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Cyril Ramaphosa's Strategic Presidency

Sanctions—Strategic Miscommunications? The Case of Iran

Blue Amazon: Brazil's Maritime Vocation

Global Rorschach Test: Responding to China's Belt & Road Initiative

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The Elephant in The Room: Measurement of Effect

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FOREWORD

'I would rather discover one cause than be the King of Persia', wrote the Greek philosopher Democritus in the fifth century BC.

For a moment it is worth reflecting on how cause and effect, and strategy are intricately interwoven in Strategic Communications. Cause and effect look to remove ambiguity in search of precision: strategy seeks flexibility if it is to rise above the fixed plan. We'll return to strategy shortly.

Cause and effect sit centre stage in formulating and propagating Strategic Communications. They always have. In the Cold War, justifying the expense of trying to influence the ideological enemy played a secondary role to the greater existential threat between geopolitical power blocks. Taking a risk that strategic communications might reach target audiences to be absorbed somehow into their lives in some ill-defined way, beneficial to the communicator, was very much a hit and miss affair for both sides.

Today there is a sense that cause and effect are on the agenda. Scholars are again turning to inquiring how we might demonstrate direct cause rather than broad correlation. Data brings out the best and worst in scientists, both pure and social: some swear by its magical powers of insight and presaging while others hesitate to hand over human behaviour to prediction by numbers. Corporate Big Data, meanwhile, circles the discussion, making promises yet to be fulfilled.

Still, those closer to the Humanities survey the human race and are bewildered by its sheer diversity and unpredictability. Individual agency seems just too random to bet the house on predicting whether a particular message might prompt someone to think twice and even act differently. And, indeed, if it does, then to claim sole responsibility amid the myriad influences that shape our lives seems disingenuous.

Searching for cause—why something has happened—is a seemingly unique human trait. Rather than simply observing and responding to events, we choose to attach reason to our actions. In his recently published *The Book of Why: The New Science of Cause and Effect*, a revisiting of his landmark *Causality: Models, Reasoning and Inference* (2000), Judea Pearl sets out to speak to non-scientists about what he sees as the Causal Revolution. 'Some tens of thousand of years ago, human beings began to realise that certain things cause other things and that tinkering with the former can change the latter. No other species grasps this, certainly not to the extent that we do.'

That by tinkering with one thing you could change another had already preoccupied the philosopher David Hume in 1748. To this observation the Scotsman attached a further lens: What might have happened had we acted differently? This represents a sophisticated twist on his first tinkering premise: in today's jargon we call such imaginings counterfactuals. Yet Pearl, the data scientist, suggests: 'Counterfactuals have a particularly problematic relationship with data because data are, by definition, facts. They cannot tell us what will happen in a counterfactual or imaginary world where some observed facts are bluntly negated. Yet the human mind makes such explanation-seeking inferences reliably and repeatedly.'[1]

That said, answering *what causes something to change?* and *what might have happened differently, if only…?* remains elusive. Why we want to know why has occupied the minds of thinkers over time; no less many contemporary proponents of Strategic Communications. At the level of policy and practice, they are regularly called to account for their decisions while demonstrating a return on investment. I deliberately highlight this reductive way of describing the fiercely complex process of communicating ideas using the language of economics: the political rationale being that taxpayers' money is at stake when governments spend to persuade. Prosaic it may be, but it occupies a prime position particularly at

1 Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie, *The Book of Why* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019), p. 33.

the campaign level where Strategic Communications delivery intersects with accountable governance.

Cause and effect sit at the heart of a triangle of mutually responsive relationships between government, practitioners, and citizens. Governments generally lack the capacity, and often the capabilities to promote their own campaigns of influence. Private sector marketing and media companies mitigate this failing and are paid, often handsomely, for their expertise in achieving attitudinal change on the ground, both at home and abroad. In turn, those market experts are expected to demonstrate through measurement of effect that they have spent public money wisely, responsibly and effectively. Government officials who commission their work answer to ministers who in turn, at least in democratic states, must be seen to be vigilant with the electorate's taxes.

Social science has long struggled with a tension between qualitative and quantitative ways of proving cause and indeed effect. From the world of data mining and artificial intelligence comes daily the promise of prediction as well as attribution through micro-targeting individuals. A cross referencing of behavioural patterns (and, we are told, our thoughts) captures minute-by-minute our transactions with surveillance technologies that monitor our lives from the supermarket check-out to our every internet inquiry. By contrast, qualitative researchers claim to speak to people rather than to numbers paraded as proxies for human actions. Surprises and contradictions emerge in qualitative interviews. Words become the liberators of our deepest feelings: numbers constrain and contain. By way of conciliating any divide, data scientist Pearl concedes that 'Data do not understand causes and effects; humans do.' But he isn't finished there.

Like others before him, he goes in search of paradigm shifts in the history of human development. And not unlike the best-selling Yuval Harari's assertion that humans' ability to depict imaginary beings and in some way breathe life into them—the so-called Cognitive Revolution—marked a new level of consciousness, so Pearl casts the Lion Man of Stadel Cave in the same mold.[2] The chimeric figurine— half man, half lion— was carved some 40,000 years ago and discovered in southern Germany. For the author, the statuette represents an exercise in imagination and Mankind's new-found ability to impose abstract thought onto the physical tusk of a mammoth. As a great leap forward in our

2 Yuval Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Random House, 2011).

species, it becomes a precursor to all who would follow and imagine great projects into being – philosophers, scientists, and technologists.

This ties neatly into the three levels of cause as imagined on a ladder of causation by Pearl. Each rung on his ladder marks a flowering of awareness as the individual ascends to a higher degree of cognitive sophistication. The first is association: a stage of seeing and observing, common to most animals and learning machines. The second is one of intervention: a stage of doing and intervening, affecting all mankind including babies. And the third is one of counterfactuals: marking imagining, retrospection, and understanding—only mankind occupies this rung.[3]

Strategic Communications attempts to bring the imagined into being. It is frequently processed through a lens of discourse theory associated with literary studies, not simply social sciences: it is constructivist in so far as it attempts to build and shape discourses across societies and win over fresh support to the communicator's argument, thus extending the reach of any strategy of influence. At the same time, it engages with international relations theory (IR) on the level of how states speak to other states in the international community; albeit IR itself repeatedly struggles to find a sufficiently robust voice for political movements that do not wear the mantel of sovereign statehood, those that operate at sub-state and trans-state and thus struggle to qualify as legitimate participants.

'Cause', argues the constructivist theorist of international relations, Richard Ned Lebow, 'resembles the apocryphal, 900-pound gorilla in the room, to whom everyone defers but no one mentions.' He goes on to ask 'Is cause the cement of the universe, or, as David Hume concluded, mere human artifice often imposed rather crudely on the world to help us make sense of it and get on with our business?' He opts for the latter. 'The open-ended character of the social world, the subjective nature of all our conceptions about it, and the reflexivity of its actors confound the Human search for "constant conjunctions" and compel us to develop thicker understandings of causation.'[4]

Cause is tantamount to 'inefficient causation', he writes, taking a leaf out of Aristotle's lexicon before adapting the philosopher's concept of 'efficient

3 Pearl, p. 26-30
4 Richard Ned Lebow, *Constructing Cause in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) p. ix.

causation'. The efficient causation of how we imagine things to be, stands at odds with the inefficient causation that exists in the real world. We reason backwards teleologically explaining how we arrived at where we stand today, when we should inquire with the eyes of the historian not the rigour of the social scientist for 'multiple pathways, mechanisms, and enabling conditions'.[5] What reads as a plea directed against the insularity of social science in fact disguises a critique of the limitations to pure science, the standards of which social scientists all too often aspire, regrettably to their detriment.

Lebow suggests where the failing lies: 'Regularity theories in science most often depend on large numbers and statistical probabilities. Physics and chemistry—the fields in which regularities in the form of constant conjunctions are possible—base these regularities on the interactions on phenomenally large numbers of atoms and molecules. They also establish, as far as possible, a closed system and limit their predictions to system-level effects.' And here lies the crucial difference for Lebow: 'In dealing with open-systems, this is not possible, especially in fields like international relations where the number of actors is small and the differences among them great.'[6] Geopolitics and societies are open systems, not closed.

In his recently published *Money and Government,* the economic historian Robert Skidelsky makes a similar point: 'The natural world does not interfere with one's observation of it; the social world does. It is the changeability of the object being studied which demarcates social sciences form natural sciences. Social reality is constantly shifting, problems crucial at one time become irrelevant at another. As a result, propositions in social science do not satisfy the "universality criterion". They are limited in time and space.'[7]

Let's, at this point, remind ourselves, Strategic Communications is not simply the confluence of strategy and communications where each term is defined separately before being joined at the hip. In fact, it's a much grander concept. Neither is it synonymous with everyday political communications that must also employ strategies. Beginning at the conceptual level, a set of understandings cascades downwards to the level of daily practice. Its starting point is ontological, relying on how an individual identifies patterns and attaches

5 Lebow, p. 68
6 LeBow, p. 39
7 Robert Skidelsky, *Money and Government: A Challenge to Mainstream Economics* (London: Penguin Books, 2019) p. 12.

meaning to a kaleidoscopic world out there. Strategic Communications then can be seen as capturing a cognitive experience requiring an 'holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment'. That environment, the information environment, is then understood as 'dynamic physical and/or virtual settings interpreted by the mind' which in turn map onto the operational environment best viewed as 'the dynamic setting that impacts decision-making and behaviour for achieving a given objective'.[8]

By speaking to the strategic level—let's call it grand strategy in higher level or geopolitics—Strategic Communications also breaks out of the straitjacket of describing mechanically how one moves from A to B. Rather, forward movement overcoming friction and skirting obstacles in a rapidly changing environment, closing in on an identified objective of change (which may entail temporary retreat to ultimately adapt and advance as extolled in Maoist insurgency strategy) cannot be left out of the discussion. Hence Strategic Communications is both a mindset corresponding to that first conceptualisation, namely the way geopolitics is pursued in an information society driven by the 24-hour a day media hubbub, and a tool placed in the hands of those who seek what they believe to be positive change through a process of influence.

For those engaged in Strategic Communications, strategy is a process through which cause finds expression. But the diverse contributions to any eventual outcome are neither wholly intrinsic, hence dependent on the communicator's will, nor entirely extraneous, so shaped by events beyond the reach of the individual's will to influence.

According to the strategic theorist, Lawrence Freedman, 'There is no agreed upon definition of strategy that describes the field and limits its boundaries. One common contemporary definition describes it as being about maintaining a balance between ends, ways, and means; about identifying objectives; and about the resources and methods available for meeting such objectives. This balance requires not only finding out how to achieve desired ends but also adjusting ends so that realistic ways can be found to meet them by available means.'

8 Neville Bolt and Leonie Haiden (eds), *Improving NATO Strategic Communications* (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Riga, Latvia, 2019) p. 30.

Hence strategy is far more than a plan. Strategy must ride roughshod over any plan, feeling neither remorse not sentimentality. 'A plan supposes a sequence of events that allows one to move with confidence from one state of affairs to another. Strategy is required when others might frustrate one's plans because they have different and possibly opposing interests and concerns.'[9] The popular notion that the best laid plans suffer on contact with the enemy, rings all too true. Even truer is on contact with the environment, from the moment the so-called rubber hits the road. Context, both spatial and temporal, otherwise known as environment is everything (see Dr Gary Buck who argues later in this issue for the development of a measurement of context). Strategy starts here and now with a given set of circumstances. It is not normative but pragmatic. To desire a different starting point is to be guilty of wishful thinking. What complicates strategic thinking is a failure at the outset of the journey to see the wood for the trees – to identify competing interests and objectives of different actors within the environment from their own point of view. This is compounded by the practitioner's worst enemy: the absence of a clearly defined objective, rendering the endpoint harder to attain.

In 1985, Henry Mintzberg and James Waters in Canada published an important article on strategy; more precisely, on separating out *deliberate* from *emergent* strategies which they saw as occupying opposite poles along a spectrum of real-world activities, accompanied by other forms. They called these other types planned, entrepreneurial, ideological, umbrella, process, unconnected, consensus, and imposed. So, far from strategy being a single concept, it actually could be broken down into various forms dependent on both the institution or organisation from which it had emanated and on the environment in which consequent actions would play out. Ten years of research had contributed to understanding strategy as 'a pattern in a stream of decisions'. Their approach led them to isolate streams of behaviour and to identify patterns within those streams that were consistent. Any pattern would have to chart the progress of what the leadership wanted (*intended*) to what the organisation was able to deliver (*realised*).[10]

Drawing on a wide array of research subjects—a food retailer, a manufacturer of women's undergarments, a magazine, a newspaper, an airline, a car manufacturer,

9 Freedman, Lawrence (2013), pxi *Strategy: A History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
10 Henry Mintzberg and James A. Waters, 'Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent', *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 6 (1985): 257–72 , p. 258–59.

a mining company, a university, an architectural firm, a public film agency, and a country going to fight a foreign war—they wanted to know where deliberate decision-making led to realised outcomes and alternatively where outcomes emerged despite any decisions undertaken at the outset, that is, where they were unintended. For a strategy to be classified as deliberate, three prerequisites had to be satisfied: precise intent; a shared project between leadership and staff; and collective intent had to be realised as prescribed. Environmental or external forces (market, technology, politics) had to be included in the design of the project and not be seen to have interfered with its process. Meanwhile emergent strategies had to be judged in the context of order ('consistency in action over time') even where little or no apparent intention was identifiable.[11]

Three decades on, Alnoor Ebrahim has conducted interesting research. In his *Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World* he investigates change across the social, not-for-profit sector which is currently undergoing a transformation. He is concerned with a sector as diverse in its constituents as are its aims and ways of measuring the achievement of those aims. Rooted in scholarly literature around organisational effectiveness that is centred on outcomes, processes and structures, he charts how strategies are created in a sector where it is often impossible if not ill-advised to clarify objectives in anything other than the most general terms. 'Of these three types of indicators [outcomes, processes and structures] organisational sociologists have noted that outcomes are often considered "the quintessential indicators of effectiveness, but they also may represent serious problems of interpretation" such as inadequate knowledge of cause and effect, the time periods required to observe results, and environmental characteristics beyond the control of the organisation such as market conditions or receptivity of external stakeholders.'[12]

What makes his insights noteworthy is his survey of a sector where impact is seen as a key measure of effect, regardless of the fact that impact remains ill-defined. For many non-profits impact is a long term goal, for others it represents 'the "difference made" by an intervention, be it short term or long term, and it may arise at individual, community, or societal level'.[13] An already tall order is further complicated by a laxness in drawing definitional boundaries. Notwithstanding, causality remains consistently and firmly in the auditor's cross-

11 Ibid
12 Alnoor Ebrahim, *Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Business Books, 2019) p. 12.
13 Ibid, p. 15

hairs. Consequently, funders increasingly demand Logic Framework Analysis (LFA) to assess impacts. Wherein lies a dilemma.

Ebrahim sees two conflicting causal chains within this method of analysis. The first speaks to the organisation's performance dominated by internal strategy mapping. Namely inputs > activities > outputs. Here for-profits and non-profits share similar conditions. The second addresses external impact mapping: what happens between the organisation and the operating environment. Namely, individual outcomes > societal outcomes. Here for-profits and non-profits do not share similar conditions. Internal organisational cause and effect do not translate seamlessly into societal environmental conditions leading to change. There is an inside-outside disconnect between two complex causal chains—the 'strategy map' and the 'impact map'.[14]

Emergent strategy characterises the social sector, an area in which many Strategic Communicators operating in geopolitics are engaged. It is not only the attitudes and behaviour of competing or hostile governments that are challenging. Rather, their populations, indeed particular demographic target groups within those populations get singled out as conducive to positive change on the ground. The policy networking organisation WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) is offered as an interesting case study. 'The end game overall', states cofounder Marty Chen, 'is that the informal [economy] should be seen as normal, and it shouldn't be stigmatized, penalized and criminalized…That's our job, to turn the paradigm on its head.'[15] And that indeed is what WIEGO set out to achieve over a number of painstaking years.

To draw the informal economy, marginalised by economists from state discussions which capture only formal economies through the medium of statistics, required a major undertaking on the part of any NGO seeking to redress the grievances of exploited and disenfranchised women. Reliable data was uneven and hard to come by: this is casual work operating below the radar of state regulation. WIEGO chose to communicate with policymakers through the language of the state, namely statistics, in order to shift informality into the same space as formality. To achieve long-term change, coalitions were pursued within the labour statistics ecosystem comprising the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the key overseer of standards in statistical gathering the

14 Ibid, p. 16-17
15 Ibid, p. 122

International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS), and the UN Statistics Division. '[We] knew exactly who the key players were. Now, whether these organisations wanted to work with us was another question', confided Marty Chen.'[16]

In the end it would take several years between 1997-2015 before sufficient trust and collaborative agendas could be developed that would allow WIEGO to shift the discourse in its favour. 'In order to influence the employment statistics ecosystem, WIEGO developed a strategy that eventually became part of its DNA: scan the environment for opportunities to engage with key influencers, gain entry to key decision forums by establishing WIEGO's expertise in producing high-quality research, secure a long-term seat at the table, and continue to push for research and evidence to change policies and mindsets.'[17] Informal employment would eventually be freed at the policy level from the stigma of criminality and illegality and absorbed into a richer appreciation of national economies.

The point of highlighting this case study is to open up strategy to scrutiny, to problematise it from a simple homogeneity to a richer heterogeneity. In Ebrahim's analysis, he draws on three key dimensions of uncertainty versus control that sit at the heart of different causal logic models—simple, complicated and complex. *Simple* employs a linear cause-effect relationship appropriate to tightly controlled interventions; *complicated* logic models are more fitting to multiple actors and alternative causal lines; *complex* addresses non-linearity where 'causal logics and outcomes are insufficiently understood, interactive, and multidirectional. They may involve disproportional impacts where small effects can magnify through reinforcing loops or at critical tipping points'.[18] For practitioners of Strategic Communications whose campaigns are directed at population groups in complex theatres of conflict, these differences become critical.

This brief discussion can only set the mood for Dr Gary Buck's review essay in this volume where he lays out the base measures of effect before proposing a more detailed focus on measurement of environment or context. This, he argues, is possible through statistical methods and models that are currently being developed in the corporate world of marketing.

16 Ibid, p. 126
17 Ibid, p. 130
18 Ibid, p. 36

Otherwise, Dr Ksenia Kirkham offers a very timely analysis of sanctions as a tool of what she calls Strategic Miscommunications. Squeezed between coercive diplomacy and economic Strategic Communications on the one side, and kinetic attacks as witnessed by the killing of the head of the country's elite Quds Force on the other, Iran appears momentarily vulnerable to external influence. But this is to misread the political economy and cultural nationalism of Iran, argues Kirkham. It is a miscalculation that can have only unintended consequences. At the same time, she reflects on the implications for how we should pursue a broader discussion of Strategic Communications.

Dr Vinicius Mariano de Carvalho profiles Brazil, a country that has also shared some unwelcome headlines in the past year for its policies towards the Amazon. De Carvalho, however, switches the focus from the Green Amazon to which global environmentalists increasingly lay ethical claims, to the new concept of a Blue Amazon. This Strategic Communications campaign by Brazil's Navy sets out to wrap its population in a new process of identity creation that would project the country as an international seapower.

While South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa sets out to undo the damage to the reputation and social fabric perpetrated by his immediate predecessor, his New Dawn rhetoric seeks to return the country to the heyday of Mandela. Dr Klaus Kotzé analyses how Ramaphosa's strategy is built on clearly identifiable, rhetorical techniques as he negotiates a return from state capture to constitutionalism. At the same time, the path he must tread between pleasing his factionalised ANC party and a dissatisfied nation is fraught with pitfalls.

China is another country that appears misunderstood, suggests Dr Giulio Pugliese. Over-reaction by hawkish observers casts President Xi's and China's ambitions as those of a rising hegemon. Consequently, its Belt and Road Initiative falls under the mantle of dissimulating that country's true intent. Pugliese digs deep into both soft power and hard power signals emanating from Beijing and pleads for greater calm and reflection before we draw misleading conclusions.

Russia, meanwhile, remains never far from the news. James Farwell ponders on Moscow's strategic thinking, competing narratives and understandings of hybrid warfare, before discussing how and why it applied particular approaches to the Ukraine after Crimea. Says Farwell, 'The EU proved blind. NATO and the US also misread Putin', picking up in Defence Strategic Communications Volume 7 an all too familiar theme of failing to gauge the perspective and intent of the adversary.

On a closing note, the art versus science counterpoint—intuition and empathy set against Artificial Intelligence and data micro-targeting—is axiomatic across all communities engaged in Strategic Communications. Any balance or blend must necessarily vary according to the communicator and whatever strategy is employed to achieve the aim. The more dynamic the strategy, the less apparent the relationship between cause and effect. Diversity spawns divergence. Do sanctions against Iran, as we shall explore in this volume, weaken or strengthen the resolve of the people and state of Iran? Will Brazil's Blue Amazon campaign unify a strife-torn country or is it, at best, intended to impress the outside world? Can South Africa's President negotiate a path between the Scylla and Charybdis of party and state? Measuring cause and effect through the circuitous journey from objective via strategy to outcome remains an ambitious undertaking. At the same time, it is because of this problematical trajectory that we invite a much needed and wider discussion among our readers to be included in future pages of this journal.

Dr Neville Bolt,
Editor-in-Chief
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CYRIL RAMAPHOSA'S STRATEGIC PRESIDENCY

Klaus Kotzé

Abstract

Strategic communication has a significant and often overlooked domestic dimension. In states facing precarious power arrangements, strategic communication is critical to commanding the internal strategic environment. South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa is currently facing the task of reforming a government weakened by years of corruption under the leadership of former president Jacob Zuma—Zuma's rule is best characterised by the term 'state capture'. Ramaphosa's challenge is to balance and lead two seemingly opposing centres of power. His leadership requires compromise and consensus; it requires a creative approach. Ramaphosa embodies national values to inspire trust and to persuade the citizens of South Africa to adopt his vision as theirs, forging a collective will to achieve national goals. This article examines Ramaphosa's strategic approach to leadership, adding to the understanding of how strategic communication can be exercised domestically.

Keywords—*South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, domestic strategic communication, strategic communications, social compact, presidential style*

About the Author

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> 'Our 1994 Consensus risks unravelling precisely because we have failed to utilise the settlement for what it was—a vehicle of transition for far-reaching changes, not an end point in itself.'
>
> Cyril Ramaphosa[1]

When Cyril Ramaphosa became president of South Africa on 15 February 2018, not only did he take office at a time of national distress, he assumed the presidency at a time when strategic communication[2] plays a paramount role in shaping and commanding strategic environments.[3] Today, purposeful and persuasive communication performs a significant role in the form and procedure of presidential strategy. Communication has always been a central tool of executive power, but in our increasingly interconnected world, the information environment has become more diffuse and human agency within it more widely distributed. This means that strategic communication, which is often seen as an exercise beyond national borders, is pertinent locally as well. 'Strategic communication is as important to internal audiences as it is to external ones';[4] it is the means for 'persuading the nation's citizens to support the policies of their leaders so that a national will is forged to accomplish national objectives. In this context, strategic communication is an essential element of national leadership'.[5] For an impressionable state such as South Africa, with its complex history and unconsolidated power base, enlisting the persuasive power of local beliefs and shaping the strategic environment is of primary importance. The state leadership must establish authority through prevailing in the battle of ideas and crafting the national interest. In the modern hypermediated era of diffused communications, citizens have greater access to power; power has taken on an increasingly distributed form. It is incumbent upon leaders to obtain trust and legitimacy through values and principles. Leadership gives strategic communication its internal form by crafting messages that serve this national purpose.

1 Cyril Ramaphosa quoted in Mcebisi Jonas, *After Dawn: Hope After State Capture* (South Africa: Pan Macmillan, 2019).
2 Strategic communication is broadly defined as 'the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission...It further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements'. Kirk Hallahan, et al., 'Defining Strategic Communication', *International Journal of Strategic Communication* Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2007): 3–35.
3 The strategic environment is the domain where leaderships interact and interests are advanced; 'strategy is subordinate to the nature of the strategic environment'. Harry Yarger, Strategic Theory for the 21st Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, February 2006).
4 Steve Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, 2008).
5 Richard Halloran, 'Strategic Communication', US Army War College, *Parameters*, Autumn 2007.

The strategic potential of communication has not been lost on Ramaphosa. He has used communication purposefully, advancing his claims to transcend the unenviable situation he inherited from his predecessor, Jacob Zuma. Ramaphosa's approach to restoring the nation to health, and inspiring faith in the national project and advancing it, has been centred upon a strategy of vision and pragmatism. Following an initial period of *Ramaphoria*, a number of questions have emerged around his executive performance and methodology. Domestic and international observers have become frustrated by the slow pace of progress in dealing with Zuma-era misdemeanours, while noisy commentators with limited or adversarial agendas are confusing a complex narrative. This article examines Ramaphosa's strategic approach, revealing the complexity of the situation he is facing. It offers insight by surveying and detailing Ramaphosa's regime of persuasion, describing the ways, means, and ends of his strategic communication.[6]

Historical background to South Africa's current domestic strategic environment

A brief history will help readers appreciate the complex strategic environment in which Ramaphosa's administration is situated. The National Party (Apartheid) government (1948–94) was authoritarian, deeply ideological, and strictly hierarchical. The state was not a dictatorship but rather a parliamentary regime with regular elections. After 1994, the parliamentary state continued, changing to adopt non-racial, universal suffrage. The Apartheid government had waged potent information warfare through its counter-insurgent Total Strategy for almost two decades.[7] Its campaigns were based on control; it employed force to achieve persuasive ends. It was, consequently, unable to co-opt the credible, conservative black elite, whose support was necessary for maintaining the Apartheid government's strategic position of 'normalcy'. Eventually, the government accepted that it could not use the military to force compliance under Apartheid.

6 Strategy is understood as how (ways) power is applied (means or resources) to achieve desired objectives (ends). Values and norms underpin these ways, means, and ends. Strategy is not reaction or management, it is the application of power towards controlling the space or environment.' Harry Yarger, 'Toward a Theory of Strategy' in J. Boone Bartholomees Jr. (ed.) *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, 2nd Edition* (Pennsylvania: US Army War College, June 2006).

7 Total Strategy drew on French General André Beaufre's edict that liberation struggles were psychological battles where a wide array of techniques must be applied to persuade the opposition to accept the terms imposed on them and give up their fight. Klaus Kotzé, 'Strategies of White Resilience: From Apartheid to Installing Democracy', *African Yearbook of Rhetoric* Vol. 8 (2018).

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In the late 1980s, under new leadership, the government's strategy changed. The boisterous securocrat PW Botha[8] was replaced by the savvy, self-proclaimed 'practical idealist',[9] FW de Klerk, who started breaking down the militarised Apartheid state after his election. De Klerk shifted the government's approach from repression to negotiation, from maintaining a divided country under Apartheid to installing democracy. In his speech at the opening of Parliament on 2 February 1990, De Klerk employed his strategic communication, using the *kairotic*[10] international moment to make the first move towards a just, new political order, setting the nation on the transition from Apartheid to constitutional democracy. His rhetorical performance achieved its strategic ends, removing constraints to negotiations and laying the foundation for sweeping reforms.

De Klerk knew that the African National Congress (ANC), the direct political rival of his own National Party, which held credibility among a broad majority of South Africans, could not turn to its former benefactor, the defunct Soviet Union, to support an armed uprising. The collapse of the Soviet Union compelled the ANC to revise its strategy and rescind its armed struggle; until then the ANC's position had been that 'the renunciation of violence […] should not be a pre-condition to, but a result of, negotiation'.[11] They now recognised that the question of South Africa's future would not be determined by violent revolution, but by negotiation and political persuasion. The agreement de Klerk negotiated, to pursue a united, democratic future for South Africa, critically shaped its politics and the presidencies that followed. Nelson Mandela understood this reality. The former militant did not meekly become the saint he is now held to be. Instead, Mandela acutely perceived and employed strategic communication. The ANC leader was pragmatic. He adapted, coaxed agreement from his adversaries, and waged a comprehensive battle for the hearts and minds of the public. He disabled his opponents tactically, through persuasion. Mandela famously encouraged his followers, that it is 'precisely because Afrikaans is the language of the oppressor we should encourage our people to learn it, its

8 Botha cared little for persuasion. In 1985, during a public address, his administration announced that he would steer South Africa onto a new path. Instead Botha shouted, waved his finger, and pledged that he would not cross the Rubicon, as had been suggested, but that he would hold down the Apartheid fort. Hereby he would commit the 'worst political communication by any country at any time'. Dave Steward, 'From the Rubicon to February 2nd 1990', *politicsweb*, 11 February 2011.
9 Jacobus Marthinus Aucamp, 'Die Nasionale Party van Suid-Afrika se Laaste Dekade as Regerende Party, 1984–1994' (Bloemfontein: University of the Free State, Doctoral Dissertation, 2010).
10 *Kairos* is the Greek word that refers to the quality of time; an opportune time for action.
11 Nelson Mandela quoted in Mac Maharaj, *The ANC and South Africa's Negotiated Transition to Democracy and Peace* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2008).

literature and history'.[12] Mandela built legitimacy, confidence, and gravitas into the South African presidency. He recognised all the country's diverse people as one; instead of advancing the idea of separateness, he endorsed national unity and therefore sovereign legitimacy and stability. The ANC's moral authority and popular support allowed the party to claim responsibility for forging democracy and ending Apartheid. This superior account captured the public imagination and won the confidence of the people. The ANC's political project successfully limited the potency of domestic opposition; it has since held an absolute majority in all national elections by presenting itself as synonymous with the ideals of the South African state. By generating a rich conceptual story, which blurred the lines between party and state, it secured the political trust of the nation.

With the ANC safe in its place as the national political force, the contest for power has shifted to take place within its ranks. While the state is constituted by ideals, the practice of politics hinges on political realities. In 2007, for the first time in more than 50 years, there was a radical contest for leadership of the ANC, initiating what has become the party's new normal of factional rivalry. As had been the case at the ANC's 38th National Conference in 1949, when Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and others challenged the moderate establishment, there was a bitter battle for the character of the ANC at the 52nd National Conference in Polokwane.[13] Thabo Mbeki, Mandela's immediate successor, who reigned as a philosopher-king, was pitted against Jacob Zuma's leftist camp. Although Mbeki's grand narratives continued Mandela's appeal to ideals, his aloof intellectualism and detachment from the everyday lives of the poor was seen as neglect for their struggle, ripening the ground for Zuma's populist declamation and radical aspirations. Zuma sang and danced to anti-Apartheid songs, comprehensively defeating his opponent with a 60% share of the vote. His argument was direct: 'We have achieved political freedom and now we must achieve economic freedom.'[14]

12 Nelson Mandela quoted in Mac Maharaj, *Reflections in Prison* (Johannesburg: Penguin Random House South Africa, 2010).
13 Academic and political commentator Susan Boysen said of the contest that it was 'no-holds barred, a brutal and all-consuming disagreement between two major ANC groupings...it divided the whole organisation'. Susan Booysen, *The African National Congress and the Regeneration of Political Power* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), p. 41.
14 South African Press Association (SAPA), 'Zuma Promises Economic Transformation', *The Citizen*, 20 February 2014. [Accessed 5 September 2019]

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Jacob Zuma subjugates the state to the ANC

Jacob Zuma's convincing election presented a shift from leading by aspirational ideals to pursuing specific, tangible ends. His strategy was materially motivated, which attracted the ANC's influential partners in the tripartite alliance—the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). Zuma's ANC presidential acceptance speech made it clear that a National Democratic Revolution (NDR)[15] would be the party's guiding philosophy and the foundation of his leadership. The goal of the NDR was nothing less than revolutionary, it was 'the deracialisation of ownership and control of wealth', the establishment of a National Democratic Society characterised by the resolution of 'antagonistic contradictions between the oppressed majority and their oppressors; as well as the resolution of the national grievance arising from the colonial relations'.[16] The NDR's prescriptive measures, such as direct demographic representation, were at odds with the national Constitution. The often contradictory pursuits of the ANC vis-à-vis those of the state is the axis whereupon South Africa's strategic environment has tilted.[17]

Under Zuma, unlike Mbeki or Mandela, the national project would be subordinated to the leadership and goals of the ANC, not to the prescripts of the national Constitution. Zuma explained: '[The ideal state] should not be confused with tactical positions that the liberation movement may adopt from time to time.'[18] Zuma's election was charged by the perception that 'we are only at the beginning of a long journey to a truly united, democratic and prosperous South Africa'.[19] At the ANC conference that re-elected Zuma in 2012, he urged: 'It is time to ask questions about the present and future [...] the last 18 years was

15 From 1960 to 1991 the Soviet Union was the ANC's closest and most important ally. The ANC's concept of the National Democratic Revolution was adopted from a late-1950s Soviet theory about how newly-independent, former colonies were the natural allies of the USSR and would naturally develop into socialist states after a transition through a period of non-capitalist development. Revolution is 'fundamental change in society', and the National Democratic Revolution is 'a process of struggle that seeks to transfer power to the people and transform society…'. From ANC, Strategy and Tactics: Building a National Democratic Society, adopted by the ANC's 52nd National Congress, 16–20 December 2007, p. 21–22.
16 South African Communist Party, 'The Road to South African Freedom', 1962.
17 'Our political transition was never only about freedom from political bondage' in §19 and '[T]he NDR concept captured far-reaching social transformation, which went beyond the formal election of a democratic government' in §34 from ANC, 'The Second Transition?', ANC discussion document towards national policy conference, Version 6.0, 5 March 2012.
18 ANC, Strategy and Tactics, 2007.
19 ANC, 'The Second Transition?'.

the first transition. We are calling for a dramatic shift […]'.[20] The first transition was from the Apartheid state to the enfranchisement of all races; the second transition was to be from a situation where economic power, which still largely lay in the hands of a white minority, would find a more equal distribution. This goal was to be achieved by whatever means appeared necessary, whether constitutional or not. When Zuma addressed the National Assembly in 2014, not as ANC President but as Head of State, and committed to the second transition wherein he said the country was entering 'a new radical phase',[21] he effectively captured the state[22] under his faction in the ANC that advanced a radical approach to transformation. Zuma's advance of radicalism determined that the policy of the ANC, not that of government, would function as the authoritative guiding hand of national political power.

