



# THE KREMLIN AND DAESH INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The paper summarizes discussions held on 24 May 2016 in Riga, Latvia, which focused on exploring the Kremlin and DAESH information activities in order to improve our understanding of the nature of these communications and their effect on Western societies. The questions discussed were:

**How are the communications and messages of DAESH and the Kremlin constructed and disseminated?**

**Are their methods changing?**

**Why do such messages appeal to youth, even if they are familiar with Western values and consumerism?**

**What are the weakest aspects of our information environment and what can we do to improve?**

Six items emerged from the discussion as most relevant to the investigation of these issues.

## **1) Identity and Values**

Identity and values are in constant flux across time and space. It is easier to attack the values and identity of the other, rather than offering something different and better than the opponent. However, the West should be clear that it cannot simply assume the moral high ground. One of the weaknesses

of the West is that we have allowed some members of society to become isolated and/or marginalised; they are now the ones who are more open and susceptible to the messaging of DAESH and the Kremlin, especially messages that project a sense of pride and/or a feeling of inclusiveness because they appear to offer the opportunity to participate meaningfully in some sort of utopian society.

## **2) Strategic Communications and the National Narrative**

There is a distinct need to create and maintain a positive national narrative in which words and deeds align, and to communicate that effectively. A narrative should not be static, but responsive to the environment in which it is based. One idea that came up in discussion was to task a specific governmental entity with coordinating messages concerning the national narrative and the strategic communication approach. This entity should be situated close to the Presidential Administration or the Prime Minister's Office and have clear operating procedures, goals, and resources that address the identified risks and threats. The highest political backing would ensure sufficient clout

to function adequately and carry out the mission. This body should oversee national narrative and strategic communication efforts, and act as an advisory and educational hub for other parts of government. A whole government approach, spanning both civil and military spheres, is required. The increase in the number of stakeholders reduces chances to create and manage coherent but relevant international narratives

### **3) Messaging and Counter-Messaging**

There is a continuing discussion as to whether the West should concentrate on counter-messaging or should focus on messaging instead. An argument for engaging in counter-messaging is that lies and harmful messages should not go unchallenged, otherwise falsehoods and partial truths may become accepted as facts and be assimilated into a society's 'knowledge base'. An argument against engaging in counter-messaging is that this practice is likely to ensure that the West remains in a defensive and reactive posture in the current information confrontation, and adversaries' harmful messages get unintentionally repeated. However, by actively messaging there is a chance to dictate the informational agenda, thereby forcing the opponent into a reactive position. Irrespective of the focus on messaging or counter-messaging, information activities

should not be done in isolation, but as an integrated part of a political or policy programme.

### **4) Perception and Legitimacy**

Emotional resonance holds greater sway than logical argument as a political or social relationship is formed between an audience and a communicator. Some individuals and groups are more susceptible to messaging than others, often as the result of an unfulfilled need. The motivation to join and/or support DAESH is largely based upon the perception that what is being offered is legitimate and will fulfil some psychological or physical need of the individual recruit. The messenger that communicates a believable response to such needs may well be able to influence that particular individual or group. However, when an individual personally experiences the dissonance between the projected utopia and reality, their trust in the utopian vision soon disappears, and along with it any sense of motivation or commitment to the cause.

### **5) Measuring Activity and Effect**

Both DAESH and Russia have adopted Western technologies and understood the audience appetite for infotainment and quick satisfaction. DAESH and the Kremlin employ the tactic of shifting focus and attention away from areas where they are losing or vulnerable. They have the ability to affect our news

agenda and our focus through big event news. Even if the Kremlin or DAESH are engaged in harmful or disruptive communication, the activity does not necessarily translate into influence that would weaken the national security of the target state. The measure of an activity, i.e. communicating, does not automatically neatly translate into the measure of its effect, i.e. influence and change of behaviour. There are many variables that can either obstruct or facilitate the level of influence and persuasion that actually takes place when an actor communicates. These differences put pressure on us to achieve a better understanding of human behaviour and develop more meaningful ways of measuring. Observing, let alone measuring, the effectiveness of 'hybrid warfare' is particularly challenging.

## **6) Analytical Tools and Frameworks**

In addition to traditional historical area studies and social science perspectives, there are a variety of promising frameworks that can be used to investigate the information activities of DAESH and the Kremlin. The potentially fruitful approaches discussed included political and obstruction marketing and psychology.



# INTRODUCTION

The following report summarises the main discussions of a closed-door seminar that took place on 24 May 2016 in Riga. The purpose of this event was to explore the nature of Kremlin and DAESH information activities from fresh perspectives in order to try and understand the nature of these communications and their effect on Western societies.

The day's event was organised around four key themes and introduced by different speakers.

**How are the communications and messages of DAESH and the Kremlin constructed and communicated?** Associate Professor Greg Simons, CATS – What are the commonalities and differences between the methods of information influence used by the Kremlin and DAESH? Are they learning from each other? If yes, what?

**Are the methods of the Kremlin and DAESH changing?** Major Rafał Zgryziewicz, NATO StratCom COE – In what direction is their usage of information activities and methods heading? Can we anticipate changes in method? Are there observable trends that can be extrapolated?

**Why do Kremlin and DAESH messages appeal to youth, even if they are familiar with Western values and consumerism?** Dr Katri Pynnöniemi, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) – Is Western appeal still superior? Is violence and hate a fad, emerging in ebb and flow?

**What are the weakest points in our information environment, where should nations focus more?** Dr Ieva Berzina, Centre for Security and Strategic Research, National Defence Academy of Latvia – What is the role of NATO and national strategic communication in defending society against the influence of the Kremlin and DAESH? How should NATO/national strategic communication be developed in order to better defend societies against such influence?

The host of the event was the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, with Dr Antti Sillanpää acting as moderator. The appointed rapporteur for the event was Associate Professor Greg Simons from the Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS) at the Swedish Defence University. Other participants were: Major Tomas Balkus (NATO StratCom COE), Mr Aleksei Günter (Government Communication Unit Adviser, Estonia), Mr Benjamin Heap (NATO StratCom COE), Mr Linas Kojala (Head of Political Analysis and Research Division, Policy Analyst, Lithuania), Ms Vineta Mėkone (NATO StratCom COE), Ms Sanda Svetoka (NATO StratCom COE).

The logic and order of this report shall be similar to that of the seminar—the order of the chapters of this report will follow the order of the discussions at the seminar, complemented with a summary, conclusions, and references.

# CHAPTER 1

## HOW ARE THE COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGES OF DAESH AND RUSSIA CONSTRUCTED AND COMMUNICATED?

### SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE SESSION

Communication by its very nature is multi-faceted in its construction, transmission, and reception. Communication involves words and deeds. Actions, therefore, must be carefully considered in the current highly politicised information environment.

The same transmitted messages can be interpreted in a variety of ways (polysemy). This seems to be an underlying factor in the lack of political consensus among NATO and EU member states about the meaning and significance of some of the methods and narratives used by DAESH and the Kremlin. The variability of interpretation affects the manner in which an audience perceives risks and hazards in their environment. It is not so much a matter of trying to enforce conformity, but an awareness of how information in an environment is processed by an audience, which is not a homogenous process either between states or within a single country.

