

# Journal of Information Warfare

Volume 1, Issue 3

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## Conferences

Third Australian Information Warfare and Security Conference, Perth, Western Australia. 28-29 November, 2002. Details at the end of the journal, on the IIW website and also on:

<http://www.we-bcentre.com/iwarconference>

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## ***Editors' Introduction***

Chief Editor Bill Hutchinson asked us some months ago to lead the effort to produce a special issue of this *Journal* dedicated to the overarching topic of Perception Management. As members of the *Journal's* Advisory Board, we were happy to do so, despite the fact that major new projects rarely arise at the most opportune times. In addition to our own contributions, we have assembled an international team of exceptional theorists and practitioners from the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Sweden.

Our respective lead articles are intended to set the over-all subject of Perception Management in strategic and operational context from both theoretical and historical perspectives. Doug Dearth's article sets out a taxonomy of Perception Management within the overall context of Information Operations, suggests historical standards, and criticises the general lack of policy-level appreciation of the principles and challenges. Phil Taylor's article specifically addresses the current Allied counter-terrorism campaign. Andrew Garfield discusses the need for Strategic Influence campaigns to operationalise and co-ordinate the over-all Perception Management effort. Robin Brown analyses Public Diplomacy, while Pierce Reid deals with the Public Relations aspects of Perception Management. Susan Driscoll analyses the nature of media-audience relationships from the academic perspective. Steve Collins and Kristina Riegert deal, in different ways, with the various aspects of the Balkan campaigns of the 1990s, especially as regards Psychological Operations. John Blaxland describes the Information Operations efforts employed by Australia in East Timor, and Leigh Armistead analyses the manner in which American domestic politics has influenced the conduct of Public Diplomacy.

Whilst we have attempted to deal with most of the major aspects of Perception Management, we could not be entirely comprehensive, given limitations of time and publication space. For instance, more attention to Deception would have been useful; and we had to forego the opportunity to deal with recent British IO experiences in Sierra Leone and Macedonia, given that these operations are ongoing. As regards the latter issues, security concerns hopefully will become less sensitive in the coming months, thereby allowing publication in this *Journal* by the relevant experts.

The Editors of this issue of the *Journal of Information Warfare* wish to thank Bill Hutchinson for the opportunity to contribute, and we thank our co-contributors for their efforts here, especially given the pressing demands of their various professional endeavours. We hope these efforts will serve to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discussion of these important topics. We look forward to engaging in any dialogue that results from this issue.

**Douglas H. Dearth**  
**King's College, London**

**Philip M. Taylor**  
**University of Leeds**

## Authors

**LtCdr Leigh Armistead**, United States Navy, was formerly a Master Faculty at the Joint Forces Staff College in Norfolk, VA, where he was the editor of a new textbook entitled *Information Operations: The Hard Reality of Soft Power*. He is now the Information Assurance Team Lead for Task Force Web. LtCdr Armistead received a masters degree from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and currently is enrolled in a PhD program with an emphasis on Information Operations. He is also a graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff, the Air Force Command and Staff College, and the US Army Combined Arms Service Support School. He presently serves as an Assistant Professor at the American Military University where he teaches a number of courses including information operations, airborne early warning, aviation history and naval strategy related courses. He has published several articles and has participated in numerous IO conferences around the world, in addition to lecturing at the Australian Defence Forces Warfare Centre and the Canadian Forces College. Since 2000, he has been selected as a research fellow for the International National Security Studies program at the US Air Force Academy to conduct IO-related research, and has also developed an online IO course for the National Security Agency.

**LtCol John Blaxland** is a serving Australian Army Officer assigned as a Visiting Defence Fellow at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. He was the Intelligence Officer and principal staff officer responsible for Information Operations in Headquarters 3rd Brigade, 1998 - 99. He is a graduate of the Royal Thai Army Command and Staff College, has a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in History from the University of New South Wales and a Master of Arts degree in History from the Australian National University. His publications include 'Consolidation and Reorganisation' in David Horner (ed.) *Duty First: The Royal Australian Regiment in War and Peace* (1988); *Organising an Army: The Australian Experience 1957 to 1965* (1989); and *Swift and Sure: A History of the Royal Australian Corps of Signals 1947-1972* (1999). He recently wrote 'On Operations in East Timor - The Experiences of the Intelligence Officer, 3rd Brigade', in *Australian Army Journal*, Issue 2000.

**Robin Brown** is a Senior Lecturer in International Communications in the Institute of Communications Studies, University of Leeds. In 2001-2002 he was Chair of the International Communications Section of the International Studies Association. His current research interests focus on the impact of new information and communications technologies on international politics.

**LtCol Steve Collins**, United States Army, currently is assigned to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. He previously served at Headquarters, United States Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida, where his responsibilities include Psychological Operations requirements and capabilities and determining future Psychological Operations force structure for the command. A career officer, he has held a variety of command and staff positions as an infantry officer and psychological operations officer in the United States and Europe. He has also served as an Assistant Professor in the European History Department at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He has written and lectured widely on the impact of Perception Management and Information Operations in current and future military environments. His most recent article on Army Psychological Operations in Bosnia was published in *Parameters*. Lieutenant Colonel Collins is a graduate of West Point and holds a graduate degree in History from Yale University.

**Douglas H. Dearth**, a Senior Associate Research Fellow at King's College London, is a Partner in D&L Education Associates, based in Asheville, North Carolina, in the United States. He is a Senior Instructor at the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre at Chicksands in the UK, and formerly held this position at the Joint Military Intelligence Training Center in the US. He lectures on international security issues in North America, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe. A veteran of over 30 years in the US Intelligence Community and Co-editor (with Alan D. Campen) of the *Cyberwar* series published by AFCEA International Press, Mr. Dearth is a Member of the Advisory Board of the *Journal of Information Warfare*. His forthcoming book, *Information Operations: Applying Power in the Information Age* (with Dan Kuehl) will be published in 2002.

**Susan C. Driscoll** is a Psychologist employed by the Defence Scientific Technology Laboratories, now seconded to the Ministry of Defence. Susan has lectured at professional institutions in the UK, the US, and at NATO on issues relating to Perception Management, and she has consulted on operations in Bosnia, in addition to writing on associated topics. She holds a First Class Honours degree in Applied Psychology from the University of Surrey, and is currently pursuing an advanced degree.

Senior Command and Staff Course, and regularly lectures at the Defence Intelligence and Security School at Chicksands.

## Authors

**Andrew J. Garfield** is Director of the International Centre for Strategic Analysis at King's College, London, from which position he lectures and consults widely on international security issues in the United Kingdom and North America. He previously served as a Senior Intelligence Officer with the UK Ministry of Defence, currently serving as a Policy Advisor in the Directorate of Policy Planning. For eleven years, he was a member of the British Army Intelligence Corps serving in Germany, Northern Ireland, and Belize. As the Defence Intelligence Staff's principal Information Warfare Staff Officer, he conducted a major study which resulted in significant innovations in the MoD's approach to Information Operations analytical and targeting support to operations, including creation of the Information Operations Support Group with dedicated Human Factors and National Infrastructure assessment teams. He also played a key role in the formation of a dedicated Open Source Information Centre in the MoD. He is a graduate of the British Army

**R. Pierce Reid** was one of the first public relations professionals involved in the Internet and was one of the pioneers in applying consumer PR techniques to high-tech and industrial products. Reid began his interest in Information Operations and Psychological Warfare while pursuing an advanced degree in Studies of the Future. He has since lectured on the topic of applying proven business media relations techniques to the Information Operations environment. He has been a speaker at InfoWarCon and was Master of Ceremonies for the Norwich University InfoOps 2000 Conference. He currently runs a PR consulting firm based in Vermont and is working to expand his IO practice,.

**Dr. Kristina Riegert** is Lecturer and Researcher in Journalism at Södertörn University College. Her research focuses on comparative broadcasting and the role of the media in identity formation, globalisation and international conflict. She is the author of two studies commissioned by the National Board for Psychological Defence on Information Warfare, Kosovo and the Media.

**Dr. Phillip M. Taylor** is Professor of International Communications and Director of the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, UK. His books include *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion during the Gulf War* (Manchester University Press, 1992), *Munitions of the Mind: a History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day* (Manchester University Press, 1995), *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media since 1945* (Routledge, 1997) and *British Propaganda in the 20th Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999). He has lectured regularly to military educational establishments on both sides of the Atlantic, including at SHAPE, USAFSOC and at DISS and JSCSC (UK). He is a Member of the Advisory Board of the *Journal of Information Warfare*

# Shaping the 'Information Space'

D. H. Dearth

Senior Associate Research Fellow  
King's College, London  
[dhdearth@aol.com](mailto:dhdearth@aol.com)

## ***Abstract***

*Perception Management is a key component of Information Operations. This article presents a taxonomy of Perception Management, which is seen as comprising five principal sub-elements: Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, Psychological Operations, Deception, and Covert Action. While these are traditional activities, the author argues that they generally have not been employed well and in a synergistic fashion by the Western Powers since the Second World War. The article suggests an approach to foreign political-military challenges in terms of 'Shaping the Information Space' as an organising principle of policy and the application of power in the international arena. In order to undertake such an enterprise, the Allied nations require improved understanding of the psychology of adversaries and neutrals, as well as one's own friends and allies.*

## **Perception Management in Peace, Crisis, and War**

Information Operations and Information Warfare are relatively new labels in common parlance and in national military doctrines, but there is much that is old about the concepts. Perhaps much of the 'hype' surrounding these relatively new terms will help, paradoxically, to resurrect some of that which is not really 'new' about them at all.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the current global counter-terrorism campaign has seemingly given this resurgence added impetus. In the wake of the events of 11 September and the beginning of military operations in Afghanistan, there was considerable commentary about how Osama Bin Laden was winning the 'propaganda war' and how the United States and its allies needed to get 'in the game', as it were.<sup>2</sup> The United States and the United Kingdom, at least, have responded with careful attention to Perception Management programmes and techniques.

'Perception Management' is an advertisement agency sort of term, in many ways fitting for new labels. Perception Management, in the current parlance, like so much of Information Operations, is not about technology (though it will be facilitated to varying degrees by modern tele-communications and computer technology). Essentially, Perception Management is about shaping the 'Information Space' in future politics and conflict. Perception Management, as one of the key components of Information Operations, will be the focus of this issue of the *IW Journal*. The formulation of Perception Management, as adopted here, is seen to include the disciplines of: Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, Psychological Operations, Deception, and Covert Action.<sup>3</sup>

Perception Management targets the human dimension in politics and conflict in a way that kinetic weapons cannot. The official American military definitions for Perception Management and its constituent components are perfectly serviceable. Perception Management is understood to involve:

“Actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives and objective reasoning; and to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviours and official actions favourable to the originator’s objectives.”<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, there is both an active and a passive element to Perception Management; and there are also truth-telling and truth-corrupting aspects to it. The US Joint Staff’s definition goes on to say that: ‘In various ways perception management combines truth projection, operational security, cover and deception and psychological operations.’<sup>5</sup> The elements of Perception Management, conceptually, can be employed in the absence of the overt use of conventional weaponry, but that is not necessarily the point to emphasize here. Rather, it is to impress upon the reader that Perception Management mechanisms will most often be employed in conjunction with the physical elements (active or deterrent) of national and international power to form a more synergistic whole, which is the entire point of Information Operations as an ‘integrating strategy’. In this sense, then, Perception Management techniques will readily support both offensive and defensive considerations in terms of political and military contexts. Properly employed, Perception Management mechanisms should be employed continually and in advance of armed conflict, whenever possible,<sup>6</sup> and they need to be employed in the post-conflict phase as well.

Perception Management works differently than other elements and mechanisms of force protection and force projection. They are not about firepower, mass, and technology; although Perception Management is enabled, like so much else in this Information Age, by rapidly-developing technological innovation. Rather, the elements of Perception Management are about psychology, artistry, and imagination. This is especially true in so far as Psychological Operations and Deception are concerned, but Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy – and even Covert Action – require an intimate understanding of the psychology of one’s opponents, neutrals, and even of one’s own friends and Allies.

## **Public Affairs**

The mechanisms of Perception Management may be quite old, but like much else in this age of computerization and advanced communications, these mechanisms gain enhanced meaning by virtue of new applied technology and humankind’s understanding of it. Consider the means of conducting Public Affairs. Broadsheet and tabloid presses are still with us, despite considerable consolidation of the market (at least in the United States). Widespread use of radio dates back eighty years, and radio as a medium is as robust as ever in this television age. Viable commercial television has been in use for half-a-century, and its information output continues to grow (regardless of the perceived true value of the production content). However, press, radio, and television have been made evermore instantaneous by computerization and satellite tele-communications. All three media are now being transmitted via the Internet and the World Wide Web, as well as by their more traditional means.

Furthermore, the Net and the Web are themselves sources of vast quantities of information quite separate from the traditional mediums of press, radio, and television.

The purpose of Public Affairs is to generally inform very broad, relatively indiscriminate audiences of one's policies and actions via the media. The conduct of Public Affairs is an art form for modern governments, and in some cases it seems to take the place of substantive policy formulation. Civil administrations pay close attention to this mechanism, often to the extreme, arraying sizeable staffs in its pursuit.<sup>7</sup> But it is a skill frequently lost on military leaders. Western military establishments, however, often relegate this crucial informational function to junior staff, gifted amateurs, or those found wanting – or at least non-competitive – in the principal combat arms. While distinctly not 'rocket science', the art of dealing with the media is a distinctly demanding one. It is a matter of knowing how the various media work, their professional requirements, individual personalities and quirks, which media personalities can be trusted to play it straight in what circumstances and which cannot. In order to have a chance of having one's story told in the electronic media requires compelling visuals, either still photographs or video 'b-roll' (the compelling video clips to which an electronic media story is written).<sup>8</sup> Serious print media require in-depth substantive details as grist for analysis; while tabloids require more 'human-interest' sort of material.

The military yearn for the ability to closely 'manage' media access to the story, such as was achieved in the Falklands War or the early phases of the Gulf War. This yearning for the days of yore is palpable amongst military officers, who want to revert to the Second World War model, when the press were accredited, wore uniforms, submitted to military orders, and were spoon-fed their stories. In times of conflict at least, the military expects the media to be 'on-side' and to support the team. Those days are long-since over, nor will they be recreated. Increasingly, the global media will be independent-minded, free to roam the theatre of operations relatively unfettered, and empowered with the latest means of satellite communications. What the media may or may not have is experience of combat situations. While members of the press will not wish to be perceived as being 'managed', they can in fact be amenable to reasonable approaches that acknowledge their legitimate role in informing the public of government and military activities and that recognise their need for saleable news product.<sup>9</sup>

In the wake of 11 September, the adversarial relationship changed markedly, but scarcely eight months on, things are reverting to form. Initially, CNN – which self-consciously views itself, however inaccurately, as a non-national news outlet – placed an American flag banner on its newscasts. Other TV news talking-heads sported American flag lapel pins. This did not last long. Media coverage of military issues and activities has been, for the most part, highly positive since September 2001, especially in the US. That is changing as the counter-terrorism campaign enters a new phase, and the issues become more complex. In a 'traditional' conflict of 'us' versus 'them, the media likely would remain on-side, but post-modern conflicts will be – in a sense – more complex and nuanced. On one hand, it will be sometimes difficult to say precisely who 'they' are; on the other, after the initial shock of 11 September wore off, the media have re-established their critical – and sometimes cynical – role as watchdog of government and military activities.

## Public Diplomacy

While Public Affairs is meant to generally inform audiences, Public Diplomacy is meant to *persuade* foreign audiences of the thrust and wisdom of one's policies, intentions, and actions. Public Diplomacy basically works in traditional ways – indirect diplomatic and political dialogue, official press conferences, press releases, media interviews, cultural *fora*, etc. – but the timeframe obviously is compressed by instantaneous capabilities for communications and hence – and more importantly – by peoples' expectations of it. Leaders of minor powers and non-state actors now have roughly the same sort of informational capabilities long enjoyed by world leaders, senior statesmen, and Great Power diplomats. The fact of a 'wired world' is becoming mundane. The important difference from the past, however, is peoples' *expectations* and hence insistence on being 'wired', that is to say their intent on being informed about more things, in more ways, and more quickly. There might be limits to the physical and truly useful nature of this phenomenon, but we do not know what those limits are. In any case, we are experiencing something of a 'revolution in diplomatic affairs' in consequence of these developments.

Effective public diplomacy requires attention simultaneously to several audiences. In pursuit of policy, governments are at once engaging their closest Allies, close and occasional friends, various 'neutrals', as well as actual and potential adversaries. While diplomacy by press agency is facile and dangerous, different messages and message emphases must be played to each audience at the same time, in order to maximize one's ability to beneficially 'shape the Information Space'. Despite seemingly limited capacity to do so, despots and tyrants appear to excel at this sort of agile Public Diplomacy, while democracies seem simply to assume the righteousness of their message. Regardless of convincing military superiority and success in the Gulf War, in the past decade Saddam Hussein has continued to retain strategic agility and the political initiative in the Middle East. The continuing American and British air-strikes against Iraqi air defences, if anything, plays to audiences sympathetic to his appeal. So, too, did Slobodan Milosevic amongst his Serbian domestic supporters and others amenable to his message, despite repeated setbacks in the various Balkan scraps during the 1990s.

In the current counter-terrorism campaign, Allied governments – principally the US and the UK – are acutely aware of the need to conduct focused public diplomacy to counter the messages and appeal of politicised radical Islam, closely co-ordinated with astute Public Affairs efforts to keep domestic audiences and friendly nations on-side. The establishment of the Coalition Information Centres in Washington, London, and Islamabad, with a forward office in Kabul, are a mark of this recognition; and they are a reasonably effective effort. This was done to account for the need to react – and indeed engage proactively – in a closely co-ordinated manner across several time zones in a world governed the 24-hour news cycle.

## Psychological Operations

Strategic Psychological Operations are conducted 'to influence and induce attitudes, perceptions and behaviour in favour of government policies'. At the operational level, they are conducted 'prior to, during, and following war or conflict to promote the commander's effectiveness.' And at the tactical level, Psychological Operations are conducted 'in war or conflict to support the tactical mission'. What is termed

'Consolidation Psychological Operations' are conducted in the post-conflict stage.<sup>10</sup> Psychological Operations – for democracies – is mostly truth-telling, regardless of popular misapprehensions in this regard. The hallmark of American and British – and indeed NATO – psyops is 'mutually-supportive words and deeds.'

The specific categories of Psychological Operations have to do with sources, not veracity, again contrary to common understanding. Overwhelmingly, democratic societies use political and military Psychological Operations in the 'white' mode, overtly acknowledging the source of the message, i.e.: 'This is my message, and I am who I say I am'. Very occasionally democratic systems will employ 'grey' Psyops by masking the messenger or source – usually to tell the 'truth' – simply because the true source is thought not to be especially believable or attractive to a particular targeted audience. For instance, a Western politician waxing eloquent about the tenets of Islam will not carry the same weight as would, for instance, a recognised and respected Muslim cleric. Extremely rarely a democratic system will employ 'black' Psyops to falsely attribute a message, which in theory might be either true or false. 'Black' Pysops, looked at one way, essentially is a form of deception (likely undertaken by covert means), but the purpose is not meant necessarily to deceive; rather it is to give greater credence to the message, especially if the message is true. The common conceit amongst democracies is that they do not do propaganda. Rather, that is thought to be the realm of despots and dictators. Perhaps to the 'dispassionate' and sceptical observer, the distinction between propaganda and Psychological Operations is thin or even meaningless. At the very least, in Western terminology, propaganda has a harsher and discredited connotation.<sup>11</sup>

## Deception

Deception works differently from other modes of Perception Management. Whereas Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, and most forms of Psychological Operations seek to inform and persuade in a fairly straight-forward manner (forget 'spin' for a moment), Deception seeks deliberately to distort the opponent's sense and perception of reality.<sup>12</sup> It is an ancient art, used mostly to overcome or to compensate for perceived one's own weakness. A finely-honed sense of one's own weakness vis-à-vis an adversary is a critical motivation. Despots consistently use deception, not merely because they are inherently evil (though they are), but because they sense intuitively that they need an edge over the forces of rationality or against stronger powers. Democracies employ deception in political and military affairs because they need an edge over otherwise insurmountable or unacceptable odds.

All forms of Deception (political, technological, and military) depend upon achieving surprise. Political or diplomatic surprise (unlike technological and military surprise) requires the shock of the unexpected to overcome entrenched diplomatic, ideological and bureaucratic positions (often within one's own system) in order to alter the geo-strategic landscape or balance-of-power in important ways. Technological surprise, the introduction of new systems (or old and known systems in unexpected ways) is meant to place the opponent at a temporal disadvantage in reacting to the unexpected and recovering operational and tactical parity. Military surprise, usually through unanticipated attack (in terms of timing, direction or strength) is meant to momentarily disadvantage the opponent at the critical time and place in the battle-space.<sup>13</sup>

Deception was used constantly and with great effect by the Allied Powers in the Second World War. It was a hallmark of General Wavell's operations and those of his successors in North Africa, especially in the battles of Alam Hufa and Second Alamein in 1942. Deception helped to cover the invasion of Sicily in 1943, and deceptive practices were central to the invasion of Normandy in 1944. In this instance, General Eisenhower's invasion strategy was underlain by the elaborate ruse of Operation Fortitude and many related and subordinate activities. The Germans used deception to good effect, especially to cover the invasion of Russia in 1941 and the Ardennes counter-offensive at the end of 1944. Meanwhile, operational-level deception was central to the Russian counter-offensive on the Eastern Front from 1942 onwards. Deception was largely peripheral to Allied thinking during the Cold War, but it was a key feature of American-led coalition strategy in the Gulf War in 1990-1991.

### **Covert Action**

This activity is conducted in such a manner that the identity of the actor is masked. Covert Action might also be included in a Perception Management campaign if the intent of its use is to influence an adversary's understanding of the political situation by shaping, limiting, or re-focusing his informational intake. All covert activity is not necessarily part of a Perception Management campaign. Again, there can be both truth-telling and truth-bending aspects. It might simply be that an official government source with a particular message would lack credibility to a particular intended audience. Therefore, the source of the information is falsely attributed to another source that would be more readily accepted by the target audience or actor.

### **Dis-Information in the Information Age**

With the overall conceptual groundwork thus established, it might be useful to concentrate for a moment on the "dis-information" aspects of IO/IW. As we have seen, distorting the information environment for either defensive or offensive purposes can be accomplished in several ways. The defensive aspect of Information Assurance denies useful and true informational content to the opponent. This is done, in the first instance, through effective physical, information, operational, and even personnel security. It is also accomplished by counter-intelligence, i.e., by passively denying one's opponent the ability to understand one's intentions and capabilities, essentially by precluding the opponent's access to the facts; as well as by more actively disrupting or frustrating the opponent's ability to collect information on one's capabilities and intentions. These are essentially physical measures, and their thrust and intent are primarily defensive in nature; although we should acknowledge that the emerging art of 'digital trade-craft' takes these traditional concepts into the cyber realm.<sup>14</sup>

A third way of corrupting the opponent's information environment is by actively distorting his understanding of reality through deception in a combination of ways. Deception, while manifested physically in various ways, is essentially an art form that takes place in the human mind. The application of deceptive practices is directed solely at the mind of that person in the opponent's hierarchy who makes authoritative decisions. One may, for instance, either project or inflate one's intentions and capabilities; or conversely one may conceal or minimize one's actual intentions and capabilities (essentially operational security). One may employ ambiguity-producing (A-Type) deception or misleading (M-type) deception. The former concept is meant

to present the opponent with a sufficiently convincing array of one's capabilities, so as to induce him to spread thin his resources, in the hope of being able to respond effectively to any of them. On the other hand, the latter concept seeks to force the opponent to make a fundamentally flawed binary decision concerning one's real intentions. Whether attempting to project/inflate, to conceal/minimize, to produce ambiguity, or to mislead, one employs an array of distorting art forms. One may *simulate* by showing the false through 'mimicking' in order to imitate reality, 'inventing' to create something that appears to be real, or 'decoying' to divert the opponent's attention. On the other hand, one may *dissimulate* by hiding what is real, through 'masking' to make something invisible, 'repackaging' to disguise something to appear to be something else, or 'dazzling' to addle or confuse the opponent. As mentioned earlier, certain kinds of 'black' Psyop and covert action can support a deception campaign in aid of such stratagems.

The Second World War, the culmination of 150 years and more of melding technical and political revolutions, saw the greatest flowering of truly integrated and synergistic Perception Management as a crucial tool in warfare. The worst possible examples were reflected in the perverse and perverted propaganda apparatus and racist campaigns of the Axis Powers, principally that of Nazi Germany. The most beneficially instructive examples come from those employed by the Western Alliance, and the finest display of their integration into grand strategy came from British experimentation, innovation, and leadership. The two greatest impulses for the use of Perception Management by the Allies in the Second World War were: 1) a keen sense of desperation, and 2) a flair for 'inspired amateurism'. These are very much-overlooked factors in conflict and war, and ones that need to be resurrected in Western (especially American) thinking.

A sense of overwhelming strength (material and spiritual) bespeaks arrogance. This is why Germany and Japan were such abject failures at (and hence in the case of Germany a greater target for) Perception Management in the Second World War. The same could be said for the position of the United States today. Britain faced the abyss in 1940, and so was forced to innovate, and to do so quickly and ruthlessly. True, much of the British advantage was largely fortuitous (as in inheriting and improving upon the ability to decrypt the German Enigma codes and in intercepting and 'turning' all the German attempts to place agents in Britain). But Human Factors and Perception Management are all about taking advantage of the inherent weaknesses of one's adversary, whatever material strengths they might seem to possess, and in having the wits to capitalize upon good fortune when it is encountered.

Under British leadership, the Allied programs for Perception Management included: The ULTRA signals intelligence programme to attack the German Enigma codes, hence giving Britain unparalleled insight into German decision-making at all levels; the so-called Double-Cross programme of counter-espionage and counter-intelligence efforts to detect, neutralize, and 'turn' enemy agents in order to 'play' the deception stories under Plan Bodyguard; the Political Warfare Executive to wage a coordinated strategic psychological operations campaign; the Special Operations Executive to foster resistance and foment unrest in Axis-occupied Europe; and the Bigot List program to insure operational security for the entire massive strategic and operational deception effort. This entire massive and complex wartime effort was inspired and led by national (and eventually allied) political and military leadership at the highest levels.

## Shaping the Information Space

In the broadest sense, Perception Management is about 'shaping the Information Environment'. Its inspiration may be taken from the tactical level, that is, the concept of 'shaping the battle-space'. The physical battle-space at the tactical level of war is shaped largely through gaining material and positional advantage and through the application of physical strength within a delineated physical space – land, sea or air. Non-physical elements of power can be useful, but they normally are decidedly of secondary importance. Operational and tactical commanders shape the battle-space in several important ways: by careful selection of beneficial terrain; by sealing the chosen place of battle from hostile reinforcement; and then by skilful application of manoeuvre and firepower, informed by timely intelligence. Psychological Operations and Deception might aid in the endeavour; and appropriate operational security clearly does so. It is important to remember that every molecule of the ground, air, and naval battle-space need not be under close control at all times; rather, only those parts critical to operational or tactical advantage at critical times need be. Shaping the battle-space is not always easy to accomplish, but the concept is well-understood by Allied commanders and staffs.



**Figure 1.** Shaping the Information Space

This concept has application in wider realms beyond the tactical battlefield. Think of 'shaping the conflict space.' In latter-day peacekeeping operations, the challenge for intervening forces is not to wage battle, unless absolutely necessary. Rather, the challenge is to prevent battles. But the 'conflict-space' is someone else's battle-space. In conflict intervention, physical power is still most useful; and it requires political power to even get into the game. We have largely moved beyond peaceful interpositioning of forces as was the case in 'traditional' peacekeeping from the 1960s up until the early 1990s. That is why, for instance, when Major General Bill Nash moved his 1st US Armoured Division into Bosnia in 1996 as part of SFOR, it was not entirely anomalous. An Abrams (or Challenger or Leopard) main battle tank is considerably more convincing on a roadblock than is a white jeep and three soldiers

sporting blue helmets.<sup>15</sup> Shaping the conflict space is largely what Allied and NATO forces have been about – to greater or lesser degrees of success – in the Balkans since that time. Beyond physical deterrent power, however, the more useful elements of power have been the more ephemeral and less physical sorts, such as Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs, media campaigns, and political interventions.

Furthermore, this concept can, in theory, be applied even more broadly at the upper operational and strategic levels in terms of 'shaping the Information Space.' In attempting to do so, one must have convincing or at least sufficient political, economic, and military power so as to command attention; but the military power is held largely in the background for deterrent purposes. Day-by-day, in the effort to shape the Information Space, the "softer" elements of power – Psychological Operations, Public Affairs, political persuasion through Public Diplomacy, Deception, and Covert Operations – will play the paramount roles, the latter two operating only in the shadows. These elements and mechanisms, of course, are normally viewed as offensive techniques. Increasingly in the Information Age, defensive mechanisms must be securely in place in order to insure one's ability to project information power; so critical infrastructures must be protected, and the viability of one's own information content, processes, and systems must be assured.

Perception Management mechanisms, in order to be effective, need to be applied synergistically and as appropriate with each other and with more tangible political, economic, and military elements of power in order to magnify the effects of each and to satisfy strategic, operational, and tactical objectives and purposes. While every level of endeavour will have its particular responsibilities and mechanisms, the process needs to be top-down driven, with central control, direction, and focus. There can, or should, therefore be no free-lancing at operational and tactical levels. Activities at these levels should be only derivative of strategic direction.

### **A Paucity of Perception Management**

It may fairly, if somewhat harshly, be said that the Western Allies have not been very interested in or adept at Dis-Information Warfare in recent times. Following the British lead in World War II, the Allies were famously successful at integrated deception and political warfare at all levels in the period 1940-1944. After that time, the principal Allies essentially adopted a defensive posture for most of the Cold War period to 1989-1991. Minor ploys were used from time to time in both strategic political and tactical military spheres, but little else in the Cold War context was attempted. In the long British retreat from Empire and in Northern Ireland, the British did actively use Psyop and dabbled in deception to advantage, but in Viet Nam, the Americans played at 'black' Psyop and minor deceptions to little real effect. Conversely, dis-information was a constant staple of Soviet policy and tactics throughout the Cold War period.

Yet there is another aspect of influence achieved through perception management that is often ignored. Throughout the post-Second World War era and to the present day, there has been a huge influence played by Western 'cultural products', i.e., not those messages peddled by governments, but those images and ideas created by free market liberal capitalism that helped frame peoples' thinking about the West, as opposed to the Soviet Union and China. While often dismissed by Western intellectual dilettantes as crude and unsophisticated, and frequently vilified by traditionalists in other

societies, modern Western culture has exerted tremendous popular appeal on a global basis. Granted, drinking Coca-Cola and wearing rock band tee-shirts does not make one Western in a tangible sense, how many people imbibe Russian soft drinks or wear Mao tee-shirts these days? The Western direction of political and economic migration tells much of the success story of the appeal of culture.

Until historians have had a fair chance to examine all the facts, we will not really know if the Reagan Administration's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) was inspired genius as a sort of strategic technological deception (without any real technology behind it) with great political effect, or overreaching nonsense with perhaps fortuitous outcome. The Gulf War was unique in post-World War II history for Allied attention to tactical and operational Deception and Psychological Operations, but the Psyop campaign was an afterthought to the theatre commander's original operational concept. (This sad fact is mitigated by its considerable operational success!) Since that time, little has changed. Since 1996 in a series of operations in the Balkans, the principal Allies have not displayed much interest in or attention to shaping the Conflict Space, certainly above the tactical level; and even that effort has not been well-coordinated amongst the various national contingents. In Bosnia, the various multi-national divisions were largely free to pursue independent approaches, with little co-ordination amongst them. Perhaps due to fundamentally erroneous political assumptions from the outset, the Kosovo operation was entirely bereft of a meaningful Perception Management (or other IO/IW) component. Serbia's Milosevic continued to shape both the Conflict Space and the Information Space in the Balkans until his eventual overthrow and incarceration by domestic elements. (Much the same can be said of Iraq's Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf region, despite his evident military defeats and Allied-imposed limitations on Iraqi sovereignty.)

During the 78-day Kosovo campaign, the NATO Alliance was consistently on the public affairs defensive in terms of placing the day-to-day events in a helpful context. NATO HQ's explanation of the exigencies and inevitable misfortunes of kinetic warfare waged from several thousand feet elevation consistently lagged hours and days behind Serbian or global media displays of facts or lies about events on the ground. Public diplomacy worked rather better in the sense that the principal Alliance political and military leadership remained largely 'on-message', though the strains of maintaining the unrealistic 'no ground war' option did begin to fray badly with the passage of time. There was no real evidence at all of a meaningful psyop program until 30-odd days into the campaign. (Eventually, over 100 million leaflets reportedly were distributed.)<sup>16</sup>

Aside from the sort of political ignorance and ineptitude displayed by NATO leadership in the Balkans, there are good reasons for strenuously rationing dis-information campaigns in such circumstances. The use of dis-information to attack such thugs as Milosevic and his henchmen is tempting. However, gaining and maintaining Alliance cohesion and approval for such measures will be difficult in 'elective' warfare such as in the Balkans. Since no critical or fundamental element of Alliance security or interest is seriously at risk (beyond unruliness on the European periphery and uncontrolled migration), many Allies will be loath to support certain measures. There is always the risk of unintended 'blowback' if certain undertakings are exposed. Underhanded techniques will remain part of individual Alliance members' arsenal, of course, to be conducted either unilaterally or in quiet consort

amongst closest nations. Even so, the risk and cost of public exposure of such operations will always pose a risk to overall Alliance cohesion and effectiveness. Heavy-handed propaganda will not likely ever serve democratic nations well. That is not to say, however, that tactical deceptions to enable military operations is not fair game, and that more strenuous and more clever and aggressive Psychological Operations cannot serve to undermine the viability of rogue regimes. Beyond this sort of direct Information Space competition, we are also competing for support, or at least acquiescence, for our actions in the broader international community. Here again, lies will not serve us well.

It is a happy fact of life that democracies are information-rich societies, and it is an unfortunate reality that despotisms are not. More channels of information flow within and into our societies than within and into dictatorships, failing states, and other less-developed areas. Thugs have the impetus towards deception and propaganda because they are typically grasping, but essentially weak, in the face of democratic principles and rational political discourse. Hence, the threat of dis-information will always – in one sense – be greater to us. But in a larger sense, it is not a fundamental threat. Just as we mostly ignore lies by our own politicians, we are largely immune to those of foreign despots. While the need to maintain popular national, alliance, and coalition support for engagement policies is recognized, that end is best pursued through clear articulation of rational policy. Even as we attempt to shape the information environment of others, as in the Balkans, for the most part that will best be accomplished by the truth-telling elements of Perception Management. 'Mutually-supportive words and deeds', the hallmark of Psychological Operations, is one of the best information tools at our disposal.

### **Requirements, Opportunities and Cautions**

If Perception Management is to have real meaning in terms of Allied diplomatic and conflict capabilities, there will need to be emphasis placed upon it at policy and operational levels. Capabilities and threats are inherently mirror-image concepts, and they are inherently escalatory. On the defensive side, there must be a realization of the risks involved in asymmetrical conflict. As the US and NATO will for the foreseeable future possess and maintain vastly superior advantages in terms of tangible political, economic, and military power, they will of necessity face challenges from both state and non-state actors that, because they lack relative physical, economic, and moral power, will present difficulties with which we are less naturally prepared to deal. Those mechanisms will often take the form of propaganda and deception. It should be a matter of faith that the best defence against lies is truth and its open pursuit. But sometimes that will not be sufficient. Sometimes it will be necessary for democracies to undertake more indirect measures.

In the Digital Age, the distinctions that we like to make in democratic societies between what is civil and military, what is domestic and foreign, make little sense – certainly less than they once did. Digits do not recognize political borders, and they wreck havoc with pristine philosophical distinctions. In an increasingly global Information Space, we must remember to take care that we do not pollute our own information environment in pursuit of the corruption of someone else's.

If Allied policy-makers and commanders are to place emphasis on Perception Management measures, they must understand the concepts involved, and they must

have sufficient confidence in the requisite operational capabilities. Assuming that not all political decision-makers are inveterate liars, the understanding of concepts can only come through education from the professional practitioners of Psychological Operations and Deception. 'Spin' and 'controlled messages' increasingly are in vogue on the national political scenes in the West. So perhaps there is hope of success with respect to educating leaders. Policy-makers and senior commanders will also need to realize, however, that the elements of Psychological Operations and Deception are not 'silver-bullets' that can be employed at no cost and no risk.

Capabilities are another matter. The American and British capabilities for military Psyops are limited, and they are hampered, above the tactical level certainly, by outdated doctrine and operational concepts. The other Allies are even worse off. Given the blurring of distinctions among strategic, operational, and tactical levels these days, tactical capabilities to distribute Psyops leaflets have limited utility. Reliance, for instance, on slow, low-flying, over-weight, limited-capability airborne radio-TV platforms increasingly will make no sense in the age of Direct Broadcast Satellites. The American solution to the vulnerabilities and limitations of the Commando Solo-II aircraft is to put the next generation of broadcast equipment on the C-130J model, hardly an adequate approach, betraying a lack of understanding or caring about the problem.<sup>17</sup> These days, if one is not playing with state-of-the-art global colour television, one is not meaningfully playing at all. Increasingly, this will be the case even in less information-rich regions.

The emergence of *Al-Jazeera* TV as a key media player in the current campaign is a prime example of the changing 'Information Space'. *Al-Jazeera* TV, based in the Persian Gulf emirate of Qatar, is staffed by media-savvy Arab professionals trained in the West. Yet Western political and military leaders have railed at its free-wheeling style and its 'scooping' of Western news sources. This is patent nonsense. First of all, Al-Jazeera has produced material very useful to the counter-terror campaign, such as the various Bin-Laden tapes that have provided illuminating open-source intelligence of his damning culpability in the 11 September attacks, his whereabouts and health, etc. Furthermore, the likes of *Al-Jazeera* are the hope of future Arab societies, in terms of opening peoples' channels of information. One can only hope that in future there will be a dozen *Al-Jazeeras* in the region, as unsettling as such phenomena will be to friendly governments. Yet we must learn to compete in that new Arab 'information space', a thought as yet only dimly glimpsed amongst Western political analysts.

