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Overwriting the City: Graffiti, Communication, and Urban Contestation in Athens
Putting the Strategy Back into Strategic Communications
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Living Post-Truth Lives ... But What Comes After?
'We Have Met The Enemy And He Is Us'

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FOREWORD

Metaphors turn up where you least expect them. Netflix—the most prolific originator of quality television drama in the US—recently launched a cop series about serial killers. The clue is in the title *Mindhunter*. This whodunit is actually a howdunit. Or should that be whydunit? Episode by intriguing episode it explores the minds and motivations of murderers with a particular taste for exotic killing. And the protagonists of the drama rapidly become drawn into the operational processes of the police involved in tracking down these killers. Produced and directed in parts by David Fincher, this drama, however, has higher ambitions.

Through the duo Holden and Tench—both special agents in the FBI's Behavioural Science Unit—*Mindhunter* challenges the mindset of policing in 1970s America where the series is set. These were the days when the mere mention of Son of Sam was enough to send a chill through the night air. Convinced of a need to break the impasse in solving serial killings, Holden, the younger of the two agents, agitates for the process to be opened up to more radical thinking from behavioural psychology. But his naivety is left pushing against a system that is entrenched, resistant, and suspicious. His boss at the Training Academy sends him packing. 'You don't want to trust academics', he warns. Tench, more sensitive to establishment politics, initially resists too. When confronted with Holden's plea: 'What's wrong with complicated?', his partner replies 'there's complicated ... and there's too complicated.'

1970s detective work may seem a long way from strategic communications in 2017. But metaphors have a habit of reducing the complicated in one's life to something that

makes more sense. If ever there was a tension between academics with their theories and operators with their experiences, then the world of strategic communications invites a little sleuthing of its own. *Mindhunter* highlights the gap between detectives and experts, or practitioners and theorists in the uncontentious space of entertainment fiction. But it provides a metaphor for the contentious gap which this journal is attempting to bridge. The two-way endeavour to find a common space for scholars to develop concepts that speak to the real world, and for practitioners to step back from the tactical to appreciate what makes strategic communications truly strategic is long overdue.

To this end, the third issue of Defence Strategic Communications brings together innovative writing partnerships to refresh our conventional thinking. The art historian Dr Anna Kim and communications professional Tara Flores collaborate in an attempt to capture the aesthetics of graffiti that both demarcate political terrain and render the anarchist suburbs of Athens so visually distinctive to any outsider. Here cultural symbols drawn from popular television programmes and commentaries on Greece's economic crisis are blended in eye-catching imagery. They offer popular resistance to what is seen as the failure of the state at home and abroad. Kim and Flores go on to develop a case for including graffiti as a means through which Greek citizens can, and we might, understand contemporary politics. More than an artistic expression, graffiti, they propose, should be further acknowledged as a communicative space worthy of a place in international relations theorising. Consequently, they stretch the bounds of what has been traditionally embraced within the idea of communicating strategically.

Where they finish, another academic-practitioner partnership begins. Professor David Betz and independent communications analyst Vaughan Phillips are keen to inject some clarity into what should or should not qualify as strategic communications. For Betz and Phillips, the further we draw away from *stratos* and its military origins recorded by classical Greek historians like Thucydides, the more definitional clarity becomes clouded and loses its utility. Without clarity, we run the danger of slipping into a generalised notion of communications in the political realm. They claim: 'all communications may be purposeful but it is only their presence in the context of war in which violence is threatened or actual that renders them 'strategic'.' These are conversations to be nurtured by our readers and contributors in future editions.

In another departure the journal offers its pages to three essayists who bring their journalistic weight to bear on topics that increasingly occupy the attention of communicators. David Loyn reviews the substantive research undertaken by Brett Boudreau into ISAF/NATO's extended experience in Afghanistan. He tackles the degree to which Boudreau's post mortem represents an accurate appraisal of the mission creep and message creep many observers feel is the single enduring legacy of those difficult years. Loyn, a former BBC specialist in Kabul, adds his own take on what went wrong and why. Another former senior BBC journalist, Kevin Marsh, tackles the thorny question of Fake News in this

so-called Post-Truth era. As Marsh pointedly reminds us, most books that have tried to set the record straight on Fake News have issued from the pens of journalists with scant contribution from other sources. Amid the confusion surrounding the concept, Marsh goes in search of the truth and yearns for its long awaited return. Dr Charles Kriel, a former journalist, spotlights the growing attractions of big data analytics to politicians and marketers who seek the means to speak their truth to each one of us. Individually data profiled and digitally targeted, that is. With this in mind, he looks at the fortunes of Cambridge Analytica—one such firm that has ventured with mixed fortunes into the turbulent waters of politics.

There is no shortage of scholarly contributions to this issue. Journalist-turned-academic Dr Abdullahi Tasiu draws on his own reporting of the Nigerian state's pursuit of the insurgent movement Boko Haram. He concludes that a faltering combination of counterinsurgency tactics and less than transparent strategic communications encountered early setbacks against the militant organisation. Employing more factually verifiable communications, then engaging with audiences online, the militants made early gains. Only for the state to reappraise its own communications approaches, eventually redressing the balance and seizing the initiative. In line with our editorial remit to open up more neglected areas for investigation, Dr Pablo de Orellana takes an innovative approach to revealing how Western states can so easily misread conditions on the ground. Good intentions become easily diverted when outsiders tend to oversimplify complex local politics. Tracing forensically through the archive of diplomatic telegrams between 2002–2010, de Orellana weaves an account of how the Malian state framed its Saharan nomad groups as a threat to Washington and policymaking in the region, while drowning out the warnings of American diplomats on the ground.

Further afield, Professor Chiyuki Aoi reviews the state of strategic communications awareness across Japanese government departments at a time of heightened sensitivities in East Asia and the South China Seas. Her research highlights the fascinating dilemma of how Japan, locked into its post-1945 national consensus of non-military engagement, should face up to the threat of Chinese agitation. But she raises the delicate question of how the country might transition from its traditional public diplomacy engagement to a more strategic communications approach that will almost certainly elicit a national discussion around the use of its armed forces. These are complicated times for Japan.

'There's complicated...and there's too complicated.' A disingenuous assertion, perhaps. Yet it echoes one respected expert, Anne-Marie Slaughter, once of the US State Department, who noted that 'sometimes the world has problems without the tools to fix them.' Maybe. But it's not an option for strategic communicators. Silence speaks volumes.

Dr Neville Bolt
Editor-in-Chief
November 2017

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OVERWRITING THE CITY: GRAFFITI, COMMUNICATION, AND URBAN CONTESTATION IN ATHENS

**Anna Marazuela Kim with Tara
Flores**

Abstract

To date, most discussions and analyses of strategic communications within the context of International Relations and Security Studies focus on the linguistic realm. Those that do recognise the power and role of images in these domains, particularly as they reflect upon the contemporary image wars waged by IS and other insurgent groups, tend to focus on the virtual realm of social media and globalized news networks. This article aims instead to articulate a methodological framework for understanding the force and potential of a distinctively spatial and material form of communication: graffiti. Taking Athens as a case study, the article articulates graffiti's role as a form of strategic communications in areas of social and political crisis, and further suggests its value as a non-violent means of negotiating conflict in areas with limited avenues for democratic expression.

Keywords: *graffiti, image war, strategic narratives, influence, soft power, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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Introduction

Graffiti is a form of communication that has played a vital role in urban uprisings from Nicaragua to Northern Ireland and more recently the Middle East and the Arab Spring.¹ Yet despite both historic and ongoing significance, it remains relatively understudied in the field of strategic communications. Two broad shifts warrant its further exploration. First, while strategic communications has long been associated with practices of the state, the paradigm is rapidly changing to focus on the role of non-state actors in shaping the course of conflicts worldwide. Moreover, there is growing recognition among scholars of International Relations (IR) and Security Studies of an urgent need to understand the force and operation of images, as distinct from the linguistic realm.²

While the definition of graffiti is subject to scholarly debate, for the purposes of this study, the term is used broadly to encompass slogans, murals, and forms of street art.³ The aim of the article is to contribute a threefold methodological framework for understanding graffiti's operation in areas of urban conflict, as a distinctive form of strategic communications. It is first defined as a tactical spatial practice: a physical means of reclaiming 'the right to the city'.⁴ Second, it is explored as a mode of critical discourse: a staging of dialogue, dissent, narrative, and memorialisation in the restitution of a 'public sphere'.⁵ Finally, graffiti is analysed as agentic image, actively inscribing civic

1 While the level of conflict differs, the role of murals depicting political history in Northern Ireland provides a potentially useful comparison. On the murals, see Rolston, Bill, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2010). On graffiti's role in the Arab Spring, see Schriwer, Charlotte, 'Graffiti Arts and the Arab Spring', Larbi Sadliki, (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization*, p. 36, who asserts that graffiti 'has become one of the most frequently used tools of psychological warfare'.

2 See the discussion by Lene Hansen in 'Theorizing the image for Security Studies: Visual securitization and the Muhammad Cartoon Crisis', *European Journal of International Relations* 17.1 (2010): 51–54; as well as Williams, Michael C, 'Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics', *International Studies Quarterly* 47(4) (2003): 511–529.

3 For recent overviews of the term, see *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City*, Avrimidis, K. and Tsilimpounidi, Myrto, (eds.), (Routledge, 2016); and Ross, Jeffrey Ian (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Graffiti and Street Art* (Routledge, 2016).

4 The 'right to the city' is an idea that was first defined by Henri Lefebvre in his 1968 book *Le Droit à la ville*; it signifies more than right of access to a city's resources by its inhabitants but further the potential to be transformed through this. The idea has taken on renewed significance in the last two decades and figures in current agendas for a new civic urbanism, as evident for example in the United Nations' HABI-TAT III Policy Paper, 4-Urban Governance, Capacity and Institutional Development (29 February 2016).

5 The notion of the 'public sphere' was originally defined by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, tr. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge MA: The M. I. T. Press, 1989).

presence and creating new imaginaries that transform the meaning and potential of the city. Taking Athens as a case study, the article illustrates graffiti's role in civic resistance and mobilisation in areas of crisis with limited avenues of political expression. As cities and the urban fabric become strategic spaces, the study of graffiti expands the parameters of the evolving field of strategic communications and the current image wars, beyond linguistic or digital domains. The article concludes with suggestions for further lines of research on the affective dimension of graffiti and its potential for influence as a form of 'soft power', increasingly supported and appropriated by state and cultural institutions.⁶

Strategic Communications: The Shift from State to Non-State Actors

Graffiti has a long history in military conflict and has taken on increasing importance in areas where urban territory is the ground of contestation. In a recent article in the journal of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Richard Clay and Neil Verrall document graffiti's role in conflicts of the past and present.⁷ They suggest its further consideration from a strategic standpoint, as a communications tactic that is 'agile, disruptive, persuasive and cheap'.⁸ In addition, from the perspective of intelligence gathering, they argue for its value as an indicator of attitudes and social processes on the ground, particularly in settings where direct measurement is difficult.⁹ Given this two-fold value, the authors propose the efficacy of graffiti for military influence operations more generally, suggesting that military forces would benefit from drawing upon the example of non-state actors, and perhaps even work in tandem with them in arenas of conflict.

Traditionally, the field of strategic communications is viewed through state lenses and state-to-state practice. It is rooted in discussions of a whole-of-government approach, of bridging the 'say-do' gap, and of ensuring that policy and rhetoric are aligned.¹⁰ To a greater degree than ever before, however, the development of strategic communications as a government tool is based upon models of effective communications strategies of non-state actors. The communications success of these constituents is part of a broader trend of how conflict has changed, particularly over the last century. As Neville Bolt has argued, following WWII a shift from inter-state to intra-state war and further to 'war among the people' has opened the definitional debate surrounding strategic

6 Nye, Joseph S., *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

7 Verrall, Neil and Richard Clay, 'Life Imitating Art, Art Influencing Life', *The RUSI Journal*, 161:2, (2016): 64–73.

8 Ibid., p. 70.

9 Ibid., p. 69.

10 See, for example, Paul, Christopher, *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates* (Praeger, 2011).

communications to include revolutionary and insurgent movements in the shape of would-be states (Marxist-Leninist) or more recently, would-be supra-states (Salafi/Jihadi/Islamic). From a practical standpoint, these social movements turned militant groups have as valid a claim to be practitioners of strategic communications as do recognised states. Both US and UK military doctrines have begun to embrace this thinking, in order to effectively combat the success of the militant groups in communications. In the political arena, however, to recognise the claims on traditional strategic communications of challengers to established states is to legitimise de facto those dissident groups or movements. Perhaps for this reason, the field of strategic communications has lagged behind in its analysis of the varied communications tactics of these groups, though it is now quickly taking stock of their activities as communicators.¹¹ Beyond emerging groups that have reshaped and expanded the field, we should consider the broader phenomenon of the citizen witness / journalist, particularly in areas of conflict. Michal Givoni has described this as the ‘era of becoming a witness’; increasingly, images play a central role.¹² While the focus of such activity has been the rapid dissemination of information through social media, a parallel might be drawn to graffiti, which is similarly a form of witnessing and is also distributed through virtual pathways, most often social media outlets.

Urban Space as a Site of Contestation

Another rationale for the study of graffiti is its deployment within the urban fabric of cities. Recently there has been growing scholarly interest in the city as the site of conflict. As social movements and the insurgent groups that sometimes grow from them increasingly coalesce and operate in urban spaces, the earlier paradigm of rural guerrilla warfare is beginning to shift. Some might argue that the city has always been perceived and used as a military weapon.¹³ In the past, however, the military use of the city lay more in its physical and material strategic position. Battles over major cities, such as the siege of York in the English Civil War, were fundamentally battles over resources and physical territory, albeit territory with symbolic value.

Urban spaces have historically been considered strategic spaces; however, their strategic use has changed significantly over time. Their significance in the context of conflict is

11 Bolt, Neville, ‘Strategic Communications in Crisis’, *The RUSI Journal*, 156: 4 (2011): 44–53. The question of who counts as a legitimate strategic communicator is complicated by a recent article which argues that effective strategic communications takes place only within an ethical framework of consensual international practices. See Frost, Mervyn and Michelsen, Nicholas, ‘Strategic Communications in International Relations: Practical Traps and Ethical Puzzles’, *Defence Strategic Communications* vol. 2 (2017): 3–33.

12 Givoni, Michal, ‘The Ethics of Witnessing and the Politics of the Governed’, *Theory Culture & Society*, 31, 1 (2011): 123–142.

13 McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (McGraw-Hill, 1964).

now not just physical or material, considering the city only as a site of territorial claims. Cities today are more commonly sites of contest between state and non-state actors over legitimacy and authenticity, as insurgents and social movements navigate the urban space, traditionally viewed as state controlled, in order to challenge state authority. As David Kilcullen has argued, the increased prevalence of urban conflict has resulted in a shift from contested geographical territory to contested networks of people.¹⁴ That is to say, the control of geographical space does not necessarily translate into actual control. More important than geographical space in the urban context is how these spaces are interpreted and understood by the people inhabiting them. It is in this context that graffiti has particular strategic importance. While the urban territory of a particular city may be controlled by the state, the inscription of graffiti serves to demonstrate that the state does not maintain full control over that particular urban space. Following the broader communication shifts outlined above, non-state actors—citizens in this case—are using graffiti to symbolically wrest control from the state through strategic use of the urban environment. This approach to understanding the urban environment is underpinned by a constructivist view, which sees the world as constantly under construction in a recursive process of understanding.

‘Actors do not have a portfolio of interests that they carry around independent of social context’,¹⁵ they are influenced by their surroundings. Equally, however, ‘social actors attach meaning to the material world and cognitively frame the world they know, experience and understand’.¹⁶ Humans are constantly interpreting their surroundings and this interpretation is constantly being contested.¹⁷ The iterative renegotiation of the meaning afforded to this social reality significantly reveals its capacity to influence human behaviour, something which is recognised by both state and non-state actors, albeit often unconsciously so. This is, of course, true of all environments, whether urban or rural. Humans are not independent of socialisation. The strategic importance of the city lies in its role as a site of socialisation. Cities are more densely populated

14 Kilcullen, David, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (C. Hurst & Co, 2013).

15 Wendt, Alexander, ‘Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization* 46, No. 2 (1992): 391–425.

16 Adler, Emanuel, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol 3, Issue 3, p. 321. This social constructivist approach is informed by Giddens’ notion of the duality of structure as something which constrains human action but also is (re)created by it. See Giddens, Anthony, *Central Problems in Social Theory* (London, 1979).

17 For a more psychological approach to this phenomenon, see Daniel Kahneman’s explanation and analysis of ‘priming’. In the 1980s, it was discovered that exposure to a word causes immediate changes in our association to this word and words related to it. This concept has since been expanded such that it is now accepted that our actions are influenced by what we have seen, heard and experienced prior to our actions. For more information see Kahneman, Chapter 4 ‘The Associative Machine’, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, (Penguin, 2012).

and have an increased presence of the state. As a result, the urban space is often more contested than the rural.¹⁸ In addition, we might point out that disenfranchised individuals are more concentrated in urban environments and generally have greater access to communications technologies, so that inequality of access to resources in the city is more likely to give rise to political and social conflict.

Indeed, it is helpful to think in terms of socialisation if we want to consider more broadly cities and their function as the predominant sites of state control. The Chicago School of sociologists were among the first to analyse the impact of urban environments on the formation of identity. Focusing on the urban gangland surroundings of Chicago of the early 1900s, researchers led by George Herbert Mead examined the extent to which the self was the result of social interaction and symbolic systems.¹⁹ Their results demonstrated a highly mutual relationship in which ‘situations are structured by individuals who, in the course of interaction, establish a joint sense of the present [...] and shape their conduct with respect to this collectively-established and situationally-sustained time-frame’.²⁰ More will be said below about cities as dynamic spaces of identity-formation and graffiti’s potential role in shaping it.²¹

Athens as a Case Study: Graffiti and Urban Conflict

Athens is exemplary of the increasingly unstable, precarious condition of many European cities, one that parallels in microcosm the broader phenomenon of failed states and is therefore of interest to IR and Security Studies. In the wake of severe economic, social, and political crises, the city has become a site of chronic low-level conflict, with protests erupting into violence and anarchist take-overs of buildings and sectors where police no longer hold jurisdiction. Among the instruments of civic dissent at work in this milieu, graffiti would seem the least significant. Yet in terms of daily disruption, longevity, and reach, its impact has been arguably greater; it threatens to overwrite the ‘traditional’ image of Athens as one controlled by the state, the ancient home of democracy, with the image of a city in the hands of unpredictable non-state actors, whose messages and agency are everywhere publicly inscribed and who have reinterpreted the meaning of democratic participation.

18 Tilly, Charles, ‘Cities, States, and Trust Networks: Chapter 1 of *Cities and States in World History*’, *Theory and Society* 39.3 (2010): 265–280.

19 Mead, George Herbert, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviourist* (University of Chicago Press, 1964).

20 Dmitri, Shalin, ‘Pragmatism and Social Interactionism’, *American Sociological Review*, 51.1 (1986): 16, cited in Bolt, Neville, *The Violent Image, Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 64.

21 On the role of the arts in cultivating civic identity and agency, see Kim, Anna M., et. al., ‘Brief on the Beautiful as an endowment of Thriving Cities’, (2015), online: <http://thrivingcities.com/endowments/beautiful>.



Figure 1. View of the Acropolis from the city center. Athens, February 2016 (photo by the author).

Athens has been described as one of the most ‘stained and saturated cities in the world’ and has become a rich context for the study of graffiti.²² Dense palimpsests of writing, tags, and images cover railways, highways, and underpasses, traditional sites of illicit intervention because they are difficult to police. Entire neighbourhoods—such as Gazi, Psirri, and Exarcheia, the anarchist stronghold, which sits just adjacent to Kolonaki, one of the most fashionable districts—are covered in signs and images. In addition to its ubiquity throughout the urban landscape, the scale of graffiti’s presence is equally impressive. Stories-high graffiti murals tower over city streets, rivaling historic sites in their visual prominence. ‘Graffiti bombing’—a technique in which many surfaces are illicitly painted—is a regular occurrence. Most spectacularly, in 2013 the entire exterior of the Technical University of Athens was covered in one night. The university, situated in the Exarcheia district, is historically a stronghold of anarchist protest; it was the site of a 1973 student uprising that ended a seven-year period of rule by the military junta as well as major protests again in 2008 and 2012. Whether in protest or in pride, graffiti has effectively become ‘the signature’ of Athens, at times even celebrated by state and cultural institutions.

But as graffiti spills beyond activist or derelict areas to target buildings of historic significance, the city, whose fragile economy depends upon tourism, is in a constant

²² Pangalos, Orestis, ‘Testimonies and Appraisals on Athens Graffiti, Before and After the Crisis’, in *Remapping ‘Crisis’: A Guide to Athens*, Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Aylwyn Walsh (eds.), (Zero Books: 2014), p. 154.

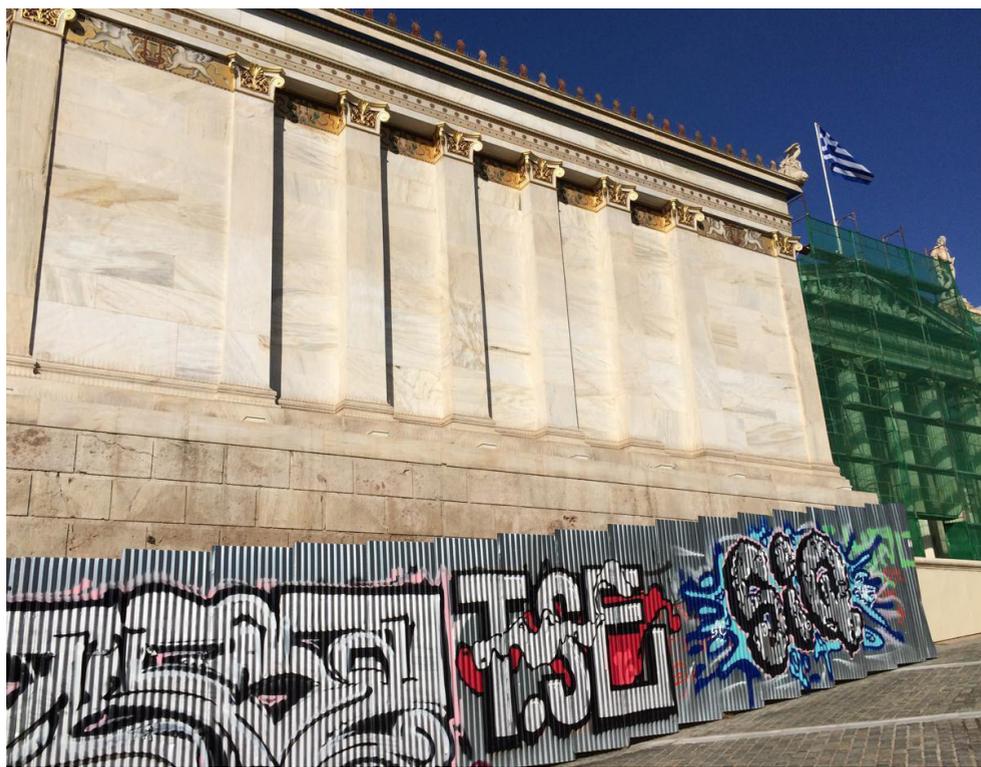


Figure 2. The restored Athens Academy and freshly graffitied fencing. Panepistimiou Street, Athens, July 2016 (photo by the author).

battle to control the ‘image’ of the city.²³ In the past few years, the Municipality of Athens has struggled to protect landmark monuments and buildings on Panepistimiou Street, which connects the working-class Omonia and the bourgeois Syntagma squares, both sites of recent protest. The historic thoroughfare showcases some of the most important neoclassical monuments in the city: the National Library, the Numismatic Museum, and the Athens Academy, which, as shown in the photo below (Figure 2), even after cleaning still bears a reminder of the always-present threat of its future defacement. As Konstantinos Avramidis notes in his study of the Bank of Greece, the buildings on Panepistimiou Street targeted by graffiti are more than architectural treasures. They are ‘symbols of nation, authority and capitalism’, rich in ‘noble’ classical materials, such as marble, and comprised of classical forms that reflect a mythic

²³ Greece Is, ‘Athens Mayor Gets Tough on Graffiti’, 8 April 2016, <http://www.greece-is.com/news/athens-mayor-gets-tough-graffiti>



Figure 3. INO, 'Ignorance is Bliss'. Nicosia, Cyprus (public domain image).

national consciousness.²⁴ Their neoclassical vocabulary visually communicates a specific ideology regarding Greek national and bourgeois identity.²⁵ To deface such buildings with graffiti is to reach beyond their façades to attack the powers they institutionalise and represent. As seminal studies by David Freedberg, Dario Gamboni, and Bruno Latour have explored, images and monuments have long stood as proxies for persons and power. Their iconoclastic defacement both diminishes that power and also utilises it to construct something new. This 'creative iconoclasm' is a paradoxical dynamic central to graffiti that will be discussed further below.²⁶

24 Avramidis, Konstantinos. 'Reading an Instance of Contemporary Urban Iconoclasm: A Design Report from Athens', *The Design Journal*, 18 (4), (2015): 524–25.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 522–23.

26 See Freedberg, David, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Gamboni, Dario, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (Reaktion Books, 1997); and Latour, Bruno, 'What is Iconoclasm? Or is there a world beyond the image wars?' in Latour, Bruno and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Kim, Anna M., 'Creative Iconoclasm in Renaissance Italy', in *Striking Images, Iconoclasm Past and Present*, Boldrick, S., L. Brubaker, R. Clay (eds.), (Ashgate, 2013): pp. 65–88.

In describing the most recent campaign against such acts of ‘vandalism’, local Greek authorities were careful to make a distinction between the graffiti and tags ‘without aesthetic value’, which they sought to eradicate, and ‘artistic’ murals that they intend to promote instead.²⁷ They highlighted the work of INO—an Athens graffiti artist with a growing international reputation—for prestigious public commissions. These include large-scale murals for the façade of the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens (2010) and the Parliament of Cyprus in Nicosia (2016), works that have been featured in both the *New York Times* and *The Guardian*.²⁸ The image for the Cypriot Parliament presents two figures associated with the origins of democracy in ancient Athens, Pericles and Solon. Like many of INO’s works, vision is thematised in the image and there is a critical edge to its iconography.²⁹ Titled ‘Ignorance is Bliss’, the mural depicts the symbols of ancient Athenian democracy blinded by swathes of blue paint: an iconoclastic gesture and artistic signature that lends itself to multiple interpretations. The commission of a Greek graffiti artist to paint a prominent foreign government building (perhaps the first commission of its kind) and the Onassis Centre, as well as the provision of mayoral support to refresh derelict neighbourhoods with murals, seem a clear recognition by the state of graffiti’s power and centrality to contemporary Athenian culture.³⁰ While artists such as INO embrace the possibility of critique through such publicly commissioned works, others note an inherent tension in the government’s appropriation of what is essentially an independent art of dissent. ‘Make no mistake: Graffiti is a weapon of influence because it’s so apparent in the city’, said Charitonas Tsamantakis, an imposing, black-clad graffitist who is publishing a book, *Hellenic Graffiti History*, in autumn of 2017. ‘The authorities want to embrace it so they can neutralize it and control it. It’s a way of breaking our spirit.’³¹ The disdain of the artists towards the attempts of authorities to legitimise their art is an implicit recognition of the contest over the urban space, a recognition that legitimisation is not acceptance of their message but an attempt to control their message.

27 Ioannidis, Sakis, ‘National Library Stripped of Graffiti’, 13 May 2016, <http://www.greece-is.com/news/national-library-stripped-graffiti/>.

28 Recent press in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* on INO’s work and Athens’ crisis: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2014/nov/11/contemporary-graffiti-art-on-the-walls-of-athens-in-pictures>; <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/16/world/europe/across-athens-graffiti-worth-a-thousand-words-of-malaise.html>.

29 For related examples see the artist’s website, online: <http://www.ino.net/>.

30 See Pangalos, Orestis, ‘Testimonies and Appraisals on Athens Graffiti, before and after the Crisis’, in Tsilimpounidi, Myrto and Walsh, Aylwyn, (eds.), *Remapping Crisis: A Guide to Athens*, London: Zero Book (2014), p. 164.

31 Alderman, Liz, ‘Across Athens, Graffiti Worth a Thousand Words of Malice’, *New York Times*, 15 April 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/16/world/europe/across-athens-graffiti-worth-a-thousand-words-of-malaise.html>.

The modern roots of politicised wall writings in Athens reach back to the Axis Occupation (1941), the Greek Civil War (1941–1949), and the years of dictatorship (1967–1974).³² But its dramatic increase seems directly correlated with the city's recent, precipitous decline, which was preceded by a brief programme of urban renewal. Graffiti's present trajectory might be charted from 1998, when Greece held its first international festival in Athens in an area northwest of the Acropolis and ancient Agora, shortly after winning the bid to host the 2004 Olympic games.³³ Urban design festivals including graffiti were organized and supported to enhance the downtown and connect its archaeological sites along the Cultural Promenade. For a few years from 2000 onwards, several prominent large-scale projects were commissioned by city institutions as part of a cultural Olympiad that contributed to a shift in perceptions of graffiti as a legitimate form of street art.³⁴ Then, in the years of economic failure and flight from the urban core, the many disused and decaying buildings became the canvas upon which a young generation of graffiti writers made their mark. In 2007, the first Athens Art Biennale—'Destroy Athens!'—announced with its title the recognition that the city could no longer sustain its image as a city of ancient or Olympic glory. It was instead a modern-day ruin: 'a socio-urban fabric of injustice, a place of increasing violence and brutality, a fragmented world of inequality'.³⁵

More recently, the period between December 2008 and 2012 marks a critical juncture in social upheaval that is generally thought to have motivated the explosion of a specifically political graffiti in Athens. The Youth Uprising of 2008, catalysed by the police killing of fifteen-year old Alexandros Grigoropoulos in the Exarcheia district, which still bears many visual memorials to the event, was the beginning of a series of protests that went hand in hand with a politicised street art, including painted slogans and graffiti.³⁶ This was followed by the introduction of severe austerity measures in 2010, which left Athens in a state of socioeconomic emergency not seen since the 1940s. Between 2010 and 2012, personal spending capacity was reduced by 40 percent, leaving one-third of the population below the poverty line.³⁷ What began as peaceful demonstrations were

32 Avramidis, 'Reading an Instance of Contemporary Urban Iconoclasm', p. 519.

33 Leventis, Panos, 'Walls of Crisis: Street Art and Urban Fabric in Central Athens, 2000–2012', *Architectural Histories*, 1.1 (2013): 1–10.

34 Ibid., p. 19. 'Graffiti tourism' is an increasing trend in cities around the world, including Athens.

35 Ibid., p. 13.

36 Tsilimpounidi, Myrto, 'If these Walls Could Talk: Street Art and Urban Belonging in the Athens of Crisis', *Laboratorium*, 7(2), (2015): 75 on protests as a trigger for graffiti-making; Stavrides, S., 'The December 2008 uprising's stencil images in Athens Writing or inventing traces of the future?' in *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing and Representing the City*, (Routledge, 2016), pp. 164–176.

37 Tsilimpounidi, 'If these Walls Could Talk', p. 78. On the crisis, see also Zaimakis, Yiannis, 'Welcome to the Civilization of Fear': On Political Graffiti Heterotopias in Greece in Times of Crisis', *Visual Communication*, 14(4): 373–396. pp. 377–79.

followed by riots and the destruction of numerous buildings throughout the core of the city. On 12 February 2012, forty-five buildings, including eleven listed historic edifices, were destroyed by fire across the downtown, ‘widening the multiple, deep wounds to the capital’s economic development, cultural heritage and urban fabric’.³⁸ Street art in Athens was deeply affected by the city’s new plight. Graffiti writers turned not only to derelict buildings, but also to destroyed architecture as their urban platform. According to a recent ethnographic study by Mytro Tsilimpounidi, contrary to the stereotype of graffiti writers as an uneducated, unemployed periphery, the majority of those active in Athens are between 25 and 35 years old, with middle-class backgrounds, university educated, and with regular daytime employment.³⁹ The economic crisis has been particularly severe for this cohort, with an estimated 55 percent of young people aged 18–30 falling below the poverty line.⁴⁰



Figure 4. Graffiti in Psirri district. Athens, June 2016 (photo by the author).

38 Leventis, ‘Walls of Crisis’, pp. 5–6.

39 Tsilimpounidi, ‘If these Walls Could Talk’, p. 73.

40 Ibid., p. 78.

Political Graffiti: Definitions and Typologies

Given its scale and ubiquity, making sense of the welter and variety of signatures, symbols, slogans, and pictures that comprise Athens' graffiti today presents a daunting task. To grasp its significance as strategic communications, it must first be defined and broken down into categories. Graffiti is generally understood as any illicitly-produced set of marks, writings, or images inscribed, drawn, or painted on public buildings or structures. Far from being a new invention, it has a long and continuous history from antiquity, the earliest examples dating back to Mayan and early Roman cultures.⁴¹ The root of the term, however, lies in the ancient Greek *graphie*, which denotes both writing and picture. Conceptually, it is useful to think of it as encompassing and extending across the domains of both language and image. As visual theorist W.J.T. Mitchell notes, writing, as a physical, graphic form, is 'an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the "image text incarnate"'.⁴²

During the 1960s, the term graffiti became associated with the urban phenomenon of signatures, or 'tagging', in cities such as Philadelphia and New York: a form of writing eventually evolving into a wider range of representations, including large-scale murals on subways and buildings.⁴³ It is this early period and type of graffiti, along with its perpetration by gangs, that informed public perceptions of it as a form of vandalism. In recent decades, however, graffiti has been acknowledged as a form of art, both by the public and the art world. It has also become a serious subject of academic study, not only in the field of visual culture, but for anthropological, sociological, political, and urban and architectural theory, all of which have expanded the range of its significance.

Clearly graffiti is a highly diverse cultural practice encompassing many forms. A schema for an initial breakdown of types—one that lends itself to a consideration of its status as an aspect of strategic communications—might be constructed along the continuum of the categories of writing and image implied by the term itself. At one end of the spectrum are signatures, tags, and symbols, such as numbers, at times stylized or calligraphic. These are codes or forms of internal communication produced by and for specific subcultures, such as hip-hop or gangs.⁴⁴ Although their function and meaning are not legible to a public audience, it might be argued that such markings of identity or territory nonetheless communicate, by virtue of their illicit nature, a form

41 Phillips, S.A., *Graffiti Definition: The Dictionary of Art*, (Grove Dictionaries, 1996). Online: <https://www.graffiti.org/faq/graf.def.html>.

42 Mitchell, W.J.T., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), p. 95.

43 Pangalos, 'Testimonies and Appraisals', p. 155.

44 Avramidis, Konstantinos. 'Live your Greece in Myths: Reading the Crisis on Athens' Walls', *Professional Dreamers, working paper* No.8 (2012): 6–7.

of agency in their urban settings. As French philosopher Jean Baudrillard wrote in an early acknowledgement of graffiti's power in this regard, 'the strength of graffiti lies in its status as self-referential or "empty" signifier, allowing it to "scramble the signals of urbania and dismantle the order of signs"'.⁴⁵ On the other end of the spectrum we might place the clearly legible images—from the graphic stencil to colorful murals, often combined with captions—created with the specific intention of communicating social or political critique to a broader public. To this category we might add a related type: the defacement of a public building, monument, or image of historic, cultural, or symbolic significance, resulting in the creation of a critical 'counter-image'. Graffiti, once perceived as mere vandalism, works complexly and doubly as a form of 'creative destruction': an iconoclasm simultaneously constructing new significations as it attacks or dismantles existing ones.⁴⁶

Recent ethnographic studies in Athens have begun to delineate the distinctively politicised character its graffiti has developed in response to the combined socio-economic and political crises of the past eight years. Analysing 1100 graffiti-related documents in core neighbourhoods of Athens, researcher Yiannis Zaimakis organises these in three categories of content that we will briefly canvass before turning to an analysis of their status as communication.⁴⁷

Protest graffiti refers directly to Greece's social and economic crisis: the severe austerity measures of the 'Troika' (the tripartite committee of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund) and authoritarian measures in governance that have led to increasing repression.⁴⁸ A much-reproduced image by the Athens-based graffiti artist Bleeps plays upon the title of a popular television show *Greece's Next Top Model* to produce a captivating yet disturbing image rendered in the colours of the Greek flag. The country's condition is likened to one of amputation: a reference to Greece as subject to the economic experiment of austerity.⁴⁹ The visual effect of the image is particularly striking as the beautiful figure seems to emerge from the wall towards the viewer, the paint below her injured leg bleeding onto the sidewalk in painted streams. Bleeps is among a growing number of graffiti artists who combine their work with political commentary disseminated through the web on blogs and Facebook, multiplying their reach and impact.⁵⁰ Equally legible and compelling

45 Baudrillard, Jean, 'Kool Killer', or 'The Insurrection of Signs' in I.H. Grant, trans., *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, (London: Sage, 1988/1976), p. 81.

46 See note 23 above.

47 Zaimakis, 'Welcome to the Civilization of Fear'.

48 Ibid., p. 374.

49 Drakoplou, Konstantina, 'Art and Politics: Bleeps' Politically Charged Paintings on the Walls of Athens', in Tsilimpounidi and Walsh, (eds.), *Remapping "Crisis": A Guide to Athens*, pp. 218–19.

50 Online: <https://www.facebook.com/Bleeps.gr/>.



Figure 5. bleeps.gr, 'Greece: Next Economic Model'. Psirri district, Athens (public domain image).

as a political provocation is the work of Political Zoo (a reference to the Aristotelian idea of the *politikon zoon*). Much like the British graffiti artist Banksy, this Athenian collective deploys the highly readable stencil technique, often to critical, satirical, and humorous effect.⁵¹ The resulting work varies from the simple to the elaborate, such as a piece that refers to a history of repressive governments from the post-Junta period to the present.⁵²

51 Zaimakis, 'Welcome to the Civilization of Fear', p. 385.

52 Ibid, 384–85; for recent interview with the group, see Tsilimpounidi and Walsh, 'Painting human rights', p. 118.

A second category, **conflict graffiti**, broadly captures work that is dialogic or responsive to particular political ideologies, such as fascism and anti-immigration sentiment.⁵³

Throughout the city, images and slogans communicate civic opposition to the growing threat of fanatical politics.

Finally, **revolt graffiti** is defined by its more militant content and production by activists along a radical political spectrum from leftists and anarchists.⁵⁴ These images represent the marginalised and oppressed with the aim of mobilising the populace, often employing slogans ('Poor people rise up in arms!'; 'Everybody out in the streets!') in areas of particular political or historic significance, such as Syntagma Square, a site of protest. There is often an international flavour to the content, drawing parallels to other revolutionary struggles worldwide or written in foreign languages.⁵⁵ In recent years, anarchists have allied themselves with the cause of the great numbers of refugees and migrants that have flooded the city, identifying with their shared experience of injustice and precarity, as well as with the necessity to emigrate for economic reasons.

Methodology for Analysis: Graffiti as a Spatial Urban Tactic

Drawing upon sociological, ethnographic, political, urban, and visual studies, we now turn to a threefold conceptual framework for analysing graffiti. While the content of graffiti provides a means to define the many forms it takes, its socio-psychological and political effects flow from its specific constitution. Unlike the spoken word or a digital image, graffiti is distinctive in its spatial materiality and its use in the public setting of the street. Its existence as a form of communication depends upon its physical inscription on the walls and surfaces of the city, where it becomes an integral, but also shaping, part of the urban environment. Like the architecture of the city of which it is a part, graffiti is a marker of place and, to draw upon the theory of philosopher Henri Lefebvre, has the potential to actively produce the 'spaces' of society.⁵⁶

To understand graffiti's potential as an aspect of strategic communications, we must first appreciate the particular characteristics of the physical media upon which it is inscribed. As anthropologists of the image such as Hans Belting remind us, images do not simply appear. They depend upon specific media for their visibility and transmission, as well as

53 Zaimakis, 'Welcome to the Civilization of Fear', pp. 388–92.

54 Ibid., pp. 385–87.

55 Ibid., pp. 386–87.

56 Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, N. Donaldson-Smith, (trans.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). See also Michel de Certeau's, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Univ. of Calif. Press, 2011), for the theory of space as 'practiced place', also relevant here. For graffiti within the framework of Lefebvre's theory, see Schacter, Rafael, 'An Ethnography of Iconoclasm: An investigation into the production, consumption, and destruction of street art in London', *Journal of Material Culture* 13 (2008): 50–51.

active realisation by their viewers. Images, like the persons who encounter them, are, in a sense, embodied, and stand in phenomenological relation to their viewers.⁵⁷ Beyond Marshall McLuhan's theory that the 'medium is the message', we should consider the significance of the specific media which allow these messages to appear. The physical media of graffiti—namely walls and façades—have an architectural and social function that bears meaning for what is materially produced upon them. They are borders between public and private domains, demarcations of property and ownership, or exclusion from property or ownership. They define territories and neighbourhoods and can be projections of power, control, and security, or the loss of the latter when threatened or destroyed. In this regard, the walls and façades of the urban environment jointly define spatial and societal relations.⁵⁸ Therefore the intentional marking of such borders by graffiti, and by extension of buildings or neighbourhoods, can serve to critique and even shift the boundaries of the existing social order. 'Graffiti bombing', for example, lacks the potential to actually destroy a structure, but it nonetheless attacks the idea of, or claim to, private ownership of the city.⁵⁹ A stencil with a Molotov cocktail deployed in the fashionable Kolonaki district ('Relax you trendy guys and enjoy your coffee, your car is burning.')60 makes evident the neighbourhood's proximity to Exarcheia, suddenly shifting the perception of social space and privacy. And as graffiti marks abandoned or ruined places—the enclaves of migrants and the poor overlooked by society—graffiti can create a new, visible significance for them. Several studies have mapped graffiti in Athens to reveal the way in which it parallels, and makes more visible, areas of protest and precarity, effectively creating an alternative geography to the official and tourist thoroughfares of the city.⁶¹ In this way, graffiti overwrites the state's ordering of its borders.

Earlier we noted a shift towards the city as a site of conflict and contestation among groups of people. Here we can proceed deeper, to the dynamic structure of the city itself in its relation to these groups. The premise upon which our analysis of graffiti is founded is that the built environment of a city is more than a set of physical structures. It is also a complex and evolving order, one that has the potential to enhance, delimit, or negatively impact the thriving of its inhabitants.⁶² The city, as Lefebvre once characterised it, is a

57 Belting proposes a theory of images or iconology according to a tripartite model in Belting, Hans, 'Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology', *Critical Inquiry*, No. 31, (2005): 302–319.

58 Avramidis, 'Live your Greece in Myths', pp. 14–15.

59 Iveson, Kurt, 'Graffiti, Street Art and the City' 14 (1–2) *City* 26, (2010): 130.

60 Stavrides, 'The December 2008 uprising's stencil images in Athens', p. 167 with photograph p. 168.

61 On graffiti and the 're-mapping' of Athens, see Tsilimpounidi and Walsh, 'Painting Human Rights'; Avramidis, 'Live your Greece in Myths', p. 13; Schacter, *A World Atlas of Street Art and Graffiti*, (Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 350–52.

62 Kim et. al, 'The Brief on the Beautiful'.

‘projection of society on the ground’.⁶³ If we think of societal space as jointly produced by architectural structures and their active ordering by institutions and inhabitants, we can see that graffiti, in its appropriation and transformation of the urban fabric, holds the possibility to actively deconstruct and reconstruct the public spaces of the city.⁶⁴ Deployed in the absence of other forms of power, graffiti functions as a tactical spatial practice: a creative means of contesting and reclaiming the ‘right to the city’.⁶⁵ Lefebvre elaborates the potential benefits that flow from the recognition of this right for the urban dweller (*citadin* in Lefebvre). Such an affirmation not only opens the right graffiti-writers to make evident their ideas in the spatio-temporal realm of the urban setting. It also recovers the right of those who have been excluded to the privileged areas of the centre (however construed), and rejects their restriction to the margins or ‘ghettos’ traditionally used for the containment of immigrants and workers’.⁶⁶

By questioning and reconfiguring the order of the city as structured by capitalism and politics, graffiti inscribed in public spaces can serve as a form of visual political action.⁶⁷ As David Harvey writes in his re-evaluation of Lefebvre’s theory: ‘The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.’⁶⁸

Recreating the Public Sphere: Graffiti as Public Dialogue and Discourse

With regard to architecture’s role in this critical, political expression—the aim of the type of graffiti under consideration—the insights of sociologist Richard Sennett are particularly relevant. In Sennett’s view, among the historic sites where Athenians exercised their political rights, the agora, by virtue of its spatial characteristics—its openness and adjacency to public buildings and functions—actively fostered the aims of participatory democracy.⁶⁹ In contrast to the Pnyx, or open-air theatre, whose structure focused attention on particular speakers, the agora was ‘absent of spatial hierarchies that would

63 Lefebvre, Henri, *Writings on cities*, (New York: Blackwell, 1996 [1968]), p. 109.

64 Schacter, in building a case for graffiti as a kind of order, emphasizes the power of the built environment to produce social as much as structural foundations; *Ornament and Order*, pp. 10–20.

65 Iveson, ‘Graffiti, Street Art and the City’, p. 115.

66 Lefebvre, *Writings on cities*, p. 34.

67 See discussion in Schacter, ‘An Ethnography of Iconoclasm’, pp. 50–53 and Shields, Rob, ‘Lefebvre and the Right to the Open City?’, *Space and Culture* 16 (3) (2013): 345–348.

68 Harvey, David, ‘The right to the city’, *New Left Review*, II, 53 (2008): 23–40.

69 Sennett, Richard, *The Spaces of Democracy*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, College of Architecture and Urban Planning, 1998), p. 20.

divide people into active or passive or ruling or ruled groups'.⁷⁰ As such, it offered a space that fostered discussion of differing and conflicting interests.⁷¹ Taking the historic monuments of present-day Athens as exemplary, we can draw a contrast between the open, dialogic forum of the agora, and the 'exclusivity' of the more remote acropolis, which served a defensive and religious purpose and now a symbolic, touristic one, as the pinnacle of a mythic Greek culture. Recently Sennett has extended this thinking to conceptualise the form of cities that might foster democratic societies. These he characterizes as 'open' with 'porous borders' that allow for maximum contact among different populations and ideas, with architecture that is dynamic and even incomplete, encouraging civic engagement. This he juxtaposes to the 'closed' and determined forms in the tradition of the modernist city planning of Le Corbusier.⁷² Graffiti—as a force in the process of transforming and opening new spaces in the city, shifting its borders—might be understood within this framework as it constructs the conditions for civic exchange at the foundation of democratic society.⁷³

Graffiti writers in Athens also describe their work as a 'social diary' on display: a public record of otherwise hidden injustices and the increasingly bleak conditions of life in the city under crisis.⁷⁴ They emphasise its function to narrate stories and histories that have been silenced or lack public forums for expression in what is perceived as an increasingly repressive and politically dysfunctional milieu. Historically, the street has been recognised as a symbol of freedom,⁷⁵ its open and public facing walls an alternative to institutional or closed settings. In the words of Exarcheia's Street Artist 84, interviewed during an ethnographic survey: 'As the song goes "the street had its own story, someone painted it on the wall". That's how you understand what happened there. Basically, it is a story, a story that needed to be written, there was no alternative'.⁷⁶ In the absence of other public venue or recognition, graffiti serves to memorialise events and victims. Insofar as graffiti serves a memorialising function, its communicative power is amplified.

Remembering is an action, an active use of our mind to recall previous events, however truthful or accurate this recall may be.⁷⁷ There is therefore an inherent agential aspect to

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁷² Sennett, 'The Open City', 2013 lecture, pp. 11–14, <https://www.richardsennett.com/site/senn/UploadedResources/The%20Open%20City.pdf>.

⁷³ Schacter, 'An Ethnography of Iconoclasm', p. 59.

⁷⁴ Bleeps.gr., 'A Visual Diary on Public Display'.

⁷⁵ Avramidis, 'Reading an Instance of Contemporary Urban Iconoclasm', pp. 57–8.

⁷⁶ Interview in Tsilimpounidi and Walsh, 'Painting human rights', p. 74.

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, Paul, 'Memory and Forgetting', in Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (eds.), *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary debates in philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 5.

memory which further influences the structures around those who remember. Crucially, memory influences present understandings and shared meanings by presenting an interpreted narrative of the past, however recent that past is, and constructing from it a vision of the future. Through this construction of what Paul Ricoeur calls the ‘future of the past’,⁷⁸ anything with a memorializing function has an implicit call to action.

Elsewhere, the memorialising function of graffiti is further evidence of its communicative power. Inherent within the concept of memory is that of narrative, the concept of telling or representing a story of the past. Indeed, many consider memory not only a way of telling a story but the result of the ‘duty to tell’ a certain story.⁷⁹ ‘The duty to remember consists not only in having a deep concern for the past, but in transmitting the meaning of past events to the next generation.’⁸⁰ The process of transmitting this message takes many forms, of which imagery must be considered a major category. To quote Ricoeur a final time, ‘The reality of history is made “visible” again through images; and this makes memory a reproduction, a sort of second production.’⁸¹ The imagery of graffiti, then, serves an important communicative function in making ‘visible’ again a narrative of historical reality which is not otherwise being told.

Lene Hansen’s important work on the theorisation of images offers a challenge to the notion of the visual as ‘deceptively persuasive in its immediacy and cutting short deliberative process in its mobilization of the populace, a perspective that has defined Security Studies in the past’.⁸²

Graffiti makes visible not only places, narratives, and critical debate, but also marginalised people. As illustrated in Figure 6, in which a woman fenced by the barbed wire of a war zone or refugee camp appears to us as if through a window, the content of graffiti can make visible marginalised people who are otherwise invisible to or forgotten by society. It has long been understood that visual portraits have the capacity to metaphorically ‘make present’ the persons they represent.⁸³ In addition to their subjects, graffiti also records the presence and agency of its writers in a way distinct from other forms of art.⁸⁴ As an illicit activity, the production of graffiti implies risk and, when its aim is the greater societal good, a kind of ethical commitment. Within the context of the social

78 Ibid, p. 14.

79 Ibid, p. 9.

80 Ibid, pp. 9–10.

81 Ibid, p. 16.

82 Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image for Security Studies’, p. 52.