Western societies can create opportunities for competing or hostile countries and entities through mistakes that result in our citizens feeling isolated, marginalised, or

discontented with aspects of the Western system. These vulnerabilities need to be addressed in order to minimise risks imposed by external actors intending to later exploit them. Governments should acknowledge that if services are cut, then there is a risk of causing psychological emptiness and resentment among vulnerable groups. This may be unintentional and a by-product of specific policies, such as programmes that have affected marginalised and isolated communities in the United Kingdom. In an attempt to create more effective public sector, the presence of some traditional actors responding to the needs of the individual has been reduced. **But if the public sector leaves a neighbourhood and its 'mental space', a vacuum of authorities and services is created. However, nature abhors a vacuum. At some stage, an adversary or competitor might occupy that space and then use it against the West.** When talking about countering the communication of DAESH and the Kremlin, there is also a need to keep in mind those communities that are vulnerable to the messaging of DAESH and the Kremlin and to ensure that

*Western societies can create opportunities for hostile actors through mistakes that result in our citizens feeling isolated, marginalised, or discontented*

communication with them is maintained. It is a matter of reducing security threats and risks by minimising self-made weaknesses in our own system that may provide external actors with opportunities.

Resolving these issues will require some level of critical self-reflection. In the current situation, both DAESH and the Kremlin have been able to exploit vulnerabilities, especially utilizing the Western principle of freedom of speech.

There are various similarities and numerous differences between communications coming from DAESH and the Kremlin. Both are creative in their messaging and means of communication. The messages are often addressed to segmented audiences physically located in the West, but that differ from the mainstream political and mass media environment in terms of their psychological profiles.

Within the global information environment, there are competing sets of opposing value and norm-based arguments working

to win the hearts and minds of global audiences. **Both DAESH and the Kremlin attempt to frame their actions as being defensive in nature—for the Kremlin the narrative is about protecting Russia and Russians, wherever they may reside, and for DAESH it concerns defending Muslims from oppression.**

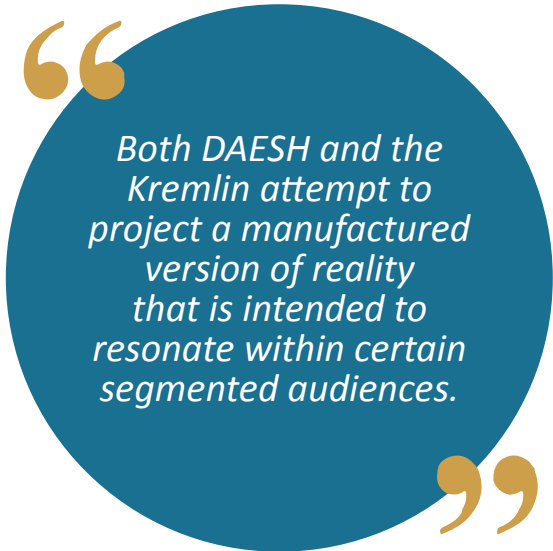
These narratives pose a challenge to the West, which, from a marketing perspective, might be likened to a political challenge to an incumbent power, i.e. the West and particularly the US. The argument and appeal of their messaging is premised upon a diametrically opposite set of values and norms. Intangible aspects play a crucial role in these conflicts, where brands, reputation, identity, culture, and perception shape the information space and peoples' opinions and behaviour. These intangible variables influence the public's belief in their political and military leadership, as well as their loyalty and will to fight for a political cause, e.g. either to support a regime or to overthrow it. Both DAESH and the Kremlin attempt to project a manufactured version of reality that is intended to resonate within certain segmented audiences.

The changing nature of both political conflict and armed conflict, especially with the increased application of hybrid warfare, means that actors such as the Kremlin and DAESH are able to engage the West indirectly with different forms of communication. An attack does not necessarily have to involve direct territorial occupation, but often involves the use of subversion in order to influence political decision-making agendas and processes.



However, Russia and DAESH are quite different actors. Some seminar participants made a distinction between Russia as a state-based actor, and DAESH as a non-state-based actor. This was seen as having an influence on the ability to utilise different means of persuasion and influence. As a state-based actor, Russia is obliged to follow certain norms and laws, which narrow the choices it can make. This in turn leads Russia to a more complex approach to strategic communication, including a more active use of distraction compared to DAESH. One remark was that Russia seeks to enforce the Westphalian system. For instance, Russia stresses, however selectively, the importance of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states the Kremlin perceives the Western promotion of democracy in other countries as this type of interference. DAESH on the other hand, is not a state-based actor and therefore has more leeway in the operational choices it makes. The situation is further simplified by the organisation reliance on the word and will of its spiritual leader for guidance. In this regard, DAESH was characterised as a revolutionary movement, seeking to overturn an existing system and seize power. There was some disagreement during the discussion on this point; some participants did not draw a great distinction between the two, arguing that they both sought to overturn the current global political and legal system.

Both Russia and DAESH have been learning from their experience in engaging with the



*Both DAESH and the Kremlin attempt to project a manufactured version of reality that is intended to resonate within certain segmented audiences.*

West. They do not seem to be learning from each other, but rather from the Western approach to communications concepts and practice. In some regards, their communication practices are more effective in quickly getting messages out into the information space and to global audiences. This is owing to the ability to formulate and disseminate attention-grabbing messages more quickly because of the flatter structure of their respective organisational hierarchies. Even so, activity does not guarantee effect. It was noted several times throughout the seminar that there is an urgent need to devise more effective ways of measuring and analysing communications activities and their effectiveness, to be able to generate useful comparisons.

# CHAPTER 2

## ARE THE METHODS OF RUSSIA AND DAESH CHANGING?

### SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE SESSION

There is an impression that populations, especially in well-developed countries do not tolerate problems as they used to. In such societies, there is a need for quicker and more effective interventions by the public sector, irrespective of whether the perception about problem reflects well the observable reality. **The importance of perceived reality, rather than reality itself, is one of the main drivers of manipulation by potential adversaries.**

A better understanding about the difference between perception, e.g. about crises and current events, is required. Resolving a crisis involves a political call to action and the mobilisation of resources to overcome the effects of the crisis. One of the key aspects of a crisis management involves the information flows that occur. An actor who is unable to control or at least manage the flows of information during a crisis is likely to have their operational choices and capacity adversely affected as a result.

Both continuity and change can be observed in the DAESH and Kremlin communication strategies. It was mentioned that although


they have a stable core of key narratives, Russia tends to vary some of its narratives over time. To a large extent, Russian president Vladimir Putin is the source of these narratives in the eyes of the general public. DAESH tends to be much more rigid and inflexible in the nature of the narratives that it transmits. On an organisational level the structures of these two entities are different; Russia is a recognised state within the international community, but DAESH is a non-state terrorist actor. These structures impose constraints on the manner in which the organisations communicate with the outside world and affect their operational choices and actions.

Recent events can be viewed and interpreted within the framework of crisis, involving not only physical and tangible manifestations, but also the intangible aspect of oppositional political mobilisation. DAESH's initial message was sent through recorded acts, i.e. beheadings, which were extremely brutal from the Western perspective. The violence was intended to capture the attention of the media and the public through a malevolent form of 'entertainment', while simultaneously

sending out two different messages. One to DAESH's enemies that they are an organisation to be feared, and the other to possible recruits and sympathisers, projecting the perception that the violence they do is of a form of 'justice' meted out. The message evolved as DAESH conquered new territories. The new themes focussed on the issue of state building in order to attract professionals to their cause, and to help build the Caliphate.<sup>1</sup> DAESH messaging has also included instructions for Muslims and non-Muslims alike on how to behave during significant religious occasions, such as Ramadan. This is an attempt to project DAESH members as being a pure and morally authoritative.