Talent, perhaps paradoxically, is a huge problem for militaries in robust post-capitalist societies. Not only is it difficult to recruit and retain good combat soldiers in an era of full employment, it is also hard to obtain and retain the best technical and intellectual talent for complementary tasks. The best technical talent is in the high-tech Internet start-up companies, and the best innovative and mischievous ideas and sales talent also are in the private sector, including advertising and entertainment. The government cannot afford to retain them, even if they could pay the going rates in the short-run. What is needed is the sort of 'inspired amateurs' who staffed the political warfare, intelligence, and deception organizations of the Anglo-American systems during World War II. Only now, we cannot conscript such academic and creative talent. We will need to hire them for highly-imaginative 'piece-work' for at least sector-standard remuneration. Long-term loyalty will be a problematic issue, and

standard security clearances will be nearly out of the question. The alternative is inadequate application of sub-standard talent, and hence sub-standard results. Implicit in all this is the need to obtain and tolerate odd personalities and habits. Uniforms will not work; and standard schedules will not be tolerated, but perhaps non-regulation lifestyles will have to be.

There will be the further need to work with an assortment of closest Allies, firm and occasional friends, and others. We must 'mind the gap', as Martin Libicki and his colleagues have aptly reminded us.<sup>18</sup> America's closest Allies are terrified that the US, with its early grasp of the concept of IO/IW and billions to expend on the effort, will run off and leave them behind. We must not allow the sort of interoperability achieved in NATO and with Australia by the late 1990s to atrophy in the Information Age. There is too much at stake. We must develop 'plug-and-play' concepts, capabilities, and procedures that allow us the latitude to: 1) go it alone when that is necessary; 2) go with closest Allies or other friends more often; or 3) go with the oddest folks on our flank when the occasion arises. And we must be prepared to do this without lengthy and costly delays and technical or procedural work-around to fix gaps in our preparedness.

Battle Damage Assessment is an arcane art, more influenced by whim, wishful thinking, and political considerations than we would care to admit. 'Measures of Effectiveness' will be even more difficult to determine in this new age of digital attack and defence and of enhanced Perception Management. BDA has been a most uncertain art when dealing with physical destruction; it will be even more difficult when we try to apply more ephemeral elements of power.

In the realm of Information Operations, Information Warfare, and Perception Management, we need something that passes for doctrine: a set of commonly-understood operational concepts and procedural mechanisms. But too much doctrine – or too rigid interpretations of it – could be dangerous. The issues are too fluid, and political and battlefield developments move too quickly. Things cannot be etched in firm substance. Ideas are key, and processes must change and mutate quickly in today's world. Policy-makers and military leaders at all levels must be developed in such a way that they learn to thrive on chaos, complexity, and uncertainty. There will be at once too little knowledge and too much information. We collectively must learn to cope, and to do so quickly. This must be seen as central to a viable 'integrating strategy' for national and coalition leadership and to the new 'operational art' for field commanders. The emerging concept of 'Strategic Influence' campaigns could have been a step in this direction.<sup>19</sup>

Given a thorough grasp of the central issues at policy and operational levels, acquisition of viable and truly modern capabilities, and development and retention of first-rate talent (no easy tasks in themselves), there will be the need for adequate strategic policy control in order to assure propriety and legality of, and coherence in, the Perception Management programme. Such mechanisms as Public Diplomacy, Psychological Operations, and Deception need to be controlled at the top, but that cannot be at the expense of operational flexibility. Such a balance will be difficult to achieve in an increasingly bureaucratized and sclerotic garrison-state system devised for the Cold War – and one that surely has not dismantled since. We must acknowledge, however, that good Perception Management will not rescue flawed

strategic policy judgment. While we will need more imaginative professionals, aided by 'inspired amateurs', they cannot be successful while led by rank amateurs at strategic policy levels.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The term 'information war' was coined by Dr. Tom Rona in a paper prepared for Boeing Corporation in 1976. In recent years, 'information operations' has gained currency since its adoption by the US Defense Department.

<sup>2</sup> See, *inter alia*, *The Economist*, 'The Propaganda War', 6 October 2001, pp. 13-14. Similar sentiments were expressed in British, American, and Irish papers in this period.

<sup>3</sup> Variations on the use of terms can be confusing. For instance, the term 'public affairs' is preferred in the US, while the British normally use the term 'media ops', which in turn, has an entirely different connotation in the US security establishment. In Europe it is referred to as simply Public Information. The term 'public diplomacy' often is replaced by 'international public information', and the American military also uses the term 'international military information'. The US, UK, and Canada see 'civil affairs', or CIMIC, as an adjunct activity. Many Allied specialists also prefer to see public affairs, or media ops, as a supporting, as opposed to a central, Information Operations activity. For the most part, the author sees these issues as essentially peripheral to the central argument.

To further confuse matters, the US Defense Department has recently begun to use the term 'international influence activities', which include: 'international public information, public diplomacy, psychological operations, strategic deception activities, sensitive covert influence activities, and designated computer network operations/information operations'. As part of a new approach to 'strategic influence' campaigns, this formulation makes sense. However, the Office of Strategic Influence established within the Department of Defense in December 2001 was disbanded at the end of February 2002 in response to adverse publicity occasioned by bureaucratic infighting over the concept.

<sup>4</sup> See Joint Publication 1-02, *Dictionary of Terms*, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* The interjection of 'operational security' rather clouds the issue. What is really meant, it seems, is information security, i.e., the denying of information, which in IO parlance is actually part of 'information assurance', another central IO component. See Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> The difficulty, however, is that major powers, in this era of elective involvement in foreign adventures, often have no clue that they are about engage in armed conflict. Prior to 11 September, the US and its Allies had no real interest in Afghanistan, and counter-terrorism efforts were not a central aspect of foreign and military policy in the manner that they have become since.

<sup>7</sup> Government by press-agency has been common in the United States since the Kennedy Administration, and is widely seen as a hallmark of the Blair government in the United Kingdom. But it should be noted that a press office was first established in Downing Street as early as 1930.

<sup>8</sup> See Chuck deCaro, 'Softwar', in Campen, Dearth and Goodden (eds.), *Cyberwar: Security, Strategy and Conflict in the Information Age*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 1996, pp. 203-218.

<sup>9</sup> See John Beer, 'Perception Management and 'Media Operations,' in *Cyberwar 3.0, op.cit.*, pp. 185-190.

<sup>10</sup> Paraphrasing Joint Publication 3-53, *Joint Psychological Operations*, 10 July 1996.

<sup>11</sup> For a more complete treatment of Psychological Operations, see: Charles A. Williamson, 'Psychological Operations in the Information Age', in Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 2.0: Myths, Mysteries and Reality*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 1998, pp. 179-190.

<sup>12</sup> See Joint Publication 3-58, *Joint Doctrine for Military Deception*, 31 May 1996. More importantly, see: Katherine Herbig and Don Daniel, *Strategic Military Deception*, New York: Pergamon Press, 1981. See also, Douglas H. Dearth, 'Deception, Human Factors and Information Operations', in Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 2.0, ibid.*, pp. 191-198.

<sup>13</sup> See the following related material by Michael I. Handel, specifically the chapters on 'Diplomatic Surprise', 'Technological Surprise in War', and 'Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise', in *War, Strategy and Intelligence*, London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> See Rusty Miller, 'Digital Tradecraft: Espionage and Security in the Information Age', in Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0, op.cit.*, pp. 125-135.

<sup>15</sup> As Andrew Garfield, has observed, however, the Americans would be better served by something less ponderous than 60-tonne behemoths. See: Andrew J. Garfield, 'IO as an Integrating Strategy', in Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0, ibid.*, pp. 261-274. See also: D.H. Dearth, 'Peacekeeping in

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the Information Age', in Harvey and Griffiths (eds.), *Foreign and Security Policy in the Information Age*, Halifax, NS: Centre for foreign Policy Studies, Dalhousie University, 1999, pp. 157-175.

<sup>16</sup> See articles by Steve Collins, Susan Driscoll and Chuck deCaro in *Cyberwar 3.0*, *ibid*.

<sup>17</sup> On the limitations of Commando-Solo, see Chuck deCaro in *Cyberwar*, 1996, *op.cit*. The UK has ambitious plans for expanding its own psyop delivery capabilities, but they essentially may replicate the American experience in choice of an airborne platform. I am reminded by Phil Taylor that we must also be mindful of not building technical broadcast capabilities that out-match the receiving capabilities of the target audience.

<sup>18</sup> See Martin Libicki, *et al*, *Mind the Gap*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> The US established an Office of Strategic Influence in its Department of Defense in December 2001, but dis-established it in February 2002 in the face of adverse publicity. The idea has made some inroads in British strategic thinking, as well. See the latter paragraph in endnote 3, above.

# Perception Management and the 'War' Against Terrorism

P. M. Taylor

Professor of International Communications  
Director, Institute of Communications Studies  
University of Leeds  
p.m.taylor@leeds.ac.uk

## **Abstract:**

*This article challenges the popular view that 'propaganda' - here defined in a value-neutral sense - is an inappropriate activity for democratic governments. Indeed, it suggests that it is essential for the 'perception management' elements of the war against terrorism. It argues that we are in a new Cold War type of situation in which our very ideas and values are under attack, and therefore must be defended, albeit within a democratic tradition. The ability of the western democracies to succeed in not just defending, but in actively promoting their value systems over 'the long haul', may even determine the final outcome. Accordingly, great care needs to be taken at both the tactical and the strategic levels of information operations, although the theory is sometimes belied by the practice.*

## **Introduction**

The degree to which the 'war' against international terrorism requires, by its very nature, the inclusion of a global struggle for hearts and minds has been somewhat obscured by the first military phase of the conflict in Afghanistan against the Taliban and the Al Qaeda network. In a struggle that is in fact being waged on several fronts – including the intelligence, law enforcement, legislative and financial fronts as well as the military front – much will be done outside of the public view, behind closed doors. Yet as the various debates about the validity of the evidence against Osama bin Laden for his involvement in the 11 September attacks revealed, as with the more familiar media debates about the 'collateral damage' caused in Afghanistan, it is essential for the eventual victor to win the moral high ground in the public domain on a global scale – and not just in the short term. In other words, they also need to win the 'propaganda war'.<sup>1</sup>

While western politicians insist that this is not 'a clash of civilisations' they have recognised, in Tony Blair's words, that they need to address 'a gulf of misunderstanding',<sup>2</sup> in order to explain to Muslim populations that this is not a war against Islam when there are many in the Arab world who believe that it is. When democratic nations go to war – usually against non-democratic adversaries – it is recognised that they need to undertake propaganda. But in this particular type of 'war' the challenge for whatever replaces the Office of Strategic Information is daunting, especially since the conflict owes more in character to the Cold War than to any other conflict waged by the United States since 1945 – and it may prove to last just as long.

Indeed, the role of strategic information warfare may prove crucial. This article will examine some of key issues involved in waging an 'information war' against a

terrorist network that utilises propaganda as one of its key weapons in its asymmetric struggle against western liberal capitalism in general and the United States and its allies in particular. It calls in the process for a continuation of the shift in emphasis in IW conceptualisation away from its early obsession in the mid-1990s with computer and communications systems at the expense of human factors.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, one suspects that history will show that it was this obsession with systems and their vulnerabilities – with an ‘electronic Pearl Harbor’<sup>4</sup> - at the expense of paying attention to worldwide perceptions which was partly responsible for the attacks on New York and Washington.

Moreover, the American media agonising over ‘why they hate us so much’<sup>5</sup> itself reflected a naivety not so much about the intricacies of US foreign policy but a decade-long downgrading of *media interest* in US foreign policy. This disinterest in foreign affairs since the end of the Cold War not only goes a long way to explain the sense of shock felt by the US public about being attacked on its own soil but it also helps to explain why the media coverage of Operation Enduring Freedom has left a lot to be desired. The shortage of specialised foreign and defence correspondents meant that much of the complexities of the ‘war on terrorism’ were simply not reported. Inexperienced journalists suddenly had to learn where Khandahar was, just as an inexperienced President had to learn who was the President of Pakistan. At one point in October 2001, the Department of Defence even had to hold a special press briefing for journalists on how to identify whether bomb damage had been faked.<sup>6</sup> In short, there was a knowledge vacuum both at home and abroad that not only allowed America’s enemies to exploit by its surprise attack but which has also had to be rapidly repaired ever since. But, even after six months, the DoD remains capable of spectacular own goals, as the mishandling of news about what exactly the Office of Strategic Influence would be doing revealed.<sup>7</sup>

The American media has, nonetheless and for the most part, rallied behind the war. Critical voices at home are mute, and objective analysis in the domestic media has almost disappeared. Rather, the immediate challenge lies abroad. After significant initial mistakes, for example by the use of the term ‘crusade’ and by the labelling of the campaign as ‘Infinite Justice’, the American government, media and public have all had to learn quickly about the importance of perception management whereas before they thought that America ‘as a force for good in the world’ would be self-evident. Nevertheless, as the controlled release of pictures of Al Quaida prisoners locked up in cages on Guantanamo base demonstrated, publicity cock-ups can still serve to undermine new-found assertions that this is in fact the case, as the criticism of some British newspapers – of all people - revealed. In other words, the problem so far has not been on the home front where public support remains high. While this begs the question of how long this will remain the case, and hence whether a modern equivalent of the World War Two Office of War Information will be required at some point in the future, for now the real perception management challenge is overseas.

Although the death toll in the September 11th attacks is less than originally thought, the very fact that homeland USA was attacked with old-fashioned civilian aviation technology that was not detected in advance by Cold War-style human intelligence techniques does indeed provide a ‘wake-up call’ to many of the assumptions of the post-Cold War global environment. And it is not just that, with the demise of communism, eyes were taken off the prize of HUMINT. It is not without its irony

that some of the most media-savvy politicians the world has ever known downgraded in significance the effort made to the projection of their national image abroad.<sup>8</sup> The integration of United States Information Agency into the State Department in 1999, and the subsequent demoralisation of its staff, was the final signal that public diplomacy was to play a less significant role as an adjunct to American foreign policy than in the Reagan era when it did so much to help 'win' the Cold War. If it does anything, the war against terrorism requires a radical rethink about power not being left to speak for itself.

The campaign surrounding the Afghanistan phase revealed how much had been forgotten. When the first bin Laden tape was broadcast on Al Jazeera television, followed by governmental requests to commercial stations not to rebroadcast for fear it may contain coded messages to terrorist 'sleepers', Voice of America ignored the request.<sup>9</sup> As a result, it found itself involved in a huge row with a State Department that had failed to understand one of the fundamental axioms of international public information, namely that to secure credibility as an information service, you need to broadcast the other side of the argument – including bad news – as well. Ironically, many of the free media complied with the official request, while the official media did not. There are many lessons to be (re)learned here, not least because the very request not to broadcast the tape was interpreted in many parts of the world as yet another example of the 'hypocrisy' of western democracies which purported to value freedom of speech as a fundamental principle and which they insisted was a precondition of progress in many Arab states.

### **Know Your Enemy**

In the aftermath of the attacks, the agonising about why 'they hate us so much' thus reflected as much on US media indifference towards foreign affairs as it did the actual consequences of US foreign policy. However, anti-American explanations tended to blame the victim rather than the perpetrator of the crime by suggesting that it was US foreign policy itself which caused suicide bombers to hijack domestic civilian airliners full of fuel and fly them into the symbols of American financial and military power. Early attempts to counter this by placing emphasis on the international demography of the victims missed the point that the New York attack was an attack upon modernity and indeed upon the very western ideology of free market capitalism wherever it originated. In so far as it was an attack upon the United States, it was also a strike against a way of life.

The simmering resentments that fuel the fanaticism of the suicide bomber are difficult for many people in the west to understand. Fortunately, suicide bombers are rarer than other types of terrorist although their impact can be as disproportionate as it is dispassionate. Their business is, however, highly emotional and, in the eyes of their supporters, they are martyrs to their cause. Where their origins lie in Islamic fundamentalism, terrorists are not always the ignorant fanatics often portrayed by the media, as several of the German University educated hijackers revealed. However, they know how to exploit the global media, as the twenty-minute delay between the attacks on the Twin Towers revealed. By the time the second tower was hit, New York newsrooms had scrambled their helicopters and captured the events live on television. It was, as many people have said when recalling their experience of viewing the images, 'like watching a movie' and the assumption that it was carried out by Islamic fanatics was quick to follow – perhaps because, for years, Hollywood

movies had been portraying hijackers as Arabs in their action movies. The immediate response to the Oklahoma bombing had been the same.

This time, however, the evidence that Arabs had indeed perpetrated the crime was quick to follow in the form of Mohammed Atta's passport found in the rubble of the Twin Towers. Thus began a series of events that were simply not believed in many parts of the Arab world. The very fact that the passport had apparently survived the crash when the black boxes had not was greeted with enormous scepticism in the Middle East. Then came Atta's suitcase which had not been loaded on the plane – a coincidence which was seized upon as more evidence of CIA-Mossad conspiracy.<sup>10</sup> The transcripts of cell-phone conversations between the hijacked passengers and their loved ones were scrutinised for any reference to the hijackers as 'Arabs' – and none was found. As the 'evidence' kept mounting, it was claimed in some Arab media that 5 of the 19 alleged hijackers were still alive (including Atta himself, according to his much quoted Egyptian father), that such devout Muslims would not have been seen in a Florida strip joint before the attack, and that US authorities' refusal to return any of the hijackers' bodies was further evidence of American contempt for Islamic culture. And if any lingering doubts were left, a rumour spread around the world on the internet that CNN was repeating footage of celebrating Palestinians that was taken during the Gulf War and not on September 11<sup>th</sup> (in fact it was contemporary footage, shot by a Reuters crew). Even the veracity of the bin Laden tape found in Khandahar in which the terrorist discussed details of the attacks was questioned in some quarters for having been faked by the US government.

At the street-level from Palestine to Pakistan, this heady mixture of rumour, gossip, selected facts, religious interpretation and disinformation reinforces perceptions of the west through hostile filters generated from an early age in schools, most notably the *madrassahs*. Much of this hostility derives from long-term regional tensions caused by the clash between modernity and tradition. Because the west is the driving force of the former, epitomised by the word 'globalisation', the incursions of western companies such as Coca Cola, McDonalds and Nike are seen as a form of neo-colonial economic imperialism bringing in its wake 'decadent' western values that threaten to overwhelm local traditions and values. Hence American driven globalisation is seen as a form of cultural imperialism threatening to displace indigenous values with those of free market capitalism. Fuelled by the knowledge that many in the west oppose the spread of globalisation, as evidenced by the riots in Seattle, Genoa and at other trade summits, Middle Eastern dissidents see an enormous propaganda opportunity to challenge US economic hegemony, especially in the poorer parts of the world where the stomachs of the hungry are fed on a regular diet of anti-Americanism. That was why the World Trade Centre was chosen as a symbolic target for attacks in 1992 and almost ten years later.

Another major theme of anti-American propaganda, of course, is Israel. US support for the Israeli intruder into the Arab world is seen as a western form of 'terrorism' against the Arabs. Although bin Laden is a comparatively recent convert to the Palestinian cause, like Saddam Hussein before him, he fully understands how to exploit street-level support for it throughout the Middle East. Further opportunities to exploit anti-American sentiment arise from the presence of US troops in the Holy Land of Mecca and the bombing of Iraq which has caused the deaths of 'one million Iraqi children' (the numbers vary from between one half and one and a half million

'innocent victims'). As the son of the President who launched Desert Storm, the continued bombing of Iraq is seen as vengeance for the failure to remove Saddam Hussein in 1991 and, like bin Laden, Saddam is afforded heroic status because he took on the west and – at time of writing - survived.

It is within this broader context that the dismissal of western 'facts' at the micro-level takes place. Hence the rumour that 4000 Jews did not turn up for work in the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup> because the attacks were in fact planned by Mossad in conjunction with the CIA in order to provide a pretext for a long-term ambition to seize oil pipelines in Afghanistan. The goal to remove the Taliban in order to replace it with a more compliant regime was said to be the real intention of the Afghan phase of the war. Every opportunity to discredit American versions of events is seized upon to cast doubts about her motives, just as every criminal attack upon an Arab living in the US or Europe is reported as further evidence of US contempt for Islam. Indeed, one poster displayed by Pakistani protesters actually transposed bin Laden's image upon a photograph of the Twin Towers being hit by a hijacked plane, suggesting that, in some quarters, the connection was never in doubt.

### **Countering the Image**

If the 'gulf of misunderstanding' is so wide, how can this be bridged? But let us first dispel with the euphemistic nonsense that surrounds this topic and which does in fact obscure what we are actually talking about – namely propaganda. Most analysts of propaganda are agreed that, as a process of persuasion, it is a value-neutral process. Most practitioners in the west, on the other hand, are extremely nervous about using the word. One might have expected such experts in targeted persuasive techniques to have dispelled many of the myths surrounding their work. Instead, an entire euphemism industry has developed to deflect attention away from the realities of what they do, ranging from 'spin doctoring' and 'public affairs' at the political level to 'international information' or 'strategic influence' at the diplomatic level and 'information operations' and 'perception management' at the military level. They are of course worried about the historical associations of propaganda as an activity of totalitarian regimes. But, despite the euphemism game, democracies have grown ever more sophisticated at conducting propaganda, however labelled, which only they deny to be propaganda in the first place.

This is not to suggest that all propaganda is the same. Propaganda in the democratic tradition derives largely from the 'Strategy of Truth' in World War Two. It became axiomatic for democratic propaganda as a result of the Second World War experience that it should 'tell the truth, nothing but the truth and, as near as possible, the whole truth'. This does not mean that whole truth was told. Nor was it always told immediately. Indeed, although we are on dangerous ground with the very word 'truth', the British and Americans learned that it was counter-productive to deliberately lie. However, here we need to distinguish between 'white' propaganda and 'black' propaganda. White or overt propaganda originates from a clearly identifiable source such as 'This is the Voice of America' or 'This is Radio Moscow'. It is essential that these overt propaganda radio stations avoid obvious or blatant propaganda of the kind associated with authoritarian regimes and what has been labelled 'The Big Lie'. They do this by being news based and their success is measured by the number of overseas listeners they can attract, which in turn is influenced not so much by their ability to tell 'the truth' but by their reputation for

*credibility*. This is a much more useful word, and perhaps it would be more useful to talk about 'credible truths'. For example, in 1943, the Americans dropped a leaflet over German lines in Italy stating that if German soldiers surrendered they would be treated well, including a welcome breakfast of bacon and eggs – which was true. However, the German forces refused to believe it because the notion that their enemy would serve prisoners with such rare commodities as bacon and eggs was simply too fantastic for them to accept. Psychologists call this 'cognitive dissonance'.

Governments direct information into foreign countries by whatever means and media that are available for specific political purposes. Democratic governments often maintain that they are merely supplying foreign audiences with news and views that are otherwise denied them by their repressive governments. As such, they are not conducting propaganda at all. 'We tell the truth. They tell lies or, at best, half-truths'. Perhaps, for analytical reasons, it would therefore be more appropriate to talk about 'our truth' and 'their truth'. During the Second World War, however, the British pioneered a form of propaganda which deviated from this. This was 'black' propaganda, or propaganda which emanates from a deliberately disguised source. In other words, the propagandist would say he was one thing when in fact s/he was something quite different. Born of a lie, it is this kind of propaganda which more justifiably equates with the popular perception of targeted persuasion. Credibility is still essential to its effectiveness, however. The audience needs to believe that the source is authentic, that it is who it says it is, and it is for this reason that this type of activity must be kept completely separate from any 'white' operation operating in conjunction or alongside it. It must also be kept completely secret, which is why it is often conducted 'in the shadows'; as soon as the source is revealed, if it ever does, the intelligence community who tend to conduct this work can compromise the credibility of other informational or more 'truthful' activities. For example, in World War Two, working in complete secrecy, the British Political Warfare Executive, under the cover of 'Research Units', ran clandestine black radio stations that purported to emanate from inside Occupied Europe as authentic dissident or resistance movements but which, in fact, were transmitted from British soil. Similarly, during the Cold War, the KGB and CIA conducted ongoing 'disinformation' operations designed to discredit the other side and undermine their enemy's credibility in areas ranging from medical experiments to involvement in Third World revolutionary movements. When the Office of Strategic Influence was announced, the dangers of conducting overt propaganda with black propaganda and deception from under the same roof once again revealed how much had been forgotten.

### **The Analogy with the Cold War**

The Cold War was, if anything, a psychological war in which not only were there two competing, and essentially incompatible, ideologies emanating from Washington and Moscow but it was also a potentially fatal competition in which the actual deployment of nuclear weapons would have secured 'mutual assured destruction'. As such, propaganda – both black and white – assumed the role of a central weapon in a world-wide struggle for hearts, minds, allegiances and allies – a strategic Manichean struggle of such global tension that the only safety valves for military aggression could be provided by the conduct of 'proxy wars'. Propaganda was now a regular feature of such wars – in Korea, Algeria, Vietnam, and Afghanistan – and in other low intensity conflicts from Kenya to El Salvador. Combat propaganda came to be more closely identified with tactical psychological warfare, in theatre, but the wider global

ideological struggle was also a form of psychological warfare at a strategic level which so permeated everyday life, from the Space Race to Olympic Games, from science fiction movies to anti-nuclear demonstrations, that it became virtually impossible for those living through it to separate 'fact' from 'fiction'. Really, it is only a decade since the end of the Cold War that we can begin to appreciate just how all-pervasive the propaganda 'framework' defined by Moscow and Washington permeated everyday life for just over forty years.

This was possible largely because the bi-polar environment remained relatively fixed in terms of communications. Although media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan began to speak in the 1960s of a 'global village', the ability to penetrate the 'Iron Curtain' remained relatively limited. The Soviets in fact spent more money on jamming western radio stations such as Radio Free Europe (originally CIA-backed) and Radio Liberty than they did on external broadcasting. The media operated under strict state control within the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc satellites and could thus be relied up to omit any other 'truth' than that decreed by the Communist Party. The American media, following the McCarthy witch-hunts of the early 1950s, was only too happy to accept Washington's version of the truth about what Ronald Reagan would later call 'the Evil Empire'. By the 1980s, however, new communications technologies (NCTs), initially in the form of the fax machine and satellite television, were beginning to create a new environment in which information could flow far more freely around the globe than ever before and, moreover, it was becoming harder and harder to detect or prevent. Looking back now, especially since the massive growth of the Internet, we can still take this somewhat for granted. But at the time, NCTs were like Trojan horses to a society like the Soviet Union whose determination to remain hermetically sealed off from the pollution of western culture and values even extended to a ban on the popular use of photocopiers. In this respect the 1991 Gulf War was a watershed because it brought CNN – and western values – to the Middle East via live satellite television that was difficult to censor.

Operation Enduring Freedom, the longer it lasts, will assume many of the characteristics of the Cold War, especially in terms of what is now termed perception management. This is because it is a struggle between two competing, and essentially incompatible, driving forces of our information age, namely the champions of modernity and those of tradition. Although much fighting will take place behind closed doors, the battle space will be the global public domain. Yet it is the efforts made in the latter domain that the ability of the US and its allies to prosecute the war in the former which will prove critical.

### **Information Warfare and Psychological Operations**

That the free media become involved, willingly or unwittingly, in wartime propaganda campaigns does not preclude the need of the military to possess their own media of communication to engage with the enemy. The Gulf War was again a watershed in the conduct of psychological warfare or, as it had become known by then, psychological operations (PSYOP). This combat propaganda campaign consisted of leaflets, broadcasts and loudspeaker messages directed at Iraqi troops urging them to 'flee and live, or stay and die'. The largely conscript Iraqi army was highly receptive to such messages, and an astonishing 69 thousand of them surrendered, deserted or defected. This figure was higher than the number of Iraqi

troops that were actually killed during the war, and earned PSYOP a new found reputation as a 'combat force multiplier'.

The Gulf War was also labelled the 'first information war'.<sup>11</sup> This wasn't a simple description of the military's PSYOP or media campaigns. It also embraced the use of communications in support of Command and Control Warfare (C2W). On the opening night of the war, an enormous effort was made at striking at Iraqi C2W capabilities, including attacks on the Iraqi anti-aircraft defences and on its communications systems (telephone exchanges and power plants) in order not just to gain air superiority but also to cut off the Iraqi troops from their leadership. Again, the success of this effort was felt to have aided coalition victory with minimum casualties to the point where it prompted a doctrinal shift from C2W to C4I (Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence) that was to emerge during the 1990s first as 'Information Warfare' (IW) and latterly as 'Information Operations' (IO).

It is important to emphasise that these new doctrines are still emerging as part of the on-going Revolution in Military Affairs. Nothing is, as yet, fixed – only the recognition that new technologies, combined with the new international environment brought about since the end of the Cold War, have changed the way we need to think about traditional concepts of battlefields, defence, attack, the role of people and the role of information. In many respects, much of the thinking about IW and IO is not new. Commanders throughout history have always recognised the importance of communication in warfare and that it was just as important to deny information to an enemy as it was to protect one's own communications system. What is different today is the *centrality* of communications and information technology to war fighting capability. Whether it be spy satellites, Stealth bombers invisible to radar, cruise missiles driven by computers, night-sight capability, flying television and radio stations or mobile encrypted communications, today's military forces are heavily dependent – perhaps too heavily dependent – upon systems that not only present new opportunities but also new vulnerabilities.

Before outlining the basic principles of Information Operations, it is necessary to point to certain key ideas behind the emerging doctrines. The collapse of communism and 'the end of history' was essentially a triumph of democracy or, strictly speaking, a triumph for democratic free-market capitalism. As more and more nations on earth transform their political systems into differing forms of democracy, the notion that democracies do not fight democracies – so far – constitutes an underlying assumption about the 'New World Order'. Democracies rely upon public opinion, respect for human rights and toleration of minorities. Free-market capitalism relies upon trade within the context of globalisation. If democracies see their principal enemies as non-democracies – now labelled 'rogue states' within an 'axis of evil' – and now such non-state actors such as terrorist organisations, the theory is that free-market capitalist democracies prefer peace and trade to war. Where free trade is jeopardised by a rogue state – such as Iraq's threat to oil supplies from the Gulf – then war is 'justified'. Where human rights are violated and minorities persecuted by a rogue state – such as Serbia's treatment of the Kosovar Albanians – then 'humanitarian intervention' is justified. When rogue states abandon their authoritarian or anti-democratic regimes, they are welcomed back into the new international community (e.g. Serbia). When they do not, they are subjected to international sanctions (e.g. Iraq). Indeed, in all the military interventions of the 1990s by the international community – Somalia, Bosnia,

Haiti, Kosovo – for whatever reason, the hidden assumption was that democracy would follow and new trading partners could expand the global market.

If the price for the restoration of peace and the rebuilding of civil society was to be democratic reform, there was however to be a limit on the cost. That limit was measured, *inter alia*, in terms of the risk to human life. The western democracies, and the United States in particular, have become quite squeamish about absorbing casualties in conflicts. In the Gulf War, coalition forces killed almost as many of their own troops in 'friendly fire' accidents than the Iraqis managed to achieve in combat. The intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was to be an air campaign, not a ground attack, for the same reason. It is frequently asserted that the US mission in Somalia (Operation Restore Hope) came to an abrupt end because of televised images of dead marines being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. This, in turn, has given rise to an academic debate about what has been termed 'the CNN Effect', whereby dramatic pictures can drive foreign policy decisions. If this is the case, the absence of such images is a possible explanation for why the international community involves itself in some conflicts but not others. Once more, it reinforces the propagandistic role which modern media can play.

Furthermore, there is squeamishness about inflicting casualties on the other side. It looks bad on television if democracies are being seen to wage war against 'innocent women and children'; it undermines their moral position about democratic principles and values. Hence, only 'smart' weapons were used against Baghdad and Belgrade and any 'collateral damage' was apologised for immediately. The international outcry – amongst journalists – at the NATO bombing of Serbian State Television (RTS) in 1999 missed an essential point about Information Warfare. The media are no longer simple observers of war, they are actual participants within it and are thus 'legitimate targets'. Whereas in the deceptively named World War Two 'strategic' bombing campaign against Nazi Germany, the primary targets were weapons factories and shipyards, now the largely accurately labelled precision-guided weaponry is directed at power stations, television and radio transmitters and telephone exchanges.

This in turn illustrates another important strand of thinking in IW/IO. In their influential work, *War and Anti-War*, Alvin and Heidi Toffler argued that the way nation states wage war reflects the way they conduct themselves economically in peace. In an earlier work, *The Third Wave*, Alvin Toffler argued that nation states historically develop through three stages, or 'waves'. First wave societies are largely agrarian in nature, the second wave is industrial and the third wave is post-industrial or 'informational' society. Agrarian societies wage war seasonally so that the farmer-soldiers can return for the harvest. Industrial societies wage industrialised warfare with machine guns, tanks, battleships and bombers and fight to the bitter end – Total War – suffering mass casualties (military and civilian). Informational societies for whom bits and bytes are now the currency of commerce thus place greater emphasis on information as a weapons system.

These larger issues about Information Age capitalist democracies belie some of the difficulties about applying theory to practice. In some societies, the three different waves overlap simultaneously. But in advanced democratic societies with advanced military establishments, they are moving swiftly from the second to the third wave. Indications of this include the transition from manufacturing industrial bases to commercial and financial service based economies. Media organisations, such as

Time Warner, are amongst the largest multinational corporations in the world, whereas about 90% of the world's computers utilise Microsoft's operating systems. Italy's richest media baron, Berlusconi, is elected Prime Minister while CNN's founder, Ted Turner, can donate one billion dollars to the United Nations to help it with its finances. In such an environment, it should come as no surprise that many businesses are now thinking about 'corporate information warfare'.

### **From Information Warfare to Information Operations**

What is the relevance of propaganda to all of this? The answer will become clearer if we now turn in detail to IW/IO doctrine. We first need to distinguish between the role of information in warfare and information warfare itself. The former has always consisted on activities involving intelligence gathering, surveillance and reconnaissance, information about weather and terrain and indeed any other activity designed to assist command decisions about where and when to deploy armed forces. Information warfare, on the other hand, consists essentially of four elements: (1) the denial and protection of information, including Operational Security (OPSEC); (2) the exploitation and ability to attack enemy information and data systems, which now embraces electronic warfare (EW), attacks on computer networks and on enemy power systems; (3) deception by various means including spoofing, imitation and distortion; and (4) the ability to influence attitudes. According to the Joint Publication 3-13, IW is defined as 'information operations conducted during time of crisis of conflict to achieve or promote specific objectives over a specific adversary or adversaries'. The same document defines IO as 'actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems'. This divides IO into two further activities, Cyber Operations (consisting of Computer Network Attack and Computer Network Defence), and Influence Attitudes, consisting of PSYOP and Deception.

It is this particular area, Influence Operations, increasingly known as 'Perception Management', which concerns us most here. Perception Management may well be yet another pseudonym for propaganda. According to some theorists, it needs to embrace a number of established communication practices, including public diplomacy (and private diplomacy), media relations (known as Public Information in Europe, and as Public Affairs in the USA), PSYOP and even the exercise of 'soft' power such as cultural and educational relations. These are the areas in which the ability to convince others of 'our truth', whether by short-term activity such as radio broadcasting or press conferences, or by longer-term work in the areas of educational and cultural activity, depends critically upon the credibility of the information source. That credibility, as we have seen through our historical examples, very much depends upon the willingness of the target audience (whether it be individuals, specific groups of entire populations) to believe what they are being told. This is a much harder task when the target audience, especially in an authoritarian regime where the media are state controlled and fundamental aspects of democracy like opinion polling are denied, has been subjected to believing a different set of 'facts' or values. 'Their truth' may be so deep-rooted by years of 'their' state's propaganda, and reinforced by a terroristic police regime which punishes harshly any dissent from the accepted state norm, that IO has its work cut out for it. For example, a rudimentary and far from coordinated Information Operation, was conducted against Serbia during the Kosovo conflict. This was an attempt to convince the Serb people that all was not as the Milosovic regime would have them believe. Over 100 million leaflets were dropped

over Serbia and Kosovo during the campaign explaining that NATO was not fighting the Serbian people but the Milosovic government which was conducting 'ethnic cleansing' in Kosovo. The international media, in a re-run of the Gulf War media management campaign, bought into this agenda and rarely questioned the legitimacy of NATO's air strikes in international law, even when 'collateral damage' took place. This time, however, news services like CNN, Sky News and BBC World could be received by a sizeable portion of the Serb population. Although many Serbs, only months earlier, had been involved in street demonstrations against Milosovic, they refused to believe the free democratic western media because they seemed to be in collusion with the NATO alliance. Rather, they were more prepared to believe their own media which argued that the Kosovar Albanians were fleeing the province because of NATO bombing, not because of ethnic cleansing by 'their' troops. When a nation is attacked, cognitive dissonance takes place on a massive scale.

This is not to suggest that no 'ethnic cleansing' took place in Kosovo. Yet post conflict investigations are revealing that it was nothing like on the scale that NATO spokespeople were claiming at the time. So whereas NATO perception management was highly effective in NATO's member countries, among their populations who largely supported the necessity of the air campaign and within their own national media organisations, it singularly failed in any short-term sense with the Serbs. The defiance of Yugoslavian soldiers as they withdrew from Kosovo, filmed by television news crews, was plain for all to see – casting some doubt on the veracity of PSYOP as a 'combat force multiplier', or at least when the target was a professional army, unlike the conscripted Iraqis. As for the Serb population, it took another year to overthrow the Milosovich regime in a 'velvet revolution' after he had revealed his own attitude to the democratic process by ignoring the outcome of the national election. When a nation goes to the polls, the state does need to accept the outcome.