83 On the dual status of the image as representation and presence, see especially Belting, ‘Image, Medium, Body’.

84 Schacter, ‘An Ethnography of Iconoclasm,’ pp. 37–42, on graffiti as a form of agency and its ritualistic, performative dimension.

and political consciousness graffiti attempts to foster, this commitment can register as a form of civic agency: an indication of the possibility of resistance to the prevailing state of affairs. It is for this reason that many artists are ambivalent to or reject attempts to appropriate their artwork, because it shifts the agency from non-state independence to collusion with the state, thereby calling into question the authenticity of the message.⁸⁵

A premise of this article and its attempt to expand the field of strategic communications is that every form of communication has a distinctive ontology or constitution, which in turn determines operation and potential impact. We have considered the material ground of graffiti as it is mediated by and transforms the urban fabric, where it has a socio-spatial effect. Its discursive, dialogic structure is likewise important to its impact in creating public forums for exchange in the absence of institutional structures. As Hansen has argued in the context of political cartoons, ‘performative genres [...] gain their authority not from documenting an external reality, but through the productive force of the visual articulation itself; it does not transmit a situation, but acts on and into it’.⁸⁶

Many of the images of Athens are dedicated to individuals who have lost their lives to police violence, or to the universal human being living under threat—whether refugee or Athenian citizen. As cultural geographer Edward Casey has articulated, public memory is closely tied to specific places, which in certain cases embody the memory itself. Beyond the recording of persons and events, graffiti also presents and provokes discussion of social and political realities that are otherwise suppressed in the mainstream media or lacking in public institutions, opening a much-needed space for dialogue.

Among the different kinds of spaces graffiti activates, central to graffiti’s political efficacy is a dialogic or discursive realm of civic participation: what has been called the public sphere. In certain respects, the function of this realm is analogous to Sennett’s idea of the town-square or agora. The concept is most fully developed in the political theory of Jürgen Habermas and what he calls ‘communicative action’.⁸⁷ The public sphere describes a realm of social life, accessible to all individuals, in which rational communication takes place and public opinion is formed, free from extraneous influence or pressure. As Nancy Fraser writes in a recent critique and development of the concept: ‘It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs,

85 As graffiti has become recognised as an art form, its creators are placed in a bind between recognition and appropriation for aims at odds with its original intent and function. Arguably there is also a neutralizing effect in museumification as graffiti is enlisted as historical document.

86 Hansen, ‘Theorizing the image for Security Studies’, p. 60.

87 For Habermas’s later use of the category of the public sphere, see *The Theory of Communicative Action, vol 2, Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, (trans.) Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas's sense is also conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations.⁸⁸

Habermas describes the historic emergence of a public sphere in Europe of the eighteenth century with the construction of physical sites such as public parks, meeting halls, and coffee houses, as well as institutions such as publishing houses and libraries. Such a sphere, which offered a space between the power of the state and private life, allowed for gatherings and discussion critical to the exercise of political activity at the heart of democracy, where civil society could blossom. Habermas charts the loss of this realm and its function with the rise of modernity, when money and power 'colonize the lifeworld', displacing more 'communicative forms of solidarity'.⁸⁹ Invoking Habermas's theory, cultural anthropologist Rafael Schacter has recently argued that graffiti, as it institutes a space for a particular kind of civic exchange, effectively serves to re-create this 'lost' sphere.⁹⁰ Athens artist Bleeps describes his work by invoking a similar claim: 'It is not just a reclamation of the public space but [...] more a reinstatement of the public sphere. The properties I choose to create are usually ramshackle, from the neoclassical period, the mid 19th early 20th century', he explains. 'Through my art I delicately borrow from the public sphere. I add a discreet depiction of my view on various topics, including politics. This type of art is not immaculate but [rather] associated with an idealism springing from the notion of the multitude.'⁹¹

While Schacter sees in certain types of graffiti the potential to mobilise rational dialogue and consensus-building around issues of critical social and political importance, he also recognises its more disruptive forms.⁹² Combining wide-ranging ethnographic research with a sophisticated array of theory across disciplines, Schacter makes a compelling case for understanding graffiti as both ornament and order. In some cases, it is consensual and in others, dissensual or what he terms 'agonistic'. In other words, graffiti and its messages can flow within the rhythm of its urban environment or it can aim to destroy or deface it. Arguably, in both cases graffiti institutes a form of

88 Fraser, Nancy, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, №. 25/26, (1990): 57.

89 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol 2, p. 336.

90 Schacter, *Ornament and Order*, pp. 55ff.

91 Online: <http://www.huckmagazine.com/art-and-culture/art-2/street-artist-responding-greeces-social-turmoil/>.

92 On graffiti as 'agonistic ornamentation' see Schacter, *Ornament and Order*, pp. 91–129.

public-facing address that encourages wider engagement.⁹³ In addition to a sphere of Habermasian rational consensus, then, we should consider graffiti's potential to produce multiple 'counterpublics' or oppositional networks of communication that are vital to the diversity of opinion that make up democratic exchange.⁹⁴ As a creative form, graffiti might be understood in the poetic, world-making capacity that Michael C. Warner describes: 'Public discourse [...] is poetic. By this I mean not just that it is self-organizing, a kind of entity created by its own discourse, nor even that this space of circulation is taken to be a social entity, but that in order for this to happen all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts



Figure 6. bleeps.gr, 'Homelands of the Deprived'. Keramikos district, Athens (public domain image).

93 Avramidis examines the idea of graffiti as a form of public address, drawing upon Kurt Iveson who redefines the public sphere in terms of the spatial 'affordances' of the city. See Avramidis, 'Mapping the Geographical and Spatial Characteristics of Politicized Urban Art', pp. 186–88.

94 Avramidis, 'Mapping the Geographical and Spatial Characteristics of Politicized Urban Art', pp. 189–91. See also Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 67.

to circulate, and it must attempt to realize that world through address.⁹⁵ More recently, Fraser has extended this Habermasian concept further to consider the role of ‘subaltern counterpublics’ as ‘parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests’—a description that seems particularly resonant in the realm of graffiti.⁹⁶

The networks that produce graffiti are also forms of solidarity, which, communicated to a wider public, invite a broader participation in the activation of the civic realm. The purposeful inclusion of the suffering and vulnerable in society in these actions may provide a counter-argument to recent critique of Habermasian theory, on the point that its model of communication as a form of praxis fails to account for the ‘experiences and needs of corporeal, vulnerable human beings who are part of the material world.’⁹⁷ Here we might again invoke Fraser’s argument that the idea of the public sphere should be one that ‘provides the conceptual condition of possibility for the revisionist critique of its imperfect realization.’⁹⁸ In other words, conversation in the public sphere must allow not only for consensus building but also for recognition of diverse perspectives, self-criticism, and the maturation of ideas.

Re-Presenting the City: Graffiti, Agency, and Visibility

In thinking about graffiti’s role in actively recreating a socially inclusive public sphere, we can draw upon the following insights by philosopher Judith Butler. The public sphere is ‘constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere by appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, as a way of establishing whose lives will be marked as lives, and whose lives will count as deaths.’⁹⁹ This appearance or perception of the public sphere is an example of a shared meaning which is open to interpretation and renegotiation by all actors—state and non-state—the result of which will have an impact on the reality of the public sphere.

The significance of graffiti’s performative dimension might be unfolded further. Insofar as its production entails risk, political graffiti carries with it not only a sense of commitment to something larger than oneself, it also communicates an internalisation of a specific lived experience or perception. In the words of Political Zoo: ‘We have an idea of a

95 Warner, Michael C., ‘Publics and Counterpublics (abbreviated)’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 88, №. 4 (November 2002): 422.

96 Fraser, Nancy, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere’, p. 68.

97 Fluck, Matthew, ‘The best there is? Communication, objectivity and the future of International Relations Theory’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 20, issue 1 (2012): 56–79.

98 Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere’, note 15, p. 79.

99 Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life: The powers of mourning and violence*, (London: Verso, 2004), xx–xi.



Figure 7. Graffiti in the Exarcheia district. Athens, July 2016 (photo by the author).

different society, different power dynamics, and different human interactions. [We] don't like to give a name to that: it is not anarchy, not communism, it is what we imagine and paint on the wall.¹⁰⁰ This idea of a vision that cannot be articulated but is understood by the target audience demonstrates the power of shared meanings, reinforcing the sense of solidarity and community behind graffiti communication. Whether as critique of prevailing conditions or expression of solidarity, communication through graffiti is based on a vision of how society or civic life should be. In this regard, graffiti has a double effect: creating both a sense of engaged presence and a re-presentation of the city: an enlivened, image-rich, and imaginary city that stands opposed to the current condition. Arguably, the creation of such a milieu can have a positive, socio-psychological effect in areas under duress, fostering the conditions for civic participation and agency. As graffiti overwrites the city with images and messages that re-present the reality of its socio-political crisis to the public, paradoxically, it contributes to the restoration of the democratic image of Athens the city would like to preserve in the historic and mythic symbols it protects.

100 Interview in Tsilimpounidi and Walsh, 'Painting human rights', pp. 80–1.

Conclusion

Appropriation by the State: Graffiti as 'Soft Power'

Graffiti, as a 'horizontal' mode of expression, provides a significant example of a strategy that derives its authenticity and power from the people, but is increasingly promoted by institutions and states that recognise its positive effects in embattled or derelict areas. As a tacit acknowledgment of the power and centrality of graffiti, the Greek government and cultural institutions have responded both by allowing its production (within certain limits) and by appropriating graffiti as an 'art' for State use. The strategic importance of urban space, and the impact of graffiti within this space, is further evident from the state's attempted appropriation of graffiti in Athens. Increasingly, city authorities in Athens are commissioning public graffiti, with the Athens School of Fine Arts sponsoring classes on street painting.¹⁰¹ Elsewhere, real estate developer Oliaros is consciously using mural art to gentrify areas of the city. The state appears to openly concede the symbolic and strategic importance of the graffiti in its commissioning of pieces. An adviser to the city mayor stated that, 'once graffiti becomes commissioned art, it is a signal of the beginning of the end of the financial or social crisis that a city has gone through'. Equally, the way an artist responds to the state's commissioning such art reveals his or her own intentions. Artists resent that their work is being 'whitewashed' and see it as an attempt to neutralise and control their messages.¹⁰² This contest over the ownership of graffiti art is a reflection of the larger battle to control the meaning of the art, and therefore control the influence it has on those navigating the space it occupies.

In addition to a form of strategic communications in an urban context, graffiti, as a product of culture, might be understood as a form of soft power.¹⁰³ Recent scholarship has argued the importance of the affective dimension of this kind of influence as it gains strength from 'audiences' affective investments in the images of identity that it produces'.¹⁰⁴ While the problem of measurement of this influence is challenging, specifically in terms of the causal impact of images, it must be reconsidered in different terms if the field of strategic communications is to engage with images. Hansen has been at the forefront of providing compelling arguments in this regard, insisting that: 'the post-positivist epistemological ambition [...] is not one of testing, either against the empirical or other explanations, but to provide a set of theoretically derived arguments that lead to concepts and distinctions that can be used in empirical analysis.

101 Alderman, 'Across Athens'.

102 Ibid.

103 A concept influential to International Relations theory, as formulated by Joseph S. Nye.

104 Solomon, Ty, 'The affective underpinnings of soft power', *European Journal of International Relations*, 20.3 (2014): 720.

The challenge is thus not to test the theory, but to engage it, both at the level of the soundness of its theoretical assumptions and through further empirical applications'.¹⁰⁵ Her proposal that the visual should be examined as an 'ontological-political condition' to be analyzed, rather than a 'variable to be measured' is also relevant here. The positive socio-psychological effects of graffiti, while difficult to measure, may be among its strongest features. In areas under crisis or siege, graffiti strategically communicates not only messages, but also active resistance to the established order and the hope of transformation. Promising lines of inquiry in this regard are those that extend Nye's original conception of soft power in terms of assets or capabilities to think more broadly about how influence works, particularly as it involves strategic narratives.¹⁰⁶

Finally, we might consider the role graffiti might play in mitigating conflict. While it is at times continuous with protest that gives way to violence, it is also a non-violent means of expressing dissent. If the essence of democracy lies in 'displacing conflict and difference from the realm of violence to a more peaceable, deliberative realm', as Sennett has argued, then graffiti, like the cities it shapes, may play a significant role in fostering civic agency at the foundation of democratic process.¹⁰⁷

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105 Hansen, 'Theorizing the image for Security Studies', p. 69.

106 Roselle, Laura and Alister Miskimmon, 'Strategic narrative: A new way to understand soft power', *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 7(1) (2014): 70–84.

107 Sennett, *The Spaces of Democracy*, p. 12.

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PUTTING THE STRATEGY BACK INTO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

David Betz, Vaughan Phillips

Abstract

Strategic communications has vaulted to the top of the agenda for governments in the West in the vain hope that it might solve a seemingly intractable conflict with jihadist groups, an adversary whose ideology seems to be an essential part of its life-force. However, these governments have failed to grasp why these groups are more adept at using stories to animate their adherents toward the achievement of strategic ends. Unlike Western governments, jihadists use communication to support their use of force. They treat strategic communications as an intrinsic element of war. Consequently, the internal coherence of their messages is greater and more persuasive. Moreover, their propaganda cadres are also nimbler; while they form a loose, decentralised network, they act in accordance with mission command principles, galvanised by a clear sense of the commander's intent and a higher tolerance for risk. Indeed, the West's failed use of strategic communications reveals a startling ignorance of several of Carl Von Clausewitz's principles and arguments, not least the importance of understanding the kind of war upon which one embarks.

Keywords: *countering violent extremism, jihadism, technology, storytelling, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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Introduction

In 2006 Donald Rumsfeld lamented that the Taliban was out-communicating the United States in Afghanistan.¹ A year later his successor Robert Gates voiced similar incredulity about al-Qaida's relative success in the discursive skirmishes of the War on Terror: 'How has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world's greatest communication society?'² More recently it has been observed of Islamic State that even as its physical presence in its Syrian and Iraqi heartland is rolled back, its 'virtual' presence in the minds of incipient jihadists³ elsewhere, particularly in Europe, is growing.

Why? Why are the strategic communications of the West—the American and European governments that promote liberal democracy—so poor relative to armed groups with far fewer resources at their disposal? Is it because of the 'postmodern' Zeitgeist of skepticism towards civilisational metanarratives that the educational system has inculcated for the last two generations?⁴ Is it that the hierarchical, centralised, and rule-based structures of Western states render them less nimble than the decentralised, flattened hierarchies of their opponents who, moreover, are relatively freer to play fast and loose with the truth? There is something to such arguments, as we shall see, but the thesis we propose is harder and more fundamental.

The jihadist armed groups that oppose the West have enjoyed, and will in all likelihood continue to enjoy, results that are more congenial to their interests for one primary

1 Rumsfeld, Donald, 'New Realities in the Media Age', Council on Foreign Relations speech (New York: 17 February 2006).

2 Gates, Robert, Landon Lecture, Kansas State University (Manhattan, KS: 26 November 2007).

3 To be understood in this article as groups and individuals which maintain that violence is necessary to bring about an authentic Islamic form of governance. Zelin, Aaron, 'From the Archduke to the Caliph' in *The First World War and Its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, T.G. Frasier (ed.), (London: The Gingko Library, 2015), p. 164.

4 On which point see Bloom, Allan, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

reason: there is strategy in their strategic communications, whereas in those of the West there is not. They are winning the ‘war of ideas’ because they actually treat it as a war in which words and deeds are deployed in concert towards the achievement of specific plausible objectives. Consequently, their communicative strategies possess more persuasive traction because they serve objectives that are profoundly more internally coherent. They are less frequently bedevilled by credibility failures because the gap between what they say and what they do is generally small, and where it is not their adherents are more forgiving of the discrepancy. Their propaganda cadres operate more nimbly in accordance with mission command principles because the commander’s intent is clear.

In this paper we consciously operationalise the concept of strategic communications rather more narrowly than is typically done in the literature. In our view, all communications may be more or less purposeful, but it is only the context of war, in which violence is threatened or actual, that renders them ‘strategic’. The reasons we define ‘strategic communications’ so strictly are fourfold. First, a strict definition renders clarity to a concept that is otherwise flabby and prone to endless dancing-on-the-head-of-a-pin definitional debate. Second, it is useful for generating insights from our case studies; our definition illuminates the dependency of compelling narrative on clarity of purpose, and the way in which discursive means (as all arms of war) reach their full potential only as part of a combination of forces and not in isolation. Third, it is the only intellectually defensible approach that squares the dominant philosophy of war (which ostensibly is the central pillar of these discussions) with the myriad other theories, ideas, concepts about the workings of the world that are brought to bear on discussions of strategic matters. Fourth, it is the view that best connects our analytical efforts with the canonical works on propaganda that ought to be the starting point of any deliberation on strategic communications. In his classic text on the subject, the very first point Jacques Ellul strove to impress upon the reader was that propaganda exists only because of a ‘will to action’—its purpose is to ‘arm’ policy and give ‘irresistible power’ to its decisions:

...in war, propaganda is an attempt to win victory with a minimum of physical expense. Before the war, propaganda is a substitute for physical violence; during the war it is a supplement to it.⁵

In other words, the context of strategic communications is war; its only point is to serve the aims of the war at hand alongside other instruments in a primary, secondary, or tertiary role in accordance with the war’s course and character. To pretend instead,

⁵ Ellul, Jacques, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. x, n. 2

as currently is normally done, that strategic communications exists in a sort of superposition of war/not war is an invitation to confusion, self-deception, and ultimate defeat.

What is war?

‘War is an act of force to compel an enemy to do our will.’ This, of course, is the well-known formulation of Carl Von Clausewitz in *On War*, the ur-text of the study of war in the West.⁶ The problem here is not that the idea of applying this definition to strategic communications requires stretching the concept of force to include non-kinetic means. Contemporary scholarship is clearly open to the notion that war involves a discursive component; indeed, it is argued not infrequently that this discursive component, or ‘virtual dimension’ as we have described it elsewhere, betimes supersedes the non-discursive.⁷ Nor, we suppose, would Clausewitz himself disagree.

It follows intrinsically and logically from his other, even more famous, proposition that war is the extension of politics by other means—which is to say that it lies upon a spectrum of political persuasion in which parties decide in one way or another the essential questions of who gets what, when, and how.⁸ It is even more powerfully embedded in his philosophical conception of war as a trinity of chance, political purpose, and passion—the last, which is the province above all of the people, being that upon which the other elements of the triad are co-dependent.⁹ Attacking the base of the will of one’s opponent, therefore, and bolstering the sustaining passion of one’s own base, is as vital to war as the clashing of arms and the making of political and strategic decisions.¹⁰

Even more pertinent—perhaps especially in the cases under review here—is recognition that the practice of strategic communications as an aspect of warlike endeavour and, concomitantly, as an essential component of strategy, requires the existence of a political aim—a condition of the world that one’s will is directed at realising.

6 Von Clausewitz, Carl, (Michael Howard and Peter Paret, trans. and eds.), *On War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Everyman’s Library, 1993), p. 83.

7 Betz, David, ‘The Virtual Dimension of Contemporary Insurgency and Counter Insurgency’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 19, № 4 (2008), p. 513. The point is also made by Smith, Rupert, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), pp. 286 & 289.

8 Lasswell, Harold, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936).

9 Clausewitz, p. 101.

10 See Smith, M.L.R., ‘Politics and Passion: The Neglected Mainspring of War’, *Infinity Journal*, Vol. 4, №. 2 (2014), pp. 32–36.

What is strategy?

Strategy has been variously described. Clausewitz did so, too narrowly for contemporary liking, as the use of battles for the achievement of the aims of war. This was adequate for the wars of his time, which could be—and were—decided by the physical contest of armies on the battlefield.¹¹ Nowadays it is more satisfyingly described as the ‘art’ of creating power (which may comprise various forms, including persuasive and non-kinetic ones) for the purposes of policy.¹² Strategy is often likened metaphorically to a bridge connecting military means with political ends.¹³ It is also sometimes conceptualised as the directive quality by which policy is enacted at the tactical level.¹⁴

These conceptions are not mutually exclusive. For the purposes at hand what is germane to all of them is that they depend upon the existence of a political object. Without such, the art of unleashing power amounts to random splattering, the strategy bridge goes nowhere and abuts on nothing, and tactics, howsoever furiously performed, constitute little but the noise before defeat.

At the present time the strategic communications of the West are astrategic. They evoke no specifically desired end state beyond, perhaps, the restoration of a beleaguered status quo to a state of normality that a significant fraction of the world considers to be invidious. At best, they are reactive—seeking to establish what was summed up at a NATO Defence College conference in April 2015, as a ‘counter-narrative which calls a lie a lie, and spreads the “truth” [whatever that may be]’.¹⁵ This is particularly evident in ongoing efforts to use strategic communications for counter-narrative work. These communications are not clear, even on the identity of the enemy, refusing to name anyone as such. Rather they rest their arguments upon implied foes and appeal to imagined values-based constituencies, whereas the actual constituencies are themselves in fractured turmoil. The latter point is especially strategically debilitating as it means not only is there a vague ‘they’ against whose will there is some contest, there is an equally vague ‘we’ upon whose passions there is no explicit mythic calling.

What is strategic communications?

‘Strategic communications’ is more variably defined than either war or strategy. There is little commonality between governments on what it means; even within the same

11 Addington, Larry, *The Patterns of War Since the Eighteenth Century* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

12 Gray, Colin, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

13 Ibid.

14 Strachan, Hew, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

15 Research Division, NATO Defence College, ‘NATO and the New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid threats’, *NDC Conference Report*, №.3/15 (May 2015), p. 8.

government interpretations of its meaning differ between ministries, in particular between those run by soldiers and those run by diplomats.¹⁶ It might be said, following from the above, that strategic communications is essentially the act of ‘communicating purposively’ in order to advance the ‘mission of an organization or cause’.¹⁷ In other words, it is propaganda—communication aimed at swaying the beliefs of someone or some group, but in the interests of someone else or some other group (normally that of the propagandist).¹⁸

Nowadays, no good propagandist would describe his or her function with that term because, at least in the West, the legitimacy of ‘propaganda’ as such was destroyed in the crucible of the World Wars. Not since Lord Beaverbrook, the media magnate and First World War British propaganda chief, described Jesus Christ as ‘The Divine Propagandist’ would a strategic communicator voluntarily wear that label.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it is the case that strategic communications, per se, is not new. Neolithic cave paintings publicly commemorate victories to galvanize friends and intimidate enemies.²⁰

Yet it will not do simply to define strategic communications as communications with a purpose because all communication is purposeful—whether it is to inform or to amuse, to request or to command, to plead or to proselytise, to frighten or to soothe, all communication is imbued with some essential intent. What makes strategic communications strategic is that it transpires within a context that is suffused by violence or the threat of violence. One belligerent party wishes that the other take a course of action contrary to its normal desire. It attempts, therefore, to sway the other to that end by means that, should words alone fail, may include causing pain and destroying wealth.²¹ It may be argued that diplomacy and other forms of purposeful communications conducted prior to the escalation of events to actual conflict, and with the desire to avoid such conflict, constitutes a sort of strategic communications; but even then it is the shadow of threatened violence, more or less dimly perceived, that renders these communications strategic.

16 Farwell, James P., *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), p. xviii.

17 Hallahan, Kirk, Derina Holtzhausen, Betteke van Ruler, Dejan Verčić, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, ‘Defining Strategic Communication’, *Journal of Strategic Communication*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2007), p. 4.

18 Taylor, Philip, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day*, 3rd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 7.

19 Beaverbrook, Max Aitken, *The Divine Propagandist* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1962).

20 Ingram, Haroro J., ‘A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict: Lessons for Counter Terrorism Strategic Communications’, *ICCT Research Paper*, (June 2016), p. 6, <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ICCT-Haroro-Ingram-Brief-History-Propaganda-June-2016-LATEST.pdf>.

21 Schelling, Thomas, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 2.

This rather raises the question: Why the fuss? What so suddenly has vaulted strategic communications (howsoever labelled) to such heights of military consternation and policy-makers' perturbation, as it now seemingly demands, if it has always been a central aspect of war?

In a nutshell, the answer is technology; which in itself is saying very little in the context of war's physical dimension. In that aspect of war change is frequent; though typically incremental rather than revolutionary.²² Armies that fail to keep up with the constant pace of warfighting adaptation lose, sometimes exceedingly demonstratively, which is why the technology of war is more or less the meat and bread of traditional military history. By contrast, technological change in the discursive aspect of war is extremely slow and actually always revolutionary because of its rarity. There have really only been four profound changes in communications technology that matter in terms of their effect upon the art of persuasive discourse from Plato and Cicero's day to our own:

- Mass literacy, which is roughly coincident with mechanical print—a development that was characterised by the advent of the pamphlet wars and helped fuel the particular ferocity of the wars of the Reformation;²³
- Mass communication, which comes with the twinning of print with power (first steam and then electric)—a development that saw the advent of the modern newspaper and is associated with the age of revolution, as the late eighteenth through early twentieth century is sometimes described;²⁴
- Radio and television, which added a degree of immediacy and, especially with the latter, a layer of emotional verisimilitude to mass communication—a development typically credited with the arrival of the concept of the 'living-room war' and the 'CNN effect';²⁵ and
- The Internet, which (for the time being) has substantially diminished the power of editors and censors to shape information content and control its flow—a development generally supposed to have powered a new era

²² There exists a large literature on this subject amongst the most useful of which is Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray (eds.), *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300–2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²³ See MacCulloch, Diarmaid, *Christianity: The First 3000 Years* (London: Penguin, 2009), Chap. 17.

²⁴ See Briggs, Asa, and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), chap. 4 on technology and media. It was Eric Hobsbawm who coined *The Age of Revolution* (London: Abacus, 1992). Charles, Louise, and Richard Tilly chose a different periodisation and a more social science approach in *The Rebellious Century, 1830–1930* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1975).

²⁵ Livingston, Steven, and Todd Easchus, 'Humanitarian Crises and US Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered', *Political Communication*, Vol. 12, № 4 (1995), pp. 413–429.

of variously described ‘diffused’ or ‘hybrid’ wars and to have enhanced the strategic reach of violent non-state actors.²⁶

Everything else is incidental. The trouble for today’s strategic communicators is that they are right at the eye of the storm brought about by the most recent inflection point and find, therefore, equanimity to be elusive.

The Power of Stories

Until quite recently it was common to separate humans from other animals by our relative propensity to fashion and use tools. *Homo habilis*, the ‘handy man’, one of modern man’s distant ancestors, is so named because of his innovative use of stone flakes and hammers for butchery and for smashing open large bones to obtain the calorie-rich marrow inside. One might as easily talk of ‘storytelling man’—one who uses language for the propagation and preservation of knowledge. Stories are intrinsic to human experience and bound tightly with our biological and societal evolution.²⁷ It has even been said that humans are ‘primates whose cognitive capacity shuts down in the absence of a story’.²⁸

Clearly, as noted above, the means of communicating stories changes, albeit slowly, from, say, the fireside telling of the Homeric legend of Achilles by Greek orators working from memory 2,500 years ago to Brad Pitt’s more recent cinematic portrayal of him downloadable in digital form in seconds to the machine on which these words are now being written. Equally obviously, the volume of stories has expanded enormously. Yet, as has often been noted, all over the world, for as long as we are able to observe them, the stories emerging from the imaginations of men and women are remarkably few in basic form.²⁹

Despite this similarity, to a degree that is much greater than we typically consciously realise, we look at the world through these stories. We naturally see our own lives, as well as those of others, as stories progressing by chapters and episodes of large and small importance. And through media, of varying forms, we also see public life as an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of stories, complete with heroes and villains and happy

26 Hoskins, Andrew, and Ben O’Loughlin, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

27 Gottschall, Jonathan, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (New York: Mariner, 2013) and Boyd, Brian, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, Fiction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

28 Dawes, Robyn M., ‘A Message from Psychologists to Economists: Mere Predictability Doesn’t Matter Like it Should (without a Good Story Appended to it)’, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organisation*, Vol. 39, № 1 (1999), p. 29.

29 Booker, Christopher, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why we Tell Stories* (London: Continuum, 2004).

and unhappy endings.³⁰ Students of literature have long recognised the centrality of story in human affairs, as well as its confoundingly simultaneous fecund diversity and static repetitiveness. In like vein, psychologists have long argued that we are driven to perceive and to act upon the world as we do on account of unconscious programming of varying sorts—Carl Jung, for instance, spoke of ‘archetypes’.³¹

The ‘narrative turn’ in social sciences on the whole is of more recent vintage. What started as a trickle in 1960s continental philosophy, building on literary theory, became a flood by the late 1970s and early 1980s. The study of the world through the prism of the creation, interpretation, and reinterpretation of stories caught on with scholars more generally, in part because it seemed to square with parallel developments in the study of cognition and culture.³² Not only were these ideas applied in the world of policy, particularly social policy, they also came to inform the techniques of anti-status-quo social movements—such as those agitating for civil rights, women’s liberation, and anti-colonialism. In these realms the idea that relative material powerlessness could be balanced by better stories had an obviously attractive strategic rationale.³³

Thus emerged a large and thriving literature on the role of narrative framing in social mobilisation, initially concerned primarily with non-violent movements but more recently increasingly preoccupied with violent non-state actors.³⁴ We understand narrative as being not simply a story but rather a system of stories, themes, and archetypes that is both open-ended and participative.³⁵ New stories constantly arise, refreshing the narrative and changing it in ways that over time may seem flatly contradictory to the outside observer, while seeming utterly consistent from the inside. Four centuries of Irish narrative of resistance to English rule, for instance, have evoked themes as disparate as Catholic mysticism, romantic nationalism, and secular Marxism.³⁶

30 Booker, p. 573.

31 Idem, p. 11–12.

32 Freedman, *Strategy: A History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 429.

33 Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford ‘Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization’, *International Social Movement Research*, Vol. 1, № 1 (1988), pp. 197–217.

34 See Wiktorowicz, Quintan, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004).

35 Corman, Steven R., ‘Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication’, in L. Fenstermacher & T. Leventhal (eds.), *Countering Violent Extremism: Scientific Methods and Strategies* (Washington, DC: NSI Inc., 2015), p. 37; and Corman, Steven R., ‘The Difference Between Story and Narrative’, ASU Centre for Strategic Communication Blog. (21 March 2013), <http://csc.asu.edu/2013/03/21/the-difference-between-story-and-narrative/>.

36 Bolt, Neville, *The Violent Image: Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (London: Hurst, 2012), p. 88.

Coherence and Integration

The key to a well-functioning narrative, one that generates adherents and compels them toward desired actions, is a frame that provides coherence to the otherwise kaleidoscopic array of symbols, images, and arguments that pervade the public sphere.³⁷ The frame provides the underlying organising idea that suggests to individuals how to interpret what is essential in any particular observed event—what consequences and values are at stake, how they ought to orient themselves to the post hoc environment, and how, ultimately, they should act. It is in effect a sort of semi-permeable membrane comprised of beliefs, as often as not unconscious and prejudicial rather than consciously logical, that filters individual and group perception of reality like a pair of polarised sunglasses.

Some scholars have supposed that there are levels of narrative. At the top level, master narrative is trans-historical, incorporating themes and stories that are widely known in a culture, frequently invoked, told, and retold over time.³⁸ Then there are local narratives, which may be taken as the way someone explains the ‘here and now’.³⁹ The function of these local narratives is to ‘ground’ the master narrative in contemporary events, thus allowing individuals to perceive how their individual stories cohere with that of the larger culture. Where there is such coherence of narrative, sometimes described as ‘vertical integration’, the results can be highly compelling in terms of mobilisation.⁴⁰

Clausewitz included ‘passion’ amongst the famous trinity that he argued constituted war, because he grasped that war requires society to cohere around the project that violence is aimed at achieving. The point is sufficiently basic in principle that it was hardly a unique insight of the Prussian master. It is essentially the same truth to which Shakespeare makes Henry V give voice in his ‘Cry God for Harry, England, and St George!’ speech at the high point in his dramatisation of the siege of Harfleur: ‘On, on, you noblest English. Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof!’⁴¹ In soaring rhetoric here, we see a straight-out appeal to a particular historical narrative—a grand cultural memory and consequent obligation on the present passed on from father and mother to son and soldier—and an evocation of myth for the purposes of imbuing Henry’s war with a palpable moral force.

37 Ryan, Charlotte, and William A. Gamson, ‘Are Frames Enough’, in Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper (eds.), *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 168.

38 Halverson, Jeffrey R., H. Lloyd Goodall, and Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 11.

39 Corman, ‘Understanding the Role of Narrative in Extremist Strategic Communication’, p. 36.

40 Betz, p. 519.

41 Shakespeare, William, *Henry V*, Act III.

After Clausewitz, others made similar sorts of argument. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century French philosopher Georges Sorel, for example, is remembered primarily for his *Reflections on Violence* in which he remarked:

...men who are participating in a great social movement always picture their coming action as a battle in which their cause is certain to triumph. These constructions, knowledge of which is so important for historians, I propose to call 'myths'.⁴²

Myth construction is an aspect of power that the West has taught itself to mistrust (because of its experience of wars of mass mobilisation) and, by and large, to abjure, for ill and for good. For its materially weaker opponents there is no similar luxury of restraint. They compete hard discursively because the odds of competition in other ways are foregone. So long as the 'moral force' that animates their adherents is secure and coherent, they can continue to score painful hits and to reconstitute themselves after taking hits in return. In Sorel's terms, one side in the 'war of ideas' is better at convincing itself that the work in which it is engaged is serious, formidable, and sublime—and that is enough to keep them in the game, perhaps even to win.

Countering Violent Extremism

Narrative came to the high importance it now possesses in strategic studies at first very slowly, before 11 September 2001, and then very rapidly after. In the mid-1960s communications guru Marshall McLuhan described the Cold War as a 'war of icons', an ideational conflict in which material weapons were incidental to the deeper and more obsessional 'electric battle of information and of images'.⁴³ It is fair to say, however, that such ideas remained decidedly outside the mainstream for decades to follow, at least as far as strategy was concerned.⁴⁴

At the very end of the Cold War, boldly and controversially, a handful of scholars began to argue that conventional warfare had been radically superseded by unconventional warfare.⁴⁵ In the mid-1990s a few suggested the possibility that an era of grand but essentially de-territorialised ideational conflicts was dawning, on account of the burgeoning digital connectedness of the planet.⁴⁶ On the whole, though, the attention

42 Sorel, Georges, (T.E. Hulme, trans.), *Reflections on Violence* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1915), p. 27.

43 McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [1964] (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 37.

44 For example, *The Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* edited by Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), mentions propaganda only passingly and media not at all.

45 Most significantly, Van Creveld, Martin, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

46 Arquila, John and David Ronfeldt, *The Advent of Netwar* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996).

of the world's defence establishments was on a simpler and more congenial tactical proposition known as the Revolution in Military Affairs—the idea that information technology would enable high-tech armies to win their wars quickly, cheaply, and decisively.⁴⁷

It turned out, though, that in the 'Information Age', a handful of Muslim commandos equipped with plane tickets, box-cutting knives, and suicidal conviction could strike the global psyche with an act of Propaganda of the Deed⁴⁸ of a sort that nineteenth century anarchists could only dream of. Meanwhile, after a brief appearance in the wake of conventional military operations—first in Afghanistan in 2001, followed by Iraq in late March 2003—the hypothesised 'happy time' of victorious high-tech, low-footprint expeditionary campaigns of the War on Terror declared after the September 11 attacks devolved into a protracted, thankless, and invertebrate quagmire.

The term 'War on Terror' was early on criticised for its faulty strategic premises and more generally as an example of poor branding, despite which it has proved a very sticky label.⁴⁹ It always had a prominent discursive dimension, particularly in its 'war of ideas' variant—a descriptor often invoked by national leaders keen to stress the 'non-kinetic' element of military operations to domestic audiences that were increasingly skeptical of the war on which they had embarked. In 2005 the White House moved to rebrand it as the Struggle Against Violent Extremism (SAVE), but the effort was widely derided as opportunistic, euphemistic, and a bit pathetic.⁵⁰ Under President Obama, who luxuriated in a much more agreeable relationship with the media, the term was successfully dropped (without much change in actual policy) early on in his first administration. The term 'Countering Violent Extremism' represents, therefore, yet another evolution in the efforts of the West to re-brand the non-kinetic aspects of the fight against what began to be seen as a 'global insurgency'.⁵¹

Countering Violent Extremism is, for the time being, the rhetorical state of the art. What, then, is the violent extremist Islamist narrative and how is it performing relative to the putative counter-narrative deployed against it? The narrative actually consists of a multitude of master narratives ranging from the master narrative of the Pharaoh or

47 Owens, William, *Lifting the Fog of War* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

48 Propaganda of the Deed consists of acts of violence intended to create an 'ideological impact disproportionate to the act itself'. Bolt, Neville, David Betz and Jaz Azari, *Propaganda of the Deed 2008: Understanding the Phenomenon*, Whitehall Report Series, (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2008), p. 2.

49 See Howard, Michael, 'A Long War', *Survival*, Vol. 48., №. 4 (Winter 2006–2007), pp. 7–14.

50 Kaplan, Fred, 'Say G-Wot', Slate, (July 26, 2005), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/war_stories/2005/07/say_gwot.html.

51 See Kilcullen, David, 'Countering Global Insurgency', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, №. 4 (2005), pp.597–617, and Mackinlay, John, *The Insurgent Archipelago* (London: Hurst and Company, 2009).

the Jahiliyah.⁵² These master narratives include stories which have been manipulated by Jihadists to broadly argue that:

1. Islam is under general attack by the unbelieving West aided by local apostates and turncoats;
2. The actions of believers against Islam's enemies near and far are just, proportional, and sanctified;
3. It is the duty of good Muslims to fight or to support those who fight.⁵³

We might add a fourth message that analysts have noted as a central piece of the Islamic State's narrative:

4. The reward for their sacrifices will be a tangible utopia embodied by the establishment of a Caliphate.⁵⁴

As a strategic value statement—a narrative frame for war—this is exceedingly clear. The statement of the problem, the grievance, is demonstrably plausible to a significant fraction of the target audience; the claim for the rightness of resistance is resonant; and the injunction to support action flows internally and logically. This narrative attacks the base of the will of the enemy by suggesting that jihadists are ready to use any means to achieve their ends. Most importantly, the narrative frame is constantly energised by real-life events. Terrorist attacks confirm that the defence of Islam is underway and that there are options for others to join the fight.

They also provoke states to respond through legislation and demonstrations of force that vindicate the four arguments above by confirming the perception of Sunni victimhood.⁵⁵ Since the rise of the Islamic State, the lure of the narrative is also enhanced by the prospect of the nascent so-called Caliphate, which seemingly offers a viable socio-economic alternative. The narrative therefore sustains the passion of its supporters by providing a multitude of incentives and options to support what seems to be a viable and just political project.

The truth or untruth of any of these points is incidental to the empirical fact that they are believed. A 2010 Pew Research report on global Muslim attitudes found that Muslim

52 Halverson, Goodall and Corman, p. 185.

53 Quiggin, Tom, 'Understanding Al-Qaeda's Ideology for Counter-Narrative Work', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2009).

54 Winter, p. 28.

55 Carter, David B., 'Provocation and the Strategy of Terrorist and Guerilla Attacks', *International Organization*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (2016), pp.133–173.

publics overwhelmingly welcome Islamic influence over their countries' politics.⁵⁶ Polls dating back to 2007 show that a majority of Middle Eastern Muslims support the goal of establishing a Caliphate.⁵⁷ In 2013, a worldwide survey found that 99% of all Muslims in Afghanistan, 91% of Muslims in Iraq, and 85% in Pakistan support instituting religious law in their country.⁵⁸ The Arab Youth Survey found that fear of the Islamic State was not the same as a longing for democracy.⁵⁹ Moreover, what might be called soft support for jihadism is relatively common and widespread: Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, and Tunisia all report double digit 'very' or 'somewhat' favourable public opinion of al-Qaida, while 'positive' or 'very positive' feelings for Islamic State occupies a lower but not inconsiderable range from two to ten per cent.⁶⁰ While such hard-core activist minorities constitute only a few millions, the ideological tenets and values that these groups espouse are spread much more widely in society in concentric rings of relative affinity.

The depth and intimacy of the extremist narrative renders it akin to a monological belief system that is, to a high degree, impervious to refutation.⁶¹ Believers easily make sense of events which unbelievers cannot fathom.⁶² Confirmation bias allows seemingly rational people to skirt the cognitive dissonance otherwise produced by contrary facts, so long as the underlying monological belief system is solid.⁶³ For example, it renders extraordinarily brutal violence of a sort that an outside observer might perceive as alienating, comprehensible, and just. To a population on the receiving end of an

56 The Pew Research Centre, Global Muslims Attitudes Report (2010), <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2010/12/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Muslim-Report-FINAL-December-2-2010.pdf>.

57 World Public Opinion, 'Muslim Public Opinion on US Policy, Attacks on Civilians and al Qaeda' (April 2007), http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/apr07/START_Apr07_rpt.pdf

58 The Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center: 2013), p. 15, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2013/04/worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-full-report.pdf>

59 ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, *Arab Youth Survey* (2016), p. 26, http://www.arabyouthsurvey.com/uploads/whitepaper/2016-AYS-Presentation-EN_12042016100316.pdf

60 Lia, Brynjar, New ME Report 2015–2016 (University of Oslo, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages), <http://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/projects/new-middle-east/publications/2015-2016/bl-r-2016.pdf>

61 Swami, Viren, Rebecca Coles, Stefan Stieger, Jakob Pietschnig, Adrian Furnham, Sherry Rehim, and Martin Voracek, 'Conspiracist Ideation in Britain and Austria: Evidence of a Monological Belief System and Associations Between Individual Psychological Differences and Real-world and Fictitious Conspiracy Theories', *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (2011), p. 445.

62 Newheiser, Anna-Kaisa, Miguel Farias, and Nicole Tausch, 'The Functional Nature of Conspiracy Beliefs: Examining the Underpinnings of Belief in the Da Vinci Code Conspiracy', *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 51, No. 8, (2011), pp. 1007–1011.

63 Swami et al, p. 459.

aerial bombing campaign, the symbolism of the Islamic State killing a Jordanian pilot by setting him on fire in a cage and burying him in rubble was quite obvious.⁶⁴ The undoubtedly horrific theatre of Islamic State executions does not mean that its authors are unhinged; on the contrary, top propagandists and commanders set the parameters of violence carefully on the basis of a seemingly astute measure of its likely impact.⁶⁵

A recent study of German foreign fighters, for instance, found that 48% of returnees who have witnessed the Islamic State's brutality first hand remained committed to extremist ideology.⁶⁶ This palliative mechanism is compounded by the increasingly siloed nature of information flows created by proliferating media channels, and the way the algorithms that underpin the profit-making strategies of the Internet's main platforms are creating self-validating echo chambers.⁶⁷ Extremist narratives, therefore, are inherently resistant to external deconstruction because they are bolstered by the technological infrastructure that sustains modern communications.

The strategic communications of jihadists have been described as a striking combination of loose structure and strong coherence—'many storytellers, one story', as one observer put it.⁶⁸ In this respect it bears comparison with the ideals of 'mission tactics', a central component of manoeuvre warfare, which holds that in order to maintain a high tempo and take advantage of fleeting opportunities for decisive action, the authority to make decisions must be decentralised. At the same time, unity of effort must be preserved. In order to reconcile these potentially contradictory impulses superiors need to tell subordinates what is to be achieved and why (i.e. to explain the 'commander's intent'), while allowing them much latitude in deciding how exactly to go about it. A corollary of expecting subordinates to show a high degree of initiative is that errors resulting from mistaken initiative must be seen as 'teachable moments' rather than career-ending debacles.

64 Reed, John and Erika Solomon, 'Video shows Jordanian pilot "burned alive" by Isis', *Financial Times* (3 February 2015).

65 For examples of the ways in which the Islamic State uses the dissemination of images of graphic violence to achieve strategic see Phillips, Vaughan, 'The Islamic State's Strategy: Bureaucratising the Apocalypse Through Strategic Communications', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (2016), p. 10.

66 Bewarder, Manuel and Florian Flade, 'Manche kommen zurück, um sich zu erholen', *Welt* (28 November 2016), <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article159797782/Manche-kommen-zurueck-um-sich-zu-erholen.html>.

67 Thomas, Jem, 'Breaching the Barricades: Biased Algorithms and Countering Violent Radicalisation' (15 June 2016), <http://www.albanyassociates.com/notebook/2016/06/breaching-the-barricades-biased-algorithms-and-countering-violent-radicalization/>.

68 Winter, Charlie, 'The Battle for Mosul: Analysis of ISIS Propaganda', presentation at conference of the King's Centre for Strategic Communications on The Informational Dimension of Hybrid Warfare (London: 12 January 2017).

This tolerance for mistakes and risk-taking is sustained by a decentralised and loose structure, which does not mean that it is 'leaderless' or unorganised. For example, in line with its pretensions as a state,⁶⁹ the Islamic State has a number of official media outlets, but relies on its ability to inspire its network of supporters by carefully choreographed acts of Propaganda of the Deed. There is, in fact, a feedback cycle between its physical activities and the digital response of its supporters, which can appear at times to be self-sustaining in the same way that corporations inspire consumers through experiential marketing cycles.⁷⁰ Within this decentralised system, the role of leadership is to set goals and parameters on operations and not so much to determine specific tactics. Fog and friction are seen as normal because war is the realm of unpredictability, uncertainty, and rapid change, and therefore the goal is to operate within them while magnifying their effects on one's opponent.⁷¹ Instead of directive command and control, there is a system of leadership and monitoring and a cultivation of implicit communication based on shared ways of thinking rather than explicit communications based on rules and procedures.⁷² This implicit communication is symptomatic of the way the different nodes in the information network are all very familiar with the multitude of stories in their narrative system and the way they can be used to frame events.

By contrast, the West's counter-narrative strategy is riddled with obvious narrative humbug, wishful thinking, incoherently muddled goals and methods, and the sort of operational fratricide that comes from over-bureaucratisation. The gist of it, according to both the USA and the UK, is that extremism is to be defeated by the empowerment of local partners.⁷³ In the words of a think-tank friendly to the policies of the Obama administration:

*Local voices hold more credibility with local populations and are best positioned to gather opposition to extremists. Americans can help to amplify those voices [...]. By linking activists around the world, civil society organizations can convey critical new skills to counter extremist propaganda.*⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Phillips, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Idem, p. 16.

⁷¹ Lind, William S., *Maneuver Warfare Handbook* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p. 7.

⁷² Winter, Charles, *Documenting the Virtual 'Caliphate'* (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015), p. 28.

http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL_documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf, pp.12-12.

⁷³ Executive Office of the President of the United States, 'Strategic Implementation Plan for Empowering Local Partners To Prevent Violent Extremism In the United States', December 2011, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/sip-final.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Lord, Kristin M., John A. Nagl, and Seth D. Rosen, *Beyond Bullets: A Pragmatic Strategy to Combat Violent Islamist Extremism* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2009), pp. 13–14, http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/LordNaglRosen_Beyond%20Bullets_Capstone%20Essay_June09.pdf.

This is humbug. Unsurprisingly, the counter-narrative strategy has made hardly a dent in the Islamic State's narrative because it is self-baffling waffle and largely blind to the cultural context that sustains the narrative it purports to counter. For one thing, open Western funding of local organisations, such as the Sawab Centre in Abu Dhabi, is normally conditional on their promoting liberal democratic values.⁷⁵ And yet these values are neither widely in particularly good odour in the region nor perceived as naturally culturally relevant, which obviously undermines the ideal of empowerment. The attempts of Western governments to work with local actors on the basis of supposed shared values⁷⁶ undermines their ability to present themselves as organic parts the communities they seek to sway—there is no amplification. For another thing, attempts to keep Western funding of local actors covert leaves the credibility of said actors hostage to fortune, as they are potentially easily portrayed as stooges of foreign powers, a measure of reputation that no amount of critical new skills will refute.⁷⁷

Counter-narratives lack the vertical integration of extremist ones, as may be seen in their relative failure to generate large numbers of voluntary propagators. While the scale of the propaganda machine of the Islamic State has dipped as Coalition military operations have been ramped up, media production peaked in November 2015 at about

75 See 'Sawab Centre Launched in Abu Dhabi to Counter Daesh Propaganda', *Gulf News* (8 July 2015) <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/government/sawab-centre-launched-in-abu-dhabi-to-counter-daesh-propaganda-1.1547345>. The idea that the US can support a 'moderate' form of Islam which embraces Western values is popular. In 2007, for example, the RAND Corporation encouraged the US government to amplify liberal voices in Muslim civil society: Angel Rabasa, Cheryl Benard, Lowell H. Schwartz, and Peter Sickle, *Building Moderate Muslim Networks* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG574.pdf. The link between democracy promotion and foreign aid is also clearly expressed by the US Agency for International Development in *USAID Strategy On Democracy Human Rights and Governance*, (Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development, June 2013), p. 7, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID%20DRG_%20final%20final%206-24%203%20(1).pdf)

76 In the UK, the value-centric approach to CVE was clearly signalled by David Cameron's refusal to work with local organisations or individuals who did not subscribe to 'core liberal values'. See Therese O'Toole, Nasar Meer, Daniel Nilsson DeHanas, Stephen H Jones and Tariq Modood, 'Governing through Prevent? Regulation and Contested Practice in State-Muslim Engagement', *Sociology*, Vol. 50. No. 1 (2016), pp. 160–177.

77 A number of domestic and foreign CVE counter-narrative campaigns have been revealed to have received government funding. See Ben Hayes and Asim Qureshi, 'Going Global: The UK Government's "CVE" Agenda, Counter-radicalisation and Covert Propaganda', *The Transnational Institute*, (10 May 2016), <https://www.tni.org/en/article/going-global-the-uk-governments-cve-agenda-counter-radicalisation-and-covert-propaganda> and Ian Cobain, Alice Ross, Rob Evans, and Mona Mahmood, 'How Britain funds the "propaganda war" against Isis in Syria', *Guardian* (3 May 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/03/how-britain-funds-the-propaganda-war-against-isis-in-syria>.

62 unique media products per day.⁷⁸ To reach this scale, the Islamic State relies on an army of highly industrious volunteer cyber activists who supplement the media production of official media outlets, effectively allowing the Islamic State to outsource media production to its online supporters, who then help it reach new audiences.⁷⁹ To respond to this propaganda, governments are relying on traditional bureaucratic mechanisms to amplify the voices of identified partners. However, relying on government funding ties these local actors to complicated, slow, and risk-averse governmental executive processes. This undermines their ability to work in a responsive and creative manner.