Zuma understood that it was the ANC that had elected him to the office of President. It was the ANC that he served and that would keep him in power. Though Zuma faced widespread allegations of corruption and malfeasance, it was his obligation to the ANC that led to his eventual downfall.[23] The same document that guided Zuma's radical leadership, the ANC's *Strategy and Tactics*, adopted at the fateful 52nd National Conference in 2007, was revised in 2017 to take an unequivocal position consolidating power in the hands of the ANC: 'in giving leadership in the various centres of power [...]. [...] from the branch level to the national structures, the ANC should act as the strategic centre of power for its members [...]'.[24] The concentration of power in the party effectively gave its president preeminence over the national president. However, at that juncture, Zuma's corruption and misdeeds caught up with him. At the 54th National Conference of the ANC, on 18 December 2017, Cyril Ramaphosa narrowly defeated Zuma's ex-wife and supporter Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and became president of the party. This sealed Zuma's fate: the party ordered him to resign from the presidency. Having stressed the party's role as the seat

20 Jacob Zuma quoted in 'ANC: Second Transition Concept Welcomed', *News24 Archives*, 28 June 2012. [Accessed 1 September 2019]
21 South African Press Association, 'Zuma Promises Economic Transformation'. 20 February 2014.
22 *State capture* is defined as: 'the efforts of a small number of firms (or such groups as the military, ethnic groups and kleptocratic politicians) to shape the rules of the game to their advantage through illicit, non-transparent provision of private gains to public officials [...] This concept links the problem of corruption with vested economic, social and political interests, which in turn form key obstacles to economic reform.' World Bank, 'State Capture', n.p., n.d.
23 Before his victory in the 2007 ANC election Zuma contested Thabo Mbeki, saying: 'I don't think we need two centres of power, it's not good...the organisation is more important than individuals.' Moshoeshoe Monare, 'Zuma Opposed to Two Centres of Power', *IOL*, 14 June 2007. [Accessed 4 September 2019]
24 §142 of ANC, Strategy and Tactics of the African National Congress, discussion document of the 5th National Policy Conference, 30 June –5 July 2017.

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of power, Zuma was hoist with his own petard and reluctantly submitted his resignation as President of the country on 14 February 2018. The next day, Ramaphosa went on to be elected, unopposed, as interim President of South Africa by the National Assembly. His dual leadership role as president of the ANC and of South Africa is forged by the dynamic sensibilities of both national and party power. His choices and actions are contingent on the tension between the strategy of the ANC and that of the state; his position as state president is subject to his ability to preserve party unity. Any examination of Ramaphosa's presidency must recognise the circumstances of his claim on power.

Enter Ramaphosa: The challenge

Ramaphosa's presidential strategy is determined by the complex challenge of leading two centres of power. He must balance state and party interests. His task of aligning ANC policies to fortify solidarity in support of his leadership determines the strategic environment. His strategy is founded on compromise and consensus. An examination of Ramaphosa's path to power reveals these conditions to have shaped his character and his leadership.

Ramaphosa gained his political profile as the founder of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), an influential labour structure formed in 1982. The NUM was the first black union to achieve significant bargaining power. He was widely recognised for his negotiating skills when he played a pivotal role in South Africa's transition to democracy. In 1994 he was appointed Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, the body responsible for drafting South Africa's Constitution. When it appeared that, although Mandela touted him to be his successor, Mbeki was favoured by the ANC, Ramaphosa left politics for business. In 2012 Ramaphosa returned as Zuma's Deputy President, preparing to take power in 2017, as is the tradition of succession in the ANC. Ramaphosa would bide his time. As his previous track record had shown, he would act only once he was in charge.

The organisational decay and system of patronage in the ANC constrain Ramaphosa's political situation. The militant radicalisation of the party under Jacob Zuma and the doctrine of the second transition remain his greatest challenges. Striking a balance between party and state depends on Ramaphosa's ability to set the agenda and to persuade his party members to follow his lead. He must proclaim a set of ideals, without aggravating any vital constituency of

the ANC. He must claim and situate his power, maintaining order while avoiding factional volatility. He must rely on strategic communication to advance his leadership, coordinating all the resources at his disposal to shape perceptions and build influence. Strategic communication is assessed here as a holistic practice—both a process and an approach. Given that 'everything communicates', the 'key to an effective strategy is therefore to understand actors and audiences, then integrate policies, actions and words across government in a coherent way to build national resilience and leverage strategic influence'.[25] Today's hyper-mediated and mediatised strategic environment empowers and obliges national leaders to direct perception in order to persuade. A president has the executive authority to create meaning according to his personal ethos—to shape the national story. We now consider Ramaphosa's strategic communication, drawing on Harry Yarger's understanding of strategy as the ways, means, and ends of power.[26]

Ramaphosa's strategic ends

Pursuing South Africa's aspirational Constitution

Ramaphosa's statements and actions establish him as a Constitutionalist.[27] His strategic communication pursues a vision of a capable South Africa as depicted in the country's aspirational Constitution. As set out in the Preamble to the Constitution, Ramaphosa's government seeks to 'heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.'[28] As Chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, Ramaphosa was one of the architects of

25 *Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective*, (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2018).
26 See Footnote 6.
27 '[Constitutionalists] 'build state capacity to deliver on the 1994 promise of equality and development by managing rents to promote investment and service delivery…. [They] operate within the confines of the Constitution and are invested in institutional building. That is, social and political transformation is deemed contingent on giving flesh to the socio-economic rights defined in the Constitution by building state administrations able to work programmatically to achieve progressive policy outcomes.' Mark Swilling et al, *Betrayal of the Promise: How South Africa is Being Stolen*, (Centre for Complex Systems in Transition, May 2017). [Accessed 15 May 2019].
28 *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, as adopted on 8 May 1996 and amended on 11 October 1996 by the Constitutional Assembly.

what he has endearingly described as 'the birth certificate of the nation'.[29] The Constitution 'belongs to all of us [...]. We claim it as ours, it enshrines the rights that make us live as South Africans, and we will protect it because it belongs to us.'[30] '[I]t is the repository of everything, everything that I ever dreamt of, that I ever wanted in my life. It gives me strength, it gives me hope, it protects me. If anyone were ever to violate my rights, our Constitution is my shield.'[31] Ramaphosa's proclaimed allegiance to the Constitution gives clarity to his strategy of empowering the state while not alienating the ANC. This appears to be the inverse of Zuma's approach; the former president's legacy lives on through a contingent of senior party representatives who remain loyal to him. This reality prevents Ramaphosa from taking sides against factions within the party. Instead, he seeks to empower the state by encouraging confidence in his leadership of the ANC.

Ramaphosa's strategic communication purposefully crafts a consolidated national identity to advance the national interest. Given the constraints placed on him by the political legacy of his predecessor, Ramaphosa wants to demonstrate that he is advancing the national interest above that of the party. He prioritises strategic command of the nation over leadership of the party; he leads the party through leading the nation. These circumstances demand that strategic communication be employed beyond the marketing of party politics. With the evolution of power in the 21st century, where strategic communications play a critical role in shaping the domestic strategic environment, this inward-looking consolidation of the national interest is extremely valuable. As the world is opening up and power becomes diffused and takes on new, often irregular forms, the primary safeguard against information campaigns attacking sovereign states is the clear articulation and consolidation of the domestic ethos. The expression of local beliefs and values is primary. A state cannot effectively exercise foreign policy when there is local disorientation and confusion about the national interest.

The State of the Nation

Ramaphosa's strategy emerges from his public speeches and political gestures. The day after he was elected, on 16 February 2018, Ramaphosa gave his first

29 Janet Smith, 'A Constitution That Put the Nation First', *IOL*, 6 May 2016.
30 Cyril Ramphosa quoted in 'Conversation on the Constitution',Nelson Mandela Foundation, 9 March 2012.
31 Lauren Segal and Sharon Cort, *One Law, One Nation: The Making of the South African Constitution*, (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2012).

presidential address—the State of the Nation (SONA), South Africa's version of America's State of the Union address. There is no legislative requirement for this annual speech to be given at the opening of the new parliamentary session; it is a ritual introduced by Mandela. The address is a ceremonial reconstitution of the state's values where, in 'one gesture, in one voice, the nation finds itself being "stated"'.[32] Parliament defines the SONA as 'a political statement of the President that sets out a social contract that seeks to [...] constitute the fabric of our nation'.[33]

The SONA is a pomp-and-circumstance celebration—guns salute, children wave the national flag, and, in a manner unique to South Africa, a praise-singer or *Imbongi* introduces the President to a joint sitting of Parliament, usually to singing and clapping. Ramaphosa's SONA speech was the ideal platform from which to launch his presidential strategic communication, to present a 'non-partisan address that maps a holistic pathway to the future'.[34] Ramaphosa clearly understood that he would be addressing a larger audience than those who had congregated in the House of Assembly to hear their newly elected president speak. The SONA is a national and international media event, and therefore an opportunity to claim national authority, embody the vision and the mission of the state, and thereby inspire in the public and in South Africa's business partners a sense of confidence. Departing from Zuma's strategy of reciting his government's plan of action for the upcoming year, Ramaphosa used the occasion to rally his audience around an alluring story of what South Africa could become. He appealed to his constituents to form a consensus around the adoption of civic responsibility—to adopt and exhibit the Constitutional values as their own.

As Hans Kelsen pointed out in 1967, power does not follow from statements of fact, but from embodiments of norms.[35] Such embodiment 'epitomizes the republican identification of politics and persuasion, for embodiment is a rhetorical accomplishment that in turn fuses speech and action, speaker and subject'.[36] Leadership, as an act of influence, does not simply subscribe to certain norms. It is through the embodiment of norms that leadership is claimed, and

32 Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *An African Athens: Rhetoric and the Shaping of Democracy in South Africa* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. 22.
33 'The Significance of the State of the Nation Address', *In Session* The official magazine of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (Pre-SONA edition, 2019) p. 6.
34 Ibid.
35 Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).
36 Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 116.

norms are redefined. Ramaphosa's claim to power has been indirect; he does not assert himself personally as a great leader to be followed, but embodies the norms and values enshrined in the Constitution he believes in.

Ramaphosa's inaugural SONA set his agenda, it opened a new chapter by marking the political transition that had taken place. The new president commenced his first public speech act by cordially thanking the former president. Ramaphosa concludes and transcends the Zuma era by creating a bridge, over Zuma's leadership, to that of Mandela. His words did not simply close the door on Zuma but sought to expunge his command by invoking Mandela's moral authority: 'Guided by his example, we will use this year to reinforce our commitment to ethical behaviour and ethical leadership. In celebrating the centenary of Nelson Mandela, we are not merely honouring the past, we are building the future […]. We should honour Madiba[37] by putting behind us the era of discord, disunity and disillusionment [...] because a new dawn is upon us. It is a new dawn that is inspired by our collective memory of Nelson Mandela.'[38]

Claiming the New Dawn

Throughout his presidency, Ramaphosa has consistently promoted the idea of the New Dawn. This project represents his vision of South Africa overcoming the preceding dark episode, a period he later called the 'nine lost years',[39] and ushering in a new, revitalised era. Ramaphosa was elected to his first full term as President by the National Assembly on 22 May 2019. At his inauguration speech on 25 May, Ramaphosa claimed personal responsibility for the New Dawn by stating: 'Through the irrefutable power of the ballot on 8 May,[40] South Africans declared the dawn of a new era.'[41] Ramaphosa's New Dawn rests on a number of pillars.

First, it is premised on sovereign accord; stability and order must first be secured. On many occasions, including at the SONA, Ramaphosa has emphasised the need for national unity: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, a diverse but united nation. Bound together by a common destiny […] we are a nation at one.

37 Madiba is Nelson Mandela's clan name.
38 Cyril Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation Address by President of the Republic of South Africa', *The Presidency*, 16 February 2018.
39 Ferial Haffajee, 'Ramaphosa's "Nine Lost Years" Speech Impresses Old Mutual CEO at Davos', *fin24.com*, 24 January 2019.
40 The 2019 South African General Election was held on 8 May 2019. The African National Congress, led by Cyril Ramaphosa won 57.5% of the vote. Ramaphosa was elected by the National Assembly two weeks later.
41 Ramaphosa, 'Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the occasion of the Presidential Inauguration', *South African Government*, 25 May 2019.

We are one people […] while there are many issues on which we may differ, on these fundamental matters, we are at one.'[42] By reigniting a feeling of national solidarity, Ramaphosa is seeking to counter the ongoing fraying of the political settlement achieved by Mandela to advance the imperative of any national political arrangement: the preservation of stability. To inspire the people in a unified and common purpose, he draws on Mandela's gravitas, reminding them of the covenant Madiba sought to build to advance a just and capable state. Ramaphosa affirms that the 'defining thing about the new dawn must be our ability to govern well, to create a capable state [...] a state where we will know that everybody who is in the state is there to advance the interests of our people.'[43]

Second, the New Dawn is both the commencement and the realisation of renewal, both an end to the previous era and a forward-looking process. The new president claims that South Africa is 'emerging from a period of stagnation and strife'.[44] He seeks acceptance for reform from the same entities (the ANC and the ANC-led government) that caused the atrophy. The New Dawn promises to address the deficiencies of the previous regime, such as 'policy uncertainty, the weakening of public institutions and high-level corruption [that] undermined investor confidence and public trust'. 'We are now firmly on the path of renewal and rebuilding', says Ramaphosa.[45] Furthermore, by recognising the failures of both the ANC and the government, the New Dawn stimulates a deliberative approach to creating a better South Africa. In bringing the deficiencies of the past to light, Ramaphosa has initiated renewal, inspiring the nation to recreate itself: 'Fellow South Africans, our country has entered a period of change [...] Our task, as South Africans, is to seize this moment of hope and renewal, and to work together to ensure that it makes a meaningful difference in the lives of our people.'[46] Ultimately, Ramaphosa describes South Africa's renewal as the resolve to 'break with all that divides us, to embrace all that unites us'; to 'cure our country of the corrosive effects of corruption'; to 'restore the integrity of our institutions'; and 'to advance the values of our Constitution'.[47] Ramaphosa authoritatively communicates that he is capable of ensuring this longed-for renewal.

42 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.
43 Cyril Ramaphosa speaking in a YouTube clip, 'Ramaphosa says his style of leadership is identical to Madiba's' published by *Eyewitness News*, 31 May 2018.
44 Jonisayi Maromo, 'Ramaphosa Says SA "Emerging From Period of Strife" As He Welcomes Diplomats', *Independent Online IOL*, 11 December 2018.
45 Ibid.
46 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.
47 Cyril Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', Speeches of the South African Government, 7 February 2019

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And finally, Ramaphosa's strategic narrative about the New Dawn advances his vision of South Africa as a fully transformed, democratic state, while simultaneously announcing that the journey toward democratic consolidation is yet to be completed. This path is presented as the natural continuation and maturation of the first transition. Herein, Ramaphosa presents an eloquent plan to neutralise the idea of the radical second transition; his vision counters the NDR's millenarianism. Instead of moving society towards a pre-configured outcome, the New Dawn returns the national focus to the approach and tools used in the earlier transition led by Mandela. His approach was based on ideals and process, on inclusion, compromise, and reconciliation. By recalling to mind that unprecedented democratic transition out of Apartheid, Ramaphosa employs sentimentality and a sense of achievement to inspire belief that the promises of the New Dawn can indeed be accomplished.[48] Apartheid was finally dismantled in 1994; in 2019 Ramaphosa used the 25th anniversary of this remarkable achievement as a kairotic moment when South Africans could recognise the intervening failures of government and renew their energy and direction.[49] With his promise of a New Dawn he hoped to inspire the people to adopt his resolve and make this national project their own. For his vision to be realised, the government must have the necessary institutional capacity; the slogan—*New Dawn*—must be translated into state practice through effective administration. However, it is the people, not the politicians, who must achieve renewal and democratic consolidation, and the people have not been uniformly inspired and mobilised. Moreover, the limited nature of the reforms Ramaphosa has enacted so far is causing public frustration; analysts and public commentators are further constraining his political momentum by labelling Ramaphosa slow and indecisive.[50] To achieve his goals he must have the people behind him.

Ramaphosa's strategic ways

> 'Politics is an art… By understanding how matters of style are crucial to the practice of politics, we discover not sham, but design, not decoration, but a world of meaning.'
>
> Robert Hariman[51]

48 'Together we are going to make history. We have done it before and we will do it again, bonded by our common love for our country, resolute in our determination to overcome'. Cyril Ramaphosa, 'Together we will make history', *In Session* The official magazine of the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (Issue 1, 2018), p. 7.
49 'This year, as a diverse people and as a united nation, we will celebrate one of the greatest human achievements'. Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 7 February 2019
50 Mpumelelo Mkhabela, 'Ramaphosa Viewed as Being Slow and Indecisive', interview with Mpumelelo Mkhabela on the *702* radio station programme *Breakfast with Bongani Bingwa*, 27 September 2019.
51 Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 195.

Cyril Ramaphosa's style

Ramaphosa's strategy is expressed through his style; the way he employs the tools at hand to pursue his goals. Style gives dynamism to values, showing how ideals are expressed. Communication must always suit its purpose, setting, and audience. Style is not incidental but critical to how an argument is constructed. Style is the way in which a strategic environment is claimed; how alternative ideas and truths are displaced.[52] A leader's claim to authority will be styled in a specific manner: Ramaphosa embodies the values of the Constitution to demonstrate the South African President's belief in the sovereignty of those values.

Ramaphosa's use of the Constitution to mobilise a multi-faceted response to South Africa's unique political and social problems best illustrates what biographer Anthony Butler calls his 'visionary pragmatism'.[53] Unlike many in the ANC, Ramaphosa 'could not commit his imagination to Marxist revolutionary fantasies. He worked hard to create institutions of self-government [...] demonstrating an ingrained pragmatism'.[54] The roles Ramaphosa played in founding the National Union of Mineworkers, in negotiating the end of Apartheid, and in chairing the Constitutional Assembly all exemplify his conviction that properly-formed institutions can give momentum to the embodiment of ideals.

As president, Ramaphosa facilitated negotiations regarding the National Minimum Wage Act. The Act presents a mechanism for stabilising the South African labour market; it has been criticised as both insufficient and untenable, given the national labour-wage equation. However, this Act is categorically not about the introduction of a minimum wage; it is not intended as a simple fix. Instead, its value lies in the institutionalising purpose it serves. It provides a framework for addressing the complex and heady issues of labour relations and income inequality. The introduction of the minimum wage was preceded by four years of negotiations. 'In the end', said Business Unity's Tanya Cohen, 'we did manage to find a sweet spot, between what is socially acceptable and economically efficient'.[55] For the consensus-seeking Ramaphosa, 'the national minimum wage represents the triumph of cooperation over conflict, of negotiation over confrontation [...] it could only be resolved through negotiation

52 Ibid., p. 3.
53 Anthony Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007).
54 Ibid., p. 384.
55 Tanya Cohen quoted in Tehillah Niselow, 'Ramphosa: "Historic" Minimum Wage to Come Into Effect on January 1 2019', *Mail&Guardian*, 7 December 2018.

[...]. This national minimum wage is a steppingstone towards having a living wage.'[56]

Ramaphosa's leadership style can be seen in the way he managed the negotiations that ultimately led to the implementation of the National Minimum Wage Act. As is the case with the other offices he has held, Ramaphosa acts from a position of authority, corralling the various stakeholders involved in an issue into negotiating a settlement wherein all parties are afforded a portion of their claim. By accommodating some elements of everyone's wishes, he binds them as members of a consensus decision. The collective process is superior to specific claims. The leader is bolstered by a united assembly. However, this increases the pressure on the President to act decisively, as expectations inevitably mount and, when they are not met with assiduousness and follow-through, can lead to increased public frustration.

Ramaphosa's strategic foundation is his ability to negotiate and achieve consensus. He maintains a dispassionate position regarding specific details; 'the benefits of the compromise were greater than the costs'.[57] He first listens to the various motions and only then decides which position to take; this allows him to frame a situation without overpowering it. It also affords the public a sense of agency and builds trust through broad inclusion. Ramaphosa is able to frame an issue so that others accept the way it is expressed, and then steer the resolution. Given South Africa's diversity, a unified outcome is preferable to a one-sided decision. He maintains his advantage through inclusivity, by speaking for all South Africans; this tactic also aids him in surmounting the arguments of those who present partisan views.[58] In Ramaphosa's words: 'the strength of doing this is to be able to bring together South Africans who have a contribution to make, who have views to put across so that we engage everyone and come out with best solutions ever. And this is what I will say defines my style of leadership, which was Madiba's style of leadership.'[59] Equating himself with Mandela is a tactical move on Ramaphosa's part. It remains to be seen whether he can imitate Mandela's executive decisiveness.

56 Cyril Ramaphosa, 'President Ramaphosa National Minimum Wage event, Kliptown: 07 Dec 18', YouTube video, *SABC Digital News*.
57 Butler, *Cyril Ramaphosa*, p. 395.
58 In an appeal to national unity, Ramaphosa shut down the left-wing Economic Freedom Fighters' call to drop a part of the Apartheid era Anthem from the compounded Anthem of the new South Africa.
59 'Ramaphosa says his style of leadership is identical to Madiba's', YouTube video, *Eyewitness News*.

Identification

Engaging the diverse population in cooperation and consensus stimulates all parties to identify themselves as South Africans.[60] Drawing on Mandela's pathos, Ramaphosa uses symbolism and metaphor to shape his image in line with the story he wishes to tell; by being a leader who identifies with national ideals he evokes solidarity. The skilful employment of this identification can be a powerful tool for forging a feeling of unity. The persuaded are guided by the persuader who appears as one of them, not apart or superior, assuming their interests as his and instituting specific forward-looking attitudes. Ramaphosa wants to be a leader who achieves his end by persuading the people to identify with the goals and visions of the state, engaging with their sense of civic responsibility.

Slogans such as the 'Rainbow Nation' are programmatic injunctions that have been used to shape South Africa's national identity. Inviting the public to identify with him, Ramaphosa employed another slogan. At the conclusion of his inaugural SONA, Ramphosa strategically appealed to both public endorsement of his leadership and to popular participation in his vision for the country, saying: *thuma mina* ['send me']. These words are taken from a song by late South African jazz great, Hugh Masekela. At the end of his speech Ramaphosa quoted the lyrics: 'I wanna be there when the people start to turn it around...I wanna lend a hand, send me.'[61] Ramaphosa invoked one of South Africa's greats to appeal to the people, in their own language, to take ownership of the state of their nation and to claim the New Dawn. Ramaphosa implores the people to follow him, saying: 'now is the time to lend a hand...Now is the time for each of us to say "send me".'[62] 'Thuma Mina' is an inspirational call to each South African to answer Masekela's charge to imagine and to build an inclusive, just, and equal society.

Towards a new social compact

Throughout his communications, Ramaphosa returns to the urgency of re-establishing a national social compact. A social compact is an active agreement

60 'We are all called upon and enjoined to heal the divisions and the pain of the past. This is a collective task ... it is our task as a nation. It belongs to all of us ... I am confident that we can move with urgency and purpose to forge a new social compact to revive our economy, to create jobs, reduce inequality and effect fundamental social economic transformation'. Ramaphosa, 'President Cyril Ramaphosa: Response to debate on State of the Nation Address 2019', *South African Government*, 26 June 2019.
61 Hugh Masekela, lyrics to the song Send Me (Thuma Mina) from the album Time, released 5 November 2002.
62 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.

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that enjoins all citizens of a country, as participants in the practice of democracy, to engage in nation-building and the creation of national accord. Given the intractable political situation that Ramaphosa inherited upon assuming the presidency, he chose to set the social compact as a cornerstone of his strategic communication. He implores: 'If we are to achieve the South Africa we want, we need a new social compact.'[63] A social compact is the glue that binds the members of a society to their leader and ensures their civic agency. It serves as a foundation for the process of forming a consensus among diverse players. The value of the social compact is that those involved are more willing to subordinate themselves to the public interest. Citizens are assured that they will not be weakened but empowered by the institutional capacity they are asked to help build from the bottom up. This approach brings the public into partnership with the government, which for its part reciprocates with a commitment to effective governance.[64] According to Ramaphosa: 'Our task, as South Africans, is to seize this moment of hope and renewal, and to work together […]. We will do this by getting social partners in our country to collaborate in building a social compact on which we will create drivers of economic recovery.'[65]

Ramaphosa advances the validity of the social compact by submitting that it was Mandela who first argued for its value. Mandela is quoted as saying: 'None of us acting alone can achieve success. We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation-building.'[66] The appeal of the new social compact draws on the success of the transition from Apartheid to democracy. It was the social compact, comprehensively entered into by the diversity of South Africans, when people recognised each other as equals, refusing to be forced apart, that broke down the walls of Apartheid. The government was forced to fundamentally change its strategy; it could not 'centrally reform into one, a system which under Apartheid was distinctly two… [it could not] permanently include a majority it considered as other'.[67] To Ramaphosa the social compact is the path to renewal made possible by consensus: 'The progress we have achieved over the last year—and the successes we need to register in the months and years ahead—ultimately depends on our ability to revitalise and

63 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 20 June 2019.
64 'Let us forge a compact for an efficient, capable and ethical state, a state that is free from corruption, for companies that generate social value and propel human development, for elected officials and public servants who faithfully serve no other cause than that of the public'. Ramaphosa, 'Inauguration Address', 2019.
65 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.
66 Ramaphosa, 'The Presidency Dept Budget Vote 2019/2020', *South African Government*, 17 July 2019
67 Kotzé, 'Strategies of White Resilience', p. 56.

strengthen the social compact between government, business, labour and civil society.'[68]

By establishing a new social compact Ramaphosa seeks to generate greater public endorsement of the Constitution as a transformative framework; the Constitution comprises an authoritative compendium of compacts, where the 'body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals; it is a social compact by which the whole people covenants with each citizen and each citizen with the whole people'.[69] The social compact is a pragmatic expression of the democratic project. South Africa's aspirational Constitution fortifies Ramaphosa's compelling vision of the ideal state; the people are encouraged to recognise the superiority of this goal and are asked to employ their civic agency in its pursuit. The inclusive approach invites participation, shaping the situation to build common ground and to deny and displace the radicalism of the Zuma era.

The establishment of a social compact is also a remedial action taken in response to the increasing sentiment that Constitutionalism is under threat from civic atrophy and populism. This is the point of view held by former Deputy Finance Minister Mcebisi Jonas who was dismissed by Zuma after blowing the whistle on his corrupt activities. Jonas suggests that outright cynicism 'which views the 1994 consensus as a carve-up among the elites' has overtaken the nostalgic feeling of the 'rainbow nation, emblematic of a time when South Africans broke out of their narrow ideological straitjackets and placed the national interest above all else';[70] '[T]he 1994 consensus has reached its sell-by date', said Jonas. 'In fact, it is unravelling.'[71] As opposed to transformation through the Constitution, there has been a rise of those who see the Constitutional settlement as an obstacle to radical transformation. The institutionally destructive state capture of the Zuma period facilitated by this very argument. It is not within the ambit of this paper to detail state capture in South Africa. It can, however, be described in brief as the improper and illegal restructuring of the state apparatus to pursue Zuma's 'radical transformation', subordinating national institutions through deliberate

68 Ramaphosa, 'Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the WEF Global Press Conference', The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 23 January 2019.
69 'Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780', *National Humanities Institute*.
70 Mcebisi Jonas, 'Mcebisi Jonas: We Need a New Social Compact to Fight the Comeback by Looters and Rent-seekers', *Daily Maverick*, 13 August 2019.
71 'Mcebisi Jonas gives glimpse into his book "After Dawn: Hope After State Capture"', interview with Mcebisi Jonas on the *702* radio station programme *Breakfast with Refilwe Moloto*, 15 August 2019.

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strategy.[72] The legacy of state capture has left South Africa in a weakened condition, its confidence damaged and its national legitimacy crippled. Jonas supports using the social compact to repair the damaged state. The brokering of 'a new consensus', says Jonas, 'will require new levels of leadership vigour across political formations as well as business, labour and civil society […]. Without a new vision of where we are going [...] our new consensus will be stillborn.'[73]

Visionary approach

Ramaphosa's visionary approach is a central feature of his strategic communications; vision and the social compact are his ways of framing the national situation and are key to countering the enchantment of radicalism. Vision is the path through which Ramaphosa connects the troubled present to the renewed future. His re-introduction of vision into modern South Africa's political strategy and discourse has caught the public and the political establishment off guard. He has been criticised for the impalpable proposals he made in his post-election SONA. He departed from what had become the tradition under Zuma of listing multicomponent short-term solutions to complex problems. Instead Ramaphosa has invoked a visionary achieved state, a 'dream we can all share and participate in building'.[74] His 'performance of nation', a reimagining of the state,[75] is an appeal to the people of South Africa to embrace the New Dawn and a renewed social compact; 'I would like to invite South Africans to begin imagining this prospect.'[76] Unlike the previous social compact, which reconciled the two sides of Apartheid's divide, Ramaphosa commits to using his power to move the nation forward. Demonstrating belief in the future must be the first step towards overcoming the present political malaise. While empowering the people, it also makes room for criticism.

Ramaphosa directs the nation's gaze towards a visionary goal, realigning the hearts of the people with the aspirations of the struggle against Apartheid, transporting the power of the Freedom Charter and the Constitution to the present day. Asking the nation to dream is a strategic gamble: 'We share a common

72 'The pattern [of state capture] is a simple one: You remove management, and put in compliant management. You remove boards, and put in boards that are compliant.' Mcebisi Jonas quoted in Patrick Cairs, 'Jonas: All Institutions in SA are Under Threat', *Moneyweb*, 12 October 2017.
73 Mcebisi Jonas, 'State Needs Trust-based Model of Economic Recovery and Governance', *BusinessLive*, 21 June 2018.
74 Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2019.
75 Ibid. 'I dream of a South Africa where the first entirely new city built in the democratic era rises, with sky-scrapers, schools, universities, hospitals and factories'.
76 Ibid.

future, and we need to forge a common path towards its realisation.'[77] Given the constraints and national tensions with which they must contend, Ramaphosa's dream seeks to embolden the public with a vision all South Africans can share. If he is able to capture the imaginations of the people, inspiring a feeling of solidarity, Ramaphosa's dream has the chance to transcend party lines. Dreaming, as was the case with 'the American Dream', transcends policy or partisan lines. It liberates and empowers the individual to claim personal responsibility. The strategic use of vision not only shapes the aspirations of the nation, it is also a salve for desperation. By redirecting attention toward a positive future, he avoids being criticised when short term targets are not met. In a tactical move to motivate the people to open their hearts and minds to his vision, Ramaphosa concluded his response to the post-election SONA debate by quoting from Proverbs: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.[78]

Strategically, the overture to vision stimulates both private and corporate initiative and responsibility to empower the framework and function of national institutions. Presently the public sector wage bill comprises an enormous 14% of national GDP.[79] South Africans are receiving some of the world's worst value-for-money services. The bloated administration and welfare state,[80] together with its failing state-owned companies, are in serious trouble, drowning the state in debt and are only being kept afloat for strategic reasons. This is taking place while the citizenry's political fealty to the ANC and the influence of the far left impede critical adjustment. The ANC is kept in power because, unlike under Apartheid, the majority of people have representation and the right to services. Regardless of its factionalism and poor service delivery, the ANC remains the only option for the majority of South Africans. This has once again been proven during the recent election when the ANC received 57.5% of the national vote. The troubled state of the nation, together with the delicate balance of power in the ANC, necessitate Ramaphosa's desperate strategic approach, to inspire belief and renew the economic viability of the state through support for entrepreneurial activity.[81] Rather than turning to privatisation, a measure that may be blocked by the ruling alliance, Ramaphosa has entered into discussion with

77 Ramaphosa, 'Response to debate on State of the Nation Address 2019'.
78 Ibid.
79 Tom Head, 'Revealed: Bloated Public Sector Wage Bill Tops R500 billion', *The South African*, 20 January 2019.
80 More than 17 million South Africans—almost one third of the population—were social grant beneficiaries in 2017 and that number is continuing to grow. Sabelo Mtantato and Thando Ngozo, 'SA's "Welfare State" is in Trouble', *Mail&Guardian*, 28 September 2018.
81 'There is another role we want the State to play, that is the entrepreneurial role. A role where a State is able to take some risks and enable the economy to grow'. 'State of the Nation', 2019.

powerful unions to get them on board to help strategically restructure the state-owned companies he calls 'sewers of corruption'.[82] By combining his strategy of cooperative consensus-building and inspiring civic responsibility with increasing support offered to private initiatives, especially small businesses, Ramaphosa has commenced a new programme aimed at entrepreneurial revitalisation of the state.

Ramaphosa's strategic means

The state as a strategic resource

Ramaphosa seeks to advance his strategy for renewing South Africa as a capable state through the agency of the state itself. The primacy of the state as a symbolic tool of power is clear to Ramaphosa. Observing the display of military resources at Mandela's 1994 inauguration, he reflected on the potency of the state to tell a definitive story and thereby act as a legitimate facilitator. He wrote that, under Apartheid, 'to the majority of South Africans these displays of military might were a grand symbol of nothing more than white minority aggression and terror [...]. [O]vernight their function—and the symbolism that we attach to them—had fundamentally and irreversibly changed. No longer were the jets instruments of oppression. Now they were guardians of democracy.'[83]

The power of the state rests on an undisputed claim to sovereignty. To be legitimate, the state must be perceived as such—the regime must tell a convincing story. In order to achieve justice, the government must express justice through its institutions. Having assumed leadership of a compromised state, Ramaphosa must employ that same state to re-establish authority and stability. Renewal functions as a process whereby a vision is achieved through the deployment of resources. One means of doing this is to continue the tradition of establishing commissions of inquiry initiated by previous presidents. Commissions such as the Nugent Commission of Inquiry into Tax Administration and Governance investigate institutional propriety to restore credibility and improve capacity. The commission is a useful mechanism for telling an authoritative story about justice, for exercising national command. The power of these internal mechanisms lies in the strategic narrative they convey, in the exhibition of procedure and not

82 Caiphus Kgosana, 'State-owned enterprises are 'sewers of corruption': Ramaphosa', *Times Live*, 31 May 2018.
83 Cyril Ramphosa, 'Swords into Ploughshares: The Challenge of Effective Governance in a Democratic South Africa', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, Vol. 9, № 1 (1996): 17–24.

in their findings, which are rarely binding and often neglected. Instead, these are performances of governance. They are aspirational stories that recognise irregularities rather than correcting them, making suggestions for how to proceed into the future. Commissions of inquiry, routinely overseen by senior justices, present an increasingly legal approach to governance concerns. Their prominence and the reliance placed on them indicate a recognition of the failure of political procedure. On the other hand, commissions perform the revitalisation of institutional capacity;[84] transcending the past by composing a picture of amelioration.

