You Can't Win If You Don't Play

Communication—Engage Early, Engage Often

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The Maginot Line, the legendary series of defenses built after World War One by the French to thwart any German invasion plan, seemed like a good idea at the time. That war had been characterized by trench fighting and static lines of defense that killed thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of soldiers on both sides. During World War Two, enemies—in this case the Germans—would hurl themselves futilely against the Maginot Line's impregnable series of fortifications. Meanwhile, the French Army would have time to mobilize and strike a decisive counterblow. This plan of "genius" was an utter failure. Daring, speed, combined arms, and a well-thought-out plan of attack flanked and defeated the Maginot Line—negating the expensive, static, and ultimately worthless fortification.

Like kinetic warfare, communication should be an offensive tool, not a static line of defense. By seizing the initiative, employing the combined-arms approach of visual information (VI) (photo and broadcast), print, social media, and nontraditional forms of communication, an organization can attack in depth, using multiple paths to produce nonkinetic results, prepping and shaping the battlefield to attain the desired effect. An organization that gains early control of the information battlespace can shape not only that domain but also many others and increase the odds of mission accomplishment.

The Importance of Communication

It is not possible to communicate nothing. As pointed out by Cliff Gilmore, a Marine Corps public affairs strategist, "everything one does communicates something to somebody, somewhere."[1] Gilmore postulates three truths of communicating. First, no one can lead without communicating. Second, not communicating is impossible. Third, people cannot communicate without influencing those in the communication process.[2] But *why* is communication important?

Strategist Colin Gray said that "war and peace is really a mind game."[3] This insightful comment explains why one must communicate before, during, and after conflict. According to Carl von Clausewitz, war is "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."[4] Essentially, it comes down to making people do what one wants them to do—by destroying the enemy's power of resistance, which Clausewitz defined as "*the total means at his disposal* and *the strength of his will*" (emphasis in original).[5]

The will of the people is the essence of warfare. Convincing the enemy that his fight is hopeless and that he would be better off agreeing to his opponent's demands or conforming to his ideals will result in victory. In other words, one can overcome the enemy psychologically. Indeed, Clausewitz declared that "psychological forces exert a decisive influence on the elements involved in war."[6] As has often been ar-

gued—and to paraphrase Rear Adm Alfred Thayer Mahan—lesser soldiers with good weapons can often be beaten by better / more highly motivated soldiers with lesser weapons.[7]

Communication is also an important way of motivating forces. Soldiers involved in a mission they believe in tend to be more mission- and service-focused. Max Boot notes that Army reenlistment rates during the Bosnia and Kosovo operations were the highest the Army had seen in years.[8] Psychological reinforcement helps make those forces stronger. A powerful army without the will to carry out its operations is almost useless. That same army, with moral and psychological strength behind it, can achieve great things.

Further complicating matters is the existence of multiple communication fronts, even battlefields. Different publics require different approaches. What works well with one may have the opposite effect on another. The trick lies in breaking the code of communicating effectively. For something so "normal" and important as communicating, it's easy to run the gamut of communication success—or failure.

The Good

The Berlin airlift offers one of the best examples of a good communication effort on multiple levels. During the early stages of that effort, Air Force leaders recognized the value of public relations, making sure to include writers and reporters in the action. Gen William Tunner described the situation as "terrific public relations potential. . . . This is the greatest opportunity we have ever had."[9] Although Tunner may have been speaking specifically about air transport, his comment applied equally to the US policy of supporting West Berlin against communist action. The airlift, with all of its attendant publicity, was "a disaster for Joseph Stalin and his foreign policies by providing graphic evidence of Soviet ruthlessness and inhumanity."[10] More importantly, it helped swing American public opinion towards an alliance with Western European nations—something not assured before the blockade and hugely successful airlift.[11]

As the airlift gathered acclaim for its humanity and international cooperation, the concurrent B-29 deployment to Europe proved equally important. The thinking was that the deployment of these theoretically nuclear-capable bombers would show the Soviets "that the West meant business."[12] Roger G. Miller observes that it represented a serious demonstration of American commitment, showing the United States' dedication to the defense of Western Europe.[13] That these planes were not actually the nuclear-capable version is immaterial because the bulk of the world's population—perhaps even the majority of Soviet leaders—did not know this. The deployment provides a good example of communicating with the adversary. In the late 1940s, there was no stronger message than the atomic bomb, so the public movement of B-29s would certainly attract attention.