However, ever since DAESH has come under increasing military pressure and began to lose territory, their messages have significantly hardened and an increased use of coercion and threat of force have been observed. Organisational leaders have reverted to threatening both internal and external audiences. For instance, those citizens who are trapped in DAESH-controlled territories are forbidden to watch satellite TV, and are severely penalised if caught doing so. This implies that the messages communicated to these audiences may not be as effective as previously assumed, and that absolute information dominance is required for the desired result to be achieved. Rather than

<sup>1</sup> To see DAESH's attempts to recruit professionals that includes their recruitment videos, please follow this link - <http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/middle-east/69025516/Islamic-State-revamps-recruitment-with-savvy-professional-broadcasts>.



*The Kremlin will continue to exploit our vulnerabilities and new opportunities as they arise.*

acting from a position of strength, DAESH is showing weakness as it tries to distract attention from its flaws and losses. In this way DAESH is similar to Russia, exhibiting a tendency make use of distraction to focus the attention of the global audiences away from their own weaknesses.

However, the Kremlin seems to take a much more flexible approach to key narratives and the nature of its messaging, taking advantage of emerging opportunities. Relations with Turkey are a prime example of how images about friendship and hostility can be rapidly altered in the media, hinting at a coordinated effort by the authorities. Some common narratives include anti-NATO and anti-US messages, which have existed for some time and remain constant. Evolving Kremlin narratives include themes tied to international affairs and international politics. The international appeal of these messages may have been of limited resonance, as these issues do not directly touch the lives of their audiences. A lack of success may have prompted a shift in the nature of the themes.

Current messages are oriented toward various contentious social issues faced by Western countries. Examples include the refugee crisis in Europe and the defence of so-called traditional values. Russia also produces messages intended for Russian audiences residing beyond the borders of Russia, e.g. defending Russian compatriots or the promise of *Russkij Mir*, the Russian World, as an alternative to the Western world, which is degraded and demoralised in their eyes. DAESH is much less flexible for changing messaging because of the restraints imposed by its leadership and ideology.

The Russian population is instilled with Russian values and media-promoted worldviews, and takes its cues from the regime. We may argue that the construction of a robust 'Russian' identity is a cornerstone of the Kremlin's strategy. This strategy includes 'immunising' the Russian people against Colour Revolutions so that the regime can survive. As with DAESH, this means isolating their own public from foreign messaging and influences.

We may assume that the Kremlin will continue to exploit our vulnerabilities and new opportunities as they arise. Currently Russian media and authorities have turned their focus on controversial social issues that resonate with ordinary people, such as the abuse of civil liberties and human rights or children's issues. Russia's active use of misinformation is likely to continue into the future.

Just a few individuals and organisations dominate the decision-making process in the Kremlin. Compared to liberal democracies, this is a different type of internal political competition that has its consequences. The regime will continue promoting ideas about external threats to preserve the importance of the current leadership. The Kremlin promotes the idea that it is the West that is engaged in propaganda and censorship, but many Russian people mirror the regime in this belief.

Both DAESH and Russia understand how the media system in the West functions and what motivates it. **They have adopted Western technologies and understood the audience appetite for infotainment and quick satisfaction. DAESH and Russia employ the tactic of shifting focus and attention away from areas where they are losing or vulnerable.** They have the ability to affect our news agenda and our focus through big event news. The prediction is that they will increase and adapt their means and methods of communication to reach audiences more effectively. DAESH and the Kremlin are likely to continue to evolve the content and strategies they use in their communication as the information and political environments change. The Kremlin will continue to use journalists as provocateurs and cover their tracks by hiding any associations with the media. Their efforts are likely to migrate to different information environments in order to follow their key target audiences, and tailor the message to resonate with them.

# CHAPTER 3

## WHY DO THE KREMLIN OR DAESH MESSAGES APPEAL TO YOUTH, EVEN IF THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH WESTERN VALUES AND CONSUMERISM?

### SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE SESSION

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is still a valid reference point and theoretical framework also for understanding the appeal of messaging from DAESH and Russia for young people. This framework provides a tool with which to understand those elements that are missing in some people's lives, causing them to be vulnerable to messaging from DAESH and Russia. Why do their offers attract people? What do they lack that makes those offers attractive?

The associations and significant words that came up were ideas, charisma, dreams, and self-expression. It is not only a question of what our opponents are doing well in their communication and messaging, but also a matter of what we are doing poorly. The current crisis involves a number of complex problems that are not easily solved. The point is not whether people are stupid or uneducated, but whether an individual is psychologically vulnerable to a certain message at a certain point in time. For example, highly intelligent people can be lured into cults if their vulnerabilities are addressed and manipulated.

During the course of this session, a clear picture emerged indicating that young people are the main targets of influence and persuasion campaigns by different actors, including DAESH and Russia.

Both DAESH and Russia appeal to the human need for a sense of belonging and wanting to contribute to something worthwhile. For example, the Kremlin offers of a utopian vision for Russian-speakers and Russophiles through creating nostalgia for the Soviet Union and promoting the concept of *Russkij Mir*. Such messages create an emotional relationship between the communicator and the messenger. The Kremlin also sponsors programmes and events in Russian that are organised beyond the state borders of Russia, such as the Russia Days in Lithuania or the Alexander Gorchakov Foundation's Baltic Dialogue Programme.

**DAESH also actively target youth with utopian messages and communications, but in an entirely different vision and form. They promote a violent utopia, where scores can be settled with other groups or individuals, where a relationship with DAESH helps individuals act on their vengeful feelings.**



*Some messages extol the promise of people living a meaningful and purposeful life and belonging to an 'exclusive' society.*

The three main drivers of terrorist violence are the quest for significance, a feeling of injustice, and the lack of a sense of belonging. This may lead to committing war crimes, as with child soldiers, the so-called Cubs of the Caliphate. Not all of DAESH's messaging involves negative appeals. Some messages extol the promise of people living a meaningful and purposeful life and belonging to an 'exclusive' society. This is especially seen in the appeal to people to not only fight for the Caliphate, but to help build the Caliphate.<sup>2</sup> By promising recruits that they will be part of building something good and can lead significant lives, the terrorist organisations can exploit the needs of others or their own benefit.

Youth are an important target audience as they represent the future of any country's way of life and ideology. The main difference between DAESH and Russia is found in their long-term planning. Russia is globally seeking also politically active individuals in order to influence and persuade them.

<sup>2</sup> Parrott, T., *Show and Tell: The Narratives Driving Youth Recruitment*, Alliance for Peacebuilding, <http://buildingpeaceforum.com/2016/02/show-and-tell-the-narratives-driving-isis-youth-recruitment/>, 2 May 2016 (accessed 24 June 2016)

The battle for influence on youth is seemingly waged through the emotional use of values, norms, and projected realities. Young people are offered a utopia, a projected reality that often contrasts starkly with the realities of their everyday lives.