To undo the state capture he inherited, a core concern of Ramaphosa's programme has been to reclaim state policy instruments. Initially hamstrung by ineffective departments, he has freed resources and consolidated authority by streamlining his Cabinet from 36 to 28 ministers. Credible, experienced candidates have been appointed to critical positions including the Head of the National Prosecuting Authority and the Commissioner of the South African Revenue Service. Ramaphosa has focused on a careful, and therefore slow, clean-up of government institutions, while restraining political opponents in his party. Instead of imposing his authority, Ramaphosa's strategy is to re-capacitate state institutions so they can both model and facilitate best practice and recover the goods lost as spoils to state capture.[85] To signal the end of the authoritarian overreach of the state capture period, he has charged panels comprised of experts with the task of selecting new heads of organisations. In so doing he is distancing himself from the selection process and redressing the patronage system associated with Zuma's appointments, targeting the populist cult of personality developed under Zuma. Ramaphosa has enacted a new, meritocratic precedent based on building consensus. This, among other actions, is directed at correcting the past by empowering institutions, instead of individuals, to lay the foundation for a capable state before implementing policies.

However, this process has proven to be time consuming, frustrating the public desire to see results. Ramaphosa is deliberate in his approach, instilling proper procedure from the top without allowing himself to be rushed or the process to become politicised. In order to set an example of best practice, he needs

84 'The Commission is critical to ensuring that the extent and nature of state capture is established, that confidence in public institutions is restored and that those responsible for any wrongdoing are identified'. Ramaphosa, 'State of the Nation', 2018.
85 Ramaphosa has established a Special Tribunal in the Special Investigating Unit that targets the recovery of misappropriated and looted state funds.

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to follow the book. By depoliticising the power of the state bureaucracy, he is subverting interests ulterior to the power of the state. In so doing Ramaphosa discharges his responsibility—to both the party and to the electorate—to lead.

Tools for restructuring and renewal

While it is too early to determine its effectiveness, the attention given to structural considerations strategically builds influence and confidence. In a particularly insightful speech delivered to the World Economic Forum in 2019, Ramaphosa announced South Africa's plans to create an environment that is attractive for development: 'We therefore come to Davos with a single message, and this year the message is that South Africa is on a path of growth and renewal.'[86] To advance this charge, his government is leading investment into the state. The government has begun to reallocate public spending to strategic sectors such as agriculture and small business development and has launched a stimulus package and an infrastructure fund[87] to advance economic growth and investment. Ramaphosa's promotion of opportunities such as the recently established African Continental Free Trade Agreement, are means to bolster South Africa's strategic attractiveness. He has, furthermore, personally launched an ambitious investment drive, aiming to raise $100 billion in new investments during his administration. For this he has appointed a team of business and finance experts that include Trevor Manuel, former Finance Minister and current senior advisor to investment bank and financial services company Rothschild & Co.

Ramaphosa has implemented targeted reforms to ensure that policies are enacted. These include new 'visa regulations to encourage more visitors, as well as making it easier for investors and business people to visit South Africa'; a Mining Charter 'that balances the need for transformation with the imperative for new investment', the allocation of a 'high-demand radio spectrum to accelerate broadband access and promote competition within the sector'; and the signing of 'long-outstanding agreements with independent power producers' to restart South Africa's successful renewable energy projects.[88] All these are corrective measures to redress corrupt Zuma-era policies and bureaucratic stagnation.

86 Ramaphosa, 'Remarks by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the WEF Global Press Conference, Davos-Klosters, Switzerland', *The Presidency*, 23 January 2019.
87 'Government has committed to contribute R100 billion into the Infrastructure Fund over a 10-year period and use this to leverage financing from the private sector and development finance institutions.' 'State of the Nation', 7 February 2019.
88 Ramaphosa, 'Remarks, Davos-Klosters, Switzerland'.

All have commenced but have not been completed. They are also all measures intended to diminish the government's involvement, advancing South Africa's strategic attractiveness for investment and growth. These reforms to consolidate and streamline regulatory processes aim to improve the ease of doing business in South Africa, which currently ranks 82nd in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index. Ramaphosa has targeted this instrument as a barometer for success, indicating that his 'administration has set itself the ambitious goal of being in the top 50'.[89] In another move to improve the functioning of his government, Ramaphosa has established the Policy Analysis and Research Service to improve the development and coordination of policies across government; a similar policy unit that performed as a clearinghouse for policy processes under Mbeki was disbanded under Zuma.

A central means of Ramaphosa's strategic communication has been the hosting of summits. Summits bring together various stakeholders to engage in diverse matters of interest. They are places where opportunities are discussed and where consensus can emerge dynamically. These are platforms to gather participants to engage with specific issues, share resources, and form compacts. At the inaugural South Africa Investment Conference in October 2018, Ramaphosa secured the first $20 billion tranche of his projected $100 billion in new investments. He also hosted a Jobs Summit: 'to align the efforts of every sector and every stakeholder behind the imperative of job creation…[and] to come up with practical solutions and initiatives.'[90] In 2019 Ramaphosa hosted the 1st South African Digital Economy Summit, addressing the opportunities provided by advanced technologies and the challenges of digital disruption. Both there and at the Presidential Health Summit, Ramaphosa asserted the need for establishing both a digital compact[91] and a health[92] compact with the people of South Africa.

Ramaphosa's dynamic approach to renewal can be seen in his government's ongoing review of the National Development Plan—since it was adopted in 2012, not much of South Africa's detailed long-term guide to prosperity has been

89 Ramaphosa, 'Keynote address by President Cyril Ramaphosa during the Ease of Doing Business Seminar, WEF on Africa', *The Presidency*, 4 September 2019.
90 'State of the Nation', 2018.
91 'Our nation is forging a digital compact that is a critical contributor to our development as a nation'. Cyril Ramaphosa, 'Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa to the 1st South African Digital Economy Summit, Galagher Convention Centre, Johannesburg', *The Presidency*, 7 May 2019.
92 'This Compact illustrates what we can achieve when we plan and work together to fix what is wrong with our country.' Ramaphosa, 'President Cyril Ramaphosa: Signing of Presidential Health Compact', *South African Government*, 25 July 2019.

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implemented. The plan is currently being reviewed to offer clearer, more up-to-date policy guidelines. Here again Ramaphosa has appealed for cooperation: 'We want to work with you, and for you to challenge us, to bring added rigour to the work of government [...] this is a government that is not afraid of new ideas, and of new ways of thinking.'[93] In showing that the government recognises its failures and by appealing to the public for participation, Ramaphosa uses the opportunity provided by the revision of the National Development Plan, not only as a signal of departure from the past, but also as a tactical approach to renewal. By restructuring the architecture of government, the new ANC is providing people and businesses with opportunities to take action. Some initial examples include the reduction of port and rail tariffs and the implementation of spatial interventions such as special economic zones. These ventures appeal to citizens' ambitions and duties. These new policies represent the government's first steps toward upholding its end of the promised social compact and an invitation to members of the public to engage in the business of renewing the state. Given the state's level of depletion, these policy tools are structured to induce members of the public to employ their creativity and their assets in rebuilding the state. While it is too early to conclude whether it will be successful, the extent of Ramaphosa's strategy demonstrates the desperation both he and his government feel.

Conclusion

Ramaphosa's precarious leading of both a party in turmoil and a captured state requires communication that is clear and targeted. To avoid being drawn into political battles, he first aligns himself with the values of the state. By crafting his message in service of the national interest, he puts the building blocks of state into place. Ramaphosa uses strategic communication to transcend Zuma's legacy. He claims his leadership in the name of advancing the national project. He builds his strategic narrative around the values of the state, personifying the ideals of consensus and compromise. Ramaphosa's embodiment of the national Constitution is a strategic approach to advancing ideals conducive to restoring order and to building a stable and capable state while countering radicalism. This alignment to the highest standard of legitimacy is strategic. It confounds his opposition.

93 ANA reporter, 'Structural Faults in Economy, Corruption Take Away From SA's Successes—Ramaphosa', *Business Report*, 23 July 2019.

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Ramaphosa's focus on ethos is a clear return to the era of Nelson Mandela. He thereby transcends the troubles of the recent past to remind the public of the early years of democracy when civic responsibility was strong. He employs the image of Mandela as the symbol of a nation reconciled. Mandela conceived South Africa's national values by crafting the nation in word. Ramaphosa's use of slogans such as the New Dawn and Thuma Mina, harkens back to the moment South Africa changed its destiny, a time of overcoming hardship and of national purpose.

Ramaphosa's communication is a call to action. He uses all of the limited means at his disposal to construct a seductive, forward-looking story of a united and prosperous nation. His leadership is not simply laying down a plan of action. Instead, it is the embodiment of a vision that calls the people to action. It is a campaign to stimulate and persuade citizens to support his mission, to forge a collective will towards achieving the national ends.

It is too early to tell whether Ramaphosa's ethos-driven strategic communication, aimed at a long-term vision, has persuaded the nation. This vision is used as a means of restoring order and stimulating the public to endorse his pragmatic short-term efforts. Ramaphosa's active drive for securing investments and restoring the confidence of the people shows that his dream is not merely a pipe dream. Instead, he uses his visionary approach strategically to engage stakeholders and elicit tangible commitments. His hands-on approach, not as a philosopher-king but a *summit king*, shows a concerted effort to drive his vision through pragmatic action.

Ramaphosa's leadership provides insight into a theory of domestic strategic communication that is useful in our hyper-mediated world. The increasingly diffuse nature of power in the 21st century requires leaders to use communication holistically to shape national realities and to deter adversarial foreign information campaigns. Domestic strategic communication expresses a leader's national ideas and ideals; the national ethos is communicated through leadership style. Ramaphosa embodies national values and norms to persuade the nation, demonstrating his approach towards reaching his ends. His leadership does not impose but stimulates an ideal; the nation is constituted and territorialised in word. Ramaphosa uses domestic strategic communication to persuade his audience to trust his message and to identify with it. If he communicates successfully, the people will adopt their leader's version of affairs, and their

agency can be applied to realising the goals of the nation; the citizens are to be empowered and emboldened to adopt civic responsibility, and Ramaphosa will lead by doing.

To achieve its end, strategic communication is used to cohere and guide the nation, pursuing a set of values and goals that is organic to the state and its cause. This approach will be critical as citizens of states around the world increasingly adopt a variety of identities, while facing foreign information campaigns. Strategic communication inspires the people to adopt the nation's ends as their own. Ramaphosa's approach has been illustrative.

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SANCTIONS—STRATEGIC MISCOMMUNICATIONS? THE CASE OF IRAN

Ksenia Kirkham

Abstract

This article explores why economic sanctions are increasingly being used despite their ineffectiveness. It attempts to contribute to the theoretical debate surrounding strategic communications (SC) by suggesting a novel holistic approach, based on a neo-Gramscian reading of international political economy, followed by examining the case of Iran under sanctions as an illustration of theory in action. The Iranian case is most suitable for the analysis of SC for its recency, durability, eccentricity and dramatic character. The paper expands the analysis of strategic communications by considering the following dimensions: the strategic and constitutive realms of social power relations, the ethical backgrounds of SC and the normative and emancipatory power of strategic narratives in Iran. It concludes that the tactical inefficiency of SC with Iran can be explained by a failure of Western strategic communicators to understand the country's socio-cultural constitutive, ethical and normative elements that reproduce the modalities of social behaviour.

Keywords—*Sanctions, strategic communications, Iran, Gramsci, hegemony, grand strategy*

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Introduction

The use of economic sanctions in strategic communications has intensified over recent years, leaving their effectiveness under-researched, which urges us to address two crucial issues: first, what is the interrelation between sanctions and strategic communications, and second, 'how can we reconcile the increasing use of sanctions with their perceived ineffectiveness?'[1] A long history of sanctions against Iran provides an excellent empirical case for assessing both questions. In *Societies under Siege,* Lee Jones maintains that the analysis of sanctions should go beyond mainstream theories,[2] as they ignore the mechanisms by which sanctions operate, and proposes a neo-Gramscian perspective[3] to shift the centre of attention from sanctions per se, to sanctioned societies.[4] Following Jones's suggestion, this article contributes to the theoretical debate surrounding strategic communications by refocusing the research on 'target' societies. This is done by introducing a novel holistic critical approach to analysing SC within the neo-Gramscian framework[5], followed by the case of Iran as an illustration of 'theory in action'.

The core component of the neo-Gramscian framework is the concept of hegemony that grasps the pervasive power of ideology in the formation of 'false consciousness' to reproduce existing class relations. Central to the concept of hegemony is the notion of 'passive revolution' that refers to the attempt at 'revolution' through the inclusion of a 'new category of mediators' who strongly position themselves within various dominated social groups, at the same time remaining loyal to the ruling class.[6] Hegemonic power is reproduced with the aid of this new class of mediators who reconstruct the ethical and normative

1 Steve Chan, 'Strategic Anticipation and Adjustment: Ex Ante and Ex Post Information in Explaining Sanctions Outcomes', *International Political Science Review*, 30.3 (2009), 319–38.
2 *The 'mainstream' are 'problem-solving' theories grounded in foundational ontology and positivist epistemology.* Positivism suggests that humans are rational, an objective reality exists independently of our knowledge, and scientific knowledge is limited to what can be observed; Interpretivism, by contrast, rejects scientism on the ground of a contingent nature of the reality, multiple interpretations of unobservable features, norms, values and identities, and value-laden human behaviour.
3 The followers of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, well known for his "Prison Notebooks". For Gramsci, hegemony is legitimised and reproduced through the cultural-ideological 'manufacture' of public consent through civil society institutions (the media, churches, universities.) The novelty of Gramsci's theory lies in the constitution of social power relations in the region of ideology and knowledge formation, secured through consent rather than military force.
4 Lee Jones, *Societies Under Siege: Exploring How International Economic Sanctions (Do Not) Work* (Oxford University Press, 2015).
5 Critical realism occupies the middle ground between positivism and interpretivism; it acknowledges the possibility of scientific knowledge, however, the analysis considers unobservable structures and causal explanations that have a strong normative component.
6 Claus Offe, *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985).

components of explicit strategic and contingent constitutive realities (not only in the observable but also in invisible, latent conflict zones) to secure the dominant ideological articulation between the ruling class and the population. As such, in the neo-Gramscian configuration strategic communications are conceptualised as activities that drive a long-term societal transformation by shaping people's knowledge, attitudes and identities, while strategic communicators are a class of mediators who set 'passive revolution' in motion, by securing the consent of the wider population to the dominant ideology.

To understand how strategic communicators operate, my analysis of SC will be illustrated by considering three essential components of the socio-economic processes in Iran since the revolution of 1979: strategic and constitutive realms of social power relations;[7] the ethical backgrounds of SC, defined as a synthesis between the individual and the community (i.e. the actualisation of the ideals of community through the actions of the individual); and the normative and emancipatory power of strategic narratives. By setting an ideological formulation of the notion of freedom within the structural and functional terrains, strategic narratives become emancipatory, 'tied to identity politics and questions of legitimacy'.[8] Strategic narratives are spoken or written accounts that are used domestically to legitimise the dominant social power relations, and internationally, to gain consent of the states affected by the global institutional arrangements.[9]

A critical approach will explain why the US decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)[10] and to resume extraterritorial sanctions on Iran,[11] is likely to fail to resolve the current geopolitical deadlock, while the recent assassination of the Iranian general Qassem Soleimani by a targeted U.S. drone attack in Baghdad on the 3 January 2020[12] has raised the threat of a catastrophic regional war. It will also shed light on the paradox

7 The neo-Gramscian critical realist epistemology synthesises the positivist 'strategic' and interpretivist 'constitutive' realms, introducing unobservable structural and functional power relations into analysis. In the strategic domain, rational actors pursue their interests (pre-given and exogenously determined); in the constitutive domain the interests are endogenous to agents and shaped by normative structures (institutionalised norms).
8 Neville Bolt and Leonie Haiden, 'Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology', 2019, p.8 [accessed 30 October 2019].
9 Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).
10 In 2015, Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States – plus Germany) reached an 'Iran nuclear deal', according to which Iran agreed to end its nuclear programme and allow international inspection in return for the lifting of sanctions.
11 The extraterritorial character of so called 'secondary' sanctions implies that the legislation of the 'sender' state of sanctions affects not only the 'target' state, but the activities of third parties (states, companies, and individuals).
12 Qassem Soleimani was a hero of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), the chief of the IRGC's expeditionary Quds Force.

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of why thirty years of anti-Iranian sanctions have not brought about regime change but instead have been largely counter-productive: Iran has adopted an increasingly Hobbesian posture and has become economically and politically more self-reliant. The clue to this puzzle lies in the title of this article: sanctions are not a means of strategic communications, as the mainstream theories assume, but rather a force that diverts normal processes and induces strategic 'miscommunications' with the 'target' states. This article will assess strategic communications in the domestic political struggle in Iran, suggesting that the consideration of sanctions as a means of SC is misleading and counter-productive. Coercive by nature, economic sanctions are a hard power mechanism (alongside military force), while strategic communications is an expression of soft power. As such, the success of Western SC in constructing information 'ecologies' and influencing minds and actions (or inactions) of Iranians is not predicated on the policy of sanctions, but rather on a deeper understanding of the domestic organisation of strategic communications.

Background

The history of sanctions against Iran goes back to the revolution of 1979, when Mohammad Reza Shah Palavi's pro-Western government (1941–79) was overthrown and, following the hostage crisis in Tehran, the US banned all imports from Iran and froze $12 billion worth of Iranian assets. Since then, Washington prolonged and tightened sanctions that remained unilateral until 2007, when the UN Security Council passed Resolution № 1747, which demanded the suspension of uranium enrichment by Iran. Until 2010, the EU's role in the anti-Iranian sanctions regime was limited to merely adding a few names of individuals and firms to the UN list of sanctioned entities, but then European leaders agreed to join targeted sanctions on Iran.

Interestingly, the EU agreement happened at almost the same time as the US Congress passed the 'Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act'—the mechanism of US 'secondary sanctions' that targeted firms and banks doing business related to Iran's energy sector.[13] The secondary sanctions were further expanded in 2013 by the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act—the IFCA. According to Tarja Cronberg, over time the

13 Alan Cafruny and Ksenia Kirkham, 'EU "Sovereignty" in Global Governance: The Case of Sanctions', in *Global Governance in Transformation: Challenges and Opportunities for International Cooperation*, ed. by Adrian Pabst and Leonid Grigoriev (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 89–104.

EU role with respect to anti-Iranian sanctions has transformed: from that of passive observer (1979–2003), to becoming a 'persuasive' mediator of US-Iran negotiations in 2003–05, then an active 'coordinator' of the P5+1 group (2006–10), then a 'sanctions enforcer' in 2010–13, and finally, to being a successful 'facilitator' of negotiations (2013–15) that led to the conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.[14] After Donald Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA in May 2018 and declared the re-imposition of sanctions, the EU tried to defend and uphold the deal, but its attempts were increasingly constrained by the 'extraterritoriality' of secondary sanctions.

This brief history of events shows that there has been no unanimity amongst Western states concerning anti-Iranian sanctions. The various Western 'grand strategies' for the Middle East are reflected in the opposing targets for SC with Iran. The role of Iran in the future of the Middle East is highly debated: some Western states see Iran as part of the international community and believe that the JCPOA should remain focused solely on nuclear non-proliferation, while others (predominantly the United States) want the isolation of Iran from the international community unless and until it reverses its military presence and missile testing. However, given the recent memory of bloodshed during the Iran-Iraq war, when outside powers extensively supplied Iraq with weapons, relaxing its military stance is unacceptable for the Iranian leadership. At the same time, the lack of unanimity amongst Western powers over the continuation of anti-Iranian sanctions leaves scope for more effective strategic communications with Iran to be put forward and for serious military conflict to be avoided. However, as previously mentioned, Western strategic communications are seemingly doomed to fail without a deeper comprehension of how SC are constructed domestically within Iranian society.

This article is divided into two parts. Part 1 is devoted to the theoretical debate over strategic communications: a brief literature review is followed by a theoretical categorisation of a critical neo-Gramscian approach to analysing strategic communications, with a focus on its central philosophical objective—knowledge formation. Hegemonic projects are advanced by the 'new class of mediators' through the ideological articulation of dominant 'grand strategies' that operate in everyday ethical life, in the strategic and constitutive realms. The consent of the population is secured by re-constituting their knowledge: this is

14 Tarja Cronberg, 'No EU, No Iran Deal: The EU's Choice between Multilateralism and the Transatlantic Link', *The Nonproliferation Review*, 24.3–4 (2018), 243–59 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10736700.2018.1432321>.

a gradual process, as it takes time for people to internalise ideological paradigms before they become common knowledge, and for strategic narratives to acquire normative and emancipatory definition. The ideas of 'grand strategies' and hegemonic powers are used to explore as yet under-researched links between strategic thinking, culture, institutional structures, and communication techniques. Part 2 applies the analytical framework to the case of Iran, with the aim of assessing why the effectiveness of SC is preconditioned by the ability of strategic communicators to reflect upon the historical and cultural peculiarities of a 'target' society. The article concludes that transformation of Iran could only be driven by grass-roots mobilisation of the Iranian people, once geopolitical tensions have eased. Meanwhile a deeper appreciation of Iranian identity and nature would be beneficial in putting forward a constructive SC framework with Iran.

1. The theoretical debate over strategic communications

Literature review

The ambiguity of the notion of strategic communications, its conceptualisation by authors at various levels of abstraction,[15] points to the need to apply a more 'holistic approach' based upon values and interests that 'encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment'.[16] As Christopher Paul observed, 'if you gathered 10 strategic-communication practitioners or experts around a table and asked each to define and describe strategic communication, you'd get 10 different answers'.[17] The absence of an agreed definition does not signal analytical deadlock, but points to a multitude of actors involved in strategic thinking; nevertheless, all definitions contain distinguishable common elements. Namely, SC a) belongs to the knowledge-building *information environment*, b) requires *institutionalised strategic thinking* and actions to shape public opinion, ideas, and values, both consensually and coercively (psychological manipulations); c) is *a forward-looking process* that targets future narratives, choices, decision-making, and actions; and d) *cannot be rationalised* in a positivist manner, as it affects peoples' cognitive and intuitive capabilities and, therefore, requires critical thinking (not a foundational ontology).

15 There are three levels of abstraction: 1) empirical—the level of general theory, 2) actual—the level of specific agents or events, and 3) real—the level of specific mechanisms that generate actual events. (see B Jessop, *The Capitalist State - Marxist Theories and Methods* -, *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* (Martin Robertson & Company Ltd, 1982), xi <https://doi.org/10.2307/2069563>.).
16 Neville Bolt, 'Foreword', *Defence Strategic Communications*, 5.Autumn (2018), 3–11., p.7
17 Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates.* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2011), p. 18.

Considering strategic communications through the prism of economic sanctions, the current literature on sanctions is focused on the question of 'if' rather than 'how' sanctions work,[18] which is very problematic. Mainstream accounts—which can be categorised as liberal institutionalist, structural realist, public choice, and neo-Weberian—all follow 'Hayek and Popper's methodological individualism'[19] that results in a deterministic perception of societies as a world of rational atoms, of quasi-natural individuals,[20] which hinders a deeper understanding of grounds for strategic communication in states like Iran. For many authors the principal goal is to evaluate the extent of the negative impact of sanctions on the economy and welfare of a targeted state, and their contribution to policy compliance.[21] The problem is that methodological individualism is mired in actor-based definitions and conflict case studies. These subjectify strategic communications and downplay the role of institutions and other material structures. Collective individual actions and choices become primary explanatory variables in modelling aggregate social phenomena. Unquestionably rational individuals in sanctioned states are expected to mobilise and push their governments to comply with required policy changes for the sake of economic and military stability.[22] This approach visualises sanctions as a tool of SC, designed to send signals to sanctioned populations, provoking them into political action. Such visualisation, however, is misleading, as it aspires to estimate the effectiveness of sanctions without considering structural and functional constraints on individual actions, and without distinguishing the mechanisms through which sanctions work in a particular historical context. Some studies provide empirical evidence of smart, properly designed sanctions, which successfully affect 'internal political bargaining within the target state'.[23] While these are useful, but to answer the question of 'how', rather than 'if', sanctions work, a more general analysis is required. Moreover, the issue of US extraterritorial 'secondary sanctions' targeting firms and banks doing business related to Iran's energy sector remains considerably under-researched.

18 Jones, Societies under Siege
19 Coined by Joseph Schumpeter to stress the centrality of the rational action theory to social-scientific inquiry: social phenomena are explained by the rational actions of "social collectivities, such as states, associations, business corporations, foundations, as if they were individual persons" (Weber 1922, 13).
20 Serguei Kara-Murza, 'The Methaphysical and Rational Foundations of Industrialism', 1994 [accessed 12 September 2019].
21 Gary Clyde Hufbauer and Barbara Oegg, 'Beyond the Nation-State: Privatization of Economic Sanctions', *Middle East Policy*, 10.2 (2003), 126–34 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4967.00111>.
22 Steve Chan, 'In Search of Democratic Peace: Problems and Promise', *Mershon Inernational Studies Review*, 41.1 (1997), 59–91 <doi:10.2307/222803>.
23 T Clifton Morgan, Valerie L Schwebach, and T Clifton Morgan, 'Economic Sanctions as an Instrument of Foreign Policy: The Role of Domestic Politics Printed in Malaysia, 0629 (2008), p. 247 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629508434868>.

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In fact, the negative impact of US 'extraterritorial' sanctions on some European companies (i.e. the case of the $9 billion fine on the French bank BNP Paribas for transacting with Iran) disrupts normal strategic communications and leads to the escalation of tensions in the International Political Economy (IPE). All this points to the limitations of such a 'scientific' approach. First, positivist accounts focus only on observable conflict zones and ignore multilevel layers of societal power relations that encompass the strategic and constitutive realms. Second, they tend to subjectify the role of SC in the construction of human knowledge in their attempt to model future responses to actions. Third, most theories consider interests as preordained and immutable, without paying much attention to the normative and emancipatory component of the formation of identities, interests, and values that guide human actions. The same critical remarks relate to existing positivist definitions of strategic communications. A holistic approach to SC grounded in a neo-Gramscian framework will help to overcome these limitations in two ways: first, by conceptualising the interrelation between sanctions and strategic communications through the prism of geopolitical and hegemonic rivalries; second, by looking more deeply into the political economy of target states, the strategic and constitutive realms of social power relations, and the ethical backgrounds and normative and emancipatory power of strategic narratives in Iran.

Yet, there are three important insights in the current literature on strategic communications that should be mentioned. First, as societies transform, the strategic narratives that shape human knowledge and perception of those changes transform as well. Lawrence Freedman offers an extensive historical background of the evolution of both integrals of SC— of strategy as a mode of thinking,[24] and of the evolution and advances of communication techniques deployed in the information environment, which he defines as a space of 'uncontrollable forms of global and instantaneous communication' that 'have exponentially increased the number of actors able to shape the narrative'.[25] This provides a major opportunity for pressure groups and political activists to shape perceptions by providing the media with images of their activities or those they wish to expose to influence the consciousness of various social groups, reconstructing networks and power hierarchies that 'enable these groups to move beyond the cellular form'.[26]

24 Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
25 Lawrence Freedman, 'Chapter Five, Strategic Communications', *Adelphi Papers*, 45.379 (2006), 73–93 (p. 75).
26 Ibid. (p. 89).

Second, the conceptualisation of SC presupposes reference to the genealogy of the concept of 'strategy'. The original Greek στρατηγική, or *strategike*, has passed its transformation from the military 'art of the general [the strategós] who practises strategy' in antiquity, to today's popular application of the term 'strategy' to 'many realms of life outside politics proper'.[27] *The Art of War* by Chinese general Sun Tzu (6th century BC) and *The History of the Peloponnesian War* by the Athenian historian Thucydides (5th century BC) were military treatises that pioneered the concept of warfare and its two major components—strategy and tactics. These ancient philosophies laid the foundation for Byzantine thought: Emperor Leo VI the Wise (r. 886–912) distinguished between 'strategy' as the means of defence and 'tactics' as organisation of defence.[28] This Byzantine hierarchical positioning of strategy over tactics, or warfare, predetermined the evolution of 'strategy' into a more political category, when Archduke Charles in the 18th century categorised strategy and tactics as 'the science of war' and 'the art of war' respectively.[29] The 19th century saw the next step in this evolution, when the Prussian philosopher-general Carl von Clausewitz argued against categorising warfare as either an art or a science, famously calling politics 'the womb in which war develops'. He suggested that '[r]ather than comparing [war] to art we could more accurately compare it to commerce, which is also a conflict of human interests and activities; and it is still closer to politics, which in turn may be considered a kind of commerce on a larger scale.'[30] The tradition of integrating military terminology into the social sciences reached its apogee in the 20th century, with the word 'warfare' being massively overused in various 'hybrid forms'[31] such as a fashionable characteristic of information environment as 'asymmetric warfare' in 'mass media ecology',[32] or as the US Department of Defense ideas of 'network-centric' and 'culture-centric' warfare.[33] The neo-Gramscian approach transcends this overuse of military terminology by conceptualising SC as a social phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a military dimension.

27 Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 28.
28 George T Dennis, *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985).
29 Heuser (p.5–7)
30 Clausewitz, cited in Heuser (p.6)
31 Ofer Friedman, *Russian 'hybrid Warfare' : Resurgence and Politicisation* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018).
32 Monroe Edwin Price, 'Information Asymmetries and Their Challenge', *International Media and Communication*, 4.2 (2016), 46–54.
33 Lawrence Freedman, 'Networks, Culture and Narratives', *Adelphi Papers*, 45.379 (2016), 11–26 (p. 11).

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Third, the mainstream literature on SC explores the history of the dramatic transformation and expansion of communication techniques that were designed to meet strategic goals. Thus, for a long time 'the key forms of communication' that formed strategic narratives 'were pamphlets, and public meetings',[34] until they were superseded in the 19th century by the telegraph and a little later the telephone, moving the developed world into an electromechanical age of the long-distance transmission of messages. Then transitions came more frequently, brought about by developments in telecommunications and electrical engineering in the 1920s, later by the era of computer science or data network engineering in the 1960s, and most recently by the digital revolution that enabled mass access to wireless data transfer mechanisms in the 1990s (cellular phones, digital television, radio, and computer networks). It is no wonder that this dramatic transformation in communication technologies has had a controversial effect on strategic players, especially on states. On the one hand, information transmission mechanisms enhanced states' abilities to communicate information (in terms of speed, scope, and coverage), but on the other hand, the credibility of their information was undermined by social media that spreads instant digital images and messages around '5 billion mobile phone users accessing Twitter, Facebook, and the Internet instantaneously'.[35] Moreover, technologies that pose a threat to state security, enabling multiple cyberspace attacks and hacking programmes, are continually being developed. Given this, new research should consider security issues with regard to the credibility of various communication techniques and the information they reproduce.

The historical evolution of both parameters—'strategy' and 'communications'—suggests that SC is a contextual phenomenon, and therefore, ironically, any 'attempts to define strategic communications in the abstract, devoid of context, can be a labour of love',[36] at the same time any precise definition and specification of dependent variables will be misleading. A neo-Gramscian framework offers a genuine contextual background for analysing the interrelations between sanctions and strategic communications through the prism of hegemonic rivalry. We shall now turn to a holistic critical approach to SC that will consider the contentious issues of credibility of 'strategies' and communication techniques in IPE, with reference to knowledge formation.

34 Freedman, Chapter Five (p. 88)
35 Neville Bolt, 'Strategic Communications in Crisis', *The RUSI Journal*, 156.4 (2011), 44–53 (p. 44) <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2011.606649>.
36 Bolt, 'Foreword'.

A critical approach to strategic communications

The central objective of strategic communications is the formation of knowledge—a complex cognitive process. However, the information space amplifies a great deal of knowledge-forming noise that was never intended to be strategic. Strategic communications, or strategic narratives, are distinguishable from noise in so far as they, in Lawrence Freedman's words, 'do not arise spontaneously but are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current' in networks and cultures.[37] Who constructs and reinforces these ideas and thoughts? Who are the strategic communicators? I will present a holistic approach to understanding who strategic communicators are and how they operate by addressing the three critical arguments mentioned in the introduction. First, I will consider the three 'faces' of power that encompass the strategic and constitutive realms of social power relations in the field of SC[38], without confining it to one dimension of 'soft power', for instance public diplomacy.[39] Second, I will overcome the subjective/objective duality when assessing the role of SC in the construction of human knowledge dependent on the ethical choices of individuals (its main objective). This will be done by applying the Hegelian dialectics between the subjective and objective dimensions of ethical life to analysing SC within the constitutive realm.[40] Third, I will show how adding a normative and emancipatory component to SC can help strategic communicators understand the formation of identities, interests, and values that guide human actions, and so generate more effective strategic narratives. (*See Figure 1.*)

The strategic and constitutive realms in the International Political Economy

The first critical argument concerning the intersection of the strategic and constitutive realms presupposes the analysis of 'grand strategies' and hegemonic powers in the IPE, in which the power of strategic communications relates to knowledge formation within the social structure. A positivist epistemology distinguishes only observable social conflicts, in which SC rarely leaves the confines of public diplomacy and is seen as one of the tools 'utilised' by

37 Freedman, 'Networks, Culture and Narratives', p. 22.
38 1. the power of observable political actions (actual decision-making); 2. the power to set agenda (potential decision-making), 3. the power to shape preferences (ideological power transformed into actual and potential decision-making)
39 Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).
40 Hegelian conceptualisation of ethical life as located at the intersection between the individual and the social whole (community) makes our understanding of SC in IPE essentially holistic.