The war against international terrorism provides fresh challenges. Identifying the location of the 'enemy' is a significant problem and no amount of leaflets dropped on Afghanistan warning Al Quaida that 'we are watching you' will remove this. Another PSYOP theme was to identify the enemy terrorists as foreigners to Afghan soil and to separate support for the Taliban out from Afghan nationalism. Perfecting this theme will be a significant part of any future military campaign if the United States is not perceived as violating international law by intervening in the internal affairs of other countries. But perhaps therein lies the real nut to crack. It is not what the USA does to win the war against terrorism, but what it is perceived to be doing. There will always be those who will refuse to believe that America is a 'force for good in the world' – and the hardest task in any propaganda campaign is to try and convert the unconverted. There is also a tendency to minimise the importance of reinforcing the views of the already converted, and this may mean that, in a long struggle, eyes are taken off the need to do this 'over the long haul'. But the greatest effort needs to be made with the vast majority of people who occupy the middle ground and whose support or opposition may depend not so much upon how events unfold but upon the perceptual framework in which events are seen to unfold.

It is ironic that the United States, as the leading proponent of Information Operations as the new doctrine for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Information Age, found itself in an election quandary following the Presidential campaign of 2000 that was eventually resolved by legal process. The son of the President who had originally declared the existence of a

New World Order was, prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, dividing the international community through his rejection of the Kyoto environmental protocols and with his determination to push ahead with the 'Star Wars' missile defence system. In this respect, bin Laden chose to attack the US with the wrong President. Whereas America before September 11<sup>th</sup> may have been turning in on itself, it now realises that its very own homeland safety is dependent upon not so much the 'nation-building' of the Clinton era but on the Reaganeque reascendancy of international information in order to tell 'her truth'.

The military advisors to President George W. Bush share many of the concerns about who the real enemies of the new international system really are – rogue states, non-democracies, terrorists, international criminals and drug traffickers. The surviving communist regimes, in North Korea, the People's Republic of China and, to a lesser extent Cuba, are being accommodated through private diplomacy backed up by the use of 'soft' power in the form of Radio Free Asia and Radio and TV Marti. The anti-communist psychological warfare of the Cold War era has moderated somewhat because if democracy hasn't quite arrived in those regimes, then there is some hope that the forces of free-market capitalism might bring democracy in its wake. Yet the perceived farce of the Bush-Gore election can only serve to jeopardise the credibility of the leading advocate of the benefits of democratic transition. And now the war against international terrorism has jumped to the top of the agenda, there is an important need to educate potential supporters of terrorism that America is not the 'Great Satan' many believe her to be.

There is one further threat on the horizon. As IO doctrine unfolds, there are those who would see deception as an integral part of winning any future conflict through perception management. Although deception has been an integral part of war-fighting since the Trojan Horse, it has largely been conducted in strict secrecy and on the assumption that it can usually only work once. Emerging IO doctrine places deception alongside other aspects of Influence Attitudes, including PSYOP and possibly even media operations. If that happens, the credibility of both of those activities – which depend upon credibility for their success – will be severely compromised. And if one part of the information operation loses its credibility, then the entire operation will suffer the same fate. 'Our truth', with its basis in democratic values, could be undermined irreparably by the desire to win while avoiding casualties almost at the expense of those values.

This is not to deny the importance of deception in wartime. It is merely to warn of the dangers that were inherent in the deployment, for example, of black propaganda in World War Two. Then, white organisations like the BBC understood that they could not risk their credibility by being tarnished with the black activities of the Political Warfare Executive. It simply wasn't worth it in the long term. One can only hope that the lesson will not be lost on the proponents of Information Operations in the war against Terrorism, although the debacle of the Office of Strategic Influence would suggest otherwise. Take for example a relatively recent twist, namely the notion of SOFTWAR. This is defined as 'the hostile use of global visual media, especially television, to shape another nation's will, by changing its view of reality'.<sup>12</sup> Because IW/IO embraces vulnerabilities as well as offensive opportunities, Serb success with this SOFTWAR concept during the Kosovo conflict, including the use of the Internet,<sup>13</sup> there may be a temptation that instead of just defending against such attacks, there will be a need to plan offensive SOFTWAR strategies in the event of

future conflict. If this is done via the free media, then unless it is kept absolutely secret for an indefinite period of time, the credibility of all other information operations will be seriously undermined.

## Conclusions

Propaganda is a complex business and one which has not been helped by those who define it in terms of it being a 'good' or a 'bad' thing. Propaganda is simply a process of persuasion designed to benefit its originator. The current NATO definition is that it is 'any information, ideas, doctrines or special appeals disseminated to influence the opinion, emotions, attitudes or behaviour of any specified group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly'. This broad concept could just as easily be applied to advertising or public relations. It therefore remains a value-neutral *process*. Value judgments about whether it is in fact a 'good' or a 'bad' thing would more profitably be examined by reference to the *intentions* of those originating the messages. If the intention is to promote aggression and hatred, violation of human rights, persecution of minorities, or denial of free speech or religion, then there is no place for it in the democratic process. But if the intention is to promote democratic values, which survive or fall on the altar of the will of the people, then democracies need not fight shy of the word. However, the main problem arises because propaganda is designed to benefit the interests of the source rather than those of the recipient. This problem diminishes if the desires of the recipient coincide with those of the source. In other words, if a people has elected a government – and has the opportunity to reject it at some future date – then the people in whose name the government rule and its military fight are quite prepared to accept, or reject, the arguments and opinions used to justify their government's actions.

Traditionally, the free democratic media served as a watchdog to ensure that this concordat was happening, and to provide a counter-balance to government arguments where necessary or appropriate. In 'our wars', as we have seen, this tends not to happen as the media and public alike rally behind 'our boys'. The problem is that, with the exception of the Iraqis and the Serbs, we don't fight 'our wars' anymore. This may have something to do with the decline of ideology, or at least of the kind of polarised ideology of the Cold War era. Democracy is in the ascendancy while the number of its enemies in the form of state-actors is in decline. The nature of its enemies is changing to one where transnational factors and sometimes even individual actors pose the greatest dangers. We would expect our professional armed forces to remain professional in the event of a national emergency, and it is appropriate that they should embrace new ways of thinking and new skills in a rapidly changing world in which they might be deployed in humanitarian or other forms of interventions. If their future role is not just to defend democracy but also to promote it, then this could be construed as a new form of 'ideological' attack on those non-democratic actors that constitute its principal enemies. In such a climate, it is essential for them to realise that if they are to be in the business of selling democratic values, they should also beware the dangers of selling them out.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See Antony J. Blinken, 'Now the US Needs to Win the Global War of Ideas', 8 December 2001, International Herald Tribune Online, [www.iht.com](http://www.iht.com).

<sup>2</sup> 'Blair seeks to remove misunderstanding between Muslims, West',  
URL: [www.jang.com.pk/thenews/nov2001-daily/02-11-2001/world/w7.htm](http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/nov2001-daily/02-11-2001/world/w7.htm)

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- <sup>3</sup> See A. Campen and D. Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 2000.
- <sup>4</sup> This term was coined by Winn Schwartau in testimony before the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, on 27 June 1991.
- <sup>5</sup> See the debate on 'Why do they hate us'? on csmonitor.com, 17 October 2001, [www.csmonitor.com](http://www.csmonitor.com)
- <sup>6</sup> Background Briefing on Enemy Denial and Deception, DoD briefing, 24 October 2001. [www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2001/t10242001\\_t1024dd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct2001/t10242001_t1024dd.html)
- <sup>7</sup> 'Rumsfeld Says He May Drop New Office of Influence' By Eric Schmitt, *The New York Times*, 25 February, 2002
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# The Offence of Strategic Influence: Making the Case for Perception Management Operations

A. Garfield

Director, International Centre for Strategic Analyses  
King's College, London  
[andrew.garfield@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.garfield@kcl.ac.uk)

## Abstract:

*In the ongoing 'War against Terrorism', it is absolutely vital that the Perception Management campaign of the United States and its allies be coordinated at the highest possible level, resourced adequately and executed effectively. With the demise of the Office of Strategic Influence within the Pentagon, there is currently no central focus for, or high-level coordination of, Perception Management operations. The individuals tasked with undertaking this activity also lack the necessary skills required to formulate target-appropriate messages and the means needed to deliver such messages to their intended audience. It is therefore vital that a new centrally-controlled Office of Strategic Influence be established, and that it should not answer to an individual department of state. Central funding and re-allocated departmental funding are also essential to ensure that practitioners of this art have the right mix of knowledge, skills and tools to craft, produce and deliver a precise message to the proper audience. Only then can we be sure that we have the capabilities needed to convince others to 'want what we want', which is for them to withdraw their explicit or tacit support from our adversaries, thereby removing the 'oxygen' these individuals must have to survive and prosper.*

## Introduction

In the ongoing 'War against Terrorism', it is absolutely vital that the Perception Management campaign of the United States and its allies be coordinated at the highest possible level, that it be resourced adequately, and executed effectively. Properly co-ordinated, such a campaign could be a war-winning capability. When left uncoordinated, such operations will achieve only modest success, at best, and at worst, could seriously backfire. Even a poorly chosen word, used in the heat of the moment (e.g. 'crusade'), can have significant negative consequences. From the President downward, the messages we send to friends and enemies alike need to be skilfully crafted, carefully coordinated, and appropriate for the target audience, in order to ensure that the maximum positive impact can be achieved.

It is therefore somewhat ironic that at a time when the need for such strategic co-ordination has never been greater, the Office of Strategic Influence at the Pentagon has been disbanded. It is clear that the demise of the OSI was due in part to petty 'Beltway politics'. However, to be fair to some of its detractors, this activity should probably not exist within the Pentagon or any other individual governmental department. Strategic Perception Management operations encompass all areas of government (not just Defence or the State Department), and they need to be managed accordingly.

The OSI was also fatally damaged by popular misconceptions as to its role and function. It is clear from this experience that the case for undertaking Perception Management Operations designed to achieve strategic influence has yet to be fully made. Part of the problem is that the public's perception of such activities is still tainted by association with the Propaganda

and Psychological Warfare campaigns of the past. It is a paradox of our time that both the public and politicians are prepared to tolerate the use of bombs and bullets, but shy away from the use of information as a weapon of war. In part, however, this is probably due to an instinctive realisation that the collateral damage resulting from the misuse of information can in many cases be far greater – looked at in one way – than the damage from kinetic energy weapons.

The OSI has now gone, probably rightly; but we must ensure that the baby is not thrown out with the bath water. Policy makers, the media and the public must be convinced of the need to develop and fully fund the capabilities required to undertake, simultaneously, multi-level (from the tactical to the grand strategic), carefully orchestrated Perception Management Operations.

As part of the debate, this article will aim to provide an overview of Perception Management Operations, highlight existing shortcomings, and recommend improvements to enhance this long-overlooked art.

### **Perception Management - Legacy Attitudes Misconceptions and Misgivings – “Words can never hurt me”?**

Perception Management has only recently been adopted as a post-Cold War term variously used to describe a range of activities including Military Deception, Psychological Warfare (PSYOPS), Propaganda, Media Operations, and Public Information. It is generally viewed as one of the key elements of the relatively new concept of Information Warfare/Operations, along with other activities such as Computer Network Attack and Information Assurance.

It is perhaps this contradictory association with the new and still controversial (Information Warfare) and much older, tainted, activities such as PSYOPS and Propaganda that has created some of the confusion that persists in discussions about this type of activity. In fact, the concept of managing people’s perceptions for ones own benefit is almost as old as the world’s oldest profession, and usually closely linked.

Adversaries across the ages have often sought to confuse an enemy through deception to gain advantage and/or surprise. The Allied campaigns to deceive the Germans as to the real location of forthcoming invasions (Sicily and Normandy) are amongst the most famous examples of Strategic Deception in modern times.

The use of false or distorted information (i.e., Propaganda) has regularly been used in an attempt to undermine the morale of an enemy, to bolster the will of ones own side, or to inflame hatred and animosity. The vilification of the Germans during World War One is a vivid example of the use of propaganda. More recently, the propaganda campaign mounted against the Tutsis in Rwanda, which resulted in the brutal deaths of so many people, graphically demonstrated the negative power of information.

There are also many examples of a protagonist using selected messages in an attempt to convince an opponent or third party to adopt another, more favourable course of action. Such messages may include an articulation of ones own case, threats, and/or offers and inducements. Psychological campaigns of this nature have ranged from the laughable radio broadcasts of Tokyo Rose, to the most recent Alliance leaflet drops in Afghanistan. In each case, information has been used as the weapon, although success has not always been

forthcoming. Indeed, some ill-conceived campaigns have actually achieved the opposite effect to the one intended.

It is the exploitation of information for extremely harmful purposes, and the unintended negative collateral effects of poorly-mounted campaigns that have created such deep public unease at the idea of using information as a weapon. Such public concerns are valid, even if they are based on legacy attitudes, and therefore need to be addressed, if Perception Management as a strategic concept is to have a future. It is therefore, vital to separate the modern expression of this activity from its antecedence. The most important message we must communicate to the public is that Perception Management is not Propaganda. It is the articulation of our message in a form that a target audience will understand and that is intended to change their point-of-view to one that is more favourable to our own position.

As Josef Joffe, editor of *Die Zeit* has written, ‘today the most interesting types of power do not come out of the barrel of a gun’ and that a much bigger payoff can be achieved by ‘getting others to want what you want’.<sup>1</sup> Perception Management operations can be one of the primary ways of achieving that objective.

### **Military Ambivalence**

Another problem, which has inhibited the development of strategic Perception Management capabilities, is the fact that activities such as PSYOPS have traditionally been the preserve of the military and intelligence communities. Both generally have shown little appetite for this art beyond tactical campaigns aimed at inducing an opponent’s troops to surrender or to desert. There are notable exceptions of course, including the US led information campaign aimed at undermining Communism during the Cold War, but most of these capabilities were allowed to erode once that ‘war’ had been won.

For most of the 1990s, public misconceptions and misgivings have often been matched by official indifference and even some hostility towards Perception Management in general, and its component parts (most notably PSYOPS) in particular. For example, in the UK the term PSYOPS was actually discarded in the late 1990’s in favour of the more generic term ‘the Information Campaign’.

Given this largely tactical focus, not enough thought or effort has been dedicated to developing operational and strategic level concepts of operations and related doctrine. In the case of Strategic Deception, too many have been seduced by the claims of the Intelligence Community with regard to improvements in collection techniques and have assumed that the opportunities for Strategic Deception no longer exist. In fact, the surfeit of information available through better intelligence, and as a direct result of the information revolution, can actually make it harder – not easier – to deduce either our or an adversary’s intentions.

Unfortunately, as a result of this military ambivalence, only very limited resources and personnel have been committed to Perception Management. PSYOPS units for example remain on the under-funded fringe, usually within the Intelligence Community rather than a combat arm, and with an over-reliance on reservists to reach even a minimum wartime establishment. This trend has at least been arrested over the last few years, as the concept of Information Operations in general has gained credence. However, such units remain under-resourced, lack some of the key skills required to undertake such operations, and are generally focused on the tactical level. Even the United States is still employing capabilities

such a Commando Solo that are now some years behind the technological and conceptual power curve.

### **National Vacuum: The Argument for Doing More**

If Alliance military establishments have been somewhat ambivalent towards Perception Management, most governments have not even given the subject a first – let alone second – thought. Things did begin to change a bit during the Kosovo conflict, but it took the events of 11th September to generate real interest in this capability. It is ironic that politicians who are surrounded by ‘spin doctors’ and ‘communications directors’, have been so slow to realise the value of strategic Perception Management capabilities as another means of implementing national foreign and security policies by ‘getting others to want what we want’.

### **Managing Perceptions in the War on Terrorism**

The events of 11<sup>th</sup> September have brutally highlighted to Americans how much they are misunderstood, envied and even hated by a diverse range of groups, particularly in the Muslim world. How can it be that a country that so many wish to visit, or would choose to live in, is so reviled? America in particular and the world in general has also discovered the true extent of the threat posed by the Al Qaeda terrorist network.

There are of course many conventional anti-terrorist techniques that can be employed to diminish the immediate threat posed by this network. However, history has shown time and again that a successful campaign must include a coordinated strategic Perception Management operation aimed at reaching the hearts and minds of those people who directly or indirectly support the terrorist or who are simply sympathetic to the ‘cause’. Such an operation is also vital to develop a better understanding of – and discourse between – the ‘Alliance’ and those who currently do not share our point of view about this crisis or who clearly misunderstand our society. A campaign of this sort can also serve as a means of maintaining wider international support for the ‘War Against Terrorism’ and to cement Alliance cohesion.

At the operational level, activities of this type can foment divisions within a terrorist network, undermine the moral of its members (particularly those on the fringe), and drive a wedge between the network and its support base. This is particularly true of third-party supporters whose loyalty is often questionable. Without this effort, a network can actually be defeated militarily, but still maintain support for the ‘cause’ whilst in a period of hibernation. Drawing on such support, it can eventually regroup and re-emerge stronger, smarter and even more deadly.

Some political and security experts often equate a terrorist network to the Hydra: cut off one head and several more emerge to replace it. However, even the Hydra only had one heart, and the heart of a terrorist movement is its support base. Separate it from that support, and it will eventually wither and die. Of course, direct action (military, law enforcement, intelligence, political, economic activities) will assist in this effort in the short term. Long-term success, however, will only come when such support is withheld willingly because the people providing it have been convinced (through reasoned argument, inducements and/or threats) that it is no longer in their best interests to do so.

### **Recent Efforts Achieve Limited Success**

Prior to 11 September, most Perception Management operations had been low-level and low-key. During the Gulf War, in the Balkans and in Sierra Leone, traditional leaflet drops and tactical radio/TV broadcasts have been used in an effort to undermine the resolve of enemy

combatants and to reduce support for their actions amongst the local communities. Particularly during the Gulf War, this approach achieved considerable success, and a large number of enemy troops were persuaded to desert or surrender. This effort has also been extended to the wider civilian populations who have been party to a particular crisis. The aim has been to win their support for 'alliance' actions, to encourage them to challenge a reviled regime, or to encourage them to endorse/accept the terms of a peace accord. Some limited success was also achieved in this respect.

The tools used by the professionals involved in these operations are not that dissimilar to those used for much of the last 75 years. Leaflet drops remain one of the principle means of communicating with adversary personnel, and still have considerable utility. Radio broadcasts and localised TV transmissions are also used, but the range of such transmissions are limited, and production techniques generally fall some way short even of that of local commercial radio and TV stations. The Commando Solo aircraft remains the pinnacle of US military capabilities despite its age and technical limitations.<sup>2</sup>

At the national level, we are largely reliant on commercial broadcasters and the media to communicate our message to international audiences. These broadcasters, particularly the BBC World Service and CNN, have global reach, international respect and an audience in target countries. However, these organisations rightly defend their independence, which does limit their utility. Use of local and foreign language broadcasters is far less common and remains an under-utilised resource.

Since 11 September, far greater effort has been invested in strategic Perception Management operations, with President Bush, Prime Minister Blair and other senior officials regularly broadcasting the Alliance message to international audiences. Some use has even been made of local networks/broadcasters such as *Al-Jazeera*. However, Osama Bin Laden has been equally adept at using the media to promote his cause, using the sort of language that his target audience better understand. In reality, the alliance message has failed to penetrate the key Muslim audiences. In particular, we have failed to exploit the various formal and informal means of communication used in these areas.

## **Operational Shortcomings**

**Lack of Co-ordination.** Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of a small, dedicated group of professionals, recent Perception Management operations have generally been undertaken in a somewhat haphazard manner, with insufficient co-ordination between each level of political and military command, between agencies and services, and between the allies. Perhaps most importantly of all, co-ordination between Media Operations, Public Information and Perception Management operations still leaves much to be desired. As a result, these operations have lacked focus and have sometimes been undermined by the actions or words of others. For example, the media campaign mounted to bolster domestic support in the US has on occasions alienated Alliance partners or provided ammunition for an adversary. President Bush's use of the word 'crusade', whilst perfectly acceptable to a Western audience, caused considerable damage in the Arab world because of its negative historical connotations.

Certainly, the first images released by the DoD showing the arrival of prisoners at Camp X-Ray, were not only acceptable to – but even welcomed by – a domestic audience still in great pain from the 11 September attacks. However, these same images created considerable disquiet amongst allies, and provided grist for the mill for our enemies. Secretary of Defence

Rumsfield argued that the picture in question was just ‘a moment in time’ and assured his audience that the prisoners were being well-treated. Unfortunately, the reality of an instantaneous global media is that such images can reach the wrong audience just as quickly as the intended recipients. As a result, in this particular case, it is an apparent image of brutality that far too many will remember, rather than the reality of their detention and treatment

### **Inappropriate Message**

For a Perception Management campaign to succeed, the message must appeal to and be understood by the target audience and must take full account of their ethnic biases and culturally-influenced perceptions. This is particularly challenging when trying to reach a domestic audience, but it is far more difficult when using a foreign language to reach a culturally and ethnically different population. When the message itself is simple (‘surrender or die’), there is little room for ambiguity and mistakes are not so common; but the more complex the issue, the more error-prone we seem to become.

Far too often, the message being delivered has been unduly simplistic, definitely not culturally sympathetic, and inadvertently distorted by our own values and notions of right and wrong. Take for example the early leaflets dropped in Afghanistan. These vilified the Taliban and Al Qaeda and painted the terrorists who carried out the attacks on 11 September as cowards. It is understandable that the American people viewed the terrorists in that light, but many moderate Afghans and other Muslims did not view the terrorist in that way. From their perspective, given that there was considerable sympathy for the cause the terrorist purported to represent, flying planes into buildings and certain death was a brave – if misguided – act. It is therefore vital that we understand such sentiments and develop our messages accordingly.

We may have had much more success had we focused on the fact that these terrible acts fly in the face of Islamic teachings. Certainly this approach appears to have worked for the French when interrogating an Al Qaeda member suspected of involvement in the attacks. The use of Muslim clerics to convince this terrorist that he had acted against God’s will was a masterstroke. By way of contrast, most Muslims take a rather different view of our ‘heroic’ pilots flying well-armed bombers, which drop their ordnance from high altitudes, out of range of enemy fire or of the operators of cruise missiles fired from secure locations hundreds of miles distant. It is a profound truism that perception is reality, and it is this reality that we must target.

Perhaps the hardest part of conducting a successful Perception Management operation is overcoming our own sensibilities, so that we can put ourselves into the mind of the target audience. Again, the reality of the global media comes into play. The messages we send to our target audience are likely to be beamed back to our domestic populations even before they reach all of their intended recipients, possibly with a negative response at home. No one ever said this type of operation was easy, but that is not an excuse to do nothing. The best way to avoid mistakes of this type is through co-ordination, adequate resources, and the right skill sets.

### **Inadequate Skill Base**

It is understandable that mistakes are made, given the very narrow pool from which our operators are drawn. Perception Management teams are usually staffed by young, predominantly male, conservative, Anglo-Saxon or Latin-influenced, Christian, military

personnel and middle-class civil servants with a similar background. It is fair to say that such individuals often fail to connect with their own domestic audiences, let alone with Pushtun tribesman on the North West Frontier. Also, the first time many of these personnel come into serious contact with a target audience is when an unexpected crisis such as 11 September literally blows up in their faces. Prior to that attack, how much knowledge had been amassed on the Afghan target, for instance?

Put simply, most of these personnel do not have all the skills and depth of knowledge required to undertake sophisticated Perception Management operations. What they need is a range of skills covering such disciplines as marketing, advertising, journalism, theatrical production and broadcasting. It is not enough to take service personnel or civil servants and send these individuals on Government-run courses. One only has to look at the experts on Madison Avenue, in the news media and in Hollywood to see what is actually required. An undergraduate education in a related topic, followed by a long apprenticeship in the industry, is usually the minimum that is needed to be successful in these disciplines.

Through no fault of their own, many personnel also lack experience and knowledge of target countries, cultures and religions and many do not even speak a second European language, let alone a language such as Farsi. Without access to such knowledge, how can a message be crafted that we can be sure is going to have the required positive impact on our target audience? It is also vital that the dynamics of human psychology and anthropology are also better understood. This is a science that we have, thus far, failed to fully understand or exploit, with one or two notable exceptions.

### **Inferior Means**

With more effort and additional resources, we could ensure that our Perception Management campaign is effectively coordinated at all levels, and is more skilfully crafted by highly-trained personnel and contractors. Yet it will still fail to reach its target audience, if we continue to rely on the extremely limited production and delivery means currently available.

In the first instance, the programmes, broadcasts, and messages that are currently produced rarely reach the same production standards of commercial broadcasters. They also do not adequately replicate the format that the target audience is conditioned to hearing or seeing. We should not underestimate the sophistication of the viewing and listening public, even in Third World countries. One of the main reasons for the great success of the *Al-Jazeera* news network is that it presents the news in a form that appeals to its Middle Eastern audience in a way that CNN International can never do. Perhaps only the BBC World Service, of all the Western broadcasters, has been able to come close to matching this appeal.

Such programming also needs to be entertaining. A boring message is one that will be ignored. In other words, we have to do whatever it takes to get them to watch or listen – to tune in, not turn off. This principal is well understood by advertisers, which is why they will pay exorbitant fees to broadcast a commercial during the Super Bowl, but not during late-night reruns.

Once a programme has been produced, it needs to be broadcast into the target area and be picked up by whatever receiver those people possess. It may also need to overcome jamming by a hostile regime. Currently, our Perception Management teams lack the means to reach many audiences using radio, TV or the Internet. This situation is lamentable, given that others on tiny budgets are able to broadcast into countries we would like to reach. There is,

for example, a small group of expatriate Iranians in California, who operate a very popular TV station that broadcasts into Iran using a commercial satellite on a budget of less than \$3 million *per annum*. We are well behind the power curve, even compared to this effort.

## **Recommendations for the Future**

### **Central Co-ordination – Resurrecting the Office of Strategic Influence**

The OSI is dead – long live the OSI! It is clear that central co-ordination of strategic Perception Management is essential. It is also clear that the organisation tasked to undertake this role cannot reside within a particular department of state. It must also be de-conflicted from other associated activities such as Media Operations and Public Information.

A new Office of Strategic Influence therefore needs to be established, possibly controlled from the centre by a National Information Advisor with similar authority to the National Security Advisor. Below this position, each Department (e.g. Defence, State, Justice etc) would also need a central function to coordinate the diverse activities that each would undertake, to report to the OSI and to convey/implement OSI policy. Whilst this author is not normally an advocate of increased government bureaucracy, he strongly feels that such an organisation is a necessary evil in order to make the case effectively for such activities and to ensure that the right message always reaches its intended target with minimal collateral damage.

### **Human Factors Analysis**

Developing an in-depth understanding of target audiences is an essential prerequisite for any Perception Management operation. We must be able to understand every nuance of language, culture, ethnicity, religion, faith or other ideological underpinning, social structures, significant societal and personal influences, history, political system, education, economy, psychological makeup, and any other relevant human factor. To do this, our intelligence community in particular must invest heavily in developing a comprehensive Human Factors analysis capability. A limited capability does now exist, but it remains over-stretched and under-resourced.<sup>3</sup>

A human factors analysis organisation should not simply employ more intelligence analysts; it must include experts from disciplines as diverse as psychology, anthropology, social sciences and academia. This enhanced team also requires specialist tools to enable it to better collect vast quantities of largely open-source information from the target country/region, and to translate that material from its original language. The Intelligence Community must also understand that much of the knowledge they will need already exists within Academia, Industry and the private-sector. Much greater use therefore needs to be made of these under-utilised resources. This is particularly true during a crisis in a region that is not normally accorded a high priority.

These teams also need to be able to study target audiences in near-real-time in order to adjust a message to suit the moment, and to assess the impact that an operation is having. Perception Management Battle Damage Assessment is just as essential as it is for any other type of operation.

### **Acquiring the Necessary Skills**

Military personnel and civil servants can develop some of the required skills internally; they must, however, also draw from a much more diverse ‘gene pool’. For example, an extraordinary mix of military, civil servants and civilian professionals undertook the hugely successful British PSYOPS and deception campaigns of World War Two. This approach

brought skills, experience and creativity that the military and government could never have provided alone. This pattern needs to be followed again; although, without the benefit of conscription, this approach will be costly.

The marketing, advertising, media and entertainment experts on Madison Avenue and in Hollywood demonstrate on a daily basis that it is possible to reach out and touch audiences in the far-flung corners of the globe. They do so with a level of sophistication far in excess of anything the military or Government currently has at its disposal, and with budgets to match. They employ all of the tools of their trade, including in-depth local market research and market-testing to refine their message or product in order to reach precisely the right audience. They also spend a great deal of money to promote a 'product'. The marketing budget for a movie, for example, is often well in excess of the production costs of that film. We must develop and/or buy in these same skills and realise that success cannot be achieved on-the-cheap. However, relative to the cost of the alternatives, a successful 'hearts-and-minds' campaign can be extremely cost-effective.

### **Acquiring the Necessary Means**

A significant contributor to the success that these civilian Perception Management experts can achieve is the means that they have available to communicate their message. They must therefore have the tools needed to produce programmes, videos, movies and commercials that have the highest production standards. They should also be able to broadcast globally, either by buying airtime (on local terrestrial networks, via Satellite, and increasingly via the Internet), or by acquiring these capabilities for themselves.

Chuck de Caro (a former CNN reporter) has long advocated the operation of a commercial satellite TV station by the US Government. He suggests that more than 90% of the content of such a station would be entertainment-based, but this could be interspersed with balanced news coverage that carries the whole story and not a distorted version of it. Even the entertainment content can deliver a positive image of United States, if carefully chosen to appeal to the right audience. As Joseph Nye (Dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government) has recently stated 'generally, the global reach of American culture helps to enhance America's soft power'.<sup>4</sup>

Whilst de Caro's idea does not come cheap, relative to the budget for a single weapon such as the Crusader artillery system, this proposal could be a highly cost-effective means of achieving real strategic influence. At the very least, we need to invest in 21<sup>st</sup> Century versions of existing capabilities such as Command Solo and in greater exploitation of the Internet. The decreased cost of communications should be a tool we use as well as the terrorist does. If politicians can now direct-call millions of voters, why can't we reach out in a similar way, and over the heads-of-governments, to our target audiences. (As an aside, we also need to develop capabilities for countering negative broadcasts, as our adversaries have already shown how adept they are at exploiting the media to deliver their message.)

### **Conclusions**

The advocates of Perception Management operations are faced with a daunting task. We must first convince our own sceptical publics and politicians of the necessity to exert real strategic influence, as part of the 'War Against Terrorism', and to then fund the capabilities needed to achieve that objective. The key is to dispel outdated perceptions of what this type of operation is all about. We will do that by better informing the public as to what our goals and objectives are, and by providing them with insights into the methods and means that we

would employ. At the beginning of World War Two, the British dropped leaflets onto the German population. When the British media asked to view those leaflets they were informed that this type of operation was “classified” and the details could not be disclosed. Such attitudes were counter-productive then, and are also futile today. The message being delivered is probably on CNN even before it is read by most of the target audience. More openness is therefore essential.

Once we have made our case, we must ensure that such activities are coordinated from the centre by someone with sufficient authority to set national policy and override, if necessary, the decisions of lesser authorities such as the DoD and State Department. A new Office of Strategic Influence is therefore needed, and it is needed now. Central funding and re-allocated departmental funding is also essential to ensure that Perception Management operators have the right mix of knowledge, skills and tools to craft, produce and deliver a precise message to the proper audience. Only then can we be sure that we have the capabilities needed to convince others to ‘want what we want’, which is for them to withdraw their explicit or tacit support from our adversaries, thereby removing the ‘oxygen’ these individuals must have to survive and prosper.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Quoted in Joseph Nye, ‘The new Rome meets the new barbarians’, *The Economist*, 23-29 March 2002, p. 24.
- <sup>2</sup> See Chuck deCaro, ‘SOFTWARE’. in Campen, Dearth, and Goodden (eds.), *Cyberwar: Security, Strategy and Conflict in the Information Age*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 1996, pp. 203-218.
- <sup>3</sup> See: Stirling & Dearth, ‘Human Factors as an Allied Intelligence Issue’, in Campen and Dearth (eds.) *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 2000, pp. 119-124.
- <sup>4</sup> Joseph Nye, ‘The new Rome meets the new barbarians’, *The Economist*, 23-29 March 2002, pp. 23-25.

# Information Operations, Public Diplomacy & Spin: The United States & the Politics of Perception Management

R. Brown

Senior Lecturer, Institute of Communications Studies  
University of Leeds

## Abstract:

*The evolution of Information Operations doctrine in the United States is placing more weight upon Perception Management, particularly at the strategic level. This paper argues that if such Perception Management efforts are to be effective they will need to work in conjunction with the State Department and its associated agencies and with the President's communication staff. Such collaboration will require overcoming institutional boundaries and different concepts of what Perception Management involves. This paper examines the place of perception management within military IO doctrine before looking at current debates over the place of public diplomacy in contemporary foreign policy and looking at the role of the White House communications organisation in international perception management.*

On 19 February 2002, *The New York Times* carried a report headlined 'Pentagon Readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad'. This report outlined how in the wake of 11 September the Department of Defense had created the 'Office of Strategic Influence' tasked to 'influence foreign audiences' using means ranging from press releases to deception (Dao and Schmitt 2002). The result of this report was a storm of criticism in the media from journalists suspicious of the agenda of the new organisation and from critics within the DoD who feared the credibility of the US would be damaged. In less than a week it was being reported that the White House was 'furious' over the plan and the Secretary of Defense had disbanded the office (Allen 2002, Ricks 2002). The story of the OSI serves to illustrate the issues discussed in this paper. It is recognized across the US government that change in the global information environment is creating new opportunities for perception management. However, deep-seated institutional and cultural differences across government and beyond place major obstacles in the way of effective exploitation of these opportunities. In particular, the US needs to come to terms with the relationship between strategic Information Operations (IO), Public Diplomacy (PD) and political spin.

Firstly, what do we understand by Perception Management? The US Department of Defense Dictionary defines it as:

Actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, and objective reasoning as well as to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviours and official actions favourable to the originator's objectives. In various ways, perception management combines truth projection, operations security, cover and deception, and psychological operations (DoD, 2002).

Leaving the final sentence to one side, this is simply a statement that perception management (PM) implies giving people information to shape that way that they see the world in the hope that this will affect how they behave. Almost any political activity, not to mention

advertising, can be seen in these terms. The connection between politics and persuasion is hardly new. Aristotle was not only the author of *The Politics* but also of *The Art of Rhetoric*. As we will see, much of the difficulty that the US faces in coming to terms with the Information Age comes from different conceptions of what Perception Management activities involve, how to do them, and what means are permissible in the pursuit of Perception Management.

### **The Evolving Infosphere and Strategic Information Operations**

The renewed interest in perception management reflects the growing reliance of organizations of all types on computer networks and the penetration of the global political sphere by flows of information. Compared with 10 years ago, the world is a more seamless informational space, as we move from a world of distinct national informational spaces into a more transnational information sphere.

More specifically, renewed interest in Perception Management within the US defence establishment reflects two developments. Firstly, there is the evolution of IO doctrine. Although IO is often identified with computer networks it has a much broader application. Attacks on computer networks are attempts to damage the opponents ability to gather, process and use information; logically measures which shape an opponent's understanding of the world have a similar effect. This means that everything from statements to the press to sophisticated efforts at deception fell into the category of perception management. The development of the IO paradigm turned a range of traditional military activities; PSYOPS, public affairs (PA), civil affairs (CA) and deception from isolated activities into a coherent whole. (Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) 1998). Secondly, the experience of Western military forces in operations such as in Bosnia and Kosovo underlined the importance of Perception Management within IO. The ability to shape perceptions of the situation was seen a crucial both for military success but also for managing complex situations (Combelles-Siegel 1998, Thomas 2000)

Thus as doctrine has developed IO is seen to consist of two elements. The first is 'influence operations' embracing PSYOPS, Deception and PA, while the second is 'cyber operations' taking in all Computer Network Operations (CNO) (Summe 2000). This conception underlines the importance of the human element of IO as a recent DoD directive puts it a 'primary focus of IO...is ultimately on decision-makers' (DoD 2001: 1)

Within the doctrine Information Operations can be conducted at strategic, operational and tactical levels. In the official lexicon strategic IO are defined as 'activities directed by the NCA to achieve national objectives by influencing...an adversary's or potential adversary's national power while protecting similar friendly elements'. Operational IO 'are conducted to achieve or support campaign or major operational objectives' while tactical IO 'involve achieving specific tactical objectives'. (JCS 1998).

These definitions reflect standard military concepts but the logic of the contemporary information environment tends to give weight to strategic IO. In an era of global media a target of perception management efforts can check what is being said by US policy-makers and reported on CNN against what information sources in the area of operations are saying. Using operational IO without regard for the total picture is likely to be unsuccessful. At the same time, in a complex media environment even tactical perception management may require access to sophisticated media such as television and the Internet, rather than loudspeakers and leaflets. (Defense Science Board (DSB) 2000: 9-10, Collins 1999: 1).

The growing emphasis within the military establishment on strategic IO also gives greater weight to the role of perception management in peacetime and crisis situations. Indeed perception management, for instance through the projection of an image of US determination and capability, may prevent the outbreak of armed conflict through deterring resistance to US objectives (JCS 1998: II 7-10). The US military establishment has developed a rigorous and relatively coherent concept of Information Operations that is placing significant weight on the ability to shape the perceptions of target groups and opponents.

Although only mentioned in passing in JP 3-13, it is argued that strategic IO requires co-ordination with other government agencies (Summe 2000, McNamara 2000). Although the DSB notes that while policy documents and doctrine may call for coordination 'military PSYOP often conduct their information activities oblivious to the higher level perception management efforts emanating from the Department of State and National Security Council' (DSB 2000, 17).

### **Public Diplomacy and International Public Information**

This need to co-ordinate implies engagement with the perception management efforts conducted by the State Department and its associated agencies. Just as the military has been attempting to come to terms with the information age, the diplomatic community has been doing the same although it lags a good way behind in developing the necessary responses. Traditionally information activities during peace time and those directed at friendly countries have been the province of public diplomacy organizations, the State Department, US Information Agency and a variety of broadcasting organizations including Voice of America, Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe. Public Diplomacy is defined as an activity that 'seeks to promote the national interest of the United States through understanding, informing and influencing foreign audiences' (State Department 1997).