Youth may be a more vulnerable target group because they have less direct experience of the real world, yet possess many dreams and aspirations that have not yet been realised. This can make them more susceptible to promises of significant action, satisfying revenge, and living a utopian dream, especially when there is something missing in their lives that remains unsatisfied and unfulfilled. The continued relevance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs remains a highly pertinent tool with which to understand these processes of influence and persuasion.

**There are a number of vulnerabilities that can be exploited by hostile actors, such as the need for a meaningful life and dignified identity, the need for belonging; craving for adventure; and real or perceived grievances or injustices that need righting. The messages DAESH and Russia use to communicate with various groups of young people may differ in content and intended outcomes, but they share an emotional approach that addresses values or promises a utopian vision.**

One effective strategy is the promotion of a charismatic leader. Although DAESH does not use this strategy, al Qaeda and the

Kremlin do. The Kremlin projects an image of Vladimir Putin as a role model and a strong man who is holding Russia together and protecting Russians against different internal and external threats. He is used as a source of inspiration and direction for Russians, especially with reference to increasing their sense of pride and patriotism. Such messages are directed toward Russian youth living in Russia, and also to Russian-speaking youth living within the borders of the former Soviet Union. One of the avenues for creating influence is through cultivating patriotism and pride through military-like camps for youth.<sup>3</sup> These policies may reach their limits, however. Most research has shown that Russian society is generally individualistic and oriented toward consumer society at the level of the individual. This is in contradiction to the characterisation of Russian society promoted by the current regime.

The appeals of adversarial messages are normally effective under conditions when there is some element or future missing from the lives of those who are seduced. There are a number of problems in Western society, involving identity and values, as well as more tangible aspects such as the standard of living. Discrepancies, deformities, and lacks create discontent that can be exploited by other actors. There is an urgent need to identify those weaknesses, and why and how potential adversaries can exploit them.

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3 Chesnokova, E., *Watch Out, NATO. Here Comes a Patriotic Youth Camp to Reunite the Soviet Space*, Meduza, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2016/06/03/save-the-children>, 3 June 2016 (accessed 24 June 2016)

# CHAPTER 4

## WHAT ARE THE WEAKEST POINTS IN OUR INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT, UPON WHICH NATIONS SHOULD FOCUS MORE?

### SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE SESSION

Existing vulnerabilities might be divided into three broad categories—people, politics, and practices. ‘People’ as a category refers to a number of issues related to social cohesion and identity. These issues are often intangible and can include ethnicity, religion, and values within a civil population. ‘Politics’ refers to those people, institutions, and policy formulations that exist and compete in different political environments. ‘Practices’ refers to the tangible elements, the implementation of policy, the execution of a communication programme (such as the creation of the national narrative). These three categories interact and mix, causing a wide number of effects in any given political environment.

There are many different values, opinions, and ideas that are held and expressed in society. Although pluralism is a source of strength, it makes the creation of a universally appealing national narrative a difficult task in liberal democracies. Strategic communication plays a key role in the current information environment.

The structure and organisation of strategic communications needs to be carefully considered and executed at the very highest levels of government. This needs to be done in order to move forward on consensus about the content of the national strategy and its implementation. A hierarchy needs to be firmly established within the areas of strategic communication and the national narrative. **Strategic communications experts should provide advice to those leading the state, with an emphasis on advising instead of monopolising communications with the public on a particular issue.** This advice should pass through an approval process before it is used. Strategic communications training should be established at the governmental level. The trained could then act as ‘Guardians of the National Narrative’. Again and again, participants stressed

A whole government approach needs to be undertaken. Communication should not be artificially divided into its civil and military components, since the threat we currently face spans both worlds. Dividing the response structure will only create problems in effectively addressing the challenges. In addition, careful consideration needs to be given to the tools used in resolving the issues and how they are applied. Are they policy or are they practice, or perhaps even a cross between the two?

This is where the national narrative and strategic communication become relevant and play central role. **Communications activities must be inclusive, forward thinking, and long-term in their orientation and practice. Stakeholders need to be actively engaged through issues that are substantive and relevant to them in order for a narrative to resonate. Such inclusiveness comes with a price. It is more difficult to get a reasonable consensus in democratic societies, not mentioning among democratic countries.**

An information confrontation can be addressed by one of two broad approaches. One is to create and cultivate your own narrative. The other is to attack the credibility of your opponent's story and narrative. The resources largely dictate the choices. Given the restraints on resources, time, and money there is a need to choose battles carefully and engage in those that can be won.

However, **each society must build its own resiliency. This involves preparing the public and key actors, such as politicians and bureaucrats, through awareness and training programmes on topics such as media literacy and media logic. Economically viable free media and professional journalism are important for the health of democracies.**

When tackling the issue of developing a society's capacity to resist threats and become more resilient, careful planning is needed to understand the nature of threat, who is it that needs protection, and what resources are available for the task? Two aspects of great importance have emerged in connection with this—identity and integrity. Each is tied to the other in the effort to increase national security and resilience to threats.

Our own thinking magnifies some of the vulnerabilities. The nature of how we perceive events, processes, threats, and risks in our own societies has an effect on our success. A more objective analysis systematically works through the available information to understand who is communicating, how they are communicating, to whom are they communicating, and what the possible motives and objectives may be.

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Number of common themes were identified that cut across the different topics of the seminar. These observations and related literature will be discussed in this chapter. The following themes and topics have been identified and each will be raised in turn—identity and values; strategic communications and the national narrative; messaging and counter-messaging; perception and legitimacy; measure of activity and measure of effect; and analytical tools and frameworks.

## IDENTITY AND VALUES

Identity was one of the critical elements identified by Bowen (1997) with regards to building a more resilient and robust national defence against risks and threats through creating a sense of unity, direction, and purpose in a nation.<sup>4</sup> Western identity and values are currently under a number of simultaneous attacks from different sources. This inhibits the ability of the West, the US in particular, to use its instruments

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<sup>4</sup> Bowen, K., *Total defence - what is being defended and what are the threats?*, OR Insight, Vol. 10 Issue 1, January - March 1997, pp. 2-7

of communication to great effect. As the leading Western country, the US can claim that it is a role model of democracy while it has severe problems of its own and offers contradictory sets of messages. On the one hand are the positive sets of values and ideals communicated officially such as music, culture, democracy, and freedom. Then on the other hand are the messages pertaining to the handling of prisoners at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, and the invasion of Iraq.<sup>5</sup> These contradictions erode US credibility as an actor and communicator. Ultimately this affects operational choices and increases the likelihood of creating fractures and splits in society that can be exploited.

John F. Kennedy is credited with saying, ‘a man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on. Ideas have endurance without death’. The West should be more concerned with promoting the values it stands for both domestically and in the

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<sup>5</sup> *Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*, Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, US Department of State, September 2005



eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the West should be clear about taking the moral high ground, and not sacrificing the very values and norms that they should champion.

The role of identity and values featured prominently in the discussions across all four sessions of the daylong seminar. Both sides of the current conflict use them in service of their own goals and understanding: Western identity and values vs. DAESH or the Kremlin values and identity. Often this battle is fought through negative communication campaigns, where the values and identity of the other are placed under attack, rather than offering something different and better.

On a number of occasions participants brought up the notion that the West's weaknesses become opportunities for actors, such as DAESH and Russia, e.g. individuals and groups have become isolated and/or marginalised in Western society. These groups are more susceptible and open to the messaging that appears to offer some form of utopia and gives supporters the chance to be part of a society that stands for something good through projecting a sense of inclusiveness or a sense of pride.