Another failing of Western strategic communications is the inability to maintain unity of effort. The West's attempts to carry out strategic communications in respect to the Islamic State through a vast coalition of NATO's twenty-nine member states plus forty-one associates, each with their own agendas and priorities, effectively torpedoes consistency. The result is a painfully visible say-do gap in which actions consistently fail to match words. In a comprehensive review by the Strategic Communications Centre for Excellence of its strategic communications in Afghanistan between 2003 and 2014, NATO itself stated that 'the communication effort regularly fell apart at the policy and operational execution levels.'⁸⁰ Instead of a coherent master-narrative-reinforced set of communications and actions driving towards a specific end state, there has been a complex multi-lateral communications programme, involving actors proceeding from distinctly different cultures and beliefs, producing a repetitive sequence of their own goals.

These failings in the implementation of the counter-narrative approach point to another flaw in the counter-narrative: an incoherent philosophy of war. Many examples of counter-narrative videos are directed at undermining values and ideological concepts rather than concrete enemies. Even though some counter-narrative media output does target groups such as the Islamic State, apart from asking people to reject that group and everything it stands for, the end state to be achieved by rejection and resistance is not outlined, nor is it explained how exactly resistance is to be manifested in individual action.⁸¹ In other words, they do not seek to answer the actual motivations of the

78 Winter, Charlie, Presentation at *ISIS in Europe* Conference (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 27–28 July 2016).

79 See Stern, Jessica and J.M. Berger, J.M., *ISIS: The State of Terror* (London: Ecco, 2015), p. 155 and Winter, p. 36.

80 Boudreau, Brett, *We Have Met the Enemy and He is Us: An Analysis of NATO Strategic Communications: The International Security Force in Afghanistan, 2003–2015*, (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2016), p. 28.

81 For examples of counter-narrative videos see YouTube videos posted on channels such as *Abdullah X*, <https://www.youtube.com/user/abdullahx>, *Average Mohammed*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vJ-SlxjRrQ>, as well as campaigns managed by the Quilliam Foundation, *Open Your Eyes*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9seUFUQZY4o>, and *Not Another Brother*, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/Uckig5UnjzDktdOB1otwK1pw>

persons whose hearts and minds are supposed to be won and swayed.

This failure is symptomatic of the reactive nature of counter-narrative work. Designed to ‘discredit messaging of a violent extremist nature’,⁸² it is designed to encourage not vertical integration but refutation of a narrative system. Indeed, Braddock and Horgan note that ‘the effectiveness of any counter-narrative will be partially contingent on the degree to which it contradicts the themes intrinsic to a terrorist narrative’.⁸³ However, as mentioned above, not only is the monologic DNA of the jihadist narrative system particularly good at resisting refutation, without a clear desired end state and a sense of the enemy whose will is contested the counter-narrative will fail to generate adherents who feel compelled toward desired actions.

By contrast, as outlined above, the end state of the Islamist extremist narrative is clear, the methodology of achieving it is plausible if not desirable, and it is backed by credible sanction. In combination, these qualities make it convincing to a noteworthy minority fraction of the target population. The success of the Islamic State’s strategic communications cannot therefore be explained by the way they play freely with the ‘truth’ as perceived by the West, but instead it is in their ability to align all the narrative layers to generate intuitive truth (or what Steven Colbert calls ‘truthiness’), which explains why they are so persuasive.⁸⁴

In fact, the narrative system of jihadists serves the function of the inhospitable terrain that Mao saw as a crucial force multiplier of insurgency. The ‘Long March’ of the Chinese communists was literally a long march through some especially desolate pieces of the country where their enemies could not follow (and which even so killed nine out of ten of its original participants); the Islamic State uses its ‘indigenous privilege’ to communicate with, and to preserve a reproducible kernel of itself amongst the population of the Islamic world through devices provided by the fabric of their culture. The Islamic State does not communicate according to different set of rules, it only applies the ones that do exist.

Tellingly, poor understanding of the motivations of foreign populations was also cited as a major flaw in the aforementioned Strategic Communications Centre of

82 Ferguson, Kate, *Countering Violent Extremism Through Media and Communication Strategies: A Review of the Evidence*, (Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research, 1 March 2016), p. 5, <http://www.paccsresearch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Countering-Violent-Extremism-Through-Media-and-Communication-Strategies-.pdf>.

83 Braddock, Kurt and John Horgan, ‘Towards a Guide for Constructing and Disseminating Counternarratives to Reduce Support for Terrorism’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 39, № 5 (2016), p. 391.

84 Shlossberg, Mallory ‘One Of The Best Moments On “Colbert Report” Was When He Coined “Truthiness” In 2005’, *Business Insider UK*, (18 December 2014), <http://uk.businessinsider.com/the-colbert-report-truthiness-clip-2014-12?r=US&IR=T>

Excellence's review.⁸⁵ The review notes that NATO's strategic communications campaign in the country was heavily informed by marketing and advertising techniques, much less by an understanding of the diverse aspirations and beliefs of the Afghan people.⁸⁶ The experience in Afghanistan and the surveyed attitudes and opinions of the region's populations should make us consider whether the ongoing counter-narrative programming vis-a-vis the Islamic State has carried out a sufficiently robust target audience analysis. Without a deeper appreciation of the narrative system of the target population, the Western counter-narrative will never undermine the will of its opponent or be able to sustain the passion of the supporters it seeks to galvanise.

Conclusion

A cynical reader might wonder, given what we have written, whether any cultural outsider would ever be in a position to shape the beliefs and ideals of another from the inside, as it were, subtly and without one's interference being seen as suspect and self-serving, essentially alien and corruptive. This is a good question that we would suggest, if not answered honestly, enthusiastically, and affirmatively, ought to be taken as a sign not to attempt to do such a thing in the first place, given a choice.

Inter-civilisational conflicts are comparatively rare in history, which is good because the best known of them are essentially exterminatory. Most of the Western history of war is intra-civilisational, and that has been soberingly awful enough. The current conflict between the West and the Islamic State possesses a slippery-slopedness that should frighten everyone involved in it, however tangentially. In the words of one historian who has attempted to grasp it in total historical perspective:

With each attack the enemy has come to be conceived in broader and more general terms. Once the enemy was a religion, Christianity, Judaism, then it was a particular power: the British, the French, the Americans. Now it is merely the 'West'. The Western response to this has been mixed. With each successive attack hostility, not merely to Islamic extremists, but to Islam in general, has grown. And that hostility has, inevitably, fuelled the conviction of even the more moderate Muslims that Western civilisation, in whatever shape it might take, is bent upon their destruction.⁸⁷

It is often remarked that war is a very blunt instrument for the resolution of questions—it is dispiriting that the *ultima ratio rex* is the mouth of a cannon; but it does have some noteworthy quality, to wit, its effectiveness in cross-cultural communication—the

⁸⁵ Boudreau, pp. 10, 30, 33, & 48.

⁸⁶ Idem, 48.

⁸⁷ Pagden, Anthony, *Worlds at War: The 2,500 Year Struggle Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 444.

jagged knife on the bare neck translates very clearly.

Strategic communicators, in the West at any rate, too often convince themselves that they are a subtler and more powerful tool than in fact they are or ever could be. It is no surprise that ‘war by other means’, a mantra held dearly by those who believed so earnestly in the power of information systems to produce cheap and practically bloodless victories a generation ago, a belief now totally ruined by its sharp encounter with reality, is so popular amongst them. It is a fallacy. Strategic communications is, at its best, a red flag to a bull—a mystifying device behind which there is the sharp point of a sword toward which one’s enemy’s own momentum propels him. Without the sword there is just a matador dressed in too-tight sequined trousers about to be trampled and perforated by an angry animal many times his size.

Strategic communications is an intrinsic element of war; it is not a device for achieving things on its own, more cheaply, quietly, or agreeably, which we cannot or will not contemplate achieving by other means of forcing compliance; it is an adjunct of force—otherwise supportive, contributive, potentially supernumerary, not a thing by itself. It is something of a cliché now to quote Clausewitz’s injunction that the supreme act and most far-reaching act of the statesman and commander is to establish ‘the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature’.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, it is true.

Attempting to deconstruct complex narrative systems alien to its own, the West’s counter-narrative approach fails to match its adversary’s agility, credibility, and propensity to take risk. The narratives of its foes succeed, not because they displace or counter the West’s narratives, but because they capitalise on the master narratives of the population they care about. It is this population to which their communicators are intimately tied by individual and collective identity, whose perspectives they innately understand, and to whom they can precisely articulate the enemy, the picture of their enemy’s defeat, and how that defeat should be accomplished.

Countering violent extremism in strategic communications terms, on the other hand, has become a ‘substitute for real politico-military strategy and actions’ at a point where the time for words substituting for deeds has passed.⁸⁹ It has already been seven years since a senior American commander remarked that, ‘We have allowed strategic communication to become a thing instead of a process, an abstract thought instead of a way of thinking. It is now sadly something of a cottage industry.’⁹⁰

88 Clausewitz, p. 100.

89 Idem, p. 19.

90 Mullen, Michael. ‘Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics’, *Joint Force Quarterly Vol. 55, 4th quarter* (October 2009), p. 2.

Western governments, therefore, need to choose areas domestically and abroad where policy and programming can work synergistically, either where the socio-political and economic conditions already accommodate counter-narratives, or where new policies can change the status quo. In June 2013 at the London Global Counterterrorism Forum it was recommended as best practice to strategic communicators that they ‘take a strategic approach to [their] communications work and articulate the totality of a government’s engagement on a given issue’, that messages should be ‘simple, concise, tailored, and delivered by credible messengers’, and that ‘policies must be aligned with messages in order to be credible’.⁹¹ In our terms, they need strategy in their strategic communications.

Until there is a calamitous event in the region that leads to escalations in the levels of bloodshed on the order of the Thirty Years War in Europe that simply exhausted the motive power of the profound enmities that animated populations of that time by killing a third of them, whether actively or by disease or starvation, ideologies that argue that violence and terrorism are a plausible way to change an intolerable status quo will possess rhetorical traction. When these dynamics are in place, a credible native counter-narrative might emerge through an organic bottom-up phenomenon driven by the youth in the region.⁹²

Until then counter-narrative is mired in wishful thinking. It could be, as some analysts have suggested, that we simply have not yet harnessed tried-and-true communication theory to ‘construct and disseminate effective counter-narratives’.⁹³ It is more likely that there are no effective counter-narratives to be disseminated by Western governments, which are facing their own storytelling crisis as evidenced by growing skepticism towards the liberal status quo and institutions such as the European Union.⁹⁴ As the Middle East spirals into schismatic civil war, the West stands aghast with one eye on the waves of immiserated refugees and the other eye coldly regarding the likely shape of the new status quo post bellum.

91 Hayes and Qureshi, op. cit.

92 Center for Strategic and International Studies, *Voice of a Frontline Researcher and Anthropologist— Scott Atran*, podcast audio (13 May 2016), <https://soundcloud.com/csis-57169780/countering-violent-extremism-scott-atran>

93 Braddock and Horgan, p. 386.

94 Walt, Stephen M., ‘The Collapse of the Liberal World Orders’ *Foreign Policy* (26 June 2016) <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/26/the-collapse-of-the-liberal-world-order-european-union-brexite-donald-trump/>.

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JAPANESE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: ITS SIGNIFICANCE AS A POLITICAL TOOL

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Abstract

Despite rising tensions in East Asia, the Japanese government has not adopted a comprehensive policy, doctrine, or institution for strategic communication (StratCom) to date. The lack of a formal StratCom concept or framework, however, does not mean that Japan is not engaged in strategic communication. The review provided in this article reveals the heavy reliance of the government on the machineries of public diplomacy to communicate its policy and intent, through which it wishes to integrate its messages. Moreover, Japan is an avid practitioner of ‘messaging via deeds’, an aspect hitherto not understood as a Japanese StratCom practice. Japan’s de facto practice of strategic communication reflects the fundamentally political nature of strategic communication, building as it must upon the particular political and historical landscape of the nation, in which the rise of China is a central factor. The analysis outlines the key challenges for Japanese StratCom practice, namely, the danger of miscalculations occurring as a result of uncoordinated messaging, especially via deeds; the ‘say-do gap’ as the government struggles to fulfil some of its aspirations under the rubric of ‘proactive contribution to peace’, and the difficulty of sending coherent messages and avoiding unintended messaging.

Keywords: *public diplomacy, Japan, China, narratives, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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Introduction

With the rise of China, mounting hybrid security tensions in the Asia-Pacific region, and the increasingly widening North Korean missile and nuclear programme, the case for Japan to develop a comprehensive policy and institution for strategic communication (StratCom) seems self-evident. To date, however, the Japanese government has not adopted a basic concept or programme to serve as a guide for such StratCom policy.

The lack of a formal StratCom framework, however, does not mean that Japan is not engaged in strategic communication. Japan has fairly well-developed apparatuses for dealing with public diplomacy across the government and has recently endorsed a focus area on ‘strategic transmission’ (*senryakuteki hasshin*). The review provided by this article reveals the rather concerted effort within the government to integrate its messages through the machinery of its public diplomacy, an effort underscored by a tacit understanding of strategic communication *as praxis*. In addition, as some Japanese officials readily acknowledge, actions as well as words do convey messages, intended or unintended. This may be the meaning and method the defence-related arms of the government primarily resort to, especially given that the nation is prohibited by its laws from adopting an offensive posture. The *de facto* practice of strategic communication without a formal framework reflects the fundamentally political nature of strategic communication in practice, building as it must upon the country’s particular political and historical landscape.

Difficulties arise, however, from inevitable gaps or inconsistencies between what the government argues it is doing (as a narrative) and the reality of its political actions, especially in some of what the government calls its ‘proactive contributions to peace’, a term that in itself can be quite broadly interpreted. Further, the need for Japan to balance proactive foreign policy and policy to bridge the legitimacy deficit arising from its negative historical legacy, makes overall coordination of strategic communication a particular challenge. Adding to that is the evolution in what Miskimmon et al. term the ‘international system narrative’ occasioned by the rise of China, which necessitates

adjustments in what is called the ‘identity’ narrative and the ‘issue’ narrative.¹ These overall shifts in the strategic environment make reappraising its messaging practice and policy an urgent task for Japan.

The purpose of this article is to engage in such a reappraisal. The first section establishes the analytical framework of strategic communication. Strategic communication is, conceptually or in practice, *defined politically*, with different states or international entities (such as NATO) adopting different concepts and groups of activities to serve political purposes within a given international and national strategic environment. In essence, it is a political tool designed to influence certain target audiences that also reflects the political culture, historical experiences, and civil-military and other intra-governmental relationships of the state/entity. The way strategic communication is practiced in Japan, even if not formally conceptualized by the various arms of government, is indicative of Japan’s particular political and strategic conditions.

In accordance with the conceptual framework thus established, the second section will discuss specific Japanese communication activities that take the form of ‘public diplomacy’ designed to influence the perceptions of domestic or international audiences through fairly elaborate mechanisms for control of the ‘narratives’. The third section goes on to identify the key narratives put forward by the government in key strategic areas. Various arms of government engage in separate public information/diplomacy campaigns but there has been an effort in response to the rapid evolution in the international system with the rise of China, especially under the Abe administration, to transform domestic and international narratives, integrating messages from various arms of the government. The impact of the rise of China on Japanese narratives is hence discussed in the fourth section. These efforts are influenced by the administration’s particular world view and assisted by newly instituted whole-of-government machinery (the Prime Minister’s office engages in whole-of-government coordination of such narratives, while the National Security Council focuses on the whole-of-government aspects of security policy). In addition, as demonstrated in the fifth section, the Japanese government utilizes ‘messaging via deeds’ (actions, rather than words) quite extensively.

¹‘[I]nternational system narratives describe how the world is structured, who the players are, and how the system works. Examples would include narratives such as the Cold War, the War on Terror, and the rise of China. [...] [Identity narratives] set out what the story of a political actor is, what values it has, and what goals it has. [...] Differences in these narratives can shape perceptions about what is appropriate behavior and the possible in terms of policy, and are shaped in an iterative process as elite and public views are considered. [Policy narratives] set out why a policy is needed and (normatively) desirable, and how it will be successfully implemented or accomplished. Issue narratives set political actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issue is, and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue.’ SEE Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), p. 8.

The sixth and final section will analyse three of the most challenging issues in the practice of StratCom for the Japanese government. The first is the danger of miscalculations occurring as a result of uncoordinated messaging, especially via deeds, in the absence of established crisis management and de-escalation mechanisms. The second area is the so-called say-do gap; the government, operating under certain constraints, struggles to fulfil some of its aspirations under the rubric of ‘proactive contribution to peace’. In certain areas, the government narrative constrains, rather than enables, further adjustments. The third is keeping its messages coherent, as the government may at times be unaware of unintended images or messages that its actions might send. In particular, given the legacy of negative history Japan must face, government responses may be too ‘controlling’ of narratives, which could compromise its image as a tolerant liberal democracy and hinder the resolution of lingering disputes through neutral and independent fact-finding processes.

As this paper will show, Japan urgently needs policy venues and options to review and integrate the various messages and narratives it has put forward in the last two decades, renewing its focus on strategic communication as a strategy and strengthening its efforts in information analysis. Such a focus should recognize the importance of carefully targeting its messages. This analysis shows that the efforts Japan has been able to make in integrating messages derive from its interest in and concern about China.

An Analytical Framework of Strategic Communication

Strategic communication can be broadly defined as ‘the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission’.² In international relations, the main actors in strategic communication are government agencies, both civil and military, although non-state actors—including insurgent groups and terrorist organizations—are increasingly potent communicators of strategic messages.³ Whether conducted by state or non-state agencies, this author agrees with Mervyn Frost and Nicholas Michelsen that strategic communication makes sense only in the context of the norms of a state system, based upon the ideas of both sovereignty and civil society.⁴

2 Hallahan, Kirk, et al., ‘Defining Strategic Communication’, *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1 No 1 (2007): 3. This definition focuses on the managerial and organizational contexts where communication is applied. For discussions more directly on the political and bureaucratic spheres, see Paul, Christopher, *Whither Strategic Communication?*, RAND Occasional Paper (Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation, 2009); Brooks, Rosa, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything*, (New York NY: Simon & Schuster, (2016); Farwell, James, *The Art of Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, (2012).

3 For the use of violent images by terror groups, see Bolt, Neville *Violent Images; Insurgent Propaganda and the New Revolutionaries* (London: Hurst and Co., 2012)

4 Frost, Mervyn and Nicholas Michelsen, ‘Strategic Communications in International Relations: Practical Traps and Ethical Puzzles,’ *Defence Strategic Communication* Vol. 2 (Spring 2017): 9–34.

Strategic communication communicates ‘narratives’. Narratives, according to Lawrence Freedman, ‘are designed or nurtured with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events’,⁵ hence narratives are about influencing others. Narratives reflect storylines that make sense to the audience, as they are built upon and relate to shared values and experiences, however, over the long term narratives can be used to shape the perceptions and interests of an audience. Conducted at the strategic level, narratives are ‘a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors’.⁶

According to Miskimmon et al., narratives are formed at three levels in international relations: systems, identity, and issues.⁷ For example, an **issue narrative** might describe defence cooperation in Southeast Asia: what such cooperation entails (e.g. how many ships visit which ports) and what it is intended for (e.g. capacity building). Issue-specific narratives necessarily include information about the actors involved in the issue, such as who the Southeast Asian nations are, individually and as a group. This information constitutes **identity narratives**; in this case, they would discuss how these states value international cooperation and mutual respect of sovereignty vis-à-vis conflicts. And, looking more closely, these narratives reveal broader assumptions that the Southeast Asian nations may have about the current status of the international system: in our example, the shifting balance of power (i.e. the rise of China). These **system narratives**, therefore, elaborate how security is or ought to be maintained in the international system, e.g. how Southeast Asian nations may accordingly act to ensure security. Each of these types of narrative is a kind of strategic communication.

Strategic narratives can be used to communicate the ‘soft power’ a country wishes to project. Indeed, according to Roselle et al., strategic narrative ‘is soft power in the 21st century’.⁸ One of the key expected function of a strategic narrative is to attract understanding and support from a broader audience. It might be used to convince potential supporters, or to deter adversaries, as will be discussed below. The importance of strategic narrative cannot be overestimated, for, as Joseph Nye has aptly pointed out,⁹ no power can consist only of ‘hard power’. The ‘smart interlinking of soft and hard power’,¹⁰ including the use of ‘hard’ military assets for soft-power purposes,¹¹ is an

5 Freedman, Lawrence, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs* (London: HSS, Adelphi Papers 379, 2006), 22.

6 Miskimmon et al.

7 Miskimmon et al.

8 Roselle, Laura, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, ‘Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power’, *Media, War and Conflict* 7, № 1, 2014.

9 Nye, Joseph, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

10 Ibid.

11 Heng, Yee-Kuang, ‘Three Faces of Japan’s Soft Power’, *Asian International Studies Review* 18, № 1 (June 2017), 171–188.

important and integral part of contemporary strategic messaging.

Strategic communication is a tool used by governments in times both of peace and of war, although the historical use by governments of information and psychological operations, now considered part of StratCom activities, might focus our attention on wartime or influence operations against adversaries. The last point brings our attention to the transformational and *evolutionary nature* of strategic communication as praxis—as the nature of warfare changes, strategic communication must change with it.

For example, the advancement of information technologies and their availability to the ‘man and woman on the street’ may have made a significant difference. The most important shift may be that as a result of citizens having access to much more horizontally structured information flows (for example, via social media), the boundary between strategic communication aimed at governments and public diplomacy aimed at the general public may be increasingly blurred. Governments are acutely aware that the information campaigns they conduct will be more visible and discernible to the public and under closer scrutiny. In addition, governments can and do use public diplomacy to influence other governments.

In effective strategic communications, targeting plays an important role. ‘Target audience’ is defined by the US military as: ‘An individual or group selected for influence.’¹² The potential blurring of the government/public divide, however, makes targeting a complex matter, and may propel some actors to opt for broad, general messaging. Governments need to be aware of the complex web of influences that their messages would trigger. In a complex information domain, the impact is often non-linear, with multiple counter-narratives forming, creating complex backlash rather than intended effects.

The prominent role that narratives play in warfare has been extensively analysed.¹³ The recent increase in interest in strategic communication in the West reflects the ever-more central role it plays in the strategy and defence of states and non-state entities alike, particularly **when warfare is understood as competition for dominant narratives**. In the last quarter century warfare has transformed from what Rupert Smith has termed industrial warfare (and its antithesis, guerrilla warfare) to ‘war amongst the people’.¹⁴

The fact that Western nations fight in more and more ‘crowded’ battlefields, where civil, military, public, and private actors intermingle, has resulted in a reappraisal of the ‘human terrain’ of warfare, hence focusing our attention on the need to understand

12 US Department of the Army, JP 3-13, Information Operations.

13 Freedman, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*; Michaels, Jeffery, *The Discourse Trap and the US Military: From the War on Terror to the Surge* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

14 Smith, Rupert, *The Utility of Force* (New York, Penguin, 2006).

war's local and human contexts.¹⁵ More recently, the rise of so-called 'hybrid' actors both in Europe and in the Far East has triggered a hybridisation of Western strategy. Critically, Western and allied states have realised the need to embrace the information domain in their strategy in order to counter their adversaries' effective use of mis- and disinformation, to counter argumentation laying claim to legitimacy (e.g. ownership of certain territories such as those in the China Seas), or to create ambiguities in order to exploit surprise (such as the use of 'little green men').¹⁶

Given the diverse strategic and technological environments various nations find themselves in, it is no surprise that there is no universally shared definition or concept of strategic communication. For some, strategic communication refers to forms—such as communicative tools, capabilities, or activities, while others perceive it as a process for engaging or understanding audiences through various communicative activities, or as an art of applying various elements and principles.¹⁷ For example, NATO defines strategic communication primarily as the use of a set of activities: 'the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims.'¹⁸ The precise activities that comprise strategic communication also vary from one country to another, or even across a single government or organization. NATO's composite activities and capabilities are public diplomacy, public affairs, military public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations.¹⁹ Obviously, not all states or agencies possess such broad capabilities or engage in such activities. The precise content of each component may also differ from one state to another.

15 Tripodi, Christian, 'The British Army, "Understanding", and the Illusion of Control' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2016, 1–27.

16 Lanoszka, Alexander. (2016). 'Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe.' *International Affairs*, 92 (1), pp. 175–195; Keir Giles, 2016, Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West ; Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power, Chatham House, Research paper: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf>.

17 Farwell, James P., *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Georgetown University Press, 2012).

18 NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 'About Strategic Communications', <http://www.stratcomcoe.org/about-strategic-communications> (accessed 23 July 2017)

19 Their precise definitions are as follows: *public diplomacy*: NATO civilian communications and outreach efforts responsible for promoting awareness of and building understanding and support for NATO's policies, operations and activities, complementing the national efforts of Allies; *public affairs*: NATO civilian engagement through the media to inform the public of NATO policies, operations and activities in a timely, accurate, responsive, and proactive manner; *military public affairs*: promoting NATO's military aims and objectives to audiences in order to enhance awareness and understanding of military aspects of the Alliance; *information operations*: NATO military advice and coordination of military information activities in order to create desired effects on the will, understanding, and capabilities of adversaries and other North-Atlantic Council-approved parties in support of Alliance operations, missions and objectives; *psychological operations*: planned psychological activities using methods of communications and other means directed to approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives.

What is fundamental, then, is that these definitions, concepts, capabilities, or the processes they entail are *politically determined*, i.e. they must serve government policy within the historical, institutional, and cultural context of the state or agency. *At its core, strategic communication refers to purposeful use of communication designed to influence others*, and its precise framework and definitions depend upon who, or what entity, engages in such activities.

Japan's Public Diplomacy: Key Agendas

Japan does not have a comprehensive policy or concept for strategic communication, nor does it rely upon an official framework of strategic communication as such. However, the idea of 'the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission'²⁰ is not foreign to Japan. Public diplomacy²¹ is a recognized official term and in this context provides the key policy and institutional framework; however, the Japanese government views public diplomacy as straightforward public relations rather than as a matter of strategy, although in reality, the substance of policy advocacy in public diplomacy is de facto strategic communication. As a nation bound by a pacifist Constitution, Japan naturally engages in a different range of communication activities than do states with different experience and fewer constraints.

Led and coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office, public diplomacy serves the dual intent of enhancing the understanding of Japanese policy and improving Japan's image abroad. This includes the focus areas of a) communicating the 'proper image' (*tadashii sugata*) of Japan; b) promoting pro-Japan experts and Japan experts in general; and c) promoting the diverse 'attractiveness' of Japan.²²

The first of these elements—communicating the 'proper image' of Japan—is most akin to strategic communication. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, communicating a 'proper image' of Japan means 'to construct an appropriate message, and strategically engage in external transmission (*basshin*), considering the nature of the target and the timing of the message, while at the same time being mindful of the methods of communication and language in which to communicate [the messages]'.²³

20 Hallahan et al., 'Defining Strategic Communication': 3.

21 Extensive analyses of Japan's public diplomacy [in Japanese] include Masafumi Kaneko and Mitsuru Kitano eds., *Paburikku dipuromashii senryaku: Imeji o kiso kokokan gemu ni ika ni shori suru ka* [Public Diplomacy Strategy: How to Win in the International Game of Images], (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyujo, 2014); Masafumi Kaneko and Mitsuru Kitano, eds., *Paburikku dipuromashii: Yoron no jidai no gaiko senryaku* [Public Diplomacy: Diplomatic Strategy in the Age of Public Opinion], (Tokyo: PHP Kenkyujo, 2007); Yasushi Watanabe, *Bunka to gaiko: Paburikku dipuromashii no jidai* [Culture and Diplomacy: The Era of Public Diplomacy], (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Sha, 2013).

22 Gaimusho [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan; MOFA], '*Kobo bunka gaiko*,' [Public Affairs Cultural Diplomacy] (June 2017); Shusho Kantei Kokusai Kohoshitsu [Prime Minister's Office, International Public Affairs Office], '*Kantei Kokusai Kohoshitsu no jigyo*' [The Work of Prime Minister's Office] (June 2017).

23 Gaimusho, 'Public Affairs Cultural Diplomacy', p. 2.

The key elements in the area of communicating a proper image of Japan are international security, historical issues, and territorial integrity.

Activities in the first category would include the prime minister's or the foreign minister's speeches at various international conferences on a wide range of security issues and Japan's current policies. They involve conveying messages about the security environment in East Asia, Japan's policy on proactive contributions to peace, and the legal foundations of international security as transparently as possible.²⁴

The second category, concerning historical issues, covers the direct responses of Japanese government representatives to diverging interpretations of historical events as put forward by practitioners, journalists, or academics. The Japanese government's more vocal protestations about what it perceives as 'incorrect' or 'distorted' views about Japan are based upon the assessment that remaining silent, as had been done in the past, would not necessarily result in a better image of Japan.²⁵

A recent example of this is the well-publicised incident following Prime Minister Abe's visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. In an article in *The Daily Telegraph*, Liu Xiaoming, Chinese Ambassador to the UK, compared Japan to Lord Voldemort, a character in the Harry Potter series: 'If militarism is like the haunting Voldemort of Japan, the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo is a kind of horcrux, representing the darkest parts of that nation's soul.'²⁶ Japanese Ambassador to the UK Keiichi Hayashi responded:

*Our maritime forces never harass neighbours on the high seas and we have upheld in action the values inscribed in the UN charter [...] East Asia is now at a crossroads [...] There are two paths open to China. One is to seek dialogue, and abide by the rule of law. The other is to play the role of Voldemort in the region by letting loose the evil of an arms race and escalation of tensions, although Japan will not escalate the situation from its side.'*²⁷

The article also attempted to de-link the (alleged) connection between visits by politicians to the shrine from the (alleged) revival of Japanese militarism of the past, asserting that: '[Democratic] values are so deeply ingrained in Japan that a visit to a shrine cannot undo them.'

The Japanese government position is more starkly presented in various international fora, including the United Nations and other treaty-based bodies. For example, it now

²⁴ Ibid., 2-1.

²⁵ Interview with senior MOFA officials. Such a shift in policy reflects stronger pressure from certain conservative political circles.

²⁶ Xiaoming, Liu, 'China and Britain won the war together', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Jan 2014

²⁷ Hayashi, Keiichi, 'China Risks becoming Asia's Voldemort', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 Jan 2014.

vocally challenges the assessment of the wartime treatment of so-called ‘comfort women’ by Imperial Japan, as stated in various UN reports concerning the number of victims affected, the authenticity of the sources, the use of the term ‘sexual slavery’, and the nature of the involvement of the wartime leadership.²⁸ Furthermore, Japanese government personnel now sometimes aim complaints directly at individuals who publish research considered deleterious to Japan’s international image.²⁹ A recent example is the Japanese government’s complaint to the publishing house McGraw-Hill Education concerning a passage in the textbook *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* regarding the treatment of the so-called comfort women by the Japanese military forces during World War II.³⁰ The government’s request to alter the passage triggered a petition published in the March 2015 issue of *Perspectives on History*, the newsmagazine of the American Historical Association, by a group of concerned American historians, who called upon the Japanese government to refrain from attempts to ‘censor history’.³¹

The third category concerns territorial integrity. The Japanese government has produced numerous pamphlets, videos, and web sites to publicize its positions. However, officials concede that care has to be taken not to paint the opponent in an overly negative or provocative manner. Rather, the materials state the government positions simply, in such a way as to promote a general understanding of these positions and to make use of the good image that Japan has cultivated for itself, such as by accentuating the rule of law and the rule-based order that Japan generally upholds.

Recently, the Abe administration has placed renewed focus on the idea of ‘strategic external transmission’ (*senryakuteki taigai hasshin*) with a view to communicating key policy messages more strategically and proactively.³² In 2015, the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II in the Pacific, the Abe administration pledged ¥70 billion for this strategic communication scheme. Although the funding is spread across various

28 For the text of the speech, see ‘The Summary of Remarks by Mr. Shinsuke Sugiyama, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Question and Answer Session.’ The review of the combined seventh and eighth periodic reports, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 16 February 2014, United Nations Office in Geneva. available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/rp/page24e_000163.html

29 For a fuller examination of press and academic freedom in Japan, see Snow, Nancy, *Japan’s Information War* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016); Jeff Kingston ed., *Press Freedom in Contemporary Japan* (London and New York: Routledge 2017).

30 Fifield, Anna, ‘U.S. Historians Urge Japan Not to Gloss Over Past Sexual Slavery’, *Washington Post*, 10 February 2015.

31 Dudden, Alexis, ‘Standing with Historians of Japan’, *Perspectives on History*, March 2015: <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2015/letter-to-the-editor-standing-with-historians-of-japan> (accessed 25 July 2017).

32 Gaimusho, ‘Public Affairs Cultural Diplomacy’, 2-1.

projects, notably including the initiation of Japan House³³ and the promotion of ‘pro-Japanese’ intellectual leadership, the key aim of this funding is to communicate to the public the ‘correct’ Japanese policy with regard to historical and territorial issues, as well as the policy of proactive contribution to peace (see below).³⁴ In 2016, that funding was ¥54.1 billion.³⁵ In 2017, that has been increased to ¥81.8 billion.

Given the fact that public diplomacy covers virtually all areas of government policy, and hence involves a vast amount of information, the priorities of Japanese strategic communication may easily become hazy in the public perception. Media attention tends to go to controversial issues, such as visits by politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine or the ensuing diplomatic row that was fought publicly in the press, causing confusion as to Japan’s intentions. The priority for Japan’s ‘public diplomacy’ is to advance understanding of Japan’s core foreign policy goals, namely, to maintain and advance rule-based order in North and Southeast Asia, centring upon the safeguarding of open and stable seas; in effect tackling various territorial disputes and especially the militarization of the South China Sea dispute. Moreover, the open order based upon rule of law and freedom would cover areas beyond Asia, through the Indo-Pacific to Africa.³⁶ In this, again, the highly political nature of strategic communication is revealed; it is apparent that the rise of China has had an immense impact on the nature of Japanese narratives and prioritization, as will be discussed further below. With such high stakes in policy and security, public diplomacy becomes essentially a strategic communication issue—to state Japan’s goals clearly and have them understood as a show of intent, making the adversary aware of what is at stake.

Japan’s Strategic Narrative: ‘Proactive Contribution to Peace’

Narratives are not policy; they are the attempt to ‘sell’ policy by framing it in a storyline that makes sense to a target audience. Japan is now arguably in transition—from an era of foreign policy narratives based on the post-war pacifism of a nation that was content with and benefiting from a liberal world order, to a new narrative aiming to present Japan as a proactive contributor to that order. The Abe administration’s slogan

33 Japan House, now existing in Sao Paolo, with plans to open ones in London and Los Angeles, aims to ‘create hubs overseas to showcase and communicate Japan’ Here, an ‘All-Japan’ approach is taken as part of efforts to strengthen ‘the strategic global communication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan’. See http://www.mofa.go.jp/p_pd/pds/page25e_000145.html

34 Sangiin [House of Councillors], ‘Senryakuteki taigai hasshin to gaiko jissi taisai no kyoka’ [Strategic External Transmission and the Strengthening of Institutions for Diplomatic Implementation], *Rippo to chosa* [Legislation and Research], March 2015, p. 57.

35 Sangiin, ‘G7 Iseshima Samitto nado o misueta gaiko yosan’ [Foreign Affairs Budget in View of G7 Iseshima Summit and Other Events], *Rippo to chosa* [Legislation and Research], February 2016, p. 57.

36 Interview with MOFA officials.

of ‘proactive contribution to peace’³⁷ carries that message, in the expectation of shaping the nation’s public willingness to embrace a more active role in international security. The policy also aims to sell the image of Japan to the global audience as a key ally and partner of nations united by the norms of democracy and freedom.

This Japanese ‘identity narrative’ is a response to the developing ‘international system narrative’, which now holds that the balance of power in the Asian region (and beyond) is shifting rapidly as the result of China’s rising power. In order to prevent that rise from altering the existing international order in disadvantageous ways, Japan needs to present a new identity that appeals to its allies and partners, and that rallies support from the domestic audience.

The *National Security Strategy of Japan*, a document published by the cross-government National Security Council [NSC] in 2013, begins by acknowledging the positive role that post-war Japan has played in promoting world peace and prosperity, and promises to ‘play an even more proactive role as a major global player in the international community’.³⁸ Analogous to the logic of Western value-based foreign policy, the NSC document goes on to say that Japan will pursue a defence policy based upon the core principles Japan upholds as a nation: ‘universal values, such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights and the rule of law’.³⁹ It also states that Japan is a maritime country that ‘has achieved economic growth through maritime trade and development of marine resources, and has pursued “open and stable seas”’.⁴⁰ It goes on to argue that Japan will ‘continue to adhere to the course that it has taken to date as a peace-loving nation, and as a major player in world politics and economy, contribute even more proactively in securing peace, stability, and prosperity of the international community, while achieving its own security as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, as a “Proactive Contributor to Peace” based on the principle of international cooperation. This is the fundamental principle of national security that Japan should stand to hold’.⁴¹

The current policy is to honour the declared objectives and make necessary contributions to international operations in fields such as collective defence and security. The revisions to the relevant laws that took place in 2015, include provisions for proactive

37 Abe’s idea of proactive contribution to peace had, according to Kaneko, several predecessors. See Masafumi Kaneko, ‘Sekkyokuteki heiwashugi no keifu’ [The Genealogy of Proactive Contribution to Peace]: 19 February 2014, <http://research.php.co.jp/blog/kaneko/2014/02/19.php> (accessed 16 July 2017).

38 National Security Council, *National Security Strategy of Japan*. National Security Council, 2013, p. 2.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid. On the maritime identity of Japan, see Patalano, Alessio, “‘Commitment by Presence’: Naval Diplomacy and Japanese Defense Engagement in Southeast Asia”, in James Brown and Jeff Kingston (eds.), *Japan’s Foreign Relations in Asia* (forthcoming).

41 National Security Council: 17.

contributions to collective defence, and to international peace more generally, by allowing the Japan Self-Defence Forces [JSDF] to provide logistical support to coalition forces. Other examples are participation in UN peacekeeping operations, now with the new JSDF authority to conduct limited protection of civilians [the so-called ‘rush and rescue’ operations, or *kaketsuke keigo*], the enhanced and more strategic use of Japan’s Official Development Assistance [ODA], and so on.

Such narratives are backed up further by Japan’s commitment to enhance bilateral and multilateral relations via defence cooperation, as will be further discussed below. In particular, the NSC strategy paper promised that Japan will ‘provide assistance to those coastal states alongside the sea lanes of communication [...] and strengthen cooperation with partners in the sea lanes who share strategic interests with Japan’.⁴² Prime Minister Abe, therefore, promised ‘seamless support’ to Southeast Asian nations, including defence equipment and technology cooperation in surveillance and rescue capabilities. He also promised these nations ODA and capability-building assistance from the JSDF.⁴³ The messages of proactive contribution to peace are often combined with reminders of how post-war Japan has contributed to world peace and prosperity, especially in the Asian region, through various forms of international cooperation and assistance provided to its neighbours. Such *linking of the past to the future* is an attempt to resolve the lingering negative legacy of the last world war. For example, Prime Minister Abe’s address on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the end of the war mentioned the four elements included by previous prime ministers Kiichi Murayama and Jun’ichiro Koizumi in their fiftieth and sixtieth anniversary speeches, namely, (the evils of) colonialism, the aggression that Japan had committed, Japan’s regrets, and expression of apology. However, criticism arose that the language with which they were referred to was more indirect than previously (a skepticism expressed in relation to the oft-advertised rightward orientation of the prime minister). Abe then stressed Japan’s post-war role of promoting economic prosperity and maintaining international peace, while pledging to remember the past and to promote the aims of economic prosperity, peace, and women’s rights, and safeguarding democracy, human rights, and freedom even more than before.⁴⁴

In a way, this formulation of ‘proactive contribution of peace’, an idea that has had a number of predecessors in the previous two decades, is the Japanese government’s attempt to negotiate its transition from what some have called a self-regarding, passive

42 National Security Council: 24. See also Heng, ‘Three Faces of Japan’s Soft Power’.

43 Heng, *ibid.*: 175–76.

44 The government has also used visual materials; see the Gaimusho, ‘Communication and Reconciliation in the Post War Era’ (video), 17 May 2015: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIZptgGafhs> (accessed 17 July 2017).

pacifism from a bygone era to a more pro-active, internationally collaborative security policy.⁴⁵ One may observe subtle differences in tone in the government narratives targeting its internal and the external audiences. Domestically, attempts have been made to explain to the Japanese public how, since the end of the last war, Japan has become an economic power that gradually expanded its contribution to world stability and prosperity through trade, ODA, human security, and peacekeeping, commensurate with its economic power. The narrative then goes on to argue, as noted, that Japan is in a position to take up an even greater role in the international community.⁴⁶

Towards external audiences, both the first and second Abe administrations have relied on Japan's democratic values and its role as a proactive promoter of international order based upon the rule of law. (This formulation, of course, presents a simplified worldview that is tailored to Japan's interest in depicting its role as a defender and promoter of the status quo.⁴⁷) The focus on values was probably an influence of US policy-making circles during the George W. Bush administration and of Japan's embrace of the notion following its need to tighten the alliance with the United States.⁴⁸ Hence, 'arc of freedom and prosperity' was the phrase of choice by the first short-lived Abe administration in 2006–2007.⁴⁹ The later Abe administration (2012–present) continued to embrace a value-based foreign policy, adopting the idea of 'proactive contribution to peace', an idea that was also intended to forge stronger relations with liberal democratic countries in the region and beyond, not to mention the United States, through more active Japanese engagement in international security and defence cooperation.

China's Rise as a Major Driver of Japanese Narratives

The role of values as a pillar of foreign policy is fully embraced by the Abe administration as a counter-balance to China in the Far East. As noted by various analysts, such as Pugliese and Hosoya, the rise of China was a significant factor that drove Japan to reformulate its narrative, accentuating its democratic identity and accompanying role as contributor to world order, a role that Japan now needs to embrace, replacing its

45 Kaneko, 'Genealogy'. See also Nihon Kokusai Forum, 'Sekkyokuteki heiwashugi to Nichi-Bei domei no arikata' [Proactive Pacifism and the Future of US-Japan Alliance], (Nihon Kokusai Forum Seisaku Inkaï, 2011): <http://www.jfir.or.jp/j/activities/pr/pdf/32.pdf> (accessed 24 September 2017).

46 See, for example, the National Security Strategy of Japan (2013).

47 In reality, legality and the modalities of the rule of law are extremely complex issues in many contested cases.

48 Pugliese, Giulio (2017) 'Kantei Diplomacy? Japan's Hybrid Leadership in Foreign and Security Policy', *The Pacific Review* 30:2: 152–68 (161–162).

49 The idea was very much a product of Prime Minister Abe and then Foreign Minister Taro Aso, assisted and substantiated by some influential bureaucratic figures, such as Nobukatsu Kanehara. See Yuichi Hosoya (2011) 'The rise and fall of Japan's grand strategy: The "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" and the Future Asian Order', *Asia-Pacific Review* Vol. 18, No 1 pp. 13–24; Pugliese, 'Kantei Diplomacy?'

passive past.⁵⁰ This dynamic was accelerated, moreover, by the particular policy and idiosyncrasies of the first and second Abe administrations, which propelled the mutually reinforcing, antagonistic narratives on both sides of the Sea of Japan.

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the Japanese government presented a narrative that attempted to link the past with a future characterised by the new Japanese policy of proactive contributions to peace. This narrative was met with a vast Chinese display of pride and patriotism,⁵¹ in which, as Pugliese and Insisa argued, in a somewhat ironic parallel to the case of Japan, the relevant past of a ‘century of humiliation’ at the mercy of Western and Japanese imperialism and the resulting trauma to the national psyche, was linked with the future, the ‘China Dream’,⁵² made possible by the re-emergence of China as a major world power.

Japanese officials refrain from using overly alarmist language, but the message that Japan considers China to be a ‘revisionist’ or anti-status-quo power is clear. That tendency is most starkly presented in relation to the dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands between Japan and China. Relations between the two nations rapidly deteriorated, to the point where official high-level meetings and exchanges between the two virtually stopped, after Japan (then governed by the Democratic Party of Japan) nationalised the islands to prevent the former nationalist governor of Tokyo, Shintaro Ishihara, from purchasing them for development. In this confrontation, Japan employed its primary official line, i.e. post-war Japan is a peace-loving member of the liberal world order based upon democracy and freedom, an order that is now proactively being upheld by Japan and actively being challenged by China. The Japanese government’s position with regard to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands has also been constant: Japan does not have any territorial disputes there, as Japan has administered the territory historically since the 1880s; hence the Japanese position is that Japan would not submit the matter to international judicial resolution.⁵³

50 Hosoya, ‘The Rise and Fall’; Pugliese, ‘Kantei Diplomacy?’

51 Pugliese, Giulio and Aurelio Insisa, *Sino-Japanese Power Politics: Might, Money and Minds* (Palgrave, MacMillan, 2017), 5; see also Erickson, Andrew S., ‘China Military Parade: 3 September 2015, Your Complete Hardware and Logistics Guide (Updated Version)’, 2 September 2015: <http://www.andrewerickson.com/2015/09/china-military-parade-3-september-2015-your-complete-hardware-and-logistics-guide-updated-version/>. China displayed 500 units of its latest weaponry, 84 per cent of which were revealed in public for the first time.

52 Pugliese and Insisa, p. 2.

53 On the detailed history of the disputes, see, see Drifte, Reinhard, ‘The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Territorial Dispute between Japan and China: Between the Materialization of the “China Threat” and Japan “Reversing the Outcome of World War II”?’ UNISCI Discussion Papers, № 32 (May 2013).

China argues, on the other hand, that Japan's nationalization of the islands violated a previous bilateral agreement whereby both nations were committed to shelving territorial disputes, and hence altered the status quo. China also emphasised its assertion that the Diaoyu Islands were Chinese territory before Japan claimed them, backing it up with various documents and videos uploaded to the internet. As Pugliese and Insisa point out, China's narrative presents Japan as revisionist and militarist, and China as the defender of the status quo.⁵⁴

China's creation of an Air Defence Identification Zone in 2013 in the East China Sea is another example where contrasting narratives developed. Both the Chinese claim to such a zone, and the demand of Chinese authorities that others who enter the zone identify themselves, were rejected by Japan and the United States, which refuse to recognise the zone. The question expressed by the US about the legitimacy of 'a unilateral change to the status quo [...] that raises regional tensions and increases the risk of miscalculation, confrontation and accidents'⁵⁵ was matched by Japan's remark: 'Setting up such airspace unilaterally escalates the situations surrounding the Senkaku Islands and has the danger of leading to an unexpected situation.'⁵⁶

Despite the seeming tit-for-tat escalation of retaliatory narratives, the communication strategies of the two countries can be interestingly contrasted. It is normally more difficult for democracies to officially engage in propaganda than for centralized authoritarian systems, although, given the covert nature of certain branches of information operations, some would argue that it is possible that the differences are only of degree, rather than of substance. Japan's means of advertising its position are officially limited to its mechanisms of public diplomacy, and the nation does rely predominantly on them.⁵⁷ By contrast, the Chinese government possesses a broader range of tools to advertise and promote its position, including public diplomacy. For example, building on the tradition dating back to the early communist era, China places propaganda at the highest position of government activities; this is recognized by the Japanese leadership. China also reaps benefits from a centralised and controlled press, and from various controls over social media and internet use.

⁵⁴ Pugliese and Insisa, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Cited in Reuters, 'China says U.S. should respect China's air defense zone', 23 March 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-defence/china-says-u-s-should-respect-chinas-air-defense-zone-idUSKBN16U0SB> (accessed 9 October 2017).

⁵⁶ Cited in BBC, 'China establishes "air-defence zone" over East China Sea', 23 November 2013.

⁵⁷ Recently, however, press reports revealed that the Japanese government was caught hiring a British consultancy firm to engage in propaganda against Chinese interests in Britain. Kerbaj, Richard and Michael Sheridan, 'Rifkind a Stooge in Secret PR War on China', *Sunday Times*, 29 January 2017.

Behind the rather reticent Japanese practice of sticking to official public diplomacy is the perception that Japan cannot even dream of matching the immense resources that China spends on its state-run television and other information apparatus, reputed to top ¥1 trillion.⁵⁸ Japanese officials also acknowledge that Japan cannot afford to paint adversaries provocatively or in a negative light. Rather, the logic should be to make Japan more attractive to its allies and to the global public by accentuating its ‘soft power’ (hence the importance of resorting to values or, in the context of territorial disputes, the rule of law)—in which case China would lose some of its legitimacy in the eyes of the global public. This demonstrates a certain degree of understanding by Japanese officials about how messaging through public opinion is possible and can be utilised.

It is also important to appeal to like-minded Western states. The Shangri-La Dialogue, organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 2014, is a good example of the value of an international diplomatic coalition. Prime Minister Abe’s keynote address at the event was notable as it articulated for the first time what rule of law amounts to in East Asia; it assumes, namely, that states will make ‘claims that are faithful in light of international law, not resorting to force or coercion, and resolving all disputes through peaceful means’.⁵⁹ His address was followed by a speech by US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel. While the Japanese prime minister reaffirmed the Japanese foreign and defence policy goal of keeping Asia safe and prosperous by ensuring that the international rule-based order would be pursued, the US Defence Secretary went even further and accused China of actively disrupting the regional order, indicating also that the United States would act in cases of breaches of international law.⁶⁰

In sum, Japan’s messages in relation to disputes with China suggest that despite the seeming lack of focus on StratCom, Japan routinely monitors and controls its narratives with strategic intent, in light of the shift in international power balance and also the role that normative frameworks play in foreign and defence policy narratives. Its strategy has many fronts, some of which may comprise more controversial attempts to control certain counter-narratives. Even with these difficulties, it is apparent that the importance of strategic communication as a policy tool is well understood by the Japanese leadership.

⁵⁸ Interview with senior MOFA officials.