The Bad

On 5 February 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell, testifying before Congress, made the case that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. At that time, Secretary Powell fully believed in the evidence he presented and argued for war with Iraq. This scenario became an example of an initially effective communication engagement that turned bad and damaged US credibility. During the invasion and subsequent occupation, the fact that no such weapons were found undermined both the United States' justification for the invasion and international/coalition support; it also harmed Powell's personal reputation, casting doubt on his integrity.[14] Powell was devastated: "I'm the one who presented it on behalf of the United States to the world, and [it] will always be a part of my record."[15] Building a coalition with inaccurate facts is a poor course of action.

The Ugly

The creation and announcement of Africa Command present a good example of an ugly communication effort. On 6 February 2007, the White House publicized the command's appearance in "a two-line . . .

announcement that said everything and nothing."[16] Dr. J. Peter Pham, director of the Atlantic Council's Michael S. Ansari Africa Center and a member of Africa Command's Senior Advisory Group from its inception, had his first inkling that something was amiss in the communication arena when African defense attachés began asking him for information. Rather than brief any of them, the United States had informed only attachés of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Africans eventually received a briefing—about 10 days later—but this failure to communicate had already proven a "costly mistake."[17]

Even worse was the dearth of information about the new command. Rather than having access to readily available answers (e.g., from public affairs guidance), African leaders and newspapers were left to their own devices in terms of gathering information about Africa Command. From the onset, an obvious lack of communication jeopardized the mission to create peace and stability. "No one was authorized to speak about the command," said Pham. "So even the simple questions weren't answered. This created an aura of mistrust that exists to this day."[18]

The "Hunker Down" or "Maginot" Method of Communication

> *Today's commanders understand that reactive public affairs provides no real added value toward the accomplishment of our missions. In order to be effective in our operations, we need the ability for our communications to be proactive or as we call it, "effects-based communication."*
>
> —Lt Gen William B. Caldwell IV
> Former spokesperson, Multi-National Force–Iraq

Sometimes the reactive mode is appropriate—even called for. In those cases, the standard "response to query" format supplies a pre-thought-out series of possible questions and answers for use if needed (e.g., before announcing a major operation or significant change to an organization). This tool is ready when the questions begin and offers to

individuals speaking for the organization a preapproved set of guidelines and key points upon which to base their answers.

Generally, classified information is not pushed to either the public or the media. In most cases, people understand this policy. Even though the actual classified information cannot—and should not—be released, one can still confirm the obvious and provide an answer.

What are the downsides to adopting a reactive course of action? For one, by doing so, one is also playing catch-up by default. Instead of leading with statements, thoughts, and positions, thereby establishing the narrative, a reactive team constantly responds to whatever the "adversary" says or does. If the Taliban declare that US forces have killed innocents, then America finds itself in a constant state of denial, trying to prove its innocence. Put more succinctly, "If you don't define the narrative, someone else will."[19] News cycles are dynamic and powerful. Whoever releases information first "scoops" the competition, forcing the less ambitious organization into a reactive posture of always struggling to defend itself and respond to what is said about it instead of expressing its own messages.

Just as importantly, such a defensive posture can easily diminish an organization's credibility. Instead of discussing all of the good things it does, it must use most of its energy, efforts, and communication to counter negative statements. By constantly playing catch-up and letting the opponent lead, the organization discusses negative aspects in the bulk of its messages, both incoming and outgoing, and further harms its reputation.

In its battles with Israel, Hamas recognizes the latter as the stronger military power and designs its strategy accordingly. If it cannot win a conflict militarily, then it wants have the upper hand in terms of its portrayal.[20] Thus, both Hamas and Israel strive to get their messages out first. By seizing the high ground in communication through quickly releasing information and communicating to its audiences, an organization automatically puts its adversary on the defensive.

Seizing the Offensive

The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding, go out to meet it.

—Thucydides

Communication works for those who work at it.