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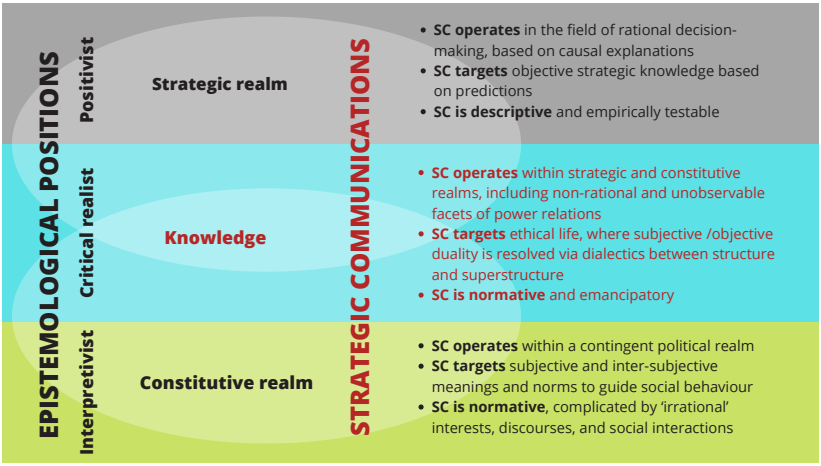

Figure 1. Strategic communications: a critical holistic approach

governments 'to wield soft power'. For instance, in positivist realist accounts the role of SC in promoting hegemony will be reduced to the political actions of territorial expansion and direct political-military and economic domination to secure the balance of power within an anarchic world system; in liberal theories – to the efforts to create an international regime of hegemonic stability to minimise uncertainty, transaction costs and market failures; in the interpretivist accounts SC will aid the construction of a 'grand strategy' within society via political discourses, providing an ideological basis for hegemony. A neo-Gramscian understanding of hegemony as the consent of social agency to the main ideological structure introduces a new characterisation of SC as a dialectical reproductive force. This predetermines political and cultural practices of socio-economic relations through the internalisation of the ideas of the ruling class in the minds of the population.

A neo-Gramscian approach establishes the link between SC and 'the various levels of the relations of force' in the constitutive realm and distinguishes latent conflict zones in unobservable power relations with the notion of 'passive revolution'.[41] A passive revolution is the result of gradual societal changes that cannot be easily traced. They are hidden in the 'continuities and changes within

41 Antonio Gramsci, *'The Modern Prince' Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), p. 175.

the order of capital',[42] in the institutional, material and ideological structures that are in the business of making human identities within a society. However, to understand how SC is involved in the 'making and unmaking of identities' in a constitutive realm of the IPE,[43] we need to relate SC to the notion of 'grand strategy'.

It is customary for mainstream theories of 'grand strategy' to distinguish between higher-level and lower-level politics. However, this division is not productive in the debates over the effectiveness of hard and soft power. Sanctions are not conceptualised as means of strategic communications, as their nature is not primarily normative and legal, but rather geostrategic. Extraterritorial legislation, or 'secondary sanctions', are then seen as one of the leading instruments of soft power.

Moreover, in some cases 'extraterritorial' sanctions serve as an international mechanism for national protectionism, evidenced in the recent shift in US trade policy. Recalling Ha-Joon Chang's allegory, President Trump's slogan 'America First', followed by the EU Commissioner's claim for Europe to be 'not last', suggests that it is the right moment now to construct a new 'ladder' of competitive advantage, kicking it away once the hegemony is reproduced.[44] That the nature of protectionism has changed and the role of sanctions in this transformation is massively overlooked. Overall, sanctions bear a potential risk of disrupting normal strategic communications not only between the Western powers and sanctioned states, like Iran, but also within the Transatlantic block itself.

At the level of 'grand strategy' states attempt to influence their position within the IPE; therefore 'the military instrument must be assessed in relation to all the other instruments available to states—economic, social, and political'.[45] Also, in the present historical conjuncture when military domination is not sufficient for long-term stability, the tactical effectiveness of SC in non-military spheres is vital for grand strategies to become hegemonic. Therefore, the best way to understand 'grand strategies' is through the prism of their hegemonic aspirations

42 Adam David Morton, *Unravelling Gramsci. Hegemony and the Passive Revolution in the Global Political Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 68.
43 Morton, p. 74.
44 Ha Joon Chang, 'Kicking Away the Ladder: Infant Industry Promotion in Historical Perspective', *Oxford Development Studies*, 31.1 (2003), 21–32 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360081032000047168>.
45 Lawrence Freedman, 'Introduction', *Adelphi Papers*, 45.379 (2006), 5–10 (p. 5) <https://doi.org/10.1080/05679320600661624>.

to achieve what Gramsci called the 'moment of hegemony' that 'involves both the consensual diffusion of a particular cultural moral view throughout society and its interconnection with coercive functions of power'.[46] The inclusion of coercive elements in the formation of consent is essential for understanding strategic communicators as guarantors of public consent to grand strategies. Grand strategies encapsulate consensual, but also purely coercive power mechanisms (the state's monopoly of coercion, such as the police and armed forces).[47]

According to critical realists, current international political economy can be characterised as a US-led hegemony, secured by the country's role as the global liquidity provider, by efficient design of the Bretton Woods institutions,[48] and by the neoliberal paradigm. This last induced people's feeling of global interconnectedness through the shared ideals of democracy, individual freedoms, and equality of rights and opportunities. However, the neoliberal ideology, despite its strong capacity to bind people by diffusing a worldview 'through socialisation into every area of daily life that, when internalised, becomes "common sense"',[49] faces resistance in societies like Iran. There traditions, ethical norms, and moral values are distinct from those of the liberal West. Resistance creates the incentive for 'contender' states like Iran, Russia, or China to launch counter-hegemonic projects to preserve their sovereignty.[50] Hegemony presupposes that strategic narratives and ideologies gain the consent of the population. Consensus could be achieved by various tactics directed to shape human consciousness, reasoning, and ethical life. As mentioned previously, strategic communications are responsible for a consensual 'exercise' of grand strategy in its path towards hegemony. Why are strategic communications techniques effective in some cases and disruptive in others? The context of sanctions is useful in seeing how the imposition of sanctions shapes orienteers, narratives, directions, and goals for SC.

46 Morton, p. 95.
47 Gramsci acknowledged that coercion was a constitutive base of consent. The coercive mechanisms, combined with cultural power, produce a 'force of social control and extraordinary resilience', as in a sociological sense, production is both material and mental (see Fulton 1987:198).
48 Originally, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), later the World Trade Organisation (WTO)
49 Gramsci, quoted in Elaine Hartwick and Richard Peet, *Theories of Development: Contentions, Arguments, Alternatives*, 2nd edn (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), p. 178.
50 Kees van der Pijl, *Global Rivalries From the Cold War to Iraq* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

Ethical life in IPE

Strategic communications affects both the 'subjective' and 'objective' will of individuals. It is dependent on the ethical choices of individuals, where subjective and objective will is reconciled. The concept of ethical life as the interrelation between the individual and the social whole (community) makes our understanding of SC in IPE essentially holistic: as Hegel argued in the *Philosophy of Right* (§146), 'ethical reality in its actual self-consciousness knows itself, and is therefore an object of knowledge'.[51] Without understanding the 'ethical life' of society, SC cannot fulfil its main duty—the acquisition of moral justification, credibility, and legitimacy for its 'grand strategy'. Ethical life considers the individual as an integral part of the social and political whole, as the individual's actions would be actualisation of the ideals of community, once his self-identity and self-consciousness in the community is found.[52] Therefore, if Western strategic communicators intend to amend and reconstruct the ethical life of a foreign society, like Iran, they should first of all understand the synthesis between the individual and the community of that society, identify domestic strategic communicators, learn the organisational features and institutional peculiarities and adopt appropriate communicative practices.

How can we distinguish 'strategic communicators' from a multitude of actors, involved in SC? To answer this question we need to understand hegemony as an evolutionary process, which passes through the initial, transitional, and conclusive phases: 'at the initial stage an element achieves hegemony at the national level, then it enters the transitional phase by becoming a 'transmission belt', through which hegemony is 'materially grounded' in other states.[53] The role of SC varies depending on the phase of hegemony. Borrowing Poulantzean notions of 'internalisation' and 'internationalisation',[54] it could be argued that at the initial (domestic consolidation) and at the 'transitional' stages SC help to 'internalise' and 'internationalise' strategic narratives, while in the conclusive phase strategic communications assist in reproducing the core elements of the grand strategy domestically and within various nations. However, to answer the

51 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right, 1886*, ed. by Translated by S.W Dyde (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), p. 133.
52 Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 235–36.
53 Ksenia. Kirkham, 'The Formation of the Eurasian Economic Union: How Successful Is the Russian Regional Hegemony?', *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 7.2 (2016), 111–28 (p. 115) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2015.06.002>.
54 Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism, London: New Left Books* (London: New Left Books, 1974), p. 74.

question of 'who gets to call themselves Strategic Communicators' in full,[55] we shall recall the role of the Gramscian 'organic intellectuals' in the dialectics between structure (organisation of production) and superstructure (culture and ideology) conceptualised through the notion 'historical bloc'.[56]

Organic intellectuals are what neo-Machiavellians referred to as 'cadre stratum', or a 'separate class of mediating functionaries'[57]—they are strategic communicators that position themselves within various subaltern social groups, at the same time remaining loyal to the ruling class, reinforcing the 'acceptance' of the dominant ideological direction by the masses.[58] The structural power of strategic communicators resides in their 'high educational status, relative economic security, and employment in personal-service occupations'.[59] At the international level, when hegemony starts moving outwards, organic intellectuals 'perform a valuable supporting role for subaltern classes in promoting social change' in the 'ethical life' of other states;[60] this function of strategic communications is normative and emancipatory.

Normative and emancipatory function in IPE

The mainstream literature defines strategic communications as a 'descriptive, rather than normative, concept'.[61] In contrast, critical theories view SC as a normative and emancipatory phenomenon, based upon value judgements that shape human perceptions of the current state of affairs and their position and actions in social relations. The emancipatory power of strategic narratives can be explained by their ability to reproduce the dominant social power relations domestically and internationally, with the aid of 'discourse ethics', to gain consent of those who are affected by global institutional arrangements.[62] The emancipatory potential of SC lies in its 'cognitive interest' in 'freedom from unacknowledged constraints, relations of domination, and conditions of distorted communication and understanding that deny humans the capacity to make their future through full will and consciousness'; by using SC in this way, they could 'restore to men and women a true awareness of their place in

55 Neville Bolt, 'Foreword', *Defence Strategic Communications*, Spring.6 (2019), 4–5 (p. 6).
56 Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order. Social Forces in the Making of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 284.
57 Gaetano Mosca 1895/, *The Ruling Class*, ed. by A. Livingston (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939).
58 Offe. *Contradictions of the Welfare State*
59 Ibid. (p. 833)
60 Morton, p. 92.
61 Nye, pp. 81, 103.
62 Habermas. *Justification and Application*

history and their capacities to make the future'.[63] From the critical standpoint, the normative and emancipatory function of strategic communications must overcome a narrow vision of society as a purely strategic domain, 'a place in which previously constituted actors pursue their goals', while their interests are 'exogenously determined', but look deeper into the constitutive domain (a domain where agents and social structures are mutually constituted) to see how normative structures (i.e. institutionalised norms) shape actors' identities, interests, and behaviour though the mechanisms of 'imagination, communication and constraint', and become 'rational' only 'because they have a force in a given social context'.[64]

Not all physical and virtual 'imaginations, communications and constraints' (e.g. talks, narratives, publications, images displayed on mass or social media, legal acts, meetings, conferences, educational plans, human resource programmes) that traditionally constitute the basis for public relations, diplomacy, business, academic and cultural cooperation—can be referred to as 'strategic'. To become 'strategic' these forms of communication need to be normative and emancipatory, and could be operationalised by delineating SC as: first, a politically and ideological oriented function, with a forward-looking target for hegemony; second, originating in institutionalised strategic public or private intellectual centres, supported or controlled by 'organic intellectuals'; third, serving to reproduce the material base for the 'grand strategy' (institutions, capital and human resources). These three components constitute the normative and emancipatory nature of domestic SC in Iran. The first point that relates to the ideological level of the 'grand strategy' will be used for analysing the strategic and constitutive realms in Iran. The second point of an institutionalised intellectual centre will be assessed through the lenses of ethical life in Iran. Finally, the normative and emancipatory function of SC will investigate how existing norms and institutions reproduce the material base for the grand strategy. We now turn to the praxis of SC in IPE and in Iran to demonstrate the applicability of the critical theoretical framework to an empirical case study.

63 Richard K. Ashley, 'Political Realism and Human Interests', *International Studies Quarterly*, 25.2 (1981), 204–36 (pp. 226–27).
64 Christian Reus-Smit, 'Constructivism', in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. by J. Burchill, S. Linklater, A., Devetak, R., Don- nelly, J., Nardin, T., Paterson, M., True, 4th edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 212–36 (pp. 221–22).

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2. The praxis of strategic communications in Iran

The following passages will apply the theoretical framework developed in Part 1 to the analysis of the strategic and constitutive realms of communications in Iran under sanctions. The focus switches from an abstract conceptualisation of strategic communications to the conflictual and contested terrains of the Iranian 'grand strategy', to Shia political philosophy as a foundation of Iranian ethics, and to strategic narratives that secure legal and institutional reproduction of the material base for the realisation of Iran's grand strategy. The aim of this section is to show how 'organic intellectuals' as strategic communicators realise the emancipatory potential of Iran's idiosyncratic institutional system of 'checks and balances'. It reveals how they maintain cultural control over the population and reproduce the material base for the Islamic revolution.

Strategic and constitutive realms of SC in Iran

The following will assess three crucial features of strategic and constitutive realms of SC in the use of sanctions against Iran that are considerably misunderstood in the West. First, strategic communicators operate in a highly dynamic and contested political environment where various rival factions compete over strategic narratives and ideologies. Second, institutionalisation of strategic communications in Iran is problematic due to overlapping cluster power networks, parallel institutions, informal power mechanisms, and new communication systems that form the constitutive realm. Third, domestically, SC between various factions is relatively successful, not only because its strategists share a common goal of encountering an authentic Iranian modernisation model, but also due to the weakness of the political party system and a strong coalition-building potential that proved effective at times when Iran was almost at the edge of social crisis.

In most Western accounts, especially in non-academic media, Iran's internal political struggle is portrayed as the division between 'reformists' and 'hardliners'.[65] However, the presentation of the 'reformists' as the Western-oriented intellectuals is misleading for three reasons. First, there is in fact no unified political entity that can be referred to as 'reformist'; several rival factions consider themselves reformist. The difficulty in distinguishing between various types of reformists makes communications tricky, as it might put strategic

65 Golnar Mehran, 'Khatami, Political Reform and Education in Iran', *Comparative Education*, 39.3 (2003), 311–29.

communicators on a wrong track in the process of making connections. Second, most 'reformists' do not oppose the Ayatollah's political dominance per se. Instead they are seeking a balance between preserving Islamic values and maintaining a harmonious relationship with the West; moreover, civil society institutions are highly politicised, but are not 'agents for potential regime change'.[66] Third, the reformists' vision of political reconstruction in Iran is distinct from the Western ideas of 'modernity' and 'democratisation'. Most Iranians (not only reformists) understand the process of democratisation through the prism of religious philosophy and believe that 'democratic reform in Iran should be shaped by Iranian indigenous struggle'.[67] Moreover, for them, the main strategic target is to restore Iran's sovereignty and the people's national self-determination, and to protect their society from the side effects of globalisation, such as 'drug abuse, family break-down, the collapse of traditional moral values, [and] the homogenization and stultification of international culture through consumerism'.[68]

To better understand the political struggle within post-revolutionary Iran, which has 'never been monopolised by a single political faction', strategic communicators in the West should expand the limited reformist/hardliner vision of organic intellectuals in Iran by considering Payam Mohseni's conceptually and theoretically rich classification.[69] Mohseni distinguishes four main factions: the first, the 'Theocratic Right', consists of the Bazaari merchants[70] and the traditional clergy who have been the driving force for the establishment of the Islamic state since the Revolution of 1979. The second faction, the 'Theocratic Left', unites the urban and provincial poor, the lower middle classes, veterans of the Iraq-Iran war, and members of the Basij and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC),[71] who hold strong anti-capitalistic views and see state intervention in the economy as an impetus for social welfare and justice. The

66 Christian Salazar-Volkmann, 'The Everyday Environments of Children's Poverty', *Children, Youth and Environments*, 19.2 (2009), 250–71 (p. 251).
67 Reza Simbar, 'Iran, Democracy and International Community', *Journal of International and Area Studies*, 14.1 (2007), 55–66 (p. 57).
68 Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran : A History of the Islamic Republic* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), p. 418.
69 Payam Mohseni, 'Factionalism, Privatization, and the Political Economy of Regime Transformation', in *Power and Change in Iran Politics of Contention and Conciliation*, ed. by Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2016), pp. 37–69 (pp. 42–47).
70 Bazaars are traditional marketplaces in Iran, the Bazaari – the merchants and workers of bazaars were among the main classes that drove the Iranian Revolution in 1979.
71 Former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–13) belongs to this faction; the IRGC (or Sepâh) is a branch of the Iranian Armed Forces, founded to maintain the country's internal political system; the Basij (the Organisation for Mobilisation of the Oppressed) is a powerful paramilitary volunteer militia, subordinate to IRGC, originally formed by civilians to fight in the Iran–Iraq War.

third group, the 'Republican Right', comprised of Western-educated technocrats and some Bazaari merchants who prioritise modernisation and economic growth in the manner of a 'China model' over egalitarian social justice.[72] The last faction is the 'Republican Left', formed of the urban middle classes, more secular-minded university students, and women's rights groups, who exchanged their anti-capitalistic vision over time for a more liberal-democratic ideology.[73] In this classification, the theocratic/republican division refers to the primary source of the legitimacy of the regime, which is the Supreme Leader for the theocrats, and the People of Iran for the republicans; the left/right division refers to the economic model of wealth distribution, which according to those on the 'left' should be controlled by the state, and to those on the 'right'—by market forces.[74]

In Iran the domestic political power shifts from one block to another while the boundaries between different institutions are permeable, and in some situations, cannot be precisely identified. The contradiction of such a diverse and fluid internal political constitutive reality is that it impedes, but at the same time aids, strategic communications in the country: on the one hand, the complicated design of overlapping power networks makes it difficult to attribute some political groups to a specific political block, which confounds institutionalisation; on the other, informal networks and various non-official interpersonal linkages became the foundation for a parallel institutional design.

Kevan Harris suggests three historical reasons for the occurrence of parallel institutions in Iran after 1979 that 'cannot be solely attributed to Khomeini's charismatic leadership', nor to 'Hobbesian state consolidation', but must also take into consideration the 'participation of millions in their country's history', the mass mobilisation of the Iranian people to overthrow the pro-Western authoritarian monarch who had lost the trust of the people: first, the distrust of the revolutionaries towards the institutions inherited from the previous Pahlavi monarchy regime; second, the need for the formation of effective revolutionary forces to resist centrifugal and separatist tendencies in times of war; third, the mass mobilisation of aspirational revolutionary groups who 'returned to their villages with intense emotional energy' and used 'personal, face-to face

72 Former President Akbar Hashemi Rasfanjani (1989–96) and current president Hassan Rouhani (2013–present) belong to this faction.
73 Former President Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), famous for his Reform program and for his popular views on Religious Democracy in Iran, belongs to this faction.
74 Mohseni, 'Factionalism, Privatization, and the Political Economy of Regime Transformation (p.42-43)

horizontal networks to subdue existing local elites', or the 'old guard'.[75] As a result, power and authority in Iran is located at the intersections of the strategic domain and the constitutive realm, and is 'unevenly spread and concentrated among formal and informal' power mechanisms of 'factions, cliques, and network jockeys' that challenge formal political institutional design, creating a 'feckless pluralism'.[76] This institutional parallelism is not only workable for the successful plurality of political opinion, for the anti-monopolisation of political power, but has also been effective in social welfare formation and in economic stabilisation in times of sanctions. The persistent ability of Iranian society to endure almost forty years of economic hardship induced by sanctions can be attributed to the growing informal mechanisms that include, among many other factors, black-market payment arrangements to maintain traditional trade relationships,[77] the provision of jobs for the youth, and an educated labour force that cannot be formally absorbed due to structural economic problems ensuing from the sanctions.[78]

Iran's weak political party system has substantial democratic potential and can be leveraged effectively to help some progressive forces come to power. This was the case for president Hassan Rouhani, the head of the Moderation and Development Party, whose achievement in coalition building was based on the trusting relationships he enjoyed with both the Supreme Leader and another candidate for the presidency, Akbar Hashemi Rasfanjani.[79] The success of Rouhani's faction is dependent on support from the Western powers, and the 'legitimacy' of his presidency is 'staked on the international, particularly the US, reaction to his platform of moderation'.[80] These positive democratic tendencies, however, were considerably hampered by the persecution of popular coalitions, such as the Green movement, organised by rival radical political forces. At the same time, Rouhani, who according to some analysts is considered to be a

75 Kevan Harris, 'Social Welfare Policies and the Dynamics of Elite and Popular Contention', in *Power and Change in Iran Politics of Contention and Conciliation*, ed. by Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2016), pp. 70–100 (pp. 78–79).
76 Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi, 'Introduction: Politics of Contention and Conciliation in Iran's Semiautocracy', in *Power and Change in Iran Politics of Contention and Conciliation*, ed. by Daniel Brumberg and Farideh Farhi (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2016), pp. 1–36 (p. 6).
77 Valentin Katasonov, *Stalinskiy Otvet Na Sankcii Zapada: Economiceskiy Blizkrig Protiv Rossii* (Moscow: Knijnyi Mir, 2015).
78 Mohammad Reza Farzanegan, 'Effects of International Financial and Energy Sanctions on Iran's Informal Economy', *SAIS Review*, 2013, p. 32 <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.2013.0008>
79 Ladan Boroumand, 'Iran's 2017 Election: Waning Democratic Hopes', *Journal of Democracy*, 28.4 (2017), 38–45 (pp. 40–41).
80 Mohseni, p. 84.

'centrist' rather than a 'reformist',[81] could for a while address what Brumberg and Farhi call the 'tricky dilemma' of channelling popular disaffection in ways that would engage support from elements within the regime—without provoking lethal retaliation from hard-liners'.[82] More importantly, Ayatollah Khamenei was unwilling to manipulate elections and supported Rouhani's intentions to bring an end to economic sanctions despite the fact that hardliners benefitted from the sanctions as the 'entire sanctions-based gap' in the economy was 'filled by companies affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps'.[83] These observations contradict the widespread view that sanctions will overturn or democratise the Iranian regime.

Strategic communications and Ethical life in Iran

Institutional dualism and parallelism, and the informality of SC in Iran, discussed in the previous sections, reflect a contradiction that lies deep in the philosophical, religious, and ideological terrains of social power relations. It concerns rival visions of the possibility of reconciling traditional norms and values with the idea of modernisation. Shia political philosophy is the bedrock for Iranian ethics: Shia Islam is not just a religion but a social system that exercises social right through legal institutions. Most political factions agree that the 'grand strategy' and people's present and future identities should be constructed in the Islamic tradition, based upon religious education—what former president Khatami called the 'key infrastructure' for the realisation of human resource potential, as it shaped the intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural, and political values of the young.[84] There is disagreement, however, concerning the possibility of combining Islamic 'salvation' with Western 'liberation', which theocrats deny, but most 'reformists' see as possible via greater accountability of the government to the population. An Iranian 'third way', however, is encountered at the intersection of these two extremes.[85] Moreover, organic intellectuals on the right have, to some extent, acknowledged that the ability of humans to determine their fate was a positive achievement of Western civilisation. However, it is crucial to understand the 'extent' of the liberation, to which the Iranian 'reformists' are ready to open up their socio-political

81 Hossein Bastani, 'How Powerful Is Rouhani in the Islamic Republic?', *Chatham House*, 2014, p. 6 [accessed 16 September 2019].
82 Brumberg and Farhi, p. 44.
83 Bastani, pp. 4–9.
84 Mehran, p. 312.
85 Mohammad Khatami, *Islam Liberty and Development* (Binghamton, NY: Global Publications, 1998).

organisation: in contrast to Western liberals, they condemn uncontrollable market competition, individualism, *laissez-fair*, and most importantly, unlimited capital accumulation, aimed at obtaining purely materialistic profit while neglecting spiritual development. Moreover, most Iranians are very passionate about their community and traditional family ties, sharing Hegel's vision, according to which, as Beiser puts it, 'the Christian ethic of personal salvation was only a cry of desperation, after a loss of community'.[86]

Organic intellectuals of various factions in Iran share the view concerning the leading role of the education system based upon the notion of self-esteem in shaping the modalities of social behaviour. According to the Quran, individuals should guard their self-worth: Muslims' 'high value is the main strategy of Islamic ethics and educational method to motivate them to act righteously'.[87] The root of Islamic ethics is self-esteem that it is 'believed to lead to a resistance against sin'—this worldview is promoted by the Iranian educational system as the 'only acceptable' one.[88] This does not mean, however, that education in Iran lacks flexibility and cannot balance between tradition and modernity. For instance, Mohammad Khatami, one of the most advanced developers of Islamic civil society, whose progressive thinking inspired many Iranians to promote religious democracy and the reformist agenda in formal schooling, 'will be remembered for opening the doors of tolerance, kindness, and culture for a new generation of Iranians'.[89] Khatami in his role as an organic intellectual attempted to bridge the gap between the traditionalists and 'intellectuals who have longed for democracy', by bringing the 'educated and learned to the forefront of society'.[90] These educated individuals were the frontrunners of the modernisation of civil society in Iran, which, however, remains highly politicised. It is guarded by the Iranian Constitution (Article 26), which, although it provides for freedom of association, prohibits contacts with and any financial assistance from foreign governmental and non-governmental agencies that 'threaten the freedom and interests of Iran'.[91]

It is important to point out a commonly mistaken view that civil society institutions in Iran are agents for potential regime change. For many in Iran, modernisation

86 Beiser, p. 43.
87 Quran 39:15, in Mohsen Joshanloo and Fatemeh Daemi, 'Self-Esteem Mediates the Relationship between Spirituality and Subjective Well-Being in Iran', *International Journal of Psychology*, 50.2 (2015), 115–20 (p. 115).
88 Ibid.
89 Mehran, pp. 312–13.
90 Ibid.
91 Salazar-Volkmann, p. 239.

in the way it has been advanced in the West 'doesn't equate with democracy', and many remain very hostile to the history of 'utterly counterproductive attempts' by the West 'to impose its culture upon the population, with the Shah serving as a conduit'.[92] As 'Iranian people, with their national independence, want to solve their problems domestically'.[93] Therefore, for international strategic communications to be efficient, it is important to follow the advice of experts, who have spent years studying Iran from within: 'democratization in Iran can be aided by reduction in external threats, as it allows for internal dynamics of contention to force state elites to refashion the post-revolutionary social compact in a politically inclusive direction'.[94] Strategists would be advised not to misinterpret the historic role of the former Supreme Leader in the country's social and political advancement, basing their judgements upon his mostly anti-Western rhetoric. In fact, Ayatollah Khomeini 'delivered unorthodox fatwas on a wide range of social issues, from women to the arts', encouraging 'a modernised form of "Muslimness"' that would go as far as to permit for 'sex reassignment surgery'.[95]

It is true that 'Iranian intellectuals, especially social scientists, view questions regarding the modernization of the country in light of today's realities and of new theories', and see modernity as an administration of complicated systems in response to the 'evolving needs of societies', divorced from its European origin. Modernity should be 'viewed only as a flexible model that adapts to diverse temporal and spatial conditions', and to the particular ethical and cultural life of a society.[96] At the same time the evolution of Iranian ethical life is not happening in a vacuum, and the character of strategic communications with other states and nations has an immense impact on the formation of national self-identity. Constance Duncombe analysed the growing 'intersubjective policy-identity' role of Twitter and other social media in Iran-US relations at times of 'difficulties of high-level diplomatic interactions', she maintains that 'our identity is formed through reflexive patterns of how others recognise us'. So when a state is 'recognized in a way that is different from how it represents itself, it may engage

92 Daniel Khalili-Tari, 'The Independent: Four Decades on, This Is What People Still Don't Understand about the Iranian Revolution', 2019 [accessed 15 September 2019].
93 Simbar, p. 57.
94 Harris, 'Social Welfare Policies and the Dynamics of Elite and Popular Contention', p. 73.
95 Saeid Golkar, 'Cultural Heterogeneity in Post-Revolutionary Iran', *Policy Notes 50*, 2018 [accessed 16 September 2019].
96 Jamshid Behnam, 'Iranian Society, Modernity, and Globalization', in *Iran Between Tradition and Modernity.*, ed. by Ramin. Jahanbegloo (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 25–34 (p. 29).

in a "struggle for recognition"'.[97] Moreover, social network strategies became a new form of governance, for instance, current president Rouhani 'incorporated social media into his new cabinet', so that key figures in the administration, such as Mahmoud Vaezi, Head of the Communications Ministry, and Mohammad Javad Zarif, Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, are actively using Twitter and Facebook to communicate their plans and decisions. Nevertheless, given the importance of political discourse in the formation of nations' identities, the West must be careful not to load its communications with counterproductive assertions. The EU gives strong rhetorical support for greater European autonomy and for efforts to minimise the economic cost of sanctions but, despite the Union's desire to remain structurally independent and unconstrained by the United States, the determining role of the US in the 'formulation of the Iran policies of other Western governments'[98] remains mostly intact. It is vital to clear the official strategic narrative from such statements as John Bolton's 'to Stop Iran's Bomb, Bomb Iran',[99] as they just fuel fundamentalism.

