amplify these skills. Meanwhile they become less adaptive and competitors learn how to counter their success. This is a particular danger with rugged landscapes because it is never clear when the optimal peak has been hit, and the components of the landscape and their interdependencies can change. Continual improvement is an important goal.

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Use the Force

Current simple landscape strategies resist complexity by limiting the number of messages to a small number that can be tightly controlled. However, on a complex landscape this is exactly the wrong thing to do. The optimal peak can only be found through testing multiple messages in an evolutionary, experimental approach.

Of course this risks an encounter with the Dark Side of interaction between messages, which control-oriented strategies seek to avoid at all costs. Here again, a better impulse is to embrace the complexity and seek to use it to advantage. As an earlier CSC white paper concluded:

You can’t control the message; get over it. The more we try to treat communication as a simple, straightforward task with outcomes we can control, the less we are likely to succeed. ...Communicators should accept this reality and try to work with it, just as Wall Street traders accept the chaos of the market and try to “go with the flow.” Once we let go of the idea of a well-ordered system that is under our control, we can start to think of what is possible in situations of uncertainty.15

This logic turns the idea of message control on its head. Current control-oriented strategies attempt to eliminate potential interaction between messages. But, suppose we accept the idea that messages will interact no matter what we do. Then we can begin thinking about how this interaction might be managed to our advantage.

For instance, messages could be formulated more in terms of general ideas and less in terms of specific details. As Goodall, Trethewey and McDonald point out,16 such strategic ambiguity can be very functional. It creates the possibility of unified diversity17 in which communicators can agree on general, abstract features of a message while preserving differential understandings of the implied details.

As another example, one message might be created to form an unstated premise when it interacts with a subsequent message, leading to some desirable conclusion. This argument technique, known as enthymeme, is attributed to Aristotle. It is thought to be a particularly effective persuasive technique18 because the unstated premise is, in effect, supplied by the listener, leading him or her to the “natural” implied conclusion. If we accept the idea that messages will interact, then new possibilities for action such as these are opened-up.

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Simplify Structure

A landscape is made rugged by interdependencies between the elements of the system. Indeed the U.S. strategic communication system is so complex that it may approach the topography of a *jagged landscape*,\(^\text{19}\) where there are so many interdependencies that movement is nearly impossible. Since control is impossible, it is unlikely that the landscape could ever be made simple. However, a systematic effort could be undertaken to make structural changes that *are* possible, reducing interdependencies in the system.

One significant opportunity for such change lies in reducing unnecessary legal constraints on U.S. strategic communication. Today, those fighting the “war of ideas” must tread carefully to avoid running afoul of the U.S. Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, which has become known as the Smith-Mundt Act (after the bill’s sponsors in the House and Senate). The Act was designed to regulate U.S. propaganda efforts in foreign countries. It places a premium on telling the truth (in contrast to the “lies” propagated by the communists). It also prohibits the government from deploying propaganda domestically to influence its citizens, as Hitler did with sinister effect in Germany.

If this law was sensible in the 1940s, today it seems naïve. Sounding a main theme of this paper, Armstrong points out that

Simple communications models of the 1940’s have been replaced by global networks of formal and informal media. Perception overcomes fact as deliberation by both the consumers and producers of news shrinks to almost nothing. Too often, by the time the truth comes out, the audience and media have moved on.\(^\text{20}\)

Though it is outdated, the law’s effects are still in force, and it adds yet another layer of interdependencies to the strategic communication landscape. So even though the truth “ain’t what it once was,” our communicators consult panels of lawyers to insure that their messages somehow convey it. Today a message delivered anywhere in the world can make its way anywhere else in the world in a matter of seconds via the Internet. Thus our communicators wring their hands when they deliver a message in Afghanistan, worrying about whether they might influence the U.S. public in violation of the law.

To be clear, we do not advocate an “anything goes” approach to strategic communication. There are very good reasons to constrain government agencies from operating on the domestic public. However, Smith-Mundt—itself born of the outdated thinking that underlies the message influence model—introduces incredible legal complexity into the already complex process of fighting savvy and agile terrorist groups. Significantly amending or replacing the Act is a prime example of a structural change that could reduce the ruggedness of the strategic communication landscape. As Pilon concludes


We are fighting a war of ideas, and we should fight it as we would fight any real war. It cannot be done with hands tied behind our backs, with self-imposed constraints that make no technological and even less strategic sense.\textsuperscript{21}

Though we are not privy to all the internal rules within the agencies that conduct strategic communication, this seems like yet another place to look for structural simplification. Any rule that links the activity of one part of an organization with another part creates interdependence, and potentially makes the landscape more rugged. Strict hierarchies—a hallmark of military and government agencies—are prime examples of this. They place constraints on their members that are well known to make organizations less creative and responsive.\textsuperscript{22} So flattening the organizations responsible for strategic communication could also have beneficial simplifying effects on the landscape.

\textbf{Accept Downside Risk}

In the course of searching for the optimal solution it is important to tolerate downhill movement, i.e. a movement toward lower fitness. This is because, first, with the experimental variation proposed above we can expect a certain number of solutions to be unfit. Second, to move from a position on a suboptimal peak to a higher position on a more optimal peak it is necessary to first move downhill. This is why Kauffman argues that a certain amount of “going the wrong way” or “foolish adaptation” can be healthy.\textsuperscript{23}

However this is easier said than done. The idea of tolerating suboptimal outcomes goes strongly against the grain of any system that strives for success and answers to the public. U.S. strategic communication is conducted by organizations that have always been control oriented, are focused on results and success (especially the military organizations in this sphere), have a recent record of failure, and operate with extremely high stakes. It will be very difficult for these organizational cultures to acknowledge that results are not always straightforwardly linked to planning and effort.

But acknowledge this they must. In large part, it is simply a matter of acknowledging the reality of a complex system. The control that these organizations have strived for is illusory. As Corman, Trethewey and Goodall point out, participants in a communication system are not independent but are “locked in a system of simultaneous, mutual interdependence.”\textsuperscript{24} In such a system it is impossible to predict the effects of a message in advance. “This means that, especially in terms of the ‘big picture,’ it is difficult to be strategic in the sense of setting a desired future state of affairs and mapping a set of logical steps that are likely to bring it about.”\textsuperscript{25} Likewise, on a

\textsuperscript{24} Corman, Trethewey and Goodall (2007), p. 10.
rugged landscape of communication it is impossible to be strategic in the sense that moving in just one direction or another will necessarily lead to the optimal message.

The U.S. government, particularly its military component, has a long history of attempting to learn from mistakes in the form of after action reports and lessons learned. To date, however, these efforts have primarily been used to learn between campaigns. Strategic communicators need to adopt a culture whereby the after action report becomes a staple of continuous improvement within a given message campaign.

Conclusion

Just as U.S. strategic communicators have relied on an outdated notion that the delivery of messages can be controlled, they have relied on an outdated idea that a controlled search for the right message is possible. It would indeed be possible if the sources, messages, media, and audience were independent, like the parts of a bicycle. However, they are, in fact, interdependent, like the parts of a great painting. Sources influence the effectiveness of messages. Different audiences prefer different media, and so on.

The resulting rugged landscape demands experimentation and exploration. In short it requires a new approach. Organizational changes that are within the control of the U.S. government can reduce the complexity of the landscape somewhat. Beyond that, communicators must accept that control is impossible, stop resisting complexity, and learn to work with it. They must adopt searches based on experimentation and random variation. They must come to grips with the idea that not all experiments will work, that failure is a normal part of the path to success. This approach would transform U.S. strategic communication into a more modern, realistic, and ultimately more successful enterprise.