⁵⁹ The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit – The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan ‘Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore: Japan for the rule of law, Asia for the rule of law, and the rule of law for all of us’, 30 May 2014: http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html

⁶⁰ Ibid., see also: Inkster, Nigel, ‘SLD 2014 – the gloves come off’, Shangri-La Voices Latest news and views from the 16th IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, 2 June 2014: <https://www.iiss.org/en/shangri-la%20voices/blogsections/2014-363a/sld-2014---the-gloves-come-off-0387>

Messaging via Deeds: ‘Deterrence through Engagement’

While Japanese public diplomacy (with its new focus on strategic transmission) plays an important role in its strategic communication, Japan also sends its messages by deeds and actions. As theories of strategic interdependence would imply, action-based messaging is a fundamental part of strategic communication,⁶¹ and, in the case of Japan, a political necessity when it has to avoid overly provocative verbal exchanges with adversaries, as well as a necessity under the exclusively defence-oriented policy that Japan subscribes to under its Constitution. Specifically, Japan tries to send the message of *deterrence through engagement* to those deemed adversarial in certain contexts (such as, most notably, in the China Seas), by accentuating partnerships that Japan has cultivated with nations in Southeast Asia, the Indo-Pacific including India, Australia, and beyond, through defence engagement, through such means as defence exchanges, cooperation, and joint military training and exercises. Deterrence is *not* the official term justifying these activities (as Heuser and Simpson argue, there are good diplomatic and strategic reasons for not calling it that),⁶² and these exchanges and exercises carry more neutral messages as well, such as commitment and stabilisation (natural disaster relief, for example).⁶³ However, the intended effect is to show that Japan is engaged in the region and committed to cooperation and the maintenance of stability. Japan expects that such an assurance strategy will help safeguard the rule-based order and security in the region, preventing adversaries from taking escalatory actions.

Defence engagement has attracted attention globally, most notably with the UK developing a specific doctrine for Defence Engagement Strategy in 2017 following adoption of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review.⁶⁴ Japan, recognized by the UK as a key ally in Asia, has also embraced an enhanced level of defence engagement both in bilateral and multilateral terms. The Japanese Ministry of Defence [JMOD] hence notes that ‘for Japan, it is important to strengthen multi-layered frameworks for multinational and bilateral dialogue, exchange and cooperation, while based upon the

61 The classic example of this is deterrence and strategic interaction theory. See Schelling, Thomas, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

62 On the multiple purposes that military exercises and training serve, see Beatrice Heuser and Harold Simpson, ‘The Missing Political Dimension of Military Exercises,’ *RUSI Journal*, 162:2 (2017), pp. 1–9. It notes that throughout the Cold War, NATO exercises simultaneously served both purposes of deterrence and building allies’ confidence in deterrence (see p. 3). Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine since 2014 have triggered NATO members to adapt assurance measures, including exercises. Exercises, they argue, have effects not only for those that participate in them but also to broader audiences.

63 For an exploration of how Japan utilizes naval diplomacy across the spectrum spanning from coercion to stabilisation and commitment, see Patalano, ‘Commitment by Presence’.

64 See the UK Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *The UK’s International Defence Engagement Strategy* (2017); https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596968/06032017_Def_Engag_Strat_2017DaSCREEN.pdf (accessed 20 July 2017).

US-Japan alliance, in order to secure peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region'.⁶⁵ It further notes that not only dialogues but 'action-oriented exchanges' (*kodo o tomonau koryu*) are becoming more important, leading, in some cases, to elevation of exchange to defence cooperation.⁶⁶

In this respect, Abe pursued the policy of enlarging defence partnerships with Australia and India, arrangements that, one way or another, send messages to China. The main justification in advancing relations with both countries, again, is shared values. Hence, in Prime Minister Abe's 2007 address 'Confluence of the Two Seas', his first address to the Parliament of India, he justified the formation of a 'Strategic Global Partnership' between Japan and India from a standpoint of shared 'fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the respect for basic human rights as well as strategic interests'.⁶⁷ This continued along the same lines as the earlier plan, the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity'⁶⁸ along the outer rim of the Asian continent, arguing that a partnership between India and Japan is key to the success of such a region. It was noted also that India stands at a strategic mid-point in the sea lanes stretching from Africa and the Middle East to East Asia, on which Japanese and global trade rely.

India-Japan defence cooperation has progressively grown since 2007. In 2008, Japan and India concluded a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, followed by a 2009 Action Plan to advance security cooperation based on the Joint Declaration. In 2014 the Ministry of Defence of Japan and the Ministry of Defence of India signed an agreement on defence co-operation and exchanges. Based on these agreements, there have been a number of joint exercises involving these two countries and beyond. The most recent example was the July 2017 Malabar exercise, involving US, Indian, and Japanese naval units. This exercise had a scenario of targeting submarines deployed to the Indian coastline.⁶⁹

As for Australia, Japan had a brief experience of working with the Australian army while being deployed to Iraq's Al Samawah province in 2005–2006. Immediately thereafter, defence ties were developed. In 2007 Australia became the second country with which

65 Ministry of Defence of Japan, 'Kakoku to no boei kyoryoku/koryu' [Defense Cooperation and Exchange with Other Countries], <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/nikoku/> [translation by the author].

66 Ibid., 'Cooperation' was not further elucidated.

67 Abe, Shinzo, 'Confluence of the Two Seas', Gaimusho, 22 August 2007: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pm0708/speech-2.html>

68 Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons', Gaimusho, 30 November 2006: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html> (accessed 1 August 2017).

69 Kumar, Hari and Ellen Barry, 'India, U.S. and Japan begin War Games, and China Hears a Message,' *New York Times*, July 10, 2017.

Japan issued a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (the first was the United States in 1996). In January 2017, the two countries signed the Australia-Japan Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement [ACSA]. The ACSA facilitates closer bilateral defence logistics support. It also supports closer cooperation between the two in combined exercises, training, and peacekeeping operations.

Again, common values between these two countries provided the primary justification. They recognized each other as key allies of the United States, and as sharing values related to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the liberal economy, as well as sharing many strategic interests. They engage in routine ministerial and defence exchanges, and participate in multinational exercises involving the United States and other countries. The most recent example of the latter is the 2017 exercise Talisman Sabre at Australia's Shoalwater Bay Training Area, in which an elite Japanese force—the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force 1st Airborne Brigade, 3rd Infantry Battalion—participated; the exercise has taken place every other year since 2005.⁷⁰

Japan's most extensive defence cooperation in Europe is with the UK, with which it has important historical ties; this cooperation takes place in various formats and particularly involves issues such as peace support, counter-piracy, and counter-terrorism. In January 2017, the UK and Japan also signed a Defence Logistics Treaty (also referred to as an Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement or ACSA). In October 2016, the UK and Japan held their first joint military exercise, Guardian North 16, involving fighter jets near Japan's Misawa Air Base. This was the first joint exercise that the JASDF has held with any country other than the United States. Furthermore, in May 2017, a four-nation (UK, Japan, France, and the US) joint exercise involving amphibious capabilities was held in Guam.

Prime Minister Abe has also expressed interest in promoting NATO-Japan ties, although this discussion is still in its early stages. Japan currently sends a Self Defence Force [SDF] officer to NATO headquarters on a rotational basis. The basic rationale provided for Japan's defence cooperation with Europe/the UK is, again, shared values—rule-based order, democracy, and fundamental freedoms.

For advancing its defence engagement and cooperation, Japan particularly focuses on the maritime domain. As an island nation, Japan has historically depended upon the open sea to achieve and maintain its prosperity and international status.⁷¹ In the post-war era in particular, it was the maritime domain that was at the front lines of

70 Burke, Mathew M., 'Elite Japanese Paratrooper Unit Joins Talisman Saber Drills for the First Time,' *Stars and Stripes*, 18 July 2017: <https://www.stripes.com/news/elite-japanese-paratrooper-unit-joins-talisman-saber-drills-for-the-first-time-1.478500#.WYBA9q3APdc> (accessed 1 August 2017).

71 Patalano, 'Commitment by Presence'.

defence diplomacy and exchange, involving both the Japan Maritime Self Defence Force [JMSDF] and the Coast Guard, while it was harder for the Ground Forces to be as active internationally.

Most recently, in May 2017, Japan sent the DDH [helicopter destroyer] *Izumo* to the South China Sea for three months. This was for defence engagement, but the mere presence of the *Izumo*, the largest of the JMSDF DDH vessels weighing in at 19,500 tons, in itself sent a message of military might.⁷² The *Izumo* first sailed to Singapore together with the DD *Sazanami* to participate in the Singapore Navy's International Maritime Review 2017, commemorating its 50th anniversary, and to hold joint exercises. The JMOD/MSDF website stated that the purpose of the mission was 'to participate in the International Maritime Review 2017 and to advance mutual understanding and friendship with other participating countries, while nurturing the international awareness of JMSDF officers'.⁷³ The *Izumo* then visited Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, and was also dispatched to the Indian Ocean to participate in exercises in Malabar jointly with India and the United States. The JMOD stated that the purpose of the JMSDF's participation in the Malabar exercises was 'the enhancement of JMSDF tactical capabilities and the strengthening of cooperation with participating navies'.⁷⁴ Although no further explanation was put forward by the JMOD, such exercises naturally carry many messages, both for the general public and for (potential) adversaries: a show of solidarity and assurance, and an expression of the will to cooperate in heightening capabilities.

Also worth noting is the major US-Japan joint naval and aerial exercise in the Sea of Japan in June 2017, in which both the JMSDF and the JASDF [Japan Air Self Defence Force] took part. Japan participated with the DDH *Huyuga*, the DDG [guided missile destroyer] *Ashigara*, and F-15s, while the US deployed the aircraft carriers *Carl Vinson* and *Ronald Reagan*, as well as FA-18s. According to the JMOD, this was the first joint exercise involving two US warships. The stated purposes were 'to improve JASDF and JMSDF's tactical capabilities and to enhance collaboration with the US Navy'.⁷⁵ The *Carl Vinson* had earlier conducted joint exercises with the Republic of Korea Navy near the Korean Peninsula, and was already close by. This exercise was reported widely by the press for its deterrent effect vis-à-vis North Korea.⁷⁶

72 *Izumo* 'cut through' the so-called 9 Dash line, and this was not mentioned anywhere by the government, as this line does not exist in the eyes of the Japanese government.

73 Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, 'Press Release', 26 April 2017: <http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/formal/info/news/201704/20170426-01.pdf>

74 Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, 'Press Release', 15 June 2017: <http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/formal/info/news/201706/20170615-01.pdf>

75 Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, 'Press Release', 1 June 2017: <http://www.mod.go.jp/msdf/formal/info/news/201706/20170601-01.pdf>

76 'Jietai, Beikubo ni-seki to kyodo kunren: Kita Chosen ni Nichi-Bei no renkei shimesu' (Joint Exercises between JSDF and Two US Aircraft Carriers), *Asahi shimbun*, 1 June 2016.

Ground capabilities also have a part in the deeds-oriented dimension of strategic communication. Here the messaging is more conventional, in that deterrent effect is achieved (or communicated) via presence, i.e. strategic placement of capabilities in certain geographical locations. For example, the JGSDF Western Army conducts annual exercises (*bomentai jitsudo ensbu*), and these have involved the temporary deployment, for training purposes, of the surface-to-ship-missile [SSM] units in Okinawa prefecture, including Miyako, Amami Oshima, and other southwestern islands.⁷⁷ It was also decided, under the adoption of the last National Defence Program Guidelines (for FY 2014),⁷⁸ that SSM units will be stationed on the southwestern islands, including Amami Oshima, Miyako, and potentially Ishigakijima.⁷⁹ Japan's interest in defending these islands can be explained by their obvious strategic location, where Chinese vessels often move between the East China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, but more importantly, Japan hopes through its presence to deter any escalatory measures.

Furthermore, a major development in terms of ground capability for Japan was the creation of a 3,000-strong amphibious force in the Western Army Infantry Regiment. The US and Japan conduct joint training in amphibious capabilities, for example, during the RIMPAC 2014 exercise, in which the JGSDF Western Army Infantry Regiment first participated, and the Iron Fist exercises in California. The Iron Fist training in 2017 focused on the use of this capability, with an emphasis on training in the use of the Assault Amphibious Vehicles [AAV] 7.⁸⁰

Another example of 'presence' with more global implications is Japan's counter-piracy operation in Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, to which Japan not only sends MSDF vessels, but also deploys two P-3Cs to its base in Djibouti. Japan also participates in CTF151 [Combined Task Force 151], which provides for zone defence. The fact that Japan now has an overseas base in Djibouti adds another dimension to its maritime counter-piracy operations. This too is a show of presence, which also provides operational experience with the US and coalition naval forces in this strategic location.

77 'Heisei niju-nana nendo Jieitai togo ensbu kakuchi de daikibo ni Riku-Kai-Ku kyodo kunren' [Fiscal 2015 Self-Defense Forces Joint Exercises: Large-Scale Joint Drills by Ground, Maritime, and Air Forces Around the Country], *Bouei News*. Bouei News, 15 November 2015, http://www.boueinews.com/news/2015/20151115_1.html

78 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond', p.20: <http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217.pdf> (accessed on 22 July 2017)

79 See also Gady, Franz-Stefan, 'Deterring China: Japan to Develop New Anti-Ship Missile for Defense of Senkakus': <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/deterring-china-japan-to-develop-new-anti-ship-missile-for-defense-of-senkakus/>

80 Gady, Franz-Stefan, 'US, Japan Practice Defending Ryukyu Islands', 10 February 2017: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/us-japan-practice-defending-ryukyu-islands/> (accessed 16 July 2017).

In sum, Japan's strategic communication comprises not only verbal messages, but also communication via deeds. Many of these activities involve territorial defence and have not acquired an extensive expeditionary dimension, but the base in Djibouti might add to the global and operational dimension of Japan's StratCom.

Gaps and Contradictions in Emerging Japanese StratComs

Japanese StratCom thus primarily takes the form of public diplomacy, with an important role being played by 'messaging via deeds'. As noted at the outset, however, the management of strategic communication is no easy task when narratives need to balance diverging factors, including the rapidly changing international power balance, the negative legacy of history, and commitment to a proactive, future-oriented policy. Evidence indicates that although Japan already engages in extensive de facto StratCom and appreciates its importance, there are some emerging gaps that could harm its efforts. Such gaps result mostly from an inadequate understanding of how certain actions or inactions impact the overall message.

One area where the current Japanese understanding of StratCom needs further development is in improving communication via actions to reduce potential for miscalculations. As noted, Japan relies quite heavily on messaging via deeds (primarily through engagement and presence). However, it is not always easy or straightforward to send 'intended' messages via actions, unless those actions are also properly *explained*. As Heuser and Simpson argue (citing Noble and Pym): 'Every exercise of power is a potential revelation of its limitations'.⁸¹ For example, at the time of writing, it is not clear how the belated development of Japanese amphibious capabilities, relative to the already well-developed South Korean and Chinese amphibious capabilities, will be perceived globally, although Japan's allies are largely supportive, considering that this addition is both rational and necessary over the medium to long term. Heuser and Simpson also note the possibility that even deliberately benign 'engagement' could be destabilising in the short term, as it might provoke the targeted adversary, should the exercises be perceived as threatening.⁸² The exercises could even be used as justification for a tougher response, which the adversary may have planned already, without the exercises or any other unilateral show of force. This concern might be applicable to at least some of the multinational exercises now frequently conducted in the Asia-Pacific region, as no visible confidence building or de-escalatory measures have been instituted by the potential adversaries.

81 Heuser and Simpson, citing Trevor Noble and Bridget Py, 'Collegial Authority and the Receding Locus of Power,' *British Journal of Sociology* 21, No 4 (December 1970), 439.

82 Ibid.

Japanese officials concede that the key goal for Japan's strategic communication is still attracting support for treating China and North Korea as threats to regional security. Although many nations are engaged in territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea and elsewhere, they nevertheless rely on Chinese help so ASEAN as a whole must remain lukewarm regarding Japan's position. Mixed messages thus seem inevitable, possibly frustrating Japanese attempts to show engagement and unity.

There are also issues concerning the so-called say-do gap. A significant example is the credibility of Abe's key strategy of 'proactive contribution to peace'. As Hornung has argued, while Abe's narrative of proactive contribution to peace has formed a part of national discourse, '...there has been little examination of whether his actions translate into contributions to peace that differ substantially from those of his predecessors, who relied primarily on various forms of financial assistance'.⁸³

As is well known, Japan has, since the end of the Cold War, gradually expanded the non-financial aspects of its international contribution to peace. Some examples are Japan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations since 1992, refuelling missions in the Indian Ocean, the reconstruction mission in Iraq, and counter-piracy operations since 2009. Defence cooperation, as well as JSDF disaster relief activities, have been a focus for quite some time. But, as Hornung points out, these activities were limited in scope, and exceptions, rather than the rule. Important though these were, financial and in-kind contributions have comprised the most central and notable segment of Japanese 'contributions to peace'.⁸⁴ Indeed, calls for Japan to play a more pro-active role in supporting the liberal order often seem devoid of any concrete proposals about what further actions should be undertaken. Under the current Abe administration, various limitations remain in Japan's substantive contribution to international peace beyond financial dimensions.⁸⁵ Indeed, the above-noted additions to JSDF authority made in the 2015 defence-related legislation, namely the provision of logistical support for coalition forces and very limited protection of civilians in UN peacekeeping contexts, are yet to be implemented.

Given the political and legal climate in Japan, which is shaped by a risk-averse and casualty-shy public, it is very difficult for the Abe administration, and the majority of Japanese politicians across the spectrum, to comprehend the centrality of operational-level cooperation and common experiences in fighting global instability. This is especially important for Japan's key Western partners on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. For

83 Jeffrey W. Hornung, 'Gauging Japan's Proactive Contributions to Peace: The Rhetoric Has Been Strong, but Has It Been Matched by Action?' *The Diplomat*, 27 October 2015.

84 Ibid.

85 The National Security Strategy of 2013 prescribes actions to 'create a stable and predictable international environment, and prevent the emergence of threats'.

example, during the last decade and a half Japan has abstained altogether from sending forces to the stabilisation mission in Afghanistan.

Japan's framework of international peace cooperation still sets extremely limited parameters for itself, as the 2015 reform of defence-related laws failed to change the conditions for JSDF deployment in peacekeeping missions, continuing to limit them to traditional peacekeeping situations. The existing framework for Japan's contribution to international peace and security seems to have served as a blindfold, rather than an educational opportunity for understanding the realities of global conflicts, for both Japanese practitioners and the general public. The legal constraints on Japan against deploying its armed forces in unstable areas under the relevant interpretation of its Constitution and related laws, and the accompanying lack of experience of its personnel with contemporary stability missions, significantly limit broader Japanese understanding and sensitivity in this area.⁸⁶ Japan's recent withdrawal from the South Sudan peacekeeping mission, which left the country with no peacekeeping troops for the first time in 25 years, was a sorry commentary on this situation. Prime Minister Abe says that Japan wants to come closer to NATO, but this is easier said than done, given the government's lack of parity in experience and understanding of international conflicts. Japan needs to fully understand and manage the messages, intended or unintended, that are sent by its actions or inactions in this now-critical area.

Last but not least is the gap that emerges from the Japanese government's sometimes misplaced attempts to control negative narratives—those deemed by the government as perpetuating a 'wrong' view of Japan. Such efforts, when overplayed, have served to advertise globally the range of domestic opinions currently existing within Japan, for example, on historical issues, allowing negative historical events to colour the image of Japan. Attempts to intervene directly in academic or journalistic publications, where freedom of views and thought must be ensured, are a case in point—the aforementioned incident involving the US history textbook, for example. Generally speaking, rather than directly intervening in historical debates, efforts should be directed towards facilitating a neutral and professional academic environment where disputes over historical facts where they exist are resolved or informed by independent experts. The Japanese government may be well-advised to exclude certain activities for 'correcting' historical interpretations from the range of 'public diplomacy' so that the government does not engage in self-conscious manoeuvring on the issue.

86 For research in this area, see Chiyuki Aoi, 'Conditions for Effective Intelligence and Information-Sharing: Insights from Dutch–Japanese Cooperation in Iraq, 2003–2005', in Irina Goldenberg, Joseph Soeters, and Weylo H. Dean (eds.), *Information Sharing in Military Operations* (New York: Springer, 2017).

Conclusion

Although Japan does not have an official concept of strategic communication, the existing agencies of government essentially perform StratCom functions, particularly through public diplomacy. The rise of China has triggered an activation of Japanese StratCom practices with a focus on linking the international system narrative to identity and issue narratives. Japan has also forged a stronger whole-of-government response to rising communication challenges. Not surprisingly, given the strategic and political environment in which it finds itself, Japan is an avid practitioner of communication via deeds—i.e. ‘deterrence through engagement’.

Japan faces a number of ongoing issues with regard to its strategic communication. The primary issue today is how to make its messages more coherent, an effort made all the more complex by the need to combine and balance all of the current administration’s policy of proactive contributions to peace, the legacy of historical events, and shifting narratives at the level of the international system. Although new government institutions have evolved, particularly the creation of the National Security Council and its secretariat, and the government has recently renewed its focus on making the ‘transmission of messages’ more strategic, Japanese strategic communication and its overall architecture require further consideration. Rather than merely taking stock of existing tactical or operational communication tools and evaluating their impact, what is called for is a more fundamental understanding of the dynamics of such communication as strategy. As stated at the outset, strategic communication is essentially political, and as a political tool, it rests upon the identification of clear political goals. Without recognising the primacy of policy in strategic communication, short-sighted efforts and misplaced efforts to control narratives will not be so conducive to strategic effects.

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‘YOU CAN COUNT ON US’: WHEN MALIAN DIPLOMACY STRATCOMMED UNCLE SAM AND THE ROLE OF IDENTITY IN COMMUNICATION

Pablo de Orellana

Abstract

How did North African states depict their nomadic minorities to the US during the War on Terror in the 2000s? How did this shape American policy in the region? Focusing on Malian-American diplomacy and drawing on post-structuralist analytics of identity-formation, this paper first examines how Malian diplomacy represented nomadic minorities in communication with US diplomatic and military envoys during the period 2002–2010. It is found that Mali consistently branded Saharan nomads as lawless subjects that make territory ungovernable, compromise security, and facilitate terrorism. Second, this paper deploys intertextual analysis to measure the success of these strategic communications efforts. It is found that, despite the advice of some American diplomats on the ground, by the end of 2008 Mali’s depiction of Saharan nomadism had been absorbed into US diplomacy. This subsumed Northern Malian subjects into the categories of the War on Terror, which privileged military control of subjects and territory over development and reconciliation efforts. This policy shift granted Mali influence over US policy and diplomatic support to ignore nomadic grievances. Analysis reveals the key role of identity-making and name-calling in Mali-US relations and in diplomatic communication more broadly, showcasing the potential of textual analysis methods to evaluate strategic communications outcomes.

Keywords: *counterterrorism, identity, North Africa, diplomacy, Tuareg, Mali, strategic communication, strategic communications*

About the Author

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Introductory démarches

Diplomatic communication was deeply involved in achieving a key shift in US policy towards counterterrorism and security in North Africa. In the early 2000s, US policy anticipated countering extremism in the Sahara through social, human rights, and economic development. By late 2008, however, though nearly imperceptibly, policy had changed to the opposite approach, one seeking control of these same subjects and territory before addressing their pressing grievances. This policy shift was predicated on depicting the Tuareg as 'terror-enabling bandits', a depiction which had long been promoted by Malian diplomacy.

In the early 2000s US policy was concerned that the Western Sahel could provide safe haven for Islamic terrorism,¹ particularly after the Algerian Civil war when the remnants of Islamist forces found refuge in the porous borderlands between Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Libya.² US diplomats agreed that counterterrorism in the Sahel depended on successfully addressing the grievances of Tuareg and Arab minorities in the north of Mali, who had staged major rebellions in the 1960s and 1990s.³ Initial responses, the Pan-Sahel Initiative (2002–2004) and its successor the Trans-Saharan Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP), sought to provide resilience to terrorism rather than combat it, and were led by the State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) with Department of Defense (DoD) support.⁴ The initiative was framed in the context of the Millennium Development Goals and managed various funding streams to address development problems and grievances fuelling radicalisation,

¹ See for instance 'Statement from Senator Coons on Situation in Mali', 22 March 2012.; Lawrence Cline, 'Counterterrorism Strategy in the Sahel', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, № 10 (18 September 2007), 889–899.

² Rear Admiral Hamlin Tallent testimony before the House International Relations Committee Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Non-Proliferation (10 March 2005). Cited in Lianne K. Boudali, *The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*, (The Combating Terrorism Center, West Point US Military Academy, April 2007), 1.

³ 6/3/2008, BAMAOK239. Wikileaks documents cited by date and original State Department reference number.

⁴ Bray, F. J., *The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership: Strategy and Institutional Friction*, (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: US Army War College, 22 March 2011).

and to promote human rights, democratic governance, and improved gender and ethnic relations.⁵ Mali did almost nothing to implement this development-based approach or reconciliation in the north of the country.⁶

North African postcolonial states have long had problems in integrating and governing nomadic minorities. Bound by the borders drawn up by European colonial convenience, the ancient peoples of the Sahara—the Tuareg and other Berbers such as the Kabyle or Moroccan Amazigh, and Arabised Berbers such as the Sahrawi, Berabiche, and Moors—are now divided among Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Mauritania, Niger, and Mali. In the Middle Ages, ever-shifting tribal federations drove Islamic expansion in North Africa and Al-Andalus, though then and now these federations have been temporary and fragile.⁷ Colonial division of the Sahara challenged the very feasibility of their social and economic existence, and upon independence from France in 1960, the Tuareg and other nomadic and semi-nomadic minorities were divided into northern Mali, southern Algeria, and Libya. While Algeria and Libya were able to co-opt—and occasionally coerce—Tuaregs into an apparently sustainable, if strained, status quo, Mali and Niger have long sought either to ignore them or to control them militarily. In Mali and Niger the Tuareg rose in arms against the Malian state in 1962, 1990, 2006, and 2012, and against Niger in 2007. Rebellions drew on existing and, crucially, ever-shifting systems of alliances,⁸ while even the very definition of Tuareg identity varied. The uprisings

5 Boudali, *The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership*.

6 Pezard, Stephanie and Michael Shurkin, *Achieving Peace in Northern Mali: Past Agreements, Local Conflicts, and the Prospects for a Durable Settlement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), p. 41.

7 See Guichaoua, Yvan, 'Circumstantial Alliances and Loose Loyalties in Rebellion Making: The Case of Tuareg Insurgency in Northern Niger (2007–2009)', in *Understanding Collective Political Violence*, (N.P.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 246–266; Guichaoua, Yvan (ed.), *Understanding Collective Political Violence*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Baz Lecocq et al., 'One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A Multivocal Analysis of the 2012 Political Crisis in the Divided Republic of Mali', *Review of African Political Economy* 40, No 137 (1 September 2013), 343–357; Lecocq, Baz and Jean Sebastian Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonisation, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 433.

8 See the major debate of the 1990s between Bourgeot and Hélène Claudot-Hawad on Tuareg identity and social structure and its modern and late modern development, especially Bourgeot, André, 'Identité Touarègue: De l'aristocratie à La Révolution', *Études Rurales* No 120 (1990), 129–162; 'Le Corps Touareg Désarticulé Ou l'impensé Politique (The Disjointed Tuareg Body, or Political Unimagination)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 34, No 136 (1994), 659–671; 'Révoltes et Rébellions En Pays Touareg', *Afrique Contemporaine* No 170 (1994), 3–19; 'Les Rébellions Touarègues: Une Cause Perdue?', *Afrique Contemporaine* No 180 (1996), 99–115; Hélène Claudot-Hawad, *Les Touaregs. Portrait En Fragments* (Edisud, 1993); 'Identité et altérité d'un point de vue touareg' (1996), 7–16; 'La Hiérarchie Des Savoirs et Des Pouvoirs Dans La Société Touarègue Précoloniale et La Recomposition Des Rôles Socio-Politiques Pendant La Guerre Anticoloniale et Après La Défaite', *Nomadic Peoples* 2, No 1/2 (1998), 17–38; 'A Nomadic Fight against Im-mobility: The Tuareg in the Modern State', in *Nomadic Societies in The Middle East and North Africa: Entering the 21st Century*, ed. D. Chatty (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 654–681; Hélène Claudot-Hawad et al., *Touaregs. Exil et Résistance*, ed. Hélène Claudot-Hawad (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1990).

were fuelled by urgent economic, social, environmental, and military grievances, and their lack of influence over the states in which they reside;⁹ most of them resulted in repression by Mali and Niger, frequently supported by the French. Droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, and the conflicts themselves, drove many into exile in Algeria as well as Gaddafi's Libya, their only state protector.¹⁰ The US policy of ending this cycle of crushing poverty, violence, exile, and rebellion through social, political, and economic development was extremely sensible.

By late 2008, however, US counterterrorism policy in the Sahel had become significantly militarised and security-led.¹¹ It moved from addressing lack of development, infrastructure, human rights, political representation, and services, towards a military-to-military partnerships approach.¹² The shift was most evident when core channels of funding, policy, and implementation became military-led. It would appear that the understanding of the problem of extremism in North Africa, and the means available to counter it, were themselves consequently subsumed into a military approach to counterterrorism. Crucially, this shift ended US pressure on Mali to implement the Algiers Accords of 4 July 2006 as a way to counter extremism. The Accords, which had ended the brief Tuareg rebellion of 2006, included redress of Tuareg grievances regarding social, political, and human rights, as well as mixed Malian-Tuareg military units, and economic development in northern Mali.

Throughout 2006–2008, the Malian government had only one position on counterterrorism in the Sahel: military control of territory and subjects. The government led by President Amadou Toumani Touré (also known as ATT) spent most of the 2000s requesting increased American military aid, arguing that the criminality and ungovernability of these nomads prevented successful counterterrorism efforts, and that only military control of space and people could deny al-Qaeda space. Contemporarily, Touré and Malian diplomats continuously rejected or heroically avoided US pressure to prevent extremism through economic development and the resolution of longstanding grievances.¹³ Instead, Touré's administration relied on the so-called 'ATT Consensus'

⁹ See also Guichaoua, 'Circumstantial Alliances and Loose Loyalties in Rebellion Making'; Rosa De Jorio, 'Narratives of the Nation and Democracy in Mali', *Cahiers d'études Africaines* № 172 (1 September 2008), 827–856.

¹⁰ Bourgeot, 'Révoltes et Rébellions En Pays Touareg'; Ronen, Yehudit, 'Libya, the Tuareg and Mali on the Eve of the "Arab Spring" and in Its Aftermath: An Anatomy of Changed Relations', *The Journal of North African Studies* 18, № 4 (1 September 2013), 213.

¹¹ Zoubir, Yahia H., 'The United States and Maghreb–Sahel Security', *International Affairs* 85, № 5 (1 September 2009), 993.

¹² Gutelius, David, 'Islam in Northern Mali and the War on Terror', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 25, № 1 (2007), 59–76.

¹³ See 19/6/2007, 07BAMAKO676.

approach, which sought to keep the presidency above party politics (ATT himself ran as an independent) by forging links with individuals across political, civil, and military spheres.¹⁴ In its latter days, this approach came to depend entirely on patronage, in some ways privatising the state into unofficial networks, which vastly increased corruption, alienating those outside the ruling coalition; these outsiders were left feeling voiceless, and their faith in democracy and republican institutions was undermined.¹⁵ In the north of the country, this approach relied on coopting loyal northerners and exploiting longstanding divisions among tribes, strata and castes within tribes, and feuds. Some, such as the Berabiche and some subaltern Tuareg groups, allied with the government to keep rebels in check, while others, such as the Ifoghas, became the targets of greater military control. Key brokers and leaders were bought off, sometimes as ineffectively as happened in Bamako, Mali's capital, with prominent Ifogha leader Iyad Ag Ghaly. Ag Ghaly was a key Tuareg rebel leader in the 1990s. When his prominence among mainstream Tuareg rebels collapsed due to his collaboration with Bamako in the late 2000s, he reinvented himself as a religious warrior.

Beginning in the aftermath of 9/11, the War on Terror and its core assumptions propelled the militarisation of American counterterrorism policy in the Western Sahel.¹⁶ As the US sought partners against terror, most states in North Africa offered help and requested military assistance. However, their new-found military capacity and diplomatic support were directed against old enemies, such as the Sahrawi for Morocco and the Tuareg for Mali and Niger.¹⁷ We do not need to speculate on Malian intentions, for President Touré's government consistently sought US assistance to achieve military control of the north, while no progress was ever made towards any other solution.¹⁸ By late 2008, this position had become part of US policy. Crucially, it carried over exactly the same assumptions: control of all north Malian subjects and spaces that were not

14 Whitehouse, Bruce, "A Festival of Brigands": In Search of Democracy and Political Legitimacy in Mali', *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*; Pretoria 35, No 2 (November 2013), 35–52; Wing, Susanna D., 'Mali: Politics of a Crisis', *African Affairs* 112, No. 448 (1 July 2013), 476–485.

15 Bøås, Morten and Liv Elin Torheim, 'The Trouble in Mali—Corruption, Collusion, Resistance', *Third World Quarterly* 34, No 7 (1 August 2013), 1279–1292.

16 Zoubir, 'The United States and Maghreb–Sahel Security', 987; 'The Sahara-Sahel Quagmire: Regional and International Ramifications', *Mediterranean Politics* 17, No 3 (November 1, 2012, 452–458; McFate, Sean, 'U.S. AFRICA COMMAND: A New Strategic Paradigm?', *Military Review*; Fort Leavenworth 88, No 1 (February 2008), 10–21; Cline, 'Counterterrorism Strategy in the Sahel'.

17 Solomon, Hussein, 'The African State and the Failure of US Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Africa: The Cases of Nigeria and Mali', *South African Journal of International Affairs* 20, No 3 (1 December 2013), 427–445.

18 See also Bøås and Torheim, 'The Trouble in Mali—Corruption, Collusion, Resistance'; Solomon, 'The African State and the Failure of US Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Africa'; Sandor, Adam, 'Assemblages of Intervention: Politics, Security, and Drug Trafficking in West Africa', (Thesis, Université d'Ottawa/ University of Ottawa, 2016), <http://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/handle/10393/34259>.

aligned with the ATT consensus, particularly the Ifoghas. This counterterrorism priority trumped long-term humanitarian, social, and economic, as well as consensual military, development. The apparent transposition onto US policy of the Malian representation of the conflict suggests that this shift was informed by a shared understanding of the significance of uncontrolled nomads to the US-led War on Terror. Specifically, we are looking at how ‘a very complex environment could be (incorrectly) completely subsumed into a counterterrorism framework’.¹⁹ In other words, this specific representation was persuasive, not in reinventing these subjects as new terrorists, but rather absorbing them into the existing powerful categories of terror-enablers or potential terrorists. We might be observing an example of the dictum on the back of this journal, that ‘perception becomes reality’. This paper enquires into how this was possible.

This incredible diplomatic event was achieved through a tendentious representation of the political identity of nomadic subjects. While diplomacy does not, of course, comprise the totality of a state’s capacity to see the world, it plays a key role in ‘recognising’ other actors. Furthermore, diplomacy is of great interest for scholarly, policy, and strategic research because it reflects and often includes the output of non-diplomatic practices, such as espionage, that also inform policy. This paper analyses this extraordinary act of persuasion and its unfolding in diplomacy, and in so doing makes contributions to understanding strategic communications. It proposes a method to determine how diplomatic communications constitute representations of identity and how these representations develop, and identifies when specific representations cross from the diplomacy of one actor to that of another and are repeated natively, that is, repeated, embraced, and written as their own, demonstrating persuasion. These two vital questions are explored through the case of US-Malian diplomacy during 2006–2010 to allow for the conceptually-driven methods developed by the author to be demonstrated against empirical evidence of diplomatic communication.

This paper takes five steps to address these vital questions of representation and persuasion in diplomatic communication. It first introduces the relevance and potential contribution to strategic communications of post-structuralist discourse analysis, textuality, and conceptualisations of identity. Second, it introduces the reader to the theory-powered diplomatic communication analysis method developed by the author—who should at this point confess to being an International Relations (IR) theorist and diplomatic analyst—and has been demonstrated in a number of historical and contemporary case studies.²⁰ Third, by applying this method, the paper shows how the

19 Cline, Lawrence E. ‘Nomads, Islamists, and Soldiers: The Struggles for Northern Mali’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, № 8 (1 August 2013), 617.

20 As well as the aforementioned research on US-Malian and US-Moroccan diplomacy, see also de Orelana *The Diplomatic Road to Vietnam*, (London: IB Tauris, forthcoming late 2017).

representation of conflict in the Sahel and of Mali's nomadic subjects was constituted in the diplomatic communication that was so successful in 2008. Fourth, the analysis follows these representations across years of communications, hundreds of diplomatic cables, memoranda, and other documents, to identify and examine the instances when the representations promoted by Malian diplomacy came to be so persuasive to US diplomacy and policy-making, such that by 2008 they had come to be absorbed and repeated. Finally, the fifth section summarises and synthesises how this study and its methodology can bring empirical and analytical contributions to the understanding of strategic communications. It is argued that this article and its empirical demonstration should encourage placing epistemology, language, and discourse at the centre of strategic communications analysis. Crucially, representation of identity emerges as the most powerful aspect of diplomatic and strategic communications.

Step 1: Diplomats, strategists, admen, and identity

It seems intuitive that name-calling should matter in political practices. Descriptions play a key role in international politics—but how? How can their persuasive success be determined in empirical analysis? In communication, including diplomacy, the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist is quite literally one of subjective name-calling. Descriptions constitute the subjectivity that distinguishes terrorists from freedom-fighters, which is no less than a normative frame separating good from bad violence. They reflect interpretive and subjective political choices that seek to identify who an actor is. These choices are the product of practices such as diplomacy, policy analysis, journalism, or strategic communications, that locate actors within existing frameworks, thus determining how they should be described. In the categorising frames of the War on Terror, an actor can be described as terrorist, terrorist-enabler, or reliable ally. Long-term, stable, descriptive trends—more accurately called 'representations'—and the frames that make sense of them, are involved in producing one's understanding of international actors.²¹

Representations of subjects, conflicts, and the contexts that motivate them are very powerful. This is a basic insight that, despite conceptual differences, can be shared by strategic communications practitioners and post-structuralist, critical, and interpretive IR theorists and analysts. In this shared analytical space provided by the perspective that the *how* of communication is crucial, this paper examines the interpretive requirements of studying representation in diplomatic communication, while adding methods that can unlock their functional dynamics and evaluate their persuasive success. This article

²¹ Shapiro, M. J., *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 12, 48.

addresses practitioner and research interests on what makes communication effective,²² bringing to bear critical IR theory approaches to the question of how representations of political identity function,²³ post-structuralist concepts and methods for analysing text and intertextuality,²⁴ and the growing and conceptually-informed interest in international and particularly diplomatic practices.²⁵

This theory-powered, practice-attentive discursive analysis arsenal is used to analyse US-Malian diplomatic communication during the period 2006–2010. If Mali was able to shift American policy in the late 2000s, it stands as a vital lesson for the study and practice of strategic communications. The evidence so far is extremely suggestive. However, analysis is yet to empirically determine how Malian arguments persuaded US policymakers. It is thus vital to examine how Malian diplomacy represented the situation in the north of the country and whether US diplomats and policymakers believed in this view of the situation and in the proposed solutions.

Diplomacy has long been both a target of and vehicle for strategic communications. Renaissance diplomat-thinkers like Niccolò dei Machiavelli and François de Callières were keenly aware that diplomatic communication, particularly how it described people and situations, had major consequences of strategic significance.²⁶ Studying diplomatic communication requires acknowledging its vast complexity and multifaceted

22 Castells, Manuel, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Miskimmon, Alister, Ben O'Loughlin, and Laura Roselle, *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2012); *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* (Routledge, 2014); Farwell, James P., *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

23 See Goff, Patricia and Kevin Dunn, *Identity and Global Politics: Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Williams, Michael C., 'Identity and the Politics of Security', *European Journal of International Relations* 4, No. 2 (1 June 1998), 204–225; William E. Connolly, 'Identity and Difference in Global Politics', in *International/Intertextual Relations* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1989); Campbell, David, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, 2nd Revised edition 1998. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Neumann, Iver B., 'Self and Other in International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 2 (1996), 139–174.

24 Derian, J. Der, (ed.), *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1989); Bakhtin, M. M., *Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); Charlotte Epstein, 'Who Speaks? Discourse, the Subject and the Study of Identity in International Politics', *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011), 327–350.

25 For the Practice Turn, see Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, eds., *International Practices* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For a focus on diplomacy's production of knowledge, see Neumann, Iver B., *At Home with the Diplomats: Inside a European Foreign Ministry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

26 See for instance Machiavelli's 'Notule' [notes for ambassadors] in *Tutte Le Opere Storiche, Politiche e Letterarie*, ed. A. Capata (Rome: Newton Compton, 2011); and Louis XIV's ambassador François de Callières, *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains* (Paris: Michel Brunet, 1716).

potential for subjectivity. At any one point, there are several—at least four—streams of communication to study: two-way communication between the diplomat and her bosses, and the same again for her interlocutor speaking on behalf of another state (In our case: US diplomats speaking to Malian officials, US diplomats reporting back home, Malian diplomats doing the same). The diplomatic communicator is part of a vast institution of diplomatic knowledge production.²⁷ Diplomats gather information and report to policymakers back home and receive instructions as to what to say to the representatives of other states, who in turn report to and receive instructions from a similarly complex diplomatic establishment. In other words, because diplomats and diplomatic institutions are both the targets and the messengers of strategic communications, their reports are a locus where depiction, description, and representation are of paramount importance.

Commercially, there is a thriving trade in strategic communications focusing on 'branding'.²⁸ Communications consultants in Washington, for example, established the Moroccan-American Center for Policy (MACP), which successfully rebranded Morocco as 'the kingdom on the move', an 'exemplary' 'Islamic democracy' 'naturally' disinclined to extremism.²⁹ Scholarly literature on this PR approach is primarily concerned with 'nation branding', and emphasises the fact that wording can achieve policy goals by favourably representing states. It rests on the assumption that representation of international actors is flexible and that diplomacy, both formal and public, can misrepresent a state.³⁰ The literature raises the question of how diplomatic communication produces the 'textual image' of an international actor, whether through tailored lies, or through disingenuous or optimistic writing.

The PR-based literature on 'nation branding' thus far appears uninterested in analysing how branding is conceptually constituted, and equally uninterested in empirically determining whether its promotion has been successful. It is suggestive to consider that US policy shifted just as Malian leaders desired, but it does not prove that Malian diplomacy achieved this feat. This is because the study of a brand's persuasiveness

27 See especially chapter 4 in Neumann, *At Home with the Diplomats*.

28 The British firm Portland Communications is a good example.

29 This campaign was so successful that its slogans came to be included in American diplomats' reports on Morocco. See <http://moroccoonthemove.com> and Pablo de Orellana, 'Struggles over Identity in Diplomacy: "Commie Terrorists" Contra "Imperialists" in Western Sahara', *International Relations* 29, № 4 (1 December 2015), 477–499.

30 Fan, Ying, 'Branding the Nation: Towards a Better Understanding', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 6, no. 2 (May 2010): 97–103; Jian Wang, 'Managing National Reputation and International Relations in the Global Era: Public Diplomacy Revisited', *Public Relations Review* 32, № 2 (June 2006): 91–96; Szondi, Gyorgy, 'From Image Management to Relationship Building: A Public Relations Approach to Nation Branding', *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 6, № 4 (November 2010), 333–343; Szondi, Gyorgy, *Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding: Conceptual Similarities and Differences* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael' 2008).

is hostage to the logic of ‘perception’: how somebody sees something. Since social science cannot (yet) drill into your head and empirically determine how you perceive me, IR scholars have had to find other avenues. Conversely, Jonathan Fisher’s analysis of how Uganda and Kenya managed donor-state perceptions focuses on the ‘images’ communicated in routine diplomacy.³¹ This approach explores *what* diplomatic communication says in terms of identity. It raises the question of how ‘images’ are constituted in diplomacy and how to empirically determine whether and how they are believed enough to be absorbed by another actor’s diplomatic establishment.

The approaches discussed, even the Renaissance diplomatic literature, concur on the importance of how an international actor is seen in cultural, political, and other contexts: its identity. Representation of identity and its links to other representations situate an actor in the international context. Policy, strategy, and political decisions are predicated on calculations of how a group of subjects will behave, which are partly constituted through descriptions that make sense of the subjects, their contexts, past actions, and their motives.³² Representations of political identity, provided by diplomats, analysts, and spies, are immensely influential upon policymaking and strategy.³³ This is why they are the most evident targets of communications strategies, such as Morocco’s ‘kingdom on the move’, and why so much was at stake in persuading American policymakers that Mali’s unruly nomads were global enemies. It is within the construction of representation that we find the key to its subjectivity. This epistemological challenge is ideally addressed through concepts and methods drawn from a post-structuralist approach to identity, and the role of identity in international relations.

31 Fisher, Jonathan, ‘Structure, Agency and Africa in the International System: Donor Diplomacy and Regional Security Policy in East Africa since the 1990s’, *Conflict, Security & Development* 13, № 5 (1 December 2013), 537–567; Fisher, Jonathan ‘“Some More Reliable than Others”: Image Management, Donor Perceptions and the Global War on Terror in East African Diplomacy’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 51, № 01 (2013), 1–31; Fisher, Jonathan, ‘Managing Donor Perceptions: Contextualizing Uganda’s 2007 Intervention in Somalia’, *African Affairs* 111, № 444 (July 1, 2012), 404–423.

32 Ashley, Richard K., ‘Living on Border Lines: Man, Poststructuralism, and War’, in *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics*, ed. James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1989), 89.

33 Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation*, 89–123. A spectacular example is Kissinger’s briefing to Ford on Western Sahara in 1975, in which the entire conflict was reduced to ‘Algeria wants a port’, which made POLISARIO a simple Algerian stooge, in Mundy, Jacob, ‘Neutrality or Complicity? The United States and the 1975 Moroccan Takeover of the Spanish Sahara’, *The Journal of North African Studies* 11, № 3 (2006), 275–306.

Step 2: Reading identity in the text of diplomatic communication

From a post-structuralist perspective, identity is a discourse describing and locating a group of subjects. I say 'discourse'—a coherent set of statements based on the same subjectivity—because identity is a composite construction constituted of a variety of contingent referents. Each of these referents, linguistically constructed linking concepts that act as the key building blocks of identity, links subjects or differentiates them from one another. For example, language is a key referent when differentiating between British and French identity. These key referents include 'deep referents' that are older and apparently permanent cultural attributes, such as my very Italian passion for spaghetti.³⁴ Crucially, representations of identity include referents that locate subjects in global subjective frames—'Muslim', for example, is one of the most powerful referents of our time. Linking subjects to referents and categorising them into existing frames takes place in communication and among communications.³⁵ This is because the 'connection between what signifies and what is signified' is constituted by the very language and formal structures that represent the link.³⁶ Representation is reliant on language and is textual, or as Roland Barthes would remind us, textualisable, and can thus be analysed using the methods of discursive analysis.³⁷ In this context, therefore, diplomacy is a practice that not only deals in texts that explain difference, but which also depends on difference to exist.³⁸

Instances of linking/differentiation take place in four dimensions: subjects, space, time, and norms. While each is vital for the categorisation of identity, they contribute to and draw on one another. Representations of subjects include race, birth, culture, and even physical features, but draw heavily on the other three dimensions, which act as explanations of what these subjects want, and why. For example, American diplomacy in the 1940s represented Vietnamese people as 'indolent', 'lazy', and 'naturally apolitical'; attributes explained by the location of a backward Asian race in a hot and humid tropical climate.³⁹ Locating subjects in the spatial dimension ascribes attributes framed

34 Connolly, 'Identity and Difference in Global Politics'; Connolly, William E., *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

35 Constantinou, C. M., O. P. Richmond, and A. Watson, *Cultures and Politics of Global Communication: Volume 34, Review of International Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

36 Foucault, Michel, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge, 2002); Foucault, M., *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), 74.

37 Barthes, Roland, 'S/Z', *New York: Hill and Wang* (1974); Barthes, R., *Leçon Inaugurale de La Chaire de Semiotique Littéraire Du Collège de France* (Éditions du Seuil, 1978); Barthes, R., *Image Music Text*, New Ed edition. (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

38 Derian, J. Der, *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

39 Bradley, Mark Philip, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

by geography. The ‘Global South’ or the ‘Middle East’ are examples where geography contributes to how these subjects and their politics are seen.⁴⁰ Locating identity in a temporal dimension frames it within a continuum of development or civilization, as, for example, the ‘Orientalised Middle East’ is represented as continually backward,⁴¹ and can additionally frame subjects and events within narratives that create causal links. Normative frames locate actors within existing ethical discourses, representing good and evil by reference to existing normative structures.⁴² The French Resistance, for instance, are not remembered as terrorists (even though their tactics clearly were terrorist) because of their opposition to Nazism. The four frames build politically comprehensible identities that can enable a variety of outcomes, from discourses justifying and requiring violence, to alliances against mutual foes.

This is how text makes identity. Building on this insight, we can move to analyse how diplomacy produces representations of identity, how they change over time, and when they persuade. This, in turn, necessitates the methodological advances developed by the author in order to research how diplomacy writes, reads, and rewrites identity—advances that are possible only thanks to the work of pioneering post-structuralists that have conceptualised and examined diplomacy and identity as text and as practice.⁴³ This method, *the diplomatic text*, is an analytical engine that brings together a rationale for data selection and three textual analysis methods.

Primary data selection focuses on practices of diplomatic knowledge production. This is not limited to the work of professional diplomats, as other agents occasionally carry out diplomatic duties. The standard for selecting evidence is determined as the textual trail of what Constantinou calls ‘embassy of theory’, the diplomatic process constituted by the delegation of the presence of the state.⁴⁴ Consequently, data selection includes classical diplomatic documents such as cables and memoranda, and also speeches, memos, and

40 See ‘On geography’ in M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

41 Said, Edward W., *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003).

42 Connolly, *Identity, Difference*, 206.

43 Particularly Der Derian, *On Diplomacy; Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed, and War* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); and Neumann, ‘Self and Other in International Relations’, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, vol. 3 (Hove, East Sussex, UK: Psychology Press, 1996); *Uses of the Other: “The East” in European Identity Formation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999); ‘The English School on Diplomacy: Scholarly Promise Unfulfilled’, *International Relations* 17, № 3 (1 September 2003): 341–369; ‘Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, № 3 (2002), 627; *At Home with the Diplomats; Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Enquiry*, 2013; Williams, Michael C. and Iver B. Neumann, ‘From Alliance to Security Community: NATO, Russia, and the Power of Identity’, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 29, № 2 (1 June 2000), 357–387.