The roots of public diplomacy contain their own ambiguities. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the US rebuilt the mechanisms for international propaganda that it had shut down at the end of the Second World War. The paradigm governing these activities was PSYOPS in a civilian guise. The aim was to defeat communism within the borders of the Soviet bloc and outside. Particularly in the first Eisenhower administration, PSYOPS was seen as key weapon to undermine the hold of communism in Eastern Europe. The emergence of Cold War PSYOPS was treated with some nervousness; legislation prevented material funded with these budgets being spent on activities within the borders of the United States. This reflected a fear that the organizations created to wage the Cold War could become instruments of government propaganda within the US – a fear that continues to influence discussion of public diplomacy (Hixson 1997).

In the wake of the Hungarian uprising in 1956, this PSYOPS paradigm had to be reassessed. PSYOPS was accused of having created hopes that could not be fulfilled and the new strategy was to seek to bring about change in the Soviet Union as a long term goal (Hixson 1997). More broadly the international communications agencies began to see their long-term goal in spreading American (liberal) values rather than defeating communism. This could be done through the cultivation of credibility; in VOA in particular the organization came to see itself as involved in objective journalism rather than information warfare (Lord 1998). This outlook was challenged to some extent with the Reagan administration but it indicates that the existence of two views of American public diplomacy.

The first view is basically instrumental – that PD should be concerned with short-term goals that directly advance national interests. The second is more concerned with what Arnold Wolfers termed ‘milieu goals’, that is to say, promoting a particular type of international order. In the case of the US this is one dominated by liberal values and institutions (Wolfers 1962: 73-77). In this perspective, the long-term goals of policy are better advanced by giving an honest warts-and-all picture of the US, even if this will have a negative impact in the short term. There is no automatic inconsistency between these positions; activities to achieve each end can reinforce each other but equally they can work at cross-purposes. In particular a focus on short-term objectives can fatally damage the long-term cultivation of credibility and trust. Here there is a potential tension with the military concept of IO with its emphasis on direct achievement of specific, concrete goals.

The current status of public diplomacy with the US foreign policy community is ambiguous. On the one hand a growing number of reports and analyses argue that in a wired world public diplomacy is central to foreign policy. In a wired world diplomacy can reach and influence a whole new set of publics (e.g., Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 1998, Metzl 1999, Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (ACPD) 1998). On the other hand the situation in practice is less positive. In October 1999 the United States Information Agency was integrated into the State Department. This could be seen as an attempt to assure better co-ordination between traditional diplomats and public diplomacy specialists. However a year after the merger the ACPD's annual report argued that the result of the merger had been a downgrading of the public diplomacy function in the integrated organization (ACPD 2000, Metzl 2001).

As the integration of the USIA was being implemented a second change to the public diplomacy organization took place. This was the promulgation of Presidential Decision Directive 68 in April 1999. PDD-68 mandated the creation of an International Public Information Co-ordinating Group (IPICG) that brought together representatives of the Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US Agency for International Development, the National Security Council and other agencies to co-ordinate information activities. There was explicit reference to the need to improve the use of information during crises such as those that had taken place in Bosnia and Rwanda. The State Department chaired the group and hosted its secretariat (Barber 1999a). Publicly available information about the origins of the IPICG is limited and the actual directive remains classified. It has been reported that the initiative was seen as part of a developing national information strategy instigated by Richard A. Clarke, then the President's National Co-ordinator for Security, Infrastructure and Counter-terrorism (Munro 1999).

The leaking of information about PDD-68 to the press triggered a furore that illustrates the sensitivities surrounding perception management. Critics from both the left and right accused the Administration of developing a system that would attempt to shape the domestic news potentially on a partisan basis: a claim that was adamantly denied by the White House (Barber 1999b, 1999c, Isenberg 1999). The Chair of the ACPD came to the defence of the IPICG making the link with their 1998 report that advocated such an initiative (Pachios 1999). In October 1999 there were indications of predictable political conflicts over the scope and role of IPICG. Should it play a narrow co-ordinating role or should it take on a broader more active one (Barber 1999d)? The extent of the group's activities remains unclear.

Via its public diplomacy programmes broadly defined the State Department plays a central role in efforts to shape perceptions of the United States. However, the diplomatic perception

management community is hampered by lack of resources, in particular the ability to respond effectively to contingencies is limited (CSIS 1998). State is also seen as unable work effectively with outside agencies (Kiehl 2001).

### **The Political Dimension**

The third group of actors within the US government important to perceptual management are the public affairs and communications personnel who represent the president. The inclusion of this group in this discussion may seem unorthodox but there is no doubt that they are becoming increasingly important in international perception management although their role sits uneasily with both military and diplomatic concepts of PM. Military doctrine assumes that instructions for strategic IO and PSYOPS come from the national command authority, and are then executed by the military in co-operation with other agencies. In the public diplomacy community there is a more active suspicion. One view is that PD activities need to be insulated from perceived partisan influences, i.e., that public diplomacy has to be seen as a politically neutral activity (eg Haley 1999). Another view (which actually contradicts the first) is that propaganda is acceptable abroad but not permitted in domestic politics (Barber 1999b).

These criticisms ignore the fact that the political leadership is already directly involved. Firstly, senior governmental figures, particularly the president, are highly visible international spokespersons for the United States. In a relatively seamless information space their statements and actions are the most visible expressions of what America is and its positions. International audiences know what the US leadership says to domestic audiences. Actions taken because of their domestic effect are visible globally. Secondly, White House practice is already to become more actively involved in international perception management activities in both the Kosovo Crisis and the War on Terrorism.

It is now clear that because it was widely believed that Serbia would concede after a few days of bombing there was no IO/PM strategy in place in advance of the Kosovo Campaign. As the bombing continued NATO struggled to achieve domination of the information battle space. Attempting to co-ordinate multiple military headquarters, NATO's governments and the diversity of Washington across a seven hour time difference proved to be a challenge that the Alliance was poorly prepared for. In consequence Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's spokesman and head of his press office took the initiative to encourage NATO governments, including the White House to provide additional personnel for the NATO press office and to begin daily conference calls between representatives of government press offices (Campbell 1999, Trimble 2000, House of Commons 1999). During the War on Terrorism Campbell, now Director of Communications and Strategy, again took the initiative to create Coalition Information Centres in Islamabad, London and Washington co-ordinate media operations across three continents (DeYoung 2001). We will return to the reasons for this in a moment but the essential point is that in coalition operations IO related activities have to be co-ordinated not just within governments but across them.

The national leadership are the most visible representatives of any state. Failing to coordinate what the political leadership is saying with military or diplomatic perception management efforts can be extremely damaging. For instance Bill Clinton's public exclusion of a ground option at the beginning of the Kosovo campaign is seen as having undermined the coercive strategy aimed at Serbia (Halberstam 2001: 424). However, there is a much more positive reason for engaging with the political specialists: their expertise in dealing with a mediated political environment. Political communications specialists have to attempt to dominate a

highly contested informational battle-space every day of the week for years on end. The increasing penetration of the global information space by media organizations is tending to make the international political sphere more like domestic political spheres. Clausewitz argued that war is the continuation of politics. As politics changes so does the nature of war (Clausewitz 1976: 586-93). War can now be seen as the continuation of a mediated politics where the relative insulation of military and political realms that existed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century has eroded (Clark 2001: 8). In this environment the skills of political communicators are extremely valuable.

## Challenges

The new international information environment makes information operations more important but they can only be effective if they are coordinated within governments and across the members of any coalition. However, the challenges that need to be met if this is to be achieved are significant.

There are three main challenges: First, to understand the complexity of the new informational battle-space; second, to come to terms with an environment where a growing part of perceptual management must be conducted via media organizations or in competition with them; third, to overcome the legacy of institutional fragmentation and diverse approaches to PM.

The global information space is simultaneously becoming more seamless and more complex. Relative to the past the world is increasingly a single informational space; actions that are directed at one target audience will be picked up by other audiences. As the 'infospace' integrates, it becomes more complex. It is still fragmented by access to media, by language, by consumption habits of its audiences. New media change the relative effectiveness of PM tools for instance international radio broadcasting are losing their effectiveness as domestic media environments become more competitive: television comes to supplant radio listening and more sophisticated print media compete for attention with strategic IO products (DSB 2000: 13). Whereas IO operators in the past could focus on relatively limited and well specified targets, they now need to understand many different potential audiences in terms of channels that will reach them and messages that will persuade them. R.S. Zaharna draws a contrast between the surefooted public symbolism of UK-US relations in the wake of September 11, in contrast with the hamfistedness of US-Arab public diplomacy (Zaharna 2001). Strategic IO needs to be able to draw on knowledge of markets and cultures on a global basis.

The limited ability and willingness of the US to conduct PD in the Middle East in the wake of September 11 reflected both problems of understanding the media environment as well as the cultural context. Over the past decade satellite Arabic language trans-national television has become a key medium in the region, and this has eroded the audience for, and reach of, US and Western radio broadcasting (Broder 2001). This new media environment provided a fertile channel for the dissemination of anti-American messages across the region.

While dealing with the complexity of the new informational space will be a demanding professional challenge this pales into insignificance with challenges of working through the media and coping with institutional conflicts. In the past, military and diplomatic operators have been able to rely on access to media that they control in future. Contemporary and future IO will often have to be conducted via media organizations that are not under the

control of the operators or where there are sophisticated and credible media competitors. This raises fundamental issues about the appropriate approach to PM.

Some of these issues are illustrated by the US response to the Qatar-based *Al-Jazeera* satellite television channel. In the period since the launch of the channel in the mid-1990s, US observers have welcomed the challenge that the station poses to the state-controlled media in the Middle East (Friedman 2001). While *Al-Jazeera* models itself on the BBC – many of its staff were employees of an ill fated BBC venture in the early 1990s – it serves a region of the world where hostility to Israel and the US are endemic, and its content reflects this. US efforts to rebut the views expressed were limited until late October. At the same time the US began to put diplomatic pressure on Qatar to rein in *Al-Jazeera* (Whitaker and Soueif 2001, Timmerman 2002, Anonymous 2001). The latter step to some extent undercuts the former. The reaction to this pressure was predictably taken as more evidence of American hypocrisy. American claims to support free speech were seen as self-serving and hollow. From an instrumental perspective such actions make perfect sense. Removing an outlet for enemy IO is clearly beneficial. From a milieu perspective the broader reaction can be seen as damaging the broader US ‘brand’

This is an area where both military and diplomatic operators can learn from political communications specialists. For them, operating via the news media is the norm. There are broadly three strings to their bow. First: media monitoring and rapid rebuttal. This involves real time surveillance of the media environment to identify what is being reported and how combined with the willingness to contact media organizations to challenge, on air or behind the scenes, what is being reported. This can result in media outlets dropping incorrect reports or at least having to report the rebuttal. Secondly, there is a daily cycle of activities, news releases, photo opportunities, interview availabilities, and video news releases all aimed to communicate a single message of the day. Monitoring and rebuttal aims to restrict an opponent's ability to set the media agenda and to open more space for the positive message. The third element is a process of strategic planning and co-ordination that seeks to project these activities into the future and across government. Strategic success emerges from the cumulation of daily media engagements. This paradigm combines the kind of planned communications activities found in advertising, PSYOPS and much PD with an extremely aggressive public affairs operation that actively seeks to influence the news agenda. These operations are constrained by the fact that since it operates through the media it is the journalists that control access to the audience. Hence the communicators must provide material that is interesting and credible. Contrary to popular perception ‘spin’ must deal in truth. Spin seeks to accentuate some aspects of reality rather than others while avoiding lies and outright deception. This kind of approach perhaps offers a way forward in balancing the competing demands of different types of perceptual management (e.g., Gould 1998: chap. 9, Maltese 1994). Whatever its current content, the emergence of operations such as *Al-Jazeera* is a positive development for the US. To the extent that media outlets are willing to provide access for US spokespersons and material they allow access to existing audiences.

On the other hand where such operations do not exist there may be a need to develop media outlets that are attractive in their right and can compete with local media in quasi-commercial terms; that is by providing content that is attractive, credible and interesting to target audiences. Here the US should turn to the lessons offered by the development of regional satellite channels. It may be that the key to competing will be the US government's ability to supply a diet of international soccer, recent Hollywood blockbusters and pop videos by artists

with local appeal for free. If such channels can develop an audience then it should be possible to reach them with the message of the day (DSB 2000).

From the perspective of military IO doctrine working via the media imposes restrictions on the tools that can be used. Within the military IO paradigm 'truth projection' and 'deception' are simply two weapons in the arsenal for the media being made a target for deception is a red rag to a bull. Exposure of deception will not only 'blow' the operation but will also generate negative coverage and damage long term credibility. While deception can be used in the military sphere operations that depend on deceiving media organizations are highly risky. The reaction to the OSI demonstrates how damaging such a reaction can be. The credibility of the organization and spokespersons concerned are directly damaged while the international reputation of the US is blackened (Anonymous 2002, Dowd 2002).

The third challenge is that of institutional co-ordination. The logic of the argument developed in this paper is for close co-ordination across military, diplomatic and political information activities. Here the institutional fragmentation of the US government, as well as the differing cultures of perception management, are obstacles to effective co-ordination. As the ACPD argued in 1998 and the DSBTF in 2000 this co-ordination needs to happen at the highest possible level and would be best situated in the NSC. This is particularly the case because of the mismatch between the resources available to the Department of Defense relative to the other US Government agencies. Departments have to work together to make the best use of available resources. There is a clearer need for greater sharing of information across the different players to facilitate co-ordination and effective communication of the message.

The reported plan that the US plans to create an Office of Global Diplomacy to continue, and institutionalise the work of the Coalition Information Centres is clearly a step in this direction. Its mission would be to create a positive image of the US abroad and would be based in the White House. The president's Director of Communications was quoted as saying that 'the president believes it is a critical part of national security to communicate US foreign policy to a global audience in times of peace as well as war' (Becker and Dao 2002).

This underlines the key argument of this discussion. As information operations are seen as an increasingly important part of military operations it puts a premium on collaboration between the different players. Although the military has long regarded the State Department as difficult to work with they may find the White House communications staff even more challenging collaborators (Tucker 2000). The demands of the new situation require more comprehensive planning for information activities that cannot be confined to the military and must take in all the concerned actors. It is one thing to identify this need, but it will be very much harder to make it work in practice.

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# Waging Public Relations: A Cornerstone of Fourth-Generation Warfare

R. P. Reid

President, PProcess Public Relations

[rpreid@pshift.com](mailto:rpreid@pshift.com)

## Abstract:

*This paper examines one of the least-understood elements of Information Operations – public affairs. Rather than focusing, however, on traditional military approach to public affairs, it examines how corporations have embraced public relations during the past decade, aggressively pursuing positive coverage that helps win consumer hearts and minds. This article will outline the basic PR techniques and tactics that have been employed in the business world over the past decade. It will show how companies develop messages and marketing plans; evaluate audiences; and disseminate these messages. And it will show how Information Warriors can rapidly and successfully adapt these techniques to an I/O environment. The paper will also outline methods for applying these consumer PR techniques in an IO environment. Most elements of Information Operations doctrine have come a long way in the past ten years, both as a theoretical science and as a practical exercise. Public affairs, however, has lagged behind other IO disciplines and there continues to be a cloud of fear, uncertainty and doubt among many in the armed services when it comes to working with the media. Yet little more than a decade ago, the same situation existed in the corporate world. Corporate leaders were convinced that reporters were simply ‘out to get them’ and would report only bad news. Corporate public relations professionals were instructed to keep companies out of the news and, therefore, out of trouble. Yet this all changed in the past few years as communications professionals took an aggressive outbound approach to media relations, turning PR from support function into a strategic weapon that helped companies establish a positive brand, presence and consumer mindshare. This paper shows how corporate PR techniques, when applied in a war-fighting environment, can be as effective as tanks and rifles. Whether you call it ‘perception management’ or ‘marketing’, ‘truth projection’ or ‘spin-doctoring’, these are key elements of IO and a cornerstone of 4th generation warfare.*

A good psychological warfare executive is no different from a market research executive, except that the Psyops officer also likes to jump out of planes.

-- Col. Layton Dunbar, Commander  
4<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Group  
in Operation Desert Storm

Business is war. It is a metaphor attributed to the Japanese in the 1980's and happily adopted by American corporate leaders during the 1990's. Business battles are not fought in mountains or caves, in deserts or the jungles. They are fought in boardrooms, on retail store aisles, on Wall Street, and in the hearts and minds of consumers. But the battles are no less intense, and business leaders have embraced Clausewitz and Sun Tsu with as much fervour as any combat line officer. Business leaders today engage in guerrilla marketing and refer to up-and-coming products as having ‘gained a beachhead.’ They fight Cola Wars and send out legions of Road Warriors to make customer calls and to seize a marketing objective. And by

embracing the military leadership ethos and strategic doctrines, many businesses have thrived.

But there are also things that America's military can learn from business. Certainly over the past few years, many business information systems and supply chain systems have helped cut military procurement costs dramatically. Another area where the military can take a cue from business success is in marketing and public relations – the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of consumers.

As Information Operations doctrine becomes more critical to fourth-generation warfare, military leaders need not re-invent many of the techniques that are critical to Information Operations. They can simply adopt and re-purpose the proven techniques from the business world. As Mark Twain said: 'A good writer writes. A great writer steals!'

### **Keep Us Out of the News**

Little more than a decade ago, public affairs – public relations as it is known in the business world – had one simple mission. Keep companies out of the news. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the business world had what they considered a highly contentious relationship with the news media. From the 'muckrakers and yellow journalists' of the early 1900's to the seemingly anti-corporate television news magazines of today, company executives felt that they would never be covered in a fair manner by the media. The answer was to dodge coverage, plead 'no comment' and bring in legions of PR people only when the news got bad and someone needed to explain the crisis.<sup>1</sup> Does this sound familiar in today's Defense Establishments?

Today, public relations is both a strategic and tactical weapon for companies and is used to drive sales, boost stock price, keep morale high among employees, and drive business relationships and partnerships. It is a key part of the marketing, sales and advertising equation and companies spend millions on aggressive, outbound PR. Today, crisis management is a niche element of PR and when a campaign is properly orchestrated, many crises are avoided before they even become a media time-bomb. Why the change?

Because business leaders recognized that the media is capable of doing things *for* you... or doing things *to* you, modern PR strategies, tactics and techniques, are now critical to the business marketing mix. PR – and its media relations component – have proven to be a tremendous force-multiplier for business compared to advertising or even direct sales. After all, if you read or hear something in the media, it must be true!

### **I'm a Soldier, not an Executive**

The business world uses a mix of tools to sell products and promote companies. This is known as marketing. Marketing is the battle for the hearts and minds of consumers and it applies to goods, services or ideas. Marketing battles are won with communications.

Marketing includes advertising, sales, direct mail, telemarketing (those annoying phone calls), competitive intelligence, consumer research, investor relations, community relations, PR and other functions designed to shape a company or product message and then disseminate it to various audiences. These marketing functions are all designed to cause or provoke a desired consumer or audience reaction. This can be a measurable physical reaction such as buying a product or making a phone call to an 800 number. It can also drive a more subjective reaction such as supporting an initiative or having a favourable opinion of a brand.

The military has the same set of goals. It needs the American public to support a peacetime budget. It needs to keep up morale among active, reserve and retired personnel. It needs to drive public and Congressional opinion and support during a time of conflict. And it needs to erode an enemy's will to fight, thus saving lives on a battlefield.

The importance of marketing as a part of the Information Warrior's arsenal has been proven repeatedly during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Korea, Vietnam, Central America, Bosnia and Somalia have shown that without a strong foundation of public and media support, the US military's ability to prosecute a campaign successfully is seriously eroded. While the soldiers may win all the battles, losing the war of public opinion means losing the campaign.

During the same time period, the campaigns which have successfully embraced a strong media component – Grenada, Panama, the Gulf War and the current war in Afghanistan – have maintained public support. The policy reasons behind these conflicts were no less complicated – and there were no fewer tactical errors. They were, however, messaged and communicated better to the American public. The ability to maintain that public support has been accomplished with various forms of marketing which the military refers to under the umbrella of Information Operations.

IO is generally recognized as consisting of psychological operations; physical destruction operations; electronic warfare; operations security; military deception; public affairs and civil affairs. With the exception of physical destruction operations – most companies don't actually blow up their competitors – all of these techniques are a part of a business marketing repertoire. The element that most rapidly translates to the IO environment is Public Affairs.

Today, those same outbound business media relations techniques that have helped corporate America to leverage the popular press can be employed effectively as part of a warfighter's arsenal. But for that to happen, men and women in uniform will have to follow the same path as the men and women in grey flannel suits. In short, they will have to treat the media as an ally, not as an enemy and to recognize that Public Affairs is no longer a just a support function – it is a weapon.

### **Starting the Spin Cycle**

In his book *Military Intelligence Blunders*, Col. John Hughes-Wilson points out that 'The perceptions of truth are more important than the truth itself'. This is what the spin is all about.<sup>2</sup>

Now for those who are wondering if spin is just a nice euphemism for lying, one thing needs to be made utterly and unequivocally clear: though the truth takes many forms and has many elements, there is no room in media relations for anything but the truth. Lying is not only unacceptable, it is counter-productive. You will be found out. And you will ruin your credibility and your organization's credibility for a long time to follow. Period.

So if spin isn't about lying, what is it? IO defines spin as "truth projection." But more accurately, spin should be defined as the *aspects of the truth that you most want to communicate*.

Marketing professionals start the 'spin cycle' by questioning everything about a product, service or idea. What is it? What problem or need does it solve? Who is it for? Who are

competitors? Are our goals realistic? Does the product do what we say it will? How can it fail? The list is almost endless. It is also not a process that will tolerate blinders or ‘yes men’. A healthy dose of irreverence always helps, because if you don’t identify and prepare to address the tough questions, someone else will run you over with them. During the Gulf War, one wag pointed out that *‘If Kuwait Grew Carrots, we wouldn’t give a damn’*. [Hughes-Wilson] It’s that kind of brutal honesty that is necessary if you are to address properly the questions that will evolve into messaging and positioning.

It is important to point out that in the corporate world, it is not at all unheard of for executives to get upset when tough questions are asked about a product or a plan. But asking and addressing those tough questions is not a sign of disloyalty or a staff’s ‘not being onboard’. In fact, failing to ask and answer the tough questions leads to expensive and embarrassing marketing disasters like ‘New Coke’ and ‘Accenture’. There is no need to go into the military equivalent; they are all well-documented. But the officer who questions his staff’s loyalties for pointing out the downsides of a campaign so that the difficult questions can be answered in advance is asking for trouble.

Once the basic questions are on the table, the next step is to answer those questions honestly and accurately. To do that, you need information and intelligence.

### **Market Intelligence = Military Intelligence**

Market intelligence is a lot like military intelligence, though there is one key difference. While military intelligence often focuses on *capabilities*, market intelligence is squarely focused on *intentions*. What is the difference? Capabilities tend to be objective, measurable and predictable. Intentions are subjective, fuzzy and far less predictable. It is far more difficult to gauge intentions, and the accuracy of your predictions is harder to measure. Examples of capabilities include: The enemy has enough tanks to overrun Outer Slobovia; the million-man army is battle tested; the enemy has poison gas. Intentions, however, include: The enemy will overrun Outer Slobovia soon; the million man army can’t wait to surrender; and the enemy won’t use poison gas.

Because intentions are hard to determine – in business or defense – it can be tempting to focus on intelligence that is known to be accurate and is verifiable. That way the researcher does not have to make career-limiting predictions and can always point out that ‘numbers never lie’. Unfortunately, capabilities do not predict intentions and while data can be accurate to several decimal places, it is not always useful in defining consumer behavior. So an Information Warrior, like a marketing executive, will have to develop a knack for the subjective.

In the business world, the subjective is determined using focus groups, surveys, sales-force feedback, competitive analysis and even industrial and market psychologists and profilers. The same tools can work just as well in the IO environment.

Once the marketing intelligence has answered as many of your key questions as possible, it’s time to establish goals for the campaign.

### **Beat Coke!**

Once the questions have been asked and you have compiled honest answers, the initial marketing goals can be established. In business, these are correlated to a product or a service. Goals will establish sales targets, market penetration, revenue projections and financial returns on investment that will result in profit for the company. By this time, the product

team will have established that the product is viable, i.e., that there is a market and they are confident that with solid execution there will be a profit. If there won't be a profit, the product is, by now, dead.

In military terms, things are fuzzier because you are not dealing with the black and white goals of 'profit/no profit', but with public policy. By its nature, public policy is often very difficult and complex to understand. It is not a matter of red-ink versus black-ink. Profit versus loss is clear to any 6<sup>th</sup> grader. Translating foreign policy decision-making into a set of definable goals can confuse a PhD. But this doesn't mean that the establishment of these marketing and communications goals is any less important. It simply makes the entire process more critical.

Examples of corporate marketing goals: Sell more Pepsi than Coke; increase pickup truck sales by 10 percent; make Furby the top-selling Christmas toy; or keep the stock trading at more than \$10 a share.

In the IO or military environment, the marketing goals can be just as clear and equally measurable. Some examples of marketing goals that would apply as part of an IO campaign? Rally the American people behind our troops; convince the UN to authorize action; or scare the enemy troops into surrendering before we show up. And in the same way that the 'Powell Doctrine' calls for a clear end-game as a part of any military intervention or campaign, the marketing goals have to be equally clear and achievable.

One final point to consider in developing goals: acceptance and approval of the final goals by the chain-of-command is critical. Unfortunately, while the process of deciding the nature of the goals can be more difficult in the public arena than in the business arena, that process is nothing compared to the difficulty of getting approval!

In the corporate world, a marketing plan and a set of goals hinges on a highly measurable profit and loss equation. The president, the CEO and the Board are virtual dictators. In the public policy arena, however, everyone has a different opinion and stake; the cause-effect equation is often so complex as to defy logic; and pleasing one group almost certainly offends another. And the left-out group may launch its own marketing and information campaign against yours.

But this doesn't mean that goals should be so watered down and fuzzy that they can be supported by nobody. It also doesn't mean that they should be established by trial-balloon and changed daily with the winds of public opinion and Gallup Polls. It does mean that goals should be signed off by as much of the chain-of-command as possible – up to and including the Commander-in-Chief. Then the goals should be embraced and echoed by the entire team. All messages and actions should be developed in support of these goals. Though evolution of goals is possible (and necessary), constantly changing goals and messages will destroy the information campaign and put the overall campaign at risk.

## **Know your Audience**

No article on modern warfare is complete without a quote from Sun Tsu. And since Sun Tsu was ahead of his time when it came to developing tactics for Information Warriors, here's a quote:

*If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear a thousand battles. If you know yourself and not the enemy, for every victory, you will suffer a defeat. But if you know neither yourself nor the enemy, then you are a fool and will meet defeat in every battle.*

Audience analysis is the most critical element in developing either a business or an IO campaign. Audience analysis should, however, never be defined in the singular. Analysis of audiences is a better way to look at this task, for there is never a single audience to deal with in either the marketing or the IO environment.

In the business world, one deals with customers or potential customers; partners; investors; competitors; government; employees and local communities. In the IO world, the audiences include the American public; allies (governments and populations); Congress; the enemy (government and population); and soldiers (and their families.) Each audience is different and each one must be addressed with messaging and communications that resonate and influence them to take the desired action.

So how do you get to know an audience? In both the business and military worlds, the techniques are almost identical – though some have different terminology.

<b>Business</b>	<b>Military</b>
Statistical Analysis	Statistical Analysis
Research/Demographics	Research/Demographics
Salesforce Feedback	Diplomatic Missions
Focus groups and surveys	Focus groups and polls
Competitive Analysis	Humint/Sigint/NTM
Read the media	Read the media
Chat Rooms/Internet	Chat Rooms/Internet

Developing audience analysis and profiles is both an art and a science. It is also absolutely critical. Information Warriors, like marketing professionals, are looking for anything about the group psyche of each different audience that will help them to get inside their heads.

Take the example of marketing a new sports car. One audience is young single men and women who want a car with a cool, hip image. A second audience is middle-aged men who are looking to reclaim the cool, hip image of their youth. Yet another audience is people who wish they could have a hot sports car, but with a wife and three kids, they can't have one. But they will come to your showroom to look at it, and they will buy your practical family sedan in the same sporty red colour. A final audience is stockholders who will never buy your sports car, but who want to make money from their shares. They will see your company as appealing to a young car-buyers who will keep buying your cars as they age – thus forecasting long-term health for your company.

Each of these audiences is important. Each is radically different. Yet you must understand each; you must understand that the message that appeals to one group may well be a turn-off to the other; and you must get that message inside their heads in a way that will get them to follow through with your desired response.

In the IO environment, are you dealing with exactly the same set of audiences. You have to take into account an enemy that might have clear religious leanings and beliefs. You have to address citizens who might be worried about keeping their jobs; getting on a plane; or filling up their SUV gas tank in perpetuity. You have to address politicians who might be looking for votes in the months ahead.

The goal of audience analysis is to create a profile of people so that you can determine what messages will be needed. In short, you have to find their ‘hot button’, their passion, or – to be cynical – their price. Once you have developed profiles of each of your audiences and determined these ‘hot buttons’, it’s time to get inside their heads. You do this with messaging.

### Get the Message?

To use an example of applying messages to different audiences as part of a single campaign, we can look at the current example of ‘The War on Terror’:

Constituency	Messages
The American People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are going to win</li> <li>• Stay strong</li> <li>• Give up some convenience and privacy</li> </ul>
Allies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are for us or against us</li> <li>• Don’t stand in our way</li> <li>• We are united in the fight</li> </ul>
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your constituents are for this</li> <li>• Your duty is to support the soldiers</li> </ul>
Soldiers/Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You are all heroes</li> <li>• Your sacrifices are noble</li> <li>• We will see this to victory</li> </ul>
Terrorists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will hunt you down; you can’t hide</li> <li>• Terror will just make us stronger</li> <li>• Your actions are an affront to Islam</li> </ul>
Followers of Islam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is not a war on Islam</li> <li>• Americans embrace diversity</li> <li>• We will not let terrorists hide in your midst</li> </ul>

## Messages come in all shapes and sizes

Product names convey a message (Thunderbird; Walkman; Urgent Fury). Benefits statements tell consumers what a product, service or idea is all about (Freshens breath and kills germs; makes your engine run cleaner; stamps out terror.) Slogans become everyday vernacular (Just do it; Have it Your Way; Be All You Can Be; The Mother of All Battles.) And differentiators help audiences recognize your product or service by contrasting it with something they are familiar with (the un-cola; no more Vietnam's).<sup>3</sup>

Though each of these messages is different and serves a different purpose, all are catchy and memorable. And each has long-term 'traction'. In fact, if your messaging is done correctly, you can create those all-important three-second phrases that everyone latches onto called 'sound bites'! Who will ever forget lines like 'We are drawing a line in the sand', or 'We're going to cut it off, and then we're going to kill it', or 'It's the economy, stupid!'?

But does good messaging just happen? Not a chance. Good messaging is created. It's developed; it's tested. And only then is it disseminated.

### Creating the Message

Messaging is created in a number of ways. The classic sources for messages are creative individuals who develop messages as they write marketing material, advertisements, speeches or press releases. These people often are thought of as 'Madison Avenue types', but they can also be found at PR and marketing agencies; in corporate communications departments; in congressional and executive branch offices and in most public affairs departments. Often, they are outside the mainstream in their thinking and sometimes they are regarded as just plain nuts.

Another common source of messaging is through brainstorming sessions where a diverse group of people throw out ideas ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous and see what resonates. Though 'messaging by committee' is never desirable, a group of individuals can provide a tremendous breadth of ideas that a core team or an individual can evolve into final messaging.

Specialists such as psychologists, sociologists and scholars can be of tremendous value, especially in the IO environment. These people spend their lives focusing on the psyche of individuals, groups and cultures. Cultural specialists are of tremendous value as they will understand the subtleties of foreign nations and people.

Two outstanding examples of message development were highlighted by Douglas Waller in his book *The Commandos*<sup>4</sup>:

In *Operation Just Cause*, the invasion of Panama to depose Manuel Noriega, American Psychological Operations troops were tasked with trying to get Panamanian Defense Force troops to surrender rather than fight it out with US Troops. Prior to the invasion, focus groups were convened and Panamanian ex-patriots living in the United States were interviewed. These focus groups were intended to test messages that would be used as part of the PsyOps campaign. One of the things that the teams learned was that asking a Panamanian soldier to surrender was likely to be counter-productive. PDF troops would regard surrender as dishonourable and an affront to their 'machismo'. However, it was felt that asking troops to 'lay down their arms' and to 'cease hostilities', would be more readily accepted. These messages were used with excellent results.

In *Operation Desert Storm*, leaflets were used to disseminate a variety of messages. One of the most brilliantly executed leaflets implored Iraqi troops to: ‘Walk three hours in the direction of Mecca’. Anyone who understands Arab culture knows that for followers of Islam, the pilgrimage to Mecca is something that must be undertaken in one’s lifetime. So for soldiers to lay down arms and walk towards Mecca was easily justifiable and since most soldiers prayed toward Mecca, it was an easy instruction to follow. Of course, the massive coalition firepower they were facing didn’t hurt either.

These messages were created for a very specific audience – the enemy. And they were critical because if they didn’t work, American troops would die. But some care and thought must go into the messaging for other audiences. Remember that victory on the battlefield must be supported by victory in the battle for positive public opinion.

How, you may ask, can you have a diversity of messages and not seem inconsistent? That is one of the challenges of messaging. But creating a set of diverse yet complementary messages – that all fit within an *Uber*-message’ is a proven media relations technique. Remember, too, that as you create messaging you will have to back up your messages with actions. If you don’t have ‘mutually-supportive words and deeds’, your communications efforts are going to be counter-productive. As they say on Madison Avenue: ‘Nothing kills a bad product faster than good advertising’! So make sure that your messaging fits with the execution plan of a campaign and with the capabilities of the warfighters. As with business, the communications effort is not something that can just be ‘thrown over the wall’. Public affairs professionals need a seat at the table both to advise and to understand what they need to communicate.

So far, we have looked at the ‘back office’ elements of a public affairs campaign – the work that has to be done before the first press release is issued, before the first press conference is scheduled and before the first interview happens. Now it’s time to learn how to get the word out.

## **Dissemination Tactics**

All the goal-setting, audience analysis and strategic message development is worthless unless you undertake an aggressive dissemination campaign. This means you have to get your message out, get it to the right audiences, and to do it with ‘reach’ and frequency.

As we look at moving business techniques into the IO environment, it helps to look at how businesses communicate. They use a mix of advertising, direct sales, direct mail, the Internet, investor relations and media relations. As we saw earlier, some of these have a close correlation to an IO component, but others are less relevant.

The key element we will focus on for the purpose of this article is the media relations component: Public Affairs. PA is one of the highest-return activities. The positive results of waging a good media relations campaign generally far outweigh the costs incurred. PA is also the area where proven corporate techniques translate most rapidly and effectively to the war fighting environment.

First, to define media relations: *It is the process of working with reporters, editors and correspondents to make sure your message is influencing your target audiences via favourable stories in the mass media.* The goal of media relations is to get your message out often, to the right people, via the print and electronic media.

Of course, there are advantages and disadvantages. The advantages for the IO environment are the fact that conducting media relations is relatively inexpensive; editorial coverage is believable; good media relations results in 'reach' and frequency of your message; and national defense is always newsworthy. Disadvantages are that reporters do tend to be sceptical when it comes to the military (and the recent Office of Strategic Influence debacle did nothing to help that perception); you do not maintain control of the messages as the reporter is still in charge of his or her story; and if you lose control of a story it can be hard to get it back. While there are risks, however, there are proven methodologies for reducing those risks, and the upside of a strong media relations campaign can be huge!

Sounds pretty simple, but can you really make that happen? Can you really influence the media? Absolutely. But first, it's necessary do analyze another audience: your target journalists.

### **Targeting Media Outlets**

Until the past few years, news dissemination channels have evolved relatively slowly. Newspapers and magazines were supplemented by radio in the 1920s. Television came on the scene in the 1950s, and the initial three American networks were joined by dozens more thanks to the advent of cable television in the 1980's. Traditional media outlets were then supplemented by the Internet and the Web during the 1990's. At the same time, the pace of coverage has increased exponentially. A newspaper story could take days to appear. Now CNN broadcasts events nearly instantly and globally.

Today, consumers are bombarded with media. Newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and the Internet create a tremendous cacophony for consumers. Coverage comes from so many directions that it's almost impossible to know how audiences get their news. So it is important that media relations efforts are directed at generating or influencing as much coverage as possible in as many different media outlets as possible. This is called a 'surround-sound' approach to generating coverage. And to ramp this up, it's necessary to create an actual media target list.

This process begins by creating a database encompassing as many magazines, newspapers, and TV networks as practical. For a corporate effort, this typically involves anywhere between 400-600 publications and media outlets. National defense issues, by their nature, will be of interest to many more media outlets.

Resources such as *Bacon's Publicity Checker* and *Media Map*<sup>5</sup> are invaluable to creating a media target list. These databases list every newspaper, magazine and broadcast outlet in America. More importantly, they also provide profiles of the audiences who read or view the outlets; they provide a description of the topics that are covered; and they provide names, beat areas and contact information for all of the reporters, editors and correspondents. These resources are the ultimate intelligence sources for the public affairs professional.

Think of creating a media target list in the same way you would creating a SIOP. The difference is that you are not targeting them with smart weapons but are instead targeting them with information that will help support your strategic and tactical military operations. Media outlets and reporters should be segmented by demographics (geography; audience; frequency of publication; editorial direction) and by importance (calibre of audience; who the publication influences; circulation numbers; credibility.) With a media target list in hand, an

outbound media relations effort can be undertaken that proactively gets critical messages out to the appropriate audiences via the reporters you have identified.

But before talking to the first reporter, it is important to know what you are going to tell them. This is the exercise of packaging a story to fit the reporter's interests, 'hot buttons', audience and sometimes even personal values.

### **Here's Your Story, Merry Christmas!**

In the corporate world, it has become a standard practice to package a story and present it to reporters. This is where all your previous work comes together. You have your goals and your audience analysed. You know your key messages and have a wide variety ready to choose from, and you have a list of reporters whose backgrounds you know. Now it is time to take all these story elements and combine them into an almost-finished story and present it to a reporter in a process called 'a pitch.'