Normative and emancipatory function of SC in Iran

The normative and emancipatory function of SC is a binding category between strategic narratives and legal and institutional reproduction of the material base for the realisation of grand strategy. In Iran, strategic communications deploy their emancipatory potential in three directions with the aim of maintaining: a) institutional design of the system of 'checks and balances'; b) the material base for the Islamic 'revolution', based upon state control over the strategic sectors of the economy (energy sector, oil and gas, banking); c) cultural and moral control over the population. The first emancipatory mechanism is the system of checks and balances that maintains relative socio-political stability and provides for the legitimacy of the regime. The factional architecture of the Iranian political system, analysed above, points to a 'quintessentially hybrid' nature of the state-society complex that includes features of competitive authoritarianism or illiberal democracy, semi-autocracy, or even the 'world's only electoral theocracy', and blurs the boundary between democracy and dictatorship.[100] Insufficient observation of civil rights and, in some extreme cases, the violation of human

97 Constance Duncombe, 'Twitter and Transformative Diplomacy: Social Media and Iran–US Relations', *International Affairs*, 93.3 (2017), 545–62 (pp. 346–48).
98 Moritz Pieper, 'The Transatlantic Dialogue on Iran: The European Subaltern and Hegemonic Constraints in the Implementation of the 2015 Nuclear Agreement with Iran', *European Security*, 26.1 (2017), 99–119 (p. 107).
99 The Associated Press, 'Some World Hot Spots See Possible Openings in Bolton Firing', September 12, 2019 [accessed 15 September 2019].
100 Mohseni, pp. 39–40.

rights, hampers Iran's democratic development. At the same time, internal rivalries and transformations in domestic politics stem not from the country's 'institutional metamorphosis to dictatorship', but rather from elite conflict management and coalitional 'reworking'. Consequently, the responsibility for policy making is shared among multiple power centres and veto players (IRGC, the Supreme Leader, the President, the Expediency Council, the Council of Experts) and prevents the monopolisation of power.[101] Despite the Ayatollah's political weight in this system of checks and balances, his role as the 'ultimate arbitrator' and 'guardian jurist' (vali-ye faqih) does not enable him to 'single-handedly dictate all policy and actively undertake day-to-day governance', but rather to resolve elite conflict.[102] For instance, when President Rouhani came to power in 2013, Ayatollah Khamenei backed his intention to constructively engage and negotiate the reduction of tensions with the Western, regional and neighbouring powers, despite the hardliner's stark opposition to such 'heroic flexibility' in foreign policy.[103] On 27 September 2013, the Supreme Leader initiated Rouhani's 'historic telephone conversation' with US President Barack Obama to 'put a crack in the wall of mistrust between Iran and the United States', aiding the EU's mediatory efforts to conclude the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Actions.[104]

The second element of emancipatory strategic communications in Iran is related to a persistent dominant role of state-affiliated institutions in the economy. Despite 'private sector growth without privatisation',[105] the dominant role of the state in strategic sectors of the economy is supported by the Quran and had been formalised by the Iranian Constitution (Article 44) from 1979 until 2004, when the amendments to the Article enabled the programme of Privatisation.[106] In 2006, Ahmadinejad incorporated a plan to privatise 20% of large enterprises in the Fifth Five-Year National Development Plan (2010–15). Long years of harsh debates over the 'method' of privatisation led to a consensus to follow the Supreme Leader's suggestion to avoid a 'capitalist approach to privatisation' or the 'China model', but to follow the ideological and cultural peculiarities of

101 Ibid.
102 Mohseni 2016:41
103 Amir Mohammad Haji-Yousefi, 'Political Culture and Iran's Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of Iran's Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani', *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies*, 2.2 (2018), 225–45 (pp. 235–37).
104 Ibid.
105 Kevan Harris, 'The Rise of the Subcontractor State: Politics of Pseudo-Privatization in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Middle East Studies*, 45 (2013), 45–70 (p. 53).
106 In 2004 the amendments to the Article 44 were made concerning the large-scale strategic sectors. Earlier (1979-2002) the Constitution allowed privatisation of small and medium-sized businesses. Under President Hashemi Rafsanjani privatisation formed part of the First Five-Year Economic Development Plan (1989-1994).

the regime. In practice, however, this caused elite rivalry over Ahmadinejad's scheme, with many complaining that instead of the primary goal of reducing state control over the economy, and despite the transferral of state assets to 'non-state' entities, the state, nevertheless, continued to choose and retain the managers and chairs of newly privatised enterprises.[107] While the official political statements claimed that privatisation helped public companies 'reduce their financial burden on the country's budget and also increase their productivity',[108] the contentious process caused lots of scepticism and critics called it 'quasi-privatisation'. The persistent control of state institutions over strategic sectors was a response to the increasing geopolitical pressures on Iran, such as economic sanctions, that led to further empowerment of the IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) as an economic actor (although not directly) and as a dominant instrument in maintaining internal security. Some analysts compare the IRGC to the Praetorian Guard in ancient Rome, whose task was to protect the emperor.[109] In 2009, in one of the biggest privatisations in Iran, 51% of the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI) was sold for the equivalent of $7.8bn to Tose'e Etemad Mobin (TEM), an entity affiliated with the IRGC.[110] In 2012, 60% of state companies, valued at $122 billion, were 'privatised' by sales to 'non-governmental' bodies, such as retirement funds (the Social Security Organisation and the Retirement Fund), companies, and military organisations affiliated with the IRGC.[111]

The third direction taken by strategic communicators that belong to various political groups in Iran striving to secure government moral control over the population evolved alongside an intensifying struggle between opposing factions and quasigovernmental institutions, led by informal clientelist networks. The IRGC was increasingly trying to control public opinion and to perform its social mobilisation function; and economic hardships at times of the US 'extraterritorial' sanctions proved to be helpful in this respect. In fact, most people in Iran point to the defective 'ethics' of sanctions with their continuously 'detrimental impact on the livelihoods of ordinary Iranian citizens and violation of their basic human rights',[112] citing evidence that sanctions 'hamper the flow of vital medicines' even to

107 Mohseni, pp. 57–58.
108 TehranTimes, 'Rouhani Declares Amended Law on Article 44 of Iran's Constitution', 2018 [accessed 16 September 2019].
109 Hesam Forozan and Afshin Shahi, 'The Military and the State in Iran: The Economic Rise of the Revolutionary Guards', *Middle East Journal*, 71.1 (2017), p. 69.
110 Ibid. (p. 81)
111 Najmeh Bozorgmehr, '"State" Bodies Stymie Iran Privatisations', *Financial Times*, 2012 [accessed 14 September 2019].
112 Sasan Fayazmanesh, 'The US Sanctions Are Affecting All Aspects of Human Life in Iran', 2019 [accessed 14 September 2019].

cancer patients.[113] These inhumane effects of 'secondary' sanctions make a wider population willing to accept as organic a transformation of the strategic narrative, giving it a more aggressive anti-American character. They secure wider popular consent to new intelligence-gathering and morality policing initiatives and actions, performed by powerful 'moral control' forces such as Nasehin teams—important groups of the Basij militia—controlled by the Council of Morality Policing.[114] The networks of 'moral control' are deeply embedded in Iranian society. Their emancipatory power is based upon popular mobilisation not only with the aid of religious organisations and mosques, the number of which has increased from 9,500 to 74,000 since the Iranian revolution, but also through intellectual communication in the multiple coffeehouses, 'teahouses', and shopping malls that 'proliferated' in Iranian rural and urban areas during the reformist era of President Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005).[115]

Despite their penetrating attempts to monitor most civil society institutions, it would be erroneous to suggest that paramilitary organisations are controlling the activities of the multiple SC networks—in fact, their voice in strategic narratives of various political and social groups have been muted not only by various political activists, but also by the Supreme Leader, especially when the system of checks and balances was under threat (as it was in the case of privatisation, JCPOA negotiations, and modernisation reforms). Strongly contradicting Western stereotypes, the strategic narratives of women in Iran have been successful at times. Despite the notorious literature that accuses the regime of the detrimental effect of enforcing religious rules on educated women that led to their 'marginalisation',[116] empirical data show some positive developments. Since the Iranian revolution the number of educated women has dramatically increased, as has the overall level of education in Iran. Female employment in low-income populations has been on the rise and non-governmental women's organisations have contributed to the country's socio-economic development, especially in the welfare system, public health, and education.[117]

113 Abbas Kebriaeezadeh, 'U.S. Sanctions Are Killing Cancer Patients in Iran', *Foreign Policy*, 2019 [accessed 5 September 2019].
114 Saeid Golkar, 'Paramilitarization of the Economy: The Case of Iran's Basij Militia', *Armed Forces & Society*, 38.4 (2012), 625–48 (p. 459).
115 Golkar, 'Paramilitarization of the Economy: The Case of Iran's Basij Militia', p. 6.
116 Goli M. Rezai-Rashti and Valentine M. Moghadam, 'Women and Higher Education in Iran: What Are the Implications for Employment and the "Marriage Market"?', *International Review of Education*, 57.3–4 (2011), 419–41.
117 Roksana Bahramitash, 'Islamic Fundamentalism and Women's Economic Role: The Case of Iran', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 16.4 (2003), 551–68 (p. 560).

Concluding remarks

The process of strategic communications in the International Political Economy cannot be fully rationalised. It requires critical thinking to influence humans' cognitive and intuitive capabilities, future narratives, choices, decision-making, and actions in the knowledge-forming information environment. Emphasis on the tactical dimension of SC is not accidental: as mentioned earlier, the Byzantine hierarchy of strategy over tactics is the clue to conceptualising the field of SC in IPE as a functional strategic domain. Moreover, one of the mechanisms for the realisation of grand strategies is the neoliberal tactics of 'opening up the contender state–society complexes, dispossessing the state classes, replacing them by a governing class submitting to liberal global governance'.[118] However, in a holistic analysis of SC, the functional domain of grand strategies should be complemented by the constitutive realm of social power relations that shapes knowledge, morality, and ethical life through narratives, images, and actions. *To become 'strategic', communications need to be politically oriented, institutionalised, and contain normative and emancipatory mechanisms for the reproduction of the material-ideological base of 'grand strategy'.*

At present, the tactical inefficiency of SC messaging to Iran can be explained by the failure of Western strategic communicators to understand the country's socio-cultural constitutive, ethical, and normative elements that reproduce the modalities of social behaviour. Moreover, there is a dangerous and erroneous politically conceived opinion that geopolitical pressures, such as economic sanctions, lay the foundation for societal transformation towards democratisation. On the contrary, sanctions send the wrong signals to Iran and induce the country to evolve in the opposite direction—towards dictatorship—leaving little chance for liberal and democratic processes to unfold. As such, sanctions *are* disruptive for strategic communications, and should rather be seen as a trigger for strategic *mis*communications.

Iran has substantial potential for democratisation and modernisation. This could be realised in accordance with its traditions, ethical norms, and moral values that have been distinct from the liberal West for centuries. The praxis of SC in Iran is considerably misunderstood in the West. The Iranian domestic strategic domain is highly dynamic, containing an elaborate system of checks and

118 Kees van der Pijl, 'Is the East Still Red? The Contender State and Class Struggles in China', *Globalizations*, 9.4 (2012), 503–16 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2012.699921>.

balances over formally and informally competing power centres, thus preventing the monopolisation of power. The long history of Islamisation is reflected in Iranian ethical life and it remains resistant to any Western-type 'liberalisation' initiatives. Democratisation in Iran is only possible once the mechanism of extraterritorial sanctions is removed. Meanwhile, it is essential for the West to elaborate a constructive SC framework with Iran. Those who nevertheless aspire to 'modernise' Iran with the aid of external tactical interference via SC, should bear in mind that in order to successfully manipulate human consciousness, shape people's choices and actions, and transform the modalities of Iranians' social behaviour, they still need to gain a deeper appreciation of Iranian identity and nature.

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BLUE AMAZON: BRAZIL'S MARITIME VOCATION

Vinicius Mariano De Carvalho

Abstract

This article discusses how the concept of the Blue Amazon, created by the Brazilian Navy, is a fundamental tool of strategic communications for establishing and consolidating Brazil as a seapower, hence contributing to the construction of a grand strategy narrative in which maritime power becomes vital to the country. The article explains how the concept was created and how it has been used in relation to the principles of maritime strategy and maritime power. Furthermore, this concept contributes to the strategic redefinition of the perception of Brazilian national identity, reincorporating an awareness of the sea as a key element.

Keywords—*Brazilian maritime strategy, Brazilian Navy, Blue Amazon, strategic communication, strategic communications, grand strategy, seapower*

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On one of the panels on display at the Imperial War Museum in London there is a poster with the following quote from Erskine Childers, author of *The Riddle of the Sands*, writing in 1903: 'We're a maritime nation—we've grown by the sea and live by it; if we lose command of it we starve.'[1]

This short sentence summarises well what a national maritime mentality means: something beyond the concerns of naval and maritime professionals only, and which comes to embody a national identity by itself. From the perspective of strategic communications this quote is exemplary. It is emblematic of the dilemmas of a country's grand strategy whilst calling for a broad commitment to maintain command and control over the seas.

This quote would apply not only to the UK but also to many other nations. Brazil, in particular, could rightfully define itself as a maritime nation—this would be consistent with its historical and geopolitical reality. In practical terms, however, the country has fully developed neither a national maritime awareness nor a maritime mentality.

The Portuguese colonisation of South America, in what would later be called Brazil, took place along the coast. The colonisers arrived from Portugal by sea and used the sea to circulate throughout their colonial territories. Brazil's first cities were coastal, and most of the population is distributed along the more than 7,000 km of Brazil's coastline on the Atlantic. The territorial occupation and colonisation of the Brazilian interior was consolidated only in the twentieth century. Demographic gaps in Brazilian territory show the extent to which the country is still coastal. Brazil has the right to explore a large ocean area of about 4.5 million km^2, equivalent to approximately half of the country's territory on dry land. There are vast pre-salt reserves[2] located along the Brazilian Continental Shelf; about 85% of the oil, 75% of the natural gas, and 45% of the fish produced in the country are extracted from this area. More than 95% of Brazilian foreign trade flows through sea routes. Moreover, there are still untapped natural resources in the rich biodiversity of these reserves. Even with all this heritage and trade, the idea of Brazil as a maritime nation has not yet fully made its way into the popular imagination, nor has the idea that Brazilians could claim such an identity.

1 Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Service* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1903).
2 The Brazilian pre-salt oil region, first explored in 2006 by Petrobras, is an oil-rich offshore reserve trapped below a 2,000m-thick layer of salt, which itself is located below 2,000m-thick post-salt sediments, located at the Brazilian Continental Shelf. For more details, see the description of Pre-Salt on the Petrobras.br.com website.

Seeking to alert society about the strategic importance of this vast maritime space, the Brazilian Navy created the concept of the *Amazonia Azul*, the Blue Amazon. The Blue Amazon concept aims at drawing attention to the immense importance of Brazil's oceanic heritage and the imperative need to protect and preserve the marine life and natural resources that can be found in these waters—a condition of securing ownership and sovereignty over this priceless treasure. The Brazilian Navy plays a key role in the protection of this space and its resources because, in addition to a navy's usual functions, the *Marinha do Brasil* is responsible for the constabulary tasks of the coastguard and the port authority, and also performs scientific and technological tasks and undertakes actions for the development of the country, such as health care for riverine populations, projects for public education and infrastructure works.

Raising national maritime awareness means encouraging the country to understand itself as a maritime nation, responsible for taking care of the resources available in the Brazilian sea. This is a key argument used by the Brazilian Navy to expand its remit. It is vital to the concept of the Blue Amazon.

In this article I discuss how the concept of the Blue Amazon is used as a strategic communications tool for consolidating Brazil's maritime mentality, hence contributing to the construction of a grand strategy narrative in which maritime power becomes vital to Brazil. I will explain how the concept was created and how it has been used in relation to the principles of maritime strategy and maritime power. To this end, I will be borrowing ideas from two authors, fundamental in the development of the concepts of Maritime Strategy and Seapower: Geoffrey Till, from his classic *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (2018); and the understanding of seapower states from the definition given by Andrew Lambert in *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (2018). Lambert distinguishes 'sea power' from 'seapower', reinforcing how much the latter is not only about expressions of power at sea, but also refers to states whose identities are fully connected with the sea. In his own words:

> These states are disproportionately engaged with global trade, unusually dependent on imported resources, and culturally attuned to maritime activity. [...] Seapower identity remains a question of national engagement with the sea, a definition reserved for states that are inherently, and even existentially, vulnerable to the loss of control over sea communications.

> As the concept includes mythology, emotion and values it is not capable of accurate calculation.[3]

This article argues that the Blue Amazon concept is a fundamental tool of strategic communications for establishing and consolidating Brazil as a seapower. Furthermore, this concept contributes to the strategic redefinition of the perception of Brazilian national identity, reincorporating an awareness of the sea as a key element. In light of the difficulty inherent in measuring this concept, following Lambert's warning, the argument presented here does not involve quantitative data. Rather, it shows how the Blue Amazon concept can transform Brazilian national consciousness to include a maritime consciousness, beyond its bare geographical inevitability, through political-strategic decisions.[4]

In this text, I understand strategic communications as 'the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives'.[5] This paper focuses on an analysis of the communicative aspect of the Blue Amazon concept. However, I do not intend to explore the Blue Amazon concept as a brand or propaganda piece. I argue that the Blue Amazon concept arose from the need to reinforce the latent Brazilian maritime identity in order to advance a clear maritime strategy that reflects Brazilian maritime power. This is much in line with the concept of strategic communications presented in the recent *NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, published by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.[6]

The Blue Amazon concept is an effective example of US President Barack Obama's definition of strategic communications in 2010, in a report on a 'comprehensive interagency strategy for public diplomacy and strategic communication' submitted to the US national congress:

> By "strategic communication(s)" we refer to: (a) the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences, as well as (b) programs and

3 Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (London: Yale University Press, 2018) p. 7.
4 Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 13.
5 James Farwell, *The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012) p. xix.
6 This publication defines strategic communications as: 'A holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment.' Neville Bolt and Leonie Haiden, *NATO Strategic Communications Terminology* (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2019) p. 46.

> activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals.[7]

First, I will explain the origins of the term Blue Amazon and its metaphorical meaning. Then, I will explore how the concept was rooted in a solid strategic perception of the sea by the Brazilian Navy, and the ways in which the Navy is communicating it to a broader audience, from school children to authorities and influencers. Finally, I will point out some potential issues concerning the use of the term *Amazonia Azul*, due to the 'semantic loan' of the ideas already infused into the concept of the 'Amazon' as it is understood in Brazil and elsewhere.

The Origins of the Blue Amazon

Brazil, along with 167 other countries, is a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).[8] This international treaty defines a country's maritime spaces:

> *territorial waters*—a coastal state is free to set laws, regulate use, and use any resource up to 12 nautical miles (NM) from the baseline
>
> *baseline*—the line along the coast from which a state's maritime zones of jurisdiction are measured
>
> *contiguous zone*—a state can enforce laws relating to customs, taxation, immigration, and pollution a further 12 NM adjacent to the territorial sea, with a maximum limit of 24 NM measured from the baseline
>
> *exclusive economic zone* (EEZ)—a coastal nation has exclusive exploitation rights, including fishing and oil extraction rights, within its EEZ, extending 200 NM from the baseline

7 Joseph Biden and Nancy Pelosi, *National Framework for Strategic Communication* (United States: White House Office, March 2010) p. 2

8 The process of determining internationally accepted rights and responsibilities of nations with regard to their use of the world's oceans has a long history. Negotiations for the modern convention began after WWII led by the United Nations. It was only at the UNCLOS III, after nine years of deliberations (1973–82), that claims to territorial waters were defined. Brazil signed in Montego Bay on 10 December 1982. However, the convention only entered into force on 16 November 1994, twelve months after the 60th state ratified the agreement, as stipulated in 'Article 308: Entry Into Force' of the convention.

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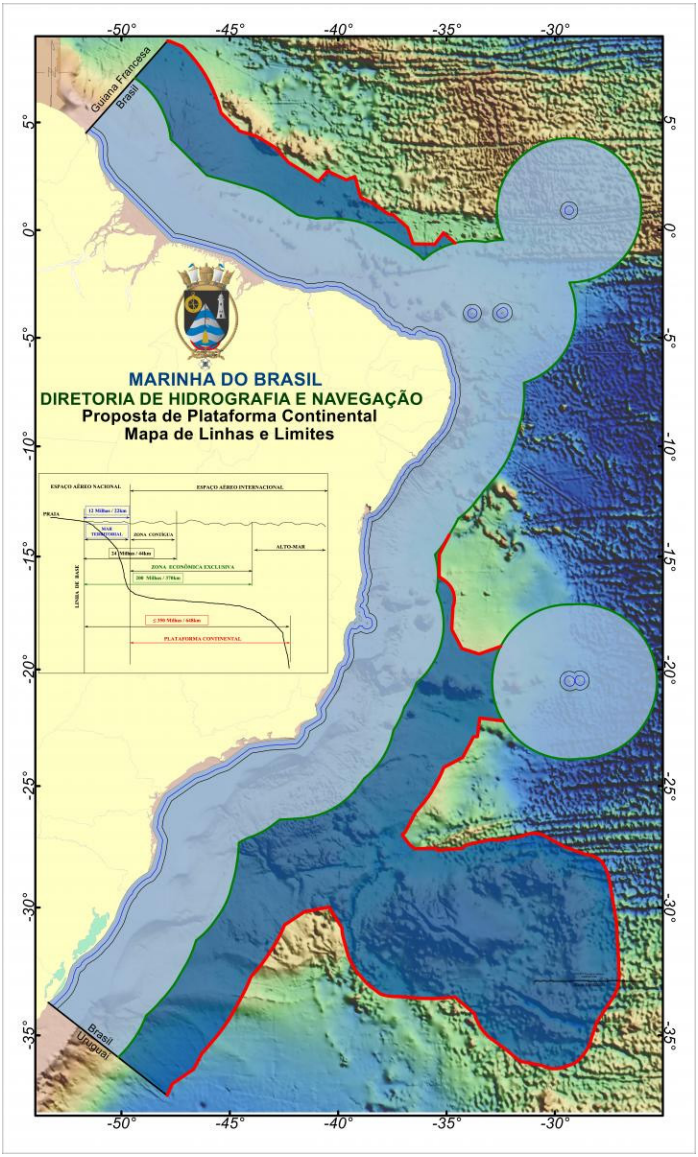
> *continental shelf*—coastal states have the right to harvest mineral and non-mineral resources and the living resources 'attached to' (not living in the waters of) the continental shelf, which comprises the ground and subsoil of submarine areas beyond the territorial sea; it may extend 200 NM or to the outer edge of the continental margin, whichever is greater, but never farther than 350 NM from the baseline.

A number of complementary concepts were also defined in the UNCLOS. A country's *internal waters* are any waters on the landward side of the baseline. For example, in Brazil, these include the Amazon River, the São Francisco River, and the Lagoa dos Patos, as well as the waters surrounding the archipelagos of Martim Vaz and Trindade, Fernando de Noronha, and the Atoll das Rocas. *International waters*, or the *high seas*, are defined as waters that transcend national boundaries, over which no nation exercises sovereign jurisdiction. The convention also defines what is called the *regime of islands*.[9] As the rights and responsibilities associated with islands can significantly expand a state's maritime territory, in the late 1990s Brazil adopted measures regarding what had previously been known as the rocks at São Pedro e São Paulo, located about 520 NM from the Brazilian coastal city of Natal, capital of the state of Rio Grande do Norte: the name was changed from 'rocks' to 'archipelago', a lighthouse was installed to replace one that had been destroyed by an earthquake in 1930, and a scientific station was built and permanently manned by a small group of researchers and Navy personnel.

Map 1 provides a sense of the Brazilian maritime potential once UNCLOS requirements are applied. It is important to note that Brazil's jurisdictional territory in the waters—the coastal waters along the *continental shelf* together with the ocean surrounding the Arquipélago de Fernando de Noronha, the Arquipélago de São Pedro e São Paulo, and the Arquipélago de Trindade e Martim Vaz—roughly corresponds in size to the territory of the Brazilian Amazon, which in this article I will call the 'Green Amazon'.

9 UNCLOS Article121, Regime of Islands, states that 1) An island is a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, which is above water at high tide. 2) Except as provided for in paragraph 3, the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of an island are determined in accordance with the provisions of this Convention applicable to other land territory. 3) Rocks which cannot sustain human habitation or economic life of their own shall have no exclusive economic zone or continental shelf.



Map 1. Blue Amazon[10]

10 Source: https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/sites/www.marinha.mil.br.secirm/files/pictures/linhamar2019.jpg

DOI 10.30966/2018.RIGA.7.3.

The largest rainforest and largest reservoir of freshwater in the world, the Green Amazon is today the world's largest bank of biological diversity. The Amazonian biome holds one third of the world's rainforests and has vast mineral deposits. With a low population density, the region is an important natural laboratory for research, and attracts a number of mostly destructive, extractivist activities. The Brazilian Amazon covers 49% (4,196,943 km^2) of the total area of the country. The Amazon absorbs and stores large amounts of carbon, playing an important role in the global climate balance. The Amazon Basin holds the world's largest hydrographic network, which drains about one fifth of the world's fresh water. Sixty percent of the Amazon Basin is located in Brazilian territory. By itself, the basin of Rio Negro, one of the tributaries of the Amazon, contains more fresh water than the sum of all Europe's rivers. The diversity of environments in the Amazon (upland forest, transitional forest, and several varieties of flooded forest) makes it home to the largest variety of birds, primates, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and freshwater fish in the world. Almost 70% of the mammal species in Brazil live in the Amazon.[11]

In August 2019, the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics [*Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística* or IBOPE], conducted a public survey entitled Perceptions about the Amazon [*Percepções da Amazônia*]; the results were revealing. 88% of Brazilians see the Amazon as a reason for national pride, and 95% say that preserving it is essential to maintaining this sense of pride. Respondents were almost unanimous—94%—in their opinion that protecting the Amazon is fundamental to Brazil's identity. For 97%, the conservation of Amazonian biological diversity is decisive for the Brazilian environment and 94% agree that it is also essential for the global environment. Eighty-seven percent of respondents recognise the importance of the Amazon to the Brazilian economy and 93% are concerned about the increase in illegal deforestation in the region.[12]

Taking into consideration the high level of national awareness around the 'Green Amazon', its richness and potentialities, as well as the fact that the importance of guaranteeing national sovereignty over this territory is already well established in the imagination of the Brazilian population, the Brazilian Navy coined the name 'Blue Amazon' to refer to Brazil's maritime sphere of interest and responsibility.

11 Brasil, Ministério do Meio Ambiente. Amazônia 2019.
12 IBOPE, Instituto Brasileiro de Opinião Pública e Estatística. Pesquisa de Opinião Pública Percepções sobre a Amazônia. Agosto de 2019.

The obvious association between the Blue Amazon and the 'Green Amazon' is advantageous and strategic in many ways. The national awareness around the richness of that territorial region and the need for its sustainable exploitation, as well as the unmistakable sense of ecological importance and national pride in sovereignty over the Amazon forest is already deeply ingrained in the Brazilian national identity, as the survey quoted above shows. Translating, or transposing, the semantic value of the word 'Amazon' onto the ocean brings with it all the values the Brazilian Navy intends to build into a Brazilian maritime mentality.

Frederico Brandini, a Brazilian oceanographer, explains the power of this correlation with the 'Green Amazon':

> The set of biomes of a nation is what breeds its wealth and what shapes its cultural and socioeconomic features. On a regional level, each biome has its part in the development of Brazilian society as a whole. The Amazon rainforest is inestimable. Its ecological significance and biotechnological potential are immensurable in our scale of values […]. Now ponder what your life would be like in Brazil without the Amazon. Now try to do the same with regard to our sea.[13]

Blue Amazon, then, is a 'semantic loan'. Transferring the national awareness of the Green Amazon to the maritime environment facilitates a quick and efficient introduction to the need for a maritime awareness amongst diverse actors, both nationally and internationally. This could be considered just another branding mechanism, as brand marketers are normally interested in leveraging value transference from one concept to another. However, in this specific case, what the Brazilian Navy is doing goes beyond simple branding, as it is provoking a change in the strategic perception of that maritime territory and in Brazil's relationship with it.

In order to popularise the name 'Blue Amazon' and insert this new geopolitical reality into the broader strategic debate, as well as to foster the construction of a Brazilian maritime mentality, a 'Blue Amazon National Day' [*Dia Nacional da Amazônia Azul*] was established by Law № 13.187 on 11 November 2015, the same day that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea entered into force.

13 Frederico Brandini, 'Amazonia Azul... uma ova!', *O Eco*, 5 February 2009. [Accessed 1 September 2019]

A series of activities and geopolitical studies focusing on the sea, also called *oceanopolitics*, was initiated or strengthened under the 'brand name' Blue Amazon with a view to consolidating a maritime consciousness in Brazil.

Thus, the 'Blue Amazon' has become a specific term with high communicative power that has the potential, as a political-strategic concept, to definitively insert oceanic spaces into Brazil's identity, to guide development projects, and to help define the preservation and sustainable use practices of Brazil's seas and rivers. Furthermore, the concept contributes to the construction of Brazil's national grand strategy. In addition, it highlights and revitalises the Brazilian maritime vocation, with the support of historical facts related to the sea and rivers. The concept is a strong instrument of awareness for the need to defend Brazil's national sovereignty over its ocean territories from external aggression.

The Blue Amazon concept is now omnipresent in the identity of the Brazilian Navy. It is also the first subject referred to in speeches, notes, announcements, and, more widely, in any internal or external communication from the Brazilian Navy. The Navy presents its mission as caring for the 4.5 million km² of Brazilian Jurisdictional Waters. To carry out its mission, the Navy must modernise both its activities and equipment. Such modernisation includes the Submarine Development Program, the Navy Nuclear Program, and the *Tamandaré* Class Corvette Construction Program. The Blue Amazon concept also justifies the acquisition of new naval, aircraft, and marine assets, such as the recent incorporations of three *Mearim* class Ocean Support Ships, and the new Flag Ship of the Brazilian Navy—the multipurpose helicopter carrier PHM *Atlântico* (formerly the HMS *Ocean*, purchased from the British Royal Navy). Three of the major programmes of the Brazilian Navy—the Brazilian Nuclear Programme, the Navy Nuclear Programme, and the Navy Submarine Programme—were consolidated in 2013 under the umbrella of a company called *Amazônia Azul Tecnologias de Defesa—AMAZUL* [Blue Amazon Technologies of Defence].[14]

Still, in preparation for fully exercising its sovereignty over its maritime territory and for incorporating what was agreed upon with regard to UNCLOS, the Brazilian government created the Brazilian Continental Shelf Survey Plan [*Plano de Levantamento da Plataforma Continental Brasileira,* or LEPLAC],[15] established by federal Decree № 98.145 on 15 September 1989. LEPLAC is a programme

14 See: https://www.marinha.mil.br/amazul/
15 See: https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/leplac

for determining the oceanic area beyond the EEZ, in which Brazil exercises its exclusive sovereign rights for the exploration and exploitation of the natural resources of the seabed and underground of its continental shelf, as established by UNCLOS.

The Blue Amazon concept was largely a result of the findings of the LEPLAC. Once the information about the outer boundary of the platform was complete, extensive ocean areas beyond the two hundred-mile boundary line was incorporated into the Brazilian jurisdiction.[16] This also led to the establishment of the National Maritime Policy [*Política Marítima Nacional* or PMN], aiming at the development of Brazilian maritime activities; to the development of the IV Sectoral Plan for Sea Resources [*Plano Setorial para os Recursos do Mar* or IV PSRM], which complements previous plans that address the research and exploration activities of maritime resources in the country, and to the Sustainable Potential Assessment of Living Resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone [*Recursos Vivos na Zona Econômica Exclusiva* or REVIZEE Program],[17] which continues and expands the work of the IV PSRM.

The Interministerial Commission for the Resources of the Sea [*Comissão Interministerial para os Recursos do Mar* or CIRM], established in 1974, was given a larger remit under the framework of the Blue Amazon concept, coordinating matters related to the achievement of the National Policy for the Resources of the Sea [*Política Nacional para os Recursos do Mar* or PNRM], established in 2005. The main mission of the CIRM is to develop activities aimed at the exploration and exploitation of biological, mineral, and energy resources of the *territorial sea*, the EEZ, and the *continental shelf*.

Conducting a survey of the Brazilian continental shelf was particularly important with regard to Brazil's foreign policy towards the South Atlantic. The information gained as a result of the continental survey reinforced the need for Brazilian oceanographic research and for the country's pioneering efforts in South Atlantic international cooperation. Brazil has exported the knowledge and expertise it gained from the continental shelf survey to neighbouring countries in South America and Africa. This has promoted maritime awareness in Brazil's foreign policy, enhancing its potential through being more assertive in maritime collaboration. The Brazilian Navy has been a significant partner in

16 Armando Amorim Ferreira Vidigal et al., *Amazônia Azul: o mar que nos pertence* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2006).
17 See: https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/revizee

work conducted by Namibia, Angola, and Mozambique, offering guidelines for the conduct of their respective projects surveying the continental shelf.[18]

This international dimension of the Blue Amazon concept is relevant here. First, the idea of a Blue Amazon was possible only thanks to Brazilian diplomatic engagement with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), in order to assure the country's capacities on the sea. Second, Brazil's National Defence Strategy and National Defence Policy clearly define the boundaries of the strategic environment within which the country interacts diplomatically and strategically in terms of defence and security. The West coast of Africa is Brazil's natural maritime neighbour and the Blue Amazon concept would not be a realistic strategic communications tool without translating the ideas involved into coordinated diplomatic actions. Under the umbrella of international cooperation in defence diplomacy and in conjunction with the IMO, Brazil hosted a number of seminars on strengthening awareness of the maritime domain and on maritime surveillance, monitoring, and communication systems in the South Atlantic, helping African countries to improve the governance and protection of their own EEZs.[19] Brazil's turn towards West African countries, the neighbours of the Blue Amazon, has been translated into partnerships, joint operations and exercises, training missions, defence industry promotion, and several other defence diplomacy actions, in order to reinforce the concept of the Blue Amazon on an international level.[20]

In order to spread the idea of the Blue Amazon brand more widely and to promote maritime awareness at home and abroad, many educational initiatives have been implemented at the inter-ministerial level. Guided by the Brazilian Navy, the Ministry of Education has developed specific didactic materials for use in elementary schools, explaining the rationale behind the Blue Amazon concept and reinforcing the need for a national awareness of the maritime territory over which Brazil exercises sovereignty and exploratory rights.[21] The Brazilian Navy has also created a series of exhibitions at its Naval Museums and has made available to children educational materials and activities, such

18 Luiz Carlos Torres and Hundrsen de Souza Ferreira, 'Amazônia Azul: a fronteira brasileira no mar' in *Passadiço*, (CAAML, 2005) pp. 3–5.
19 *Strengthening Maritime Security in West and Central Africa* (London: International Maritime Organization, 2017) p. 9.
20 Nathan Thompson and Robert Muggah, *'*The Blue Amazon. Brazil Asserts its Influence Across the Atlantic*'*, *Foreign Affairs*, 11 June 2015.
21 Here we have an example of educational materials produced by the Ministry of Education for use in primary and secondary school geography classes: http://portal.mec.gov.br/seb/arquivos/pdf/EnsMed/expensgeo_1e2.pdf

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as theatre plays and performances, always seeking to enhance their maritime awareness based on the Blue Amazon idea.

The comics below are examples of teaching materials produced to educate children and young people about the Blue Amazon. In these comics, a group of students and their teacher visit a Navy ship and learn about the importance and value of the Blue Amazon. Such comics are distributed at schools during visits of Navy personnel or passed out to school classes visiting ships berthed in some cities.

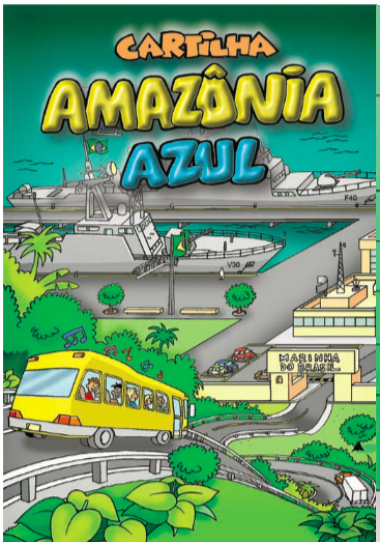


Figure. 1 An educational publication designed to introduce schoolchildren to the 'Blue Amazon'

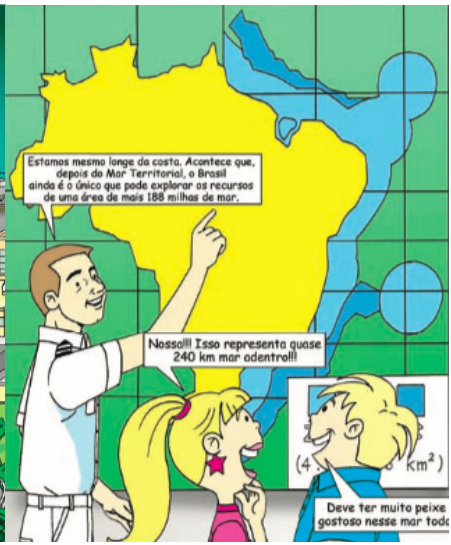


Figure. 2 A page introducing children to the Blue Amazon concept as it is displayed on maps

The Navy Social Communication Centre, responsible for editing the institution's official webpage, commissioned informative videos which it made available on YouTube; their materials attracted a significant number of views.[22]

22 The YouTube video Amazônia Azul, published by Marinha do Brasil had received 21,941 visits by 14 September 2019.

DOI 10.30966/2018.RIGA.7.3.