Identity and values are in constant flux across time and space. Societies are not homogenous in terms of their identity and values, and these discrepancies can be exploited, especially during periods of



perceived risk and threat. Currently, the refugee crisis is an emotionally charged lightning rod in Europe and the US that can be exploited, especially given the 'clash of civilisation' logic associated with the crisis. Those groups who see an influx of refugees as a threat, both to their personal values and identities and to those of Europe, can look to Russia. Russia prides itself as a country that maintains 'traditional values' and 'identity', distancing itself from the 'liberal' West. This explains Kremlin's relations with, or even support for different right wing political parties.<sup>7</sup> DAESH also exploits the weaker Western sense of identity and values to leverage some measure of influence in recruiting people and attracting various kinds of support. They project themselves as being 'pure' Islam—an all-inclusive, egalitarian, and merit-based society.

Both DAESH and the Kremlin place emphasis on weaknesses that exist in Western society—claiming corruption and decadence, exploitation of the common man by the elite, lack of equality

<sup>6</sup> Junes, T., *The Trap of "Countering Russia"*, Open Democracy, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/tom-junes/trap-of-countering-russia>, 23 June 2016 (accessed 28 June 2016)

<sup>7</sup> Simons, G., *Aspects of Putin's Appeal to International Publics*, Global Affairs, vol. 1, issue 2, 2015

and opportunities, and the ‘imminent’ collapse of Western society. Both DAESH and the Kremlin communicate effectively and emotionally, even if rational and knowledgeable audiences would find the basis of their stories mostly unfounded.

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND THE NATIONAL NARRATIVE

Even if we are talking about novel or evolving concepts such as national narratives and strategic communication, organisation and purpose are vital. Prior planning and forethought is needed to carefully shape communication activities, and ensure their effectiveness in attaining desired goals and outcomes. Ulrich Janssen of the George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies once stated that **‘StratCom is nothing but the process of ensuring the consistency and credibility of communications by ALL means through comprehensive coordination’.** We should also remember that ‘events don’t just happen as points in history but instantly emerge as competing narratives where truth is not as important as believability’.<sup>8</sup> Henry Kissinger observed that technology and politics have evolved and interacted to produce the current climate where multiple projections of our current reality exist, in contrast to the more unified understanding of history and past events that was the

8 Snow, N., *Public Diplomacy and Propaganda: Rethinking Diplomacy in the Age of Persuasion*, E-International Relations, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/12/04/public-diplomacy-and-propaganda-rethinking-diplomacy-in-the-age-of-persuasion/>, 4 December 2012 (accessed 1 April 2016)

norm at least until the Treaty of Vienna that marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>9</sup>

As in real life, a narrative should not be static, but at its core it should be mutative and responsive to the environment. ‘The purpose of a strategic narrative is to create and shape identities not in isolation but as a behavioural norm, which could be based upon short-term tactical gains or long-term sustainable visions with the range of possibilities’.<sup>10</sup> Narratives and stories form a foundation that can either unite or divide any given society through offering either hope or despair for the future.

Narrative is central to the outcome of current conflicts. ‘While war remains a human endeavour, and stories/narratives are a way for humans to use emotion to understand a complex phenomenon, the battle for the strategic narrative remains vital. If we fail to engage in this fight, the future of war will look very much like the recent past where we win tactical engagements but lose the war.’<sup>11</sup> However, this task requires more than coming up with a ‘better story’ than that of the opponent.

**It not only requires compelling stories that resonate with the audience, but they must also fit with our strategic goals and objectives.**

9 Kissinger, H., *World Order*, New York: Penguin Books, 2015

10 Chaudhary, P., *Strategic Narrative; a Perspective*, <https://puruesh.wordpress.com/2016/06/25/strategic-narrative/>, 25 June 2016 (accessed 28 June 2016)

11 Carl’s Cantina, *The Future of War and the Fight for the Strategic Narrative*, The Bridge, <https://medium.com/the-bridge/the-futureofwar-and-the-fight-for-the-strategic-narrative-1e07f6c69a8#.2vrezrbyb>, 25 March 2015 (accessed 17 April 2015)

One of the criticisms levelled at the West is that this story has not yet been invented; instead the focus has been on summarily dismissing the opponent's story.<sup>12</sup>

**There is a distinct need to create and maintain positive proposals for national narratives, and to communicate effectively so that words and deeds align.** If the West does not manage to do this, then we are likely to continue responding reactively to DAESH and the Kremlin communications that challenge Western narratives and national stories. Dissatisfied people tend to see their environment in polarized terms, so imaginary solutions, even from adversaries, are tempting. **By ensuring a national narrative is fact-based it is also easier to avoid the polarization of attitudes. Adversaries cannot point to individual problem as easily as they can claim that the entire Western system is rotten, implying their alternative would be perfect.**

To create a credible national narrative the West needs to engage its publics with stories ideas that resonate and are inclusive, and are consistently communicated across all channels and to gradually gain a proactive communicational stance. This would be an opportunity to set the informational agenda instead of just reacting to it.

The various countries that collectively compose the seemingly homogenous



entity known as the West, is in fact a bundle of values, identities, interests, and circumstances. This makes narratives that cross national boundaries very difficult to create and maintain, as it is already challenging within boundaries of one democratic country. In approaching the needs of national narrative and strategic communication, each step must be carefully considered and created, and then effectively implemented. All stakeholders involved in the creation of a national narrative should feel a common sense of purpose and reach a consensus.

**Among the suggestions considered during the seminar was the idea to task a specific governmental entity with coordinating communications concerning the national narrative and strategic communication approach.** Depending on the nature of the political system involved, the coordinating body should be placed in close contact with the Presidential Administration or the Prime Minister's Office. Highest-level political backing would ensure that the body has sufficient clout to function adequately and

<sup>12</sup> Cottee, S., *Why It's so Hard to Stop ISIS Propaganda*, The Atlantic, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/03/why-its-so-hard-to-stop-isis-propagan6216/>, 2 March 2015 (accessed 4 July 2016)

carry out its mission. This body should not only oversee the national narrative and strategic communication effort, but also to act as an advisory and educational hub for other parts of government. A whole government approach is required, which spans both civil and military spheres as the risks and threats faced also span simultaneously across civil and military spheres. There should be a very clear set of guidelines concerning operating procedures, goals, available resources, and the budget, and these should match the plan addressing identified risks and threats.

## MESSAGING AND COUNTER-MESSAGING

A strong element of marketing is observable in the communications coming from DAESH and Russia.<sup>13</sup> DAESH has seen a meteoric rise, which is the result of a combination of factors: the ability to market themselves effectively to multiple target audiences on a regional and global level, battlefield successes, and the influence of al-Baghdadi's speech in rallying and inspiring audiences and as a basis of organisation of their information strategy. The combination of words and deeds has had a powerful impact on the rise of DAESH, such as the timely declaration of the renewed

Caliphate.<sup>14</sup>

The value of information channels and messaging during times of crisis and conflict, including military or armed conflict, has been widely recognised, not only by the West, but also by DAESH and Russia. A 2011 document from the Russian Ministry of Defence already laid out the importance of events and processes in the information space, as well as the need for creating trained specialists that could effectively be deployed and engaged in order to take maximum advantage of possibilities there to strengthen their position. As such, the role of information and perception is key to either solving or exacerbating the crisis. 'In a crisis, your goal is to get ahead of the news cycle and position your organisation as the voice of credibility, trust and leadership.'<sup>15</sup> Being proactive enables an actor to better shape and dictate the flows of information, which in turn shape the perception of and reactions to a crisis.