When you pitch a reporter, you are outlining a compelling story idea or angle. You have all the elements of the story ready – a first/best/most proposition that will make the story newsworthy; facts and figures that will be must-reading/must-viewing for that reporter's audience; and experts from within your organization who can provide punchy quotes. You have a third-party independent analyst or source lined up to talk as an expert. You may even have an exclusive story that nobody else has ever covered. These are things a reporter looks for.

There are dozens of techniques for packaging a story, but the rubber hits the road when you combine all the elements of a news story into a pitch for a reporter who, thanks to your earlier research, you think will be interested in your angle. When the reporter has bitten on the story, it becomes a basic exercise of managing the interview process through to publication or broadcast. You must be a resource for the reporter. Help him or her to get to sources. Schedule interviews. Steer reporters to facts and figures. Get them punchy, interesting quotes and unique story angles. And make sure they get everything they need in time to make their deadline.

Managing this process is key to a successful story appearing.

### **Reporters are Not your Enemy**

Contrary to popular belief, professional reporters are not out to 'get' anybody. True, there are exceptions – but these people fall outside the mainstream of professional journalism. The vast majority of journalists are out to report on the news and tell a story that will interest and inform their readers. It is up to the public affairs professionals to shape the story.

That said, there are still some things that you should not do when dealing with reporters. Don't engage in 'trial balloon' media relations. If you keep feeding reporters stories that are just to test public reaction, you will lose credibility when it comes to discussing the final policy. (Besides, real leaders don't make decisions with trial balloons.) Also, the techniques of going 'off-the-record', giving information 'on background', 'deep background', etc. are techniques seen more in the movies than in real life. When dealing with reporters, stay 'on-the-record'. Recognize and make clear that everything you say is for the record. Then stick to your messages and story. If you don't know something, don't be afraid to say so. Then help the reporter find a source for the information or make it clear that the question can't be answered.

One of the ways to keep from losing control of a story is to pay close attention to the people who are involved in the actual dissemination process. It is critical that the chain is kept simple, that the number of spokespeople are limited and well-trained, and that everyone is 'singing from the same hymnal'. Whether in a 'corporate launch' or in an IO campaign, messages must be kept consistent. Inconsistent messages – whether intentional or by accident – can cause all kinds of problems. Again, this is where it is critical for the entire chain-of-command to understand the Public Affairs process and to include it in their thinking as they develop their war-fighting campaign planning.

Finally, when working with reporters, you should use the simple rule of five P's: *Proper Preparation Prevents Poor Performance*. This not only means that PAO professionals should be highly-trained in using proven media relations techniques, it also means that internal and outside sources should be briefed and prepared before interviews, that briefing documents should be provided to interviewees to outline the scope of the story before the interviews are held, and that any interviewee should receive at least some level of professional media coaching.

Senior and career officers of any branch should make a strong effort to seek out media coaching as a key part of their professional development plans. Classes are not only taught at the various War Colleges, but are available in most cities or through specialty trainers. Any career officer should make media training a priority. It's also fun!

### **Uh Oh! What Do We Do When Things go Wrong?**

Crisis communications is a very hot topic in the corporate world and so much can be said about dealing with crises that it represents a topic all its own. But it cannot be left out of any discussion of public affairs in the IO environment. In the business world, crises tend to be rare events. In the military world, crises communications is 'business as usual'. After all, any military action is generally a sign of a crisis!

For the purpose of this article, though, a crisis will be defined as a mistake that is made in prosecuting a military action or as an unexpected public/press/ally reaction to a policy. Examples from the 'War on Terror' include the accidental killing of allies in a raid, an intelligence failure that results in unexpected casualties, or the reaction to the detainment of combatants and terrorists at Camp X-Ray.

The key elements of crisis public relations, whether in the corporate world or the IO environment are simple: Tell it all. Tell it fast. Tell the truth. And always remember that most public relations disasters do not come as a result of the initial issue, but stem from the attempts to hide the problem or cover it up.

Another thing to keep in mind: if you already have waged a successful PR campaign and you have a positive public image or brand, then a crisis is much easier to weather. If you have a negative image to begin with and then have to pile a crisis on top of that, things get worse in a hurry.

The ability to weather a crisis is yet another reason to embrace an ongoing, proactive, outbound media effort that we have discussed throughout this article.

## Welcome to Hyper-coverage

In the past decade, a new doctrine of ‘Hyperwar’ has evolved. ‘Hyperwar’ comes from the US capability to wage war around-the-clock with massive technological and information superiority, overwhelming force superiority and highly-trained and motivated professional personnel. ‘Hyperwar’ allows the US to prosecute conflict at a pace that makes Blitzkrieg look like a trench stalemate from *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Hyperwar doctrine involves striking an enemy everywhere simultaneously and relentlessly. It is intended to degrade the enemy’s ability to wage offensive – or even defensive operations – within weeks or even days. Hyperwar takes the Clausewitzian concept of Total War and puts it on ‘fast-forward’.

The first time elements of Hyperwar were used was during Desert Storm. Desert Storm also marked the first time the world saw a new form of reporting and a new media doctrine that will be defined here for the first time: hypercoverage.

Hypercoverage stems from the ability of news media to use technology to broadcast and disseminate news as fast as it is happening. Like hyperwar, hypercoverage goes on around-the-clock. It reports news and information from every possible front almost simultaneously. And it is relentless, often pushing all other news aside to completely absorb all communications channels and mediums. Hypercoverage has created an environment in which the news reporter on the ground is likely to be reporting a story to a global audience before the intelligence community, military or government even knows what is happening. There is a reason for all those TV’s tuned to CNN at the Pentagon and Langley.

When hypercoverage ramps up, as it did for weeks following September 11<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, the pace of reporting is almost incomprehensible. In any five-minute period on CNN, live reports can come in from a cave in Tora Bora; a hospital in Kandahar; a Congressional office in D.C; and a Pentagon briefing room. Cameras are on the front lines; at the peace rallies; in the homes of soldiers; and even in enemy-held territory. And they are able to broadcast live and around the clock. Thanks to news reporting services like CNN, reporters have an intelligence gathering and reporting capability that makes the CIA salivate. But instead of feeding it to analysts who use it for strategic and tactical decision-making, they broadcast it to the world.

In the hypercoverage environment, it may seem that all of the preparations and processes that have been examined earlier in this article would become irrelevant. If the reporting is happening as fast – or even faster than – the war, it must be impossible to shape the messaging, the story and the coverage, right?

Wrong. In an era of hyper-coverage, the processes that have been outlined in this article – and proven over the past decade in business – are more important than ever. In a time of confusion and rapidly-changing events, it is critical to have a series of goals, audiences and messages to fall back to and rely upon. Even if the news reporting is happening faster than intelligence is coming in from the battlefield, you will have a playbook and a series of messages prepared that you can use until you have confirmed events and can then comment from a foundation of accurate knowledge.

Moreover, hypercoverage represents an opportunity. When the networks are all looking for more material – and more exclusive stories – this is the time to pitch reporters and to fill

network airtime and news pages alike with your stories. In a hypercoverage environment, reporters are hungry for your news. If you are prepared, you can take tremendous advantage of the opportunity. How? With expert sources; footage; hometown stories; coverage of new weapons or doctrine... you name it. Be creative.

Another tactic for dealing with hypercoverage is the ability to resist reacting to every event, pundit, critic, and news story. Whether you are a corporation which is being subjected to a rapidly breaking crisis or whether you are dealing with hypercoverage as part of a conflict, the ability to stay on-message, categorize stories and work proactively – not reactively – is key to turning hypercoverage into an opportunity.

A further examination of hypercoverage, along with additional doctrine for dealing with the hypercoverage environment, will likely be the subject of a follow-on article in this *Journal*.

## Conclusions

In the past decade, business has learned a lot by studying military doctrine. Now, by adopting the same media relations and public affairs techniques proven in the business world, the service branches can dramatically increase the effectiveness of the Public Affairs component of their IO capabilities.

There is no question that the media relations and communications tactics and techniques that work in the business world can be effective on the battlefield and can be as valuable as rifles and tanks. Public Affairs training that encompasses business marketing and PR techniques should be a part of the professional development not only of officers with a public affairs specialty, but should be incorporated into the professional development for senior officers who need to understand how they can use PA effectively as part of an overall campaign.

So, whether you call it ‘Perception Management’ or ‘Marketing’, ‘Truth Projection’ or ‘Spin-Doctoring’, aggressive outbound public affairs is a key IO element and a cornerstone of 4<sup>th</sup> generation warfare.<sup>7</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A more comprehensive history of public relations will be found in the book *PR! A Social History of Spin*. (Stuart Ewen; Perseus Books Group, October 1998.)

<sup>2</sup> *Military Intelligence Blunders* (Col. John Hughes-Wilson; Carroll and Graf, 1999)

<sup>3</sup> A thorough examination of message development and positioning can be found in *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind* (Ries and Trout Pub: Warner Books, 1986)

<sup>4</sup> *The Commandos* (Douglas Waller; Bantam Doubleday, 1995)

<sup>5</sup> Bacon’s publicity checkers are available in several volumes that encompass magazines and newspapers; television; radio; Internet, etc. Bacon’s is a Business unit of PRIMEDIA, Inc. [www.bacons.com](http://www.bacons.com). Media Map is an competing subscription service that puts its databases online at [www.mediamap.com](http://www.mediamap.com)

<sup>6</sup> During the Vietnam conflict, daily press conferences were held by more than 25 different and sometimes competing agencies. The result: mass confusion in message dissemination and the appearance of lying. For more details, read: *Tet! The Turning Point in the Vietnam War* (Don Obendorfer; Da Capo Press, 1984)

<sup>7</sup> *Joint Vision 2020* and its antecedant *Joint Vision 2010* are available at <http://www.dtic.mil/jv2020/> (JCSI Pub: 2001) Both highlight information supremacy as critical elements of Fourth Generation conflict.

# Who's in Control? Contemporary Audience-Media Relations and their Implications for Perception Management

S. C. Driscoll

Psychologist  
Defence Scientific Technologies Laboratories, UK  
[susiedriscoll@hotmail.com](mailto:susiedriscoll@hotmail.com)

'Facts do not always speak for themselves...if the media is using fact to build an argument, then we have to do the same. It's not something the media are happy about us doing. It is as though facts are only safe in their hands and criticism is their sole preserve.'

-- Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair's spokesman

## **Abstract:**

*The production of media content and meaning has traditionally been considered the sole preserve of media professionals, or producers. As such, in attempting to understand the nature, or potential influential quality of the media, it has largely been thought that the role of the audience is of little consequence. However, research clearly indicates that the audience plays a critical role in constructing the meaning of the information to which they have exposure (Newman, Just and Crigler, 1992; Philo, 1993). This fact has only gained recognition as a result of a shift in the way in which mediation and communication has been conceptualised and studied. More contemporary approaches to audience-media relations that have adopted a greater audience-centric approach have shown that media transmission is only half the story. Audiences are, and have always been, active rather than passive consumers of information, and as new technology affords even greater interactive possibilities, the distinction between the producer and the receiver is becoming increasingly blurred and re-defined.*

War reporting is typically characterised by a tension between the government and the media. Each accuses the other of somehow contaminating the process of communication. Yet in this debate each side is making an assumption that it is the main player in this process of story production. It is a position that is readily adopted by those involved in the news industry. Since news production has traditionally been considered the mediation of 'fact', determining the nature of news content has been considered the exclusive remit of the producers. As such, in attempting to understand the nature of broadcast media, and news in particular, it has largely been regarded that the role of the audience is of little consequence. This discussion, however, I will endeavour to argue that this approach underestimates the significance of the audience. I will go on to argue that by considering the relationship between the media and its audience, principally from the perspective of the latter, a better understanding of the term 'perception management' will ensue.

In order to explore the relationship between the media the audience research I shall use television news as a pertinent example of a universally influential medium. Moving from the traditional media-effects theories towards the more contemporary, interactionist perspectives, I will turn to look at the various points whereby the meaning and nature of television news can be influenced. Through exploring the ways in which the audience may become actively

involved in determining the nature of the news, this paper will aim to explore the utility of television news from the audiences' perspective. This discussion of the function of television news presents several implications for the notion of media effects and perception management. These implications are discussed in order to highlight the complexities involved in using the term 'perception management', particularly in terms of agency and control. I aim to conclude this discussion by stating that when asked, '*who is in control of the information?*' or '*who is influencing public perception?*' one should not bestow a privileged status to agencies or media organisations, but rather attend to the constructive powers of the audience.

Traditional media-effects theories have typically placed the audience at the end of a linear process of production. Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer (1972, 1995) characterised the audience as consumers, who, due to their relationship to position power, could do little to challenge the ideological force of the dominant, economic elite who control the media systems (Thompson, 2000). Post-World War II administrative research, whilst more concerned about the psychological influence of the media on audiences, still worked on the assumption that audience reception was a fundamentally linear. As McQuail (1994) stated, such theories were almost entirely '*based on the premise that the media have significant effects*' (Newbold, 1995). It was not until the 'uses-and-gratifications' approach was first put forward by Blumler and Katz (1974) that the media-effects question was turned on its head, and a new dimension to traditional audience research emerged (Elliot, 1974). This approach purported that individuals experience basic human needs that may be met through media use. The audience was thus considered far more active in its relationship with the media, as the focus was not on what the media could do *to* people, but what people could do *with* the media (Elliott, 1974; Newbold, 1995).

The uses-and-gratifications tradition was an important milestone in development of mass communications theory, not just because it emancipated the audience, but because the very critique of this approach led to a shift away from theories of transmission and towards an evolution of interactionist thinking. The uses and gratifications approach was criticised for being too mentalistic and functionalist. So much attention was paid to the audience as an autonomous agent that media production and responsibility was marginalised (Elliott, 1974). The reaction to this was the development of reception theories that, based on literary theory, focused on how meaning could be generated through the cycle of production and reception. Linear assumptions were thus dismissed in favour of an approach whereby meaning was determined, not exclusively by either the media or the audience, but as a result of the interaction of the two (Hall, 1980). 'Readers' (audiences), thus, 'concretised' media texts through making implicit connections, filling in gaps and drawing inferences (Eagleton, 1983). It has largely been the implications of this latter approach that sheds light on the role of the audience in understanding perception management. As such these literary, or reception theories will be examined in more detail. However, in order to examine the debate in full, I will first turn to the elements of media production that can be considered the significant hooks upon which the media intend to guide or encourage particular meanings to evolve. From here I will then turn to how the audience use such hooks to build their own interpretations and aid in the construction of particular meanings or perceptions.

Whilst the traditional, transmission-effects theories have overlooked a critical element of audience activity, it would be misguided to reject the significance and potential influence of institutional involvement completely. Despite the fact that the relationship between the media and the audience has been shown to be more complex than first thought, the basic premise that media production can be influenced by political economies is still a relevant

argument, especially for the production of television news. If one considers the mass media as the means through which individuals forge the link between public and private life (Newman, Just and Crigler, 1992), then news should be considered the epitome such a link – the objective window on the world. Often news has been positioned as a learning tool, which is said to bridge the personal world of the audience member to the political world at large (Merrill, 1997). However, in spite of the struggle for journalistic impartiality and independent news services, many studies have shown that no news is produced without being tainted to some degree by political and organisational factors. It may be, as Taylor (1995) highlights, that *'no one journalist can report the whole truth'*, so what constitutes news are in fact pieces of a story, often determined by what the *'news net'* happens to catch (Tuchman, 1995). Campbell (1999), in his account of news journalism in Kosovo illustrates this tendency:

*If a bomb went astray, the Serb media machine would round up a few chosen journalists at the Hyatt in Belgrade, take them down to the scene and get the story running. Pictures. Therefore news.*

The shaping of news stories, however, can also be determined by the policy or corporate interests of those in a position of media ownership. Whilst the media industries today can no longer monopolise news content to the extent that they may have fifty years ago, there are still political agendas and power struggles at work that sculpt the contextual meaning of news stories (Golding and Elliott, 1979; 1995, Taylor, 1992).

It is important at this point stress the distinction between the political economy aspect of former mass communication theories and their linear effects tradition. As Hall (1980), in his challenge to the traditional effects-based models suggests, a more cultural approach that does not assume audience passivity but also does not reject the potential for influence, provides an account which allows the signifying practices of both audience and media to come to the fore. Media texts, audience reception and power are, he argues, inextricably linked, and therefore in order to understand one, the others also have to be considered. To this extent Hall's conceptualisation of the relationship between the audience and the media is helpful. The notion of a *'preferred reading'* inscribed through a series of encoding practices within production, and the possibility of *'negotiated'*, or *'oppositional readings'* arising from culturally relative decoding practices of the audience, has been a feature of much reception theory research.

The way in which the audience relates to television news has been looked at in two ways. The first, transmission approach, is based on the notion that audience activity arises from its desire to cope with the often-overwhelming amount of information available in society. Graber (1988), for example, states that in order for people to cope with the flood of information presented in the mass media, they must develop strategies in order to select and reject what they would like to know. Such strategies include information scanning, selecting stories according to personal pleasure and rejecting stories that are considered too complicated, or of little interest to them. Graber concludes, as have others, that this is a necessary means to simplify the reception process:

*In an ever-changing society what we look for...is information which provides an instant definition of the world around us. ...We take those things that stand out and make them fit with what we already know, want and expect. (Deutsch, 1997)*

Whilst it may be argued that this type of information processing perspective underestimates the audience's full potential to interact and construct the media text, it is nonetheless an

important step in the reception process. This type of theory highlights the fact that in order to make a text personally meaningful, the audience member has to first select that information to which he/she can relate. One is unlikely to 'decode' every media text made available – this would be overly time consuming and would require too much effort, and studies such as Graber's have illustrated that this is precisely what audiences are attempting to minimise. As such, there must first always be a certain amount of filtering and selection before a more extensive interaction with the text can ensue.

The second way in which the audience has been studied in relation to the media is via ritual models of communication. This perspective focuses on the audiences' construction of news as influenced by their complex cultural and social backgrounds. In essence this takes the issue of '*taming the information tide*' (Graber, 1988) a step further, and should not, therefore, be regarded as a distinct approach. As Newman, Just and Crigler (1992) have argued, the constructionist perspective '*sees individuals select items for attention, reject and ignore topics, redefine terms, infer meaning, draw parallels and make connections.*' This, it can be argued, fairly reflects both the transmission and ritual traditions.

In research by Newman, *et al* (1992), they found that both the media and the public employ simplifying cognitive frames for interpreting public issues. What was most significant in their findings was the fact that whilst the media and the public used many of the same frames, they did not match in terms of their application. For example, a news story that was considered to have an economic frame due to its preoccupation with profit and loss and the culture of capitalism, was interpreted by the audience using a moralistic or evaluative frame. Similar examples include audiences overlaying a conflict frame (where the focus was on polarised forces) with a human impact frame (where they expressed their personal concerns and compassion). Newman, *et al*, concluded that individuals do not '*slavishly follow the framing of issues presented in the mass media*', but rather they frame issues in a more visceral and moralistic style. Philo (1993) similarly found in his analysis of the news reporting of the miners' strike in 1984-5, that audiences negotiated the meaning of the message within news stories using different filters of interpretation from those implied by the news. In both these studies, audiences were found to be reorganising information in personally meaningful ways. Philo's study emphasised a variety of interpretations based on the personal experience, culture and social backgrounds of the audience, whilst the study by Newman, *et al*, illustrated a desire to maintain consistency and personal relevance across a diversity of news stories.

It would appear, therefore, that audiences treat texts, and thus media, as literally *in*-formation (Dillion, 2000). Whilst the texts provides a frame work which implies a certain interpretation, the audience builds upon this using its own expectations and codes of meaning (Iser, 1978, from Eagleton, 1983). The meaning of the text, therefore, is only fully realised when textual codes are negotiated in the context of the interpretative framework held by the audience (Livingstone, 1998). At this point it could be argued, as Fish states, that,

*What the text does to its audience is actually a matter of what its audience does to it', and thus, 'the object of critical attention should be the structure of the readers experience, not the objective structure found in the text itself.* (Eagleton, 1983)

Fish's approach allows this discussion to draw two conclusions in relation to the media and its audience. First, by adopting an audience-centric perspective in this way one has to reject the traditionally held belief that some media, such as television news, is '*high culture*', or a '*closed text*' (Eco, 1979). By recognising the audiences' potential to construct the meaning of

the news one has to state that television news must, to a certain degree, be open and polysemic in nature. Note, however, that this statement is made with a caveat. The earlier discussion of the encoding effects within news production should not be overruled by the notion that the audience can make a text mean whatever it likes (Eagleton, 1983). Whilst the audience has shown its propensity to offer aberrant or oppositional readings of news stories, they are still made within certain guiding principles of the news genre.

In drawing the conclusion that the meaning of mediated information is significantly determined by the audience, further insights can be made about the function and future of media sources, such as television news. As Thompson (2000) highlights, there are considerable implications for living in a world in which the capacity to experience is increasingly disconnected from the activity of encountering. The function of television news has evolved beyond the simple mediation of fact. The way in which news is selected and incorporated reflexively into the lives of its audience, highlights an increasing demand for '*mediated quasi-interaction*' (Thompson, 2000) - the ability to be both in touch with the diversity of global affairs, whilst also managing to cope, and make meaningful, its overwhelming complexity. News, therefore, has more than one purpose: it informs, but it also functions as a means for the audience to construct a personally meaningful world. In this respect, one could argue that the more the news provides the opportunity to make global affairs personally meaningful, the greater it's chances of capturing the audience and surviving among the competition. News that reflects a greater match between it's framing of a story and that of its audience is clearly doing just this (Newman et al). Whether such news can be regarded as informing, rather than purely entertaining, however, is debatable.

Taking into account the research and arguments presented in this discussion, one must conclude the nature of the relationship between the audience and the media is not only complex, but is becoming evermore so as our society develops faster and more interactive ways to mediate information. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, and where mediated experience and lived experience become evermore entwined (Thompson, 2000), one has to question whether it still makes sense to refer to the media producers and the audience as two distinct agents. Hall's approach, and those of the reception theorists have helped to develop a more critical understanding of the relationship between the media and the audience; however, there are limitations that have become apparent as a result of the changing media environment. One can no longer make a clear distinction between the 'encoders' and the 'decoders', as Hall did. Audiences are becoming as inextricably bound up in the processes of production as they are in the process of reception. Interactive technologies have led to an era of '*armchair activism*' (Stech, 1994) never before experienced in the communications industry. Similarly, the dominant elites that Hall argues influence the encoding process, who previously were considered as '*those in control*' have become swept up in the cycle of transmission and reception to the point where '*television images are deeply imprinted on White House decision making.*' (Stech, 1994). These shifts in contemporary media-audience relations imply that the traditional dichotomy between the two may be breaking down, and as the boundaries between power, production and reception become increasingly blurred, what it means to be the 'audience', and the nature of their relationship to the media, is clearly being re-defined.

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not intend to represent those of DSTL or the MoD, UK.*

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# NATO and Strategic PSYOPS: Policy Pariah or Growth Industry?

S. Collins

United States Army  
Staff Officer, North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
[Steven.Collins@shape.nato.int](mailto:Steven.Collins@shape.nato.int)

“The Serbs...were excellent in organizing press coverage and directing it toward NATO mistakes. Where were the compelling eyewitness stories and snapshots of the ethnic cleansing, the brutality and destruction? In this war, a camera inside Kosovo would have been worth a dozen strikes on Serb vehicles.”

GEN (ret.) Wesley Clark, *Waging Modern War*, p. 443 <sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of 9/11, among many other changes to its defense establishment, the United States has undertaken a significant re-vamping of its strategic psychological operations (PSYOPS) structure and capabilities.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, NATO must now determine if it can adapt and face the realities of the modern security environment -- where current and potential threats to peace will confront NATO through asymmetric means rather than through the use of conventional military forces. Of particular interest in this study, are unconventional attempts to confront NATO via aggressive regional and international perception manipulation.<sup>3</sup>

Presently, NATO is restrained by a restrictive policy that prohibits NATO from conducting any perception management activities, which may involve military personnel, above the level of the local military commander. Attempts to operate in this hamstrung manner exposes a tremendous weakness in NATO's political and military capabilities, as amply demonstrated during Operation ALLIED FORCE. This paper examines the current NATO PSYOPS policy, reasons why NATO should make changes, how NATO fared in Operation ALLIED EFFORT in its PSYOPS campaign, and recommendations what changes should be made.

## Lies, Damned Lies, and PSYOPS

PSYOPS and its practitioners are often misunderstood, and the discipline is alleged by even senior NATO military commanders to be a 'black art' practiced by dealers of lies and deceit. This is very far from the truth and does a great deal of harm to those trying to conduct effective PSYOPS in NATO operations.

People from an egalitarian cultural heritage have an innate distaste for the concepts of perception manipulation and deception. Notions of fair play, due process, and an open society are seemingly placed in jeopardy by the prospect of psychological operations – even if directed towards an adversary. Many in positions of authority often tend to dismiss the psychological dimension and feel uncomfortable with the implications.

The attempt to make the PSYOPS function more palatable and politically acceptable has led to a plethora of PSYOPS synonyms such as: perception management, persuasion operations, information support, information campaign, influence operations, etc. NATO PSYOPS practitioners themselves are sensitive to this issue and often try to make a differentiation

between their "truth-based PSYOPS" and what they term as the "lie-based propaganda" of the adversary.<sup>4</sup> Because of this confusion, it is always helpful to start out with some definitions.

The role of psychological operations (PSYOPS) is to influence the perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of selected individuals or groups with the goal of achieving political or military objectives while preventing effective use of these activities by an enemy or adversary.<sup>5</sup>

PSYOPS, like all military activities, is divided into tactical, operational, and strategic spheres. In accordance with PSYOPS policy, PSYOPS, within the NATO context is limited to operating in support of the local military commander -- confined to what could be termed low level operational and tactical PSYOPS. Strategic PSYOPS, as it is defined within NATO policy:

Strategic PSYOPS Activities are high level (i.e. national government level) PSYOPS conducted in peace, crisis and war and directed toward friendly, hostile, potentially hostile or neutral audiences. Normally the objectives of strategic psychological activities are long-term and political in nature, they aim to undermine the adversary's, or a potential adversary's readiness for conflict, will to fight and to reduce his war-making capability while gaining the support and cooperation of neutral and friendly populations. Conduct of SPA is a national responsibility. The NAC has the responsibility of coordinating these high level activities among the nations.<sup>6</sup>

And unlike NATO military doctrine, NATO policy is not a guideline or recommendation that can either be followed or ignored as the local commander sees fit. Policy documents are hard constraints placed upon NATO by nations to ensure adherence to certain procedures and conduct.

### **Is it Broken?**

Why change the manner in which PSYOPS currently operates in NATO? In the past, clear distinctions existed between the three levels of PSYOPS -- strategic, operational, and tactical. In the post-Cold War world, these distinctions have blurred to the extent that they may no longer exist. The world's almost instantaneous access to news and information make it nearly impossible to localize any PSYOPS effort. A leaflet handed out by a PSYOPS soldier in Bosnia is just as likely to be shown to a reporter on the nightly news in all the NATO capitals as read in Sarajevo. Strategic PSYOPS, as MC 402 correctly points out, is planned and conducted at the highest levels and have long-term, political goals and implications. PSYOPS, in a military context, should never seek to do anymore than to *support* strategic PSYOPS through rendering requested planning and subject matter expertise, and if tasked, with dissemination assets. Still, there is not systemic method for NATO military PSYOPS to gain insight into the higher-level perception management effort occurring at NATO HQ or to de-conflict these activities with a supported commander's theatre information effort. Additionally, there may be activities that occur in the *seam* between strategic and operational spheres of NATO activities that require PSYOPS.

Even the most creative PSYOPS products, and the most modern media and technologies for delivering PSYOPS messages, will lead to very little unless there is co-ordination from NATO HQ all the way down to the tactical PSYOPS soldier in the field with respect to the PSYOPS message intent and content. PSYOPS now has to react within 12-hour news cycle that drives all information efforts during crisis and war. As PSYOPS structures adapt to this frenetic pace of message/counter-message co-ordination issues become even more

important.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, NATO's former Supreme Allied Commander, GEN (ret.) Wesley Clark gives a first hand account of the how the news cycle drove his staff's work (the so-called 'battle rhythm' of daily meetings and intelligence updates) during Operation ALLIED FORCE -- the bombing of Serbia and Kosovo during Spring 1999.<sup>8</sup>

NATO's PSYOPS dysfunction offers potential adversaries a clear asymmetric opportunity during crises. As military analyst Steven Metz notes:

In an attempt to trump the American [or NATO] advantage at rational war [use of technology to prevent 'hand-on conflicts'], enemies will utilize ambiguity and attempt to stay below the threshold of clear aggression. Existing or emerging enemies will thus seek asymmetric counters – technological, psychological, ethical, and strategic. Consequently, America [and NATO] will require increased cross-cultural and socio-psychological acumen.<sup>9</sup>

As seen in the conflict with Serbia, NATO adversaries are far more likely to attack NATO asymmetrically through information operations (INFO OPS), particularly strategic PSYOPS, as opposed to traditional military means. Indeed, often more flexible and synchronized, and less restricted by bureaucratic barriers, NATO's adversaries will attempt to manipulate NATO's strategic actions through selected, discriminate propaganda.

Putting aside more traditional military conflict, trans-national and trans-regional threats to NATO members, such as terrorism and development and transport of weapons of mass destruction, further accentuate the need for a more proactive PSYOPS policy by NATO. These latter threats do not lend themselves to easy compartmentalization within a specified theatre of operations. Consequently, PSYOPS efforts that cut across these boundaries, the strategic and operational seam, may be needed and will require integration and planning at the highest levels.

NATO HQ has made some attempts to grasp the PSYOPS issue and provide some direction. However, the NATO policy regarding INFO OPS has been in review for over a year as nations within the NATO Alliance wrestle over definitions and the role of INFO OPS within the various layers of the NATO Command structure. Currently, during a crisis, at the NATO HQ level, an *ad hoc* Media Operations Centre (MOC) is created, and theoretically, an Information Operations Working Group (IOWG) is stood-up as well. The purpose of the MOC is to bring together press officers from all the NATO nations to ensure the information that is put out to the news media throughout the Alliance nations is synchronized and consistent. The theoretical purpose of the IOWG is to provide the direction to the various elements of INFO OPS at lower levels in the NATO structure. While the MOC was active during ALLIED FORCE and has been manned during exercises, the IOWG is a group that exists on paper only and has never been activated. One of the reasons for the IOWG's theoretical nature is that there is a lack of INFO OPS experience and expertise at the NATO HQ level, and no PSYOPS experience whatsoever.

While some may feel comfortable with this void at the top (and purposely cultivate this gap), for those below it can prove very challenging. It is clear that there must be congruence between policy as expressed at NATO HQ and actions on the ground. When there is no guidance from above, or when policy objectives remain nebulous or kept from those below, pressure is placed on the PSYOPS operators at the lower rungs in the chain-of-command to either do nothing, or even more dangerously, make policy decisions and run an uncoordinated effort that runs the risk of being contradicted by the decisions and actions of those above.<sup>10</sup>

### **ALLIED FORCE – A Preview of Coming Attractions**

As the Clark quotation at the beginning of this study suggests, ALLIED FORCE was as much, if not more, a perception's battle than a traditional kinetic conflict.<sup>11</sup> In fact, in hindsight, judging by the small amount of damage done to the Serbian military force during ALLIED FORCE, the kinetic portion of ALLIED FORCE shrinks in comparison to the daily battles on CNN and other news venues.<sup>12</sup> The Serbs were content to avoid confrontation with NATO in a direct military manner, and to fight in an asymmetric manner through the weapons of the Internet and statements to the international press corps in Belgrade. As Clark notes in his book, he spent a great deal of his time reacting to the media operations initiated by the Serbs rather than focusing on the purely military tasks.

Over time NATO learned that it had to respond in kind to the Serbian strategic PSYOPS campaign. The bombing effort that some in the West felt would loosen Slobodan Milosevic's grip on Kosovo within 3-days turned into a 78-day campaign of attrition, with PSYOPS becoming more and more an item of emphasis. After a slow start, over 100 million leaflets eventually papered Serbia and its population of a mere 12 million. Radio and television broadcasts emanating from land and airborne broadcast transmitters attempted to take the 'hearts and minds' fight to Milosevic. As *New York Times* reporter Steven Erlanger noted:

What began as a campaign against the Yugoslav military, to get Slobodan Milosevic to capitulate quickly over Kosovo, veered, perhaps out of frustration, into a psy-ops war aimed also at civilians, at their electricity and their water and their heating plants.<sup>13</sup>

Despite a tremendous amount of money and energy, the NATO PSYOPS effort was not very effective during ALLIED FORCE. The Serbs proved very resistant to the NATO PSYOPS effort. NATO's outside efforts of perception management on the Serbs failed miserably. Later efforts to over-throw Milosevic within Serbia by the student organization OTPOR were incredibly successful. The use of OTPOR to change the perceptions of the people of Serbia is a story yet to be fully told, but an excellent example of successful strategic PSYOPS.

Of perhaps even more importance to NATO than being prepared for another ALLIED FORCE-like conflict, which seems unlikely in the near term, is how to confront the asymmetric efforts of nations or trans-national entities that may use terrorism, threat of the use of weapons of mass destruction, or perception management against the nations of the Alliance. These threats cross national boundaries and are not neatly confined to a military commander's joint operational area. While nations will continue to combat these threats in manner that conforms to their own interest, NATO must be prepared to assist, using the pooled resources of all the members of the Alliance. PSYOPS offers the NATO leaders in Brussels a more discreet, a more targeted, and often more politically palatable tool than conventional military activities that are a blunt instrument to put 'steel on target.'

Additionally, NATO's continued activities in the Balkans demonstrate that there is also a seam between traditional operational and traditional strategic activities that needs to be filled and a policy modification must therefore take place. NATO clearly has interests in the region and has some kind of diplomatic gameplan. But implementation of any NATO policy within the Balkans will be most effective if all levers of power: military, diplomatic, economic, *and informational* are in play by NATO. PSYOPS would be an important player in the exercising of informational power -- but only if it included in the original calculus.

## What To Do

This paper is not an argument for more PSYOPS organizations or more bureaucracy to add to an already heavily bureaucratic structure. The changes that need to take place are more subtle but still could have great impact. There is no need or call for NATO to become a 'supranational' organization that attempts to take over the duties and responsibilities of the member nations.

However, NATO's view of PSYOPS and perception management as a whole reflects an outdated Cold War mentality. As one observer noted:

...PSYOP[S] has perhaps suffered most from identification with the hardware and missions of the tactical battlefield – that is, leaflet delivery, loudspeakers, and radio broadcasting. As a result of this, PSYOP[S] has had very low priority in terms of personnel, equipment, training, exercising, and doctrine. In addition, it has suffered from low visibility at senior command levels within the military...<sup>14</sup>

PSYOPS within NATO need no longer be just 'leaflets and loudspeakers.' Modern communications methods have dramatically changed the way in which PSYOPS dissemination can occur. PSYOPS targeting in today's age can be precise – mass PSYOPS need no longer be the primary means to conduct information dissemination. The Internet, email, personal computers, paging systems, cellular telephones, CD-ROMs, allows the modern PSYOPS practitioner to target specific segments of the population – even individuals. Today's marketing firms still use mass mailings but with the message modified to correspond to the changing incomes, ethnicity, family situations, etc., of specific population segments. Many today seek information through hundreds of television channels, radio stations, the Internet, or printed media. Specific PSYOPS targeting, *exploiting* the diffusion of information dissemination can be more effective than older methods and lessen potential 'information collateral damage.'<sup>15</sup> PSYOPS products need no longer be of the lowest common denominator in order to appeal to a mass audience of hundreds of thousands.

This brings us to the various items recommended for action. While these are relatively small steps, this should begin the process of allowing NATO to use the PSYOPS tool more assertively and effectively.

Explore and change policy to allow NATO PSYOPS to operate in the seam between strategic and operational spheres -- as in the Balkans. Some have suggested that this could be called Conflict Prevention Psychological Activities (CPPA).<sup>16</sup>

Proposed definition:

*'Conflict Prevention Psychological Activities (CPPA): Planned psychological activities in peace and crisis directed at target audiences in non-NATO countries in order to contribute to crisis management, deter conflict, and prevent outbreak of hostilities. CPPA are conducted in support of NATO diplomatic actions and in consonance with Alliance strategic objectives'.*

- Convene the NATO HQ Information Operations Working Group and make it a permanent fixture in NATO HQ. Have it begin to work on issues that cross political and military boundaries. Ensure PSYOPS participation and expertise is included in the IOWG.

- Discuss with nations the viability of a standing PSYOPS capability to provide planning expertise on a continuous basis to NATO HQ.

NATO found in its last military effort against Serbia that the battle to shape the international and regional perception of the conflict was more important than the casualties sustained or the land controlled. Certainly this trend will only be accentuated in the future. Consequently, the “battle for the mind” must be a central feature of future NATO actions -- at all levels of diplomatic and military activity. By adding PSYOPS within the "seam" between operational and strategic matters, NATO can begin to feel more comfortable that they can contest the informational 'high ground' in any future crises and conflicts.

*The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the policies or positions of NATO HQ, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, or the US Department of Defense.*

## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat*, New York: Public Affairs, 2001, p. 443.
- <sup>2</sup> Some untoward remarks regarding the new Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) in the Pentagon have setback these efforts by the US. The head of this organization, Brig. Gen. Simon Worden, reportedly said OSI would attempt to mislead the US public in order to create an environment favorable to US government actions to counter terrorism. Reported by James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad," in *The New York Times*, (February 19, 2002): 1. Worden's remarks about attempts to manipulate US domestic opinion led US President George W. Bush to order the shutdown of OSI in its current form.
- <sup>3</sup> Both China and Russia are in the process of reinvigorating their perception management capabilities. See Laura K. Murray, "China's Psychological Warfare," a <http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/MILREV/English/SepOct99/murray.htm> and Timothy L. Thomas, "Russian Information-Psychological Actions: Implications for U.S. PSYOP," at <http://call.army.mil/fms/fmsopubs/issues/psyop/psyop.htm>.
- <sup>4</sup> See the interesting commentary regarding the value laden term 'propaganda' ('a good word gone bad') in the introduction to Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995, pp. 1-16.
- <sup>5</sup> MC 402, *NATO Psychological Operations Policy*, 16 September 1997, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>7</sup> For similar suggestions regarding requirements within the US PSYOPS force structure, see *The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information in Support of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Time of Military Conflict*, Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, May 2000, pp. 14-17.
- <sup>8</sup> See Wesley K. Clark, *op.cit.*, pp. 441-43.
- <sup>9</sup> Dr. Steven Metz, "War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," presentation at the U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 6 May 1999.
- <sup>10</sup> This perspective is not new. See Daniel C. Pollock (ed.), *The Art and Science of Psychological Operations: Case Studies of Military Application* (Department of the Army Pamphlet 525-7-1), vol. 1. Washington, DC: Department of the Army, April 1976, p. 363.