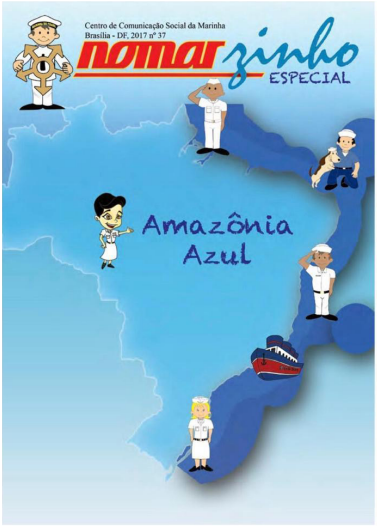


Figure 3. Normazinho № 37

The same Centre also produced a children's play kit called *Nomarzinho*, with topics related to maritime themes and the Blue Amazon as a recurrent subject. In all this material, the Navy insists on depicting a map of Brazil that includes the EEZ as a way of promoting the symbolic construction of this space. The cover of *Nomarzinho* № 37 depicts sailors on the sea, together with a ship, giving a real sense of Brazilian presence in this space (see *Figure 3*).

All of these initiatives fall into a broad spectrum of strategic communications, each playing an important role in building Brazil's national maritime awareness, including Brazil's maritime and naval capacity within a grand strategy framework. But can it be demonstrated that Blue Amazon is more than a communication brand, that it in fact reflects a strategic concept?

From Brand to Strategic Concept

To demonstrate this, let's turn to Geoffrey Till's classic book, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*. Till's concepts are instrumental to the argument presented here and provide evidence that the Brazilian Navy is using the name Blue Amazon to conceptualise a grand maritime strategy for Brazil.

Till gives a very specific definition of seapower: 'Seapower is not simply about what it takes to use the sea (although that is obviously a prerequisite). It is also the capacity to influence the behaviour of other people or things by what one does at or from the sea.'[23] The Blue Amazon concept is a conscious attempt to influence the strategic decision-making that has the potential to create the national maritime awareness required to assert Brazil as a seapower. Moreover,

23 Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-first Century*. 4th edn revised and updated. (London: Routledge, 2018) p. 25.

the work conducted by Brazil in surveying its continental shelf has definitely influenced the behaviour of other actors internationally in relation to Brazil's capabilities and intentions in its use of the sea.

Till argues that a country's identity as a seapower is based on four ways of using the sea: 'as a resource'; 'as a medium of transportation and exchange'; 'as a medium of information and the spread of ideas'; and 'as a medium of domination'.[24] The Brazilian Navy strategically constructs its responsibilities in the maritime space in what it calls four Aspects of the Blue Amazon [*quatro Vertentes da Amazônia Azul*]: *the economic aspect*, or the exploitation and sustainable use of living and non-living resources; *the environmental aspect*, which refers to the rational use of the sea and the preservation of the environment; *the scientific aspect*, which deals with knowledge; and *the aspect of sovereignty*, in the sphere of security and defence.[25] These strands correspond, *mutatis mutandis*, to Till's ways of conceptualising use of the sea, not in the sense of a direct and translatable correspondence, but they may be understood as background for the argument presented here.

The Economic Aspect

More than 95% of Brazilian foreign trade is transported by sea—a figure seldom made known to the Brazilian population. Although 80% of the country's population lives a short distance from the coast, in striking counterpoint to the immense size of the country, the general population knows little about the economic and strategic importance of Brazil's maritime transportation/trade routes. The country's heavy dependence on the sea means that this is also a potential vulnerability; Brazil requires a strong navy to ensure control of its maritime trade routes.

Despite its overwhelming reliance on maritime transportation for its economy, Brazil still relies heavily on foreign-flagged vessels to transport its sea-freight. The country will need to make significant investments in building a strong merchant marine, which will consequently create jobs and reduce the burden of costly payments to foreign corporations.

24 Till, *Seapower*, p. 6.
25 Júlio Soares de Moura Neto, José Roberto Bueno Junior, and Armando de Moura Ferraz, *Amazonia Azul - A Última Fronteira* (Brasília: Centro de Comunicação Social da Marinha, 2013).

Brazil is also heavily dependent on offshore oil exploration; its gas and oil reserves are another great economic resource coming from the Blue Amazon. The country has two major offshore oil producing areas—the Campos Basin and the Santos Basin. Eighty-seven percent of Brazilian oil comes from the ocean within its EEZ. Eleven percent of this is pumped from depths of 400 meters or less; 30% comes from depths between 400 and 1,000 meters; and the largest amount, close to 46%, comes from deep waters below 1,000 meters. Brazil has developed complex technologies to explore for oil below 1,000 meters, which is how exploration is conducted in the Santos Basin, a pre-salt oil field. Oil and gas are currently being extracted from or near the following sea basins: Foz do Amazonas, Pará-Maranhão, Barreirinhas, Ceará-Potiguar, Sergipe-Alagoas, Camamu and Almada, Jequitinhonha, Espírito Santo, Campos, Santos, and Pelotas. To transform that into numbers, Brazil's proven oil reserves (both land and sea) amounted to 11 957 billion barrels in 2018, with onshore production being less than 3% of this total.[26]

Fishing is another economic potential of the Blue Amazon. The Brazilian coast is fiercely sought after by industrial fishing vessels from various countries. This massive fishing industry was indeed the reason for one of the few international crises that Brazil had to face in its maritime space in the 20th century—an episode that came to be known as the Lobster War. This diplomatic-military crisis occurred in 1961–63, when French fishermen practiced lobster fishing near Brazilian territorial waters. When approached by Brazilian Navy ships and warned to withdraw, the French fishing vessels refused to comply. Even worse, the French government sent warships to escort and protect them. This crisis led the Brazilian government to employ coercive naval persuasion, sending Brazilian Navy ships to the crisis site in order to demonstrate clearly that the country was willing to defend its rights.[27] The crisis was finally resolved through diplomacy.[28]

This episode occurred before UNCLOS entered into force, but it already demonstrated the extent to which Brazil's seapower, as defined by Till, was put to the test by France. From the perspective of strategic communications,

26 Ministério de Minas e Energia do Brasil, *Plano Decenal de Expansão de Energia 2027* (Brasília: Ministério de Minas e Energia. Empresa de Pesquisa Energética MME/EPE, 2018) p. 133.
27 At that time, Brazil had defined its territorial waters as reaching 3 nautical miles from the coast. There was no consensus among the states about this distance; that came only after UNCLOS III. The problem in this episode is related to the legitimacy of extracting resources from the continental shelf, as the concept of EEZ had not yet been established.
28 Cláudio da Costa Braga, *A Guerra da Lagosta*. (Rio de Janeiro: Serviço de Documentação da Marinha–SDM, 2004).

this episode supports the argument that the Blue Amazon concept is strategic; Blue Amazon communicates to a broader audience the importance of having a strong Navy with the capability of responding to crises such as the Lobster War.

In order to identify sites of strategic and geo-economic interest on the high seas of the South and Equatorial Atlantic, Brazil created in 2009 the Program for the Prospecting and Exploration of Mineral Resources in the Equatorial and South Atlantic International Area [*Programa de Prospecção e Exploração de Recursos Minerais da Área Internacional do Atlântico Sul e Equatorial* or PROAREA]. Several national institutions together with the Brazilian Navy Admiral Paulo Moreira Institute of Sea Studies [*Instituto de Estudos do Mar Almirante Paulo Moreira* or IEAPM][29] have conducted a number of studies on marine life, exploring not only the potential for economic exploitation, but also the conservation of maritime biodiversity.

The Environmental Aspect

Blue Amazon programmes and projects aimed at the integrated management of coastal and marine environments have been mainly concerned with investment in alleviating the harmful effects of pollution, in urban revitalisation, in developing new activities, such as ecotourism and environmental education, and in maintaining environmental quality. Many of these programmes serve as platforms for scientists to provide their input on policy reform. They have improved Brazil's capacity to prevent disaster and have provided a better understanding of the rapid change in socioeconomic dynamics in recent decades. The programmes have also made appropriate environmental technologies available and have implemented the use of international environmental quality indicators.

The Blue Amazon strategy, including maintaining biological diversity, reconciling competing interests in marine and coastal areas, investing in sustainable activities, and sharing the benefits from the use of maritime resources fairly, has promoted cooperation with other countries through multilateral and international events. Some important initiatives have already taken place, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), signed during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which entered into force on 29 December 1993.

29 See the website of Instituto de Estudos do Mar Almirante Paulo Moreira .

The ultimate goals of this convention were 'the conservation of biological diversity', 'the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity', and 'the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources'. As concerns what would come to be called the Blue Amazon, it aimed to achieve a good ecological status of the marine environment and to give sea-dependent activities predictability and security.[30]

Regarding the safety of navigation in waters under national jurisdiction, Brazil approved the Water Traffic Safety Law [*Lei de Segurança do Transporte Aquaviário* or LESTA], Law № 9.537/97, which established concepts and rules of behaviour for the safety of sea-going vessels, excluding warships. Shipping safety and environmental standards are actually the subject of a number of conventions, codes, and resolutions adopted by the IMO. The Commander of the Navy in his role as the Brazilian Maritime Authority is responsible for regulating and controlling waterway transport in matters related to navigation safety, the safeguarding of human life at sea, and the protection of the marine environment. The Maritime Authority acts as a representative of the Brazilian government in international fora addressing these issues. The standards are managed by the Directorate of Ports and Coasts, the Brazilian Navy organisation that advises sea users on safe navigation, safeguarding human life at sea, and preventing pollution of the environment and waters.

The islands and sea cliffs of the Blue Amazon are also of strategic importance. In these places, the Brazilian Navy has installed an efficient navigation safety system, composed of lighthouses, weather stations, and communication centres, thus benefiting national and international navigation.

Given the importance of oil exploration and the transportation of oil through Brazilian territorial waters, the Maritime Authority must act in conjunction with other environmental agencies to control the oil industry nationally to ensure that environmental damage is prevented or, if it does occur, contained. Alongside industry, NGOs, and other government agencies, the Brazilian Navy has been influencing policy makers and practitioners, promoting maritime awareness under the umbrella of the Blue Amazon concept to consolidate perception of the importance of the sea for Brazil's grand strategy.

30 The Convention on Biological Diversity is a part of the United Nations Environment Programme.

The Scientific Aspect

The National Policy for Sea Resources (PNRM), was the starting point for the scientific programmes associated with the exercise and guarantee of Brazilian sovereignty at sea. There are three major plans coordinated by the Inter-ministerial Commission for the Resources of the Sea (CIRM),[31] directly related to the Blue Amazon: the aforementioned Continental Shelf Survey Plan (LEPLAC), the National Coastal Management Plan [*Plano Nacional de Gerenciamento Costeiro* or PNGC], and the Sectoral Plan for Sea Resources (PSRM). The programmes and actions of these three plans focus on knowledge of the marine environment and its preservation, the rational use of resources, and the education of specialised personnel.

The Aspect of Sovereignty

The Aspect of Sovereignty that comprises the fourth aspect of the Blue Amazon strategy is what Till would call seapower's input; 'the obvious inputs are navies, coastguards, the marine or civil-maritime industries broadly defined and, where relevant, the contribution of land and air forces'.[32] This is defined in Brazil's National Defence Policy and Strategy [*Política Nacional de Defesa/ Estratégia Nacional de Defesa* or PND/END], which establishes that the Navy must have the capability to control maritime areas and to deny the use of the sea to intruders, as well as to determine what the naval power will focus on. The Navy's responsibilities include:

- increasing security and the ability to defend oil platforms, naval and port facilities, and archipelagos and oceanic islands in the Brazilian Jurisdictional Waters;
- responding promptly to any threat, by state or by unconventional or criminal forces, to maritime trade;
- and increasing participation in peacekeeping missions.

The PND/END also specifies the strategic maritime areas that control maritime access to Brazil and thus deserve special attention: the area between Santos and Vitória, and the area around the mouth of the Amazon river.

31 See: https://www.marinha.mil.br/secirm/
32 Till, *Seapower*, p. 25.

DOI 10.30966/2018.RIGA.7.3.

Constitutionally, the Brazilian Navy is responsible for the naval defence and maritime security of the country. In fulfilling this mission, the Brazilian Navy develops a strategy of deterrence in peacetime through advertising the permanent readiness of the Naval Power, in order to discourage any aggression by state, non-state, or criminal forces.

The Brazilian Navy conducts various operations in areas of strategic interest for national defence in accordance with their assessment of potential threats posed to Brazilian sovereignty. The territory of the Blue Amazon is continuously monitored for possible conflicts arising in the South Atlantic. Even without explicit conflict, Brazil's immense coast line and geographical position in the South Atlantic require a Navy capable of reacting and responding to any possible threat to its sovereignty. The Navy also develops hydroceanographic activities to better understand environmental factors that affect Naval operations.

As previously mentioned, maritime security is a subsidiary mission of the Brazilian Navy. Maritime security is understood as the absence of threat in the maritime space. In peacetime, maritime security assures the good use of the seas. In this context, a number of 'new threats' are of great concern to the international community, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, smuggling, human trafficking, and piracy; these threats also inform the strategic thinking around the projection of the Blue Amazon concept. This has led to enhanced management and monitoring systems through information sharing and cooperation with other institutions and navies. As mentioned above, the Blue Amazon concept also justifies the modernisation of operational assets in the Brazilian Navy.

According to Till, maritime success requires 'an intimate relationship between maritime power and economic prosperity', 'an association of seapower and trading values', 'policy moderation', and 'controllability'.[33] For Brazil, economic prosperity is directly related to its maritime power; it is not possible to imagine Brazil as a seapower without it having an intrinsic and direct relationship with trade. Therefore, the country needs a robust and modern naval force, capable of guaranteeing policy moderation and exercising deterrence, in order to exert control over its maritime space.

33 Till, *Seapower*, p. 17.

The Blue Amazon concept goes beyond that of a mere a brand or promotional campaign. It has, in fact, provoked Brazilians to change their attitude towards the sea. According to Marianne Wiesebron: 'The Brazilian Navy is not just building the Blue Amazon, rethinking the South Atlantic national security and all the challenges that arise from these issues: it wants Brazil to find its maritime vocation again.'[34]

In Till's words, the constituents of a seapower are 'maritime community', 'maritime people (professionals)', 'maritime geography', and 'maritime economy.[35] The Blue Amazon as an instrument of strategic communications has created a national maritime awareness, within both the Brazilian government and Brazilian society, and has projected this idea internationally.

The combination of a strategic understanding of the potential uses of the sea, the clear definition of strategic priorities for Brazil's maritime space, and a coherent and creative correlation with the Green Amazon, makes the Blue Amazon concept an efficient tool of strategic communications.

Possible side effects

The Blue Amazon has immense potential as a strategic communications tool. However, some possible side effects must be considered when images of the Green Amazon are transposed onto the maritime space.

In an article entitled 'The Threats on the Green Amazon and the Blue Amazon',[36] Moreira has already started to address the problems that this transposition may yield. The main problem, from my perspective, is that because of its global relevance and potential, the Blue Amazon can be framed as belonging to the global commons, and therefore not subject to Brazilian sovereignty.

The Green Amazon has historically been targeted by many groups and countries as a universal good, claiming that access to it should not be restricted under Brazilian sovereignty or that of any other country. Carlos Nobre and Juan Carlos Castilla-Rubio, in an article entitled 'The Amazon's New Industrial Revolution', propose what they call a 'new development model' for Amazonia,

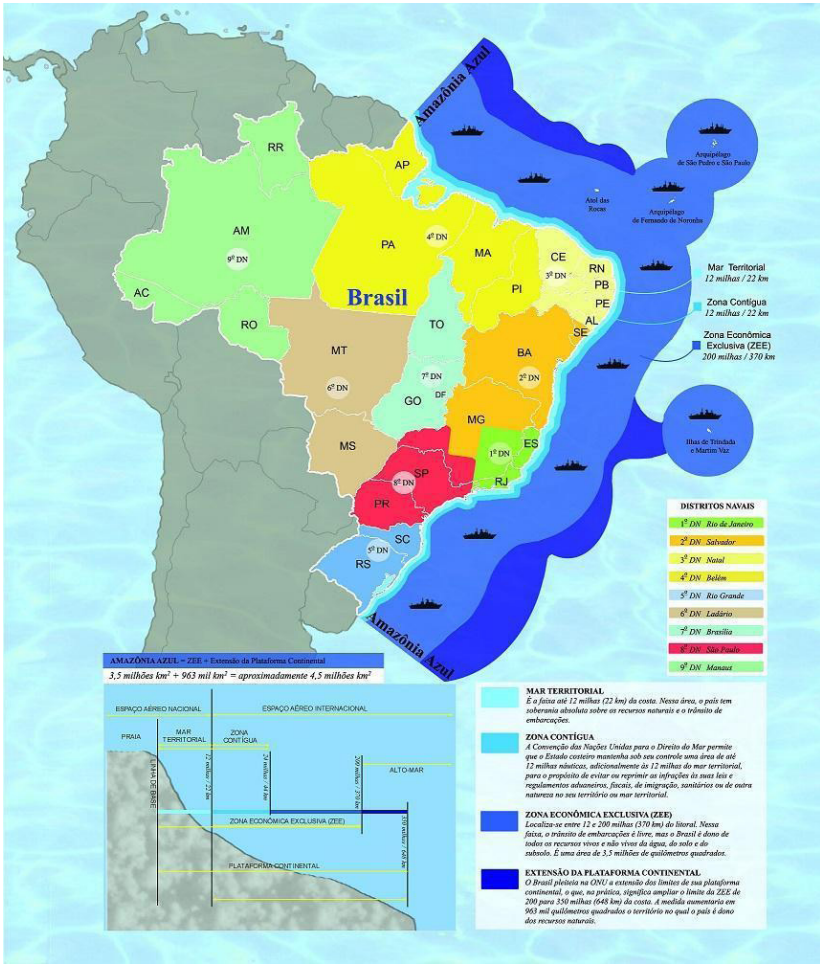
34 Marianne Wiesebron, 'Amazônia Azul: Pensando a defesa do território marítimo brasileiro', *Austral: Revista Brasileira de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais*, Vol 2, № 3 (Jan/Jun 2013): 124.
35 Till, *Seapower*, pp. 110–12.
36 Alexandre Santana Moreira, 'As Ameaças sobre a Amazônia Verde e a Amazônia Azul: uma relação possível?', *Revista da Escola de Guerra Naval,* Vol. 23, № 1 (Jan/Apr 2017): 239–74.

listing the region's many potential resources and benefits—the same things that make Brazilians proud of their Amazonia. They start their article by stating: 'The Amazon system exemplifies the global commons on which the health and stability of the planet depends.'[37] They promote the unquestionability of the assumption that the region belongs to a global commons.

This particular discourse is normally used when the economic potential of the region is addressed in combination with Brazil's ability to conserve and protect the environment. The July/August 2019 fires in the Brazilian Amazonia have rekindled this discussion, pointing to Brazil's inability to protect the forest or disinterest in conserving it, further provoking suggestions of international intervention that would threaten Brazilian sovereignty over the region. On 31 August 2019, Prof. Lawrence Douglas published an article in the British newspaper *The Guardian* entitled 'Do the Brazil Amazon Fires Justify Environmental Interventionism?' He argues in favour of the international community intervening in any situation where the global commons are at risk.[38] Any incident in the Blue Amazon could easily trigger the same discourse.

The second problem is a Naval operational one, which derives from the image that the Brazilian Navy might unintentionally create. Presenting itself as having a duty to safeguard its territorial waters, to protect the Blue Amazon, the Brazilian Navy may end up creating an image of itself as a constabulary Navy, and not as a Navy with the intention and capability of operating beyond the borders of its territorial sea and EEZ. In other words, it may end up reinforcing an image of Brazil as an isolated country, instead of a seapower. Many maps of the Blue Amazon, such as *Map 2* below, depict Navy ships only within the territory of the Blue Amazon. This suggests that Brazil is capable of controlling and securing only its territorial waters and EEZ. Again, such images contradict any discourse of Brazil as a seapower.

37 Carlos Nobre and Juan Carlos Castilla-Rubio,' The Amazon's New Industrial Revolution', *Global Environment Facility*, 16 December 2016.
38 Lawrence Douglas, 'Do the Brazil Amazon Fires Justify Environmental Interventionism?', *The Guardian*, 31 August 2019. [Accessed 1 September 2019]



Map 2. Blue Amazon and the Brazilian Navy district division[40]

39 Source: https://www.marinha.mil.br/amazonia-azul

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Conclusion

The Brazilian Navy's master instrument of strategic communications was the semantic appropriation of a concept already deeply rooted in the Brazilian identity. By transposing the value of the Green Amazon onto a Blue Amazon, Brazil aims to promote maritime awareness among the Brazilian population, support its national maritime strategy, and develop its grand strategy. The Blue Amazon concept as a strategic communications tool corresponds precisely to what Farwell says about using words, actions, images, and symbols to direct behaviour and policies.[40] Or, in the words of the White House, it is a precise 'synchronization of words and deeds'.[41]

The Blue Amazon concept has allowed the Brazilian Navy to engage the imagination of the Brazilian people and inform them about the relevance of the sea to the national economy, to national development, and to the country's projection of power. The Navy is using this communicative tool to create an awareness of the importance of having naval assets capable of responding to any issue regarding defence and security in the region. It is difficult to measure effectively the success of this strategic communications initiative, as it directly transforms the historical view of Brazil commonly understood by the general public, pushing the country to assert itself as a seapower.

Finally, the Blue Amazon concept seems to represent an effective strategic communications tool with the potential to support a more robust maritime strategy. Its effectiveness will be proven by its success in reframing a national grand strategy that seeks to make Brazil identify itself as a maritime nation and a seapower. The Blue Amazon is presented as a shared understanding, not only as a national brand. It is important to remember that, to be effective and convincing, this kind of shared social construction should transcend the verisimilitude of its message.

Returning to Lambert,[42] what we are seeing through the use of the concept of Blue Amazon is the Brazilian Navy deliberately shaping a maritime culture that reflects the economic, strategic, political, scientific, and environmental potential of the sea. More than simply trying to prove that it has power at sea, Brazil is

40 Farwell, *The Art of Strategic Communication*.
41 Biden and Pelosi, *National Framework for Strategic Communication*.
42 Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 4–13.

using the concept of Blue Amazon to frame itself as a seapower, at least within its home strategic environment, the South Atlantic.

Basing its Blue Amazon strategy on the economic, environmental, scientific, and sovereignty aspects of its rights and responsibilities in its maritime territories, the Brazilian Navy targets a broader audience, intending to promote a change in perception of the sea, and consequently in the prevailing towards about it. In other words, the holistic strategy that the Blue Amazon concept communicates has the potential for creating a cultural change in the Brazilian mentality, which if it does not succeed in catapulting Brazil into the category of a 'seapower state', as Lambert describes it, at least makes Brazil understand that it is a 'maritime nation'.

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A GLOBAL RORSCHACH TEST: RESPONDING TO CHINA'S BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE

A Review Essay by Giulio Pugliese

Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order
Bruno Maçães. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2019.

Rebranding China: Contested Status Signaling in the Changing Global Order
Xiaoyu Pu. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

Super Continent: The Logic of Eurasian Integration
Kent E. Calder. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

The Silk Road Trap: How China's Trade Ambitions Challenge Europe
Jonathan Holslag. Cambridge and Medford: Polity, 2019.

Keywords—*Belt and Road Initiative, Free and Open Indo-Pacific, US-China Relations, economic statecraft, EU-China Relations, strategic communications*

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Of China Dreams and China Nightmares: The BRI Goes to Italy

NATO's recent 70th summit testified to the resurgence of great power politics, as the transatlantic alliance broadened its strategic horizon to include China. Discussions would, according to Jens Stoltenberg, now address the mix of challenges and opportunities posed by a powerful China but avoid turning Beijing into an enemy. To avoid those rigidities China's advancement into the South China Sea was not an important agenda item, but 'the fact that China is coming closer to us, investing heavily in infrastructure', was a notable inclusion for the world's largest security alliance. Given its political and geopolitical implications, China's mammoth connectivity policy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), naturally lends itself to securitisation, a lesson that the previous Italian government learnt the hard way when China's President Xi Jinping visited the peninsula in March 2019.

Back then, beneath the composed pomp and circumstance surrounding Xi's state visit, passions were running high. The Italian government's qualified endorsement of China's BRI had triggered a media and political frenzy, kindling domestic and international fears that Italy—a member of the G-7 and a founding member of the European Union—was, at best, lending legitimacy to China's mammoth connectivity project or, at worst, capitulating to China's so-called 'debt trap' diplomacy. Ahead of the summit, some news reporting read stranger than fiction: one authoritative Italian newspaper suggested that Italy would espouse Chinese socialism through the BRI Framework Memorandum of Understanding (henceforth, MoU); others warned that Italy could develop an unhealthy economic dependency on China, similar to the developing countries in China's near abroad; still others depicted Michele Geraci, Italy's Undersecretary of State for Trade and Foreign Investment and the MoU's leading promoter, as the Manchurian Candidate. I started wondering whether Xi qualified as evil Dr. Fu Manchu in the grander scheme of things.

Italy greeted Xi's arrival with regal fanfare: for the first time in decades, the President of the Republic welcomed a visiting head of state with chariots and horses, as if the Chinese president were visiting Buckingham Palace. This careful choreography was part and parcel of the BRI MoU deal; its images would reverberate into China and feed into Xi's charismatic (and authoritarian) leadership. This was particularly important as Xi's signature policy initiative, enshrined in the Party Charter, was under domestic and international heat. Rome's endorsement of the BRI instead reinforced the idea among Chinese

audiences that the 'China Dream' lived on and the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' was aptly symbolised by revamping the Silk Road, with China leading the way.

International chancelleries gave their diverging readings of the Italy-China agreement. Japanese officials were anxious about a naïve Italian government kowtowing to China, and potentially jeopardising the G-7 entente. France and Germany worried about the true intention of Rome's Eurosceptic government and feared that such bilateralism would sabotage a somewhat coordinated intra-EU approach to the China challenge. After all, the Franco-German entente had just pushed for an EU rethink on China, now labelled as a cooperation partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. Franco-German anxieties are understandable if we consider that the Eurosceptic Italian government had picked fights with both countries, had lamented the stifling role of EU institutions, and had developed its international diplomacy with extra-EU powers headed by 'like-minded' *souverainists*—Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping—and with friends like these…. On the other hand, more than half of EU member states had signed the BRI MoU by spring 2019 and the EU Council's position was in fact supportive of Italy's document, which couches the terms of Italy's cooperation with China *within* the framework of EU initiatives. This was the first time a BRI MoU had been couched in such constructive terms. Italian diplomacy was hard at work to make sure that this document would, among other things, constructively engage China, at least on paper. Still one more reading of the document stresses its communication value: Geraci himself repeatedly qualified the MoU as a marketing operation. The realistic pursuit of national interests is alive and well in Machiavelli's country.

Yet, the most forceful reaction came from the natural ally of the Italian populist government, Donald Trump's United States of America. The US government played up the internal divisions within Italy's Eurosceptic coalition government, and the US National Security Council publicly condemned, via social media and exclusive first page interviews with Italian news media, the risks of endorsing Xi's dangerous 'vanity project'. The Italian government then squared the circle by strengthening oversight over foreign direct investments in critical infrastructure and restraining its overtures to Beijing for fear of incurring US wrath. In short, a dearth of information surrounding the MoU translated into a global Rorschach test, according to which global audiences superimposed their China dreams, suspicions, expectations, and nightmares onto an essentially

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tame, and easily reversible, framework agreement. In the process, Italy got the worst of both worlds: it first angered the US government, which has been on an all-out offensive against China since early 2018, and eventually frustrated China with its timidity in reaching out following the MoU. This symbol diplomacy and Rorschach test may have real impact, for better or for worse.

Unsurprisingly, China's official proclamations expound on the 'win-win' narratives embedded in the BRI and downplay its hegemonic aspirations. Xiaoyu Pu's *Rebranding China* is not about the BRI per se but is deeply interested in disentangling the complex images that China willingly projects to communicate its status. China's strategic signalling ranges between extremes—from nationalistic resolve to an altogether low-key posture, from great power status to China as a developing country. Pu argues that this almost contradictory messaging depends on China's many international and domestic target audiences. The distinction among China's audiences has been insisted upon in the academic literature of recent years, especially works that are concerned with propaganda and public diplomacy.[1] In fact, the party-state's paranoid pursuit of regime security translates into nationalism-led legitimacy and 'cultural security' posturing, which insulates the state from foreign interference. In fact, China's prioritisation of domestic over international audiences along the above lines is the weak point of China's international signalling and of its public diplomacy generally.

Beijing's conspiratorial narrative on the Hong Kong protests is another case in point. The Janus-faced quality to Chinese not-so-strategic transmissions is also to blame for the global Rorschach test. Still, China's prioritization for its domestic audiences can also be played to a counterpart's advantage: mere symbolic recognition of China's status—such as the centrality accorded to China in the BRI—may well be amplified by Chinese Communist Party propaganda agencies, thus enhancing that country's soft power among Chinese audiences. Preliminary evidence suggests that this was part of the Italian government's cool-headed bet towards the tame BRI MoU: a branding exercise aimed at reaping the benefits offered by Chinese investors and consumers (2020 will be the Italy-China Year of Culture and Tourism, for instance), while signalling to its own electorate that it was pursuing its national interests while not necessarily going against the EU line.

Pu's analysis of narratives and signals can be applied to the complex and amorphous BRI brand, possibly the People's Republic of China's most successful

[1] See, for instance, Kingsley Edney, William Callahan, and Falk Hartig's work, as well as my co-authored book.

strategic narrative. Narratives are nothing more than stories that aim to make sense of the world, and they become strategic when states actively intervene to shape these stories to advance a national interest. In international politics, it is possible to differentiate narratives on three levels—system-level narratives that address the nature of international society, national narratives that situate a country within that society, and issue-specific narratives. For instance, China frames its expansive claims in the South China Sea as historically legitimate, peaceful, and defensive (an issue-specific narrative). These claims are also emblematic of the so-called 'rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' under Xi Jinping, breaking the country free from a 'century of humiliation' (a national narrative). Although international society may still be hostile to China's assertive advance into, and militarisation of, the South China Sea, China argues that there is much to gain from a 'community of common destiny', an ill-defined narrative that stresses the importance of international cooperation between China and the world (a system-level narrative). According to the same narrative, China's economic and military ascendance is unstoppable given its continued economic growth and transition to higher value-added economic sectors; hence, third parties ought to know better and avoid provocation. This international narrative has gained traction in China's neighborhood, especially as US global influence wanes and shows signs of retrenchment, for example Trump pulling the US out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Narratives, such as Beijing's presentations about the South China Sea, simplify a complex reality into an easily digestible linear story. This allows the narrative to gain a wider audience, both internationally and domestically. In fact, the most powerful narratives are those that are widely believed. Powerful strategic narratives must also be supported by government policy—when words and actions match, narratives gain traction with the public. Along these lines, the BRI is chock-full of strategic signalling that makes use of all three types of narratives: it aims to build 'win-win' international relations, it symbolises the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and it provides proof of China's peaceful economic rise through concrete projects. Ultimately, the BRI aims to use these projects to strengthen the idea of a 'community of common destiny'. The Italian government, fully aware of the spurious nature of these tactics, has played up the symbolical relevance of Italy in the Silk Road narrative. Just as the PRC depicts itself (ahistorically) as the successor of all previous incarnations of the Chinese Empire, Italian governments have a tendency to present Italy as the successor of the Roman Empire; Italian diplomacy has long played 'the Rome card' when bolstering historical ties with China.

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The BRI Goes to Eurasia, FOIP Responds

Semiotics, biases, and signalling aside, what is the BRI all about? Oddly enough, the debated academic and policy issues also often resemble Rorschach blots; definitions vary depending on the author's field of expertise. Security experts warn of the BRI's embedded geopolitical and grand strategic aspirations and stress the dangers of China's hegemonic ambitions and economic nationalism for developing and high-income countries alike. Developmental and political economists stress China's understandable economic and energy sufficiency goals along with the huge infrastructure investment needs of the Asia-Pacific region—around $26 trillion according to the Asian Development Bank; influential voices from that field are, on balance, sanguine if not welcoming of more government financing by the world's second largest economy, provided that China abides by international good practice. Specialists on the domestic politics of China tend to stress its shallow sloganeering; they find continuity between China's earlier initiatives, such as its 'Go Out' policy in the late 1990s, and lament the corruptive effects of opaque State-Owned Enterprises and development banks on recipient countries. For instance, analysts warn that China is simply exporting bad governance because that's how its Leninist system operates, not because of 'debt trap' diplomacy that aims to turn Beijing into the world's loan shark. Others more provocatively suggest that, if there is a debt trap, it's the one China finds itself ensnared in as its international bad loans pile up; and sub-par facilities, such as the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, and other white elephants across Central Asia and the African continent hardly qualify as 'strategic' collateral. The debates surrounding China-Pakistan relations and the embryonic Gwadar Port, a much-talked-about seaport facility operated by a Chinese SOE, is an illustrious example of all of the above perspectives.

The three remaining books reviewed in this essay shed light on these debates, each pointing out different policy implications. Kent Calder's *Super Continent* provides a nuanced analysis of Eurasian integration, which has been a long time in the making, by stepping back from the BRI to highlight structural factors instead. A political economist and Japan specialist by training, Calder argues that critical historical junctures, such as China's opening and reform and the fall of the Soviet Union, have coincided with major changes in the international logistical, technological, and energy sectors: these are the key drivers behind connectivity and China's growing influence. On top of that, the Middle Kingdom's fortunate geopolitical location at the very centre of a dynamic Asia is allowing Beijing

to develop its hinterland while pursuing economic and geopolitical goals. Like the smaller scale initiatives of Japan, Russia, and the European players, China's Eurasian regionalism is essentially aimed at economic goals; the BRI is fundamentally epiphenomenal to the *longue durée* of Eurasian integration and China's rise. Beijing mainly aims at exporting overcapacity, securing raw commodities, fostering new markets, and taking advantage of higher returns of capital in developing countries.