—John Powell, film score composer

Communication should be an intrinsic part of the battle plan, traceable to a leader's lines of operations. Engaging during mission analysis provides enough lead time to plan in parallel and synchronize key leadership-engagement opportunities through the media, broadcast release, and so forth. Too often, public affairs is relegated to an annex and added as an afterthought after all the planning is completed. That approach will not win a communication engagement and can prove detrimental to the overall plan as the organization struggles to play catch-up. Rather, communication must be part of the plan from conception through realization—but how?

Like reactive communication and the Maginot Line, the proactive method is akin to World War Two's famed blitzkrieg, which so handily defeated those static lines. Although the combined-arms approach is indeed a vital part of a proactive communication plan, it is much more than that. The blitzkrieg, also known as "lightning war," was fast and of short duration. Such tactics may work in some instances, but they are not the basis for a solid, comprehensive communication strategy, which must take a long-term approach.

Who makes a proactive communication strategy work? According to journalist Willy Stern, "General and flag officers must empower subordinate officers."[21] If senior leaders aren't talking, then junior leaders have no example to follow—to actually get out and talk to both their own people and their adversaries. Thus, it is crucial that senior leaders set the stage by communicating—often. They then serve as role mod-

els to the subordinates who won't feel as threatened by communicating. Nor will they worry about being in front of their leaders if those individuals lead from the front. Moreover, senior leadership must *empower* those junior leaders to communicate rather than follow a zero-defect mentality. Allowing these leaders to take a little risk encourages them, and others, to communicate.[22]

As Gen David Petraeus, former commander of the International Security Assistance Force, outlined in his counterinsurgency guidance, the vital nature of communication demands that one do it correctly:

> Be first with the truth. Beat the insurgents and malignant actors to the headlines. Preempt rumors. Get accurate information to the chain of command, to Afghan leaders, to the people, and to the press as soon as possible. Integrity is critical to this fight. Avoid spinning, and don't try to "dress up" an ugly situation. Acknowledge setbacks and failure, including civilian causalities, and then state how we'll respond and what we've learned.[23]

Openness and honesty are only part of the equation. Communication needs to be timely, accurate, and truthful. But how do modern communicators carry out their mission?

Make It Strategic

"You want a strategic, well thought out plan, where everything reinforces everything else."[24] To be truly strategic, one should plan in advance and persuade international partners to cooperate and help spread the narrative. Franklin D. Kramer, former assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, recommends answering five questions to start the plan: (1) What's the message? (2) Who are the audiences? (3) Who are the communicators? (4) What are the channels to communicate? (5) What is the desired end state?[25] Though great tools for planning a communication strategy, these questions need modification for today's and tomorrow's environment. Moreover, these steps are linear but planned in such a way that they become mutually reinforcing. Rather than figuring out the messages first, one should begin by defining the end state or intent of the project.

What Is the Intent and/or End State?

Normally, the communication intent or end state is based upon supporting the operational goal. The entire team must determine the best way to match the operational and communication goals to attain synergy; otherwise, people will be communicating just to hear themselves speak. As part of designing the overall battle plan, one should identify the desired end state and factor it into the communication plan. The plan needs to include an operational goal linked with the communication goal, a method of communicating, and—just as importantly—a public with whom to engage.

What's the Message?

Now that one knows what to talk about, the next question should address the messages that help further that aim. What is the communicator trying to convey? What is the goal of the operation supported by this communication? However, it's more than just what to say. It's with whom to communicate and how best to do so.

Who Are the Publics?

The term *public* is used here instead of *audience*, which receives information. Communicating seeks to engage in a dialogue with various publics. Importantly, this step determines with whom to communicate—something not as easy as it may seem. It is simple to pick "US military" or "adversary X" as a group, but one must keep in mind that multiple publics almost always exist. The fact that a message is directed at one does not imply that others won't receive it. For the purposes of basic planning, however, the key publics must be identified and prioritized. Who is the message intended to reach?

Who Are the Communicators?

Once the publics are defined, the next—and equally crucial—step involves determining the spokespeople. One must not limit them to the

standard US public affairs types but seek out who can and will make the greatest impact. Who has the most legitimacy? If, for example, the United States wants to communicate with a host nation's people, then why use American spokespeople if the local leadership is ready, willing, and able to communicate more effectively?