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- <sup>11</sup> For a review of the entire perception management battle during ALLIED FORCE see: Steven Collins, "Perception Conflict in the 'Modern' Balkan Wars," in Alan D. Campen and Douglas H. Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0: Human Factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, Fairfax, VA AFCEA International Press, 2000, pp. 191-201.
- <sup>12</sup> The large numbers of Serbian tanks and other instruments of war declared destroyed by NATO by airstrikes were later found to be grossly exaggerated. See John Barry and Evan Thomas, "The Kosovo Cover-Up," in *Newsweek* (May 15, 2000): 23-6. When asked by a reporter to explain the discrepancy between the official estimates of damage to the Serbian military and actual destruction verified by the Air Force, former NATO Commander Wesley Clark responded that NATO had been under pressure by the press to provide figures and had given the best information they had available at the time. Interview with Clark conducted by Martha Raddatz on *ABC World News Tonight*, 12 May 2000.
- <sup>13</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Beneath the Falling Bombs," in *The New York Times Magazine*, 13 June 1999, p. 86.
- <sup>14</sup> Carnes Lord, "The Psychological Dimension in National Strategy," in Frank R. Barnett and Carnes Lord (eds.), *Political Warfare and Psychological Operations: Rethinking the US Approach*, Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1989, p. 28.
- <sup>15</sup> Christopher M. Centner, "Precision-Guided Propaganda: Exploiting the U.S. Information Advantage in Peacetime," in *Strategic Review*, Spring 1997, pp. 35-41.
- <sup>16</sup> New PSYOPS category and definition proposed by LTC Peter Westenkirchner, 19 March 2002 presentation in Mayen, Germany.

# Know Your Enemy, Know Your Allies: Lessons Not Learned from the Kosovo Conflict

K. Riegert

Lecturer and Researcher in Journalism  
Södertörn University College, Stockholm

## **Abstract:**

*There appears to be a world of difference between NATO's war over Kosovo in 1999 and the US-led war in Afghanistan 2001. The former was a limited war waged with the active involvement of NATO member countries against an identifiable enemy in well-known terrain, whereas the recent war in Afghanistan seems to lack any of these characteristics. Despite the differences, however, US media management in the first weeks of the war in Afghanistan have been hauntingly familiar for observers of previous conflicts. While mistakes will clearly always be made in times of crisis and war, the US efforts to shape the Information Space outside its own territory demonstrates that certain lessons should and could have been drawn from the Kosovo conflict – if the US is genuinely serious about enlisting the aid of its allies in its struggle with global terrorism.*

*This article describes how the perceptual aspects of Information Warfare were invoked by NATO and Yugoslavia during the Kosovo conflict in the struggle to influence the attitudes and behaviour of each other, the media and public opinion. NATO's own evaluation of the lessons learned regarding media management is contrasted to some lessons evidently not learned about shaping the Information Space in this asymmetric conflict situation. In light of these lessons, some indicators of recent US media management efforts are analysed during the first weeks of the war in Afghanistan to determine whether there has been a profound recognition of the need to shape the Information Space.*

## **Information Operations: Shaping the Information Space**

Information Operations is a concept that has only recently been incorporated into the military doctrines of the US and NATO in the late 1990s. In this globalised world of instant financial transactions, where state sovereignty is increasingly undermined and where the plethora of media channels opens new possibilities for civic activists, lobbying groups, international organisations – but also for terrorist groups – the Information Age brings new challenges. While the activities gathered under the umbrella concept of Information Operations are not new in themselves, the attempt to co-ordinate and integrate them into an overall strategy which utilises the rapid advances in information and communications technology is part of what has been called a revolution in military affairs.

The US *Joint Publication 3-13* defines Information Operations broadly as, 'actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems'. These include both computer-based and electronic information systems and human decision-making processes. *JP 3-13* also stresses the need to take into account the 'Information Environment':

The growth of information systems and technologies offer continuing potential for exploiting the power of information in joint warfighting. The labels placed on information systems and associated networks may be misleading as there are no fixed boundaries in the information

environment. Open and interconnected systems are coalescing into a rapidly expanding global information infrastructure.<sup>1</sup>

The global information infrastructure is thus not one battlefield, but many, and includes civilian and commercial sectors of societies. The issues that IO doctrine raise are thus not only military-civilian interdependency (and the need for increased co-operation), but also the intertwining of the national and international information environments (and legal issues this entails). Strange then, that the ultimate target of information warfare, namely human decision-making processes, should get such short shrift in IO doctrine. Little is said about the public information systems although these can play a decisive role for political objectives.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Dearth attempts to develop the human aspects of IO by gathering such activities under the term 'Perception Management' which include the military disciplines of Public Affairs, Public Diplomacy, Psychological Operations, Deception and Covert Action. This is about using or withholding information that will influence leaders' and 'foreign' audiences emotions, motives and objective reasoning.<sup>3</sup> The ultimate goal, he says, is to shape the 'Information Space' to one's own advantage. This article assumes that one of the main 'shapers' of the Information Space is the international and national news media. As Driscoll writes:

The ability to receive and share information globally has created societies wherein actor and audience become one and the same. To observe is to be part. As such, events have become boundless, determined not by the details of what actually occurs but by the way in which they are mediated, received and interpreted. The battlefield, thus, becomes an issue of *battlespace*, enveloping those who have become caught up in the perpetual transmittance of information from across the globe. [Italics in the original.]<sup>4</sup>

Since one of the main weapons of asymmetric warfare has been to use the news media and morally defined rules of engagement as spearheads in an attempt to drive a wedge between democratic leaders and public opinion, the Kosovo conflict is an interesting case study. NATO's war with Yugoslavia over the province of Kosovo was the first time that Alliance members – both individually, and as an organisation – had the concept of Information Operations in their military doctrines. The next few sections will look at how the perceptual aspects of Information Warfare were implemented for the purpose of influencing the attitudes and behaviour of the adversary, the media, and opinion.

### **Perceptual Aspects of Information Warfare in the Kosovo Conflict**

NATO's military strikes on Yugoslav territory began 24 March 1999 and lasted for 78 days, ending officially on 10 June. Prior to the campaign, only the US had a developed IO doctrine.<sup>5</sup> NATO's Military Committee presented a framework policy (MC-422) for Information Operations which was approved by the North Atlantic Council just three months before the strikes began in 1999.<sup>6</sup> Thus, neither the member states nor NATO itself had integrated IO strategy into their military structures or operational environments when the Kosovo conflict began. Furthermore, as the Defence Committee of the House of Commons noted:

An effective information operations campaign by NATO would have required an integrated political-military effort. At all levels from grand strategy, through doctrine, training and resourcing to intelligence support

information operations were not adequately incorporated into national or Alliance planning.<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, NATO used IO weapons during the Kosovo conflict – among them, Command-and-Control Warfare (C2W), electronic warfare, psychological operations, public information and public diplomacy. These were not however planned and co-ordinated at the strategic level as envisioned by IO doctrine, but implemented *ad hoc*, as the situation arose. According to British government reports and parliamentary inquiries, there were a number of successful IO-related attacks on Yugoslavia's air defence systems, communication lines, and mass media systems.<sup>8</sup> The electromagnetic (graphite) bombing of power plants and transformer stations is considered by observers and military analysts to be among the more successful attacks. The periodic blackouts caused by bombing became more and more frequent and made repairs increasingly difficult. The attacks were effective from both a physical and a psychological point of view - they not only blocked computers (including military systems) but also greatly inconvenienced the civilian population, which put pressure on the Yugoslav government.<sup>9</sup> Yet, as Zachary Hubbard points out, 'IO and IW target the cognitive processes of the adversary's decision-makers to shape their behavior to conform to the security interests and desires of the US and its allies'.<sup>10</sup> The extent to which the Milosevic leadership was affected by these attacks is difficult to evaluate.

The term media management used here encompasses what military doctrine calls Public Affairs/Information and Public Diplomacy. These describe strategies, activities and routines worked out to convey information internally and externally, i.e. to the media and the public so that the preferred message is received. The focus here will be on the civilian-dominated NATO Information Office (formerly called the Spokesman's office) and its media operations. These were the primary locus for the news media, not NATO's Public Affairs/Information Officers. It is however important to note that although U.S. IO doctrine prescribes PA representation in so-called IO cells, there was little such participation during the Kosovo conflict due to mutual bureaucratic opposition.<sup>11</sup> PA personnel argue that since they try to engrain the trust of the news media, their work would be compromised if they are considered part of a military campaign. On the other side of the fence, IO planners felt there was nothing that PA 'needed to know'.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, there was little co-ordination between Public Affairs and the NATO Information Office during the Kosovo conflict – since the two are conceived of as having different functions.<sup>13</sup>

Most analysts consider NATO's media management during the Kosovo conflict to be one of the less successful aspects of the war. In fairness, much of this was due to the fact that this was the first war of its kind – 19 member states, 19 national media and 19 spheres for public opinion constitutes a mammoth task for which NATO had no preparedness. The NATO media operation was very much trial by error; it became more adept as the conflict progressed. NATO's main problem was that its credibility was compromised in mid-conflict. This is a significant problem since the success of media managing 'depends significantly on the ability to maintain absolute credibility.'<sup>14</sup>

NATO's need for better 'news management' was underscored when some 70 Albanians were killed in the bombing of two refugee convoys near Djakovica on 14 April. After days of accusations, evasions, and conflicting information, NATO finally admitted responsibility. The increasingly suspicious journalist corps, and confusion between the military and political arms of NATO, necessitated reinforcements.<sup>15</sup> A team headed by Prime Minister Blair's Press Secretary Alistair Campbell and President Clinton's speech writer Jonathan Prince, were brought in to re-organise the spokesman's office. The team increased the number of

personnel, improved the co-ordination between the military and political arms of NATO, and between the NATO capitals, so that the Allies would be seen to be speaking 'with one voice'.<sup>16</sup> Former NATO spokesman Jamie Shea likened the new organisation to a political campaign with seasoned professionals monitoring the media around-the-clock.<sup>17</sup> The renamed Media Operations Centre increased the number of personnel from 4 to between 35-40. Although the re-structuring was meant to improve information delays between the political and military arms of NATO, and between NATO headquarters and the Pentagon, the Media Operations Centre continued to have difficulty obtaining correct and timely information from the military, in particular due to US restrictions on the release of information.<sup>18</sup> More successful was the co-ordination between the national governments that consisted of a number of daily conference calls and the simultaneous dissemination of the same material in order to get out the same message.

The functions of the Media Operations Centre can be summarised thus:

- Occupying the space: being on the air constantly with briefings, interviews, speeches;
- Planning events for the media: press conferences, interviews, trips to refugee camps;
- Coordinating external activities and deconflicting;
- Media Monitoring: in the Allied countries and in Yugoslavia;
- Rebuttals and replies;
- SHAPE liaison: information to and from the military arm of NATO; and writing and placing debate articles, research, and analysis.<sup>19</sup>

The strategy of occupying the media space with one's own message appears to be one of the lessons learned from the Gulf War, where 'feeding the media' was one of the major characteristics. Aside from NATO's twice daily press conferences, there were daily press conferences from the British Ministry of Defence after which there were press conferences from the White House, the Pentagon and/or the State Department. This meant a virtual bonanza of information for a European audience. These were supplemented by off-the-record briefings, overnight updates, or the 'interview of the day'. According to Shea, occupying the space has the advantage of keeping the media occupied, with less time to go and dig up other types of stories. It also plays to the weaknesses of 24-hour news by exploiting the thirst for the latest 'twist' in the story, and increases the chance of being able to set the agenda with NATO's own stories and themes.

Prior to the convoy incident, NATO had no possibility of monitoring the Serb media, no resources to monitor the media in member countries, or to fully coordinate the media message among national governments. Due to the continuing problems of getting information from the military, and the international media's access to events on the ground in Serbia, Serb media monitoring became an 'early warning indication' that civilians were involved in an attack. Secondly, the lack of Serb media monitoring meant that it was difficult to quickly respond to Serb claims with rebuttals and disclaimers, which gave the adversary the advantage of time. One of the lessons learned by NATO was thus that a crisis management team, including a dramatic increase in personnel, needed to be deployed at the first sign of a crisis and that the media needed to be integrated into NATO exercises.<sup>20</sup>

## **The Battle for Public Opinion**

In order to win the 'media war' three types of opinion are important: domestic opinion, adversary opinion and allied opinion/world opinion. Allied opinion was considered problematic by NATO since opinion was predominantly negative in Italy and Greece as well as in some of Yugoslavia's neighbouring countries. One of the tasks of the office was to

contribute to the press debates by sending in Op-Ed. pieces and letters to the editor, but these information efforts were focussed on the larger alliance partners like the US, the UK, France and Germany. Shea concluded, 'We will need in future a team to monitor the situation in certain sensitive Allied and Partner countries and to devise specific media campaigns in co-operation with the national authorities.'<sup>21</sup> One of the lessons drawn by the spokesman's office was thus that public opinion was going to be mobilised differently in different countries due to historical, political and cultural factors, and this had to be taken into account in the formation of media messages.

Adversary opinion is here conceived to include both that of the government, its soldiers and civilians. The latter two are important for a number of reasons, not least of which is the prospect of undermining support for the government. Regarding the attempts to influence Serb opinion and the Milosevic regime, the NATO Information Office was not ambitious. NATO hoped that Milosevic would realise that he had no prospect of victory through the overwhelming show of force and destruction, which aired nightly on satellite channels such as CNN, BBC World and Sky News. This was under girded by constant messages that the Alliance would remain firm, and would see the campaign through until its demands were met. However, due to early news reports of divisions between NATO governments and to negative public opinion in some countries, there is little evidence that this had any influence. Milosevic's strategy was to enlist Russian aid, while waiting and hoping that the images of the war would turn public opinion, and the 'wobbly' Alliance members, against the war.

NATO used traditional PSYOPS tactics such as EC-130E 'Commando Solo' radio and television broadcasts, and leaflets in an effort to influence civilians and soldiers throughout Yugoslavia. These had little effect on the Serb population, due both to technical problems and content reasons.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that although the target audiences for the leaflets and those for the NATO Information Office differed, the messages were often the same. Thus, the leaflets 'betrayed an astonishingly shallow knowledge of the political and cultural dynamics of the region.'<sup>23</sup>

For their part, the NATO Media Operations Centre considered it 'impossible' to influence Serb opinion since it could not gain access to the Serb media to present its case. The Media Centre considered television and radio the best media for reaching the international 'masses', with the press being an important medium for elite opinion. The Internet was never considered a viable tool for influencing Serb or international opinion, because one's message does not 'get out' there.<sup>24</sup> This despite the fact that NATO spent much time refuting rumours spread on the Internet, for example that it was going to use bacteriological warfare against Yugoslavia. This casual attitude toward the Internet is interesting in light of the rush to call the Kosovo conflict the first Internet war. Although the Internet was not especially widespread in Europe, and even less so in Yugoslavia, those who did use the Internet for information-gathering, debating and criticising the war consisted of an economic, educated and influential elite. As Taylor puts it:

It consisted of opinion-makers, people who were in a position to influence much larger numbers of people, and the very type of people who would want to get the story behind the story, for which the Internet is an invaluable tool. As such, this was a significant target audience for anyone battling for access to hearts and minds about the rights and wrongs or any given issue. The Serbs realized this, but not NATO.<sup>25</sup>

Both academics and radical Western critics as well as anti-Milosevic opposition voices frequently published articles on the Internet. These voices formulated a critical discourse on aspects of the war, not found in the mainstream media. They questioned NATO's motives, its military strategy, the legality of the intervention, and the regional and environmental consequences of the conflict. If nothing else, it should be noted that it was the Serbian-based NGOs, the Serb media (much of it Internet-based), together with the opposition parties that played leading roles in forcing President Milosevic from power in 2000. If one of NATO's goals was to weaken President Milosevic's power position, then it was negligent not to attempt to address such forces.

The extradition of hundreds of thousands of Kosovo Albanians to neighbouring countries at the start of the Kosovo conflict was a gift dropped into the lap of NATO's Information Office. This was one area where NATO exploited events to its own advantage through the media. Fortunately, NATO's civil-military co-operation (CIMIC) efforts to convince Yugoslavia's neighbours to at least passively support Operation Allied Force succeeded, and NATO literally took over the co-ordination of aid and relief efforts, its soldiers building the roads and facilities for the refugee camps. The NATO Information Office used this to revive its image as the 'good guy' – the strategy being to move the focus from NATO's military tactics to the humanitarian crisis.<sup>26</sup> The lack of access to Kosovo meant that journalists stationed themselves in and around the refugee camps. These were the only alternative sources of information to the press conferences in NATO's capitals, and the human drama witnessed there fitted media logic. From here the media could demonstrate NATO's humanitarian efforts, the evil of the Serb 'military machine' and the justification of the bombing in one fell swoop.

### **The View from Yugoslavia**

NATO failed to persuade the Yugoslav population of the righteousness of its cause. From a Serb perspective, this failure was not only due to the unconvincing form and content of the messages aimed at the population, but also to a lack of co-ordination between the messages and the development of the bombing campaign. The campaign was not designed in such a way as to strengthen these messages, but instead appeared to contradict them. Secondly, there was very little attempt to create identification between NATO and the civilian population in Yugoslavia.

NATO's main messages were that every precaution was taken to avoid civilian casualties, and that NATO had no quarrel with the Serb people. Yet, as the campaign dragged on, infrastructure targets were hit with increasing frequency, incurring major environmental damage and recurring electrical black-outs which threatened the water supply. No attempt was made to justify the targets chosen, such as the heavy attacks on Novi Sad in Vojvodina, and the bridges in the Northern part of the country.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, NATO waited until mid-April to bomb targets associated with the Milosevic regime and its political and business allies, although the campaign was said to be directed primarily at the government.

Independent Serb journalists, academics and civil rights organisers monitored international news organisations on a regular basis, either by satellite television, radio or the Internet. One of the most trusted sources of information was Radio Free Europe's South Slavic Programming.<sup>28</sup> The international media such as CNN, Sky News or BBC were considered trustworthy, but biased toward NATO for the following reasons: personal animosity towards Jamie Shea, misleading and false information, exaggerated statistics of missing and dead Kosovo Albanians, and the feeling that the media saw only the Kosovo Albanians as victims in the conflict. Those who presented the Serb perspective in Western media outlets were

Milosevic supporters simply repeating the government line. Alternative Yugoslav sources who may have had other types of arguments against the bombing were excluded.<sup>29</sup>

Key to understanding the Yugoslavian information environment is the media landscape and the coverage during the conflict. In October 1998, the Yugoslav government imposed a draconian Law on Public Information, which effectively muzzled the independent media. This preceded a crackdown on media organisations in the months leading up to the conflict. When the bombing began in March 1999, the Serbian Information Minister Aleksander Vucic introduced war censorship.<sup>30</sup> This included detailed instructions on close daily contact with the Information Ministry, and on what aspects of the war were to be highlighted or played down.<sup>31</sup>

One of the main narratives dominating the news coverage by government-controlled Radio and Television Serbia were the infrastructure targets hits, especially when these were schools, factories, hospitals and bridges. RTS was a main source of information for target reports – and much of this information was supplied by spontaneously organised radio amateurs.<sup>32</sup> Snjezana Milivojevic's content analysis of the main evening news programme on RTS, *Dnvinik 2*, concluded that 40% of the coverage during the 78-day campaign consisted of civilian or government 'resistance to NATO'.<sup>33</sup> These news items dealt with activities like protest marches, the 'We are all targets' slogan and accompanying bulls eye, the 'defence of the bridges' campaign, rock concerts, interviews with refugees from Kosovo, activities in the bunkers and the ways the government was aiding the population. Incidentally, the bulls eye slogan, the rock concerts, the protest activities and 'human shields' on the bridges were organised or usurped by either the government or the local authorities, and filmed for television. These may thus be called Serb psychological operations.<sup>34</sup>

One-quarter of the news coverage on *Dnvinik 2* dealt with 'negative reactions world-wide' – protests against the bombing in other countries and statements against the war by international celebrities or politicians. There was little coverage of the military activities in Kosovo and, needless to say, little on the humanitarian situation in the province. Those fleeing from the province, when shown, were said to be fleeing from NATO's bombs. Thus, the focus of government-controlled media was on the victimisation of Yugoslavia, the bravery of its people and the support of 'the entire world' against NATO.<sup>35</sup>

The Yugoslav media exploited the opportunities provided by NATO misinformation or collateral damage episodes: for example, when NATO said that Kosovo Albanians were being rounded up in a stadium in Pristina, Serb television went live to the empty stadium. When Kosovo Albanian leader Rugova was said to be missing, Serb television showed footage of Rugova being interviewed by international journalists. Against the background of ten years of government controlled news coverage depicting external involvement in the Balkans as fundamentally anti-Serb, where counter-propaganda in the form of explicit rebuttals of claims in the international media were common, this type of coverage was not exceptional in Yugoslavia.<sup>36</sup>

Not only was NATO unable to eliminate government-controlled Yugoslav media system, it lost propaganda points in the process. When NATO bombed the broadcasting repeaters, transmitters and facilities, the government simply took over those belonging to the independent media. RTS was back on the air within hours of the NATO bombing of its main Belgrade building.

The use of the Internet rose drastically, from 80,000 till 105,000 users during the bombing campaign.<sup>37</sup> The Internet was considered a lifeline by the NGO sector, independent journalists and academics. Here they could access ‘unfiltered’ information, share information with each other, debate among themselves, and make their voices heard abroad.<sup>38</sup> Although the Yugoslav government evinced little savvy in its use of the Internet, it did encourage Serbia’s computer experts and hackers to use their talents. The ‘war in cyberspace’ was thus the result of different spontaneous efforts – nationalistic exile groups, Serb hackers, the opposition, students organised by moneyed individuals – whose intent was to make their views known, to influence international opinion or to sabotage NATO and member countries’ computer systems. The most common methods by these different groups were: setting up home pages, sending petitions of protest, voting in Internet opinion surveys, participating in news groups, spamming, pinging, sending viruses or sabotage of official government or NATO’s home pages.<sup>39</sup>

The Yugoslav defence against NATO remained essentially within the realm of perceptions – military deception, psychological operations and media management. The Milosevic government exploited NATO’s Achilles heel by attempting to sway opinion through the media and thus provoke a split within the Alliance. Although this ultimately did not succeed, the Yugoslav propaganda offensive turned attention from what was happening in Kosovo to what was happening in Serbia, and put the Alliance on the defensive against its own constituencies rather than on the offensive against Yugoslavia. Indeed, NATO’s media management methods were the subject of controversy long after the war was over. Reports questioning the claims about the damage inflicted on the Serb military and the extent of the atrocities caused a great deal of unease among British journalists about whether they had been manipulated.<sup>40</sup> The media war is not necessarily over, even when the actual war is won.

### **Kosovo Media Coverage and Opinion in Europe**

What effect did the two protagonists have on international media coverage and public opinion? A number of media studies have demonstrated that the major news organisations in the member countries uncritically repeated the NATO version of the conflict. Dissent and debate about the legal and moral implications of NATO’s new role in Europe were marginalised.<sup>41</sup> The media participated in the personification of the conflict, the demonisation of President Milosevic, and this was often generalised to the Serbs as a people. With the notable exception of Greece, the national media in NATO countries cast their spotlights on the plight of the Kosovo Albanians in refugee camps on the borders of Yugoslavia. The KLA’s role in the conflict received little attention and the reasons for the onset of the campaign – the collapse of the Rambouillet talks – remained obscure. The results of these studies demonstrate that criticism of NATO was a function of the media’s assessment of NATO’s actions, rather than those of Yugoslavia. This means that the conflict was depicted in positive or less positive terms depending on the medium’s interpretation of NATO’s goals, tactics and the consequences of the war. While the press generally has a more nuanced picture of conflicts than television, each national media reflected the mood in that specific country.

Media studies of previous conflicts have shown that the alignment between national media coverage and foreign policy is related to the political, economic or cultural proximity of the country to the conflict.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the British and the US media were among the most supportive of the NATO intervention, despite reservations about the effectiveness of an air campaign without a ground offensive. The German and French elite press were more sceptical, with *Le Monde*’s journalists especially suspicious of the US, Anglo-American

dominance of NATO's media management efforts and the veracity of claims from Brussels. *Frankfurter Allgemeine* was sensitive to the differences between NATO members and what problems this could pose for the campaign. Finally, the mainstream media of two countries as similar as NATO ally Norway and non-aligned Sweden evinced differences in criticism towards the war.<sup>43</sup>

The European media could thus hardly be accused of adopting the Yugoslav media version of events. This notwithstanding, public opinion in a number of European countries was predominantly negative or split at the outset of the campaign: in Sweden, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Italy and Greece.<sup>44</sup> The ability of international journalists to observe and record the damage inflicted on the Serb infrastructure and population contributed to criticism of a campaign which appeared to drag on with little result. Polls indicated a waning of public support in a number of NATO countries, with Britain being the only exception. Opinion in Germany and the US, never strongly supportive, grew weaker as the campaign dragged on.<sup>45</sup> For countries such as France, Germany, and Italy with governing coalitions including Socialist or Green Parties, any changes in NATO strategy were particularly sensitive to criticism.

The differences between a predominantly supportive European media and a divided public opinion are significant insofar as politicians and the military tend to assume casual relations between the mainstream media and public opinion. This cannot be taken for granted, especially in an era of increasing globalisation. As scholars have observed, representative democracy is experiencing a legitimisation crisis. Declining identification and participation in existing political party systems are augmented by the erosion of national sovereignty through different forms of globalisation. As the convergence of print, television and digital communication media continues, so does the concentration of media industry ownership and the fragmentation of audiences.<sup>46</sup> The mainstream media have increasingly come to be seen by audiences, civic groups, lobbies and government as a power elite in its own right. Digital communication and the Internet have provided a forum for networking and organising new global social movements, potentially dangerous disaffected groups and the medium of choice for critical voices for whom the political system offers no alternative.<sup>47</sup> I do not suggest that public opinion on the Kosovo conflict was shaped by the Internet, but there should be an awareness of fragmentation of media audiences as one of the forces shaping the Information Space.

The lessons of Kosovo for shaping the Information Space were thus the need for improved military-civilian co-operation, and the need to address and prepare for the key role of the media in war faring. This means to plan for a media crisis centre to facilitate the flow of information at the first sign of a crisis, to closely monitor the media of allies, adversaries and geographically important nations, to quickly react to negative or untrue allegations and to understand the importance of the Internet as a factor in shaping the Information Space. Finally, and most importantly, it is essential to gain an understanding of the cultural and political terrain of the adversary. Gauging from the first weeks of the war in Afghanistan, have any of these lessons been learned by the U.S. administration?

### **Media management in War in Afghanistan**

In an historical perspective, the Kosovo conflict differed from previous Anglo-American conflicts - from the Falklands to the Gulf War. The 'pool system', designed in earlier conflicts to control journalistic access, was planned for, but quickly abandoned upon NATO's

entry into Kosovo. In its place, NATO elected to feed the media appetite and appear helpful by 'directing' journalists rather than controlling them. As one BBC journalist explained:

it is not about control but it is about presenting things in a certain light and providing access to certain areas to present things in that light ... not by being forbidding but providing a constant string of things which lend weight to the argument you want to get across<sup>48</sup>

In the aftermath of 11 September, the bombing of Afghanistan initially looked like it was going to be a repeat performance by US administration officials. Resources were mobilised for occupying the information space and feeding the media: press conferences were staged, still photos and videos of the planes used in the bombing were made available, detailed information on weapons systems was disseminated. One important difference here was that the deployment of Special Forces on the ground in Afghanistan meant that secrecy was paramount and that no media pools would accompany troops.

Initially, little media management was needed since the worst terrorist attacks in U.S. history were shocking enough to provide President Bush with overwhelming public support for an attack on Afghanistan. The media was onboard and participated in the collective labour of mourning and the search for those responsible. According to US media observers, few critics of the option of bombing Afghanistan gained access to US television networks.<sup>49</sup> The political rhetoric was pressed into sound bite form and broadcast repeatedly on domestic and foreign television media. Osama bin Laden was the incarnation of 'evil', just as Slobodan Milosevic, Saddam Hussein and Manuel Noriega had been before him. Old and new atrocity stories about the Taliban were daily fodder in the television media. This was about democracy vs. tyranny, rule of law vs. anarchy, good vs. evil, Bush vs. bin Laden. The world would either be 'with us or against us'.

As in previous conflicts, the war would not be directed at the long-suffering Afghani civilians, but at the Taliban rulers and their al-Qaeda allies. Pains would be taken to avoid civilian casualties. Lest the media or world opinion should worry about the consequences of bombing of one of the poorest countries in the world, food bombing was initiated early in the campaign. The drops were ostensibly to demonstrate that the US was not making war on the Afghan people, but criticism from aid organisations about the possibility that they could be mistaken for cluster bombs, and the need to provide 'real' aid through convoy deliveries, prompted many observers to conclude that the food bombing was aimed at placating Western opinion. The Taliban, as Yugoslavia had done with the PSYOPS leaflets in 1999, warned civilians that the food parcels were poisoned.

Despite warnings that the Afghanistan campaign would be a secretive one - this was going to be 'a different kind of war' - journalists seemed unprepared for the tight restrictions imposed by US administration. Although censorship and access restrictions are common features of wars, the US governments efforts to control its image and the flow of information are unprecedented in modern times.<sup>50</sup> This, in spite of broad support in the US media for the government. Such was the strength of support that the U.S. news networks and newspapers readily complied with the government's request not to air Osama bin Laden's speeches in their entirety. In Europe, media organisations scoffed at the suggestion that Osama bin Laden was using the speeches to send coded messages to terrorist cells around the world. Forbidding the enemy a voice is not new, and for the British media it may have been a chilling reminder

of the Broadcasting Ban (1988) on Northern Irish nationalist groups, including the political party Sinn Fein, who were forbidden to present their case in their own words.<sup>51</sup>

Few statistics or estimates have been cited by US sources, leading journalists to complain that the US is not keeping a tally of the dead or wounded in Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> This may be a sign that the US government is trying to avoid the discredited estimates of military targets and casualties from the Kosovo conflict. Another feature of that conflict, admitting or apologising for ‘blunders’ (i.e. collateral damage), appears to have disappeared from the Pentagon’s media management.<sup>53</sup> Critics have also noted that there have been few images of dead and wounded in the U.S. media. According to such observers, news coverage differs in this respect from its U.S. counterparts.<sup>54</sup> While the U.S. government’s efforts to control the domestic media may be grudgingly accepted due to fear of a public backlash, similar efforts world-wide have had a detrimental effect on the image of the U.S. ‘as a force for good in the world’.

### **Lessons Learned? Look Again.**

The U.S. efforts to control the international media image of the war in Afghanistan became visible in October 2001 with US Foreign Secretary Colin Powell’s request to the Qatar government to exert control over the television station *Al-Jazeera*. Since *Al-Jazeera* had a reputation for independent reporting and for antagonising Arab governments, the incident was embarrassing. In addition, *Al-Jazeera* was the sole foreign television station covering the effects of the bombing from Kabul, and had broadcast speeches sent to them by Osama bin-Laden. Conspiracy theorists had a field day when *Al-Jazeera*’s office in Kabul was ‘mistakenly’ bombed by the US some weeks later.<sup>55</sup> Journalists from the Middle Eastern departments of such radio stations as Radio Free Europe and Voice of America have also been accused of broadcasting ‘inflammatory’ and anti-American views.<sup>56</sup> Matters were not helped when it emerged that the U.S. government had bought the copyright to high-resolution commercial satellite images retrospectively from the start of the Afghanistan campaign.<sup>57</sup>

These overt control attempts appear to be the result of the belated realisation that Arab opinion matters and that images of dead and wounded Afghan civilians were getting significant coverage in the media throughout the Middle East. British Prime Minister Tony Blair was the first to publicly announce his worry about the lack of a co-ordinated public information policy aimed at a Middle Eastern audience.<sup>58</sup> Blair was also the first to give an interview with *Al-Jazeera* in early October. This was followed up by appearances from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and President Bush’s National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice. In the rush to improve its image, the US Administration hired a public relations firm, the Rendon Group,

We were interested in someone that we knew could come in quickly and help us orient to the challenge of communicating to a wide range of groups around the world.<sup>59</sup>

A coalition of information centres was then established in Washington, London and Islamabad to disseminate news to Middle Eastern reporters. According to recent reports, the efforts of Charlotte Beers, who heads the Rendon Group to improve the image of the US have been in vain.<sup>60</sup> As Taylor has recently reiterated: it is crucial to ‘know your enemy.’ CNN, particularly in the aftermath of 11 September, is considered in the Arab streets as an extension of the US government’s voice, and as such, an expression of US media imperialism.<sup>61</sup> No surprise then, that the belated U.S. effort to deliver evidence of the guilt of

bin Laden was met with scepticism in the Middle East. When the credibility of the messenger is called into doubt, then so is the message. CNN's recent launch of an Arab-language service is thus not likely to change matters. What is surprising is not the failure of these efforts to improve the US image in the Middle East, but the notion that several months of 'hard sell' can make up for years of neglect.

The concentration on controlling the flow of images of civilian casualties from Afghanistan may have diverted attention from anticipating the impact of images of suspected Taliban and al-Qaeda prisoners on their knees and blindfolded in US custody. To add insult to injury, the US then let it be known that the suspects would not be considered Prisoners of War under the Geneva Conventions, as this would make it difficult to try the prisoners in closed military courts. This has played badly in both the European and Arab media. European leaders expressed their dismay at this interpretation of international law and announced that the prisoners' human rights have to be respected. The US attempts to control the media were now compounded by the image of a unilateral superpower which was defining its own rules, despite international agreements, in its war against terrorism.

A Pew Research Center survey of 275 opinion leaders conducted between mid-November to mid-December 2001 reveals that non-U.S. elites are worried about the tendency of the world's only superpower to act 'unilaterally'. The poll also reported wide gaps between how Americans believe their country is viewed abroad and the way the US is actually perceived.

Americans surveyed believed largely that they were taking their partners' views into account in the war on terrorism, but most of those surveyed abroad said that the United States was 'acting mainly on its own interests.'<sup>62</sup>

The *International Herald Tribune* compares the results of the opinion leader survey to an earlier finding that 7 of 10 West Europeans felt that Mr. Bush made decisions based 'entirely on US interests'. There was also 'a far greater tendency' for opinion leaders abroad to see terrorism as a result of US policies than did Americans. Whereas American elites believed that resentment towards their country was a result of its power and its support for Israel, West European foreign elites cited the growing power of US multinational corporations, and US policies which contribute to, rather than alleviate the widening gap between rich and poor in the world.<sup>63</sup>

Clearly, the Taliban and Osama bin Laden have shown themselves to be adept at the use of the Arab media. Osama bin Laden's main tactic was to spread fear and panic in the United States by promising new terrorist attacks, while attempting to get support in the Arab world by associating himself with the Palestinian cause.<sup>64</sup> The Taliban used the tried and true method of allowing a specially chosen television station, *al-Jazeera*, to broadcast the images of destruction created by the bombing in an effort to undermine support for the military action. Alliance wars, as demonstrated in the Kosovo case, suffer not only from difficulties of co-ordination, but also from the differing needs of justifying the war to different national publics. In spite of this, it appears once again to be the mistakes of the media management campaign rather than the propaganda successes of its enemies that have contributed to increasingly negative image of the US in Europe and in the Arab world.

The US media management campaign appears thus far not to have benefitted from the lessons of Kosovo. In this age of global media convergence, domestic media and opinion are no

longer the only target audiences. Different national media interpret events according to historical, political and cultural contingencies. The same messages will not be interpreted similarly in different cultural contexts. This means an *understanding* of the political and cultural background of the relevant international actors is essential. Shaping the Information Space means recognising the need for intimate civilian and military cooperation, for integrating the media into *preparations* for crisis situations. It means understanding the consequences of visual images of the conflict, and preparing to deal with the backlash in a non-dogmatic way. Shaping the Information Space means monitoring the foreign media, including the Internet. Know your enemy; know your allies. So far, these lessons appear not to have been learned.

## Endnote

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- <sup>11</sup> Gary Pounder, 'Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War against Serbia', *Aerospace Power Journal*. Summer 2000, 14:2, pp. 56-77.
- <sup>12</sup> Pounder, *ibid.*, p. 66.
- <sup>13</sup> Jamie Shea, interview with author, 29 November 2001.
- <sup>14</sup> Hubbard, *op.cit.*, p. 58.
- <sup>15</sup> BBC 2 documentary, 'How the War Was Spun', aired 16 October 1999.
- <sup>16</sup> Author's interview with former Defence Correspondent Mark Laity, 24 November 1999. Laity has now replaced Jamie Shea as NATO spokesman.
- <sup>17</sup> Jamie Shea, telephone interview with the author, 29 November 2001.
- <sup>18</sup> Jamie Shea, 'The Kosovo Crisis and the Media: Reflections of a NATO Spokesman', Transcript of an Address to the Summer Forum on Kosovo organised by the Atlantic Council of the UK and Trades Union Committee for European and Transatlantic Understanding. Reform Club, London, 15 July 1999. Transcript of speech. See also Pounder, *op.cit.*, p. 68.
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- <sup>31</sup> ANEM, *ibid.*, pp. 318-319.
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## Information Era Manoeuvre: The Australian-Led Mission To East Timor

J. Blaxland

Australian Army  
Visiting Fellow, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario  
[johnblaxland@hotmail.com](mailto:johnblaxland@hotmail.com)

### Abstract:

*Several recent international military operations have been criticised, but one success story stands in contrast – the Australian-led mission to East Timor. Australia has a history of seeking to ‘punch above its weight’ with stealth, and battle cunning, backed up with, but not driven by, kinetic capabilities. This paper sets out emergent thoughts on the Australian way of war and the growing awareness of ‘Information Operations’ and Perception Management in Australian military doctrine that preceded the East Timor operation. Australia’s disciplined, restrained and self-deprecating approach helped bind together a 22-nation ‘coalition of the willing’, demonstrating the application of a manoeuvreist mindset adapted for the mass-media information era. The result in East Timor was a method that relied largely on a ‘tactics and television’ approach to accomplish the mission with minimal fighting and collateral damage to the region. The success of this approach would suggest that this form of Information Era manoeuvre is valid for the military challenges of today and beyond.*

‘When this is over it will be asked what was different about this operation from others. One of those things will be that we conducted Information Operations.’