In the process China aims at global systemic transformation, especially through connectivity and consensus building. That is, 'distributive regionalism' will pave the way to China's hegemonic aspirations, but it will do so by being 'less intrusive into domestic political systems than liberal-internationalist alternatives. Beijing-led distributive globalism will be less legalistic and more reliant on distributive incentives to induce cooperation'.[2] Eventually, as China's economic footprint looms larger over the Eurasian continent, the Middle Kingdom will enjoy loose regional hegemony and change the modus operandi of international affairs. Calder's big picture analysis places the BRI and China's rise in a wider spacial and temporal context; it is thus refreshing reading for considerations informed by straightforward economic thinking on a macro level. Calder occasionally does the same at the micro-level as well, for instance throughout the book he repeatedly mentions that 'debt traps' and the BRI are far from a unilateral 'tributary system' and that these pose challenges to both recipient countries and to China itself.

Readers may opt for either Calder's book or Maçães' *The Dawn of Eurasia* to understand the push and pull behind the birth of the super continent. Yet, they must complement their selection with Maçães' recent *Belt and Road*, an empirically rich and insightful overview of the BRI, its political and economic implications, and the responses it has already elicited. After all, the unveiling of the BRI has coincided with Beijing's push to secure hotly contested territorial and maritime claims, especially under Xi Jinping, ruffling the feathers of several regional states. Maçães finds that China's political reach now extends well beyond its immediate neighbourhood, down to South Asia and further west across the Eurasian and African continents.

Of note is Maçães's conclusion that we won't enter a China-dominated international or regional system, but rather one of deep pluralism. This interpretation is

2 Calder, *Super Continent,* p. 231.

exemplified by the panoply of military, economic, and narrative-based alternatives embedded in the Japan-sponsored Free and Open Indo-Pacific plan (FOIP), a strategic vision that has as many definitions as the number of countries, or indeed multilateral bodies, that endorse it. It was never lost to Japan and the United States, among the leading impresarios behind FOIP, that China's ascendance and 'going out' was a potential geopolitical game-changer in international politics. By the mid-2000s, well before the BRI, influential Japanese strategic thinkers had fleshed out comprehensive responses premised on the ideas of Alfred Mahan, Nicholas Spykman, and Halford MacKinder. My research on Japan's China policymaking under the first and second Abe administrations has traced back this point of view to Abe, the Prime Minister's Office, and key bureaucrats; these policymakers reasoned that China's reach over the Eurasian heartland would lead to world domination. Japan's 2006 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity' initiative perfectly embodies Japan's more comfortable embrace of strategy and is indispensable for understanding FOIP's genealogy; unsurprisingly the Arc orbited around China to encompass economically vibrant portions of the Eurasian landmass, especially its rimlands and other like-minded maritime powers.

Since FOIP provides a set of alternatives to the BRI, spelling out FOIP's economic and strategic narrative components (these components are also the BRI's most important and powerful parts) sheds light on the BRI and how it is understood in regional capitals. Along with an emphasis on maritime security and greater military coordination between the US, Japan, Australia, and India, FOIP rests on economic foundations. In fact, the Japanese government has been an early driving force of connectivity through grants and loans aimed at the construction of high-quality infrastructure in the region. Yet, the BRI has prompted the Japanese government to devote a substantial amount of resources to overseas infrastructure investments, either through its own agencies or via the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Abe steadily increased Japanese funding for regional infrastructure, doubling his earlier pledge in favour of $110 billion-worth of bilateral investments, and provided an additional $50 billion to the ADB. These monies would allow Japan to preserve a degree of political leverage vis-à-vis recipient countries, especially those in the immediate neighbourhood as well as other states of strategic importance for Japan. India, a rising great power with substantial demographic assets and a testy relationship with China, is the biggest recipient of Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA), making Japan India's biggest bilateral donor. And conversely, as detailed by Maçães, China's economic engagement of

South Asia excludes India by design and develops the comparative advantage of the Subcontinent's neighbours.

In passing, it is worth noting that infrastructure and influence competition among China, Japan, the United States and other states have played to the advantage of local strongmen: for example, Rodrigo Duterte has cleverly played Chinese economic pledges to extract financial concessions from Japan. In 2017, Abe promised $9 billion to Duterte over five years, with projects tailored for the development of the Philippine President's impoverished stronghold in Mindanao. As evident from this example, great power rivalry explicated by economic statecraft—rather than China's so-called 'authoritarian influence' or 'sharp power'—ought to be understood as one of the engines behind democratic retrenchment in developing countries. The same logic is at play in Hun Sen's Cambodia, democratic—if genocidal—Myanmar, Narendra Modi's India, and so on.

More recently, the United States has fleshed out its economic participation in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. Following US Secretary of State Pompeo's underwhelming offer of $113 million for the Indo-Pacific region, representatives from the Australian government and from the policy banks of Japan and the United States have inaugurated a trilateral partnership for infrastructure investment in the region, as evidenced by the Blue Dot Network, an infrastructure certification system. Japan's Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and the United States' Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), now known as the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), will coordinate infrastructure financing. Finally, the United States has just created a 'mega-OPIC', the DFC, through the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act that more than doubles its budget to $60 billion, thus allowing the new US policy bank to work hand-in-hand with the powerful JBIC, its budget being roughly $100 billion, and with other like-minded partners. It is not clear how this cooperation will work given Trump's extortionist goals, US retrenchment from ambitious free trade deals, and the understandable competition among most FOIP partners for access to profitable markets. For instance, the $10 billion in energy infrastructure from the Japan-US Strategic Energy Partnership (JUSEP), serve as an alternative to the BRI but the financing is essentially Japanese. Moreover, India's presence in these multilateral efforts should be understood, at best, as rhetorical support (e.g. in the vague Japan-India Asia-Africa Growth Corridor initiative), and India is a net recipient of Japanese economic diplomacy.

At the level of strategic narratives, FOIP should be understood as part of a counter-narrative to China's aggressive advancement into the East and South China Seas, at the military level, and the Belt and Road Initiative, at the economic level. Official declarations repeatedly emphasise the importance of free and reciprocal trade, freedom of navigation, and the rule of law. They also remind the international community that the US and its allies are committed to engaging with the broad Indo-Pacific region which spans two oceans. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy effectively acts as an alternative to China's Belt & Road Initiative through various rhetorical mechanisms. Just like the BRI, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy relies on state-led strategic narratives as a source of power.

Moreover, at the international level the Free and Open Indo-Pacific pits an open, multilateral, rules-based order against a China-dominated region; at the national level, the narrative highlights the democratic nature of its proponents against China's autocracy; and at the issue level, China's moves are inherently expansionist while the opposing camp's views are defensive. The following paragraphs contrast the American and Japanese interpretations of the concept.

First, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision refutes the notion that the US is a declining and disengaged power. On the contrary, the Trump administration has buttressed words with actions by strengthening the US military presence in the region and, to a far lesser extent, its economic presence. In the same vein, the Obama administration's Pivot to Asia, an earlier incarnation of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy, was meant to remain engaged in the region and reassure its regional friends, especially in South-East Asia, about US commitments. Washington is effectively using FOIP to disrupt Beijing's narrative on its irresistible ascendance to regional centrality. It is worth noting, however, that the US emphasises the security components of the strategy, while Japan prefers focusing on the economic ones; there's a modicum of division of labour in that regard. Actual US economic contributions to Asian development are still rather limited, mostly directed at the stabilisation of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Second, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific narrative presents the United States and its allies as peaceful, democratic players confronting an autocratic and nefarious counterpart. A clear example of this logic is the American National Security Strategy's stark language when it describes the international environment 'A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific.' Similarly, under the Trump administration, US officials have lambasted China's 'debt trap diplomacy', qualified it as a new

imperial power, and accused Beijing of 'interfering in the domestic policies and politics of the United States'. What is the purpose of these Manichean strategic narratives? The White House is—with a degree of bipartisan consensus—drumming up the resolve of domestic and international audiences and preparing them for major, and potentially divisive, policy decisions aimed at China. Thus, characterising Chinese behaviour in a negative light—such as Mike Pence's October 2018 speech at the Hudson Institute and his more recent one at the Wilson Institute—will prompt US audiences to support sustained, yet costly, strategic competition. Conversely, recent exposés on China's so-called sharp power may influence foreign countries to stray away from developing close relationships with China and Chinese businesses.

A degree of simplification in the China message is understandable, but the US would be better served by constructive language that recognises the need to work with China in the international arena and should avoid demonising Beijing. After all, as Calder and Maçães warn, the BRI *does* provide benefits to China's immediate neighbours, to the extent that most South-East Asian governments do not want to have to choose between the US and China. This is also true of states that have maritime and territorial disputes with China. They are in close proximity to a re-emergent China and are unwilling to make choices, especially an anti-China choice: ASEAN's endorsement of a constructive reading of FOIP in the summer of 2019 was reportedly pre-approved by China, via Thailand's intercession. But if the narrative becomes overly adversarial, ASEAN countries may want to distance themselves from the US. Japan has appreciated these dynamics with its earlier, failed attempt at promoting its Arc of Freedom and Prosperity that *de facto* excluded China, thus prompting ASEAN countries' unwillingness to sign up to the initiative. Also for these reasons Abe has rebranded the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy into a more inclusive vision that leaves space for cooperation with the Belt and Road Initiative. Abe's four most recent conditions for cooperation with the BRI (economic viability, transparency, openness, and fiscal sustainability) are meant to reassure ASEAN and the international community of Japan's inclusiveness, rather than to serve as a hedge against a tougher stance pressed by the US. While the underlying logic of great power politics remains—to the extent that Japan welcomes Washington's militarised Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy—the United States government would do better to take note from Tokyo on how to craft a more nuanced strategic narrative and perhaps match words of economic cooperation with deeds.

The BRI Doesn't Go to Washington

International politics specialist Jonathan Holslag's *The Silk Road Trap* emphasises the zero-sum economic logic and strategic factors behind the BRI, especially vis-à-vis EU economies. Holslag's book looks beneath the surface of China's 'win-win' rhetoric and issues an economic call to arms in Brussels and major Western European capitals. In January 2017 at Davos, in an apparent jab at Trump's 'America First' protectionism, Xi Jinping famously extolled the merits of globalisation and of China's economic contribution to global growth. Yet, China has not lived up to earlier expectations of progressive reform towards a market economy, expectations that were particularly diffuse in Western capitals during China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. On the contrary, China has climbed up the added-value chain while doubling down on its *dirigiste* economic model and taking advantage of economic openness abroad without reciprocation. European governments generally welcome China's sustained growth, through its vast reserve of talents and capital, not least because there's much to benefit from trade and investment ties with the world's second wealthiest economy. But China is in many ways no longer a developing country and needs to live up to international market economic standards on a level playing field. Chinese innovation and growth ought not to take place through forced technology transfer, the infringement of intellectual property rights, state-sanctioned predatory mergers and acquisitions, and internal market distortions against foreign competition. It is these practices and the lack of reciprocity, Holslag warns, not Chinese growth per se, that comprise a wakeup call for Europe.

Under Xi the Chinese state has made a comeback, and with a vengeance. Xi's ambitious 'Made in China 2025' industrial policy has given further proof of Beijing's *dirigiste* instincts in strategic sectors. And the BRI, along with dumping practice and cheap loans for strategic sectors may well privilege China's access to new technology and the export of its own goods, possibly fixing a whole new set of standards. For instance, the overwhelming majority of BRI contractors (89%) comes from China and opaque development banks are behind these tied loans, often to the benefit of China's national champions. Scratch the surface of Xi's 'win-win' rhetoric, and one sees that Beijing benefits greatly by a tacit 'China First' vision.

For this reason, European governments have recently pushed for boosting their defensive mechanisms against China's potentially rapacious state-led economic behaviour. In the past two years, several European governments have tightened

the screws on their Foreign Direct Investment screening regimes and, as of now, fourteen EU countries have tighter investment screening legislation. The EU has inaugurated an investment screening mechanism that allows for information sharing with other EU member states or the European Commission on incoming extra-EU investments in critical enterprises and infrastructure, such as power grids and ports. This institution mandates the exchange of information and best practice. Scarcely noticed, Italy signed up to the Belt and Road MoU *while* strengthening its FDI defences on telecommunications in a direct jab to Huawei and ZTE. Moreover, the Franco-German entente has pushed for changes in the EU's public procurement policy to allow greater reciprocity vis-à-vis China as well as changes in the EU's industrial policy, in favour of European business champions that can compete with Chinese and other foreign juggernauts. Lastly, in 2018, the European Union also came up with an Asian connectivity strategy of its own that essentially stipulates the principles for sustainable, multilateral, transparent, and open infrastructure financing that takes local needs into account. This is a jab at the Belt and Road Initiative's deficiencies, but—in contrast to the United States' confrontational approach (see below)—it provides alternatives, and reportedly acts on an inclusive logic that constructively aims to improve China's financing practices. There are pragmatic and strategic reasons to improve China's government financing: it would raise the standards of its own projects, possibly to the advantage of Western and Japanese companies. It is noteworthy that the EU has built bridges with Japan through a partnership on sustainable connectivity, of which the African continent will likely be the main target.

In short, the European Union has recently been fleshing out defensive and 'offensive' economic countermeasures aimed at China, because there is wider recognition of the challenges Holslag highlights in his study. Holslag however magnifies the challenge China presents and his faulty economic logic is the same as that impinging on current US strategic thinking. In fact, Holslag belongs squarely to the zero-sum camp, according to which China behaves essentially as a predator. 'There's no win-win partnership with China. [For] the vast majority of European countries the impact of China on their growth has been negative',[3] Holslag claims. This provocative claim is based on the very same thinking as that of Trump's economic team, according to which trade deficits at home and China's current account surpluses automatically translate into structural economic predation (see below).

3 Holslag, *The Silk Road Trap*, p. 146.

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Yet, domestic consumption has become China's leading economic engine, while exports account for less than 20 percent of the economy. What is less evident is that in the first quarter of 2018 China registered a current-account *deficit*; this was brought by a trade deficit in services, which in turn was a reflection of China's 'exports' of tourists and students, and by imports of commodities. China's ageing population will further favor more domestic consumption and higher imports. More generally, by inflating the China challenge the author loses sight of the nuance presented in Mações and Calder's analyses; as a result, China's *dirigiste* economic outreach appears too predatory, too efficient, and too unstoppable to be true. Alas, the same thinking informs US policy towards the Middle Kingdom.

The fear that a Leninist China will become a global hegemon, especially through its economic outreach, is feeding US zero-sum responses. The US government's decision to place an embargo on US technology exported to Chinese high-tech powerhouses, and the Commerce Department's recent proposal to curtail imports of technology deemed 'national security threats', or from foreign adversaries, will effectively slow down China's technological catch-up. Such measures are expected to heighten the risk of doing business with China's multinational enterprises such as Huawei, and slow down China's technological catch-up. For example, Google's Android platform is widely used on Huawei and other Chinese smartphones—the moment Android stops selling to Chinese companies and no longer allows security updates, they will have to rely on home-bred, suboptimal alternatives. Consumers from high-income countries will then shun Huawei smartphones—and suboptimal Huawei 5G for that matter—because it lacks the superior US technology. These US-led initiatives are part and parcel of Washington's 'whole-of-government' pushback. The underpinning rationale results from the convergence of two distinct zero-sum worldviews within the administration: the economic team's mercantilist concern with trade imbalances and China's 'predatory' economics, and the national security team's low tolerance of China-related risks.

Against the backdrop of an ascending, assertive, authoritarian, and repressive China, Trump's advent has coincided with a major rethink of Washington's China policy. In late 2017 the US executive branch has rearranged its foreign and security policy outlook to conform to the National Security and Defense Strategies, where China and great power competition figure highly. With time, however, the US government has become almost dogmatic in its strategic

competition. Preliminary fieldwork suggests that top US policymakers have presented the China challenge through stark narratives that may resonate in Washington DC, but sound unconvincing to friendly governments, to authoritative portions of the expert community, and, importantly, to US public opinion. The US government has acted on its zero-sum view of China. It has mischaracterised the Belt and Road Initiative as carefully engineered 'debt trap' diplomacy—a notion that has been authoritatively discredited—and has enlisted new government agencies and pressured third parties from endorsing Xi Jinping's signature project. The US government's calls for public criticism of the BRI by like-minded states, such as Japan and some of its Western European allies, have fallen on deaf ears. Public pressure against Italy's timid and symbolic embrace of the BRI is another case in point.

The US government has zero tolerance for risks involved in its economic relationship with China, because all matters Chinese are seen through thick zero-sum lenses. A preoccupation with national security and simplistic economic thinking, according to which Chinese economic gains automatically translate into US losses, are anxieties causing Washington to lose sight of a cool cost-benefit analysis; such reasoning is reflected in Holslag's account. This mirrors the decision-making process under Trump regarding China, where trade hawks and national security agencies have been over-empowered, while the bureaucratic apparatus of the Departments of Commerce and State play second fiddle. The following is a telling example of these dynamics: in spring 2019 a high-ranking official from the Pentagon suggested that the US government explore ways to further tighten the screw on its foreign investment screening mechanism and recounted the tale of a fact-finding mission to Hollywood to study China's influence on the US movie business. The image of a Department of Defense official walking down Sunset Boulevard worrying about the China-US battle for hearts and minds is indeed an unusual one and hints at the depth of America's security obsession with China. (This story may well figure in a Coen Brothers' movie on the 21st century Red Scare). In fact, if Chinese money were to embed deeply unpalatable political messages into US blockbusters, moviegoers worldwide would be the first to punish them at the box office. At worst, big Hollywood productions that eye the lucrative Chinese market eliminate the PRC's many blemishes, but Western public opinion has access to multiple channels of information beyond blockbuster movies.

Another excellent window on Washington's security-driven stance is the FBI's

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visa ban against Chinese *social* scientists responsible for collaborating with their own security apparatus. A more nuanced policy would *manage the risk*, which is arguably low considering the background of these scholars and the risible nature of property rights infringement in those fields. A more enlightened policy would also preserve influential avenues for US public diplomacy, world-class research, and higher education exports. Emphasis on defence and deterrence downplays and ultimately weakens the United States' intrinsic soft-power assets. On the contrary the ban will foster an atmosphere of resentment and deep suspicion on both sides. An earlier failed attempt by an influential Trump confidante to ban Chinese students from US universities to curb potential Chinese espionage and influence operations is proof that this administration risks throwing the baby out with the dirty bathwater.

On the economic side of the US-China equation, Trump's nationalistic economic agenda has become one of the few constants of his erratic administration, again premised on zero-sum thinking. Trump aims at adjusting US trade deficits based on the outdated mercantilistic belief that exports must exceed imports and that countries with big current account surpluses are economic 'predators'. This is profoundly mistaken thinking because, again, it downplays US strengths: the US can live with big current account imbalances—and has been in the red since 1975—thanks to its global currency. Since trade imbalances are not recognised as symptomatic of US economic vitality and high propensity to consumption, it is assumed that they must be adjusted through protectionist countermeasures and bilateral bully tactics. In fact, the US president has beaten the trade war drums and slapped tariffs and export controls on China in a purely transactional spirit for the purpose of pressuring Beijing into making concessions to the US and changing its economic practices. Since China is more dependent on exports than the US, and since the Chinese Communist Party relies on sustained economic performance to maintain domestic stability, Trump has gone 'all in', triggering a game of chicken that still promises to rock the entire global economy, no matter the likely bilateral 'deal'.

In fact, Trump's economic team is more ambitious and, from the looks of it, its goals are based on the mistaken belief that the US must keep China down to preserve its economic lead. Although it is perfectly reasonable for the US to maintain its security through primacy in science and technology, it is problematic to use state-led economic coercion and blatant protectionism, rather than competition and risk management, to enhance national technological leadership

and the country's industrial base. For instance, Peter Navarro, Director of the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, pushes for a technological and economic decoupling due to the alleged Chinese predation of a victimised US. The current US response to legitimate concerns about China's infringement on intellectual property rights, distorted market practices, and forced technology transfers is overkill; reshoring supply and assembly lines away from China, possibly all the way back into the United States, to help domestic manufacturers is bound to do more harm than good. This constant concern with the manufacturing industry and real assets, rather than the powerful US service industry, also reflects the personal backgrounds of Trump and many of the members of his team, such as former steel industry lawyer and current US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer.

Trump's 'Entity List offensive' points at the alignment of economic hawks and the national security establishment. An executive order, issued in May 2019 and a separate action by the US Department of Commerce that included Huawei and 68 affiliates in an Entity List identifying entities of national security concern, aimed at blocking goods and services from companies controlled by 'adversary governments'. While these initiatives have been eventually watered down by reprieves and exceptions, the economic logic is a maximalist one: US companies *and* foreign suppliers of goods and services with an (ill-defined) 25% of US content are at risk of incurring US sanctions if they sell their products to Chinese companies on the Entity List. If this measure goes into full swing, what the US government hasn't achieved through its global campaign to block Chinese companies from rolling out the 5G network may well come to fruition through economic coercion, thus allowing its military to operate more securely abroad. The measure would substantially weaken China's dearest national champion, Huawei, one that for the US is emblematic of China's massive market, of its economies of scale, and of unfair state protection, which is well-documented in Holslag's book. On 26 November 2019, the Department of Commerce issued further proposals for implementing the executive order, possibly banning all equipment and services provided by 'foreign adversaries' in the information and communications sector.

At any rate, US countermeasures will slow down China's technological and economic advancement by instilling diffuse fears of political risk associated with Chinese products and services in the information and communications technology sector. An economic Sword of Damocles in the form of greater

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export controls through future executive orders or another list preoccupied with restricting foundational and emerging technologies, is already rocking global supply chains.

Paradoxically, Trump's non-ideological transactional style, his mercantile goals and the upcoming US presidential election might be the only hope for halting a costly US-China technology and trade war, because Trump essentially wants to win the election through a 'deal' with Xi. Economic decoupling would further destabilise US-China relations and usher in a neo-protectionist world order. Yet, predictions are not rosy; there is a degree of bipartisan consensus between Democrats and Republicans and Xi's China seems unlikely to make significant concessions. A watered down 'deal' will not make this confrontation between world economic powers disappear. In fact, it may well escalate as hawks on both sides call for resolve.

Conclusion

In recent years, China's foreign policy and domestic politics have hardened, eliciting anxiety and dismay in Western capitals. These anxieties are more deeply felt nowadays given China's ambitious Eurasian economic outreach and its Janus-faced strategic communications, the two subjects of this review essay. However, a zero-sum confrontational approach that over-securitizes Beijing's economic and communication initiatives will do more harm than good in *both* China and the US, since many of America's economic and political strengths depend on an open world economy and its soft power assets; a degree of risk tolerance regarding China is a small price to pay for America to retain its ability to exercise its influence there. If this conflict continues in the same vein, the US approach may well become a self-fulfilling prophecy—transforming China from a rival into an enemy. Disenfranchised elites on both sides will feel victimised in the process, which will heighten tensions and exacerbate the security dilemma. US business elites, US-based area experts and US allies need a cool financial and political calculus to tackle the zero-sum thinking of Trump's economic and national security advisors to convince Washington of the merits of a more nuanced, if still clear-eyed, China policy. China's unfair trade and investment practices must be rectified and a healthy dose of economic realism is needed, but European players at the opposite end of the Eurasian landmass cannot risk imperilling the health of the open world economy in the process and looking more like China, in terms of excessive state protectionism.

Italy's engagement with the BRI in March 2019 has translated into a global Rorschach test, upon which global audiences have superimposed their dreams, expectations, suspicions, and nightmares of China onto what is essentially a tame and easily reversible framework agreement. This essay has examined the logic behind these interpretations, as discussed by Maçães, Pu, Calder, and Holslag, in an attempt to 'seek truth from facts' by disentangling the closely-knit strategic communications, economic and (geo)political components of the BRI. Many of these truths are in the eye of the beholder, which is also the reason why the BRI—and more broadly the rise of China—is easily politicised. In particular, Kent Calder adds to the body of research of Rosemary Foot, Andrew Walter, and Nicola Leveringhaus—among others—to show that China is, in important ways, still a relatively responsible actor in international society, with some notable exceptions—such as its assertiveness in the China Seas and its 'China First' distorted economic practices.

Still, the various approaches towards China and differing interpretations of the BRI depend on national interests, which ordinarily would seek to balance security with prosperity and national values. When the two are in conflict, security normally trumps prosperity, but 'maximum security' is an impossible proposition and does not sound at all inviting. The most sensible starting point for a conversation about China is to ask how best to *manage* the potential risks associated with the economic and political rise of a repressive—if, on balance, defensive—Leninist autocracy. The preservation of a favourable balance of power and meaningful collaboration with like-minded partners *together with* joint efforts in constructively shaping Chinese political and economic behaviour using sticks, carrots, and international norms, are still the best strategic options for the EU and its friends—China is not the Soviet Union. Perhaps the most important lesson here is about assessing national interests comprehensively and remembering that European states are stronger together in this age of power politics and Italy's qualified endorsement of the BRI does *not* necessarily run against intra-EU coordination. European partners should avoid over-securitising China, not least because the country should be seen as a whole. For that purpose, field experts—such as professional economists and authoritative area studies experts—and specialists from *relevant* government agencies should be closely involved in discussions and eventual responses. After all, that is how effective grand strategies or 'whole-of-government' approaches ought to function.

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WAR AND TRUTH

A Review Essay by James P. Farwell

Ukraine and the Art of Strategy
Lawrence Freedman. Oxford University Press, 2019

This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality
Peter Pomerantsev. Public Affairs, 2019

Keywords—*European Union, hybrid warfare, information operations, information warfare, Internet Research Agency, Maidan, NATO, propaganda, Putin, Russia, social media, strategic communications, Ukraine*

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In *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*,[1] Lawrence Freedman offers his take onRussian strategy in Crimea and eastern Ukraine; he also discusses Syria and comments on strategic theory. Peter Pomerantsev follows up on his fascinating jaunt of 2014 into Russian political surrealism[2] with *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*.[3] Writing vividly, Pomerantsev's book centres on how social media foment confusion and disinformation to create disruption, eroding confidence in public and private institutions and making it difficult for people to discern the truth about ideas or events. Both books merit attention.

Pomerantsev's book is a great read. He uses vivid illustrations to show how social media and disinformation are a global concern. Social media's effects vary in impact. At times they are constructive, at others perverse. Russia stands alone in this arena. Consider Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA). Heavily staffed by journalists, not intelligence officers, it has become Russia's most infamous factory for Internet disinformation. Yet exposing the purveyors of 'fake news' elicits little reaction.

Pomerantsev describes the courageous efforts of one Russian woman to discredit the IRA's operation by exposing it. She took huge risks to get out the truth, only to discover that few people cared. 'Instead of an outcry,' Pomerantsev reports, 'she found that many people, including fellow activists, just shrugged at the revelations.' Russians viewed IRA lies as part of a new normal. Anti-Putin dissenters in Odessa experienced the same futility. One point that he misses is that changing audience beliefs is difficult. Smart political campaigns don't even try. They focus on provoking emotions to channel beliefs into desired conclusions.[4] Social media can affect attitudes and opinions, but their impact can be overstated.

Pomerantsev identifies heroes and villains. In Belgrade, Srđa Popović teaches self-empowerment to overthrow despots. In Russia, bot-herder Nizhny Novgorod champions German far-right memes. In the Philippines, an enterprising Internet operator, identified as 'P', manipulated the crime issue to elect Rodrigo Duterte that nation's president and has helped to maintain his credibility. Philippines journalist Maria Ressa stands out bravely with her news website *Rappler* and her

1 Lawrence Freeman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
2 Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible* (London: Public Affairs, 2014).
3 Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).
4 Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973).

exposé of Duterte's excesses. She's a true heroine. We need more like her. Her courage sets an example.

Pomerantsev echoes cyber expert Evgeny Morozov[5] who demonstrated that the Internet helps dictators as well as democrats. Being a tyrant doesn't make you stupid. Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Bahrain employ the Internet to identify dissidents and suppress dissent, notably by spinning conspiracy theories that demonise their opponents.

These days, 'conspiracy theory replaces ideology with a mix of self-pity, paranoia, self-importance and entertainment'.[6] Authoritarians use conspiracies to explain events, especially where the facts may be obscure to an uninformed public, filling in gaps by offering absurd connections of disparate items to fabricate a kaleidoscope of falsehood. Dmitry Kiselev, an influential Russian presenter gifted at spinning tall tales, invokes an ingenious rhetorical catchphrase to connect unrelated dots in propounding propaganda as truth: 'A coincidence—I don't think so!'[7] Kiselev weaves ridiculous narratives into plausible tall tales. Give the Devil his credit—Kiselev and his confederates elevate 'fake news' to high political art. Authoritarians and their supporters, Pomerantsev argues, obscure truth by creating 'white noise'. They flood their audiences with a tidal wave of information that renders them numb, cynical, and unable to assess news reports or information intelligently.

Actually, matters may be less dire. Pro-Erdoğan Turkey columnists pummel his critics. Yet he's not all-powerful. Municipal elections handed him his political head. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen, ostensibly to thwart Iran from turning the Houthis into terrorists. Its clumsy propaganda cannot conceal the starvation and disease—arguably war crimes —that its intervention has engendered.

Pomerantsev raises a cogent point about the chaos that disinformation and 'fake news' create. The value of his book lies in the examples he cites. There's no easy counter to fake news. Unsurprisingly, he is short on solutions. He argues that people need to read books and educate themselves. The requirement for taking responsibility to educate ourselves is a powerful point. Freedom can be easily lost if one fails to stand up for it. Nations that have won hard-earned

5 Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).
6 Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda*, p. 48.
7 Ibid.

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freedom in the wake of the Cold War know a thing or two about this challenge. So do the brave protestors in Hong Kong who demand that Beijing respect its legal obligations, entered into with the United Kingdom by treaty, to honour democracy in that city.

Political leaders and an *informed*, independent media in the West must provide clarity to political debate. In today's polarised environment, this has become a shaky proposition. The US news media used to report the news. Today they find themselves lost in a wilderness of partisan politics. They share the blame for confusion, lack of solid information, and disruption. Talk radio and talk television pass off inflammatory commentary as news to viewers tuning in mainly to confirm their prejudices or beliefs, not to get the low-down on facts. It's sad. Things are likely to change, at least in the West, only if citizens call out politicians and the media.

Strategic Communications, Competing Narratives, and Ukraine

The core of Freedman's book is his analysis of Ukraine's civil war. Strategic communications is central to what transpired. There's nothing new about this tool. From ancient times, it has played a key role in armed conflict. Scipio Aemilianus used it through brutal action to subdue Spanish dissent.[8] Napoleon's Italian campaign can be viewed as an exercise in strategic communications, one that he exploited to gain power in France. Napoleon capitalised on the power of newspapers and social networks, art, poetry, personal appearances, and other information tactics, to gain power as First Consul.[9] George Washington used false propaganda during the American Revolutionary War to discredit the British.[10]

In that war, the gold medal for the use of strategic communications goes to Lt Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis. He surrendered at Yorktown, in the face of overwhelming superiority in forces, to Washington and Lafayette. Like any smart commander, Cornwallis knew when to fold. But while American history has been unkind to his reputation, Cornwallis was an exceptional commander, a brilliant strategist, and a ferocious tactician.

8 Alvin H. Bernstein, 'The strategy of a warrior-state: Rome and the wars against Carthage, 264–201 B.C.', in W. Murray, M. Knox, & A. Bernstein (eds), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 63.
9 James P. Farwell, *Persuasion & Power* (Washington: Georgetown U. Press, 2012), p. 67.
10 Ibid., p. 66.

Commanding British forces in Virginia, he offered to free the slaves, who made up 40% of the state's population. Half of them defected, providing intelligence and other support. Cornwallis knocked the Colonialists on their back heel. Cornwallis's jealous superior, Sir Henry Clinton, forced Cornwallis to back down, and that tactic degenerated organisationally. Had the British pursued this strategy in Virginia and elsewhere with discipline, vigour, and focus, they might have suppressed the Revolution, even though a majority of Colonials supported independence.[11]

In the 20th century, Vladimir Lenin used movies on freight trains to shore up his revolution. William Donovan's OSS operatives adroitly used information warfare in carrying out their missions.[12] Strategic communications campaigns were a characteristic of the Vietnam War and of the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Pomerantsev points out that in Ukraine, the narratives of each side drove military action. Russia propounded the narrative that separation produces civil war and chaos. Kyiv argued that it leads to misery. Both sides calibrated their military action to support their narratives. Both authors raise the topic of 'hybrid warfare' in Russia, a complex topic that has engendered confusion. Many argue that Ukraine was a test-case for Russian hybrid warfare.[13]

Actually, Russia's military does not recognise the notion of hybrid warfare.[14] Although its political and academic elite does invoke the term, as *gibridnaja vojna*, and applies it to describe colour revolutions. The Russian understanding is distinct from Western interpretations. It corresponds to the definition of strategic communications that I offered in *Persuasion & Power*: 'the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to mould or influence the attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives or a defined end-state'.[15]

11 Gregory J.W. Urwin, 'Virginia Campaign Threatened the Revolution in Virginia', in R.G. Davis (ed.), *The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare: Selected Papers from the 2007 Conference of Army Historians* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2008).
12 Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan*, (New York: Free Press, 2011).
13 L. Todd Wood, 'Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine', *Washington Times*, 19 November 2018;
Noah Peterson, 'Russia Field-Tested Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine. Why That Cyberthreat Matters for U.S.', *The Daily Signal,* 27 October 2017.
14 Ofer Fridman, 'A War of Definitions: Hybridity in Russia and the West', in Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, and James C. Pierce (eds), *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2019) p. 73, and Ofer Fridman, 'On the "Gerasimov Doctrine": Why the West Fails to Beat Russia to the Punch', *Prism*, Vol. 8, № 2 (2019).
15 Farwell, *Persuasion & Power*, p. xviii–xix.