The idea of the counter-narrative is often narrowly understood. A recent European Parliament document shows this

<sup>13</sup> Simons, G., *Russian Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Structure, Means and Message*, Public Relations Review, 40, 2014, pp. 440-449  
 Simons, G., *Islamic Extremism and the War for Hearts and Minds*, *Global Affairs*, 2016

<sup>14</sup> Zgryziewicz, R. (Ed.), *DAESH Information Campaign and its Influence: Results of the Study*, Riga, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016 | Verdon, T., *The Return of the Khilafah: The Constitutive Narratives of Daesh*, Riga, NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016, pp. 76-98

<sup>15</sup> Agnes, M., *War of Ideas: How to Fight and Win on the Social Media Front (Part 2), Position Your Organisation as the Voice of Credibility, Trust and Leadership Now*, Melissa Agnes, <http://melissaagnes.com/war-of-ideas-how-to-fight-and-win-on-the-social-media-front-part-2/>, 3 March 2015 (accessed 5 March 2015)

approach in action at a conceptual level.<sup>16</sup>

However, a '[...] counter-narrative does not necessarily have to contradict what the adversary is saying. Indeed, a more successful course of action would be to build on some of the stories already known to be truths and offer a different, but not necessarily opposing explanation of the current situation and the path forward'.<sup>17</sup>

By reacting to events there is a tendency to remain reactive and let the opponent determine the narrative and course of events. When constructing one's own story, a good deal of reflection and evaluation should be done to anticipate any possible risk associated with those communications. A number of questions should be asked. How is this going to relate to our audience/our stakeholders? What is the emotional connection here? How is this going to impact them on an emotional level? How can this potentially be misconstrued or misinterpreted? What is the worst that can happen?<sup>18</sup>

Several examples show how countering adversary messaging can be organized. The US has established the Global Engagement Centre within the State Department, which shall lead the 'coordination, integration,

16 Fotyga, A. E. (Rapporteur), *Draft Report on EU Strategic Communication to Counteract Propaganda Against it by Third Parties*, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2016/2030(INI), 2 May 2016

17 Holmstrom, M., *The Narrative and Social Media*, *Defence Strategic Communications*, Volume 1, Number 1, Winter 2015, pp. 118-132

18 Agnes, M., *War of Ideas: How to Fight and Win on the Social Media Front (Part 1), Debunking the Unpredictability of Social Media and Digital Landscape*, Melissa Agnes, <http://melissaagnes.com/war-of-ideas-how-to-fight-and-win-on-the-social-media-front-part-1/>, 24 February 2015 (accessed 5 March 2015)



synchronisation of Government-wide communications activities directed at foreign audiences abroad in order to counter the messaging and diminish the influence of international terrorist organisations [...]'<sup>19</sup> The Global Engagement Centre is to be the hub for coordinating, integrating, and synchronising all public communications and serve as a guardian of key values, such as the freedom of expression.

The United Kingdom has established a Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) within the Home Office. The RICU operates within the framework of the UK's PREVENT counter-radicalisation programme in managing a strategic communications campaign aimed at Muslims in the UK and abroad. The inspiration for this came from similar programmes that were operational during the Cold War. Their work has been focusing on countering the DAESH social media

19 Obama, B., *Developing an Integrated Global Engagement Centre to Support Government-wide Counterterrorism Communications Activities Directed Abroad and Revoking Executive Order 13584*, Executive Order, Press Release, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 14 March 2016



*Irrespective of the focus on messaging or counter-messaging, it should not be done in isolation, but as part of a greater plan.*

campaign.<sup>20</sup> A multitude of contractors are hired by the Foreign Office, but overseen by the Ministry of Defence to produce communication material that is designed to bring about behaviour and attitudinal change among British Muslims and to produce large-scale anti-DAESH messaging.<sup>21</sup> These different organisational and operational responses seem to share a number of similarities.

**Our opponents' ability to communicate directly to different publics in the West and around the globe has been enhanced through Internet and social media based communications. These inventions that were developed in the US are being used more effectively by DAESH and Russia.**

DAESH's estimated 25, 000 recruits hint at

20 Cobain, I., Ross, A., Evans, R. & Mahmood, M., *Inside RICU, the Shadowy Propaganda Unit Inspired by the Cold War*, The Guardian, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/02/inside-ricu-the-shadowy-propaganda-unit-inspired-by-the-cold-war>, 2 May 2016 (accessed 9 May 2016)

21 Cobain, I., Ross, A., Evans, R. & Mahmood, M., *How Britain Funds the 'Propaganda War' Against ISIS in Syria*, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/03/how-britain-funds-the-propaganda-war-against-isis-in-syria>, 3 May 2016 (accessed 9 May 2016)

problems with the counter-message effect. 'The empowerment of violence is very much a theme that they have effectively harnessed by marrying it with social media, so, they're using an old theme but with cutting-edge 21<sup>st</sup> century technology.'<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the counter-messaging strategy that fails to influence and persuade a portion of the target audience is deficient in some way.

Similar patterns can also be detected in the Kremlin case, specifically those linked to the Russian annexation of Crimea. Polls were conducted in Russia, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan concerning their media consumption. Polled residents who use both Western and Russian media tended to trust Russian media more about events taking place in Ukraine and Crimea. In addition, support for Crimea 'joining' Russia was higher among adults who use both Russian and Western media.<sup>23</sup> In the information chaos, a truthful message is easily lost. The information space is so broad and varied, with many different media and messages, that for a message to stand out and have an effect it must first be noticed, and after that it should resonate with the consumer of the message.

22 Hoffman, B. & Gevarter, D., *Counter-Insurgency in the Modern Age: An Interview with Professor Bruce Hoffman*, Harvard Review, <http://hir.harvard.edu/counter-insurgency-modern-age-interview-professor-bruce-hoffman/>, 19 February 2016 (accessed 8 March 2016)

23 Esipova, N. & Ray, J., *Information Wars: Ukraine and the West vs. Russia and the Rest*, Harvard Review, <http://hir.harvard.edu/information-wars-ukraine-west-vs-russia-rest/>, 6 May 2016 (accessed 10 May 2016)

There is a continuing discussion as to whether the West could or should concentrate on counter-messaging or to focus on messaging instead. An argument for engaging in counter-messaging is that messages should not go unchallenged. Otherwise falsehoods and part-truths may become accepted as facts and blend in to a society's 'knowledge'. One of the arguments against is that counter-message focus is likely to ensure that the West retains a defensive and reactive posture in the current information war. And, actually the harmful messages from adversaries would be repeated. However, on the pro side of the argument, by actively messaging there is a chance to become proactive and dictate the informational agenda, thereby forcing one's opponents to become reactive.

In practical terms, it is very difficult to organize effectively both counter-messaging and one's own messaging. The West faces different restraints and constraints in its ability to engage in messaging, such as a more open and transparent society with a plurality of opinions being expressed; the issue of financial constraints increasingly restricts the nature and intensity of communication programmes.