-- Major General Peter Cosgrove, Commander  
International Force East Timor (INTERFET)

### Why Look at East Timor?

One of the most remarkable of the Post-Cold War conflicts occurred in 1999 in the Indonesian-controlled territory of East Timor. Believing it could win the election, Indonesia agreed to let the United Nations supervise a ballot on the future of East Timor, a former Portuguese colony it had forcibly annexed during the Cold War. On 30 August 1999 the East Timorese voted overwhelmingly in favour of separation from Indonesia. The Indonesian-sponsored militias raised to help ensure an outcome favourable to Indonesia were let loose in early September in an attempt to spoil the outcome. This triggered an Australian-led evacuation operation from 6 to 14 September. Known as *Operation Spitfire*, it used mostly Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) C-130 Hercules aircraft to evacuate hundreds fleeing the terror, including unarmed UN staff and associated East Timorese. Indonesia appears not to have appreciated just how transparent the events would be before the world, and by 12 September, facing intense international diplomatic and economic pressure, agreed to accept a UN-mandated international force to restore order.

The Australian-led International Force East Timor (INTERFET), under Major General Peter Cosgrove, arrived on 20 September. The Force swiftly restored order in what has been described as a ‘by the book’ operation mandated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter that has set the benchmark for peace enforcement operations.<sup>1</sup> Since then several publications

have been released providing detailed descriptions of the conduct of '*Operation Stabilise*' in East Timor.<sup>2</sup> The Australian Deployable Joint Force Headquarters or DJFHQ (dual-rolled as Headquarters, 1 Division) was renamed and expanded to form Headquarters INTERFET, commanding a force of over 11,000 troops from 22 countries from around the globe, including key regional Asian neighbours that added to the credibility of the force.

The initial deployment into Dili by sea and air consisted primarily of an Australian combined-arms, light-infantry brigade with naval and air supporting elements, special forces, and smaller attached British and New Zealand contingents. Troops were tasked initially to provide a secure environment in Dili in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1264. This involved disarming the militias while avoiding inadvertent confrontation with Indonesian troops still in East Timor – many only grudgingly accepting the force's international mandate. Within three weeks, Dili was secure and a light-infantry brigade had deployed to secure the border with Indonesian West Timor, effectively opening the way for the restoration of basic services, provision of humanitarian assistance and preparations for full independence.

The contribution of 5500 personnel to the East Timor operation at its peak was the largest single deployment by Australian forces since the end of World War II. While the Vietnam War involved a larger overall commitment of Australian forces, that deployment was much more gradual. The East Timor effort also severely strained the limited resources of the Australian Defence Force. Yet, the operation's broader significance merits reflection in terms of the nature of military operations in the post-Cold War Information Era – an era of asymmetric and low-intensity conflicts, many in urban but desolate locations, remote from the infrastructure of our modern world. The East Timor operation stands out as an unusual success in the post-Cold War era.

### **The View from Australia**

For a medium-sized power, Australia features prominently on a world map, but the size of its land mass belies its limited economic and military power and influence.<sup>3</sup> The Australian Defence Force has long taken pride in being a relatively high-technology force in a low-technology neighbourhood. In addition, the low population base has long driven Australian defence planners' thinking towards fighting smarter – 'punching above our weight'. Australia's experience in fighting in the nearby South-West Pacific in World War II and thereafter in Korea, Malaya, Borneo and Vietnam intensified political concerns about the effects of military actions on relations with neighbours. Consequently, Australian diplomats, politicians and commanders have often weighed the long-term political ramifications of military action against short-term expediency. While prepared to apply kinetic force – or firepower – when necessary, and structuring forces accordingly to include tanks, warships and fighter-bombers, Australia has always looked to achieve its objectives with minimal collateral damage. It has sought to keep its own casualties to a minimum and to contain the negative effects of forceful action on the nation's long-term strategic interests, including its relations with its neighbours.

During the Vietnam War, Australian commanders were conscious of the need to conserve limited manpower, and fight as efficiently and effectively as possible by applying their more stealthy and less firepower-intensive tactics – away from the more heavy-handed US forces.<sup>4</sup> Australian forces also employed tactical-level psychological operations, deception, electronic warfare, civil military affairs, public affairs and an array of other supporting military activities to enhance the tactical capabilities of the force.

Since its inception, the Australian Army also has been influenced by British military writings and, particularly since the Vietnam War, by US military theory as its source of operational thinking and doctrine. In 1991, following similar developments elsewhere, the Australian Army promulgated a doctrinal manoeuvrist approach to land warfare, emphasising an understanding of the centre-of-gravity, decisive points, lines-of-operation, the culminating point and tempo. Even while force levels were being reduced in the 1990s, doctrine underwent rapid change and strategic thinking shifted, reflecting government direction on strategy focused primarily on the continental defence of Australia. By the late 1990s, as the countries to Australia's north increasingly came to form an 'arc of instability', Australian military doctrine emerged from two decades of reactive thinking about defence of continental Australia to embrace the more realistic maritime strategy that has come to be termed 'military operations in a littoral environment' (MOLE).<sup>5</sup> What emerged in 1999 was an innovative and admittedly incomplete work-in-progress vision of employing force flexibly to achieve battle-space dominance.<sup>6</sup> 'Fighting Power', articulated by Martin Van Creveld<sup>7</sup> and already adopted by the British Army, was also incorporated, to encapsulate the significance of the intellectual, moral and physical components of battle.

Advances in information technology have been touted as triggering the most recent Revolution in Military Affairs,<sup>8</sup> and the term Information Operations has sprung into use along with it in the late 1990s,<sup>9</sup> in recognition of the wider use of information in peacekeeping and crisis management. Information Operations has also been referred to in Australia as 'shaping and influencing'.<sup>10</sup> By the late 1990s, many in the Australia Army had already learnt to think about military operations in ways appropriate for the Information Era. To most, that understanding is encapsulated in a 'manoeuvre warfare' mindset – avoiding hard spots and going for the soft spots, or 'gaps', to achieve a mission – where speedy and informed decision-making is considered critical to maximise fighting power and minimise casualties.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Australian Government and Preparations for INTERFET**

As the East Timor crisis unfolded, the international media had an important role to play, extending the political fallout during the crisis. Australian government policy had long stressed good relations with Indonesia and therefore wished to avoid a confrontation that would harm that relationship. However, widespread revulsion at what was being reported from East Timor compelled the Australian Government to act, mustering international support to pressure Indonesia to stop the carnage and wanton destruction, and to let an international force assume responsibility in East Timor.

The Australian Government's policy of engagement with Indonesia was being de-railed, but the crisis brought together the government ministers from the Department of Defence, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Attorney General's Department, as well as the Prime Minister, John Howard, in the National Security Committee of Cabinet. They met regularly at the peak of the crisis and consulted with senior officials including the Australian Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie. The personal involvement of the Prime Minister in the crisis meant that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet had *de facto* leadership.<sup>12</sup> In effect they were validating Clausewitz's key dictum that military operations are 'an extension of politics by other means'.

At the highest levels, for instance, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Australia engaged potential mission partners at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum fortuitously being held in New Zealand at the peak of the crisis. In the meantime, the Vice

Chief of the Defence Force, Air Marshall Doug Riding, visited several South-East Asian countries, seeking contributions from long-time regional partners. The personal nature of the Vice Chief's negotiations helped shape the operation as he overcame many of the misunderstandings that were arising as INTERFET was assembled.<sup>13</sup> Clearly the task of forming a coalition force at short notice presented Australian officials with enormous difficulties that required cooperation and a degree of mutual understanding – itself something of a challenge given the different departmental cultures of Defence and Foreign Affairs.

### **Information Operations and Perception Management in East Timor**

The cultural difference in Australia between Foreign Affairs and Defence was negligible compared to the cultural difference between INTERFET and the East Timor militias as well as their Indonesian military backers. What is more, even though the environment in East Timor was as rudimentary as any theatre of military operations, Information Operations were conducted – demonstrating that many of the components still apply even where high-technology infrastructure is missing or destroyed. Some observers have commented that the Information Operations campaign was not one-sided and the plan in support of the militias was orchestrated at high levels. In addition, after INTERFET's arrival militia groups continued to run an effective misinformation campaign in the refugee camps in West Timor in order to discourage the refugees from returning to their former homes.<sup>14</sup> Some have argued that Indonesians have a natural affinity for perception management and were able to 'run rings around' INTERFET's efforts.<sup>15</sup> However, the substance and success of INTERFET does not support this argument. For instance, Indonesia's actions in East Timor were widely discredited and internationally censured, to the point where it lost control over the territory it had spent 24 years trying to subjugate. By contrast, INTERFET was successful on the ground in containing the violence with minimal casualties, while managing a disparate coalition of 22 nations from around the globe, from many different races, language groups and creeds – and all prepared to commit to INTERFET while risking strained relations with Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> The limited violence and extent of coalition co-operation points to the success of INTERFET at shaping and influencing events.

The Commander of INTERFET, Major General Peter Cosgrove, envisaged a four-phase campaign in East Timor with specific but limited objectives. The first phase would be to negotiate with the Indonesian force commander, Major General Kiki Shyanakri, to establish safe conditions for lodgement. The second phase would be the rapid lodgement of the necessary combat forces. The third phase would be to establish a secure environment in Dili and then throughout East Timor. The final phase would be a transition of INTERFET to a UN peace enforcement operation. The security of INTERFET troops was to be the highest priority for each phase. Cosgrove was also committed to facilitate humanitarian aid to relieve the suffering of thousands of displaced East Timorese as quickly as possible.<sup>17</sup>

In the event, when INTERFET troops deployed to East Timor on 20 September 1999, they encountered minimal armed resistance, but they had to be prepared to fight in order to uphold their mandate under UN Security Council Resolution 1264. The maintenance of a high level of preparedness proved an ongoing potent deterrent to aggression, particularly in the first few days when the still heavily-outnumbered INTERFET troops were most vulnerable. Furthermore, the collapse of the militias had as much to do with the knowledge that they faced a sharp and determined response as it did with the purported withdrawal of Indonesian military support and patronage.<sup>18</sup>

As Major General Cosgrove noted, a less robust 'force optimised for peacekeeping would have in my view invited more adventurist behaviour by our adversaries'.<sup>19</sup>

The naval and air components were also prepared for other contingencies should the situation have deteriorated. The maritime forces deployed with INTERFET were assigned the mission to act as an air-defence screen and to provide back-up if the lodgement did not go according to plan or was opposed.<sup>20</sup> Naval-force protection also helped sustain the troops ashore since it enabled merchant shipping to deliver 90-percent of the cargo landed. The maritime component of INTERFET created a protective umbrella, within which the land component could concentrate on the job to be done in East Timor, without concern about the prospect of external interference.<sup>21</sup> Their very presence and contribution helped to shape adversary perceptions, to bolster INTERFET's confidence and ability, and to influence outcomes positively, particularly in the critical first few days of the operation. Also crucial for the lodgement and sustainment of the force was air support, particularly with surveillance and the provision of airfield services in Dili and at East Timor's second airport, Baucau. A recent media report also suggests that Australian F/A-18 fighters were on readiness patrol and F-111 strike aircraft were on standby in northern Australia.<sup>22</sup> Fortunately, in the end the land forces did not have to call on air or naval gunfire support.<sup>23</sup>

The land component operations in the first few days revolved around three elements. The first was the establishment of an INTERFET Response Force presence in the countryside, conducting reconnaissance, maintaining an Immediate Reaction Force and acting as pathfinders for follow-on forces. This force was a unique international group based around an Australian special forces squadron and including British and New Zealand components. The second element was 3 Brigade's security operations using two Australian infantry battalions, a British Gurkha company, aviation and armour, as well as other elements of 3 Brigade in support.<sup>24</sup> The third element was human and technical intelligence collection, and psychological operations.<sup>25</sup>

This third element played a pivotal role in discretely and efficiently vectoring INTERFET's limited resources onto fleeting and difficult-to-locate militia concentrations.<sup>26</sup> Based on threat assessments and the intent to prevent an escalation of tensions, INTERFET did not deploy tanks, field artillery or anti-aircraft artillery. The armoured vehicles that did deploy did not possess adequate protection against heavy machine-gun, anti-armour and mine threats, as they were not considered likely to be found in use by militias. Armed with this intelligence, focused troops could then weed out the militias with precision and throw off-balance those contemplating a strike against INTERFET. After taking a few days to gain first-hand situational awareness, INTERFET got well inside the decision cycle of the militias and their controllers, conducting 24-hour operations, dominating Dili and conducting air-mobile operations. INTERFET continued intervening and apprehending suspected militiamen, as well as responding to threats to peace and security in the Dili area and beyond. This vigorous response caused the remaining militiamen to flee and their controllers to close down their communications networks and withdraw.<sup>27</sup>

Before those networks closed down, several other incidents occurred that demonstrate the mindset permeating through various levels of INTERFET's chain-of-command. In the first few days of the operation, Indonesian troops continued to gather in East Timor's capital, Dili, from outlying areas while militias continued sporadic activity around the town. Sensing that deterioration in the security situation was possible, the brigade commander sought to pre-empt any increase in hostile actions – yet without escalating the situation – by applying

disciplined and restrained combat power for a psychological effect. He directed that all available rotary-wing and fixed-wing aircraft should deploy above the city. His plan was to demonstrate air superiority, mobility, observation and (even though only installed for self-protection) some aerial firepower. Aircraft were directed to fly low and hard across the city, appearing fearsome and making a lot of noise to unsettle the adversary psychologically, while at the same time looking for anyone likely to oppose INTERFET.<sup>28</sup> In the meantime, infantry troops and armoured vehicles conducted a hammer-and-anvil style sweep through the city. Admittedly, many of those that participated in this operation enjoyed the exhilaration of an unfettered but highly disciplined show of force.<sup>29</sup> Some people had worried that the presence of armour might escalate conflict, but the adversary saw armour and wouldn't engage. One commentator observed: 'We saw people scared of armour. We often talk about the psychological effects of armour. We saw it in East Timor'.<sup>30</sup>

These efforts paid off handsomely. The brigade commander had proactively grasped the initiative at a critical juncture, when the energy generated from the initial rapid deployment had subsided, and when the intent of the adversary was, once again, becoming unclear. He followed up this sweep with a series of night-time cordon-and-search actions and sustained overflights of the Dili area using helicopters equipped with forward-looking infra-red (FLIR) equipment. The message being sent out around Dili was that INTERFET owned the night as well. This operation sent a clear and strong message to anyone considering undermining the INTERFET mission. It also demonstrated the brigade commander's keen sense of timing and measured use of force to unbalance the adversary.

Similar restraint and keen understanding of the mission's intent also was demonstrated at the grassroots level. One 22-year-old Australian platoon commander and his troops handled a potentially inflammatory situation involving an entire battalion of approximately 500 East Timorese territorial soldiers. These troops, travelling in about sixty trucks loaded with loot, barrelled into Dili where Australian infantrymen had established a vehicle checkpoint. The territorial commander refused to show his identification and demanded passage as his troops began taking aim at the Australians. A keen sense of good judgment was required to defuse a potentially disastrous escalation of tensions. The platoon commander checked with higher headquarters, who authorized him to allow the territorial troops to proceed westwards out of Dili to the border. The Australian troops' discipline had held, despite provocation, and an exchange of fire was averted.

The platoon commander demonstrated that he had a sharp appreciation of his higher commander's intent and, although his rules-of-engagement authorised the use of lethal force against such provocation, he realised that the best approach was to seek to diffuse the situation. Major General Cosgrove observed that 'the decisions of junior leaders and the actions of their small teams can influence the course of international affairs'.<sup>31</sup> This was never more obvious than during the tense days after INTERFET's arrival and before the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor. During this period there were several clashes between militia groups and INTERFET's Response Force and between militia and INTERFET light-infantry troops near the border with West Timor and to the east of Dili.<sup>32</sup> These incidents demonstrate that INTERFET was a tolerant, disciplined force; once engaged, however, it could respond with immediate aggression and apply lethal force effectively. Moreover, the fact that these incidents did not degenerate into ugly fire fights where protagonists are hardly discernible from unfortunate bystanders – as occurred in Somalia in October 1993 – suggests that INTERFET was taking a different approach. The dividends from this policy as applied in East Timor are stark, particularly when contrasted with the limited success of some other recent peace-enforcement operations.

One of the key groups that INTERFET sought to influence was the armed faction of the Timorese pro-independence FRETILIN (*Frente Timorese de Libertacao Nacional*). This armed faction, known as FALINTIL (*Forcas Armadas da Libertacao de Timor L'este*), had exercised considerable discipline in the days before INTERFET's arrival when the militias ran amok, recognising that they had to avoid giving the Indonesians and their militias a pretext to justify excluding an international force. Response Force personnel carefully administered arrangements to convince FALINTIL to defer aspirations of taking a stronger role in security issues, effectively preventing them from adding to INTERFET's challenges. This approach also made it easier eventually to give FALINTIL a positive liaison role alongside peacekeeping troops assisting in border management, particularly once INTERFET had accomplished the initial tasks of providing a secure environment.

In the days and weeks that followed the initial deployment, INTERFET numbers increased and a secure environment was established in Dili as militia groups and Indonesian troops withdrew to Indonesia. This allowed Commander INTERFET to deploy the Brigade by sea, road and air to the western border area adjacent to Indonesian West Timor. Brigadier Evans' force included the two infantry battalions and integral 3rd Brigade units, as well as the British Gurkhas and the 1st Battalion of the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, which had arrived shortly after the main force had landed in Dili. A company of Canadian infantry from the Royal 22nd Regiment and a platoon of Irish Rangers joined the New Zealanders in October. Other national contingents deployed to the more benign sectors in central and eastern East Timor. By mid-October the manoeuvre phase of the operation had wound down, with forces allocated distinct areas of operation in which to establish security and facilitate humanitarian aid. Although the critical phase of the operation had passed, there was still much work to be done, including the coordination of some aspects of a fairly complex ongoing Information Operations campaign.

Headquarters INTERFET -- as the Australian Deployable Joint Force Headquarters became known once it deployed to Dili -- established an *ad-hoc* Information Operations cell to coordinate these efforts for INTERFET. The cell was formed from the Joint Offensive Support Coordination Centre (JOSCC), since the Australian Defence Force's paucity of assets and personnel had precluded such a cell from being included beforehand. In effect, this arrangement meant that the JOSCC staff officer, or J93, Major Kent Beasley, took on the job as he became increasingly available because of the decreased emphasis on lethal fire and because the targeting methodology applicable to Information Operations mirrors the lethal-fire targeting methodology used by the Field Artillery.<sup>33</sup> Given its *ad-hoc* nature and initial concern with the risk of escalation in tensions, the cell took some time to establish. Once it was set up, the cell was able to plan beyond the initial arrangements made in early September with the staff on Headquarters 3 Brigade for the deployment phase of the operation.

As an interim step at least, assigning these responsibilities to the JOSCC staff made sense because, when selecting a target, Commander INTERFET appreciated that the target's real value and the desired effect needed to be considered against the overall objective of an operation. Still, had the JOSCC function been needed, he would not have been able to perform these additional duties and Headquarters INTERFET would have been caught short. Subsequently, intelligence and targeting staffs were required to look beyond the obvious for alternative non-destructive, non-lethal options to achieve the desired effect. Major Beasley, despite the lack of extensive prior training, then set about seeking to coordinate the work of the Public Relations Officer, the Psychological Operations Platoon and other force elements

at Headquarters INTERFET level, developing themes and messages and ensuring a coordinated and timely approach to the task. Still, the *ad-hoc* nature of the new cell and the lack of established procedures inhibited the full integration of intelligence support and civil military affairs into the Information Operations cell planning process.<sup>34</sup>

By contrast, at INTERFET's smaller and subordinate Headquarters 3 Brigade, Information Operations matters were coordinated by the S2 (or Intelligence Officer). Information Operations formed part of the S2's portfolio because of the paucity of staff in the S3 (Operations) cell. Given resource constraints, it made sense for the S2 to have oversight because of the close links between the intelligence preparation and estimates process, reconnaissance and surveillance tasking, and the key aspects of Information Operations, including psychological operations and electronic warfare. The integration of different forms of intelligence, ranging from signals intelligence to aerial surveillance and topographical information, gave an unprecedented degree of tactical situational awareness to the S2 cell, enabling it to provide the necessary support to the Brigade Commander's planning and conduct of operations.

A major factor in promoting many peace operations has been the force of public opinion. In East Timor, public relations was the most significant aspect of Information Operations to be managed as INTERFET evolved, because the maintenance of the collective will of INTERFET's member states was the operation's centre-of-gravity. The legitimacy of INTERFET as a peace enforcement mission was dependent upon achieving a high degree of international consensus, and Commander INTERFET recognised this. Legitimacy was demonstrated by the inclusion in INTERFET of members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). They were particularly concerned that their participation not damage their relationships with Indonesia, ASEAN's largest member.<sup>35</sup> Commander INTERFET also appreciated that international satellite broadcast television and the Internet had increased his ability to influence the perceptions of key individuals and groups – including adversaries and coalition partners – and subsequently their decision-making process.<sup>36</sup> Consequently it was incumbent upon him and his staff to ensure that a carefully managed and scrupulously honest media-awareness program was maintained to foster ongoing cooperation. Commander INTERFET's media conference in Darwin prior to the commencement of the operation demonstrated his understanding of this issue. He knew that he was going 'live' to Jakarta and Dili and those first impressions would be lasting. He also knew that his words and manner could either intensify or ease tensions.<sup>37</sup>

Consistent with this appreciation of the media's role, and to the chagrin of the infantry troops deploying to Dili on the first day of *Operation Stabilise*, 20 September, two C-130 aircraft-loads of journalists were flown into Dili. The Australian Defence Force's Media Support Unit, assigned to assist journalists, accompanied them. The arrival of the journalists was scheduled at late notice, reflecting the *ad-hoc* initial efforts at the strategic level to conduct the campaign with an Information Operations mindset. Still, despite the initial resentment over the risks had the situation deteriorated, and the additional burden of protecting accredited journalists, many soon came to appreciate that the 'double edged sword' of media attention was working in favour of INTERFET. Media attention reinforced the mandate's legitimacy and further discredited the militias and their Indonesian sponsors. In the first few days before Headquarters INTERFET was fully established, and while 3 Brigade was busy establishing a secure environment in Dili, the Brigade Commander's immediate action on the discovery of militia and Indonesian military burning or looting was to cue the media.<sup>38</sup>

Critical to the plan for cueing the media was a confidence in the troops' discipline, high level of training, and understanding of the laws of armed conflict. The Australian Chief of the Defence Force, commenting on the degree of competency displayed by Australia's Army, Navy and Air Force during *Operation Stabilise*, observed that: we don't regard this as a one-off – is built into the system.<sup>39</sup> It was the calibre of the troops that gave the Commander the confidence to bring in the media on that first day. Australian troops have rules-of-engagement and orders for opening fire drilled into them, producing disciplined and alert soldiers. This kind of training proved instrumental in ensuring that the 'strategic corporal'<sup>40</sup> worked towards the common goal of INTERFET. Such discipline, combined with a clear and moral mandate, gave commanders confidence not to fear the media presence, but to work with it, wielding the double-edged sword advantageously.

In addition to media and legal concerns, a concerted Psychological Operations effort was undertaken by INTERFET. Conscious of the damaging effect of the backlash that misinformation could generate, the Psychological Operations Platoon was tasked with generating material that was scrupulously honest. The Platoon Commander worked closely with the INTERFET Information Operations Cell, as well as with the subordinate elements. This material included leaflets and loud-speaker broadcasts that were used in the early stages of the operation. In such a low-technology environment, leaflets and broadcasts were essential and effective tools for disseminating messages to a range of audiences. Then, as the force was established, radio messages for a repaired radio station and a weekly newspaper were produced and well received by the locals and supporting aid organisations. The newspaper was the main source of news for many people in the first few months, since no other news media outlet had been left undamaged throughout East Timor as the Indonesians and the militias departed. The radio program, which took longer to reach a wide audience, included what came to be known as the 'INTERFET Hour'. An appeal in Australia led many to donate spare radios for the people of East Timor. Over 300 radios, many of them large enough for use in a community hall, along with thousands of batteries, were shipped to East Timor and distributed.

In a low-technology environment such as the one in East Timor in late 1999, counterintelligence operations primarily meant field intelligence work – teams of humans collecting information, asking questions. These teams played an important role complementing the other available information collection capabilities to enhance situational awareness. They also helped provide feedback on how successful the Information Operations efforts were being in influencing specific audience groups. Infantry battalion commanders who had, at first, expressed reluctance to include such elements as part of their units changed their tune within the first few days of the operation, even requesting additional supplementation.

Today, electronic warfare is widely considered to be a conventional component of any military force, and once it became clear that an operation was to be launched, resources were allocated and information became available. Once deployed, the coordination elements were retained in Dili, but the Signals Squadron teams were deployed with elements of 3 Brigade.<sup>41</sup> At battalion level, the lack of experience in regularly working together on exercises meant that the Light Electronic Warfare Teams and the command elements were not conversant with battalion procedures, suggesting that more integrated training was required.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the concerted application of the various aspects of Information Operations,

INTERFET would not have achieved its mission without the support of the contributing coalition countries. Consequently, a concerted effort was made by INTERFET and the higher Australian defence machinery to 'shape and influence' in order to quickly muster the necessary international support, particularly from key allies and regional partners.<sup>43</sup> These troops came with their own professional skills and heritage, complementing the force with their unique strengths that contributed to the successful outcome of the mission. Many nations also provided military airlift assets – critical for the lodgement phase of the operation. It was no mean feat to enlist and then maintain the support from so many diverse countries with different cultures, languages and religions. Shaping perceptions and influencing opinions was an important part of the equation. This achievement alone is a mark of the success of the INTERFET operation in countering external pressures aimed at undermining the INTERFET coalition.

Arguably one of the most important aspects of US support for INTERFET was the critical moral, political and financial pressure applied at the APEC Forum in New Zealand in early September that helped persuade Indonesia to accede to the international intervention.<sup>44</sup> The United States went on to provide civil affairs, intelligence and communications support to INTERFET, as well as unique heavy-lift and combat-support capabilities that were in short supply in the Australian Defence Force. The offshore presence of major components from a US Navy-Marine Amphibious Ready Group, with about 2500 Marines, was an additional important demonstration of US interest and resolve as well as of alliance solidarity. Their pressure also shaped perceptions and helped influence key opinions, convincing wavering minds in the militia and among Indonesian local commanders not to confront INTERFET directly, particularly in the vulnerable first few days of the deployment.

INTERFET had been created partly to assist the United Nations Assistance Mission East Timor (UNAMET) that had supervised the fateful ballot on 30 August 1999. Once INTERFET had completed its essential tasks, particularly establishing a secure environment, the Australian Government – keen to keep costs down and restore relations with Indonesia – was eager to shift responsibility for East Timor back to the United Nations. Thereafter the UN resolved to establish a Transitional Authority for East Timor (UNTAET) to supervise the shift to full independence. While the fate of UNTAET is not the topic of this paper, it is encouraging to note that, despite the usual challenges associated with UN mandates, UNTAET has managed to assist the East Timorese progress towards independence in a peaceful and relatively successful manner. As Commander of INTERFET, Major General Cosgrove understood that his mission was finite in scope and time. Once his mission was successfully completed, he set about ensuring that the United Nations was best placed to take over as soon as possible and INTERFET handed over to UNTAET on 23 February, 2000.

## **Conclusion**

Although the threat environment in East Timor did not feature adversaries as heavily armed and equipped as those in other recent international military operations, the evidence suggests that the INTERFET mission could have been far less successful and far more turbulent. Instrumental in its success and the avoidance of greater clashes was the restraint and clear understanding demonstrated by the troops of the higher commander's intent for the mission. INTERFET troops and their commanders appreciated the need to limit the collateral political effects that an escalation of violence would have generated.

In September 1999, Australian operational and strategic concepts of Information Operations were relatively unrefined and in draft form, but at the tactical level, adaptation of the known to meet new circumstances resulted in a classic example of manoeuvre tailored for the Information Era. INTERFET's actions demonstrated an information-era manoeuvre mindset that delivered a relatively comprehensive Information Operations campaign consistent with emergent Australian Defence Force doctrine. Focused Information Operations efforts, incorporating fused and timely intelligence, allowed for careful and efficient vectoring of combat forces to hot spots in the early days that effectively unhinged the adversary in Dili, along the border with Indonesian West Timor, and throughout the remainder of East Timor. The coordinated application of stealthy and highly mobile Response Force assets along with the light infantry, armour and air elements quickly put the adversary off-balance and gave INTERFET the clear psychological advantage. This was the case even while it was still outnumbered by militias and Indonesian troops, which – at the lower levels and amongst territorial units at least – were prepared only grudgingly to accept INTERFET's mandate.

*Operation Stabilise* also demonstrates the significance of a shift from reliance on kinetic effects to an emphasis on Perception Management as a key tool to accomplish a mission. With this approach, carefully-crafted and carefully-timed actions, demonstrations, and announcements were targeted at specific audiences as part of the efforts aimed at 'shaping and influencing' – that is, pressuring them to bend to the will of INTERFET and hence of the International Community. Such actions were only credible because they were backed up with highly-trained, mobile and well-equipped forces on the ground. Also important were the maritime forces in support and the potent air elements elsewhere, just in case they were needed. Arguably, in basic terms, *it was really the tactics and television that carried the day*.<sup>45</sup>

The Australian commanders involved in launching *Operation Stabilise* demonstrated their understanding that an obsession with kinetic effects – blowing things up – can have long-term detrimental effects on national and international interests. In multinational operations, where a fragile coalition plays a pivotal role, relegating such concerns can have long-term, drastic and damaging ramifications. Furthermore, in the case of *Operation Stabilise*, the effective display of military prowess in a measured, constrained and focused way laid the foundations for the nation-building that is still occurring in East Timor today. The disciplined and careful application of force also limited the collateral political damage to Australia's relations with regional neighbours, and particularly helped contain the political fallout with Indonesia. For instance, had less disciplined troops not understood the intent of the mission in the tense first few days, unintended confrontations could have resulted in a far more difficult situation, further damaging Australia's relations with Indonesia and threatening to unravel the coalition that was so critical to INTERFET's legitimacy.

Perhaps this operation also serves to demonstrate what some have already argued – that Sun Tzu's notion of victory with minimal violence may displace Clausewitz's emphasis on the deadly clash of armies amidst fog and friction.<sup>46</sup> Regardless, *Operation Stabilise* was no fool's errand. It was an operation launched with regret, but also with measured determination. This combination ensured that INTERFET was an unqualified military and political success. Moreover, students of military operations can refer to it as a 'by-the-book' example of applied military force for limited strategic aims in a coalition environment – an appropriate way to use military forces as an extension of national and international policy. *Operation Stabilise* also demonstrates how Information Operations can be applied with a manoeuvrist

mindset in what is arguably the most likely form of military conflict in the current era – asymmetric, low-intensity and urban operations.

### Disclaimer

*This paper is written as my personal opinion. It is not an official account of events or government*

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See Ian Bostok, 'By the Book': East Timor -- An Operational Evaluation' in *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 3 May 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> See for instance: Bob Breen, *East Timor, Mission Accomplished*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2001; Alan Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks -- Australian Defence Force Participation in the International Force East Timor*, Study Paper No. 304, Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, November 2000; David Horner, 'Testing the Australian Defence Force, in *Making the Australian Defence Force*, in the series 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; and Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, in the series 'The Australian Centenary History of Defence', Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. For a detailed description of the foreign policy background to the events, see *East Timor in Transition 1998-2000: An Australian Policy Challenge*, Canberra: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2000. The economic and national interest dimensions are also explored in Nicholas J. Wheeler and Tim Dunne, 'East Timor and the new humanitarian interventionism' in *International Affairs*, 77:4 (2001) pp. 805 – 827.
- <sup>3</sup> With a GDP of US\$ 416.4 billion, Australia is ranked as only the fourteenth largest economy in the world. See *The World in 2000*, Economist Intelligence Unit, London. In addition, Australia only has a population of 19 million, and is nestled next to a large and turbulent neighbour, Indonesia, with a population of 210 million.
- <sup>4</sup> Australia committed an infantry battalion to fight alongside 173 US Airborne Brigade in Bien Hoa in South Vietnam in 1965. The experience disturbed Australian commanders, who were concerned to reduce casualties and more effectively implement the Australian tactics of stealthy jungle patrols and ambushing. By 1966 Australia had increased its deployed force to an independent combined-arms infantry brigade in addition to its air and naval contributions. See, for instance, Bob Breen, *First to Fight: Australian Diggers, N.Z. Kiwis and U.S. Paratroopers in Vietnam, 1965-1966*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988; and Ian McNeill, *To Long Tan: The Australian Army and the Vietnam War 1950-1966*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993.
- <sup>5</sup> This shift from continental defence to operations in the littorals has been a strong feature of Michael Evans' writings. See *The Role of the Australian Army in a Maritime Concept of Strategy*, Working Paper No. 101, Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, September 1998; and Michael Evans, *Developing Australia's Maritime Concept of Strategy -- Lessons from the Ambon Disaster of 1942*, Study Paper No. 303, Canberra: Land Warfare Studies Centre, July 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Australian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine 1 (LWD1): The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, Canberra: Doctrine Wing, Combined Arms Training and Development Centre, 1999.
- <sup>7</sup> Martin Van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance 1939-1945*, London: Arms & Armour, 1983.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for instance Alvin and Heidi Toffler's seminal work *War and Anti-War: Making Sense of Today's Global Chaos*, New York: Warner Books, 1993.
- <sup>9</sup> The Australian Defence Force has sought to define Information Operations into three components: offence, defence and support. Offensive Information Operations is defined as including: Electronic Attack (EW), Psychological Operations, Deception, Computer Network Attack, and Destruction. Defensive Information Operations includes: Information Assurance, Counter-intelligence, Counter Deception, Physical Security, Operational Security, Electronic Protection (EW), and Counter PSYOPS. Support Information Operations includes: Intelligence; Electronic Support (EW); Public Information; Civil Affairs; Information Management; Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence (C3I) Systems Infrastructure; and Situational Awareness.
- <sup>10</sup> Email correspondence with author from Lieutenant Colonel Mark Smethurst, 26 July 2001.
- <sup>11</sup> Popular books read and absorbed by junior Australian Army officers in the mid-1990s included: William Lindt's *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*; and Robert Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and AirLand Battle*, Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1991.
- <sup>12</sup> Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 39; and Horner, *Making The Australian Defence Force*, pp. 14-17.
- <sup>13</sup> Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, pp. 47 - 53.
- <sup>14</sup> *East Timor in Transition 1998 -- 2000*, p. 169.

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- <sup>15</sup> Correspondence with author from Major John J. Frewen, and Lieutenant Colonel Mick Lean, 27 July 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Correspondence with author from Lieutenant Colonel Mick Lean, 27 July 2001.
- <sup>17</sup> Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 23 - 24.
- <sup>18</sup> Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 17.
- <sup>19</sup> Major General P. J. Cosgrove, 'The ANZAC Lecture at Georgetown University', Washington D.C., 4 April, 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 29.
- <sup>21</sup> Richard Scott, 'Learning the Maritime Lessons', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 30 August 2000, p. 28, cited in Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Tasks*, p. 80.
- <sup>22</sup> MacDonald, 'East Timor – Revealed: When Australia was forced onto a war footing', *The Sydney Morning Herald*.
- <sup>23</sup> Horner, *Making the Australian Defence Force*, p. 38.
- <sup>24</sup> Horner, *Making the Australian Defence Force*, p. 38.
- <sup>25</sup> Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 53-54.
- <sup>26</sup> For a discussion of how these elements were employed in 3 Brigade during Operation *Stabilise* see John Blaxland, 'On Operations in East Timor: The Experiences of the Intelligence Officer, 3rd Brigade' in *Australian Army Journal*, 2000.
- <sup>27</sup> Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 53 - 54.
- <sup>28</sup> Some have argued that this was courting a similar disaster to that which occurred to US forces in Mogadishu in 1993. What marks this incident as different is that, although it entailed risks, it had not been done before in Dili; it did not involve the firing of weapons from aircraft; it took place in an environment with no heavy weapons in use by militias; it was for a short duration only; and arguably, its positive effect justified the limited risk. Arguably, the sweep was deliberately timed to test the waters – to see what the reaction might be – but not to allow sufficient time to organize any form of coordinated reaction. Correspondence with author from Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Fielding and Major Chris Field, 30 July 2001.
- <sup>29</sup> Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 55.
- <sup>30</sup> Major Chris Websdane, Officer Commanding, C Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, 2000.
- <sup>31</sup> Peter Cosgrove, 'The night our boys stared down the barrel', *The Age*, 21 June 2000, cited in Ryan, *Primary Risks and Primary Responsibilities*, p. 72.
- <sup>32</sup> See Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, pp. 56 - 57 (Com incident), 63 (on the border), 77 - 78 (Motaain) and 87 (October incidents).
- <sup>33</sup> Beasley, *op. cit.*
- <sup>34</sup> Correspondence with author from Lieutenant Colonel Chris Shine, 27 July 2001, and with Major Chris Field, 30 July 2001.
- <sup>35</sup> Ryan, *Primary Risks and Primary Responsibilities*, pp. 41, 55 and 66.
- <sup>36</sup> Andrew Garfield, 'Information Operations as an Integrating Strategy', in Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0*, p. 269; and correspondence with Lieutenant Colonel Chris Shine, 27 July 2001.
- <sup>37</sup> Breen, *Mission Accomplished*, p. 25.
- <sup>38</sup> Email correspondence with author from Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Fielding (S3 of Headquarters ,3 Brigade during Operation *Stabilise*), 22 July 2001.
- <sup>39</sup> Interview with Admiral Chris Barrie, AO, RAN, Australian Defence headquarters, Canberra, 31 July 2000, cited in Ryan, *Primary Responsibilities and Primary Risks*, p. 2.
- <sup>40</sup> General C. C. Krulak, 'The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War', *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.
- <sup>41</sup> Blaxland, 'On Operations in East Timor', p. 9.
- <sup>42</sup> Field, correspondence with author, 30 July 2001.
- <sup>43</sup> Ground-forces capabilities were enhanced by contributions from Canada, New Zealand, Italy, Ireland, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom.
- <sup>44</sup> *East Timor in Transition*, 137.
- <sup>45</sup> Fielding, correspondence with author, 22 July 2001.
- <sup>46</sup> Arquilla and Ronfeldt, *In Athena's Camp*, p. 18.