Russian military officers view *gibridnaja vojna* as an American gambit, not a Russian doctrine.[16] Russians view it as the 'use of Western economic and soft power to bring about political change through covert and deniable means'.[17] Here emerges a critical distinction between Russian and Western notions of warfare. In Ofer Fridman's words, 'the West thinks of war in binary terms, as a conflict between defined actors for a temporary duration that has a beginning and an end. Russians think about it differently. They see the whole history of international relations as one eternal war.'[18]

Freedman sees Putin's operations and actions as tactical. Mikhail Zygar concurs that 'there was no concrete plan'.[19] Putin's Defence Minister, Sergey Shoygu, cautioned against intervention. Advisers expressed concern about whether to keep Crimea *de jure* independent while *de facto* turning it into a proxy state. Putin elected to intervene and annex Crimea. Helpfully, most Crimeans (the ethnic Russians, but not the minority Tatars and Ukrainians) did, in fact, identify with Russia. While Freedman's description of events is accurate as far as it goes, his analysis misses the mark. Putin operated tactically. But the key point is that Russian tactics stemmed from a strategic view towards Ukraine, the US, and NATO. One must understand Putin's actions through that view.

Putin views the West as hostile to Russia. He believes it works continuously to oust him. The West views 'colour revolutions' such as those in Ukraine (Orange), Georgia (Rose), Kuwait (Blue), Yugoslavia (Bulldozer), Lebanon (Cedar), Kyrgyzstan (Tulip and Melon), Belarus (Jeans), Moldova (Grape), and Iran (Green), as the expression of individual citizens clamouring for freedom. Putin and his coteries hold the opposite view.

Georgy Filimonov and other Russian writers[20] state that, for Russia, *colour revolution* 'refers to specific techniques intended to stage a coup d'état and

16 Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political Warfare*, (New York: Routledge, 2019) p. 28.
17 Ibid., p. 18.
18 Author's interview with Ofer Fridman, Director of Operations in the King's Centre for Strategic Communications and Lecturer in the Department of War Studies at King's College, University of London. An Israeli citizen, Russian by birth, who served for fifteen years in the Israel Defense Force.
19 Ibid
20 Georgy Filimonov, 'The Color Revolutions in the Context of Hybrid Wars', in Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, and James C. Pearce (eds), *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2019), pp. 25, 33; Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Ofer Fridman, *Russian Hybrid Warfare*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Galeotti, *Russian Political Warfare*. All of these scholars delve deeply into the complex views offered by Russian academic, political, and military leaders over the last century. These scholars don't always agree, but their fine scholarship and interpretations of how Russians have and do view the West provide invaluable contributions to understanding East-West relations.

establish external control over the political situation in a targeted economy'.[21] Filimonov details the stages that define such revolutions. Russians believe that the US and its allies have stage-managed these revolutions behind the scenes.

Some Western experts on Russia, including George Beebe, citing the Armenian Revolution in 2018, argue that Putin does not object to democratic movements or popular protests per se. He opposes only the rise of anti-Russian governments on Russia's periphery, especially those intent on joining NATO.[22] He argues cogently for his views, but on this point a competing school of thought argues equally cogently.

Putin's strategic communications on Ukraine merits a close look. In the propaganda film, *Crimea: The Road Home*,[23] he puts out the narrative that the US stage-managed the Maidan Revolution to subvert and oust his regime. The film depicts Putin as a statesman, guided by reason, struggling to understand and to do right by Russian ethnic residents in Crimea. In this telling, Russian intervention played second fiddle to bolstering peace-loving Crimeans, with whose young children Russian special operators in unmarked uniforms shared chocolate. The film's narrative depicts Russia's patriotism, virtue, legality, and courage in the face of a determined foe aligned with terrorists.

Russian strategic communications touted a calibrated use of force deployed to *defend* Russians whose safety Kyiv and the US were endangering. This posture is not novel. Mark Galeotti points out that a 'recurring theme in Russian official and unofficial statements is the belief that their country has been belittled and beaten down by the West', and that this is a 'genuinely held view within a significant fraction of the political and especially security elite, most notably Vladimir Putin and his allies'.[24]

Here emerges another dimension in Putin's strategic communications, which he adroitly propagated. Putin blasted 'our Western partners, led by the United States of America', for ignoring international law in favour of 'the rule of the gun. They have come to believe…that they can decide the destinies of the world,

21 Filimonov, 'The Color Revolutions', p. 33.
22 George Beebe, *The Russia Trap: How Our Shadow War with Russia Could Spiral into Nuclear Catastrophe* (Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2019).
23 *The Road Home,* Russian documentary film on Crimea by Andrey Kondrashov featuring interviews with Putin. It first aired on Russian TV channel Rossiya24 and was republished on YouTube by Russia Insight.
24 Galeotti, *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 16–17.

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that only they can ever be right.'[25] Putin's use of 'partners' is, as Ofer Fridman points out, 'a well structured play of words':

> In Russian, the word 'partner' can be used in two different contexts. The first is similar to English as a synonym to associate, ally, etc. The second is as a synonym to opponent, but in a highly regulated, gentlemanly competitive game (in which the rules of participation are more important than the outcome). In English you can also use it, like 'a chess partner'. In Russian, however, it is much more prevalent, you can say 'partner in wrestling' and even 'partner in duel'—the question is what is more important, to play the game by the rules (then it will be partner), to wrestle or to fight for life (then it will be opponent/adversary/enemy).
>
> So, when Putin says 'our Western partners' he doesn't mean 'our associates' or 'our allies', he actually implies two things: (i) Russia and the West are opponents, but (ii) Russia wants to manage its contradictions with the West in a very civilised gentlemanly way, when following the rules is as (or even more) important as the outcome.[26]

Putin's choice of the word 'partners'—he invokes it frequently in reference to the West—suggests restraint and the intention of avoiding military escalation. It's about competition for influence, not war. Western skeptics gag at that, as well as at Russian charges that the US or NATO staged the colour revolutions or aim to overthrow Putin. They note that President Barack Obama—whom Putin neither trusted nor respected—took pains to assure Putin that the US was not trying to overthrow his government.

Putin skeptics argue that hatred for the West consumes him. In their view, Putin is dissembling to mask an ambition to revive the Soviet Union. They treat Russian efforts to sow discontent, disruption, and distrust in social and political institutions, as well as election meddling, as proof of such ambition.

25 'Address of the President of the Russian Federation', 18 March 2014, cited also by Galeotti at p. 17.
26 Author's interview with Ofer Fridman, 23 October 2019.

The EU proved blind. NATO and the US also misread Putin. Putin had long cautioned that Russia viewed Ukraine as part of its vital sphere of interests.[27] He had signalled that making Ukraine part of NATO would cross a red line. Interestingly, he did not oppose Ukraine becoming an EU Associate Member, mainly cautioning that Ukraine would pay a stiff price as Russia terminated discounts on the sale natural gas. Nor did he oppose an agreement for new elections at the end of 2014 that likely would have produced a pro-Western President. Western leaders ignored those signals.

Russia and the West mirrored one another—each projecting its own motives, intentions, strategies, and tactics onto the other, and each assuming that the other side thought and would act as it itself does. Putin also misread how the West would respond. Freedman's Ukraine analysis merited strong analysis of Russia's strategic view and how this affected its actions.

Journalists such as Mikhail Zygar, who have first-hand knowledge of Putin and his inner circle, have reported on Putin's viewpoint, the conflicting advice he received, and the action he approved.[28] Putin revealed his attitude towards Western leaders in advising colleagues to watch the TV series, *House of Cards*, a Washington-based political soap opera about unbridled ambition, murder, and betrayal. Evidently, he felt the series accurately depicted Western politicians as scoundrels whose words about values and human rights are hypocritical nonsense.[29] He may have a point, but the sensibility isn't productive.

Putin is careful about his strategic communications. At every turn, he articulated a white-washed narrative that praised Crimeans—two-thirds of them ethnic Russians—for patriotically seeking to be annexed by the Motherland. He presented himself as a champion for peace and a statesman guided by reason.[30] He kept a straight face as he played fast and loose with the facts. Consider the role that Russian operators played in Crimea.

When Crimean Tartars and Crimean Russians staged competing rallies outside the Supreme Council building on 26 February, Russia's defence minister sent in

27 Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, Mr. Putin (Washington: Brookings, 2013), Kindle Loc. 1923, 4611, 4847, 4923 6660/12753
28 Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men,* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), p. 275–77.
29 Ibid., p. 271–72.
30 Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2015), Kindle Loc. 1831/12753. They write: 'A frequent refrain of Russian officials and Kremlin-connected commentators was that "Vladimir Putin is more reasonable than 99% of Russians".' What is an unreasonable Russian like?

paratroopers to carry out a night-time seizure of the building and to close the airport. In the meantime, FSB and GRU operators had shown up to organise an emergency session of parliament to elect a new, pro-Russian prime minister. When parliamentarians refused to attend, they were forced to show up.[31] Putin's propaganda film, *Crimea: The Road Home,* neatly obscures these facts in the interest of glorifying peace-loving, self-starting Crimeans.

Putin does not use the term *lawfare,* integral to China's Three Warfares concept of rooting its actions in dubious constructions of what it deems to be legal principles. But he does carefully encase Russian actions in legality. He said—incorrectly—that a treaty with Ukraine allowed Russia to station 20,000 troops in Crimea (actually it was 25,000). He insisted in the film that Russia respected that limit. Zygar calls him out. He puts the number close to 46,000.[32] Accession to the Russian Federation required satisfaction of legal formalities. In theory, Ukraine had to consent to such action. That being impossible, Russia had Crimea's Duma pass a law that authorised annexation upon voter approval by referendum. The referendum took place on 16 March 2014.

Back home, Putin secured Russian parliamentary approval for his plan. On 1 March 2014, in a well written speech, he formally asked the Federal Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, for permission to deploy Russia's armed forces outside the country. It was all a matter of appearances. Putin is uncommonly articulate in formal and extemporaneous discourse, a key strength in his strategic communications. Zygar points out that while the Constitution required such permission, no previous Russian President had bothered to request it.[33] Of course, the vote authorising action was unanimous. These actions affected what Russia did in Ukraine, the limits it imposed on its actions and its operations. I wish Freedman had explored the implications of these actions of Putin.

Freedman misses another key point in failing to address what pressure the US tried to exert. On 1 March 2014, President Barack Obama and Putin spoke by phone. Obama threatened to boycott the upcoming G8 summit in Sochi. Putin shrugged off that threat. What Obama failed to do was warn Putin that annexing Crimea would produce tough economic sanctions, a response that Putin did not

31 Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men,* p. 277–78.
32 Ibid., p. 278.
33 Ibid., p. 295.

shrug off. Apparently, their imposition shocked him. But Obama waited until *after* the damage was done, in a referendum on 16 March, to act. Obama's obtuse strategic communications misled Putin. What action Putin might have taken had he read US strategic communications correctly, or had Obama been clearer, is speculation.[34] History does not reveal its alternatives. It's a lesson on the need to understand an adversary's messaging.

Errors by the parties in misreading one another riddle the Ukraine conflict. For years, Putin had cautioned that it viewed Ukraine as part of its vital sphere of interests, and that efforts to make it a part of NATO would provoke a strong response.[35] Alert foresight and prudent action by the EU and the West might have avoided the ensuing conflict.

Yanukovych was no hero. He was despotic. He was a Putin proxy. He enriched himself at the expense of everyday Ukrainians. He ran an incompetent, corrupt regime. Still, he was the legitimately elected President. He would have lost the December 2014 elections, just months away from the date of his flight from Kyiv. Putin was prepared to accept that result and Ukraine associate membership in EU, as long as it did not open the door to joining NATO. Yet no effective effort was made to persuade protestors to bide their time.

Whether or not ousting Yanukovych was morally and politically justified, unfolding events outraged Putin and triggered a chaotic, unproductive conflict. Caught off guard when Putin acted, there's no evidence the US or the West looked over the horizon to deal with the knock-on consequences.

Even after Russia acted, the West seemed tone deaf to Putin's signals. Russia limited its operations in Crimea. It denied an official presence. Its special operators wore unmarked uniforms. They behaved peacefully. They were polite, if firm. The gambit fooled no one. Nor was it intended to. Putin seemed to be signalling that he wanted to avoid creating a state of war. Russian success required military force. But its adroit use of information warfare in tandem with limited kinetic operations defined its approach in Crimea, and in eastern Ukraine.

Freedman acknowledges that political turmoil in Ukraine crossed a Russian red line. He rightly criticises the European Union's club-footed effort to force

34 Ibid., p. 282–83.
35 Andrew Osborne, 'Putin warns NATO against closer ties with Ukraine and Georgia', *Reuters*, 19 July 2018.

Ukraine to separate itself from Russia. He correctly observes that both the EU and Russia were unwise to demand that Ukraine choose between them. That analysis is fine. But his analysis of the EU role, its strategic view, and its actions, would benefit from greater depth.

Putin lacks the dictatorial power of Josef Stalin. His actions bespeak a leader who views his grip on popular approval as tentative. To deal with that, he adopts multiple poses that enable Russians to identify with him and to value his leadership. His strategic communications pitches him as 'everything from a big game hunter and conservationist to scuba diver to biker—even nightclub crooner'.[36] He is politician as performance artist. His communication suggests he is 'the ultimate Russian action man, capable of dealing with every eventuality'.[37] The performances aim to unify Russians around him. Strategic communications to external audiences aims also to satisfy domestic audiences.

How successful was Russia's intervention in Ukraine?

Freedman and Pomerantsev argue from different perspectives. Pomerantsev focuses on Russian narratives. Russian action sought plausible deniability to avoid responsibility or provoking a reaction that defined that action as creating a state of war. Freedman writes that Putin failed to achieve the shock value of a bold move and miscalculated how events would play out. A better view may be that he wanted the world to see and understand what Russia was doing and why, and the consequences of a colour revolution.

Freedman seems to feel that for Putin, success entailed driving Ukraine away from the EU. Yet most would agree that his greater concern was NATO. Freedman gets Putin's strategic miscalculation in eastern Ukraine right. Putin seems to have expected more popular support and the emergence of more and better pro-Russian local leaders. Russian action has damaged Russia's standing within the international community. It triggered sanctions. Freedman argues that at 'the core of the Russia-Ukraine conflict was a struggle over territory'. Narrowly, he's correct. But assessing the incursion through a broader strategic lens, Putin is achieving a vital goal. The miserable stalemate advances his narrative that colour revolutions produce violence, hostility, deprivation, anger, misery, and chaos. The stalemate in eastern Ukraine is a poster child for that narrative.

36 Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, Kindle Loc. 333/12753
37 Ibid., Kindle Loc. 354/12753.

It bears stressing: successful strategy requires a clear-sighted comprehension of how all stakeholders view a strategic situation. Sun Tzu is celebrated for his saying:

> If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.[38]

While some of my observations differ from Freedman's, I still recommend his book. It is well written. He understands the nature of strategy (although perhaps not that of Putin). His discussion of strategy is helpful, clear, and concise. Warfare is often ambiguous in what ignores and drives it. Freedman merits credit for his illuminating thoughts on strategy and the book is worth a close read.

38 Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Lionel Giles, (trans.), (Amazon Classics, 2017), p. 6. Ofer Fridman makes the same point in his insightful discussion of Western misinterpretations of the statements made by Russian Chief of the General Staff, Army General Valery Gerasimov on the notion of hybrid warfare. Fridman, 'On the "Gerasimov Doctrine"'.

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THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: MEASUREMENT OF EFFECT

A Review Essay by Gary Buck

The Book of Why
Judea Pearl, Dana Mackenzie. Basic Books, 2018

Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World
Alnoor Ebrahim. Stanford Business Books, 2019

Keywords—*Measurement of Effect, causality, strategic communications, information operations, assessment strategy*

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Introduction

Measuring effect is a little like obeying the speed limit when driving; everyone agrees in public that it's a good idea, but no one seems to do it. I am not convinced it is as hard as it seems. As a practitioner of PSYOPs, Information Operations, and Strategic Communications for the last twenty years, both in military and civilian capacities, I have thought long and hard about the issue. Reading two excellent books on the subject has prompted me to re-engage with it. *The Book of Why,* by Judea Pearl and Dana Mackenzie, seeks to debunk the idea that it is too difficult to attribute causality when measuring effect. Alnoor Ebrahim's *Measuring Social Change: Performance and Accountability in a Complex World* also examines this issue, along with various other questions, such as whether to measure goals in the short or long term. In this, I hope to broaden the discussion around the state of play of Measurement of Effect (MoE). I refer to these authors when considering which objectives to measure and when to measure them. I also address the issue of attributing causality to communication campaigns and conclude by describing an approach to MoE, currently under development, that I believe will allow us to both qualitatively and quantitatively assess the impact of context on campaign outcomes.

To structure this exploration, I shall employ Rudyard Kipling's 'six honest serving men'—*What and Why and When and How and Where and Who*—to ask the following questions:

Why should we measure effect? *What* should we measure? *When* should we undertake measurement? *Whom* should we measure? *Where* should we measure? *How* do we know we've had an effect?

In each instance I shall address points of received wisdom, so often cited with regard to Measures of Effect, which I am not convinced withstand detailed scrutiny. Specifically, I shall address the following claims:

- MoE is only or primarily about evaluation
- Campaign activity is reported by activity type
- Evaluation is about big studies that have a midline and an endline assessment

- Longitudinal studies are the only or best study design
- It is too difficult to measure online activity
- Statistical significance is both a necessary and sufficient condition
- It is impossible to attribute causality

These are big issues and I have attempted to be provocative to stimulate what I hope is a useful and informative debate.

Why measure effect?

The first and perhaps most fundamental question to be addressed is why should we be measuring effect? This answer also speaks to the first point of received wisdom: 'MoE is about evaluation.' We obviously conduct measures of effect to assess the outcomes from our campaigns. However, the thinking often stops there—too often MoE is seen as a process that occurs at the end of (and possibly midway through) a campaign to justify actions by showing some effect being achieved on the ground.

There are two issues on this point. First, we should be trying to extend our thinking in terms of justifying and assessing the Return on Investment (ROI) from campaigns. This is more than merely justifying actions by pointing to some effect being achieved on the ground. Those involved in measuring effect should also factor in the cost of conducting the activity as well as accord some value to the benefit the effect delivers.

The second reason to measure effect—and one often overlooked—is to test and adjust. To determine the extent to which we are making progress towards achieving the desired outcome, we should measure effect at different points during the campaign. By doing so we can both demonstrate incremental progress towards the end state and identify early what isn't working and take corrective action. When we look under the bonnet of a campaign to see what is happening, it is helpful to have a model against which to structure our thinking. As a starting point, we can turn to a model that should be familiar to most practitioners and customers of Information Operations—the OODA Loop (Figure 1 below).

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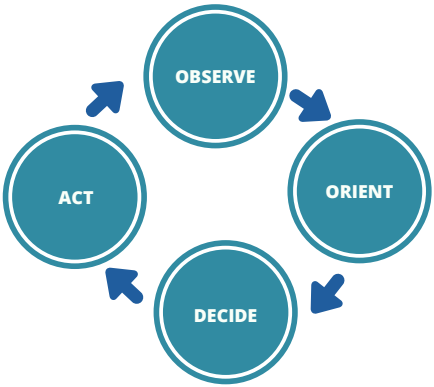

Figure 1. The OODA Loop

The OODA Loop is a decision-making model developed by USAF Colonel John Boyd, who saw the process as a cycle involving four steps: Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. Boyd's model provides a starting point for assessing a target audience's (TA) progress towards a desired effect.

At each stage of the loop we use a specific type of measurement to assess progress regarding a key objective in the process.

Once we make a baseline assessment of the target audience and deliver the campaign message, the three key objectives around which we can build our MoE framework are:

- *knowledge transfer*—the extent to which the TA is aware of the desired behaviour
- *attitudinal shift*—the extent to which the TA believes it is correct to engage in the desired behaviour
- *behavioural change*—the extent to which the TA actually engages in the desired behaviour

Considering Measurement of Effect through the lens of the OODA Loop means we can structure our assessment around the changes in *knowledge*, *attitudes*, and *behaviours* (KAB) the TA will need to make if we are to achieve the desired effect. Breaking down the desired outcome of the campaign into specific objectives at each stage allows us to define the content of a measurement framework.

OODA Loop stage	Key objective	Measure of Effect
Observe	Message Exposure	Performance (MoP)
Orient	Knowledge transfer	Understanding (MoU)
Decide	Attitudinal shift	Outtake (MoO)
Act	Behavioural change	Impact (MoI)

What should we measure?

By thinking about the behavioural change process in terms of the OODA Loop, we can answer the question: what should we be measuring? Undertaking an assessment at each stage of the loop gives us four different Measurements of Effect:

- Observe—Measure of Performance (MoP)
- Orient—Measure of Understanding (MoU)
- Decide—Measure of Outtake (MoO)
- Act—Measure of Impact (MoI)

Measures of Performance (MoP) show the extent to which the TA has been exposed to the message or campaign and has actually perceived it. These measures are relatively simple to collect (and, unfortunately, are often mistaken for Measures of Effect in their own right). Measuring performance allows us to demonstrate progress in the early stages of a campaign—we can show that we have reached the TA. If we are not seeing an effect, we must determine the cause—has the TA not been reached and, if so, why?

MoP's should be familiar to everyone. Typically, MoP's are reported and included in the MoE analysis on the basis of the nature of the output, i.e. x number of TV commercials aired, y number of impressions on social media. The problem is that it makes the analysis more difficult in that it is hard to equate campaign activity with outcomes. I would argue that rather than reporting MoP's at the

overall level, campaign activity should be reported thematically against objectives. It then becomes possible to tack the impact of greater activity against different objectives. In this way, the evaluative comparison can be made in a more direct fashion and it becomes easier to assess what objectives the Target Audience has been exposed to.

Assuming we have reached the TA sufficiently at the Observe stage, and following the OODA Loop round, we can assess the extent to which the exposed members of the TA have understood the message at the Orient stage. Measures of Understanding (MoU) are essentially about the transfer of knowledge from sender to recipient. If the target hasn't received the message and understood it, it will not be processed correctly. Again, measuring at this point can demonstrate further progress and determine if there is a problem with comprehension of the message.

Continuing the cycle, Measures of Outtake (MoO) assess how far the TA has decided to act on the information contained in the message. The decision that is reached involves, to a greater or lesser extent, a shift in stance regarding the issue in question. Thus, MoO measures shifts in attitudes. Measuring at this point provides further demonstration of progress and can identify problems—namely, has the mindset of TA shifted in the right direction? Assuming it has, the final step is for the TA to change its behaviour and to act in line with the desired outcome. This is the impact that we should be seeking to achieve and so the actual desired behavioural change can best be measured with Measures of Impact. This is our final, evaluative assessment.

Using this structure, we can both conduct evaluative assessments and demonstrate progress towards the desired objectives. And, crucially, this structure allows us to diagnose problems along the way. Understanding why we should measure effect helps us understand how often we should measure, and that takes us to the next question: when should we be measuring?

When should we measure?

The implication of measuring effect to demonstrate the progress of a campaign or test and adjust its direction is that it must be assessed early and regularly.

This is where the dictum 'fail fast' is often applied. Use this phrase with senior officers in the military or account managers in a civilian agency and they turn pale, spluttering about not wanting to fail. I think the term misses the point. A much better phrase would be 'learn quickly'; you don't necessarily need to fail to learn valuable lessons. Learn quickly better encapsulates the notion that we need to measure early and often throughout the lifetime of a campaign.

This point addresses one of the themes Ebrahim discusses in *Measuring Social Change*. He presents a contingency framework for assessment comprised of four different measurement strategies (niche, emergent, integrated, ecosystem) that he argues should be adopted under different circumstances (low uncertainty/low control, high uncertainty/low control, low uncertainty/high control, and high uncertainty/high control, respectively). The choice of strategy is driven by the degree of certainty one has about the causal relationship between campaign activities and intended outcomes, and the ability to control those outcomes. A key point he makes is that under circumstances of high uncertainty and low control, which is the case for most strategic communications campaigns, it is preferable to measure in the short-term as high uncertainty about cause-effect makes it difficult to understand the best course of action for achieving desired outcomes.

Ebrahim argues for flexibility. We need agility in our approach to assessment. Measuring early and often can provide crucial new information and make it possible to readjust the course of the campaign. This refutes the next point of received wisdom, that 'evaluation is all about big studies that have a midline and an endline assessment'. Comprehensive assessment once or twice in a big campaign does not provide the agility needed to make best use of the assessment process. Although these large-scale assessments are important, there is also a need for more frequent assessments of smaller samples that provide quicker feedback. I agree with a colleague's assertion that an: 'N of 40 gives you 80% of the answer'. It is at this figure that an unbiased sample begins to approximate a normal population (and thus begins to lend itself to the assumptions about distribution of error upon which statistical testing is based). Using smaller sample sizes is, in a way, more rigorous in that larger (more meaningful) effects must be demonstrated for them to be statistically significant. I am not suggesting that all sample sizes should contain only 40 subjects. Should be used smaller samples to produce more frequent assessments

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to provide the agility necessary to learn quickly and respond flexibly in low control contexts. I will return to the issue of statistical significance later.

Another reason why measuring more frequently makes sense is the high reliance on social media within populations and the increasing use of online platforms to deliver digital content within influence campaigns. The 'always-on' media environment, within which we are measuring messaging, is a rapidly changing context. Therefore, we need quicker assessments to keep pace and get inside the TA's OODA Loop.

We do not have the luxury of being able to conduct large-scale baseline, midline, and endline assessments spread months apart. The environment is changing too quickly. Any time gap between assessments leaves room for circumstances and events to change that significantly impact a target audience and thus confuse the picture. Greater access to information and a rapidly changing media environment pose challenges that can be answered by more frequent assessment and, possibly, by changing whom we assess.

Whom should we measure?

I would like to challenge the default setting for measurement approaches—the longitudinal study. This is the approach recommended in the US Department of Defense (DoD) handbook on measurement, but I suspect it is too restrictive and does not correspond to the reality on the ground.

I propose a flexible approach to study design and making use of Quasi-Experimental Designs where we measure a cross-section of samples exposed and not exposed to our message. Because measurements take place at the same time, we can form judgements about the effectiveness of a campaign with greater speed, allowing us to 'learn quickly'. Because there is no intervening time period, making more direct comparisons reduces the potential impact of confounding events or variables. The difficulty arises with finding a suitable comparison group. But provided samples are matched across relevant demographic factors this should not pose a problem. Going one stage further, adopting a 'mixed method' strategy—combining a multiple sample (exposed/non-exposed) approach with a

longitudinal design—means we could track changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of the exposed TA against the control group across time as well.

The dynamic nature of the media environment, especially the pace of audience reaction on social media, demands greater agility around how often and at which stages to measure. Target audiences' use of social media requires greater consideration when measuring the effectiveness of campaigns.

Where should we measure?

A conventional wisdom is the perception that it is too difficult to measure effect online. However, given that a great deal of campaign activity is delivered online and audiences spend much of their time engaging with this space, it is important to assess effect in this domain. Problems centre on using automated sentiment analysis. Social media analytical tools are often criticised for not being able to identify and factor in sarcasm and irony. This adds up to a lack of assessment in the online space when we should also be measuring effect here.

One approach to measuring effect online is to measure shifts in narratives used by a target audience in relation to the campaign theme. The TA can be members of the public in the Area of Operations or, indeed, the Adversary. This approach means viewing a shift in narrative as an instance of behavioural change—the TA has changed its behaviour and shifted the narrative it uses in the online domain. To achieve this, we need to break down the narrative into more measurable units; namely, its component parts:

- *Narrative*—the overarching position or explanation stated by the target audience
- *Themes*—key points or topic areas that, when combined, make up the overall narrative
- *Stories*—specific events or accounts used by the TA to illustrate the themes being discussed

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Breaking down the narrative in this manner, then measuring changes at the story level, would make an assessment more robust and easier to conduct. Shifts at the story level could then be assessed along two dimensions: change in topic and change in sentiment. For example, a Strategic Communications campaign might be focused on highlighting the desirability of its target audience engaging in community activities as a way of fostering a return to normalcy after a period of conflict. If members of the TA who had been exposed to the campaign message began discussing security concerns less frequently and instead started to relate stories about getting involved in community activities, they could be assessed as having shifted their narrative in line with the campaign objective. This would be a shift in topic. Shift in sentiment can also be used as a measure of effect. For example, a shift from being against the unification of a nation to being open to the concept could be assessed as a measure of effect.

It is possible to measure effect online. Indeed, any measurement framework should include both offline and online assessment. Regardless of where measurement takes place, it is vital to determine if there has been an effect and the extent to which a campaign was responsible.

How do we know we've had an effect?

I've left the biggest and perhaps trickiest issue until last. This subject is discussed in Ebrahim's *Measuring Social Change* and forms the core theme of Pearl and Mackenzie's *The Book of Why*. There are two issues of interest: the focus on statistical significance and the assumption that it is impossible to attribute causality.

Assessment studies typically identify and report on results that are statistically significant. This is right and proper. If a result is not statistically significant there is an unacceptable chance—greater than 5% probability—that it might have occurred through an error in the measurement process. More specifically that the sample is not representative of the population as a whole and, if another sample were taken, it might yield a different result. Problems arise when a statistically significant result is taken to be a meaningful result; this is not necessarily the case. A result may be significant statistically but not tell us anything meaningful. This is because the calculations used to estimate statistical

significance are largely dependent on sample size. The greater the sample size the smaller the effect (the difference between two groups on an opinion survey question, for example) required for the result to be statistically significant.

It is important to look not only at the significance level, but at the meaningfulness of the result. We should not confuse significant with meaningful. Statistical significance is a necessary but insufficient condition for reporting a result; what does the result tell us about the impact of our campaign? Have we made clear progress towards the desired end state? In other words, have we seen a real effect?

Even if we do see an effect, perhaps the most difficult question to answer is what caused it. Was it our campaign? Was it outside factors? Both? How do we attribute causality? The received wisdom is that we can't attribute causality to a campaign. I believe we can.

Pearl and Mackenzie introduce a number of useful concepts when considering this issue, such as the Ladder of Causation and the use of causal diagrams to map the flow of causality. Their ideas are useful and stimulating. However, I would like to come at this from a different perspective. To answer the problem of causality, we must determine the extent to which an observed effect is driven by campaign activity and/or by possible confounding variables. To address this issue, we need to monitor the operating environment during a campaign to measure changes in the context that might have made an impact on the target audience. For example, we might be running a campaign to increase a target audience's sense of agency and optimism for the future in a particular country. One impact indicator might be a survey question asking how optimistic respondents feel. After a comparison of baseline and endline assessments, it may turn out that the TA has become more optimistic, which might lead us to think that our campaign has been effective. However, an upturn in the economy and concurrent rise in the employment rate may also have had a positive impact on the TA and their survey responses.

My team currently monitors the environments within which our campaigns are operating across five different factors (that are similar to the PMESII factors): Social, Military, Economic, Political, and Physical. They create daily information summaries, which are collated at the end of the week, and an assessment is

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made of any changes in the environment that may have an impact on campaign objectives or sub-objectives. The table below provides examples of each of the five factors.

Contextual factor	Examples
Social	An increase in social unrest is likely to make the target audience less optimistic, whereas a period of stability or even rapprochement would most likely contribute to increasing feelings of optimism for the future.
Military	A reduction in levels of insurgency following the defeat of a terrorist organisation would most likely improve the target audience's view of the future.
Economic	A prolonged period of security and stability might lead to an upturn in the economy as jobs are created through foreign investment/support for local businesses. Increased employment would help increase feelings of optimism.
Political	Frequent changes in government or a series of scandals would create a sense of instability and thus reduce levels of optimism, while a period of good governance would have the reverse effect.
Physical	Changes in the environment, such as harvest failure or the adverse impacts of climate change, would have a negative impact on the target audience's feelings of optimism for the future.

This approach clearly raises questions about reliability and rigour in the assessment process. There is devil in the detail surrounding the robustness of assessments made. However, these are made against a set of clearly defined factors and based on a structured rating scale using a range of verified data sources. The assessments are then 'Red Teamed' through internal peer review and subjected to external confirmation.

This may seem like an overly complicated approach that requires a lot of effort. It certainly requires effort; however, the daily commitment produces a

secondary benefit in terms of situational awareness. Insights from the analysis are provided directly to the teams running the campaigns in order to help them identify 'hot topics' that they might wish to feature or avoid.

Weekly assessments are used to evaluate how changes in the environment might impact outcome measures. At the moment, whilst we are still collecting data, our assessments are conducted on a qualitative basis. For example, if the employment rate had fallen and security had declined during our campaign to increase the TA's sense of agency and optimism for the future, but the optimism rating for our target audience had still gone up, this would provide some justification that the effect was due to our campaign; or at least that a greater proportion of the effect was due to the campaign messaging. In this way, we can provide some context for our reporting.

A more interesting and useful possibility is to look at this quantitatively. Weekly assessments produce a numerical rating that evaluates the permissiveness of the environment in terms of our campaign messaging. In this way, we generate a fifth Measurement of Effect: Measure of Context (MoC)—currently a work in progress. If we were to generate a quantitative assessment for the confounding contextual variables (the MoC), we could then consider this along with our Measures of Performance (gathered as part of our ongoing monitoring of the campaign) and create a statistical analysis capable of apportioning causality to various factors within the MoE. We could then quantify the agency of the various factors contributing to the observed outcome (e.g. our campaign is responsible for 58% of the observed outcome, whilst other factors, such as economic factors, contributed 42%).

We are developing a statistical model on one of our campaigns to test this hypothesis; the results won't be available before this publication goes to press. Initial results are encouraging. I can of course be contacted directly. If we are able to measure the operating environment or the context in this way, we can attribute causality in a quantitative manner and help to answer one of the fundamental questions about the practice of measuring effect. This, along with the other ideas I have put forward, might help transform Measurement of Effect from the elephant in the room to the elegant swan gracing the lake of Strategic Communications.

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Conclusion

I have employed Kipling's 'six honest serving men' (somewhat loosely) to ask some fundamental questions about Measurement of Effect and hope I have challenged some outdated received wisdom on the subject. My suggestions in response to these points can be summarised as:

1. Conduct MoE assessment for diagnostic reasons as well as evaluation.
2. Report and assess Measures of Performance by campaign themes.
3. Learn quickly—be more agile by conducting smaller studies more frequently.
4. Combine QED studies with longitudinal designs.
5. Measure shifts in narratives online.
6. Look for meaningful, not just statistically significant, differences.
7. Measure the context to control for confounding variables.

My hope is that this discussion has stimulated some thoughts, whether provoking agreement or disagreement. If I have, then I will have achieved my effect; now, how to measure it?