Irrespective of the focus on messaging or counter-messaging, it should not be done in isolation, but as part of a greater plan. Therefore an information programme should be included in a political or policy programme. This should be done through using a comprehensive approach that

takes in to account scarcity and distributes resources where they are needed most and where they can achieve the greatest effect in terms of outcomes, i.e. influencing thinking and behavioural outcomes in the target audience(s). In practice this may mean not challenging every single message from DAESH or Russia as some of those messages may not pose a risk or threat. And, engaging indiscriminately in counter-messaging may actually undermine the West by strengthening the possible perception of the West as using propaganda.

## PERCEPTION AND LEGITIMACY

Information is not knowledge per se, but can be an interpretation or projection of a desired reality that shapes an information environment in order to influence people and outcomes to benefit the communicating party. Therefore, the importance of a communication strategy lies not only in one's own message, but also in being able to anticipate the opponent's strategy. Geoffrey Goff (2016) stated 'perhaps the most important lesson from Game Theory is that in business, war, or any competitive enterprise, one must anticipate his opponent's strategy before developing one's own strategy'.<sup>24</sup> This means going beyond a standoff of moral or ethical relativism with the other side. 'The argument to be won is not one of we are right and they are wrong. It is the argument

<sup>24</sup> Goff, G., *A Game Theory Approach to Battlefield Interrogations*, Small Wars Journal, 21 June 2016, available from <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/a-game-theory-approach-to-battlefield-interrogations>

*To capture an audience's attention and imagination, three aspects must be embedded in the messaging: emotional impact, relatability, and a short catchy headline.*

of what the future is going to look like.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, messaging must first capture the audience's attention and then their imagination.

To capture an audience's attention and imagination, three aspects must be embedded in the messaging: emotional impact, relatability, and a short catchy headline. The first two factors are critical, the third assists with the visibility of the message.<sup>26</sup>

Emotional resonance holds greater sway than logic as a political or social relationship is formed between the audience and the messenger. At times this tendency defies rational logic. As Daniel Kahneman (2011) suggests, human beings have two modes of thought: the instinctive and emotional System 1 most often 'decides', rather than the more logical System 2.<sup>27</sup>

25 Holmstrom, M., *The Narrative and Social Media, Defence Strategic Communications*, Volume 1, Number 1, Winter 2015, pp. 118-132

26 Agnes, M., *War of Ideas: How to Fight and Win on the Social Media Front (Part 1), Debunking the Unpredictability of Social Media and Digital Landscape*, Melissa Agnes, <http://melissaagnes.com/war-of-ideas-how-to-fight-and-win-on-the-social-media-front-part-1/>, 24 February 2015 (accessed 5 March 2015)

27 Kahneman, D., *Thinking, fast and slow*, 2011.

One strategic goal of messaging and counter-messaging is to deny one's opponent the chance to communicate as much as they would like, in other words to harry and disrupt their ability to communicate. Shutting down and disrupting DAESH social media communications is an example. That campaign included taking down videos and other content on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. It was, in effect, a cyber war against DAESH.<sup>28</sup> Another US approach was to revamp the State Department's Global Engagement Centre to stop focusing on promoting US messages, but to amplifying moderate voices that give added credibility and legitimacy to their statements among Middle Eastern publics.<sup>29</sup> The success of these tactics depends on the reception of the messages among the target audiences. Some target audiences may simply not be persuaded owing to a number of environmental factors, i.e. specific political, economic, social, and cultural factors pertaining to specific target audiences.

28 Howell, K., *US Begins Cyberwar Against Islamic State*, Washington Times, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/apr/6/us-begins-cyber-war-against-islamic-state/>, 6 April 2016 (accessed 10 April 2016); Taylor, G., *ISIS Expanding Digital Footprint With 90000 Twitter Accounts, Counterterrorism Adviser Says*, Washington Times, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/mar/8/isis-expanding-digital-footprint-with-90000-twitte/>, 8 March 2016 (accessed 9 March 2016); Barthelemy, L., *Efforts to Counter IS Propaganda Bear Fruit, Experts Say*, AFP in Space War, [http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Efforts\\_to\\_counter\\_IS\\_propaganda\\_bear\\_fruit\\_experts\\_say\\_999.html](http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Efforts_to_counter_IS_propaganda_bear_fruit_experts_say_999.html), 15 May 2016 (accessed 16 May 2016)

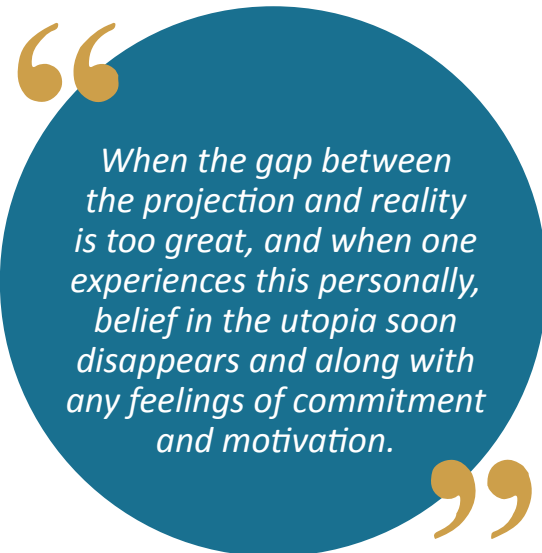
29 Barthelemy, L., *Efforts to Counter IS Propaganda Bear Fruit, Experts Say*, AFP in Space War, [http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Efforts\\_to\\_counter\\_IS\\_propaganda\\_bear\\_fruit\\_experts\\_say\\_999.html](http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Efforts_to_counter_IS_propaganda_bear_fruit_experts_say_999.html), 15 May 2016 (accessed 16 May 2016)

One problem that creates distance between publics and their respective governments can be found in policy responses to informational risks and threats, for example surveillance of a government's own citizens and a lack of transparency. Such an environment creates uncertainty and an information asymmetry in the public sphere. In this context, 'secrecy breeds conspiracy – and conspiracy is fertile ground for propaganda.'<sup>30</sup> DAESH, Russia, and other actors have been able to capitalise on such discontent towards governments and authorities.

DAESH has been able to attract recruits for a number of reasons. According to Revkin and Mhidi (2016) these include enabling recruits to experience some sense of revenge or justice, peer pressure, forced conscription, the sense of belonging to a unique group and/or building a special society, a personal sense of power and purpose, and even financial benefits in those regions where jobs are scarce.<sup>31</sup> The motivation to join or support DAESH is largely based upon perceptions and sense of legitimacy that matches some psychological or physical need of the individual recruit. There are also various reasons why members abandon DAESH; these are also

30 McCarrel, R., *The Reason Russian Propaganda Works so Well is Because we're Fooling Ourselves*, The Accidental Geographer, <https://theaccidentalgeographer.wordpress.com/2016/05/08/the-reason-russian-propaganda-works-is-because-were-fooling-ourselves/>, 8 May 2016 (accessed 9 May 2016)

31 Revkin, M. & Mhidi, A., *Quitting ISIS: Why Syrians are Abandoning the Group*, Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-05-01/quitting-isis>, 1 May 2016 (accessed 9 May 2016)



based upon perception and legitimacy issues and matters and can include factors such as a sense of hypocrisy (DAESH say they fight cronyism and corruption, but are corrupt themselves), the harsh conditions of life and service, witnessing war crimes against civilian populations, declining financial rewards, and greater personal risk owing to the increasing number of military setbacks.<sup>32</sup>

When the gap between the projection and reality is too great, and when one experiences this personally, belief in the utopia soon disappears and along with any feelings of commitment and motivation.