# **Fall from Glory: The Demise of the United States Information Agency during the Clinton Administration**

L. Armistead

United States Navy  
Doctoral Candidate, Old Dominion University  
armisteade@aol.com

## **Abstract:**

*This article examines the role of public diplomacy as an instrument of power within the overall United States government organization. It traces the development of various National Security Council directives and policies that attempted to utilize information as element of power, and in turn how successful each one was. This paper also details the formation and historical use of the United States Information Agency as the most visible sign of a strategic organization, designed to use information in the battle against Communism. However, with the changes brought on by the fall of the Soviet Union, calls for the dissolution of this group began. It looks at how the agency was ultimately absorbed by the State Department during the Clinton Administration and suggests reasons for this change. In the end, the author comes to the conclusion, that while the United States government may no longer have a dedicated organization to conduct strategic information campaigns, in reality its ability to do so, has actually been strengthened over previous eras.*

## **Introduction**

Information is the oxygen of the modern age. Breezes of electronic beams flow through the Iron Curtain as if it were lace. Trying to control the flow of information is a hopeless desperate cause. The Goliath of totalitarian control will rapidly be brought down by the David of the microchip.<sup>1</sup>

-- President Ronald Reagan

Information is power, and how a nation uses that power determines how effective a country can be in influencing the world politic. The use of information to affect international relations has a long and varied history through which the government or leadership elite attempted to control it, thereby exercising power over their people. Yet the tremendous advances in technology over the last decade, most notably in the computer, telecommunications and perception management fields, have forever shattered the monopoly of control over information. Unlike in the past, where the primary elements of power included military, economic and diplomatic factors, in the 21st century, it is much different with information rapidly assuming a place of primacy in the conduct of foreign policy.

However in this new era, the government no longer owns the resources nor do they have the monopoly on the flow of information, therefore they can only attempt to coordinate its use as best as possible. The fact that the power of information has been disseminated from the government to the masses, is a huge and radical change that is only now beginning to dawn on politicians, bureaucrats and the military. This is mainly because information has changed the power structure of international relations. No longer will it require a large organization to execute this element of power, but instead it will be the nimble, smaller activities and agencies that will succeed in this new era. The structure that can best maximize their

capabilities in the information age, whether it is at the strategic, operational or tactical level, will be in a formidable position to gain power. And yet in today's society, organizations that coordinate information the best, are often not part of the governments overall architecture.

People often ask what has changed recently to make information that different from other weapons or forms of power. The most important concept to remember about information per se, is that while it is normally thought of as a process, it is above all a way of thinking about relationships. Information is an enabler, a "source multiplier," a tool that increases one's ability to shape the operational environment. It can be a decision-tool, a central theme for an offensive campaign or even a force multiplier, but in the end, it all comes back to the question of power and how information can be used as a source of power. Therefore, information must be understood for what it truly is - a weapon, and if not used correctly, it can backfire just like any other kinetic device in your inventory.

As mentioned earlier, the use of information to influence foreign audiences is not new. Throughout this century, the United States has attempted to use information namely in the form of public diplomacy as a tool to influence foreign audiences around the world. President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information in 1917 (the Creel Committee), and during the Second World War, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Office of War Information, which included the Voice of America. This agency and its overseas component were the forerunner of the United States Information Agency (USIA), which was for almost 50 years the home to public diplomacy within the federal structure. Public Diplomacy is defined as government activities intended to understand, inform and influence foreign publics. This strategic use of information was a key factor of United States foreign policy in the Cold War, where information was disseminated to worldwide audiences by television and radio broadcasts, in the form of a state-to-state dialogue. And we were not alone. Nations throughout history, and to this present day have tried to use information to influence other countries as well as their own citizens since time immortal. How successful they were in those attempts often depended on a number of factors including cultural and psychological biases, as well as their means and methods of technology used to transmit that information.

Thus for almost 50 years, the United States Information Agency was the main organization responsible for the conduct of public diplomacy by the federal government. Formed in 1953 under Reorganization Plan No. 8 of the Smith-Mundt Act, this new activity encompassed most of the information programs of the State Department at that time. The lines of authority for this new agency when it was created were unique, not only because it operated as an independent organization, with the director of USIA reporting to the President through the National Security Council, but also because he coordinated his own separate budget. These factors and resentment of their freedom would become major elements in later reorganization efforts by the State Department over the next five decades.

## **Historical Background**

As the spectre of Communism appeared to be spreading rapidly in the immediate post World War II era, the Truman Administration wanted to strengthen and coordinate the foreign information measures in order to attain United States national objectives. To do this, the National Security Council (NSC) passed an executive directive, NSC 4, *Coordination of Foreign Information Measures* on 17 December 1947.<sup>2</sup> This policy was expressly designed to combat the extensive propaganda campaign currently being conducted by the Soviet Union at that time. NSC 4 was written to exploit and promote the message of economic aid that the

United States was delivering to a number of foreign nations, especially in Europe. In the immediate post World War II era, there were no existing government agency which was tasked to conduct strategic information campaigns, therefore this policy document was meant to serve as an interagency coordination mechanism. Led by the Secretary of State, the *Coordination of Foreign Information Measures* was mainly seen as a collateral duty for the newly created Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs position, whose other official duties included efforts to counter the effects of anti-United States propaganda campaigns.<sup>3</sup>

Coincident with these efforts by the NSC to develop organic information programs were concern within Congress about the State Department's ability to propagandize United States citizens as well as foreign nationals. Therefore legislation was enacted to ensure a separation existed between these two capabilities. It is somewhat amazing in this era of a throw away and disposable society, that much of the government agencies discussed in this paper are actually constrained by a 53 year-old law. The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 forbids the United States foreign policy apparatus and in particular the State Department from conducting propaganda on American citizens.<sup>4</sup> Much of this was in direct response to the immediate post World War II period, in which the conduct of public affairs and psychological operations within the governmental security structure was unrestrained. There were operations conducted by the Office of War Information and the United States Information Service, in and outside of the continental United States that quickly raised a number of questions about the propriety of these activities. Therefore to ultimately legislate the activities of the foreign affairs organizations, the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act (Public Law 402; 80<sup>th</sup> Congress) popularly known as the Smith-Mundt Act, was enacted as a sweeping legislative bill, that directed among other items the forbiddance of the State Department from conducting propaganda, psychological operations or public affairs on the American public.

Of course this new act created a serious dilemma for the State Department. Here you have a new Assistant Secretary who is supposed to conduct public diplomacy with a target audience of foreign nationals abroad and is also supposed to manage a public relations campaign for the State Department, aimed for domestic consumption. There is an extremely fine line between building information tools on the same subject for two different audiences. To make it worse, the Smith-Mundt Act actually made it illegal to conduct public diplomacy on the American people and directed that separate budgets exist for public diplomacy and public affairs. So not only do these staffs have to differentiate products between their different audiences, but they also need to do so under separate operating authorities and budget tasking. This was too much to ask, and so a decision was made to stand up a new organization, the United States Information Agency, whose sole purpose was to create a public diplomacy arm that could in fact conduct these activities legally, but only abroad and then only against foreign citizens.<sup>5</sup>

The USIA was thus involved in strategic national objectives throughout the course of its existence. Although Presidential staffs came and went, the mission remained the same, mainly to promote public diplomacy as a tool of the United States. However there have also been other attempts to strengthen their tools. Specifically on 6 March 1984, the Reagan Administration published a policy entitled National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 130, *US International Information Policy*. This document was envisioned to be a strategic instrument for shaping fundamental political and ideological trends around the world on a long-term basis and ultimately affecting the behaviour of governments.<sup>6</sup> Written by the staff of the "great communicator," it is not surprising that President Reagan would believe in the power of information. Recognizing that a strong international interagency capability was

needed, NSDD-130 was a follow-on to NSC-4 and a predecessor to later policy efforts. This document was important because not only did it draw on lessons learned from earlier administrations but current State Department officials acknowledge that any Bush Administration directive would probably be modelled more upon its precepts than that of the Clinton era PDD-68.<sup>7</sup>

As you can see from this historical overview, the use of a strategic information campaign is not a new idea. As documented earlier, all of the post World War II Presidential Administrations to some extent or another, have attempted to build a coherent public information strategy and to a varying extent they have succeeded in one form or another. Therefore the introduction of *International Public Information* (IPI) by the Clinton Administration (PDD-68) was just another policy document in a long line that dates back though the Reagan era NSDD-77 or NSDD-130 and even to the Truman Administration's NSC-4. This Presidential Decision Directive was an attempt to try to control and coordinate the flow of information across the interagency bureaucracy, and it was pushed hard by the Clinton Administration due to the realization that in the information age, it is true more than ever before that the pen is mightier than the sword. Defined as a combination of public affairs, international military information and public diplomacy, IPI is in reality about the power of information. For as we have stated earlier, even in this technological era, public diplomacy and the use of information remains indispensable to achieving our national interests, ideals and leadership role in the world. Concurrent with these efforts was also a major restructuring of the US State Department, where changes were to have major effects on not only IPI but the USIA as well.

The actual legislation that amended the structure of the State Department is known as H.R. 1757 "Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998." Divided into three parts, it is in Division A, Title III-V where the abolition of the different State Department functions are discussed. What is very interesting is that the actual language of the bill states that it's purpose is to strengthen and coordinate United States foreign policy, by giving the Secretary of State a leading role in the formulation and articulation of foreign policy through the consolidation and reinvigoration of foreign affairs functions.<sup>8</sup> To do this, the writers of this bill proposed the elimination of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), USIA and the United States International Development Cooperation Agency (USAID). By definition, the State Department's mission is to advance and protect the worldwide interests of the United States. The USIA on the other hand was designed to understand, inform and influence foreign publics as a means of promoting US national interests and dialogue between Americans and their institutions and counterparts abroad with its 7,000 employees. The USAID and ACDA are smaller agencies with very specialized missions, but under this new proposal, all of the functions, personnel and funding from these organizations as well, would then be transferred to the State Department to increase the power of the cabinet level agency. The actual language for these operations was spelled out in sections 311-314, 411-413 and 511, while a reorganization plan was proposed in section 601.<sup>9</sup> Of course as this paper will show, the reality of organizational politics is vastly different than theory.

For 40 years, the USIA has served as the primary public diplomacy advocate and strategic information within the United States government. Its task was to fight communism and to highlight the benefits of democracy around world. And in a nutshell, the USIA did its job very well, maybe too well, because some analysts believe that it was these international information programs that played a major role in the demise of the Soviet Union. Can an

activity be too successful and actually work themselves out of a job? Which leads to the question of what do you do with an organization that no longer has a mission, namely to combat communism, in this new era of peace and prosperity? Do you maintain the agency, abolish it or do you try to transform it into something new? With the change of Presidential Administrations in 1993, that was the problem posed to the Clinton Administration in the first year of his term by then Secretary of State, Warren Christopher. Although these politicians weren't the first to advocate the restructuring of the USIA, because of the changing world political situation, their suggestions were taken much more seriously this time around. The effort to restructure the State Department was actually opposed by Vice President Al Gore who cited both organizational and conceptual factors against consolidation. Arguments included the fear of a "super" bureaucracy, no monetary savings, too much strain on the administrative functions of the State Department and a loss of flexibility for the public diplomacy professionals. Taken altogether then, it should be no surprise that no changes were thus made in the first Clinton Administration, with respect to the State Department or USIA.

However the status quo would not stay the same for long. In late 1997, the NSC under the leadership of Richard Clarke, the director of the Transnational Affairs working group, began to develop the framework for what eventually became 18 months later, the *International Public Information* (IPI) policy document. The NSC Director laid out a Terms of Reference for a White House Fellow named Jamie Metzl, who was given the task of pulling together the various disparate interagency personnel into a coherent working group that could lead and coordinate a strategic information policy.<sup>10</sup> Not all executive level organizations agreed on the need for an information policy and so not only did they need to be convinced of its importance but also about the timeliness of this issue. So if nothing else, Jamie Metzl was successful in getting IPI promulgated as an official interagency policy. In addition, the NSC was able to integrate this new information concept into the larger reorganization effort of the State Department.

Much of the impetus for the formulation of PDD-68 within the Clinton Administration can indeed be attributed to these key individuals who were thus able to tap into a network of Defense, State and other Interagency personnel and build a consensus on the need for this policy. In addition to Jamie Metzl, other Department of Defense officials (including Colonel Bob Trost, Captain Dick O'Neil, State Department representatives such as Dennis Skocz, USIA official Carol Dorflein, and Rick Barton from USAID) who all met beginning in November of 1997 to build a sub-group on IPI to support the larger construct of PDD-56, *Managing Complex Contingencies*. This earlier policy document had been signed as a tool to help the interagency process cope with complex contingencies and its main output was the development of an executive committee (EXCOMM), that would meet and help make executive decisions during a crisis. The problem, as laid out by NSC Director Richard Clarke in his "Terms of Reference", was that if one waits until a crisis has occurred to get together and form a committee, then one cannot use the power of information to help shape the environment. Instead, Clarke suggested at this 25 November 1997 meeting, that there was a need for the group to develop a process to build a construct that would allow the United States to plan earlier for an information campaign. Thus, the primary task of this interagency group was to study the issue of how the United States government used information over the next six months and conduct an assessment of United States and multi-lateral for planning, coordinating and conducting IPI activities within the context of the PDD-56 construct.<sup>11</sup>

Thus throughout the winter and spring of 1997-1998, this interagency group met to discuss their objectives and by May 1998, a rough draft of a PDD was starting to take shape. A

decision was made at a October 1998 Deputies Meeting to go forth with this summary as a new Presidential policy document, and by November 1998, a smooth agreement was ready for signature. It was during that Deputies meeting in which the formal change of terms of International Military Information was substituted for Psychological Operations. This was done in order to get executive level approval and to mollify critics of the fact that Public Affairs and PSYOPS were combined in the same organization.<sup>12</sup>

What is especially interesting when you compare the combining of public diplomacy and public affairs under the mantle of IPI, is that the decision made in 1998 is exactly the opposite conclusion that the Truman Administration came up with 50 years earlier. In 1948, the State Department officials dealing with these two issue areas thought it was too difficult to coordinate under one office and so they were split, and the USIA was formed. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Congress was so concerned about the possible propagandizing of the American public that they passed the Smith-Mundt Act that legislated that the State Department could only conduct public diplomacy abroad and only then to foreign nationals. While that task may have been difficult to do in 1948, how about trying to do it 50 years later? Technology has changed over the last five decades. How does one ensure that a Internet-based web-site is only viewed by a foreign audience, especially given the fact that video and audio-streaming technology, radio and TV broadcasts can now be sent around the world? How does that change the nature of public diplomacy? These were the types of questions that had to be answered by this interagency working group as they struggled to find consensus on their new policy.

Yet change does not come from just policy alone. As most bureaucrats understand, the real power of organizational change and especially a large one such as the State Department often only results from funding and personnel moves. To get things done, a new group must have these criteria, otherwise it is only a "pipedream". To an extent, that is what happened with IPI. It wasn't until August 2000, more than 16 months after the original signing of the PDD, that the first uniformed military officer was stationed at State Department and it was at that time that true progress began to occur. While State Department officials like Jamie Metzler, Peter Kovach and Joe Johnson have done an incredible job of keeping the flame and spirit of IPI alive, their job was not to function as planners. That is what was needed to make this program work, namely an action officer who can be assigned to run a program. As one of the participants stated, the biggest problem with IPI early on was that there were no operators (i.e., that was no one to operationalize the process). For these reasons and more, that is why during the first two years, PDD-68 has been slow to function and overall results been less than outstanding. But the other aspects of reorganization within the State Department have gone somewhat smoother.

## **The Information Revolution**

Perception is based on ideas. Technology changes ideas, perception and reality. Whereas in the past the average citizen, activist, group or organization was dependent on the government for communication and information infrastructure, that is no longer the case today. There is much more interaction and interconnectedness among people of the different nations, than ever before which changes the way that a state must conduct its foreign policy initiatives. No longer can pin-striped diplomats hash out an agreement in secret and then deliver it fait accompli to the American public. Or for that matter any nation's populace. Instead, agreements or negotiations need to be "sold" to the audience; they need to be packaged in a manner that is not only understood but supported by a majority in order for that treaty to

obtain ratification. And that is where public diplomacy and the State Department become so important.

Public Diplomacy as mentioned earlier is considered the act of conducting public affairs about the United States to foreign audiences. While some consider it an act of propagandizing our adversaries, others have termed it instead as the use of public opinion to validate American policies. As mentioned earlier, many government officials have come to realize the power inherent in public diplomacy and have come to believe that it can be an effective tool, perhaps a "Soft Power" weapon that can fight anti-American doctrine around the world. As noted by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in a 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, "Soft Power and free information can, if sufficiently persuasive, change perceptions of self interest and thereby alter how hard power and strategic information are used."<sup>13</sup> So the question is often asked "Can pressure really be put on foreign governments simply by spreading the word of democracy to these oppressed people"? Perhaps by raising hope of the local populations, this is possible, but the other question that must of course be asked is: How effective can public diplomacy can really be? And even if a strategic information campaign can be implemented, how can one be sure of its effectiveness? Can one accurately measure the effects of a radio broadcast, a polling survey, or a distributed pamphlet? Yet according to former officials of the USIA, these State Department personnel felt exactly that: that their efforts to conduct offensive informational campaigns was very productive around the world.

In the heyday of the USIA, TV and radio programs produced by contracted artists and directors were on par with any domestic programs then available. Quality was top notch and these products were distributed around the world as an overall campaign by the United States to demonstrate the superiority of democracy over communism. In fact, the famous Nixon-Krushchev "Kitchen Debate" was held in a USIA sponsored exhibit, at Moscow's Sokolniki Park.<sup>14</sup> So events such as these did a lot to promote the ideas of freedom and they were very successful. But with the advent of numerous worldwide TV and radio stations, streaming video, and 24-hour news stations, how can a government bureaucracy compete in this information-saturated environment? So even though it is true that the United States needs an information capability probably now more than ever, many officials believed that the government would be best served if that function were to be an integral part of the State Department, accountable to the Ambassador and serving as a support function within the overall architecture, not as a standalone entity. In fact, as will be highlighted in the last section, much of the language of the Reform and Restructuring Act was actually written to strengthen the State Department by eliminating redundancy and developing a core of public diplomacy professionals.

So why didn't the advent of new technology reinforce the idea that the USIA needed to be retained? If it is true that we are living in the Information Age, then why shouldn't an agency whose sole task is to disseminate information abroad be in fact enlarged or enhanced? Perhaps more than any other factor, because the USIA is precisely that, a bureaucracy. And any agency in this era of networked organizations and flattened structures is going to have trouble competing in an environment where corporations and non-governmental organizations are much more responsive to the fast paced world.

## **The End of the Cold War and the Breakup of the Soviet Union**

In many ways, World War II forever changed the United States. From a foreign policy perspective, the surrender of Germany and Japan reinforced the feeling within the leadership of America that it could no longer return to its interwar isolationist posture. At the same time, influential diplomats like George Kennan, George Marshall and others were arguing that

containment and deterrence were new strategies that must be pursued by the United States in order to combat the spread of communism. From these earliest post war documents, strategic information campaigns as noted earlier were seen as valuable tools in the Cold War and organizations such as USIA and the VOA were commissioned.

From this auspicious start, the USIA and its supporters had high hopes for its success in promoting the causes of the United States. The use of public diplomacy throughout the Cold War and post Cold War period by the United States is characterized as a history of extreme emotions. There were periods of intense activity in the use of public diplomacy as a tool to combat communism (1945-1953, 1962-1968, 1980-1989), while there were also times of relative inactivity. The high interest in public diplomacy appears to have coincided with time periods of Cold War that were "colder" than others. Government officials were thus forced to try to think "out of the box" to put pressure on the Soviet Union, and since the traditional methods of power including military, diplomatic and economic often did not seem to be as effective in these particular periods, then it was only natural that the role of information and public diplomacy would tend to rise in importance. These information tools were able to reach deep inside the borders of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, through the use of broadcast radio, TV stations, newspapers, direct mailings, and leaflets. Their effect was immeasurable but anecdotal evidence seems to point to huge dividends for the United States by this relatively small group of public diplomacy professionals.

The end of the Cold War has rendered obsolete much of the *raison d'etre* for the USIA, specifically regarding their programs affecting propaganda against the Soviet Union. Threats of course can change, and as it became more clear to Americans what a new world order really meant, calls began to arise not for a series of cuts in public diplomacy programs, but instead for a series of strengthening measures. Commissions were authorized to study the uses of strategic information campaigns in a variety of regional conflicts where the use of military power was not always seen as entirely useful. As mentioned earlier, the basic premise that information is power, and that it can be used to effect national security has still yet to be realized. Some of that can be attributed to the fact that the United States as a whole is reticent to involve itself in peacekeeping campaigns that are not seen as threatening the national security of our nation. Therefore each of the different military operations that has been conducted in the post Cold War era, has been justified to the American public in one form or the other as necessary to maintaining our nation's vital interests. So there has not been a concerted effort to meld together the disparate portions of the United States governments strategic information campaign to conduct an integrated campaign against any of the current regional threats.

Attempts were thus made to adapt the USIA to these new constraints with the development of the Information or "I" Bureau. This sub-group was designed to take advantage of the growing power of technology, particularly with respect to the Internet and provide for a "team" approach to conducting public diplomacy. This Bureau developed extensive web pages and electronic collections of United States government documents on major foreign policy issues that could be downloaded or transmitted to any of the more than 100 embassies that were suitably equipped instantaneously. While this was a right step in the direction of greater interoperability, there are still many instances where the great changes brought on by the end of the Cold War are still causing perturbations for the diplomatic community.

Whereas before public diplomacy professionals could somewhat feel comfortable in the fact that they felt knew the Soviet threat, that is not the case today. With crises occurring all over the globe, it is often impossible to develop the background data and intelligence briefings

necessary to properly produce a successful propaganda plan. Therefore unfortunately for USIA, measures of success in the post Cold War are not nearly as effective or tangible as before. There is no “evil empire” to combat, and so when Congress or the Administration is looking for agencies to cut or restructure, naturally they will turn to organizations whose main mission was previously dissolved with the collapse of the Soviet Union. While the USIA has adapted and changed somewhat over the last decade, the mere fact that the majority of their effort was applied against the Soviet Union does not help when it comes to developing support on Capitol Hill. Success and quantifiable results must be given to secure adequate funding in this era of downsizing and cutbacks, so it is only natural that all agencies had to prepare for their own respective share of restructuring. It was in this environment that the USIA found itself in during the Clinton Administration, so in the end, USIA was probably marginalized by its very success.

### **Domestic Political Agenda**

The USIA has always enjoyed an independent status within the United States government since its founding in 1953. While that is good in many aspects, it can also lead to a distinct lack of support when it comes to defending the organization from its critics. This was notably apparent when the various proposals to absorb or abolish the agency began to surface during the Clinton Administration. Some of these ideas were mainly internal, like the one first initiated by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, but there were also other long-standing criticisms of these activities from Congress as well. In addition, factors such as personnel, budgeting and mission responsibilities were considered as part of the debate for any reorganization efforts. Specifically, there were some State Department officials who were anxious to capture their share of the semi-independent organization's budget (approximately \$313 million), but also the freedom enjoyed by the various personnel within the USIA was resented by those at Foggy Bottom, as well.

One comment that I heard repeatedly from State Department and career Foreign Service officers, as well as staffers on Capitol Hill, is that they viewed the USIA as a “loose cannon”. A number of Ambassadors had also stated that they felt they had little to no control over the foreign service personnel working the public diplomacy issues within their embassy. Thus, although the USIA staffers were officially based within the overall State Department structure, their chain-of-command was often straight to Washington, which bypassed the Ambassador and his country team. This lack of accountability was a main theme I found resonating in State Department personnel, and so it was only natural that any reform effort would focus on building a clear command and control structure. Therefore, it should be no surprise that in their attempts to build support for their Reform and Restructuring Act, the staffers of Senator Helms were able to get the five former Republican Secretaries of State to come on-board as a bit of a partisan *coup* to help build consensus for this new legislation.

As former House Speaker Tip O'Neil once said, "All politics is local." And such is the case in the bureaucratic maneuvers associated with attempts by the House of Representatives and the Senate to reform the State Department. Most of the effort arose from the momentous 1994 elections, in which for the first time the Republicans gained control of both the House and Senate, a position that they quickly turned to their advantage. Speaker Newt Gingrich signed the *Contract with America*, which promised a new way of doing business and there were even calls for a serious reorganization of the executive branch of the United States government. Many Representatives and Senators wanted to get rid of whole Departments such as Energy or Education, and so the study to reorganize the State Department was just one in a series of

efforts by the Republicans to minimize the influence of the government in the day to day affairs of the average American.

Yet if you want to attribute the driving voice for the reorganization of the State Department, most of that recognition must go to Senator Helms, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The senior Republican from North Carolina began a campaign to reform the State Department that lasted the better part of four years from 1994-1998. As with all great reform movements, this effort had its successes and failures, but the reorganization of this agency would probably not have happened if President Clinton were not in the situation of having to nominate a new Secretary of State in 1997. Warren Christopher who had held that post since 1993 was leaving and there was a very short list of potential candidates for this top level foreign policy position. However, any nomination had to go through Senator Helms' office, and as a long-time critic of this executive Department, he was not willing to approve the next Secretary of State unless an agreement was reached to initiate a serious reform of the bureaucracy within this cabinet agency. Therefore a deal was struck between the President and the Senator from North Carolina. A private meeting was held between the President, Vice-President and the Senator in which in exchange for the processing of the nomination of Secretary Albright and other key executive appointments, the White House and incoming Secretary of State would agree to a reorganization of the State Department. Although internal memos by Secretary Christopher had suggested this possibility as early as 1993, efforts by Vice President Gore and other State Department bureaucrats, notably Brian Atwood at USAID, had changed President Clinton's mind. Therefore, in the minds of these Senate staffers, it was only with the need for a new Secretary of State that gave Senator Helms the political leverage he needed to effect a change.

Thus it may not have been a surprise when, on 18 April 1997, the White House announced that the State Department was officially starting a reorganization process. Teams were set up at each level (Steering Committee, Core and Planning), and they were supported by six task forces and ten major management groups to deliberate the exhausting details. Throughout the spring and summer of 1997, representatives from USIA and State Department met to iron out the differences and lay out the procedures for the merging of these two organizations. The basic purpose of the proposed Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 as reiterated by staffers for Senator Helms was to strengthen the State Department, and to make it more responsive as an instrument of foreign policy. In addition, Congress felt that there was duplication and redundancy between USIA and the Cabinet agency that could be eliminated. Thus, the best practices from each organization were, in theory, to be accepted and used in a manner beneficial to the overall conduct of foreign policy. So, as the negotiations proceeded, one of the major goals of this effort, was to build a reformed Department that could give public diplomacy a better voice within the larger overall structure. But to do that, and especially during these first crucial years, it was agreed during these initial negotiations that funding for public diplomacy would be deliberately fenced off from the State budget for a short period. This was also done to abide by the provisions of the Smith-Mundt Act, which are still in effect and prohibits the Department from propagandizing the American public.

So in this process, political maneuvering by both the Democrats and Republicans to sign the Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 resulted in compromises on both sides of the aisle. The Republicans got a reduction in government agencies as well as a higher profile for public diplomacy within the overall structure. The Democrats on the other hand ensured that no jobs were lost and although the other semi-independent agency USAID remained independent, it came at huge political cost to its former director.<sup>15</sup> Yet many of the former USIA activities

were not affected by the absorption such as the cultural or broadcasting activities. Likewise most of the employees of the former semi-independent agency USIA have ultimately been transferred in status to lateral comparable positions within the State Department, and some have even obtained raises or promotions as part of the overall process.

Public diplomacy is extremely important in the conduct of foreign policy and through the efforts of the USIA, the Voice of America and its surrogate radio stations, much progress was made throughout the Cold War era. Therefore a key component of the Reform and Restructuring Act was to maintain a credible public diplomacy capability during the reorganization plan by keeping the majority of the Foreign Service Officers intact as a new "cone" within the overall State Department organization. It was recognized that public diplomacy functioned more like a functional rather than a regional bureau; therefore, much emphasis was placed on building a new bureau or department with the enlarged State Department.<sup>16</sup> This new division, which in reality was a briefed up version of the pre-consolidation "I" branch, would now house two key components of the former USIA, notably the Education and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and International Information Programs (IIP) branches as well as the public affairs section. Probably the most important feature of the consolidation was development of this public diplomacy core of personnel. Supported by senior level management, this new section is now led by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, whose main goal was give a larger focus on public diplomacy within the State Department.

However that was not the only area that former USIA officials filled with the transition plan. Over 100 public diplomacy specialists transferred into positions within the regional and functional bureaus, and in doing so they have ensured that public diplomacy has become much closer to typical State Department policymaking. Yet it really is the work of the IIP as the "operational arm" of the executive branch, as the advocate of the United States positions on public diplomacy where the consolidation has had the greatest effect. A good example of this can be seen in the upgraded use of the Washington File, an electronic daily program that produces government texts, transcripts and policy statements. Greatly expanded as more and more State Department employees gain a greater appreciation of its capability, this product and other services are only now starting to become really appreciated within the State Department as a whole.

As time goes on, the hostility of many former USIA staffers seems to be subsiding, and some now view the organizational changes less as a hostile takeover than as a leveraged buyout.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, while to some a sense of independence was lost, in the long-run a new advocate for public diplomacy was developed in the case of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.<sup>18</sup> What these results will be from the standup of a new high-ranking official within the State Department bureaucracy to date has yet to be realized, but the true benefits could in the end benefit the State Department and the public diplomacy professionals as well. When all is said and done, however, the fact remains that the USIA has been dissolved and absorbed by the State Department. From a number of conversations with senior staffers from Senator Helms office, it was in the end the influence of the domestic political agenda by the Republicans that probably more than any other factor directly resulted in the Reform and Restructuring Act. The consolidation efforts at State were a direct result of elections of 1994, and the perceived need to reduce government bureaucracy. Therefore over a time period of four years, through many different political machinations, the senior Senator from North Carolina prevailed in his vision of strengthening and downsizing the State Department.

## Conclusion

Information and education are powerful forces in support of peace. Just as war begins in the minds of men, so does peace.

-- President Dwight D. Eisenhower

Power comes in many forms. The elements that figure most prominently in discussions of international relations are often military, diplomatic, economic and information based. These are the tools that the United States have used to combat communism around the globe, and the extent to which they were successful, depends on a number of factors. Thus while one cannot say unequivocally that public diplomacy contributed to the demise of Communism, there are many analysts who believe that this informational tool was one of the most effective weapons that the United States possessed during this time period. By informing foreign audiences as to the advantages of democracy, the United States has been successful at changing the hearts and minds of these people.

Power is about creating effects. What many politicians and bureaucrats are beginning to realize is that you can only "make the rubble bounce" so many times, and that in this new era, it is information more than anything else that can create the effect that you desire. Unlike the military aspects of power that can often be non-fungible and non-transferable, information on the other hand is often very transparent and useful to a policy maker. The fact that information in general and public diplomacy in particular, are so fungible, is one of the key factors that have enhanced the prestige of this element of power in the last decade.

Originally I had thought that domestic politics played a major factor in this organizational change, and that fact was confirmed after numerous interviews with key congressional aides and State Department staffers. In fact, I have come to the conclusion that in reality domestic politics was the only reason that the USIA disappeared. The other factors were simply not relevant and in the long-run did not significantly alter the political situation enough to account for this large organizational change.

Therefore in my opinion, the future of public diplomacy in the United States is actually very bright, notwithstanding the demise of its primary agency. The recognition of the importance of this type of strategic information as a tool to conduct foreign policy is growing and much of this comes from the realization that in today's society, the limitations of military power are becoming readily apparent. The United States is in an era in which the shaping of the international environment is crucial to the conduct of foreign policy and public diplomacy has proved itself a valuable element in these operations. With the reorganization of the State Department and the distribution of information specialists throughout the regional and functional bureaus, advocates for public diplomacy are now entering higher and higher positions that will ultimately allow them in the future to affect the conduct of business at Foggy Bottom.

In addition, feedback from State Department officials indicate that the Public Diplomacy "cone" is now the second most popular area for new foreign service officers to serve in, mainly because they receive public affairs and management experience. As mentioned earlier, the use of the Washington File has been expanded by all State Department personnel, and there has been a greater recognition of the role of public diplomacy throughout the organization. Some of this is due to the influence of the former USIA officials who have now been placed throughout the executive branch and have raised the profile of the role of public diplomacy in foreign affairs. It has helped somewhat that public diplomacy has an advocate

in the form of the new Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Taken together, all of these efforts have shown a growing awareness of the power of information, and truly useful it can be. So where does that leave us, in the new millennium? Was the Reform and Restructuring Act of the State Department successful in the long run? Has the abolishment of the USIA been beneficial to the overall use of public diplomacy by the United States government? These questions and others will probably need more time to settle out as any reorganization normally produces multiple reverberations of the system. The changes brought about by advances of technology, the end of the Cold War and the domestic politics have all in one form or the other contributed to the demise of the USIA. However, as mentioned earlier, I believe that it was the actions of Senator Helms and his staff more than anything else that contributed directly to a change in organizational structure. While the other factors are significant, taken singularly, they were probably not important enough to have effectively brought about a massive change in informational architecture. If it had not been for the willingness of the Jesse Helms and his staff, to assume this challenge, the USIA would still be an independent organization today. It was only the direct and sustained result of Congressional action that brought an end to the USIA. Are their lessons to be learned from this? Perhaps the principal lesson is that theory, policy and process are all important in a period of change, but in reality it may come down to politics as the only thing that really matters.

#### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ronald Reagan, speech to the *English Speaking Union*, 1989.
- <sup>2</sup> National Security Council, *Coordination of Foreign Information Measures*, 17 December 1947, p. 21.
- <sup>3</sup> United States House of Representatives, *United States Information and Educational Exchange Act* (Public Law 402; 80<sup>th</sup> Congress).
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Nancy Bernhard, "Clearer than Truth: Public Affairs Television and the State Department's Domestic Information Campaigns, 1947-1952," *Diplomatic History*, p. 566.
- <sup>6</sup> Dan Kuehl, "The Information Component of Power and the National Security Strategy," in Campen and Dearth (eds.), *Cyberwar 3.0: Human factors in Information Operations and Future Conflict*, Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 2000, p.275.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview with LTC Brad Ward, Department of Defense representative to the IPI Core Group, 2 June 2001.
- <sup>8</sup> HR 1757
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Jamie Metzl, 14 June 2001.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Tim Thomas, 12 June 2001.
- <sup>13</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Power and Interdependence in the Information Age," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 77 (September/October) 1998.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S. Information Agency. *United States Information Agency, A Commemoration*, September 1999.
- <sup>15</sup> Brian Atwood succeeded in keeping USAID as a separate political agency, by calling in many political favors. But politicians have long memories and his nomination for an Ambassadorship in 2000 was blocked.
- <sup>16</sup> Interview with John Dwyer, Director International Information Programs, Department of State, 15 June 2001.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Bruce Gregory, former Staff Director, US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, 2 August 2001.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Dwyer.

## **3rd Australian Information Warfare and Security Conference 2002 Call for Papers**

### **Background**

The 3rd Australian Information Warfare and Security Conference will be held in Perth, Western Australia, during November 28- 29, 2002.

### **Conference Theme**

The theme of the conference is "Protecting the Infrastructure". The conference will draw participants from national and international organisations.

Best papers will be put forward for publication in the Journal of Information Warfare.

### **Sample Topic Areas**

The topics below are for guidance and not intended as an exhaustive prescriptive list:

- E-Intelligence/counter-intelligence
- Perception management
- Information warfare theory
- Information security
- Cryptography
- Physical security
- Security policy
- Information warfare policy
- Information warfare techniques
- Hacking
- Infra-structure warfare
- National security policy
- Corporate defence mechanisms
- Information warfare and security education
- Electro-magnetic pulse weapons

Invited speakers from government and major commercial interest will present position papers to complement invited academic keynotes

### **Call For Papers**

The word limit for papers is 3,500 words. The deadline for submitting papers is June 28th, 2002. Best papers will be submitted to the Journal of Information Warfare (JIW).

For each submission, the first page should contain the title, abstract and the contact information of the main author (name, e-mail address, mailing address, phone number and fax number). The second page should contain only the title and abstract with no mention of the author.

Suggestions for debates and panels are encouraged and should be accompanied by the title and a 500-word summary of proposed discussion and the names and affiliations of all panel members. Early submissions are strongly encouraged.

All submitted papers must represent completed and original work and must not have been published previously. Except for panels, all submitted papers will be double blind reviewed. In an instance where there is a dispute, a third reviewer will be called in. Papers should be submitted via e-mail to: [w.hutchinson@ecu.edu.au](mailto:w.hutchinson@ecu.edu.au)

Instructions for Authors can be found on the JIW website:

<http://www.jinfowar.com/autt.nsf/pages/infowarfare2>

For more detailed information regarding submission requirements, please visit the conference website at:

<http://www.we-bcentre.com/iwarconference>

### **Important Dates**

Submission of papers	28 June 2002
Mini-Track Debate and Panel Proposals	12 July 2002
Notification of acceptance	19 August 2002
Camera ready copy due	20 September 2002