44 Constantinou, C. M., *On the Way to Diplomacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

reports authored by non-diplomats, such as leaders or parliamentarians, but only those that are produced when representing the state.⁴⁵ That is, while US diplomatic cables to and from Mali total nearly one thousand documents, many are procedural or irrelevant because documents such as invoices do not engage in representation of the state, nor do they describe the actors and agents diplomats are dealing with. Documents analysed for this paper include US diplomatic communication between the US embassies in Bamako and the State Department during 2006–2010, and documents of diplomatic relevance, as per the above selection rationale. We are specifically looking for contextualised descriptions of oneself and others: by US and Malian officials, by representatives from Tuareg groups, especially the Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), and by other individuals claiming to represent Tuareg grievances. This rationale additionally entails the inclusion of some documents from the US diplomatic mission in Niamey, Niger, reporting on Tuareg issues affecting both Niger and Mali. In US missions, cables are drafted by embassy staff, particularly the Political Officer, the Military Attaché, or the Deputy Head of Mission, or sometimes dictated by the Ambassador. The common reoccurrence of signatures (almost always bearing the Ambassador's name or that of the Political Officer) is misleading, for this denotes signing off rather than drafting, much as most cables from the State Department are signed with the name of the Secretary.

Cables from missions reveal what American diplomats were reporting back to their superiors in Washington. However, it is also necessary to consider communications from the State Department back to Bamako and Niamey, as well as communications to the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) and other missions interested in Sahelian issues, for these documents bear feedback on reporting, assessments, priorities, and instructions, and reveal what Washington officials prioritised, which items from the missions' reporting they absorbed, and which they did not. In other words, policy developments are clearly reflected in cables from the State Department, which often come replete with citations of work by policy-making bodies such as the National Security Council's Principals' Committee. To complete the policy side of the cascade of reporting from the ground up to policymakers, it is necessary to draw also on non-diplomatic documents that are included by the data selection rationale, including public appearances, speeches, and statements by key policymakers in the Senate, the State Department, the Department of Defence, and the White House. The vast majority of the documents are available only due to the leak in 2010 of hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables by Wikileaks, which has allowed analysis to take place before

45 This accounts for concern on instances of practice—which I address from the perspective of their investment in text, such as the negotiations studied in Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, 'Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya', *European Journal of International Relations* 20, № 4 (1 December 2014), 889–911.

declassification and release, but also imposes limitations including being restricted to the timeframe of leaked documents. Because the method depends on wide documentary availability, it is ideally executed on historical cases, cases with vast leaks such as this one, or from within a diplomatic institution. The documents selected for this analysis total 413.⁴⁶

The first analytical step determines how a description constitutes and situates an actor. It draws on Foucauldian archaeology which, beyond linguistic analysis of how words suggest meaning, ‘retrieves’ or identifies and examines the modes, rules, and references that make the expression of identity discursively meaningful and subjectively operational. As will be demonstrated in the next section, this step reveals *how* identity works in specific texts, and additionally retrieves textual markers, called *topoi*, that signpost the presence of the specific aspects and architectures of representation. These markers allow the next analytical step—to follow exact representations of political identity across time and countless texts.

The second analytical step maps the chronological evolution of representations across hundreds of texts. This analysis is based on Foucauldian and Nietzschean genealogy, a method used to trace the history of an idea.⁴⁷ Following the textual markers identified in the previous step, it maps which representations thrive, disappear, or change within each diplomatic establishment. This evolution is charted chronologically and across the institution, from the reports of diplomats on the ground to the memoranda handed to policymakers. We are dealing with a number of locutors and authors producing the ‘picture’ that contributed to shaping decisions, including Malian government representatives, US diplomats reporting, Tuareg representatives from various factions or none, Malian Civil society representatives, and policymakers prioritising and deciding and then writing back to the missions abroad. It is across these documents, their categorisation and prioritisation driven by dominant policy concerns, that the American ‘picture’ of events in Mali is forged. That is, it is not only what Malian officials said that matters, but especially how this information was treated on its way back to policymakers’ desks. This will be demonstrated in the fourth section.

The genealogy and the archival research are carried out backwards. They begin with texts denoting that a policy shift had indeed occurred, and travel backwards through the history of those policy-determinant representations to establish their development

46 All Wikileaks documents can be searched by reference number: <https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/> (accessed 25 October 2017).

47 Foucault, Michel, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in *Nietzsche*, ed. John Richardson and Brian Leiter (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 139–164; Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, ‘Genealogy of Morals’, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 2000).

and provenance. Having mapped the story of specific representations within each country's diplomatic knowledge production, the third step identifies representations that cross over into the diplomatic knowledge production of another state with which it is in contact. When a representation (e.g. you readers, interested in strategic communications analysis methods) crosses over, is repeated up that country's chain of diplomatic reporting, and becomes common within it, still carrying the exact same architecture (readers+interest: StratComms+analysis+methods), it is fair to conclude that it was believed and absorbed. This is particularly evident when it begins to shape policy assumptions.

The consequences of identity-making cannot be underestimated. The method used here can uncover and explain the vital identity-making precursors to specific international phenomena, such as securitisation and stigmatisation,⁴⁸ alliances,⁴⁹ and even diplomatic sponsorship affording protection from the international community, which is particularly important for states in dubious normative terrain, such as those occupying or annexing territory, for example, Israel or Morocco.

Step 3: Representations of nomads, terrorism, and crime in US-Malian diplomacy

The first analytical move analyses how US and Malian diplomatic communications represented the conflict, its subjects, contexts, and solutions. The four texts analysed below were selected to represent the most important portrayals in US-Malian diplomatic relations of this period. Crucially, they are texts that illustrate how representations crossed over from one country's diplomacy to the other's. This substantiates the above-discussed crossover into US diplomacy of Malian representations of the conflict, and demonstrates how these representations worked and how they are constructed.

The first key text is the report of a meeting on 26 February 2008 between Malian President Touré, the Malian Military Chief of Staff Saydou Traoré, US Ambassador Terence McCulley, and AFRICOM commander General William Ward.⁵⁰ Drafted by Political Officer Aaron Sampson, it is an example of the occasional diplomatic functions of non-diplomats, such as military and government leaders. The 'continued instability in northern Mali' is represented as determined by space, military weakness, and Tuareg criminality. Lack of military control of the '650,000 sq. km. of terrain in northern Mali' was due to 'porous borders' and especially 'traffickers looking to turn quick profits by whatever means available', including collaborating with and enabling al-Qaeda in the

48 Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, 'Stigma Management in International Relations: Transgressive Identities, Norms, and Order in International Society', *International Organization* 68, No 01 (January 2014), 143–176.

49 Williams and Neumann, 'From Alliance to Security Community'.

50 26/2/2008, 08BAMA KO217. To accompany this analysis, the full text is available at: https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAMA KO217_a.html (accessed 15 June 2017).

Islamic Maghreb [AQIM]. This representation of northern Mali conjures Wild West-like chaos in ‘vast’ empty spaces inhabited by lawless Tuareg subjects dedicated to ‘banditry’ and ‘trafficking’. In their intrinsic criminality, these subjects constitute the lawless space of northern Mali, and are in turn constituted by that spatial context. In addition, they are solidly set in a temporal frame that represents them as backwards in development and governance.⁵¹ Lawlessness could not be contained due to ‘the Malian military’s lack of resources’, whence the President’s request for American military trucks, arms, and combat helicopters. This was not only a question of matériel, but also of necessary conditions: before Mali is able to fulfil its commitments to the US and TSCTP, it ‘must cut off the routes used by drugs, arms, and human trafficking’.

This aspect of the representation of the security challenge in Mali is vital. Without total and exclusive Malian military control, new hardware, as well as expanded and new garrisons, this situation will continue to enable terrorism. Achieving military control is represented as a necessary condition to any other Malian action in the north, including fighting AQIM and the long-awaited economic development promised in the Algiers Accords. Touré explained that ‘Mali wants to help the US counter Islamic extremism but that Mali must deal with its security issues on its own’. Mali’s future counterterrorism efforts were thus predicated on first finding a military—not social or economic—solution to Tuareg issues. Malian diplomacy consistently represented itself as supportive of the War on Terror, and throughout diplomatic contact with the US repeatedly ‘pledged Mali’s continued strong support for the US in the fight against global terrorism’. At the close of a meeting with Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte, American diplomats noted: ‘“You can”, said the President, “count on us”’.⁵² Malian diplomacy was keen to convey that Mali was most willing to help with counterterrorism, but that it needed first to control the Tuareg by military means with US assistance.

This representation of the conflict in the north, its context, dynamics, and solutions, appears in a US embassy report a year later.⁵³ The cable to the State Department discusses whether the defeat of veteran Tuareg rebel Ibrahim ag Bahanga might finally ‘enable northern units commanded by Bamako to turn their sights on other pressing northern security matters including AQIM’. The importance of this cable cannot be overstated. It contains the same articulation of the Malian security challenge discussed

51 For the an analysis of this Orientalist representation of this space and subjects, see Vatin, Jean-Claude, ‘Désert Construit et Inventé, Sahara Perdu Ou Retrouvé: Le Jeu Des Imaginaires’, *Revue de l’Occident Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 37, N° 1 (1984), 107–131. For a contemporary American popular culture expression of this lawless desert imaginary, see the TV show ‘American Odyssey’, 2015.

52 28/11/2007, 07BAMAKO1361. https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAMAKO1361_a.html (accessed 15 June 2017).

53 12/2/2009, 09BAMAKO85.

above: military control of the Tuareg to be followed by the implementation of the Algiers Accords and counterterrorism operations. Remarkably, it is posited as a policy assumption, demonstrating that the military-first approach desired by Bamako had been absorbed into US policy together with the representation of the Tuareg problem. This document furthermore denotes absorption of the nomads of northern Mali into existing War on Terror categories of facilitators and occasional participants in terrorism, i.e. AQIM. This is a vital insight because it suggests that there was no precise policy decision that Malian nomads facilitated or participated in terrorism. Rather, we are observing a far smaller step: the inclusion of these subjects into the existing category of North African terrorists.

The military-first solution relied heavily on representing Tuareg subjects not only as occasional smugglers and petty criminals, but as inherently lawless professional felons. This representation focused on rebel leader Ibrahim ag Bahanga, who in 2007 refused to disarm and held out with a small force in Tin Zaouatine, on the Algerian border. Until he was defeated in 2009, Malian diplomacy consistently described him as a bandit interested only in trafficking. A cable detailing a meeting between Malian Foreign Minister Moctar Ouane and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Todd Moss reports that Ouane described Bahanga's rebels as 'a small number of Tuareg bandits'.⁵⁴ '[B]andits like Ibrahim Bahanga', Ouane explained, 'had no political motivations, had formulated no political demands, and were solely interested in securing a portion of Malian territory for illicit trafficking'.

Malian diplomacy consistently represented the Tuareg way of life as based on smuggling,⁵⁵ crime, and conflict motivated by greed.⁵⁶ This is a powerful normative frame that depoliticises Tuareg rebellion, pulling these subjects and their war out of the possibility of ethical conflict. Another consequence is that engagement in negotiations or obtaining help against AQIM appears unthinkable. This is, of course, untrue. Many Tuareg call themselves 'businessmen' with better reason than any, having traded and controlled Saharan routes for over a millennium.⁵⁷ This representation reinforces Malian arguments that their very presence, if unsupervised, enables terrorism because they would have no qualms about supporting AQIM for profit.

54 13/6/2008, 08BAMAKO558. https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAMAKO558_a.html (accessed 15 June 2017).

55 08/07/2008, 08BAMAKO639.

56 See for example 9/1/2009, 09BAMAKO12 and 11/12/2008, 08BAMAKO932.

57 Boàs and Torheim, 'The Trouble in Mali—corruption, Collusion, Resistance', 1281. Considering their military successes as well as those of POLISARIO 1975–87, it should be conceivable, as they have themselves often suggested, to draw on their expertise in desert warfare.

This representation was fully and unproblematically absorbed into US diplomatic reporting. In a response from October 2008 to a State Department enquiry on why ‘president Toure appears reluctant to enter into negotiations with Bahanga’, the US Embassy explains that ‘Bahanga’s overriding interest appears to be carving out Tinzawaten [sic] as a personal fiefdom to secure revenues from drugs, arms and cigarette trafficking’.⁵⁸ This is the same description delivered by Foreign Minister Ouane in the above-analysed meeting, expounded in exactly the same articulation and similar wording—though using the more medieval-sounding term ‘fiefdom’. This does not have to be seen as a manipulative lie; it was common opinion in Bamako at the time, and thus this act of persuasion may not have been instrumental. Crucially, its relevance for this analysis is that its core conceptualisation and depiction was carried over to US reporting on the issue. Believing this representation of the Tuareg and their criminality—driven by the depoliticisation of Bahanga and his cause—was a catastrophic mistake for US diplomats and policymakers. After the fall of Gaddafi in 2011, Bahanga rallied armed Tuaregs in Libya to the banner of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), which in 2012 launched the biggest Tuareg uprising since Malian independence.

These representations and their constituent discursive elements were effective, and were soon absorbed into US thinking on the issue as reflected in the diplomatic correspondence. In this picture, lawless and vast ungoverned spaces inhabited by opportunistic and determined criminals like Bahanga cohered with the need for military control. Malian military weakness, the War on Terror, and the presence of AQIM in the Malian–Algerian borderlands provided the urgency for the gradual shift away from the previous development-based approach. The (mis)perception of Tuareg criminality sabotaged the ethics of preventing extremism through development, sustaining the notion that unpoliced Tuaregs enabled AQIM. This representation of the conflict, and its context and subjects, provided the tenets for a policy shift that made sense in the context of the War on Terror. Understanding the construction of this representation of the conflict, however, raises the question of how it found its way into American diplomacy.

Step 4: The evolution of textual representations of identity 2006–2010

The previous section analysed the inner workings of the representation of the conflict as absorbed by US diplomacy and policy. We now move to determine the history of this event by tracing the origins and conditions of the representation. This involves taking an intertextual and trans-institutional perspective, establishing how representations

⁵⁸ 3/10/2008, 08BAMA KO824. https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08BAMA KO824_a.html (accessed 15 June 2017).

crossed between diplomatic institutions and the conditions that made this possible. This takes the analysis back in time from the texts analysed in the previous section, and back and forth between the Malian and American diplomatic institutions concerned.

Mapping the development of representations during 2006–2010 reveals several shifts. Malian diplomacy depicted a conflict driven by greed, rather than by political grievances. This became particularly persistent after the ADC signed the Algiers Accords with Mali in July 2006, leaving only Bahanga's Tuareg faction still fighting. Between 2006 and Bahanga's death in 2011, he and all Tuareg in arms were described as criminals, feeding the need for military control *before* implementing the Algiers Accords. These representations were absorbed into US diplomacy in mid-2008 and late 2008 respectively. Tuareg descriptions of the conflict during 2006–2012 consistently focused on Malian unwillingness to implement the Algiers Accords, the need for development, the need to end abuses by Malian troops and militias, and the formation of mixed Malian-Tuareg military units. Furthermore, they repeatedly requested to collaborate in anti-AQIM efforts. The only Tuareg complaint that had an impact, in early 2009, was their representation of Malian human rights abuses.

While US diplomacy initially regarded development and cooperative security arrangements as vital to counter-extremism security, from late 2008 these concerns took a lesser role as focus shifted to Tuareg criminality and the need for military control. This policy shift, it is found, was not the result of a specific and explicit decision about Mali. No evidence was found of an NSC [National Security Council], DoD, or State decision to move US policy toward Mali from a development to a counterterrorism approach based on control of subjects and space. While such a decision might yet emerge upon declassification, the diplomatic data available does not reference or seem to defer to a new policy decision about Mali. Rather, by October 2009 we find that in terms of diplomatic reporting, interagency operations, military policy, and even espionage, Mali has been fully absorbed into the broader sweep of the assumptions and methods of the War on Terror in the Sahel.

These events raise questions as to the conditions that enabled them. First, why didn't representations of nomadic criminality cross over to US diplomacy before early 2008, and why didn't the military-first approach make the crossover until late 2008, despite Malian constancy during 2006–2008? Second, why were Tuareg allegations of major human rights abuses believable in 2009 and not before?

Mali relentlessly restated its commitment to counterterrorism and the need for a Tuareg-first military approach. Before the exchange with General Ward analysed above, President Touré met President Bush and declared that Mali adhered to 'all different

initiatives on the fight against terrorism'.⁵⁹ This conversation, however, did not include a full articulation of the representation of the conflict, and did not yield significant policy results. In a far more influential precursor, a conference in January 2008 on TSCTP, French officials linked ungoverned space, trafficking, insurgency, and AQIM. Widely disseminated among the American diplomatic and security community, it likely added credence to Malian claims and prepared the ground for their later admissibility.⁶⁰

Previous attempts to persuade US diplomats and policymakers were not effective. An excellent example is an exchange between Touré and Deputy Secretary Negroponte, which featured the same representation of the conflict including 'bandits', 'more than 7,000 km' of borders, and the need to control the north before counterterrorism efforts were possible.⁶¹ American diplomats and policymakers did, however, consider Mali an important ally in the global war on terrorism and a key member of [TSCTP].⁶² Touré's own regional counterterrorism initiative, a counterterrorism law, requests from Foreign Minister Ouane for State Department meetings in 2007, and even an offer to host the AFRICOM headquarters in Bamako, garnered sympathy but no change in the development-first policy.⁶³

In the early 2000s the Bush administration was enthusiastic about Malian democracy. In this context, ATT and his consensus approach were regarded, particularly by Secretary Rice, as having succeeded in nurturing and furthering democracy in Mali and bringing the country closer to Western economic development.⁶⁴ Former Ambassador to Mali Robert Pringle called Malian democracy 'a transformation that seems nothing short of amazing'.⁶⁵ Rapprochement was therefore facilitated by seeing Mali as a successful democracy, a representation that Malian diplomats assiduously reiterated and highlighted with comparison to Niger's brutal repression of a 2007 Tuareg revolt.⁶⁶ Backtracking to early 2007, US diplomacy still saw development as key to ensuring peace and countering extremism. Diplomats were keenly aware that 'should development efforts lag, violent outbreaks may reoccur', and that US influence should be used to encourage peaceful resolution and development.⁶⁷ Earlier, in 2006, US diplomats did not even believe in

59 12/2/08, Office of the Press Secretary, White House.

60 18/3/2008, 08STATE28385.

61 28/11/2007, 07BAMAKO1361.

62 2/6/2008, 08BAMAKO491; 12/12/2008, 08BAMAKO937.

63 18/9/2007, 07BAMAKO1028; 14/2/2007, 07BAMAKO166; 16/7/2008, 08BAMAKO660; 22/7/2008, 08BAMAKO676; 1/10/2008, 08BAMAKO821; 29/9/2008, 08BAMAKO817; 11/4/2008, 08BAMAKO357.

64 See for instance Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, 'Remarks at the Community of Democracies UNGA Event – Secretary Condoleezza Rice'.

65 Pringle, Robert, 'Mali's Unlikely Democracy', *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 30, № 2 (2006), 31.

66 19/6/2008, 08BAMAKO574; 22/12/2008, 08BAMAKO956; 13/6/2008, 08BAMAKO558.

67 3/4/2007, 07BAMAKO374.

Mali's counterterrorist commitment, writing puzzled and politely frustrated reports that even rebel Tuareg ADC forces were fighting AQIM, while Mali had never tried.⁶⁸

Malian depictions of the conflict depended on 'Tuareg criminality'—a key enabler of the Tuareg-first military approach. This representation was energetically promoted by Malian diplomats and officials in almost every communication studied. Even peaceful Tuareg protests were turned into 'ransacking', forcing Malian troops to 'fire in self-defence'.⁶⁹ On the day of his inauguration in June 2007, for example, President Touré explained that some Tuaregs 'provide logistical support to AQIM' for profit, positing a vision of self-serving violent crime.⁷⁰ A cable from late 2008 titled 'Bahanga runs amok', suggests that US understanding of the conflict was deeply affected by the representation of Tuareg criminality as a way of life, stating that 'harassing the Malian military is a part-time diversion from their full-time job trafficking drugs, guns and contraband' and that Tuaregs were themselves in constant internecine conflict.⁷¹ Backtracking to late 2007, however, it can be seen that US diplomats and policy did not hold such assumptions and still regarded justice, peace, and development initiatives as key. A May 2007 report, for example, carries a nuanced description of Bahanga's rebellion and its cause, and, while it is stated that he had trafficking experience, he is described as a veteran of the 1990 rebellion, frustrated by the failure to implement the Algiers Accords.⁷² Likewise, the reinsertion and reconciliation of Tuareg rebels in neighbouring Niger was commended as an effective measure of great counterterrorism value; a stark contrast with the shift in late 2008.⁷³

Tuareg leaders and mediators were keen to remonstrate their grievances to US diplomats. When questioned on the murder of Tuaregs by Malian troops in 2008, 'top rebel' Ag Bibi mused that there was 'no chance Mali would ever investigate the murders'.⁷⁴ National Assembly member Ibrahim Mohamed Asselah told embassy officials that they needed 'infrastructure' and 'wells for their communities and animals', but that 'he was sure the nomadic groups would never receive these wells'.⁷⁵ Tuareg demands were constant: reduction of the Malian military presence in northern towns, the 'creation of mixed military units' for security, and the investigation of 'summary executions'.⁷⁶ Discussing terrorism, ADC leader Deity ag Simadou 'complained about

68 31/10/2006, 06BAMAKO1244.

69 19/11/2008, 08BAMAKO898.

70 19/6/2007, 07BAMAKO676.

71 29/12/2008, 08BAMAKO968; 8/7/2008, 08BAMAKO639.

72 10/5/2007, 07BAMAKO505.

73 10/10/2006, 06NIAMEY113, see also 31/10/2007, 07STATE151024

74 11/12/2008, 08BAMAKO932.

75 14/11/2008, 08BAMAKO888.

76 6/5/2008, 08BAMAKO419.

alleged GOM [Government of Mali] diversion of counterterrorism funds to combat Tuareg rebels' and 'charged that several Malian officials were working with AQIM to secure a percentage of any eventual ransom'.⁷⁷ Tuareg leaders frequently suggested that they could help fight terrorism, recounting with pride two battles in 2006, when the ADC alone had taken the fight to AQIM—significantly, this was the unit commanded by Mokhtar Belmokhtar.⁷⁸

Tuareg claims did not make a significant impact on the US understanding of the conflict. While the need for economic and cooperative security development was well appreciated, few Tuareg grievances were ever reported as reliable by US diplomats. This is curious considering that allegations featured events as horrific as Malian-sponsored militias led by Colonel Meydou executing Tuaregs by crushing their skulls with military vehicles,⁷⁹ though in sum it is fair to conclude that by the mid-2000s, diplomatic portrayals of the Tuareg as victims were very ineffective.⁸⁰ Allegations were taken seriously only in 2009, when the Malian military denied the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisoners feared tortured or executed, revealing attitudes of perceived unreliability to Tuareg communications.⁸¹

During this period, the US embassy in Bamako developed considerable expertise and strove to provide an advanced understanding of Malian issues. They employed a Tuareg assistant, maintained contact with most major Tuareg factions and leaders, reported on the finer details of the ethnic, clan, and tribal structures of the Tuareg and of the Hassaniya Arabs of the north, and even canvassed voters before elections.⁸² Far more sanguine about the 'need for forward movement on the Algiers Accords' than most policymakers in DC,⁸³ the embassy in Bamako warned that unaddressed grievances would fuel an uprising and frequently advised that the US pressure Mali to implement the Accords.⁸⁴ It is found that, when they denied that 'Tuareg smugglers or bandits have any religious or ideological links with AQIM', or remarked that the ADC had attacked AQIM twice in 2006, this was not reported further up the chain for analysis in Washington.⁸⁵ In sum, reports from diplomats during 2008–2010 that

77 21/5/2008, 08BAMAKO462.

78 21/5/2008, 08BAMAKO462; 13/9/2007, 07BAMAKO1006; 31/5/2007, 07BAMAKO587.

79 See 27/4/2009, 09BAMAKO257; 21/4/2008, 08BAMAKO375 and earlier.

80 See for example Zounmenou, David, 'Rethinking the Tuareg Factor in the Mali Crisis', *Conflict Trends* 2013, № 3 (1 January 2013): 16–23.

81 6/3/2009, 09BAMAKO141.

82 17/4/2008, 08BAMAKO371; 15/12/2006, 06BAMAKO1415.

83 Senator Chris Coons, Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, is an important exception.

84 2/6/2008, 08BAMAKO491; 6/3/2008, 08BAMAKO239; 3/10/2008, 08BAMAKO824; 21/4/2008, 08BAMAKO375; 7/4/2008, 08BAMAKO339.

85 17/4/2008, 08BAMAKO371; 6/3/2008, 08BAMAKO239.

were primarily concerned with justice and development as a solution had little influence on how officials in Washington saw the situation.⁸⁶ Reports on security concerns and individuals, however, received far greater attention.

Malian representations of the conflict were, conversely, very effective in engaging dominant US policy concerns. This does not, however, explain why they were effective in late 2008 and not before. There was another powerful factor at work: instructions from policymakers at the level of the State Department and above. The history of the two key representations, and the fate of nuanced and detailed reporting from the Bamako mission, point to practices of prioritisation governing the salience of particular perspectives and items of information. A cable from March 2003 mentions that Mali 'is now a EUCOM/AFRICOM high priority country within the context of [TSCTP]', a shift in practice described as in-progress.⁸⁷ This suggests that there was a militarisation of reporting and a move to allow AFRICOM to lead initiatives hitherto led by the State Department. These practices determined what dominant policy concerns looked like, which is why the same Malian representation of the conflict failed to persuade in late 2007, but succeeded in late 2008. This is why the lack of a specific strategic decision concerning Mali makes sense: an increased prioritisation of security concerns subsumed Mali into the existing categories, knowledge, and methods of the global War on Terror. The devil lies, therefore, in the finer bureaucratic details—all the categories into which northern Malian nomads were subsumed already existed, which is probably why a specific policy decision appears absent and we see a procedural, rather automatic, shift to include Mali into global counterterrorism approaches.

The self-disciplining of diplomatic knowledge production can be traced in communications from the State Department. A cable congratulating the Bamako mission on its reporting reveals which information the Department was interested in, implying that it was read entirely through a security lens, and analysed by individuals and institutions such as the NSC's Senior Director for Counterterrorism and 'senior policymakers from the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and the Department of Defense'.⁸⁸ The commended cables concerned primarily biographic lists, links to trans-Saharan crime, and Mali's only strike ever against AQIM in 2009.⁸⁹ Writing was heavily conditioned by a set of instructions on 'reporting and collection needs: West Africa'. An update of the National Intelligence Priorities Framework (NIPF) of 24

86 An excellent example is cable 08BAMAKO485, which is never referenced again. For a detailed discussion on this problem, see Pablo de Orellana, 'When Diplomacy Identifies Terrorists: Subjects, Identity and Agency in the War On Terror in Mali', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Counterterrorism Policy*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

87 3/3/2008, 08BAMAKO219.

88 24/9/2009, 09STATE99793.

89 See for instance 31/7/2008, 08BAMAKO695

February 2003, the instructions subsumed State Department reporting into intelligence needs. This was not problematic per se, except that it framed and directed diplomatic knowledge production around military and intelligence needs, inheriting assumptions from these fields of practice. For instance, reports on ‘insurgents’ and ‘separatists’ were filed into the same reporting category. The new instructions did not request reporting on the goals of such groups, but focused instead on their capability to ‘destabilize host country government’, ‘links to international terrorist groups’, and ‘criminal activity’, stripping the context from these reports and placing all ‘criminal activity’ in the context of terrorism. This is a self-sabotaging lack of nuance that, in our case, strips the politics out of Tuareg activity due to centrally mandated lack of context.⁹⁰

Another interesting revelation that emerges from this analysis concerns policy differences between the Bush and Obama governments. While a sharp break in policy and its underlying assumptions might be expected, this was not observed in US diplomacy and its resulting policy concerning Mali and the Western Sahel. Despite her earlier expertise, Condoleezza Rice had little interest in Africa after the Cold War, and during her tenure as National Security Advisor, and later as Secretary of State, her work on Africa concentrated on economic liberalisation, particularly privatisation and the Millennium Development Compact.⁹¹ Her successor Hillary Clinton did not drive any major development in North African policy until the Libyan crisis erupted in 2011. At the Department of Defense, Robert Gates provided continuity in Mali and Sahel policy, particularly with his establishment of AFRICOM in late 2007 and its key security initiatives in 2009, bridging the Bush-Obama transition.⁹² The analysis here suggests that neither administration dedicated much policy effort to Mali until 2012. An exception was the effort Secretary Rice invested in the Millennium Challenge Corporation,⁹³ which sought to promote democratic prosperity through development aid and a privatisation drive.⁹⁴ Despite the transition to the Obama administration, the AFRICOM-led interagency approach to counter-terrorism in the Sahel remained focused

90 16/4/2009, 09STATE37566.

91 See Lusane, Clarence, *Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice: Foreign Policy, Race, and the New American Century* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 135–8.

92 Harmon, Stephen A., *Terror and Insurgency in the Sahara-Sahel Region: Corruption, Contraband, Jihad and the Mali War of 2012-2013* (London: Routledge, 2016), 137.

93 Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State, ‘Remarks at Signing Ceremony for Millennium Challenge Corporation’s Compact with the Republic of Mali – Secretary Condoleezza Rice and Ambassador Danilovich’, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/75871.htm> (accessed 24 October 2017); Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, ‘Remarks at the Community of Democracies UNGA Event – Secretary Condoleezza Rice’, 1 October 2007: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2007/10/93344.htm>

94 23/5/2006, 06NIAMEY515

on unchanged 'country-specific requirements and strategies'.⁹⁵ One notable exception was increased US policy concern about trafficking and slavery passing through Mali.⁹⁶

Analysis of Malian-US relations unveils a conjunction of factors behind the discursive success of Malian descriptions of its northern subjects. These include dominant policy concerns about global terror and bureaucratic prioritisation practices focusing on terror and terror enablers, which had significant effects on diplomatic interactions that sought to make sense of events in terms of these global factors. This is what enabled the subsumption of many of Mali's northern peoples into the global drive against terror. This conjunction of factors was key to these subjects being simply absorbed into the knowledge and methods of the War on Terror, as evidenced in the NIPF instructions to American diplomats, rather than being the subject of a Mali-specific decision. To summarise, the policy shift of 2008 was predicated on an absorption of Malian representation of its northern subjects and on the conflict itself. The crucial representations that crossed over into the US understanding of the conflict, despite the qualms of diplomats on the ground, were those of nomads as opportunistic bandits who engaged with terrorists for profit (this is how Bahanga was so spectacularly depoliticised), and those of the conflict necessitating a military-first approach, which came to be defined as control of subjects and territory. It is in the context of knowledge-production for policy that a discussion or decision specific to Mali might seem less necessary than a simple recategorisation of the Malian issue in terms of the War on Terror. This shift would seem logical only in this specific set of circumstances, and not before late 2008.

This is how Malian representation of Tuareg subjects and their extremely tenuous links to AQIM came to justify a policy shift. This was unnecessary, considering US diplomats in Bamako were remarkably well informed. My research on representations of identity in diplomatic knowledge production has found this to be a surprisingly common phenomenon. In other words, policymakers can discipline diplomacy's reporting from abroad to see what they prioritise seeing and, of course, to choose what to read and what to believe; however, in excess this practice constitutes self-sabotage. This is not necessarily a failure caused by selective intelligence analysis, such as that leading to the Iraq invasion in 2003.⁹⁷ Rather, this is the result of practices that discipline an institution's knowledge production. For a Foucauldian IR theorist, this is a fascinating example of epistemological power in practice, for we are witnessing the practices that govern, produce, and discipline knowledge. This is far more pervasive

95 11/4/2009, 09STATE35882

96 5/11/2009, 09STATE114215

97 Fitzgerald, Michael and Richard Ned Lebow, 'Iraq: The Mother of All Intelligence Failures', *Intelligence and National Security* 21, № 5 (1 October 2006), 884–909.

than ignoring certain reports. This is a process that limits both the writing and the reading of information, resulting in a lack of essential nuance, context, and detail in the US policy regarding Mali. Crucially, it created the conditions, including urgency, for Malian representations of the conflict to be more believable—they responded better to dominant policy concerns and knowledge-governing practices than the work of US diplomats. Thus it is that through representations of identity carried in diplomacy that Mali obtained unlikely influence over US policy.

Step 5: Nomads wrapped in terror? Conclusions on Mali regarding strategic communications

This paper has expounded a conceptually informed method designed to retrieve how diplomatic communication constitutes representations of subjects, territory, time, and politics. Putting this analytical engine to work, it has explored the linguistic and discursive topography of the conflict over the meaning and significance of Tuareg presence, activity, grievances, and insurgency. It has shown the role played by identity-making in representing people, space, and conflict in US-Malian diplomacy, identifying the exact instances when Malian representations of the conflict came to influence the US understanding of the conflict. Analysis found that the conditions that enabled this event were not only contextual, but also pertained to American diplomatic and policy priorities and practices instituted during the War on Terror.

Understanding the role played by the representations of conflict and of its context in Malian-US relations in the 2000s holds vital lessons. The first lesson is methodological. This paper demonstrates the usefulness of conceptually informed discourse analysis methods that pinpoint how reality is constituted in words, comparisons, writing, text, and relations among texts. In terms of policy analysis and research, this means that it is worthwhile paying attention to the way representations are constituted. This is relevant not only to the practice of strategic communications, but also to an empirical assessment of its effects, effectiveness, risks, and, particularly, to understanding how they work. In other words, it is worth analysing the power of descriptions that are, ultimately, one of the key ways through which political events can be reported on a page. Methods such as the one expounded and applied in this paper, can reveal how words, language, comparisons, and associations constitute the ‘reality’ that informs policy.

Conceptually, this research shows that identity-making in diplomatic communication is a powerful and influential aspect of international relations. Furthermore, it pays tribute to the old post-structuralist adage that words, language, and how they constitute subjectivity, are of vital importance in constituting how the world is seen and dealt with. Identity, it emerges, is a key aspect of how the world is understood. More broadly, while theories exploring epistemology might seem impenetrable and philosophically indulgent, they can yield a greater understanding of events occurring in the delicate

conceptual limbo between what is known and how something is known.

Two lessons emerge for diplomacy. First, it is worth reading the work of diplomats on the ground in more detail, particularly when resources and effort have been expended to make them as well-informed, nuanced, and detailed in their local understanding as the American diplomats in Bamako were during the 2000s. In other words, their work went unheeded though their advice might have helped avert the disaster of 2012. Second, it should be clear that disciplining diplomatic knowledge production to make it useful to seemingly more important, immediate, and 'powerful' practices, such as intelligence and military strategy, can have unintended medium- and long-term consequences. In this case, such disciplinary practices made it possible for the northern Malian issue to become subsumed in 2008 into the strong categories of the War on Terror. That is, it was a case of reclassification into the concerns of the Global War on Terror, its assumptions and methods, departing from a more localised understanding of the issues involved. This recategorisation was, of course, not only born of Malian diplomacy, it depended on the broad and global categories of the counterterrorism policy of the 2000s. This suggests that the very presence of broad, global policy categories and assumptions that can be found at the core of most government policy is an enabling factor for slippages in meaning and precision, which can appear very minor at one level, but which can lead to major changes in policy application on the ground.

For policymaking, this research shows that it can be counterproductive to err too far on the side of focused prioritisation of information as it is produced and written. This creates a self-fulfilling loop where policymakers risk seeing only what they expect to see, and other information of potential importance is discarded as irrelevant. This was the case with much of the detail collected by diplomats on the Tuareg's grievances, their relations with AQIM, and their relevance to the War on Terror. Ultimately, this resulted in a lost opportunity to counter extremism, promote peace in northern Mali, and destroy AQIM. While diplomacy is not the totality of information gathering and decision-making, it is a site where other knowledge-production and policy practices of government are reflected. This is how this study of diplomacy was able to take into account other institutions, such as the NSC, and their knowledge production, and infer that the policy shift went unchallenged in Washington. Further, in terms of policy agency, the heavy dominance of counterterrorism concerns allowed Mali—as well as most north African states—to obtain US assistance which was, conversely, mostly invested against old enemies and not against terrorists. This means that while clear policy concerns and priorities issued from the top focus minds, they also render policymaking vulnerable to representations that resonate with or appear to address these concerns.

For strategic communications, the lesson is evident: identity-making is crucial to the exercise of communicative influence, and this paper has shown how. The diplomatic strategic communications success of one of the world's poorest countries shows that it

is not always evident who is most susceptible to instrumental approaches to diplomatic communication. Finally, this paper should serve as a warning about the unintended consequences of strategic communications power. The spectacular and unlikely strategic communications victory of Touré's Malian government obtained a discreet but significant reversal of the American development-first approach to the Sahel. The militarisation of Saharan security initiatives meant that the reversal was accompanied by significant military and training assistance to Malian forces, which inevitably came to be invested against the Tuareg.

It would be disingenuous to believe that these diplomatic and policy events did not contribute to the staggering MNLA-led Tuareg uprising that followed in early 2012. The 'bandit' Bahanga, seeking to carve out a 'trafficking fiefdom', turned out to be deeply committed to the Tuareg cause, and from exile in Libya rallied thousands of young recruits and of veterans of the 1990 uprising to the MNLA. He was so important to the grouping of various Tuareg clans and individuals into the MNLA rebel alliance that his death in August 2011 resulted in a significant degradation of its unity, cohesion, core networks, and leadership.⁹⁸

By late 2012, northern Mali had collapsed into disaster. The uprising by the Tuareg and Arab minorities in the north was overtaken by the rapid advance of Islamic insurgents, Ansar Dine, and the AQIM offshoot Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, (MUJAO). In Bamako, a small group of officers staged a coup protesting President Touré's failure to hold the country together. Soon the Tuareg were defeated by Ansar Dine, AQIM, and MUJAO, leading to a French intervention that only restored the problematic status quo ante and caused the exodus of tens of thousands of Tuareg into precarious exile across the Sahara. Following its strategic communications triumph, Touré's administration collapsed due to its own success in avoiding the implementation of the Algiers Accords. US policy failed in its goal to combat extremism and came to unwittingly facilitate an Islamic takeover, while northern Mali's problems remain unaddressed. Such is the price of persuasion.

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⁹⁸ Walther, Olivier J. and Dimitris Christopoulos, 'Islamic Terrorism and the Malian Rebellion', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 27, № 3 (27 May 2015), 513.

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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, BOKO HARAM, AND COUNTER-INSURGENCY

Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar

Abstract

Strategic communications is gaining traction as a potent tool of countering insurgency. State and non-state actors—including insurgent groups—are increasingly turning to it in pursuit of their goals. This article offers a comparative study of the use of strategic communications by both the Nigerian Armed Forces and the jihadi group they seek to obliterate: Boko Haram. It also assesses their impact on the media coverage of their activities. The jihadists deployed both their communications skills and their infamies to put their insurgency onto the global scene. The Army employed a range of tools—some effective, some less so—to counter them. The media's obsession with jihadi stories gave the insurgents an edge, but the Army managed to disrupt most of their strategies. Extraneous factors do influence strategic communications campaigns, but honesty—or the perception of it—is a necessary condition for their long-term efficacy.

Keywords: *Boko Haram, counter-insurgency, jihadists, militants, Nigerian Army, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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Introduction

On 29 July 2017 the Nigerian Army did something they rarely do: they apologised for issuing a false statement.¹ It was in respect of a setback they had suffered in their war with the jihadi² group Boko Haram. Four days earlier the group had ambushed and kidnapped a team of oil explorers and their ancillary staff who were under Army and vigilante group³ protection. In the false statement,⁴ the Army had claimed to have rescued all the explorers and seized weapons from the insurgents. In reality, it was the dead bodies of some of the explorers, their supporting staff, soldiers, and members of the vigilante group that they had managed to recover.⁵ The families and colleagues of the victims cried foul.⁶ And Boko Haram released a video showing three surviving

1 Director of Army Public Relations Brigadier General Sani Kukasheka Usman issued the statement, which was widely reported by the Nigerian media. See Ronald Mutum, 'Abducted oil workers: Army apologises for misleading the public, recovers 21 additional bodies', *Daily Trust*, 30 July 2017, <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/abducted-oil-workers-army-apologises-for-misleading-public-recovers-21-additional-bodies/207747.html> (accessed 30 July 2017). The Nigerian Army published the statement on its official website too. They used the phrase 'highly regrettable' but buried it deep beneath a vague headline: 'Update on Oil Exploration Team Ambush': <http://www.army.mil.ng/update-on-oil-exploration-team-ambush/> (accessed 30 July 2017).

2 The terms 'jihadi group', 'insurgent group', and 'militant group' are used interchangeably in this article. Jihadi is used here in the same sense the news outlets in the West use it to refer to a violent extremist group. It is radically different from the term 'jihad' in Islam, which simply means struggle to uphold righteous deeds.

3 The vigilante group is a team of armed youths, formed by local communities in the northeast, to counter the Boko Haram militancy. They are sometimes called 'Civilian JTF' (Joint Task Force) and often work as a support team for the Nigerian Armed Forces, largely because of their excellent knowledge of the local terrains.

4 The statement, which was issued by the same Brigadier General Usman on 26 July 2017, was reported by several news outlets. See Idris Ibrahim and Abdulkareem Haruna, 'Nigerian Army announces rescue of kidnapped NNPC officials, says nine soldiers killed', *Premium Times*, 26 July 2017, <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/238267-nigerian-army-announces-rescue-kidnapped-nnpc-officials-says-nine-soldiers-killed.html> (accessed 26 July 2017). It was also published on the Army's website: 'Update on Search and Rescue of NNPC Staff': <http://www.army.mil.ng/update-on-search-and-rescue-of-nnpc-staff/> (accessed 27 July 2017). And ironically, it remained on the website for many weeks after the retraction.

5 Media reports say more than 45 people were killed. See Hamza Idris, Ibrahim Sawab, and Yusha'u Ibrahim, '45 killed, many missing in Boko Haram ambush on oil workers', *Daily Trust*, 28 July 2017 <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/45-killed-many-missing-in-boko-haram-ambush-on-oil-workers/207500.html> (accessed 29 July 2017).

6 For instance, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Maiduguri, Professor Abubakar Njodi, whose younger brother and staff were among those killed, criticised the Army for describing 'the recovery of corpses' as the rescue of the victims. See Abdulkareem Haruna and Idris Ibrahim, 'NNPC Ambush: UN-IMAID Vice Chancellor faults Nigerian Army, says nobody rescued', *Premium Times*, 28 July 2017: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/238453-nnpc-ambush-unimaid-vice-chancellor-faults-nigerian-army-says-nobody-rescued.html> (accessed 28 July 2017).

members of the exploration team in their custody.⁷ The three—two geologists who are lecturers at the University of Maiduguri and their driver—said in the video that they were being held hostage by the militants. They pleaded with the Nigerian authorities to negotiate with the insurgents to secure their freedom. It was a complete repudiation of the Army's claim. And so, with the Nigerian public getting more accurate reports of the incident from other sources, the Army had no viable option but to admit that their own original statement was false.

They would have saved themselves from this humiliating experience, had they not ignored one of the key tenets of strategic communications: truth-telling. The retraction itself—which earned them some praise⁸—was actually a more dignifying act than their previous tradition of telling untruths and keeping quiet. A few days before this incident, the Chief of Army Staff, Lieutenant General Tukur Yusufu Buratai, had given his troops a 40-day ultimatum to capture the leader of Boko Haram, Abubakar Shekau, dead or alive.⁹ The Army had made multiple claims of killing or maiming the militants' leader.¹⁰ Issuing the ultimatum was a confirmation that the Army had deliberately misinformed the public in the past.

In the brutal war they have been waging against the jihadists since 2009, the Nigerian Army have actually been winning the gun battle in the field, though not as effectively and as accurately as they have been representing to the public. They have retaken most of the territory once seized by the militants, killed many of their commanders and young fighters, and forced a significant number of them to surrender. But it is in the 'communications battlespace'¹¹ that the insurgents often outwit their superior opponents. And this has often been helped by lapses in the Army's narratives. Unknown to military officials, any time they issue a false statement about their encounters with

7 The video, which was apparently recorded on 28 July 2017, was shared on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5q8pTK7pzw> (accessed 30 July 2017). Boko Haram—the faction led by Abu Musab al-Barnawi, which kidnapped them—released the video immediately after the Army had claimed to have rescued the explorers. The captives specifically called for negotiation with al-Barnawi, something that raised questions about a previous claim that he had been arrested by the Nigerian security forces.

8 Asaju, Tunde, 'Towards a Positive Army-media Relations', *Daily Trust*, 2 August 2017.

9 See 'Capture Shekau "dead or alive", Buratai directs Commander', *The Nation*, 22 July 2017: <http://thenationonlineng.net/capture-shekau-dead-alive-buratai-directs-commander/> (accessed 22 July 2017).

10 See, for instance, Festus Ewete's analysis in *Premium Times*: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/238515-analysis-nigerian-military-repeatedly-claimed-killed-boko-haram-leader-abubakar-shekau.html> (accessed 29 July 2017). There were occasions when the Army admitted that Shekau had not been captured, but they didn't admit providing false information. One example is the report in *Premium Times*, 'Why We Are Yet to Capture Shekau – DHQ', 30 March 2017: <http://thenationonlineng.net/yet-capture-shekau-dhq/> (accessed 30 March 2017).

11 Giese, Jeff, 'It's Time to Embrace Memetic Warfare', *Defence Strategic Communications*, 1(1), (2015), p. 71.

Boko Haram, they indirectly empower the jihadists. For, as academics Mervyn Frost and Nicholas Michelsen have argued elsewhere, non-adherence to truth telling creates ‘opportunities that empower even very weak hostile actors and undermine the basic structural conditions on which even the strongest actors’ credibility is rooted’.¹²

The problem probably stemmed from the Army’s misconception or misapplication of strategic communications, though in fairness to them they do not claim to be using it.¹³ The terms they frequently use are ‘public relations’, ‘public affairs’, ‘defence information’, and ‘crisis communication’ (all components of strategic communications)¹⁴—but all of which they tend to misapply because none of them advocates using misinformation as a tool. The narrow scope of the military’s communications strategy—they seem to target only domestic audiences, apparently in compliance with their specific remits—is an additional constraint, especially as they are, in reality, dealing with an issue that extends far beyond the borders of Nigeria. This might explain their use of terminologies that are of narrower scope than strategic communications, which is usually associated with communication with external audiences. Yet their task is of the magnitude that only a skilful application of strategic communications techniques could address. But, like many military formations, the Nigerian Army appears to equate strategic communications with spin.¹⁵ It is perhaps a hangover of the entrenched tradition of using propaganda as part of military campaigns. But as communications expert John Williams points out:

*Strategic communications is not propaganda, nor psychological operations, nor information ops, nor spin—all of which involve an intention to mislead in some way. Strategic communications is about strategic impact through credible narrative. In complex situations, where reasonable people can hold different views or see the problem from different angles, strategic communications is an honest attempt—always honest—to frame the way people around the world understand what is at stake.*¹⁶

12 Frost, Mervyn and Nicholas Michelsen, ‘Strategic Communications in International Relations: Practical Traps and Ethical Puzzles’, *Defence Strategic Communications*, 2, (2017), p. 22.

13 Former National Security Adviser Sambo Dasuki does use the term ‘strategic communications’, but other security officials rarely do. Most references made here are to the Nigerian Army because they are the ones leading the counter-insurgency campaigns. And the words ‘Army’ and ‘military’ are often used here interchangeably.

14 See Farwell, James P., *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication*. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

15 See Thomas, Timothy, ‘Russia’s 21st Century Information War: Working to Undermine and Destabilize Populations’, *Defence Strategic Communications*, 1(1), (2015), 11–26. Even NATO’s strategic communications definition includes psychological operations (see, NATO, ‘NATO Strategic Communications Policy’, *NATO Unclassified*, (SG (2009)0794) 14 September 2009).

16 Williams, John, ‘Weaponised Honesty: Communication Strategy and NATO Values’, *Defence Strategic Communications*, 2, (2017), p. 205.

The lack of credible narratives is a major lapse in the Army's counter-insurgency efforts. On numerous occasions the military would issue half-truths or untruths that were easily punctured by the militants or simply detected by the public. Their repeated claims of Shekau's death, for instance, were effectively countered by the insurgents with simple releases of their leader's video and audio recordings to prove that he was still alive and unharmed.¹⁷ Each successful rebuttal of such claims erodes the credibility of the Army and enhances that of the jihadists. It is not that the Boko Haram militants do not exaggerate their claims or spread outright falsehoods; they do. But they tend to give the media more credible accounts of events than the Nigerian military does. This strengthens their standing as news sources and increases the visibility of their narratives in the media. But, of course, it is the media's obsession with jihadi stories that helps lift them out of their relative obscurity and put them onto the global scene.¹⁸ As will be explained later, a growing body of literature has shown that the media's preoccupation with covering terrorism and Islamist militancy, as well as the jihadists' quest for publicity, has helped generate much more media attention to insurgents and terrorists than they deserve.¹⁹

This article examines the communications strategies of both the Nigerian Army and the Boko Haram militants, and broadly assesses their impact on the media coverage of the jihadi insurgency and counter-insurgency in Nigeria. The data was drawn from interviews with journalists and public relations officers;²⁰ analysis of Boko Haram's video and audio messages; the researcher's personal reflections, as he has covered the Boko Haram insurgency as a journalist working for both the BBC World Service and the Nigerian *Daily Trust* newspapers; library research; and analysis of the press releases

17 In one such video, given to the online news outlet *Sahara Reporters*, the Boko Haram leader denied that he was injured in a military airstrike. *Sahara Reporters*, 'Boko Haram Leader, Shekau, Releases New Video to Prove He Wasn't Injured in Nigerian Air Force Bombardment', 4 May 2017: <http://saharareporters.com/2017/05/04/boko-haram-leader-shekau-releases-new-video-prove-he-wasnt-injured-nigerian-air-force> (accessed 5 May 2017).