The issue of perception and legitimacy is at play with Russia too. According to Andrey Manoilo, Putin prefers to keep the West guessing about his moves and counter-moves.<sup>33</sup> This is a matter of keeping the West on the back foot by encouraging a false perception what is happening.

32 Ibid.

33 Piirsalu, J., *FSB Information Warfare Specialist: Russia will Quickly Establish Private Military Units*, Diplomaatia, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/fsb-information-warfare-specialist-russia-will-quickly-establish-private-military-units/>, No 154/155, June 2016

Perception is a powerful force that has the ability to trump reality, even when the two do not align. The fight for hearts and minds is largely contingent upon perception, especially at a level of emotional resonance for some segments of the population. Some individuals and groups are more susceptible to emotional messaging than others; this may be caused by some deficiency along the ladder of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: a sense of belonging/purpose/self-esteem are higher order needs, basic physiological needs and feeling of safety are lower order needs. A messenger whose offer resonates with an individual's needs may well be able to influence that particular individual or group. This can be seen in the seminar's discussion concerning the situation in Lithuania. On the one hand, Russia had organised 'Russia Day' events in Lithuania, meant to resonate along cultural and identity lines for Russian speakers. This is an attempt to create a sense of belonging and pride in being Russian. On the other hand, grass roots initiatives are under way in Lithuania intending to recognise Polish and Russian ethnic origins, but to help members of these groups feel included in Lithuanian society. One of the initiatives highlighted successful Poles and Russians living in Lithuania so they can serve as role models for the young and let them know it is possible to succeed in the country regardless of ethnic origin and to cultivate an inclusive civic identity. Ideally such a communication programme should align words and deeds, work with relevant and meaningful issues that resonate with its

intended audience, work towards a specific goal, and be inclusive. The programme should be interactive and relational in nature, and foster dialog.

## MEASURING ACTIVITY AND EFFECT

One of the potentially problematic areas that emerged was the assumption that since Russia or DAESH are engaged in some form of communication, their actions would translate in to some form of influence that would weaken the national security of the target state.

**However, an activity (communicating) does not automatically translate cleanly an effect (influence and persuasion).**

**There are many variables that can obstruct or facilitate the influence and persuasion resulting from an adversary's communications.**

Observing, let alone measuring the effectiveness of 'hybrid warfare' is particularly challenging. Hybrid warfare is heralded as being a significant threat by one side of the argument, and that Russia is an experienced and dangerous exponent of this form of conflict. Arguments point to events such as the 2007 cyber-attacks on Estonia in the wake of the Bronze Soldier incident, and to the 2008 Georgian-Russian War and the cyber-attacks on Georgian government websites, as well as the current conflict in Ukraine and Syria.<sup>34</sup> On the other side of the hybrid warfare argument,

<sup>34</sup> Bachmann, S. D. & Gunneriusson, H., Russia's Hybrid Warfare in the East: The Integral Nature of the Information Sphere, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 2015, pp. 198-211



critique is made for a number of reasons. One author claims that ‘alarmism is not just unnecessary; it is also singularly unhelpful’ and goes on to say that ‘one cannot make strategy against an adjective’.<sup>35</sup>

One of the possible misinterpretations is taking the general assumption that if an individual or a group ‘like’ someone or something, they may become active participants in a cause that may undermine national security. However, this does not always have to be the case. A recent example from Estonia demonstrates a level of complexity and the need to distinguish between presumed effects and actual effects. ‘People in Narva love Putin. But it’s a platonic love. They don’t want him here’, said Sergei Stepanov, editor of the local newspaper, *Narvskaya Gazeta*. ‘People here are not stupid. They can just cross the border and compare how things are in Russia.’<sup>36</sup> In other words, someone may admire an external person or a cause, but still remain loyal to their home state. Such meaningful distinctions put pressure on us to learn to better understand human behaviour and to find a more meaningful way of measuring effort.

35 Biscop, S., *Hybrid Hysteria*, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Security Policy Brief, No. 64, June 2015

36 Birnbaum, M., *Near Russia’s Borders With the Baltics, Soldiers on Both Sides are Practicing for War*, The Washington Post, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/near-russias-border-with-the-baltics-soldiers-on-both-sides-are-practicing-for-war/2016/07/01/5a1ea29c-2775-11e6-98ad-1e25d68f2760\\_story.html?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_nato-221pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/near-russias-border-with-the-baltics-soldiers-on-both-sides-are-practicing-for-war/2016/07/01/5a1ea29c-2775-11e6-98ad-1e25d68f2760_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_nato-221pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory), 3 July 2016 (accessed 4 July 2016)

*Russia, DAESH, China, and others use obstructive marketing as to challenge the West and influence the process of globalisation.*

## ANALYTICAL TOOLS AND FRAMEWORKS

Any analysis of the Kremlin or DAESH is dependent on how questions are framed, and which approaches, analytical tools, and methods are used. In addition to the more traditional historical analysis, area studies, and social science perspectives, the discussion raised several other analytical perspectives that may also be fruitful for those interested in the subject.

It is also important to understand what crisis is and what it is not. Crisis is a threat to values, involves uncertainty, and is constrained in time. A crisis involves a political call to action in order to overcome the effects. An actor who is unable to control, or at least to manage the flows of information during a crisis is likely to have their operational choices and capacity adversely affected as a result.

From a political marketing perspective we can imagine that our adversaries are tailoring their offers to the current political market and countering their opponents’ messages. Obstructive marketing means that an

actor interferes with the original intended meaning, imposing his or her own image or brand interpretation/projection. Russia, DAESH, China, and others use obstructive marketing as to challenge the West and influence the process of globalisation. By doing so, they hope to decrease the effectiveness of the US and increase their own competitive advantage. They have positioned themselves as 'challengers to the incumbent'. It is safer to challenge a stronger opponent indirectly, for example through the use of communication. The challenger then must discover and exploit the weaknesses of the opponent.

Analysing our own vulnerabilities and finding the motivation for an adversary's actions is therefore important. It is possible to explain the underlying logic behind an action, e.g. a suicide bombing, on three different levels—the individual, the organisational, and the strategic levels. First, we can analyse the individual's reason for blowing themselves up. Second, we can analyse the organisational goals and agendas. And at the highest level, we can analyse the narrative that is being used to support the strategic vision of the adversary. These three perspectives offer different ways to understand why an actor chooses to act as he does.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a theoretical framework for understanding the appeal of DAESH and the Kremlin messaging. Why do their offers appeal to young people? What is missing from their lives that makes these offers attractive?

A sense of identity and belonging, the quest for significance, and the ability to redress perceived grievances all play their part. These are the three main drivers of terrorist violence. DAESH promises recruits that they will be part of building a positive future, suddenly otherwise disenfranchised youth are given the prospect of leading a meaningful life.

The appetite for an adversary's messaging can also partially be explained through the concept of mental space. If public services and organizations leave a neighbourhood, then they also leave the mental space of the local inhabitants. There are fewer and fewer traditional actors responding to the needs of the individual; this means that a vacuum is being created in the public sector. But nature abhors a vacuum, so sooner or later a competitor will come to occupy the empty spaces and use them against the West.

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