18 Abubakar, Abdullahi Tasiu, 'Communicating Violence: The Media Strategies of Boko Haram' in *Africa's Media Image in the 21st Century: From the 'Heart of Darkness' to 'Africa Rising'*, eds. M. Bunce, S. Franks and C. Paterson, (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), pp. 200–210.

19 See Weimann, Gabriel, 'The Theater of Terror: Effects of Press Coverage', *Journal of Communication*, 33(1), (1983), 38–45; Weimann, Gabriel, 'The Role of the Media in Propagating Terrorism' in *Countering Terrorism: Psychosocial Strategies*, eds. U. Kumar and M.K. Mandal, (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2012), pp. 182–200; Lynch, Marc, 'Al-Qaeda's Media Strategies', *National Interest*, 83, (2006), 50–56; Moeller, Susan, *Packaging Terrorism: Co-opting the News for Politics and Profit*. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Farwell, James P., 'The Media Strategy of ISIS', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 56(6), (2014), 49–55; and Nacos, Brigitte L., *Mass-mediated Terrorism: Mainstream and Digital Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, 3rd ed., (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

20 Part of the data was obtained from the individual interviews conducted with twelve Nigerian journalists, two police public relations officers, and two former army public relations officers. The interviews were done in the months of January, April, and July 2017.

and web content generated by the Nigerian Armed Forces (in particular those of the Defence Headquarters, the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force, and the Nigeria Police Force).

The Army versus Boko Haram

The Army were not the primary adversaries of the Boko Haram insurgents;²¹ politicians and police were. The jihadists were first critical of politicians whom they accuse of corruption and breach of trust. They then added the police who protect the politicians and enforce their laws. And when they began their uprising in July 2009, they were primarily confronting the Borno State Government and the police, who were trying to enforce a law that stipulates the wearing of helmets by motorcyclists, which the insurgents hate and routinely violate. It was the failure of the police to contain them that prompted the then President Umaru Musa Yar'adua to bring in the Army. The military suppressed the uprising, arrested the founder of the group, Muhammad Yusuf, and handed him over to the police in Maiduguri, Borno State's capital and Boko Haram's main base.²² Yusuf was killed while in police custody,²³ an act that was believed to have further radicalised the group and made its members more violent. There was a renewed uprising followed by a full insurgency, and the Army became the group's main adversary. With the escalation of the insurgency came a wider involvement of the armed forces. By 2013, almost all the Nigerian armed forces and intelligence agencies were drafted into the counter-insurgency campaigns, which the Office of the National Security Adviser coordinates. This article assesses the overall communications strategy employed in this counter-insurgency work, focusing mainly on the Army's part and making references to that of the entire military and the Defence Headquarters.

The Army has long been playing the lead role in the campaign, although there have been changes in strategy and in the structure and scope of the communications team, which have often been occasioned by changes of governments or of personnel. During the Yar'adua administration it was the Army that handled the media strategy, operating mostly from Maiduguri. The Department of State Services (DSS)—the domestic intelligence agency usually called the State Security Service (SSS)—was involved more in security operations but less in open communications. This system continued in the early part of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration under the supervision

21 The words 'insurgents', 'jihadists', and 'militants' are used here to describe Boko Haram members because of the political nature of their activities, although most of their activities fall within the definition of terrorism. The Nigerian government and the armed services actually call them terrorists and their actions terrorism. In this article, the term 'insurgency' is often used to describe their activities—again, due to the perceived political intentions of the actions.

22 Smith, Mike, *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria's Unholy War*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

23 Ibid.

of the then National Security Adviser retired General Andrew Azazi. But when the insurgency intensified, the strategy was modified. The involvement of other agencies, both in direct security operations and in public communications, was expanded. This was further widened when retired Colonel Sambo Dasuki became the National Security Adviser in 2012. ‘That was the time when we saw a lot of media effort and greater involvement of other agencies in the counter-terrorism work,’ observed a former Army public relations officer.²⁴ The busiest period was perhaps between 2013 and 2015 when the power of the Boko Haram insurgents was at its peak. The military was doing badly in the battlefield and was using a media campaign to cover it up, noted many journalists interviewed for this piece. Now it was the Defence Headquarters in Abuja—not the Army base in Maiduguri—that was in clear control of public communications, with Major General Chris Olukolade, the then Director of Defence Information, overseeing the production and distribution of most of the media content.

Another feature of the communications strategy at that time was the establishment of the Forum of Spokespersons of Security and Response Agencies (FOSSRA), which includes representatives of the military, paramilitary, intelligence, and response agencies. The 17-member forum was made up of spokespersons from the Nigerian Defence Headquarters, the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air Force, the Nigerian Navy, the Office of the National Security Adviser, the National Intelligence Agency, the Department of State Services, and the Nigeria Police Force, as well as officers from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, the Nigeria Customs Service, the Nigeria Immigration Service, the Nigerian Prisons Service, the National Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Fire Service, and the Federal Road Safety Commission.²⁵ A public relations specialist, Yushua Shuaib, engaged by the Office of the National Security Adviser, was the media consultant to the forum.²⁶ Their open function focused mainly on public relations work. They ran their own website and held monthly meetings in Abuja during which they would often give journalists an update on the campaigns against the Boko Haram insurgency.²⁷ It was an important component of the overall strategic communications setting. But it didn’t last long.

When President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office after defeating President Jonathan in the 2015 general elections, he appointed a new National Security Adviser, retired Major General Babagana Monguno, and new Defence, Army, Navy, and Air Force Chiefs. With these changes there also came a shift in media strategy. FOSSRA still exists but has lesser

24 Interview with the researcher in Abuja in July 2017.

25 Shuaib, Yushau, *Boko Haram Media War: An Encounter with the Spymaster*, (Abuja: Image Merchants Promotions, 2017), p. 275.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

involvement in public communications work. Shuaib, the media consultant, resigned a few months after former National Security Adviser Sambo Dasuki, the person who hired him, was arrested and taken to court on corruption charges—which he denies.²⁸ The media visibility of the Defence Headquarters was significantly curtailed. And the Army regained its leading role in handling public communications. The other security services continue to play different roles in the overall communications strategy, though not as much as they were doing previously. However, being conventional security institutions operating under formal government structures, they all publicly maintain their conventional relationship with one another, and with the media.

Boko Haram's case is radically different. First, the group is a secretive extremist Islamic sect whose ideology was originally rooted in Salafism,²⁹ from which it has since deviated. Even before its members went underground in 2009, many of their activities were shrouded in mystery. The name 'Boko Haram' itself—meaning 'Western education is sinful'—is not the group's real name. The jihadists actually detest it. They want to be called *Jama'atu Ablus Sunna lid Da'awatu wal-Jihad* (approximately 'Movement for the Propagation and Enthronement of Righteous Deeds') or *al-Wilaayat al-Islamiyyah Gharb Afriqiyah* (the Islamic State's West African Province)—their new name after pledging allegiance to the so-called Islamic State group in 2015. Founded by Muhammad Yusuf in Nigeria's northeast in 2002,³⁰ Boko Haram was originally a peaceful movement. But its liaisons with politicians and clashes with security forces turned it into Nigeria's most violent terror group.³¹ The July 2009 uprising, in which more than 800 people (mostly its members) were killed, was one of the most radicalising events for the group.³² It was after that violence that its members went underground. They resurfaced a year later with Shekau as their new leader. He spearheads their deadly campaigns—which include bombing schools, churches, mosques, and markets, and kidnapping for ransom and for sexual enslavement.³³ They also engage in bank robberies, cattle rustling, and raiding towns and villages in Nigeria and in neighbouring Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.³⁴

28 The former National Security Adviser was arrested and later taken to court in December 2015 in connection with alleged arms procurement fraud (see BBC, 'Nigeria's Sambo Dasuki charged over \$68m fraud', 14 December 2015: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/amp/world-africa-35093785> (accessed 14 December 2015)). PR consultant Shuaib resigned few months later (see Shuaib, *Boko Haram Media War*, p. 275).

29 Meijer, Roel (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

30 Smith, *Boko Haram*.

31 Amnesty International, 'Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter and Kill': Boko Haram's Reign of Terror in North-east Nigeria', (London: Amnesty International, 2015), AFR44/1360/2015, pp. 1–98.

32 Smith, *Boko Haram*.

33 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

34 Ibid.

Although it was their abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in Borno State in April 2014 that gave them global notoriety, Boko Haram militants have committed far worse atrocities, such as beheadings and mass executions.³⁵ They seized swathes of territory in north-eastern Nigeria where they declared their caliphate. At one time (between mid-2014 and early 2015), they were controlling a territory the size of Belgium, upon which they imposed their own version of Islamic law, beheading suspected spies and stoning to death those they convicted of adultery.³⁶ The 2015 report of the Global Terrorism Index describes Boko Haram as the world's deadliest terror group.³⁷

It took a reorganisation of the Nigerian Armed Forces and coordinated responses from the neighbouring armies to dislodge the jihadists from much of the captured territory. The formation of the multinational force, called the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), made up of troops from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin did help in strengthening the regional response; but it was not until the Nigerian military had put its house in order that the jihadists were contained. Boko Haram has since split into two—one faction led by Shekau and the other by Abu Musab Yusuf al-Barnawi,³⁸ son of its founder Muhammad Yusuf. But even with this split, both camps have been carrying out suicide bombings, raiding villages, kidnapping vulnerable people, and inflicting losses on the Army. The overall impact of the eight-year insurgency has not been fully assessed (as the crisis is still going on and some areas are still inaccessible to researchers), but an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 lives are reported to have been lost and about three million people displaced. In Nigeria's northeast alone, the economic impact amounts to \$9 billion, and, as of September 2017, some 10.7 million people require humanitarian assistance, according to a United Nations briefing.³⁹ Researchers have identified various reasons for the emergence of Boko Haram, among which are poor governance, Nigeria's endemic corruption, youth unemployment, chronic poverty, incompetent security agencies, the rise of jihadi ideology in response to the West's war on terror, British colonial legacy, and a lack of adequate education.⁴⁰

35 Amnesty International, 'Our Job is to Shoot, Slaughter and Kill'.

36 Ibid.

37 Institute for Economics and Peace, 'Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and Understanding the Impact of Terrorism', November 2015/IEP Report 36: <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf> (accessed 12 January 2016).

38 The real leader of al-Barnawi's faction is believed to be Muhammad Nur, the alleged mastermind of the 2011 UN Building bombing in Abuja. He, like Shekau, was once a deputy to al-Barnawi's father.

39 United Nations, 'Security Council Briefing on the Situation in the Lake Chad Basin, Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman', 13 September 2017: <http://www.un.org/undpa/en/speeches-statements/13092017/lake-chad-basin> (accessed 12 October 2017).

40 See UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*, (New York: UNDP, 2017); Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'; Smith, *Boko Haram*; and Herskovits, Jean, 'The Real Tragedy in Nigeria's Violence', *Foreign Policy*, 3 August 2009: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/08/03/the_real_tragedy_in_nigerias_violence (accessed 5 August 2009).

As members of a terror group, Boko Haram jihadists derive their power through the use of brutal force; but they also rely on the media to spread their ideology, extend their brutality, intimidate their enemies, and recruit new adherents.⁴¹ Their use of media began long before the commencement of their insurgency. Earlier, when they were still operating as a peaceful movement, Boko Haram leaders had established a 'Public Awareness Department', which was mainly responsible for the production and distribution of their propaganda materials, liaising with the media, and recruiting members. It was run by the group's spokesman, known variously as Abul Qaqa or Abu Darda or Abu Zaid⁴²—all pseudonyms used by the group to hide their identity as they tend to be exposed to higher risks. Unlike the bureaucratic setting of the Nigerian Army's communications team (which is often based on impersonal governmental formality), in the Boko Haram structure a spokesman is usually a senior member of the group's *Shura* (Supreme Council) and a close associate of its leader.⁴³ This is a key feature of the organisation that ensures the centrality of media in the jihadists' overall strategy.

An Obsession with Information Control

Despite the sharp contrast in the structures of their communications teams, however, the Nigerian Army and Boko Haram share a common obsession with information control. They have demonstrated this in multiple ways, with Boko Haram showing greater ingenuity. Even when they were operating openly as a peaceful Islamic youth movement, the Boko Haram leaders had evidently maintained strict control of the information they were releasing to the public. They were not attracting the attention of the news media in their early days because they were just one of several religious movements mushrooming in different parts of the country. And even when they were producing and selling recorded cassettes of the fiery sermons and speeches of their founder and of his deputies, Shekau and Nur,⁴⁴ not much media attention was given to them because in northern Nigeria it was not unusual for religious groups to be critical of government. Their inflammatory sermons were, of course, attracting security scrutiny, but the news media showed no interest in the group. It was only when the group members began to clash with security agents that such interest developed. And they too made concerted efforts to cultivate relationships with journalists. This, though, did not stop them from killing and intimidating journalists and attacking media organisations that published

41 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

42 Idris, Hamza, 'Boko Haram Spox Abul Qaqa Captured', *Daily Trust*, 2 February 2012: http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=153791:boko-haram-spox-abul-qaqa-captured&catid=2:lead-stories&Itemid=8 (accessed 2 February 2012).

43 Ibid.

44 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

reports they dislike⁴⁵—further evidence of their obsession with information control. The stronger they grew, the more they exerted their control on information flow. This was clearly demonstrated when they established their caliphate in 2014. According to many journalists who covered the region, the militants maintained a near-absolute control of information flow during their reign in the seized territory. The little that the outside world heard about the happenings there came from the fragmented accounts of those lucky enough to escape from the territory—and the narratives of the Boko Haram themselves. The group maintained an effective news blackout there throughout their reign. Journalists had no access to the caliphate. Safety concerns and logistics were, understandably, significant factors, but the primary reason was the insurgents' mistrust of people who do not belong to their group. When they decided what they wanted the outside world to know about the caliphate, they would produce video and audio recordings and hand them over to journalists and media outlets through emissaries, or upload them directly to the internet.⁴⁶

The Army's fixation with information control is also unhidden. Over-centralisation of authority and deliberate denial of information are among the techniques they use to ensure control. In the first three years of its confrontation with Boko Haram (July 2009 to June 2012), the Army had allowed its unit in Maiduguri, which was mostly directly involved in the fight, to communicate directly with the media. The officers there would inform the public of the situation on the ground, speak to journalists, issue press releases, and offer guided tours of the areas affected by the conflict. But this approach was abandoned in favour of an over-centralised system, under which virtually only the Defence Headquarters or the Army Headquarters in Abuja would make comments on events happening in remote areas of the northeast. Local commanders and local army public relations officers, who were fully aware of what was happening in their areas, would decline to share such information with local journalists. They would instead refer them to the Defence Headquarters. Journalists in the northeast would get a hint of an incident happening within their locality and seek confirmation from the local commander or the unit's public relations officer, only to be referred on to the Defence Headquarters in Abuja as the sole source of such information. Military officials at the Defence Headquarters usually would not respond to such queries; they would just disseminate information when they saw fit. The Nigerian Army claims that its information dissemination system is decentralised because it has public relations officers at several different levels, but in reality these officers, and even the brigade commanders, are not always given the authority to release useful information to the public.

45 Smith, *Boko Haram*.

46 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

Deliberate denial of access to military-controlled areas and intimidation of journalists who dare to go there are two other methods the military employs for information control. The Army's detention of *Al-Jazeera* journalists, who went to Maiduguri in March 2015 to report on the insurgency ahead of the 2015 general elections, illustrates this.⁴⁷ Common excuses given by the military when preventing access to certain areas include security concerns and fear for the safety of the journalists. But many journalists who have covered the crisis believe that the Army simply didn't want them to report what was happening there. Since the beginning of the insurgency, there have always been areas that journalists could not access because they were under the control of Boko Haram or the Army, and guided tours of the Army-controlled areas wouldn't always give journalists the information they were looking for. *Agence France-Presse* (AFP) correspondent Mike Smith, who participated in one such tour organised by the Army along with other journalists, expressed disappointment with the quality of the information he received.⁴⁸ There were improvements, though, especially after the military had regained control of most of the area; many journalists who were taken on the later tours came back with useful footage and detailed information.

This, however, does not compensate for the more serious cases of the Army's intolerance of media coverage of the insurgency. One such case was the decision made in 2014 to confiscate and destroy copies of several editions of newspapers across the country—another testimony to the Army's obsession with information control. For many days in June of that year, soldiers seized and destroyed bundles of newspapers from at least ten media houses for 'security' reasons, but many regarded this action as a reprisal for the newspapers' coverage of their poor performance in the fight against Boko Haram.⁴⁹ Civil society organisations and advocacy groups expressed dismay over the action.⁵⁰ The Army's claims of receiving intelligence reports indicating movements of dangerous materials via newspaper distribution vehicles were never substantiated, and the anger of the newspapers' proprietors was never in doubt—the impulse to suppress criticism was unhelpful to the military's strategic communications efforts.

47 *The Guardian*, 'Al-Jazeera Calls for Release of Two Journalists Held in Nigeria', 31 March 2015: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/mar/31/al-jazeera-calls-for-release-of-two-journalists-held-in-nigeria> (accessed 4 April 2015). *Al-Jazeera*, 'Nigeria Releases Detained Al-Jazeera Journalists', 5 April 2015: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/nigeria-releases-detained-al-jazeera-journalists-150405161952385.html> (accessed 11 May 2015).

48 Smith, *Boko Haram*.

49 Freedom House, 'Freedom of the Press 2015 – Nigeria', 28 April 2015: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/nigeria> (accessed 28 April 2015).

50 *Reporters Sans Frontières* (Reporters Without Border), 11 June 2014: <https://rsf.org/en/news/army-seizes-newspaper-issues-day-after-day-security-grounds> (accessed 12 June 2014). Committee to Protect Journalists, 4 June 2014: <https://cpj.org/2014/06/nigerian-military-seizes-leading-newspapers.php> (accessed 7 June 2014).

Direct Engagement with the Mainstream Media

The aversion of both Boko Haram and the Army to media scrutiny does not deter either from seeking media support. The jihadists in particular rely on media to do much of their work. After all, they put it at the centre of their overall strategy from the outset. Whether it be small-scale media (audio cassettes and leaflets), legacy media, or social media, Boko Haram militants never ignore the opportunities the media provide—however, their key target has always been the mainstream media. As stated earlier, before turning to violence, the insurgents were not getting the attention of the mainstream news media. But they did have a taste of the prestige it could confer when local broadcast stations aired some speeches given by their group's founder. As a young preacher, Yusuf's sermons propelled him into the public arena; some of the speeches he had made at Muslim youth conferences were aired by local broadcast stations in Borno State. When he became too critical of the government, the stations shunned him.⁵¹ This apparently taught him and his followers a lesson about relating to the mainstream media. When their radicalism brought them into open confrontations with the authorities, they actively cultivated relationships with independent journalists to have them reflect Boko Haram's side of the story. The confrontations naturally drew media attention, and because the insurgents were willing and eager to talk, their stories were reaching wider audiences. They maintained contact with journalists and often held news briefings at their headquarters in Maiduguri. Journalists who attended those briefings said the group's founder would first complain about alleged harassment of his followers by security operatives and then denounce Western culture and express his desire to turn Nigeria into a Salafist state.⁵² The peak period of Boko Haram's open engagement with the mainstream media was from the middle of June 2009 to the end of July 2009, when its members were regularly clashing with the police. In those weeks Yusuf spoke frequently with journalists, threatening retaliations for the killings of his followers.⁵³ But the intensity of the July 2009 uprising and its brutal suppression ended Boko Haram's open media relations approach. The insurgents had to devise new ways of engaging with the media.

The power of the media to define issues in the public mind provides sufficient motivation for Boko Haram to endeavour to sustain the engagement. Apart from

51 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

52 Ibid., p. 204.

53 Smith, *Boko Haram*.

its status-conferring role,⁵⁴ which the group's leaders must have noticed in their early encounters, the media does equally have an agenda-setting function—a key factor of its attraction to jihadists.⁵⁵ From the days of Walter Lippmann's identification of the media's central role in shaping public opinion⁵⁶ to the current era of sophisticated branding and strategic communications, agenda-setting theory—the transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda⁵⁷—has always been a guiding principle of those who seek to use (or manipulate) the media to attain their goals. Although numerous audience studies have highlighted the limits of media 'effects' on its audiences,⁵⁸ state and non-state actors will always want to leverage whatever level of influence the media can wield. Theorists of journalism have argued that the media's ability to place issues on the public agenda is a significant factor in shaping people's minds. 'The media not only can be successful in telling us *what to think about*, they also can be successful in telling us *how to think about it*.'⁵⁹ The spread of this perspective explains the centrality of media in the battle for hearts and minds. And that was perhaps why the Boko Haram insurgents were keen to maintain their contacts with the mainstream media, even after being pushed underground, as will be seen later.

The Army's direct relationship with the mainstream media was more straightforward. Being a well-established institution that had formal contacts with the media industry long before its encounter with the insurgency, the Army reinvigorated its communications structure and utilised the services of legacy media in its counter-insurgency campaigns. As stated earlier, the Defence Headquarters' information department, FOSSRA, the Army's public relations units, and so on are all involved. They regularly issue press releases, hold news conferences, visit media houses, and organise (in the case of FOSSRA) monthly interactive sessions with journalists. They also employ the services

54 Lazarsfeld, Paul and Robert Merton, 'Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action' in L. Bryson, ed., *The Communication of Ideas*, (New York: Harper Row, 1948), pp. 88–107. See also Wright, Charles, 'Functional Analysis and Mass Communication', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 24(4), (1960), 605–620.

55 See Weimann, 'The Theater of Terror'.

56 Lippmann, Walter, *Public Opinion*, (New York: Macmillan, 1922).

57 McCombs, Maxwell, 'A Look at Agenda-setting Past, Present and Future', *Journalism Studies*, 6(4), (2005), p. 543.

58 Decades of audience studies point to the limits of media influence. The literature on this is vast, but the following works provide a range of examples: Klapper, Joseph, *The Effects of Mass Communication*, (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960); Morley, David, *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, (London: British Film Institute, 1980); Ang, Ien, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*, (London: Routledge, 1996); Abubakar, Abdullahi Tasiu, 'Selective Believability: A Perspective on Africans' Interactions with Global Media', *Journal of African Media Studies*, 5(2), (2013), 219–236; and Abubakar, Abdullahi Tasiu, 'Audience Participation and BBC's Digital Quest in Nigeria' in *Everyday Media Culture in Africa: Audiences and Users*, eds. W. Willems and W. Mano, (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), pp. 140–160.

59 McCombs, 'A Look at Agenda-setting Past, Present and Future', p. 546 (*italics original*).

of public relations consultants.⁶⁰ So, in terms of maintaining a direct relationship with the media regarding its counter-insurgency work, the public relations machine of the armed forces has been quite active. For instance, in two years alone (from mid-2013 to mid-2015) the army ‘issued over 3000 media contents including newsworthy items and publications’.⁶¹ This emboldened the then National Security Adviser to claim that the military had used its cordial relationship with the media to effectively counter Boko Haram’s propaganda.⁶²

The military’s trust in the power of the legacy media could also be seen in their decision to set up their own radio station in Abuja in 2015 to promote ‘counter-terrorism operations’.⁶³ And they have been expanding both its services and its reach. The main snag, though, is that a single false statement from the military authorities (as noted in the opening part of this piece) is capable of undoing months of hard work. And their inability to always match words with actions is an equally major drawback. This was evident when the Army was losing territory to Boko Haram in 2014–2015. The image of cowardly soldiers running away from marauding jihadi fighters and abandoning their positions and weapons could not be repaired by propaganda alone. The Army had to retake most of the seized territory and demonstrate that they were gaining control before they began to erase that image of cowardice—and get it reflected in the media. As public diplomacy scholar Nicholas Cull argues, the most effective voice of an actor is ‘not what it says but what it does’.⁶⁴

Psychological Operations and Guerrilla Tactics

Apart from employing traditional media relations methods, both the Army and Boko Haram have also used unconventional approaches in their engagement with the media. The techniques they deploy are mostly reactive (though some are proactive) and necessitated by the situations in which they find themselves. When Boko Haram went underground—making open contact with journalists dangerous and mostly impossible—they devised a guerrilla media strategy. ‘This consisted of using anonymous mobile phone lines to deliver messages to journalists, emailing materials to media houses using fake addresses, and organising teleconferences from secret locations.’⁶⁵ It worked particularly well from the middle of 2011 to the early part of 2012, when the militants

60 Shuaib, *Boko Haram Media War*.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Daily Trust*, ‘Armed Forces Launch Radio Station’, 24 May 2015: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/sunday/index.php/news/20798-armed-forces-launch-radio-station> (accessed 24 May 2015).

64 Cull, Nicholas, *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past* (CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy), (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2009), p. 27.

65 Abubakar, ‘Communicating Violence’, pp. 204–205.

were deeply involved in urban guerrilla warfare. But it was terminated after the Nigerian secret police tracked down the jihadists' two spokesmen, killed one, and arrested the other.⁶⁶

The group then came up with a new approach—a direct drop strategy. They would produce video and audio messages and leaflets and deliver them discreetly to journalists.⁶⁷ Because of their strong faith in propaganda, Boko Haram fighters often travel with their cameramen to record operations. Their leaders also record sermons and messages. Those they wanted to publicise during this period were usually delivered to journalists through emissaries, while leaflets were mostly dropped in places where journalists and the public would see them. It was through this approach that they staged their biggest publicity coup—when they handed over the video of the Chibok schoolgirls they abducted in 2014 to an AFP journalist.⁶⁸ Security agents eventually detected and disrupted this strategy too, but not before it had generated the global media attention the group craves.

The Army's unconventional approach to communicating with the mainstream media was anchored on the desire to manage the security challenges created by Boko Haram's violence. Military officials use their contacts with the media to persuade editors to suppress stories they deem inimical to national security. This approach does not involve using threat or intimidation, rather it relies on moral suasion and appealing to journalists' sense of patriotism to make them handle issues in a way that is helpful to the Army's counter-insurgency mission. Some of the journalists interviewed for this article admitted that they had, at one time or another, handled stories based on appeals from their editors or directly from the security agencies regarding security concerns caused by the Boko Haram crisis. The Army was more successful in using this approach when Boko Haram's use of violence was at its peak. There was a collective fear then, even among journalists and media establishments, some of whom were victims of Boko Haram's attacks. The support the security services received from the media might have come from the need to address this. There was confirmation that the security services did receive this support. 'We received massive and unprecedented support from the local and foreign media for the accomplishment of our nation in the war on terror.'⁶⁹

The other approach the Nigerian Army employed in countering the Boko Haram insurgency was psychological operations. Details for this are hard to decipher, but the Army's former media consultant admitted that it was part of their strategy.

66 Idris, 'Boko Haram Spox Abul Qaqa Captured'.

67 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

68 Ibid.

69 Former National Security Adviser Dasuki made this comment in the foreword he wrote in Shuaib's book, *Boko Haram Media War: An Encounter with the Spymaster*, p. 10.

We also deployed psychological operations (PSYOP) in conveying appropriate narratives through right communication channels in persuading and convincing target audiences on specific objectives. Though strategies under PSYOP are strictly confidential, including self-censorship, few editors are aware of some of the initiatives to counter wicked propaganda and tackle information that could rubbish the nation's integrity.⁷⁰

The extent to which the Army has engaged in PsyOps is difficult to know, and that is the nature of PsyOps. They have never publicly explained why they engaged in psychological operations—nor have they even admitted using them. There are debates over the inclusion of PsyOps in strategic communications. Security expert James Farwell argues that PsyOps aim at influencing and shaping audiences' behaviour—the key objectives of strategic communications.⁷¹ NATO endorses them.⁷² But defence officials at the Pentagon in America were so worried about the pejorative connotations of PsyOps they rebranded them Military Information Support Operations (MISO).⁷³ And Williams has argued that since psychological operations would involve the deliberate use of disinformation, employing them in strategic communications could be counterproductive.⁷⁴ The risk usually lies in the public uncovering the truth—which they sometimes do—and losing their trust. Being caught lying is costlier for the Nigerian Army than for Boko Haram because the public regard the group as an outcast and do not always expect honesty from its members. Ironically, as noted earlier, on many occasions Boko Haram gave more credible accounts of events than the Army did. And this has dented the Army's strategic communications campaigns. However, there is an area where they are making progress—digital engagement—though there, too, it was the jihadists who made the first move.

Digital Engagement

A strategy common to both the Army and Boko Haram was the use of digital technology and online media to advance their causes. Boko Haram has enjoyed a head start in this. From uploading their videos and audios on the internet to opening and operating social media accounts, the insurgents have demonstrated adequate technical skill to help transform them into 'digital terrorists'. Three factors account for this: Boko Haram's need to disseminate propaganda; the ease with which the new technology can be used; and assistance from international jihadists. When the Nigerian security forces blocked almost all of Boko Haram's chances to contact journalists and the mainstream media physically, the militants were compelled to devise new ways of reaching the

⁷⁰ Shuaib, *Boko Haram Media War*, p. 16.

⁷¹ Farwell, *Persuasion and Power*.

⁷² See NATO, 'NATO Strategic Communications Policy'.

⁷³ Farwell, *Persuasion and Power*.

⁷⁴ Williams, 'Weaponised Honesty'.

public. And they were probably surprised to find out how easy and how effective new technology could be in doing this. They first discovered YouTube and began to upload their messages directly onto the video-sharing site.⁷⁵ As soon as they uploaded their videos, they would usually alert journalists and direct them to links where the videos could be found. YouTube regularly removes these videos from its site,⁷⁶ but often not fast enough to prevent the newsworthy ones from making headlines in the mainstream media, which is the main objective of the jihadists.⁷⁷

Boko Haram's digital endeavours continued to develop. On 18 January 2015 they launched their first Twitter account, *@Alurwa_Alwuthqa*,⁷⁸ (Figure 1) where they uploaded a variety of propaganda messages, including videos of child soldiers. Jihadists from the so-called Islamic State group—to whom Boko Haram has pledged allegiance⁷⁹—were quick to promote the account.⁸⁰ There was also a rapid improvement in the production quality of their materials. Slick and well-produced videos featuring 'music, graphics and slow motion shots' replaced



Figure 1: Boko Haram's first Twitter account *@Alurwa_Alwuthqa*, which could be translated as 'The Indissoluble Link', was opened in January 2015. It was later shut down by Twitter. [Image accessed on 28 January 2015].

75 AFP, 'Boko Haram: Changing Media Strategy for a Wider Conflict?' *Daily Mail*, 20 February 2015: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-2961665/Boko-Haram-changing-media-strategy-wider-conflict.html> (accessed 21 February 2015).

76 Ibid.

77 Abubakar, 'Communicating Violence'.

78 BBC Monitoring, 'Is Islamic State Shaping Boko Haram Media?', 7 March 2015: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-31522469> (accessed 7 March 2015).

79 Callimachi, Rukmini, (2015) 'Boko Haram Generates Uncertainty with Pledge of Allegiance to Islamic State', *The New York Times*, 7 March 2015: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/world/africa/boko-haram-is-said-to-pledge-allegiance-to-islamic-state.html?smid=nytcore-iphone-share&smprod=nytcore-iphone&_r=0 (accessed 8 March 2015).

80 BBC Monitoring, 'Is Islamic State Shaping Boko Haram Media?'

their previous grainy ‘amateurish footage’.⁸¹ Once they discovered the effectiveness of social media, they worked on learning how to use it more effectively. Their Twitter account was frequently suspended,⁸² but usually long after the content had been picked up by the mainstream media and published or broadcast to a wider audience.

The Army’s digital strategy for counter-insurgency involves the deployment of new technology and the use of the internet and social media both to disrupt Boko Haram’s online activities and to counter their propaganda. The military and other security services had engaged in cyber activities, including running their own websites and carrying out official business online, well before the emergence of the Boko Haram crisis. As the crisis developed, they extended their remit to include the fight against the insurgency. In this, too, the Army is leading the campaign, followed by the Defence Headquarters. The Nigerian Air Force, the Nigeria Police Force, and related bodies also employ digital strategy.

The Army’s website (<http://www.army.mil.ng>) is dominated by reports of the military’s counter-insurgency efforts. A banner with pictures of ‘Boko Haram suspects wanted by the Nigerian Army’ is placed at the top of the homepage, on the right-hand side (Figure 2)⁸³—clicking on it expands the banner to a full page.

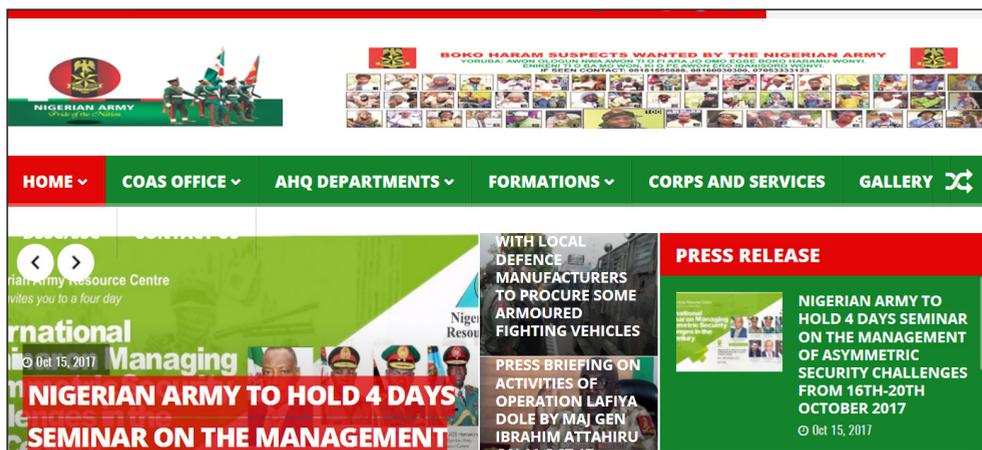


Figure 2. The homepage of the Nigerian Army website. At the top, on the right-hand side is the poster of ‘BOKO HARAM SUSPECTS WANTED BY THE NIGERIAN ARMY’. [Screenshot taken 19 October 2017].

81 AFP, ‘Boko Haram’

82 BBC Monitoring, ‘Is Islamic State Shaping Boko Haram Media?’

83 The banner, which shows a big picture of Boko Haram leader Shekau at the centre surrounded by pictures of other commanders, has been widely circulated and posted in many public places including airports across Nigeria.

Stories of the Army's various operations—troops intercepting suicide bombers, Boko Haram commanders surrendering, gallant officers receiving promotions, and Boko Haram terrorists being arrested—are the main contents of the site (see Figures 3, 4, 5, and 6). The websites of the Defence Headquarters (<http://defencehq.mil.ng>), the Nigerian Air Force (<http://www.airforce.mil.ng>), and the Nigeria Police Force (<http://npf.gov.ng>) also regularly feature related stories, though not at the same scale as the Army's. The Air Force sometimes posts videos of successful bombardments of Boko Haram targets on its website.⁸⁴ Such videos are often shared by other security services and usually uploaded on YouTube for wider circulation (see Figures 7, 8, and 9).



Figure 3. Nigerian Army website.
[Screenshot taken 20 September 2017].

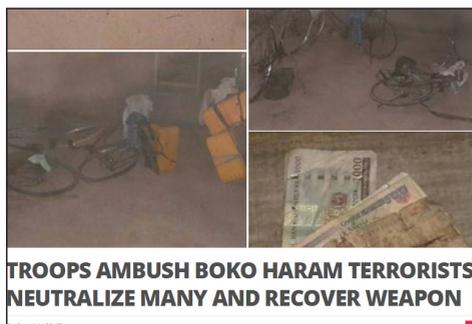


Figure 4. Nigerian Army website.
[Screenshot taken 19 October 2017].

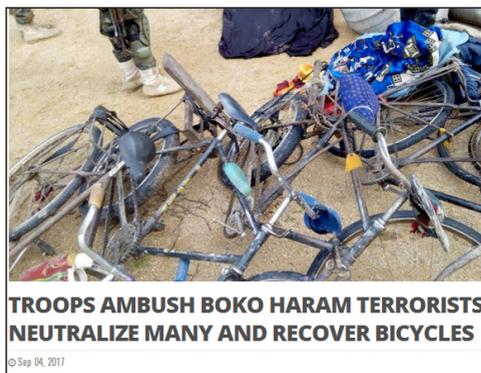


Figure 5. Nigerian Army website.
[Screenshot taken 20 September 2017].

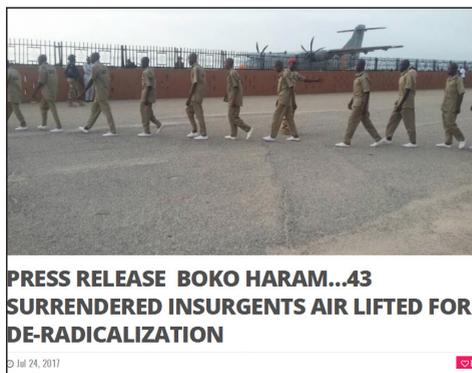


Figure 6. Nigerian Army website.
[Screenshot taken 20 October 2017].

⁸⁴ One of them was its attack on the militants in Sambisa Forest on 8 August 2017. See Nigerian Air Force, 'Nigerian Air Force Destroys Boko Haram Hideout', 10 August 2017: http://www.airforce.mil.ng/post/nigerian_air_force_destroys_boko_haram_hideout (accessed 20 August 2017).



Figure 7. Nigerian Air Force video showing their strike on Boko Haram target in Sambisa.



Figure 8. Nigerian Air Force video showing their strike on Boko Haram target. [Posted on YouTube by the Nigerian Air Force 7 March 2017].



Figure 9. One of the videos of the Nigerian Air Force's attack on Boko Haram in Parisu, Borno State. [Posted on YouTube 30 May 2017].

The armed forces also actively use social media in their counter-insurgency strategy, with the Army and Defence Headquarters taking the lead here, too. The most popular platforms they use are Twitter and Facebook, though the Defence Headquarters' Facebook account did not seem to be active as of 20 October 2017 (Figure 10). Their official Twitter account, @DefenceInfoNG, has been very active (Figure 11). It has been so effective that it became a target for cyber criminals who created a fake Twitter account using the same logo. In August 2017 the Defence Headquarters had to alert the public about this, vowing to track down 'the perpetrator of this heinous act'.⁸⁵ The Army's Twitter account, @HQNigerianArmy, is even more popular (Figure 12). On 20 October 2017 it showed 245,615 followers and 2,668 tweets, compared to Defence Headquarters' 194,092 followers and 1,770 tweets. The Nigerian Army's Facebook page—<https://www.facebook.com/NigerianArmy/> (Figure 13)—has an even wider reach in Nigeria; this is where they embed pictures and videos promoting their counter-terror activities. The security forces interact and promote one another's activities extensively. News outlets keenly monitor these accounts as they are a significant source of counter-insurgency-related stories.

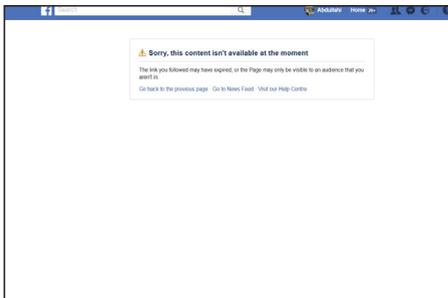


Figure 10. Inactive Facebook account of the Defence Headquarters [Screenshot taken 20 October 2017].



Figure 11. Defence Headquarters active Twitter account [Screenshot taken 20 October 2017].



Figure 12. Twitter account of the Nigerian Army [Screenshot taken 20 October 2017].



Figure 13. Nigerian Army's Facebook account page [Screenshot taken 20 October 2017].

⁸⁵ *The Nation*, 'Beware of fake twitter handle, DHQ warns', 24 August 2017: <http://thenationonline.net/beware-of-fake-twitter-handle-dhq-warns/> (accessed 24 August 2017).

The open engagement of the security forces with the digital media is wide-ranging and generally robust, but they also use technology in their covert operations to counter the jihadists. What they do exactly is unclear, but officials indicate that they are secretly using technological expertise to dislodge Boko Haram from cyberspace. Director of Defence Information Major General John Enenche has made comments to this effect. ‘We have our strategic media centres that monitor the social media to be able to sieve out and react to all the ones that will be anti-government, be anti-military, (and) be anti-security,’ he said. ‘We have measures in place, scientific measures to be able to sieve this information and also to get the public and let them know that some of this information they are getting is not genuine.’⁸⁶ There are numerous anti-Boko Haram videos online—some of them purporting to come directly from the group or showing the capture and killing of its leader (Figure 14)—which many believe were uploaded to the internet by the security services. Apart from helping to get Boko Haram videos removed from YouTube, and their social media accounts suspended (Boko Haram has no active social media account as of 20 October 2017), the Army frequently disrupts the online activities of the jihadists, distorts their messages, and sometimes blocks access to the content of their accounts. They have largely managed to contain the militants on this front.

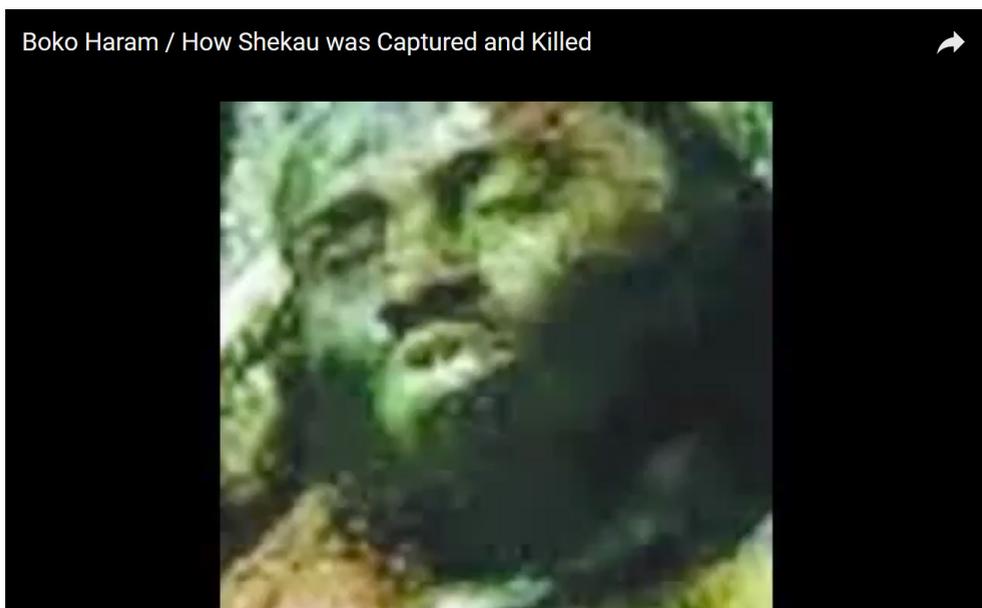


Figure 14. A video claiming that Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau was captured and killed. But Shekau has repeatedly released a counter video denying that he was killed [Screenshot taken 20 September 2017].

⁸⁶ *Daily Trust*, ‘Nigerian Army Now Monitors What You Post on Social Media,’ 23 August 2017: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/online-special/nigerian-army-now-monitors-what-you-post-on-social-media/211303.html> (accessed 23 August 2017).

The Media, Newsworthiness, Insurgency, and Counter-Insurgency

This containment, however, is not enough to eliminate the ability of Boko Haram jihadists to manipulate the media and advance their cause. Some factors are simply beyond the control of the Nigerian security forces—the ideological orientations of various media outlets and the expectations of their audiences. Media practitioners and their audiences are orientated in such a way that certain activities of Boko Haram attract their attention more than others. And this has theoretical foundations. In their seminal work *The Structure of Foreign News*,⁸⁷ Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge argue that journalists have a set of criteria—news values—which they use to determine the newsworthiness of events. They identify twelve such criteria—such as frequency; threshold; relevance; unexpectedness; unpredictability; and negativity—and conclude that the more an event meets these criteria, the higher the possibility of its being reported by media and regarded by audiences as news.⁸⁸ Although further studies have since added other factors and modified some of Galtung and Ruge’s original criteria,⁸⁹ Boko Haram activities fit well into many of them. ‘The more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item.’⁹⁰ Whether it was the kidnapping of schoolgirls, the bombing of markets, or the beheading of innocent civilians, each major action carried out by Boko Haram militants has intense negative consequences and is therefore deemed newsworthy. ‘Events have to be unexpected or rare, or preferably both, to become good news.’⁹¹ Many of the actions taken by Boko Haram jihadists were unexpected. And even the expected actions often meet the newsworthiness criteria of negativity and continuity. For, as Galtung and Ruge note, ‘once something has hit the headlines and been defined as “news”, then it will continue to be defined as news for some time even if the amplitude is drastically reduced’.⁹²

The concepts of news values and agenda setting (discussed earlier) are the engines that empower Boko Haram and other insurgents and terror groups to manipulate the media. The increasing competition for audience shares or expansion of readership, the incessant pursuit of drama and controversy, and the intense pressure arising from 24/7 news coverage have unwittingly made media more vulnerable to terrorists and insurgents.

87 Galtung, Johan and Ruge, Mari Holmboe, ‘The Structure of Foreign News: The Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers’, *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), (1965), 64–91.

88 Ibid.

89 Harcup, Tony and O’Neill, Deirdre, ‘What Is News? News Values Revisited (Again)’, *Journalism Studies*, (2016), DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193.

90 Galtung and Ruge, ‘The Structure of Foreign News’, p. 68.

91 Ibid., p. 67.

92 Ibid.

As long as terrorists offer visuals and sound bites, drama, threats, and human interest tales, the news media will report—and actually over-report—on their actions and causes at the expense of other and more important news. Terrorism fits into the infotainment mold that the news media increasingly prefers and offers villains and heroes the promise to attract new audiences and keep existing ones.⁹³

Scholars of terrorism and counter-insurgency experts have argued that publicity is the ‘oxygen or lifeblood’⁹⁴ of terrorists and that the frenzied media coverage of their activities is empowering them. Professor of Communication Gabriel Weimann puts it succinctly: ‘More than anything else, publicity is the lifeblood of terrorism and the media, therefore, are playing a central role in the calculus of terrorism and through their choices can serve to minimize or magnify terrorist violence’.⁹⁵ There are others who argue that the media’s motive in playing up terrorists’ stories is to impel the authorities to take tough actions against them.⁹⁶ Whatever the motives, insurgents relish the media attention they are receiving. It is not that journalists cover insurgencies or terrorism with the deliberate intent of promoting such activities; it is just that insurgents and terrorists are willing to do anything to attain their goals. Unless there is a radical reorientation of the concept of news and of the nature of media coverage, opportunistic insurgents will continue to reap benefits from the questionable premises of the news media’s orientation.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Armed Forces and Boko Haram insurgents have engaged actively in strategic communications campaigns in pursuit of their goals. The jihadists have succeeded in attracting global media attention, mainly by the sheer scale of their violence and their infamies, but also by the effective use of their communications strategies. The Army is at the forefront of Nigeria’s effort to counter these strategies. It uses its formal communications structure and other methods to challenge their narratives and disrupt their media strategies. The military has recorded some successes in containing the insurgents, largely because of the upper hand it has gained on the physical battlefield, but also because of waning media interest in the militants due to their diminishing capacity to stage headline-grabbing attacks.

The Army’s narrow conception of strategic communications—often limiting it to public relations work and spin—has sometimes had costly consequences, harming

⁹³ Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, pg. x.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 30.

⁹⁵ Weimann, ‘The Role of the Media in Propagating Terrorism’, p. 197.

⁹⁶ See, for example, Spencer, Alexander, ‘The social construction of terrorism: media, metaphors and policy implications’, *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 15(3), (2012), 393–419.

its credibility and empowering the insurgents. Yet, the main factor enhancing Boko Haram's communications efforts seems to be the media's fixation on jihadi stories. The militants do demonstrate remarkable media skills and fully utilise the opportunities offered by the online and social media, but the biggest boost to their publicity has been the mainstream media's preoccupation with their stories. As media scholar Brigitte Nacos asserts, 'the mainstream news media remain indispensable for terrorist propaganda because conventional news outlets tend to alert the general public to the most sensational features and developments in terrorists' mass self-communication via internet sites and social media networking'.⁹⁷

However, as pointed out earlier, the media do not cover insurgency or terrorism with the intent of enhancing them. They cover them as part of their basic function to inform the public, based on the guiding principles of their profession. There are, no doubt, excesses that need to be addressed, but downplaying the risks of terrorist attacks wouldn't necessarily be part of the solution. Doing so would carry the inherent danger of undermining public safety. Both the insurgent groups and those responsible for counter-insurgency work are aware of this dilemma—and it is the insurgents who benefit from it. There is a strong need to review the concept of news and how it is covered. Counter-insurgency strategists also ought to devise ways of minimising insurgents' ability to manipulate the media. The Nigerian Armed Forces have obviously made progress with their counter-insurgency campaigns. To be clear, their success has come more through the use of force (e.g. killing Boko Haram spokesmen and commanders, and retaking captured territory) than the use of soft power (effective strategic communications campaigns). To enhance their soft power, the Nigerian Armed Forces would have to expand their strategic communications remit by incorporating into them the services of rich Nigerian cultural institutions—such as the Nollywood and Kannywood film industries⁹⁸—and enlisting the support of respected religious bodies. Even more importantly, they should anchor their communications strategy on credible narratives. Credibility is the cornerstone of effective narratives, and honesty—or the perception of it—is a necessary condition for the long-term efficacy of strategic communications.

97 Nacos, *Mass-mediated Terrorism*, p. 36.

98 Nigeria has a booming film industry that has received international recognition and has made a significant impact on the country's cultural scene. Films could be good vehicles for conveying strategic messages. See McCain, Carmen, 'Video Exposé: Metafiction and Message in Nigerian Films', *Journal of African Cinemas*, 4(1), (2012), 25–57. One Kannywood producer, Zaharaddeen Sani, has produced a film with such intent, but it remains a private individual effort and its first screening was planned outside Nigeria (see *Premium Times* of 24 June 2017: <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/kannywood/234994-why-film-depicting-boko-haram-atrocities-wont-premiere-in-nigeria-producer.html> (accessed 30 June 2017)).

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FAKE NEWS, FAKE WARS, FAKE WORLDS

A review essay by Charles Kriel

Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy
Daniel Kreiss. Oxford University Press, 2016

HyperNormalisation
Documentary film by Adam Curtis. BBC, 2016

Emotions and Personality in Personalized Services: Models, Evaluation and Applications
Marko Tkalčić et al (eds). Springer, 2016

Computational Propaganda Worldwide, Working Paper No. 2017/11
Samuel C. Wooley and Phillip N. Howard. Oxford Internet Institute website, 2017

Keywords: *fake news, Cambridge Analytica, social media, electoral analysis, psychographic influence, Brexit, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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¹ Available at <http://CVE.Ci>.

Do influence campaigns based on data-driven psychological profiling work? Both Cambridge Analytica and a significant part of the campaign apparatus for the UK to leave the EU appeared to think so.

That is, until they didn't.

Leave.EU, 20 November 2015:

*Cambridge Analytica are world leaders in target voter messaging. They will be helping us map the British electorate and what they believe in, enabling us to better engage with voters.*²

Alexander Nix, Cambridge Analytica CEO, Campaign, 10 February 2016:

*Recently, Cambridge Analytica has teamed up with Leave.EU ... to help them better understand and communicate with UK voters. We have already helped supercharge Leave.EU's social media campaign.*³

Alexander Nix, Bloomberg Businessweek, 8 February 2017:

*We did undertake some work with Leave.eu, but it's been significantly overreported.*⁴

The Guardian, 25 February 2017:

*The communications director of Leave.eu, Andy Wigmore, told the Observer that [...] he introduced [Nigel] Farage and Leave.eu to Cambridge Analytica: 'They were happy to help. Because Nigel is a good friend of the Mercers.'*⁵

Bloomberg, 23 March 2017:

*A few days later, Cambridge issued a statement denying any involvement in the campaign. [Richard] Tice, [co-founder of Leave.EU] reached again by phone, stood by his statements that the firm worked for Leave.EU and said of Cambridge Analytica's denial: 'Just put it down to politics.'*⁶

2 Leave.eu, 'The Science Behind Our Strategy', 20 November 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170129224011/http://leave.eu/en/news/2015-11-20/the-science-behind-our-strategy> (accessed 13 October 2017).

3 Nix, A., 'How big data got the better of Donald Trump', *campaignlive.co.uk*, 10 February 2016, <http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/big-data-better-donald-trump/1383025> (accessed 13 October 2017).

4 Baker, S., Kocieniewski, D. & Smith, M., 'Trump Data Gurus Leave Long Trail of Subterfuge, Dubious Dealing', *Bloomberg*, 23 March 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-23/trump-data-gurus-leave-long-trail-of-subterfuge-dubious-dealing> (accessed 13 October 2017).

5 Cadwalladr, C., 'Revealed: how US billionaire helped to back Brexit', *Observer*, 26 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/26/us-billionaire-mercer-helped-back-brexit> (accessed 13 October 2017).

6 Baker, 'Trump Data Gurus'.

Three months later, on 27 June 2017, Nix told BBC Newsnight:
*We had absolutely no involvement in the Leave campaign. We did not do any paid or unpaid work for Brexit.*⁷

Can the combination of big data social media profiling, hyper-customised content, and Facebook ‘dark ad’ buys be used to sway opinion? Or are these claims little more than big-data mumbo jumbo, spun like some seductive web designed to draw in big political budgets and security services contracts?

This matters in strategic communications, as a caution, as well as an opportunity. Any significant claims to advances in the technology of propaganda potentially shift methodologies and efficacy on all sides. And as Paul Virilio would remind us, invent the technology and you invent the accident of that technology. Cambridge Analytica’s story bears this out; at this writing, they have now been compelled to submit a cache of documents to the US House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.⁸

New approaches to influence campaigning can cut both ways.

As shifting stories go, the claims and denials surrounding Cambridge Analytica’s involvement with Leave.EU operate at a Trumpian level.

The Nigel Farage-endorsed campaign for the UK to leave the European Union, Leave.EU, first launched in July 2015 and by November claimed Cambridge Analytica would help them both map British voters according to their beliefs, and drive voter engagement.

As detailed in BBC Newsnight’s episode *Did Cambridge Analytica play a role in the EU referendum?*, Cambridge Analytica is a once-obscure data analytics company whose Vice President,⁹ Stephen K. Bannon, went on to become White House Chief Strategist for Donald Trump. Largely owned by American right-wing activist billionaire Robert Mercer, Cambridge Analytica (CA) specialises in influence and election campaigns,

⁷ BBC News, ‘Did Cambridge Analytica play a role in the EU referendum?’, 27 June 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-40423629/did-cambridge-analytica-play-a-role-in-the-eu-referendum> (accessed 13 October 2017).

⁸ Woodruff, Betsy and Spencer Ackerman, ‘Russia Probe Now Investigating Cambridge Analytica, Trump’s “Psychographic” Data Gurus’, *Daily Beast*, 11 October 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/russia-probe-now-investigating-cambridge-analytica-trumps-psychographic-data-gurus> (accessed 13 October 2017).

⁹ Confessore, Nicholas and Danny Hakim, ‘Data Firm Says “Secret Sauce” Aided Trump; Many Scoff’, *New York Times*, 6 March 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/us/politics/cambridge-analytica.html> (accessed 13 October 2017).

profiling potential voters through social media, and analysing their personalities before sending them micro-targeted Facebook ads in order to nudge them either to turn out to vote—or often more crucially—to not.

This process starts with understanding the individual voter. In a keynote speech at the 2017 Online Marketing Rockstars conference, CEO Alexander Nix claimed that with ten Facebook Likes Cambridge Analytica can predict an individual's behaviour better than their work colleague might. They only need 70 to make behavioural predictions better than a friend; 150 to understand a voter better than a parent; and with 300 Likes, his organisation can predict a person's actions, thoughts, and feelings better than their spouse.¹⁰

Says Nix, 'We have four or five-thousand data points on every adult in the United States.' Or as his company puts it, the entire voting population. That is roughly 5,000 discrete pieces of information—anything from a Facebook Like / Love / Haha / Wow / Sad / Angry response to a post and its natural-language-analysed subject, through to publicly available demographic data—on 220,000,000 Americans.

Psychographics companies like Cambridge Analytica then use this data to steer voters to highly customised web pages to persuade their thinking, stir them to action, or stop them in their tracks, as was done in the Trump campaign. In several videos, from Nix's 2016 Concordia Summit presentation¹¹ through his 2017 Online Marketing Rockstars keynote Nix has been unambiguous in his claims that Cambridge Analytica played a significant role in the Trump presidential campaign, contributing to its success.

On their website, political pollster and Fox News commentator Frank Luntz says, 'There are no longer any experts except Cambridge Analytica.'¹² Sporting the 2016 logos of the Trump, Cruz, and Carson campaigns, as well as those of the John Bolton and Make America Number 1 (anti-Hillary) Political Action Committees, Cambridge Analytica touts their credentials in political campaigning across research, data integration, audience segmentation, targeted advertising, and evaluation.

They claim to have run a reputation management campaign for a candidate in Columbia, where nearly all politicians are viewed as corrupt. Discouraging their candidate from declaring innocence to the public, Cambridge Analytica instead engaged credible voices to deliver public testimonials over their client's integrity.¹³

10 Nix, Alexander, 'Keynote', Online Marketing Rockstars, 2017, *YouTube*, 10 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bG5ps5KdDo&t> (accessed 13 October 2017).

11 Nix, Alexander, 'The Power of Big Data and Psychographics', Concordia Summit, 2016, *YouTube*, 27 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8Dd5aVXLCc> (accessed 13 October 2017).

12 CA Political, Homepage, <https://ca-political.com/> (accessed 13 October 2017).

13 Ibid., 'Case Study Colombia', <https://ca-political.com/casestudies/casestudycolombia> (accessed 13 October 2017).

In India, Cambridge Analytica conducted in-depth electoral analysis, identifying key swing voters. Once complete, they created a communications hierarchy to increase supporter motivation, winning an impressive 90% of the election's targeted seats.¹⁴

In Indonesia, Cambridge Analytica's claim is even more astonishing. Following the 1999 restoration of democracy, the company assembled a full-scale general election campaign built to appeal to 200 million voters in 40 languages. The company makes no declarations to victory, but claims to have 'played an important role in managing the robust feelings present in the populace'.¹⁵

The claims go on and on—suppressing violence in South Africa's first post-Apartheid election; conducting the largest political research campaign in the history of East Africa for the 2013 Kenyan presidential campaign; helping maintain Denzil Douglas as the longest serving Prime Minister in St. Kitts and Nevis' history; and building the world's largest electoral campaign operations centre in Thailand. The claims are consistently positive, and emphasise Cambridge Analytica's decisive role.

The same is not true when it comes to Brexit.

The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine is an unforgiving documenter of the past, attempting to record *everything-that-ever-was-the-internet*. Politicians who on their websites hastily hagiographise their histories are often caught out by this keeper of the internet's memory. On 20 November 2015, as quoted by the Wayback Machine, Leave.EU's website said, 'Cambridge Analytica are world leaders in target voter messaging. They will be helping us map the British electorate and what they believe in, enabling us to better engage with voters. Most elections are fought using demographic and socio-economic data. Cambridge Analytica's psychographic methodology however is on another level of sophistication.'

The website no longer says anything close.

Writing the next year in *Campaign* magazine, Alexander Nix himself said, 'We have already helped supercharge Leave.EU's social media campaign by ensuring the right messages are getting to the right voters online, and the campaign's Facebook page is growing in support to the tune of about 3,000 people per day.' That was in October.

14 Ibid., 'Case Study India', <https://ca-political.com/casestudies/casestudyindia> (accessed 13 October 2017).

15 Ibid., 'Case Study Indonesia', <https://ca-political.com/casestudies/casestudyindonesia> (accessed 13 October 2017).

By November of the following year, his tone had begun to mellow, telling *Bloomberg Business Week*, ‘We did undertake some work with Leave.eu, but it’s been significantly overreported.’

By June 2017, Nix was in full denial, telling the BBC’s *Newsnight*, ‘We had absolutely no involvement in the Leave campaign. We did not do any paid or unpaid work for Brexit.’

What gives? Probably campaign finance law. In the same *Bloomberg* article, reporters Stephanie Baker, David Kocieniewski, and Michael Smith wrote, ‘[T]he story changed after the *Observer* reported on 26 February that Cambridge Analytica had provided free services to Leave.eu, and raised questions about whether the work was an in-kind donation that should have been reported. Under UK Electoral Commission rules, campaigners are required to report all donations over £7,500. The commission confirmed that Leave.eu didn’t report any donation from Cambridge Analytica.’

The debate over Cambridge Analytica’s involvement in the Leave.EU campaign is disjointed, if well-documented. More surprising is the debate around their impact on the Trump Campaign. Sue Halpern in the *New York Review of Books* writes that in the warm afterglow of Trump’s victory, Nix credited his firm with the win, while Brad Parscale, the campaign’s Digital Director, claimed it was he and Jared Kushner’s ‘overall digital strategy that took Trump over the top’.¹⁶

But all these claims, counter-claims, and denials obscure a deeper question at the heart of the matter: Does Cambridge Analytica’s methodology actually work?

Nix has supposedly said, ‘Persuading somebody to vote a certain way is really very similar to persuading 14- to 25-year-old boys in Indonesia to not join al-Qaeda.’¹⁷ But can psychometrics do even that one small but important thing—persuade a young man to not commit public suicide?

For an answer, it is worth looking not only at the specific reputation of Cambridge Analytica, but also the methodology of influence campaigning (aka computational propaganda), plus the sheer volume of global activity and its effectiveness in creating the desired outcomes of agencies, politicians, and governments around the world.

¹⁶ Halpern, S., ‘How He Used Facebook to Win’, *New York Review of Books*, 8 June 2017, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/06/08/how-trump-used-facebook-to-win/> (accessed 13 October 2017).

¹⁷ Mayer, J., ‘The Reclusive Hedge-Fund Tycoon Behind the Trump Presidency’, *New Yorker*, 27 March 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/03/27/the-reclusive-hedge-fund-tycoon-behind-the-trump-presidency> (accessed 13 October 2017).

On 19 June 2017, Robert Gorwa published a blog post announcing one of the most sweeping public studies of the use of social media for public opinion manipulation—*The Computational Propaganda Research Project* at the Oxford Internet Institute.¹⁸ Housed at Oxford University, it is a series of case studies analysing ‘qualitative, quantitative, and computational evidence collected between 2015 and 2017 from Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Poland, Taiwan, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States.’

Ukraine has become a kind of hot lab for social media manipulation, with both the West and Russia conducting Facebook and Twitter wars to influence the population. Far beyond the straightforward goal of electing ‘the most powerful man in the world’, these campaigns work to destabilise the other side’s societal narrative, with industrial scale operations operating out of Ukraine, and in nearby Poland. According to the Institute’s reports, in some places online public life is completely dominated by bots on social media.

Cambridge Analytica’s methodology employs the O.C.E.A.N. method of typology, a multi-tiered scale rating an individual’s personality based on five categories—Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. As documented in *Emotions and Personality in Personalized Services*,¹⁹ the system dates back decades, building on less complex typological systems, but Cambridge Analytica often appears in the public imagination as the original instigators of psychographics, mostly due to the company’s close ties to high-profile campaigns, and the controversy surrounding their efficacy or lack thereof.

The company’s tendrils run deep beneath the ground of the West’s political landscape. Founded in 2013 as parent company SCL Group’s American operation, by 2014 Cambridge Analytica was servicing 44 Congressional, Senate, and state-level American midterm political campaigns. Stephen K. Bannon, recent White House Chief Strategist and current Executive Chairman of *Breitbart News*, served as Vice President of Cambridge Analytica’s board right up until the beginning of his White House tenure.²⁰

But most significantly, Cambridge Analytica is 10%-owned by SCL Group and 90%-owned by Robert Mercer.²¹ According to the *Washington Post*, Mercer is one of the most influential

18 Woolley, Samuel C. & Philip N. Howard, *Computational Propaganda Worldwide: Executive Summary*, Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, Eds. Working Paper 2017/11. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda, <http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/89/2017/06/Comprop-Russia.pdf>

19 Tkalcíč, Marko, Berardina De Carolis, Marco de Gemmis, Ante Odić, and Andrej Košir, *Emotions and personality in personalized services: Models, Evaluation and Applications* (Human–Computer Interaction Series), (Switzerland: Springer, 2016).

20 Confessore, ‘Data Firm Says’.

21 Woodruff, ‘Russia Probe Now Investigating’.

billionaires in politics.²² Co-CEO of Renaissance Technologies, a hedge fund using artificial intelligence to manage at least \$65 billion in assets, Mercer also owns significant chunks of *Breitbart News*, SCL Group, the Government Accountability Institute, Reclaim New York, and Bannon's media production company, Glittering Steel LLC. Glittering Steel is famed for its anti-Clinton documentaries, 'Clinton Cash' being the most popular, receiving nearly 3.5 million views on YouTube,²³ and becoming the source of panel discussions on the political punditry circuit, from *ABC News This Week*²⁴ to *The O'Reilly Factor*.²⁵

In 2016, Renaissance Technologies contributed more than \$33 million to US federal political campaigns. In addition, Mercer and his wife personally donated more than \$25 million to conservative candidates in the same period, making them the United States' seventh largest individual political donors, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a non-partisan research charity who run Opensecrets.org.²⁶

Mercer made his billions through Renaissance Technologies, but his first career lies closer to the heart of Cambridge Analytica's work. From 1972 to 1993, Mercer worked at IBM's Thomas J. Watson Research Center writing code to help computers understand humans. His most famous project: IBM's natural language analysis engine, Watson.

Understanding humans is at the essence of Cambridge Analytica's work, as well as that of parent company SCL Group—both sharing many of their collective 200 employees.²⁷

But while Watson's reputation is well-established, questions have been raised over Cambridge Analytica's ability to deliver the goods, with many commentators and former clients calling 'snake oil' on their work, if not their methodology.

In a 6 March 2017 *New York Times* report, Nicholas Confessore and Danny Hakim write that 'a dozen Republican consultants and former Trump campaign aides, along

22 Phillips, A., 'The 10 most influential billionaires in politics', *The Washington Post*, 21 September 2015: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/09/21/the-10-most-influential-billionaires-in-politics/?utm_term=.ce5b547a981e (Accessed 13 October 2017).

23 *Clinton Cash Official Documentary Movie*, YouTube, 23 July 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LYRUOd_QoM&t (accessed 13 October 2017).

24 ABC News, 'Clinton Cash' Fallout', YouTube, 26 April 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-0mzeBgiMA> (accessed 13 October 2017).

25 Government Accountability Institute, 'Bill O'Reilly Discusses CLINTON CASH by Peter Schweizer', YouTube, 21 April 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0g5jBBdFAB0> (accessed 13 October 2017).

26 The Center for Responsive Politics, 'Top Individual Contributors: All Federal Contributions', *OpenSecrets.org*. Based on data released by the FEC on 05/16/17, <https://www.opensecrets.org/overview/topindivs.php> (accessed 11 October 2017).

27 Confessore, 'Data Firm Says'.

with current and former Cambridge employees, say the company's ability to exploit personality profiles...is exaggerated'.²⁸

'They've got a lot of really smart people, but it's not as easy as it looks to transition from being excellent at one thing and bringing it into politics', says Brent Seaborn, MD of a competing firm.²⁹

Rick Tyler, a former aide of Cambridge Analytica client Ted Cruz, said, 'When they were hired, from the outset it didn't strike me that they had a wide breadth of experience in the American political landscape.'³⁰ In one test identifying Oklahoma voters who preferred Cruz, more than half actually liked other candidates. Another consultant involved in the campaign says Mercer and Bannon used bullying tactics when the campaign disputed a \$2.5 million invoice. The pair claimed Cambridge Analytica was the only thing keeping Cruz's candidacy alive.

Several former Trump campaign aides say the company's data and models were less effective at getting voters to the polls than the existing Republican National Committee system, and after Nix's people placed a \$5 million Trump ad buy with many spots airing in Washington, DC, a reliably solid Democratic stronghold, their role in television scheduling was terminated.

Confessore and Hakim also point to a 2017 brochure mail-out to Cambridge Analytica clients touting their 'pivotal role' in electing Trump, calling it their biggest US political success, while simultaneously their Head of Product, Matt Oczkowski, told a conference, 'I don't want to break your heart; we actually didn't do any psychographics with the Trump campaign.'³¹

But these accusations are levelled mostly against Cambridge Analytica rather than their methodology. And whether the company was simply inexperienced with the American electorate or prone to gross exaggeration takes nothing away from the central question of the efficacy of their methods.

According to their own literature, and several of Nix's presentations, the Cambridge Analytica 'method' is based on three pillars: Behavioural Science, Data Analytics, and Addressable Ad Technology.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

Cambridge Analytica base their behavioural approaches on the O.C.E.A.N. trait-profiling system, where trait modelling is used to determine an individual's personality. Conceptually similar to the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, Cambridge Analytica's flavour of typological testing instead bases personality profiles on Facebook information, publicly-available demographic data, and responses to online Facebook questionnaires like those published through the MyPersonality Facebook app.³²

This form of data analytics—Demographics + Psychographics + Personality Data—relies on the application of O.C.E.A.N. to a target audience's digital footprints. Nix and company then use addressable ad technology to send the right people to the right ads through cookie matching, mail shots, set-top box viewing data matching, and highly targeted, non-public, paid Facebook posts often referred to as 'dark ads'.

Hannes Grassegger and Mikael Krogerus wrote in *Das Magazin*,³³ 'On the day of the third presidential debate between Trump and Clinton, Trump's team tested 175,000 different ad variations for his arguments, in order to find the right versions above all via Facebook. The messages differed for the most part only in microscopic details, in order to target the recipients in the optimal psychological way: different headings, colors, captions, with a photo or video.'³⁴

'Pretty much every message that Trump put out was data-driven', Nix told *Vice's Motherboard*. 'We can address villages or apartment blocks in a targeted way. Even individuals.'

Fundamental to not only Robert Mercer's fortunes, but also to the modern field of trait profiling, is Artificial Intelligence. Adam Curtis' 2016 BBC documentary, *HyperNormalisation*, is a sprawling document of contemporary control and chaos, drawing lines of connection between such events as a failed New York City bond issue in 1975 and Hafez al-Assad's support of suicide bombing in Beirut in 1985, and more recent developments such as the use of artificial intelligence in monitoring public sentiment, the ascendancy of Donald Trump, and the invention of non-linear warfare.

³² <https://www.facebook.com/My-Personality-120057564782166/> (accessed 13 October 2017).

³³ Grassegger, H. and M. Krogerus, 'Ich habe nur gezeigt, dass es die Bombe gibt' *Das Magazin*, 3 December 2016, <https://www.dasmagazin.ch/2016/12/03/ich-habe-nur-gezeigt-dass-es-die-bombe-gibt/> (accessed 13 October 2017).

³⁴ Grassegger, H. and M. Krogerus, 'The Data That Turned the World Upside Down', *Motherboard*, 28 January 2107, https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/mg9vvn/how-our-likes-helped-trump-win (accessed 13 October 2017).

Curtis tells the story of Larry Fink, who arrived on Wall Street in 1976 and began trading mortgage-backed securities for First Boston, building a reputation and fortune for the bank that peaked in 1986 when Fink structured the \$4.6 billion securitization of the GMAC auto loan. According to *Vanity Fair*, 'he became the youngest managing director in First Boston's history and, at 31, the youngest member of its management committee. Many believed that he would eventually run the firm'.³⁵

Then disaster struck. Fink had predicted interest rates would rise—his traders took a huge position based on this instinct—but instead they fell. In the second quarter of the same year, Fink's department lost \$100 million.

Fink told writer Suzanna Andrews that almost overnight he went 'from a star to a jerk'; people stopped talking to him in the hallways.

'We built this giant machine, and it was making a lot of money—until it didn't', Fink told Andrews. 'We didn't know why we were making so much money. We didn't have the risk tools to understand that risk.'

Fink vowed to never again be in a position where he didn't understand the risks he was taking. Along with several partners, Fink transferred his future to Blackrock, a multinational investment management corporation, where he set up a unique computer farm designed to search the markets for risk. Five thousand computers ran 24 hours per day—more than 200 million calculations per week—A / B testing the future, looking for things that could go wrong in the future based on what had occurred in the past. The system was called Aladdin, and according to Curtis, it now controls 7% of the world's wealth—nearly \$75 trillion in investments.

These kinds of artificial intelligence agents were soon being used to predict the behaviour of individuals. Security agencies began collecting data on millions of people, hoping to predict everything from the free market to the movement of refugees. According to Curtis, what arose was a system designed to keep the world stable in the face of infinite complexity.

But predicting the behaviour of individuals proved far more complex than forecasting markets. What was needed was a system to first comprehend the individual, and through understanding their personality, to both divine and direct their behaviour.

35 Andrews, S. and N. Parry, 'Larry Fink's \$12 Trillion Shadow', *Vanity Fair*, 2 March 2010, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2010/04/fink-201004> (accessed 13 October 2017).

Emotions and Personality in Personalized Services: Models, Evaluation and Applications focuses on online services. If this multi-authored, specialist-targeted volume contained a central research question, it might read: how can we learn enough of the personality of an individual that we might persuade their behaviour through providing a more targeted service. And foundational to the various methodologies outlined throughout the book is *trait profiling*, of which O.C.E.A.N. is the most widely accepted model.

The chapter ‘Models of Personality’ reminds us the field was first imagined by Hippocrates, and that Galen of Pergamum’s *The Four Humors* was the foundational trait theory of personality. Modern trait theory is rooted in the occasionally questionable and often over enthusiastically typological work of practitioners like Sir Francis Galton (who also attempted to create a beauty map of the British Isles, rating the women he encountered on his travels: ‘I found London to rank highest for beauty: Aberdeen lowest’, he wrote).³⁶

The Myers-Briggs (MBTI) method is a more modern example. Still venerated by advertising interns and small-town marketing juniors, MBTI has been broadly criticised for its oversimplification of the complex nature of individual differences, and its questionable reliability. But the foundational practice of the contemporary marketer, particularly those working with social media profiling, is the Big Five (or Five Factor) system, O.C.E.A.N.

The balance of these five factors—Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism—in an individual’s personality are gleaned in the contemporary world through analysis of the subject’s digital footprint. In the chapter ‘Acquisition of Personality’, Finnerty, Lepri, and Pianesi make it clear that in ‘the last 50 years the Big Five model has become the standard in psychology’, and that the future is digital.

‘Digital products and services offer an unprecedented repository of easily accessible and yet highly valid records of human behaviour. Recent studies show that personality assessment based on such digital footprints can rival those based on well-established questionnaire measures. Potential sources of footprints include personal websites, Facebook Likes, Facebook Status updates, or Twitter messages.’³⁷

36 The Galton Institute, ‘The Measurement of Man’, 2017, <http://www.galtoninstitute.org.uk/sir-francis-galton/psychology-statistics-criminology/> (accessed 13 October 2017).

37 Finnerty, A.N., Bruno Lepri, and Fabio Pianesi, ‘Acquisition of Personality’, in *Emotions and Personality in Personalised Services*, edited by Tkalčič et.al., Springer, 2016, pp. 81-99.

Frequently gleaned from questionnaires, they claim the O.C.E.A.N. profile so accurate that ‘having people close to you, such as family members and friends, rating the questionnaire items was found to have the same results as self-reported values’.³⁸

The chapter, ‘Sentiment Analysis in Social Streams’³⁹ takes a more granular approach, focussing on social media feeds. Here, user-generated content is the primary source of personality profiling, tapping connections, discussions, the sharing of content, language analysis, URLs, video, images, and the like. Most arresting in this analysis is the simplicity of determining political ideology. The writers declare politics to be a ‘binary classification problem’. Up / down. Left / right. Polarity detection seeks a straightforward positive / negative sentiment result, and even where an entire personality profile has not been discerned, something as simple as political support can be perceived, given that the question is asked in the correct way.

But the system is not without potential pitfalls. After all, there is a world of difference between ‘Do you feel positive about Ted Cruz?’ and ‘In a field of a dozen candidates, would you support Ted Cruz?’

Once personalities have been profiled, the next step in the method is to algorithmically generate content at scale, and then direct each individual voter to the page most likely to yield results. Back to that *Das Magazin* article.⁴⁰

According to Grassegger and Krogerus, Cambridge Analytica divided America into 32 personality types for the Trump campaign, and focussed on seventeen states (and possibly to their regret, Washington, DC). The company’s psychometric findings told the Trump team which messages were working and where, not at the conceptual level, but as we’ve seen, at the ‘chunk’ level of headings, colours, captions, and photos. One-hundred-seventy-five-thousand algorithmically generated variations were designed not only to get out the vote, but to suppress it as well. And dark ads drove the direction.

Facebook dark ads are highly targeted adverts that only the targeted user can see. Although Facebook targeting can go notoriously wrong—Facebook thinks I like first person shooter games and musical theatre, for example—at scale, it can be an effective influencer.

38 Ibid.

39 Saif, Hassan, Javier Ortega, Miriam Fernández, Ivan Cantador, pp. 119-140.

40 Grassegger, ‘The Data That Turned’.

In Miami's Little Haiti, the Trump campaign spread the word about the Clinton Foundation's failures following the Haitian earthquake. Staffers also created a South Park-style animation pushing the message that 'Hillary Thinks African Americans are Super Predators'. According to a pre-election-day *Bloomberg Businessweek* story, 'The animation will be delivered to certain African American voters through Facebook 'dark posts'—nonpublic posts whose viewership the campaign controls so that, as Parscale puts it, 'only the people we want to see it, see it'. The aim is to depress Clinton's vote total.⁴¹

In door-to-door operations, Trump canvassers were provided with an app that would help them filter their doorstops down to only voters receptive to the Trump message. Canvassers were armed with conversation guidelines geared for the resident's personality type. They then provided feedback through the app after each doorstop, which was then aggregated into data that showed up on Trump campaign dashboards, influencing next steps.

A Trump campaign official went on to say, 'We know because we've modelled this. It will dramatically affect her ability to turn these people out.'⁴²

But it is not only canvassing and campaign ad buys that are narrowing the news to which users are exposed. Social media algorithms also famously create bubbles of information—echo chambers—that, as Curtis points out, serve to benefit both politicians and big business. Social media users click and like and dwell on that which the algorithm sends their way, all the while yielding more personal information to marketing agencies, and more views and click-through to advertisers. Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram control the flow of information, and benefit thereby, just as (political and other) advertisers reap the rewards of deep customer insight combined with micro-targeting.

Politically, Trump, the Republicans and Leave.EU are neither the only players exploiting these technologies, nor are they the first.

41 Green, J. and S. Issenberg, 'Inside the Trump Bunker, With 12 Days to Go', *Bloomberg*, 27 October 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-27/inside-the-trump-bunker-with-12-days-to-go> (accessed 13 October 2017).

42 Green, Joshua and Sasha Issenberg, 'Inside the Trump Bunker, With Days to Go', *Bloomberg Business Week*, 27 October 2016.

In *Prototype Politics*,⁴³ Daniel Kreiss offers a history of big data in D.C., where the consensus gives Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign the pioneering nod. Dean leveraged the internet to reinvent small donor campaigning, raising a record \$50 million. After his defeat at the hands of George W. Bush, Dean went on to chair the Democratic National Committee until 2009, radically innovating the DNC's digital operations.

And herein lies Kreiss' theme—in victory, the best campaigners are hired into the party and the White House, where they have little chance of continuing to improve the party campaign apparatus. In defeat—or in Bannon's case, departure—bereft digital innovators create consultancies and private projects, changing the culture of the networks, infrastructures and practices surrounding electoral campaigns.

'As I documented in *Taking Our Country Back*, the programmers, open source idealists, dot.commers, and technically skilled college students who migrated to the Howard Dean and Wesley Clark campaigns in 2004 helped forge a new set of innovative technologies and digital organizing practices, and after the election founded new organizations that diffused them across the Democratic Party network', says Kreiss.

By Kreiss' argument, the Republicans' years beneath a Barack Obama-shaped shadow in the 2008 to 2016 political wilderness created precisely the conditions that cultivated a cabal of Cambridge Analytics.

But there is another condition that brings rise to the Cambridge Analytics and SCL Groups of the world—covert operations in foreign countries, as covered in the Oxford Internet Institute's series of reports.

Even a short review of the Computational Propaganda Research Project's conclusions is stunning:

- Facebook, Twitter, *et al* have become the monopoly platforms for public life
- Social media is now the primary conduit by which young people develop their political identities; and
- So overrun is social media by automated bots and manual trolls, sponsored by governments and organised disinformation campaigns, that the political sections of some platforms are completely controlled by propaganda operations, including bot-driven campaigns, comment-section-flooding of

⁴³ Kreiss, D., *Prototype politics: technology-intensive campaigning and the data of democracy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

news sites, and the bullying of social media users into silence, stifling real debate and dominating the dialogue of public life.

At the heart of this battleground is Ukraine. The Oxford Study is unambiguous—Ukraine is the frontline for experimentation with and development of computational propaganda. Russian, Ukraine nationalist, and civil society botnets swarm Ukraine's public arena, drowning discourse in a deluge of disinformation. It is open warfare of a radically new variety.

In *HyperNormalisation*, Curtis points to the rise of the role of non-linear warfare in Ukraine, a practice he argues was invented by Putin's 'political technologist', Vladislav Surkov. Seen by most as the Kremlin's lead ideologist, Surkov also advised Putin during the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts.

Having spent three years studying theatre direction at the Moscow Institute of Culture, Surkov took ideas from avant-garde theatre and used them to manipulate the public. Curtis singles out Surkov's pro-Putin domestic designs, where he funded both anti-fascist movements and neo-Nazi organisations. Curtis argues that in a spectacular feint, Surkov then let it be known to the public what he was doing. If anyone doubted Putin's message, the argument goes, they now equally doubted opposition messaging, left as they were uncertain whether the words and deeds of Putin's opponents were authentic, or Surkovian acts. Curtis adds that this rendered all campaigns by all players as 'fake'.

In Ukraine, Syria, and elsewhere, Curtis sees the mighty hand of Surkov. According to Curtis, Western governments were bewildered by Syria, uncertain where and how to act. As the US, the UK, and France bombed ISIS, Russia entered the game, conducting 'non-linear warfare', which Curtis attributes to Surkov. Because no-one understood what Russia wanted in Syria, it became impossible to mount an effective opposition. As Surkov once wrote, 'The underlying aim is not to win the war, but to use the conflict to create a constant state of destabilized perception in order to manage and control.'

The West has struggled to cope with the online version of Surkov's non-linear war. According to the Computational Propaganda study, while Germany has become the international leader in countering networked disinformation, the Polish ICT sector has taken up the mantle of the management of fake accounts and automation on an industrial scale.

As author Lisa-Maria N. Neudert concludes, 'Brexit and the US election have spurred a cautious vigilance in relation to the manipulation of opinion in the digital sphere in Germany. Computational propaganda has become a controversially debated issue on the public agenda, with much media and political attention dedicated to its causes,

agents, and countermeasures.⁴⁴ She goes on to say Germany's approach has been one of prevention, rather than waiting to address issues once they've raised their heads.

Poland, on the other hand, appears 'to be entering a new golden age of propaganda, misinformation, and media manipulation, compounded by the wide-ranging political instability and electoral uncertainty that has characterized European politics of late.' The author, Oxford's Robert Gorwa, nominates the country as a bellwether, suggesting that 'A look at Poland ... provides some new perspectives into what is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon.'⁴⁵

In the United States, bots now account for 10% of Twitter traffic and their use is not limited to covert operations. Both Trump and Clinton campaigns employed botnets to shift public opinion, but Trump's network was three times the size of his rival's.

Published in ten documents by twelve researchers examining nine countries, the Computational Propaganda project 'analysed tens of millions [of] posts on seven different social media platforms during scores of elections, political crises, and national security incidents'.⁴⁶

The study uses interviews with political party operatives, freelance campaigners, and election officials. It's not just algorithms distributing the contents of influence campaigns—the report for Taiwan shows that mainland Chinese social media propaganda is heavily coordinated, with a strong human element in the distribution.

'[L]arge and well-organized groups use computational propaganda on Twitter to promote information and perspectives that are counter to Chinese state messages – the 1989 democracy movement, Tibetan rights, and the victims of the pan-Asia scheme. Additionally, independent bots promote ... Hong Kong independence.'

Author Gillian Bolsover goes on to write, 'Twitter is a battleground for public opinion and ... political players apparently see a lot to gain in the use of these computational propaganda techniques to influence the online information environment, particularly in flooding discourse on Twitter about a particular issue.'⁴⁷

44 Neudert, Lisa-Maria N., 'Computational Propaganda in Germany: A Cautionary Tale' in Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, (eds.) Working Paper 2017.7. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda, comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk

45 Gorwa, Robert, 'Computational Propaganda in Poland: False Amplifiers and the Digital Public Sphere' in Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, (eds.) Working Paper 2017.2. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda, comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk

46 Woolley and Howard, 'Computational Propaganda Worldwide'.

47 Bolsover, Gillian, 'Computational Propaganda in China: An Alternative Model of a Widespread Practice' in Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, (eds.) Working Paper 2017.11. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda, comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk

The sheer sweep of the programme presents a breathtaking measure of the state and operations of the disinformation-driven ‘fake news’ world. The suite of studies point out that the World Economic Forum ranks computational propaganda as one of the Top 10 threats to society. But perhaps its most important contribution lies in Sergey Sanovich’s study of Twitter in Russia—Sanovich and his team analysed ‘14 million tweets posted between February 2014 and December 2015 by more than 1.3 million accounts’ posted as the Crimea crisis hotbed. Using a machine learning algorithm, they trained an ‘engine’ to predict whether an account was bot or not.

Says Sanovich: ‘[O]ne fact is particularly illuminating in the context of the discussion of the evolution of the Russian government’s strategy. While our collection covers an important and consequential moment in recent Russian history, during the conflict with Ukraine and the subsequent period of tumultuous relationships with Western countries, and bots’ patterns of activity clearly respond to the conflict dynamics, *many of the bot accounts used in this conflict were created years in advance* [emphasis mine]. While we don’t have data from that time, it is likely that these accounts were used for purely domestic purposes (for example, against Russian opposition, on behalf of Putin or even Medvedev) before they were deployed to wage a Russian propaganda war in Ukraine and beyond.’⁴⁸

In the face of a bewildering level of botnet activity, Sanovich and his team turned the technology on itself, employing AI to analyse, filter, and identify propaganda bots, their activity, their history, and the intention behind them. And in this lies one of the more promising strategies for both ‘sides’. Through sophisticated analytics, influence campaigners have the opportunity to measure the effectiveness of their campaigns—to tweak and hone them, perfecting and directing their message for maximum impact.

And yet in these same engines lies one of the few weapons available to civil society organisations for the reclamation of the public sphere from a tsunami of disinformation and influence campaigning. But, as Tamsin Shaw writes in the *New York Review of Books*, ‘It is impossible to test the claims of organizations such as Cambridge Analytica, since there can be no control group, only the kind of ambiguous observational data that can be attained in a very “noisy” environment.’⁴⁹ In other words, how can you prove a negative?

48 Sanovich, Sergey, ‘Computational Propaganda in Russia: The Origins of Digital Disinformation’ in Samuel Woolley and Philip N. Howard, (eds.) Working Paper 2017.3. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda, comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk

49 Shaw, T., ‘Invisible Manipulators of Your Mind’, *The New York Review of Books*, 20 April 2017, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/04/20/kahneman-tversky-invisible-mind-manipulators/> (accessed 13 October 2017).

Social media data insight engines like Netbase, Datasift, and Sprinklr are beginning to yield campaign impact studies to the major players in politics, advertising, and influence campaigning in combination with artificial intelligence frameworks. But their costs are prohibitive, and the level of expertise required to produce meaningful results is high. As the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network has suggested, for civil society organisations to operate in this sphere, ‘tech and social media companies could [...] provide pro bono support with analytic tools that can be used to measure campaign impact’.⁵⁰

For major campaigns, impact measurement seems a strictly internal exercise, with as much disinformation streaming from Cambridge Analytica over their role in campaigns as from the campaigns themselves. What is clear is that two major electoral exercises in two traditional seats of democracy delivered astonishingly awry results, in the face of all predictions and punditry.

Do psychographic influence campaigns work at all? Barring readily available natural language analysis evaluations, it is nearly impossible to tell, but one thing is certain: sat close to the seat of those campaigns were Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group, analysing attitudes, driving discourse, and possibly delivering results that shook the world.

⁵⁰RAN Issue Paper, ‘Counter Narratives and Alternative Narratives’, Institute for Strategic Dialogue in cooperation with RAN Centre of Excellence, 10 January 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_cn_oct2015_en.pdf (accessed 12 October 2017).

LIVING POST-TRUTH LIVES ... BUT WHAT COMES AFTER?

A review essay by Kevin Marsh

Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back

Matthew D'Ancona. Ebury Publishing, 2017

Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World

James Ball. Biteback Publishing, 2017

Post Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit

Evan Davis. Hachette UK, 2017

The Retreat of Western Liberalism

Edward Luce. Hachette UK, 2017

Keywords: *post-truth, Brexit, Trump, spin, fake news, political communication, strategic communication, strategic communications*

About the author

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On the walls of the Musée Anne-de-Beaujeu in Moulins, a small town in the Auvergne, hangs a striking painting. It's called *La Vérité* or, more descriptively, *La Vérité sortant du puits armée de son martinet pour châtier l'humanité*—'Truth emerging from the well armed with her whip to chastise mankind.' Truth, in the painting, is naked; rendered almost photographically; and if her eyes and mouth, fixed in a barking rebuke, are anything to go by, she is angry. Very angry.

The painter was the conservative academist of the Belle Époque, Jean-Léon Gérôme. He and his 'realist' contemporaries faced an artistic assault on two fronts; from Impressionists, who disdained the visual 'truth' of figurative painting, preferring emotional 'truth'; and from photography, which by the 1890s captured visual 'truth' more precisely than any painter.

For Gérôme, though, photography was scientific 'proof' that there *was* a tangible 'truth', an objective reality out there that he and his like, rather than the impressionists, were able to reproduce: '*c'est grâce à elle*' he wrote, '*que la vérité est enfin sortie de son puits*'—'it's thanks to photography that Truth has finally left her well'.

That became an icon for conservative artists and writers of Gérôme's generation; French politics were chaotic, self-serving, and ineffectual; populism, nationalism, protectionism, clericalism, and anti-Semitism were the dominant 'isms of the day. It was the time of the Dreyfus affair—an exercise in 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' if ever there was one—and as the 19th century wheeled over into the 20th, 'Truth' was wished out of her well again and again to whip the liars into honesty.

Yearning for 'Truth'—with or without a chastising whip—is one of those cyclical things. It comes at critical moments when we feel we've somehow lost the collective ability to distinguish truth from lies, fact from opinion. The year 2016 was one of those critical moments.

Its signature events—Leave's narrow victory in the EU referendum and Donald Trump's electoral college win in the US—undermined our liberal conventional wisdoms about democracy and political communication. Both winning campaigns were founded on untruths, aggressively promoting divisive world views; both sought to overturn conventional economic or social thinking; both threatened cultural ruptures, or promised them, depending on your point of view.

More than anything else, though, both appeared finally to have snapped the overstretched link between democratic politics and anything deserving the name 'truth'. Together, they made 'post-truth' the word of the year and introduced 'fake news' and 'alternative facts' to a wider audience. Unsurprising, then, that in 2017, the cycle turned and politicians, political communicators, and journalists—especially, ironically, journalists—yearn for *La Vérité* to whip the offenders back to honesty.

Matthew D’Ancona in *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back*, for example—a short, sharp cry of anguish and frustration from a journalist of the centre-right, who ...

... would be betraying my trade if I stood by as its central value – accuracy – was degraded by bucksters and snake-oil salesmen.

D’Ancona wishes *La Vérité* out of her well to confront ...

... the declining value of truth as society’s reserve currency, and the infectious spread of pernicious relativism disguised as legitimate scepticism.

It’s unfortunate that he elides ‘truth’ which, if it’s anything, is a moral value and ‘accuracy’, a mere process. While we can approach ‘truth’ through ‘accuracy’, achieving ‘accuracy’ is no guarantee of ‘truth’—accurately reporting the words of a liar is a long way from ‘truth’.

The idea of fighting the ‘post-truthers’ with classical, objective ‘truth’ is seductive—but it’s an epistemological nonsense. As nonsensical as G  r  me’s vision of *La V  rit  *, based as that was on a mistranslation and misunderstanding of the pre-Socratic Thracian atomist Democritus:

We are ignorant ...

... he is reported to have said ...

... since Truth has been submerged in an abyss, with everything in the grip of opinions and conventions.¹

Democritus’ point—as well as Cicero’s in referencing him—was to underline a fundamental and very old idea in epistemology. *If* objective truth even exists, it’s beyond the reach of our perceptions; our senses are limited, our minds weak, and our lives short; *‘nihil veritati relinqui, deinceps omnia tenebris circumfusa esse’*—‘nothing is left for truth and everything, in turn, is wrapped in darkness’.

By the end of 2016, that felt less like a maxim of classical philosophy and more like a description of the state in which the political culture of the UK and US found itself. Nothing was ‘true’; ‘fact’ was indistinguishable from ‘opinion’, for every ‘fact’ there was an ‘alternative fact’; falsity flourished; scarcely credible conspiracy theories jostled with genuine inquiry; and mainstream media battled with the ‘bots’ spewing out ‘fake news’. Something had clearly gone wrong—but what?

¹ Nothing of Democritus’ writing survives, however Cicero attributes the aphorism to Democritus in Book 1.44 of his study of scepticism, *Academica*.

D’Ancona, though a journalist of the centre-right, is no fan of Leave nor of Trump:

... the expectations raised on both sides of the Atlantic,

he writes,

cannot possibly be satisfied.

And he disdains the 45th President as a ‘political sociopath’. But, he insists, neither Trump nor Leave is or was the cause of post-truth politics and culture. They’re its consequences, the symptoms of that ‘pernicious relativism’ which is, in turn, the ‘rust on the metal of truth’ that started its corrosive growth on the *Rive Gauche*, nurtured by ‘the loose-knit school’ of post-modernist thinkers—the ‘Po-Mos’—who...

... preferred to understand language and culture as ‘social constructs’ ... rather than the abstract ideals of classical philosophy. And if everything is a ‘social construct’ then who is to say what is false?

Thus, the election of Donald Trump:

... unhindered by care for the truth, accelerated by the force of social media ... in its way, the ultimate post-modern moment.

It’s a misguided attribution of blame.

The Po-Mos he chastises—Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and Baudrillard—in essence did little other than align a constructivist brand of epistemology as old as philosophy itself with 20th century communication ... predicting, incidentally, a time when the quantity of communicable information (and the means of communicating it) would far exceed our capacity to give it meaning. And where the act of communicating was the socialising factor in our lives, not the sharing of meaning.

Remind you of anything?

D’Ancona partly concedes that the habitués of *Les Deux Magots* didn’t invent the relativism and socially constructed ‘truth’ he castigates. He mentions Protagoras but could have added Democritus—Gérôme’s inspiration—Plato, or Aristotle. He could even have added the Gospel of John or, from the modern era, the Italian philosopher-scientist Giambattista Vico, who wrote in 1710 that: *‘verum esse ipsum factum’*—‘truth is itself a made thing’.

Unsurprising, then, that D’Ancona’s fightback comprises counsel and perhaps even rules to ensure we scrutinise one another more skeptically and behave towards each other more honestly: we should all take less on trust and become our own information gatekeepers, ‘scrutinising editors’, for example. We should rationally and diligently filter out what’s clearly ‘fake’ and untrue—the internet giants, Google and Facebook, should

do the same ... and so on. And doubtless the Po-Mos would shrug with Gallic approval when he demands more compelling narratives in the service of accuracy, for 'truthful' myths and for leaders who show statesmanship and leadership—socially constructed notions, all.

Journalism has taken a battering from the 'post-truthers' who dismiss and deride mainstream media as 'fake news'. President Trump does it daily, while the hard-line Brexiters do much the same with the BBC and the 'Remoaner' centrist press. But there is little evidence of a rush to journalism's defence outside of those in the trade. Journalists are bottom feeders in every poll measuring public trust.

Nevertheless, re-establishing trust in mainstream media seems a logical step to counter 'fake news'. But there's a snag—that's exactly what the relatively new army of fact-checkers have been trying to do for a decade. And it's made not a scrap of difference. In fact, mainstream media's fact-checking fetish—presented as if it were something new to and separate from journalism—may even be making things worse.

Few political campaigns can have been exposed to fact-checking as relentlessly as the Leave and Trump campaigns. Both saw their claims debunked but neither was harmed by it nor did either feel their campaigning styles cramped by pesky facts.

How come? Well, one explanation might be found in a survey published in the summer of 2016 by *Rasmussen Reports*²—an American polling organisation. That survey found just 29% of those likely to vote in the Presidential election trusted the fact-checkers. Nine out of ten Trump supporters believed mainstream media skewed its fact-checks; four out of ten Clinton supporters did the same. Fact-checking—'truth'—was never going to bring a divided America together. As new-media guru Clay Shirky tweeted in despair during the Republican Convention that confirmed Trump's nomination: 'we've brought fact-checkers to a culture war'.

There's something else, too. However 'fact-checked' our journalism, it simply doesn't have the traction the media classes believe. In 2016, researchers Seth Flaxman, Sharad Goel, and Justin Rao wanted to find out how Americans read news online³—but their work almost failed to get past first base.

2 *Rasmussen Reports*, 'Voters Don't Trust Media Fact-Checking', 30 September 2016, http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/general_politics/september_2016/voters_don_t_trust_media_fact_checking

3 Flaxman, Seth, Sharad Goel, and Justin M. Rao, 'Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers and Online News Consumption', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 80, Special Issue, 2016, pp. 298–320, <https://5harad.com/papers/bubbles.pdf>

Their initial sample was the browsing data of some 1.2 million internet users. To be included in their study, a user had to have read just ten news articles and two opinion pieces over 12 weeks—a pretty low hurdle. Only 50,000—4% of the original sample—made it over that hurdle. The other 96% were more or less immune to mainstream journalism and any corrective to ‘post-truth’ it might offer.

When we realised in 2016 that the thread between politics and even the fuzziest notion of ‘truth’ seemed to have snapped, it was inevitable that we should rediscover the 1986 paper by American philosopher Harry Frankfurt: *On Bullshit*.

He it was who, in a different world, systematised the ontology of bovine faeces—not entirely seriously but not entirely tongue in cheek either. His paper first saw the light of day—in the pre-internet age—in a well-respected but narrowly read journal.⁴ Two decades on, in 2005—post-internet but pre-social media—it became a bestseller in a book of the same name.

Frankfurt described rather than defined ‘bullshit’. Critically, it’s not the same as lying. To lie, Frankfurt argues, you have to be aware of and sensitive to the possibility of ‘truth’. The ‘bullshitter’ has no such awareness, no such sensitivity:

... the fact about himself that the liar hides is that he is attempting to lead us away from a correct apprehension of reality ... The fact about himself that the bullshitter hides, on the other hand, is that the truth-values of his statements are of no central interest to him.

Leave and Trump seemed to fit the second category. The Leavers had put front and centre of their campaign exceptionally questionable claims; the infamous red bus that screamed leaving the EU would free-up £350m a week that could go to the National Health Service; that 80 million Turks—‘Muslims, don’tcha know’—were about to flood into the EU; and that we could ‘Take Back Control’ without any sense of what that could possibly mean. Once their claims had worked their magic, they simply walked away.

Trump, however, did not walk away from his claims and promises made on the campaign trail, but he did appear to remain as indifferent to the distinction between truth and falsehood once in the White House as he had out on the road. Within hours of his inauguration, he was claiming that the crowd had ‘looked like a million-and-a-half people’⁵ ... even though TV and still images proved beyond argument the event was

⁴ The *Raritan Quarterly Review* published by Rutgers University

⁵ In a speech delivered at CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia, on 21 January 2017

more sparsely attended than either Obama inauguration. And he claimed that ‘millions of undocumented migrants’⁶ cost him victory in the popular vote. That both assertions were easy to debunk seemed not to matter.

Mainstream journalism, found ‘bullshitting’ frustratingly difficult to deal with, precisely because ‘bullshitters’ don’t care about truth, accuracy, or even consistency—nor do their supporters, who judge mainstream media’s obsession with ‘facts’ and accuracy as nothing more than the strategy of the enemy in a class and culture war.

In *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* James Ball charts mainstream media’s witting and unwitting collusion in its own irrelevance, creating the partial vacuum into which ‘post truth’ has oozed. Traditional media’s failure to deal with new media’s assault on its business model is well documented. As is the consequence of its economic collapse on serious, costly, watchdog journalism. Those press titles that have kept their heads above the financial waterline have done so with a degraded form of ‘journalism’ that, not wholly unlike the worst of the fake news websites out there, peddles stories that are ...

... essentially untrue, but arguable to people who believe them or can convincingly pretend to ...

Even what we still think of as the reputable press has found itself chasing online advertising revenues by pimping clickbait and filling their online and paper pages with recycled content that, after even the most cursory journalistic examination in a previous age, would have gone straight to the spike. But for all these new-ish challenges, journalism’s vulnerability to ‘bullshitting’ derives from its very nature.

Journalism isn’t a taxonomic information source. It is, among other things, a competition for attention. It deals not in completeness but in timeliness and salience. Its practice demands instant judgments, extremes, superlatives, conflict, and shame. Its entry points—its headlines—are calculated to excite rather than inform but, often to the dismay of their authors, are as far as many readers or viewers ever penetrate into a story.

Even one of the central values of the best journalism—‘impartiality’—has worked in the service of ‘bullshit’ rather than ‘truth’, especially when the complex idea is reduced to simple arithmetic ‘balance’. It leads to what Ball terms:

... the long standing media habit of leaving campaigns to duke it out over who was telling the truth ...

⁶ A claim made in his Twitter account and repeated to Congressional leaders on 23 January 2017.

Now ‘duking it out’ in this way has a respectable British philosophical heritage. Remember John Stuart Mill’s maxim that ‘truth emerges from the clash of adverse ideas’,⁷ opinion in combat with opinion. Suppressing that clash—that ‘duking it out’—reduces our liberty:

If the opinion is right, [people] are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.

But if one party has no interest in arriving at any kind of ‘truth’, Mill’s maxim is meaningless. Instead, we become lost in ‘agnotology’—the deliberate creation of doubt and ignorance.

It was Stanford Professor, Robert Proctor who coined that term in 1998 to describe how Big Tobacco had, for decades, countered the overwhelming scientific evidence that proved its products were a lethal, addictive poison.⁸ That strategy was not to argue the science—it was to create a state of ‘not knowing’, uncertainty, and doubt even though science, the facts, showed there could be none. It was a strategy captured in a 1969 internal memo between tobacco executives:

Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the ‘body of fact’ that exists in the minds of the general public. It is also the means of establishing a controversy.⁹

‘Doubt’ and ‘controversy’. Think anti-vaxers; creationism; climate change; the ‘birther controversy’; even wholly fake ‘controversies’, such as ‘Pizzagate’, often lurking behind the hashtag *#justsaying*.

Doubt is simple, facts are complex. We doubt in a single, emotional step; we verify in multiple, coldly rational steps. In the media, controversy makes headlines and demands attention; debunking fact-checking is buried deep in the story. Worse, the process of fact-checking itself gives currency to the so-called controversy, and when broadcasters challenge ‘doubters’ on air, they simply establish a subtext that says: ‘there are no facts here, just claim and counterclaim ...’

7 Mill, John Stewart, *On Liberty*, (London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1869).

8 Proctor, Robert, *Cancer Wars: How Politics Shapes What We Know and What We Don't Know*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1995).

9 The memo is quoted in Michaels, David, *Doubt is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

James Ball belongs to a generation equally at home in traditional and new media, a good place from which to set out how the online world—especially Facebook—is a place where...

... small and unscrupulous players trade off sentiment and stolen content with little or no regard for truth ...

Facebook matters far more than older, media-class Westerners imagine. It's the gateway to all that's out there for some 1.2 billion users each day and is the world's preferred path to its 'news'. That gateway, those paths are for each user the result of Facebook's algorithms. Those algorithms are supremely effective at creating online communities around what's 'trending', irrespective of whether it's 'true' or fake—and as Ball points out, there's no economic advantage of any kind to Facebook to weed out 'fake news'.

It is, if you like, Harry Frankfurt's ultimate 'bullshitter'—utterly indifferent to the truth or falsehood of anything its algorithms place in front of its users. And content producers, whether traditional mainstream media or the newest newcomer, are effectively forced to acquiesce in its 'bullshitting' by conforming to its formats and aligning with what's 'trending'.

It might matter less if there were anything intrinsic to any online content to indicate honesty and integrity. But there isn't; academic papers and careful journalistic inquiry jostle for our attention with wild conspiracies, pure ignorance, and the deliberately and carelessly fake. If it trends, if it's endorsed by our online community, it's 'true'.

Where does strategic, political communication fit into all of this? A trade that, over the past generation, has finessed its techniques to deliver short-term 'wins'—but has shredded both its own reputation and trust in representative democracy along the way.

Political communication in the West took its current shape in the US in the Clinton years and in the UK during Tony Blair's leadership of New Labour—its purpose, according to Peter Mandelson twenty years ago, was 'to create the truth';¹⁰ within a year, the word 'spin' had passed into ordinary speech; and voters' expectations of honesty in politics hit new lows. Fifteen years ago, they lowered still further when Downing Street created the infamous September 2002 dossier that tipped the balance in persuading MPs to vote

¹⁰ In an interview with Kath Viner, 'The ministry of truth', *Guardian*, 9 August 1997, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1997/aug/09/labour.mandelson>.

for war in Iraq.¹¹ While in 2017, Theresa May simply ripped up her manifesto when it failed to deliver her the majority she expected.

In *Post Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit*, BBC presenter and former Economics Editor, Evan Davis, reflects on this trend in our politics which, he writes, have:

... become rehearsed, often defensive, obfuscatory and unwilling to entertain radical ideas ... the professionally crafted messages of expert political advisors, which are designed to hammer home a consistent, clear and simple message, have come to sound unnatural.

That feels a generous description: accurate as far as it goes but stopping well short of capturing the psychologically manipulative, quasi-propagandist quality of ‘post-truth’ political communication designed to deliver election victories with little regard for what comes after, little regard for representative democracy as it reflects back to the δῆμος, or *demos*, its certainty that complex problems, long-term problems, have simple, short-term solutions.

‘Creating consent’ by political communication has always flirted with the ethical touchlines and never assumed the most rational and informed audiences. Walter Lippmann, wrote about ‘creating consent’ in 1922, wondering at the same time how on earth we could allow ordinary voters to decide anything of consequence since their knowledge of the world was partial, imperfect, and random and each made his decision:

*... based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him.*¹²

Harold Laswell wrote in 1927 that consent could be created by:

*... the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols.*¹³

While Edward Bernays a year later, asserted that:

*The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society...*¹⁴

¹¹ *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction*, published September 2002

¹² Lippman, Walter, *Public Opinion*, (Courier Corporation, 2004). The publication of this volume sparked a famous debate over the nature of democracy with the educationalist John Dewey.

¹³ Lasswell, Harold D., ‘The Theory of Political Propaganda’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (August 1927), pp. 627–631.

¹⁴ Bernays, Edward, *Propaganda*, (New York: Ig Publishing, 1928). Bernays is often called ‘the father of PR’. Significantly, in his PR business, Bernays was scrupulously ethical, demanding the same from his clients.

By the latter quarter of the 20th century, William Riker tried to put ‘creating consent’ on a quasi-scientific footing. His ‘positive political theory’ became the default model and brought statistics and Game Theory to the table, turning election campaigns into finely tuned exercises in statistics. It was a model that seemed to work on the grand scale. Its flaw was its assumption that voters were ‘rational agents’ and made their decisions in order to maximise their self-interests by seeking out and assessing with logic and reason all available evidence.

But we’re not ‘rational agents’. None of us is. And as two Yale researchers pointed out in the late 1990s,¹⁵ if we were, very few of us would ever vote; the investment in time and energy that we’d have to make to decide who to vote for would far exceed any potential personal gain.

Riker himself eventually conceded that:

*There is no set of scientific laws that can be more or less mechanically applied to generate successful strategies.*¹⁶

Enter cognitive psychology and Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel laureate economist who turned his back on ‘rational agent’ theory and sought, instead, to explain how we actually think our way to our decisions.¹⁷

Kahneman and others theorised that there are two distinct parts to our brains; the emotional, instinctive part and the deliberative, rational, logical part. And that it’s the emotional, instinctive part that we use to solve the most complex problems—like whether the UK should leave or remain in the EU or which of two candidates, each unsatisfactory in their own way, to send to the White House.

That emotional, instinctive part is full of ‘biases’—the bias to believe something is ‘true’ because it’s similar to something else that we already believe is ‘true’, for example. And rather than iteratively testing possible decisions until we come to the optimal, we use thinking shortcuts, ‘heuristics’, to leap from flawed perceptions and imperfect interpretations to a handful of possible decisions, settling on the first that satisfies our instinctive biases.

15 Shapiro, Ian with Donald Green, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory: A Critique of Applications in Political Science*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

16 Riker, William T., *The Art of Political Manipulation*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

17 In particular his 2011 book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*—a book based on his research that ‘integrated insights from psychological research into economic science, especially concerning human judgment and decision-making under uncertainty’ that won him the 2002 Nobel Prize for Economics. Kahneman, Daniel, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

By the 2010s, political communication focused on leveraging the biases and heuristics of the tiny number of voters in any election who would determine the outcome. And doing that with semi-personalised, emotionally engaging narratives delivered with the precision offered by Facebook's algorithms—ideology and 'winning the argument' with facts and reason were passé. As the centre-right election supremo Sir Lynton Crosby puts it:

In politics, when reason and emotion collide, emotion invariably wins.¹⁸

Neither the Remain nor Clinton campaigns were calculated to engage emotion. Neither had its own 'deep narratives', both underestimated the power of their opponents' emotional appeal putting their faith in reason and expertise.

Davis reminds us that 'bullshit' dominates public communication for one simple reason: it works. And it works because we lap it up ... and we lap it up because it makes us feel better, whether it's 'bullshitting' politicians, advertisers, perfume packaging, PR—even the Greek tourist destination that promises butterflies when all it has is moths.

We lap it up because of the way our minds work—our biases. But we have a choice. Davis characterises that choice as one between the 'high road'—ethical, truth-regarding, placing a high value on integrity and reputation—and the 'low road'—indifferent to ethics or truth, short-termist, self-regarding. Without making the conscious choice to take the 'high road', whole communities can become trapped on the 'low road' cycling through repeated patterns of low trust and low integrity.

He cites Edward Banfield's 1950s study of an anonymised southern Italian town that he called 'Montegrano'—actually Chiaromonte; a community very firmly located on the low road. He identified there what he termed *amoral familism*; a way of life that maximised the material, short-run advantages of the family with little regard for the longer term or the wider community, a way of life followed on the assumption that everyone else would do the same.

But older residents in 'Montegrano' would speak almost wistfully of the Mussolini years. None thought fascism was in and of itself a good thing—but its tight controls touched everything from the price of food to the quality of cloth and abruptly ended the corrupt, cheating, self-serving navigation of the 'low road'. For a time, 'Montegrano' seemed to the old timers back on the high road. An object lesson, Banfield concluded, as to why:

18 From Sir Lynton Crosby's 2013 masterclass on political campaigning available on YouTube at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=H_YareK6WKk It's worth noting that while Sir Lynton delivered election victories for Boris Johnson in 2008 and David Cameron in 2015, he also delivered Michael Howard's defeat in 2005, Zac Goldsmith's defeat in 2016, and Theresa May's loss of majority in 2017.

...the economically disadvantaged would always see attractions in strong leadership to counter the selfish-anarchy of amoral familism.

As Davis concludes, we can read across from Banfield's 'Montegrano' to the 'post-truth', 'low road' culture of 2016:

...a pattern of low trust and low integrity that fuels and is fuelled by short term horizons and then encourages voters to look for candidates of a different, and more decisive character.

That choice, between 'low road' and 'high' is the determining one of our generation. Those on the 'high road' aren't intrinsically superior to those on the 'low'—the distinction lies in the choice. And we can choose to reward those who reflect back to us the simplicities that affirm our biases or we can reward with our consent:

... those who take the high road and behave with long term integrity ... we don't want politicians to believe that honesty is the wrong tactic during an election campaign.

Plus, taking the 'high road' isn't just about rejecting dishonesty; it's also about rejecting false doubt and fake controversy:

We need to be particularly sceptical of claims that make us feel good or satisfy our existing beliefs. There is an inverse requirement too: we need to be willing to believe things.

Davis isn't overly pessimistic. He refrains from talking up a 'crisis' and suggests by his title that we might already be emerging from a 'post-truth' world by virtue of understanding it for what it is. By contrast, Edward Luce in *The Retreat of Western Liberalism* is very much gloomier.

His central thesis is, in essence, that the Western model of free-market, liberal democracy is swerving in new directions—towards plutocracy on the one hand and populism on the other. Blue and white collars alike now count themselves among the 'left-behinds', with little access to the wealth accumulating in plutocrats' hands, losing faith in democracy's capacity to change their situation, living lives over which they have less and less control. A process intensified by the much faster economic growth in the semi-democracies of South and East Asia, China in particular, that many in the West seem oblivious to.

Western democracy is no longer the envy of the world; its survival isn't inevitable. Nor is it something we adhere to through principle—though that's what we tell ourselves. As Luce writes:

When growth vanishes, our societies reveal a different face.

That face we see on those who voted ‘Leave’ and Trump because they wanted to hear someone say that the past *‘they... the others’* took away can be given back—the grunt jobs in mines and steel-mills, the mono-ethnic neighbourhoods where ‘we know who we are’ and can ‘Take Back Control’:

... the chant of Brexiteers and Trump voters alike. It is the war cry of populist backlashes across the Western world ... blue-collar whites on both sides of the Atlantic are speaking the same idiom. They yearn for the security of a lost age

That yearning is satisfied by the ‘post-truth’ deep narratives that are to be taken ‘seriously but not literally’. But the risks of satisfying that demand extend far beyond simply losing the little trust voters still have in democratic politicians and democracy.

Trump’s attacks on the Washington ‘swamp’, on mainstream media, globalisation, Muslims and Mexicans; his aggressively dangerous projection of ‘alternative facts’ in his Twitter account; his equivocation over events such as August’s white-supremacist violence in Charlottesville ... all these are calculated to reflect the characteristics of the ‘left-behinds’ back to them, a yearning for strong leadership and an imagined past.

Trump is, Luce writes, the political equivalent of the Ultimate Fighting Championship—a no-holds barred cage-fighting franchise:

... a brutal and unforgiving breed of show business. In place of solidarity, it offers the catharsis of revenge.

Or alternatively a:

... Ku Klux Kardashian, combining hard-right pugilism with the best of post-modern vaudeville.

The war against truth might well be being waged from the White House, as Luce writes, and Trump might well have made it clear that the US-led global order is no more—but there’s no clarity around the alternative he has in mind. Nor that he’s sensitive to the danger in which he’s placing the entire planet.

While Trump is clearly a disrupter, it’s hard to see any fully formed ‘disruption’ thesis in his vision, even harder now that his one-time chief strategist, Steve Bannon, who declared himself dedicated to ‘blowing up the system’, is back at Breitbart News and the Washington ‘swamp’ seems to be closing over the President’s head. Likewise, it’s hard to see in Trump’s belligerent ‘post-truth’ international relations any rationale behind making enemies of former NAFTA friends or crashing blindly into the ‘deepening thicket of Sino-American trip wires’ that could lead to the war with China that Luce imagines.

It's almost as if the cage-fight is an end in itself.

Post truth politics has posed questions that the normative instincts of the 'small-L' liberal media and political classes cannot hope to address, certainly not through more 'truthful' journalism and more assiduous fact-checking, given that those 'lapping up' the 'bullshit'—to use Evan Davis' phrase—see mainstream media not as watchdogs but as opposition. The former BBC journalist and № 10 senior staffer Craig Oliver puts it simply:

Serious journalism ...

... he could have added, conventional political discourse, too ...

... is struggling to hold to account those who are prepared to go beyond standard campaign hyperbole and stray into straightforward lies.¹⁹

Trump's and the Brexiteers' indifference to 'truth', indifference even to evidence, has challenged more than just political epistemology. It has, along the way, licenced and legitimised world views that, so those who held them felt, the 'small-L' liberal consensus had delegitimised and silenced for a generation. And it's, apparently, established 'new normals': one, that political communication is effective only when it tells publics what they want to hear, not what they need to hear; another, that trust in a political leader or cause bears little relationship to the credibility of either, or their willingness to be held accountable.

It's an episode in our history whose end is hard to see, though of one thing we can be certain. It doesn't end with *La Vérité* in all her angry purity climbing out of her well to whip the bullshitters into line. Perhaps it ends when bullshitt-ees realise the extent to which bullshitt-ers have taken them for fools. That undeliverable promises don't prevent reality's habit of happening in spite of truth-like assurances that it need not.

In his 2017 page-turner *To Kill The President*. 'Sam Bourne'—aka *Guardian* columnist and BBC broadcaster Jonathan Freedland—invents for his reader an improbably loathsome, racist, misogynist, amoral incarnation of mendacity, Crawford 'Mac' McNamara. 'Mac' is the imagined senior counsellor to an imagined, improbably unhinged President and the second most powerful man in the White House. His description of the imagined campaign that transformed his imagined boss into the most powerful man in this imagined world has a worrying familiarity about it:

¹⁹ *Unleashing Demons* is Oliver's account of his time in Downing Street as David Cameron's Director of Communications. Oliver, Craig, *Unleashing Demons, The Inside Story of Brexit*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 2016).

... you should have been there. These lines of morons and in-breeds, with one tooth in their head and a flag in their hands ready to believe absolutely anything. I feel sorry for them, I absolutely do. But the President had their number from the start: 'easy marks' he called them. You could tell them you're going to bring their jobs back, re-open the mines, bring back the horse-and-buggy—whatever you like—and they'd lap it up ... I mean, really.

Really.

‘WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US’

A review essay by David Loyn

‘We Have Met the Enemy and He is Us’. An analysis of NATO Strategic Communications: The International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, 2003–2014

Brett Boudreau. Publisher: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence

Keywords: *ISAF, strategic communication, NATO, Afghanistan, war, strategic communication, strategic communications*

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The idea that winning hearts and minds is an important element in military success is far older than might be supposed. It was Sir Robert Sandeman, a colonial officer in the North-West Frontier region of what was then British India, who coined the phrase in the 1860s that has since come to define a particular way of engaging in warfare. ‘To be successful on this frontier’, he wrote, ‘a man has to deal with the hearts and minds of the people, and not only with their fears.’¹ Sandeman and his colleagues spent their lives in the regions where they worked, spoke the local languages, and were supported by their government. To them, Information Operations and Public Affairs—two of the main pillars of Strategic Communications as now generally defined—were not separate processes, but a mindset, an organic part of other elements of integrated civilian/military policy.

In contrast, most international troops on the Afghan side of that same frontier in the war since 9/11 were constantly rotating in and out on short tours, and few had more than a brief introduction to the customs and languages of Afghanistan before deployment.² This constant churn was a change even from America’s last long war, Vietnam, where the idea of winning hearts and minds was popularised, and where only two generals commanded the operation in the same time period that there were eight in Afghanistan. As the wheel was reinvented every year in Kabul, by 2009 it became a well-worn saying that it was not ‘year eight’, but ‘year one for the eighth time’. And in contrast to the coordinated messaging approach adopted by Sandeman and his colleagues 150 years ago, the argument over whether StratCom was to be a coordinating function, a separate process, or a capability remained fluid for the whole duration of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation.

Communications have best effect when fully coordinated with all other elements in any mission. That was well understood by 2001. But how to do it proved complicated. Even those who knew that StratCom needed to be an essential structural element of planning, rather than an add-on, never had the time or resources to complete the task. Brigadier Andrew Mackay, who commanded the UK’s 52nd Infantry Brigade tour of Helmand in 2007–2008, had more ambition than most to put influence at the heart of the mission. He spent months preparing his brigade in some unusual ways—bringing in psychologists and experts in game theory, nudge economics, and in particular the

1 India Office Records: L Parl 2 284

2 This has changed a little with the introduction of the ‘Afghanistan–Pakistan Hands Program’, launched by the US DoD in 2009, where US troops learn Afghan languages and are on longer-planned rotations.

behavioural research of Tversky and Kahneman.³

He conducted one significant and successful ground operation, retaking the northern Helmand town of Musa Qala.⁴ But to Mackay ‘winning kinetic battles is comparatively easy, winning the influence war much more difficult’.⁵ And he sought to insert this thinking at all levels of his command. He believed influence essential ‘to any political strategy which in turn provides the foundation for effective conduct of influence at tactical and operational levels’.

Another early and prominent exponent of a more coordinated approach was the Canadian ISAF commander in 2004, General Rick Hillier, who saw information as a ‘strategic weapon [...] our normal inattention to information, its flow, use and accuracy was no longer acceptable’.⁶ He did this despite, and not because of, NATO. Indeed his Deputy Chief of Staff, Brigadier General Serge Labbé, said success in this area came ‘only because Hillier operated on the basis of operational requirement, untainted by NATO politics and doctrine’.⁷

This lack of confidence in NATO is not surprising. In 2003, the year before Hillier’s command, when the ISAF mission first evolved from the ad hoc international coalition that had existed in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban, the initial plan was to have only one Public Affairs Officer in the country. According to Brett Boudreau, ‘from the start, NATO-led ISAF had ceded the ground and narrative to adversary forces’.⁸

Boudreau is well qualified to write the authoritative analysis of NATO’s StratCom efforts during the ISAF mission. He spent more than two-thirds of a 28-year military career specialising in public affairs, including a close focus on Afghanistan in several roles since taking over as Chief of Media at SHAPE HQ a week before 9/11. This is a rare career. Only six NATO nations have Public Affairs career paths, and fewer can field them into a non-national NATO post.⁹ In the British Army, Public Affairs Officers were in the main ‘enthusiastic amateurs seconded from across the military’,¹⁰ according to Mackay, rather than a cadre of professional practitioners. In most nations there

3 In particular: Kahneman, Daniel, Paul Slovic, & Amos Tversky, *A Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

4 A British decision to pull out of the town earlier in 2007 caused considerable tension with American forces in Afghanistan.

5 Mackay, Andrew, ‘Helmand 2007–2008, Behavioural Conflict—From General to Strategic Corporal’, in *British Generals in Blair’s Wars*, Bailey, Jonathan, Iron, Richard, Strachan, Hew (eds.), (Ashgate, 2013).

6 Boudreau, Brett, *We Have Met the Enemy and He is Us*, (NATO StratCom COE, 2016), p. 116.

7 Boudreau, p. 119.

8 Boudreau, p. 111.

9 Boudreau, p. 280.

10 Mackay, op cit, p. 257.

was a lack of ‘robust national, expeditionary communication and information-related capabilities’.¹¹ Put simply, without qualified StratCom officers available in the field, ISAF drew on people who were less qualified but who had expeditionary capability.

It was not just in StratCom that ISAF was making it up as it went along. In all areas, the war called for novel approaches. ‘Missions such as Afghanistan present wholly new challenges in terms of generating forces’, according to the NATO Secretary-General Jap de Hoop Scheffer in 2004. ‘We have never done anything like this before.’¹² In a mission that was under-resourced, force generation was improvised from the beginning and increased in fits and starts. Led by America and matched by increasingly wary allies, the mission never had any authoritative or consistent political direction.

The problem with this piecemeal approach was not just about numbers—never enough¹³—but effectiveness. In the complex jigsaw that is the application of military force, sequencing matters almost as much as firepower—getting the right troops to task, in the right order at the right time. In the US this is systematised into a computerised work flow, the ‘time-phased force deployment list’, the best way to use combat troops to achieve an end. But in Afghanistan this system could not be used as troops arrived subject to the NATO force-generation cycle not a central military plan, with the consequence that military resources were always behind the curve, commanders improvised with what they had rather than being given what they needed, and combat power was reduced. One former ISAF commander described the approach as ‘not optimal’,¹⁴ something of an understatement.

Public Affairs teams thus started at a disadvantage, with a self-inflicted handicap, even before they faced the challenges of communicating an ill-defined counterinsurgency in the demanding theatre of Afghanistan. Boudreau found ‘[t]he force generation process at this stage [2006] was a particularly chaotic undertaking [...]. The jury-rigging of a mission to fit the forces at hand was already beginning to embarrass the Alliance’.¹⁵

And StratCom faced a further problem not shared with combat troops. Many of the nations participating in the ISAF mission were unwilling to put troops in harm’s way, imposing detailed ‘caveats’ on where and how they could be deployed, preferring to give them staff jobs. So ISAF was top-heavy, with a headquarters staff far bigger than required by the size of the military operation. Some nations sent only a handful of

11 Boudreau, p. 252.

12 Boudreau, p. 106.

13 Counterinsurgency doctrine, properly applied, demanded more than 300,000 troops for Afghanistan—at the peak NATO had half that number.

14 Interview with author

15 Boudreau, p. 105.

soldiers, just to put another flag on the board as loyal allies of the US. StratCom, which should demand a high level of language skills, drew its staff from this multinational pool.

Perhaps not surprisingly, those nations with the fewest ‘caveats’ had the best capacity in the communications field. Others were reduced to reading out press releases over the phone in broken English. The experience of many reporters at the time was an office that was unresponsive, and often unable to answer specific queries about operations because they had taken place under the separate US counter-terrorism mission. None of this built confidence in the mission among reporters sent out to explain it to increasingly sceptical Western audiences.¹⁶

There may never be another NATO campaign as complicated as Afghanistan; it is certain there will never be another piece of research into StratCom as exhaustive and thorough as this. It will be the main source material for media historians and practitioners for years to come. Boudreau goes methodically, creatively, and with some impressive statistical back-up through the different phases of the ISAF operation. For the first eight years there was not even an agreed NATO definition of StratCom. Boudreau concluded that across the various efforts to define the term, let alone produce a doctrine, ‘the differences are more pronounced than the similarities’. This is an important part of his research, with ramifications for other campaigns.

Surveying all the military doctrines he could find from the UK, US, and NATO, he concludes that if there were a StratCom doctrine, it would be the only one with the word ‘strategic’ in its title. But what would such a doctrine look like? Boudreau delves into a familiar rabbit warren in ‘the unending quest for a grand unified theory of communications’. The approach favoured by those who want to stretch the term to its widest is to judge all actions (or inactions) for their likely effect on several audiences. ‘The information environment, after all, is defined by NATO and some national doctrine as comprising “the information itself, the individuals, organisations and systems that receive, process and convey the information, and the cognitive, virtual and physical space in which this occurs”.’¹⁷ Boudreau tartly concludes, ‘So then, *everything*.’

All terms in this discussion are contested, to the point that some in the military want no part of the burgeoning StratCom world. As Chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2009, Admiral Mike Mullen made a last attempt by the old warriors to drown the upstart at birth. Good military communications, he wrote, consisted of ‘having the

¹⁶ The author of this piece has visited Afghanistan every year since 1994 and reported the ISAF mission for the BBC.

¹⁷ Military Committee Policy on NATO Information Operations 422/5, 22 Jan 15, quoted by Boudreau on p. 253.

right intent up front and letting our actions speak for themselves'.¹⁸ His article did not deliver the coup de grace he hoped, but was influential in cementing US thinking that StratCom should not be a coordinating function, but was instead a 'process'. This meant that strategic communications was to be a deliberate part of the planning and execution of all military action, but not a separate professional career stream. Process-driven communications required a significant effort in planning teams that few nations possessed, so it was perhaps inevitable that only the US kept to this narrow definition.

In the UK, the other nation that Boudreau investigates in detail, a more pragmatic approach emerged, in which StratCom was to be a 'mindset', infusing all action (and indeed inaction). Kinetic action was messaging in itself. The deed and the word were bound together in a package that put the emphasis on 'strategic' rather than 'communication'.¹⁹

That most intellectual of the UK's brigade commanders, Andrew Mackay, was an advocate of this approach, writing of the 'singular focus' needed to get communications right. As part of his rigorous preparations for Helmand, he looked at the 'lessons identified' database from several recent campaigns in the British Army's Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre. He quickly concluded that if identified, lessons were certainly not applied. In Kosovo in 1999 the conclusion was that 'the UK Information Operations capability was inadequate'. At the start of Afghanistan in 2001, there was a complaint about under-resourcing, and 'much of the thinking and experience dates from World War II'; in 2002 again in Afghanistan, 'paucity of understanding of media operations'; in 2003 in Iraq, a lack of 'robust PsyOps capability...this operation demonstrated once again the paucity of media ops capability'.²⁰

Mackay said that during his tour in Helmand in 2008, *seven years into the campaign*, it had felt new to make influence central. He wanted to embed it in 'any political strategy which in turn provides the foundation for effective conduct of influence at tactical and operational levels'. It was also risky, as 'successful military careers are laid on hard power'. Prioritising communications effect may involve inaction, but that is not rewarded: there are no medals for nation-building, and there should be.

It is perhaps unfair to criticise Boudreau for not writing enough about the public affairs efforts of individual nations in his account of the ISAF mission, but they were the main conduit for most reporting of the conflict, and his account would have been better with more of an examination of their effectiveness, and how their work fed into the development of NATO doctrine.

¹⁸ Joint Forces Quarterly 55 (4th quarter 2009), quoted by Boudreau on p. 273.

¹⁹ Boudreau, p. 276.

²⁰ Mackay, p. 259.

The UK MOD was the most controlling of any—both in terms of access to the theatre, and in attempting to construct a relentlessly positive story-line. The most enduring media output of Mackay’s command, perhaps the best book about the conflict, *Helmand*, a haunting book of photographs of men and women at war by Robert Wilson, came about not through any farsighted StratCom thinking in the MOD, but through a chance encounter in London between Wilson and an enthusiastic amateur photographer in Mackay’s headquarters.²¹

There was no appetite in the MOD for visceral, challenging, three-dimensional human images like those taken by Wilson. Reporters were viewed with deep suspicion, not allowed to move even inside bases unescorted, and force-fed a sugar-coated narrative. One Kabul-based BBC cameraman witnessed different British units painting the same school in Helmand over a three-year period.²² It became even worse in the later years of the Tory/Liberal coalition, particularly under Philip Hammond as Defence Secretary, who would not allow even senior generals to talk off the record with reporters. During his time (2011–2014) it became increasingly useless for reporters to travel to Helmand, where interviews would be rehearsed and often there were two minders accompanying each reporter.

There were several problems with this media management. First, it had no authenticity, and the public knew it. They watched casualties mount, and joined in as an impromptu ritual developed in the Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett, on the route from the airport where all combat casualties returned. Second, the tight control meant that when things did start to improve after about 2009/10, when British troops were far denser, moving into a relatively small area in the centre of Helmand province (while thousands of US Marines filled the space further north), the MOD had no words for what was going on. More honesty about the challenges earlier on—actually letting impartial reporters report—would have made the story of the arc of the conflict easier to tell. It did get better, the surge worked, the lives of people in central Helmand improved, but with a messaging baseline written by Polyanna throughout, there was no way to get to this story.

It was a shameful dereliction of the democratic duty of those in authority to fail to permit proper scrutiny of an operation with high costs in money, but more importantly in the cost as young lives were lost or changed by serious injury. Video and stills of the moving memorial events at the flagpoles in the UK HQ in Lashkar Gah were banned. One freelance cameraman²³ succeeded in filming the talk by a platoon commander

21 Wilson, Robert, *Helmand*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).

22 Interview with the author

23 Vaughan Smith, owner of the Frontline Club

in the field after the death of one of his men—mourning the loss, then stiffening resolve to go out and fight the next day. It was a vivid and powerful window into loyalty, leadership, and comradeship, and the MOD press machine hated it. The cameraman secured the access as he was a former officer in the regiment involved and was trusted by them.

Ironically more honesty in this area would have reduced the image of soldiers as victims, which has infused much of the post-war narrative. The public can smell authenticity, and giving more access to simple reporting of the war—with its inevitable ups and downs—would have portrayed soldiers better as agents not victims.

Of other nations with large forces, the US gave better access, as did Canada and Italy. But the revelation that this was not a peacekeeping campaign but a worsening war led to increasing nervousness across NATO, and individual countries had no resilience in their communications teams to cope with this. The Netherlands—fielding a significant force abroad for the first time since the shame of Šrebrenica in 1995—were wary throughout. This was the only country where a government fell over the war in Afghanistan.

The coverage the UK MOD liked best were a series of films for Sky about squaddies by Ross Kemp—camp life and a bit of bang-bang, with rare glimpses of Afghans. Darker, more complex reports by the likes of Ben Anderson or Sean Langan, on life in Afghanistan not inside a British base, won little official approval. Journalists who wanted to spend more time in the field, living and reporting for longer periods than the standard two-to-three week embeds, were rebuffed.²⁴ The MOD attempted to ban one of the finest books about the war, *Dead Men Risen*, an account of the tour by the Welsh Guards in 2010 by Toby Harnden.²⁵ And they tried to ban *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, 1978-2012*,²⁶ by a brilliant Pashto-speaking former soldier, Mike Martin. Of course in both cases, the bans helped book sales. This attempt at management was clumsy and self-defeating. But even as scepticism of the war grew, support for the armed forces remained firm. It was as if people were saying ‘I don’t agree with what you do, but I support you anyway.’ This of course justified the high-handed and controlling approach adopted by the MOD: support for the armed forces was up, recruitment was up, where was the problem?

While these national narratives were playing out, back at NATO there was similar success in shoring up support for the alliance if not for the war. Boudreau’s criticisms

²⁴ The author made several attempts and failed every time.

²⁵ Harnden, Toby, *Dead Men Risen: The Welsh Guards and the Real Story of Britain’s War in Afghanistan*, (London: Quercus Books, 2011).

²⁶ Martin, Mike, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict, 1978–2012*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

of the ISAF communications operation are many and detailed, explaining the title of his work. But his view is that since the raw material available to communications experts was not promising, their operation was a success. The erosion of support for the war was not because it was being badly communicated, but because there was no clear and consistent political direction: there was a ‘fundamentally flawed political/command structure’. He concludes that the NATO StratCom operation was a success. A harsher analyst may say they were involved in a cover-up, failing to allow proper scrutiny. If information is not actually in line with operational effect, then it is malign, attempting to turn black white—whatever the honourable intent.

This was a profound moral failure. Had there been a fairer discussion of the challenges, there may have been more urgency to improve the situation, or radically change course. Instead, the narrative every year was for more of the same, ‘one last push’, despite the fact that, as Boudreau finds, ‘few individual nations could explain the mission themselves’. This political failure to engage the public of NATO nations in their largest out-of-area campaign felt rather casual. Unlike for example Kosovo, or clearly defined moral conflicts such as World War II, there was a lack of an overarching narrative for the Afghan campaign. What was the war about? Boudreau finds there were ‘as many narratives as nations’, a situation compounded by arguments within nations.²⁷

His positive gloss on the StratCom efforts is restricted to the Public Affairs efforts that principally pointed home to NATO troop-contributing nations. For Psychological Operations, and Information Operations—pointing inwards to Afghan audiences—the ‘outcomes are decidedly more mixed, if not a failure’.²⁸ One reason for this was the failure throughout the conflict to understand the Afghan context. Communicating with home audiences remains higher in Boudreau’s hierarchy of priorities than ‘understanding Afghan audiences’.²⁹ Logically, although Boudreau does not go on to this conclusion in his analysis, a better understanding of the human terrain would have made this a far more successful campaign from the beginning, having a better narrative to deliver to home audiences. So this was failure across the board—operationally, in Public Affairs pointing to the home audience, and other Information Operations pointing at Afghan audiences. In fairness to NATO, when Boudreau dug deep into databases, the NATO Military Committee did have a policy paper that talked of ‘sensitivity to local environment’. He records that this was not present in strategic communications policies released by US or UK forces.³⁰

27 Boudreau, p. 334.

28 Boudreau, p. 9.

29 Boudreau, p. 262.

30 Boudreau, p. 265.

Whatever lip service was paid in training for cultural values etc., failure to understand the history and context of the situation was a fundamental flaw of the war—going back to the beginning when the initial force that defeated the Taliban did not identify that many of those who emerged to replace them were not social democrats, but often the same corrupt warlords defeated by the Taliban five years previously. They were funded and empowered by the US-led force that arrived in 2001. This criticism is not hindsight, but was recognised at the time by many observers of Afghanistan.³¹ Instead of attempting to understand, the invasion force brought its own standards and moral codes, believing they were universal, although they may not be seen that way by others. (Indeed, far from being universal, some are as local as the tribal customs of southern Afghanistan.) They literally did not know what they were doing.

Apart from the crucial category error of not identifying the warlords who replaced the Taliban, which had substantial and lasting consequences, there was a failure of understanding and imagining Afghanistan, leading to blindness to the impact and consequences of Western actions even after the event. This has had significant impact across the board on the analysis of StratCom effect beyond Boudreau's book. For example, one of the leading US experts in strategic communications, Christopher Paul from the RAND Corporation, is concerned that adversaries have a StratCom advantage, because they do not have similar moral constraints as Western military forces. In a book that is often cited as one of the guidebooks to modern StratCom thinking, he writes 'In order to adhere to our values, societal norms, and laws [...] we as a nation choose to constrain our messaging and signalling activities.'³² He goes on to examine several areas where this supposed lack of constraint by adversaries causes problems. But looked at from the outside, almost all of these enemy actions exactly mirrored what ISAF troops did in Afghanistan. Adversary behaviour is said to include:

Intimidating journalists and controlling their access: By controlling which journalists are allowed into an area and by influencing what they are allowed to witness (or influencing what they safely feel they can report on), an adversary shapes the content of the news.

31 Loyn, David, *Butcher and Bolt*, (London: Windmill Books, 2009), p. 269; see also Christina Lamb's response to Question 115 by the Foreign Affairs Committee in its report 'Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan' on the UK Parliamentary Website: 'Seeing these warlords who had caused all this damage suddenly being paid huge amounts of money and being allowed to then become powerful again gave such a bad signal to ordinary Afghan people', 21 April 2009. <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmfaaff/302/9042102.htm>

32 Paul, Christopher, *Strategic Communication—Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates*, (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), p. 114.

There may not have been intimidation, but there were tight controls on access, although less from US forces than some others in ISAF. The UK MOD tightly controlled which journalists were allowed to report on the ground, and what they witnessed.³³ The tradeoff of independence for access, inherent in the process of embedding, is the same for conventional armies as for insurgents.

Filming and distributing records of operations: Many insurgent groups have adopted this tactic.

As indeed have all NATO armies, although it was not until 2008 that NATO TV emerged. The UK often sent their own combat camera teams into areas where they denied access to journalists. The material produced was prolific and of a high technical quality, and formed a significant part of the coverage of the conflict, particularly on news channels that had scarce resources to send their own teams. High-minded editorial decisions that decreed the material should only be used with a caption displaying its provenance were often ignored, particularly once material was in the library and became stock footage—Polyfilla to fill the gaps in later programmes.

This material was justifiable for internal communications, but should rarely have a place beyond that: it mimicked real reporting, but lacked the key elements of distance and impartiality that define journalism. Video deemed not helpful was not distributed.³⁴

Forging special or exclusive relationships with certain media: Adversaries often tip off reporters from sympathetic media outlets about operations, which allowed them to record the events, scoop other news agencies, and report operations in a manner favourable to the insurgents.

Once the word ‘insurgents’ is replaced by ‘ISAF’, every word in this paragraph precisely describes a modus operandi that was identical to the way the Taliban operated.

Providing basic services: Doing good works is a classic approach to winning friends and influencing people. Both insurgents and terrorist networks have adopted this strategy.

And in this space they competed directly with NATO, who had a strong desire to deliver ‘quick impact projects’ after military engagements, in particular by US troops through

33 During a three-week embed in 2008 in the UK-commanded Lashkar Gah base, I was blocked from talking to an Afghan intelligence analyst there on a military contract. This included a rule that I could not eat unsupervised in case I sought him out. I met him in London on my return.

34 On one occasion in Iraq in 2005, I wanted to use material from a military patrol. But it was not distributed because, in the words of the MOD minder ‘the people in the village were not smiling enough’ when British soldiers arrived.

the Commander's Emergency Response Programme.

Supporting youth and childhood education: Adversaries also integrate influence messages into school curricula.

As did NATO nations, with decidedly mixed results. Indeed, local mistrust of Western educational aspirations, particularly the view that girls were being indoctrinated to abandon their traditional place in society, was a significant recruiting asset for the Taliban.

Making cultural, religious or national appeals: Adversaries also draw on approaches that are unique to their culture, region, religion, or nation. These are particularly challenging to US influence efforts, as there is little opportunity to reply in kind.

Paul's weak response to this, the most useful of soft power approaches, is the most revealing part of his analysis. It would have been better if the US *had* gone into this area, in particular overcoming its fastidious prohibition on state support for religious activities. Small sums requested by the Afghan government to reform the country's madrassa system in 2007, giving it a more moderate tone, were not forthcoming, with the consequence that Saudi-funded reform programmes with a more extremist message had far more influence.

Engaging in disinformation: Adversaries sometimes fabricate events, or more effectively, lay down a fabrication atop a base of fact. Today's operating environment facilitates disinformation. Irregular adversaries worldwide often eschew uniforms, so after any engagement, there are casualties in civilian clothes.

Disinformation campaigns have played an inevitable role in warfare since the days of Sun Tzu. NATO armies do not disguise fighters as civilians, nor do they fabricate information, but they do use Information Operations designed to deceive. The problem is that they do not coordinate well with Public Affairs and PsyOps teams. Boudreau, an enthusiast for taking down the firewalls, tells of a commander who stood up at his morning meeting with a story he had heard that showed things were on the right track. The story turned out to have been planted in local media by his own IO team to sow confusion in the ranks of the Taliban. Another officer said 'Intel assets withheld information under the misguided thinking that "if you tell Public Affairs anything they'll tell media so we better keep this for ourselves"'.³⁵ Stories like this fueled the widespread view among journalists that Public Affairs Officers are kept out of the loop.

³⁵ Boudreau, p. 118.

The Taliban had no such niceties, no firewalls between IO and Public Affairs, and no scruples about fabrication. Thus, insurgents are competing in the same space as Western armies, in the battle for influence as for ground. And Paul explains why they are better at it. Unlike Western armies, they ‘recognize influence as a primary operational objective, and they integrate operations with related media environments as a matter of course’.³⁶

One other major problem was that, for much of the campaign, most US troops remained outside ISAF, deployed on Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), under a different command structure, with a commander sitting not in Kabul, but in Bagram, and answerable not to SACEUR at SHAPE in Mons, Belgium, but to the commander of CENTCOM in Tampa, Florida. Information fratricide did not quite adequately describe the challenges this posed. StratCom on this dual but related operation was mission impossible. One officer called the relationship ‘dangerously unclear’.³⁷ Journalists, whether local or international, did not know whom to call to check on reports of incidents, which significantly slowed response times, as the Public Affairs teams in each command checked accounts. And issues such as civilian casualties caused by OEF threatened to undermine the whole mission, as they were never dealt with in a timely or satisfactory manner. The ISAF commander was expected to be answerable for all foreign troops both by the Afghan system, from President Karzai downwards, and by the international civilian presence, from the UN downwards. But it was not until the second part of General David McKiernan’s tour in 2008 that the ISAF commander was double-hatted as commander of OEF as well.

McKiernan was a far better commander than he appears in Boudreau’s research. Modern counterinsurgency doctrine was being refined when he took over, and he had a clear population-centric approach as approved in the doctrine, and also crucially had the first one-star head of an ISAF StratCom operation, as well as setting up the first fully resourced civilian-casualty-tracking cell. But his reserved demeanour and his abrupt dismissal have tarnished his reputation. Instead, Boudreau emphasises the qualities of his successor, General Stanley McChrystal, the only commander to have a time period named for him in the chapter headings of the book. McChrystal certainly talked the talk, and produced comprehensive well-argued material. But the facts on the ground—in particular his inheritance of a troop surge that McKiernan had fought long and hard for—were far more important to 2009 being the year the war actually turned round in the right direction for the first time. Facts always trumped spin.

³⁶ Paul, p. 114.

³⁷ Boudreau, p. 7.

The Afghan campaign was fought in the most imperfect of conditions—a cautious coalition with improvised methods and too few resources, in the harshest of terrains against a misunderstood enemy who was constantly refreshed from a neighbouring safe haven. What reinforcements came were piecemeal, while throughout the long war there was mixed political support from politicians who knew little of military matters. Better ISAF technical superiority, in particular unchallenged mastery of the air, meant the Taliban lost nearly every military engagement. But lack of resources, incoherent intent, and a corrupt and unreliable partner, meant these daily tactical wins could not be converted into overall military success.

And against this background, NATO built a new apparatus for communications, in an environment where it became accepted wisdom that the Taliban won the information war on a daily basis.³⁸ Boudreau sees the transforming of the Internet since 2001 as a challenge that would have been hard to counter by the most agile of media operations. One key difference was to take insurgents out of a space they had previously sought in mainstream international media. In the mid-1990s, after re-establishing himself in eastern Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden did a series of interviews with Western media outlets. And as late as 2007, the BBC interviewed the Taliban's then military commander in Helmand. These were conscious efforts by insurgent actors to stake a wider claim to support. But soon this avenue became unnecessary. With the launch of Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006, and entry-level costs for any website sinking every year, insurgents no longer needed to explain themselves to conventional journalists: they could manage their own communications with no mediation. Neither ISAF nor the Afghan government developed the right mechanisms to confront this.

Afghanistan redefined the StratCom world more than any other event in NATO's history, although Boudreau believes that the words 'Strategic Communications' are not used in any NATO document until 2007, and it was not until 15 September 2008 that there was the first NATO attempt actually to define StratCom. It was not comprehensive, more 'a statement of responsibilities than an expression of policy, intent, or desired specific effect'. Following US lead, StratCom was to be seen as a process, lacking organisational capacity, leaving StratCom as 'a collection of related but separate functions that is expected to coordinate decisions effectively [...] not as a function to help shape the decision in the first place'. It was not for a further two years, in 2010, that what felt like an actual doctrine of StratCom, called a 'concept', emerged. This was a step in the right direction, noting that 'everything' had information implications.

³⁸ Boudreau found this was not universally believed by communications experts. One quote from a range on p. 354 of his report: 'Most media over-credited Taliban efforts simply because they had an internet presence. We beat the enemy on every channel.'

By 2011, this slippery-as-an-eel concept StratCom had become a mindset as well as a process, but not a coordinating function in NATO. The US fought against this to the last ditch, proposing the term ‘information synchronization’ in 2012, but that did not last long. And when Latvia stepped in as the host of the Centre of Excellence endorsed at the Newport summit in 2014, the coordinating function of StratCom, binding the various parts of information in any theatre, was formally recognised—although this was effectively how it was understood in the field by then. Subsequently the new approach was agreed by SHAPE in August 2017, in a policy statement defining StratCom as ‘the integration of communication capabilities and information staff function with other military activities, in order to understand and shape the information environment in support of NATO aims and objectives.’

Thus theory and policy caught up with practice, but Boudreau concludes that the lessons for future communications from ISAF, NATO’s longest war, have not been acted on. And this is similar to the post-Afghan experience of forces engaged in fighting. The old cliché about armies, that they are ‘always fighting the last war’, is not being followed. The last war was a complex campaign with considerable advances in a modern doctrine of counterinsurgency. But the military tends to revert to its comfort zone of training for armoured manoeuvre warfare. Faced by the unpredictable Russian threat, this may be a prudent course. But as US Defense Secretary Robert Gates wrote, after failing to secure a modest budget for counterinsurgency training, ‘the military’s approach seemed to be that if you train and equip to defeat big countries, you can defeat any lesser threat’.³⁹

Similarly NATO has yet to embed communications in the right place, at the front end of operational planning, a failure that could prove costly in the current information environment. Despite the shock of Ukraine, Crimea, and the hybrid warfare threats to NATO’s eastern flank, StratCom has remained an add-on. Boudreau shrewdly observes that ‘[t]he information environment is being shaped long before forces are deployed.’⁴⁰ But it is not countered. There remains a mismatch between NATO’s rapid reaction capability in hard power and its response in the information environment, where the enemy is far better coordinated: Boudreau points out that both Russia and ISIL/Daesh are strong precisely because for them ‘information effect becomes central to the operational effort.’⁴¹ Russia’s mastery of *maskirovka* over many decades is not well enough understood, but is a central feature of its success in Crimea and Ukraine. ‘The fog of war isn’t something which just happens—it’s something which can be manufactured’, wrote the radio producer Lucy Ash after travelling to Ukraine. ‘In this case the Western media were bamboozled, but the compliant Russian media has also

³⁹ Gates, Robert M., *Duty—Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, (London: W. H. Allen, 2015)

⁴⁰ Boudreau, p. 387.

⁴¹ Boudreau, p. 277.

worked hard to generate fog.⁴²

NATO does not lack capability to draw on in member countries. There are comprehensive and mature resources available in PsyOps, particularly from Romania and Poland, experienced teams across the Baltic nations, innovation in several NATO forces such as the UK's 77 Brigade, and French experiences gained from successful recent campaigns in northwest Africa. But there is inertia in the system that delays effective management and coordination of this capability to proactively deliver effect in the new information environment.

There is plenty of new thinking available. Learning lessons from his promotion of 'courageous restraint' in Afghanistan, using force with far more discrimination and regard to effect, the British General Nick Carter, now Chief of the General Staff, has been prominent in the redefinition of the modern battle space. He has developed the idea of Integrated Action as a foil to the Russian concept of Hybrid Warfare, among other new challenges. 'The franchise of ideas' is the new battleground for Carter. 'It's much harder now to distinguish between defeat and victory. It's much more about the perception of those who are involved.'⁴³

In Russia the task is easier because there is not the same fastidiousness between Public Affairs and PsyOps, or indeed between truth and lies. And that feels like the real danger posed by some Western politicians (including in the Trump administration) who muddy the information space with claims about fake news. 'The Russian strategy, both at home and abroad, is to say there is no such thing as truth',⁴⁴ according to journalist and filmmaker Peter Pomerantsev. When fake news becomes a strategy for those who are constant competitors for strategic space, if not actually formal enemies, we need better tools to deal with it. The history of ISAF is not a comforting one.

42 Ash, Lucy, 'How Russia outfoxes its enemies', The BBC News, 29 January 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-31020283>

43 'The Future of the British Army: How the Army must Change to Serve Britain in a Volatile World', Transcript of an event at Chatham House, 17 February 2015, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150217QBritishArmy.pdf

44 Ash, 'How Russia outfoxes its enemies'.