What Are the Channels to Communicate?

Just how will the message be conveyed? By means of television, radio, social media? It's not enough to say, "We'll tell them." One must identify a method of communication.

It is also important to consider whether to communicate in multiple languages. One can gain much by ensuring that messages to foreign nationals are conveyed in local languages and terms as opposed to a tongue that they may not understand. At this point, the combined-arms approach, discussed later in this article, comes in. Moreover, this is why it is vital to know what the goals and messages are. By coordinating these elements, one can work them together to best take advantage of the strengths of each communication medium. But what are these mediums? What weapons systems does the communicator have at his or her disposal?

Plan for Formal Assessments

Although not included with the five questions above, assessing how a communication effort is or is not progressing represents an essential part of any operation. Recurring assessments of communication plans allow commanders to determine if they have produced the intended effects. Moreover, they provide valuable feedback regarding the target publics and changes in behavior or attitude. Finally, assessments are worthless unless one learns from them and adapts. By assessing an operation and then adjusting, based on lessons learned, one can make the next round of communication efforts much more effective.

Using the Combined-Arms Approach to Attack in Depth

As discussed earlier, the method of communication represents one of the key elements to identify and then use. Today, more than ever, the United States is fortunate enough to have a vast network of communication tools at its disposal. No longer are communicators restricted to press conferences and releases. A truly savvy communicator can draw upon the power of combining public affairs assets in a synergistic manner to bring about truly powerful results. The combined-arms approach blends VI, print, social media, and nontraditional methods to create an in-depth effort to communicate with varied publics around the world.

US Air Forces Central Command (AFCENT) serves as a prime example. It runs a multifaceted communication shop out of its combined air operations center in Southwest Asia. The command's public affairs office (AFCENT/PA), led by Lt Col Sean McKenna at the time of this writing, communicates the Air Force and coalition story, but "the methods and audiences vary widely. Thus, each communication element must be keenly aware of the intended target of each AFCENT/PA product and understand how best to reach that particular audience. Consequently, most of our internal products (video, photos, and print stories produced by AFCENT/PA) are repackaged and direct-marketed to (largely stateside) media interested in the focus of the story."[26]

Visual Information (Photo/Video/Broadcast)

A picture is worth a thousand words

VI, used by the military to tell the story of its operations, has been around as long as humans have captured the moment in drawings and paintings or even sewing and weaving. Modern VI traces its roots to photographs of the American Civil War. Today, the military fields a large, highly skilled force of photographers and broadcasters in a network that spans the globe. Using still photography and video to document both combat and humanitarian operations, these teams are es-

sential to narrating in the visual medium. If the audience has only a minute, conveying the message with a photo or a 30-second video clip is much easier than doing so by almost any other means.

Take for example the US response to the recent disaster in Haiti. A large VI team deployed both to Haiti and to bases that supported operations. In this deployed role, team members captured images of relief efforts, heroism at all levels, and international cooperation—releasing them not only to the public but also, and more importantly, to the media. In one memorable case, Air Force broadcasters shot video of C-17s dropping food supplies to the Haitians, copying these images to DVDs and distributing them to various news agencies deployed to Haiti. This footage led the *CBS Evening News* that night, appearing online and in print form in multiple publications—including *Time Magazine*'s special Haiti edition—telling the story to an audience potentially numbering in the millions.[27] Nevertheless, VI does not stand alone. Photographers and broadcasters can and do work in close conjunction with print journalists.

Print

> *The printing press is the greatest weapon in the armory of the modern commander.*
>
> —T. E. Lawrence

Like VI, print has existed for as long as people have recorded events. Present-day commanders have a variety of means to communicate via print. The best known are newspapers—from the local base paper to the *New York Times* or the *Times of India*.

The most effective part of print communication is that it allows the writer to delve into more detail than in other mediums. The inclusion of greater background, depth, and content about any subject can prove especially useful in describing complicated situations or, just as usefully, working in conjunction with VI to offer a more comprehensive narrative.

True, portraying events by means of traditional print, such as newspapers or magazines, isn't nearly as fast as the visual realm. Many print publications are produced daily, which of course leads to lags in communicating news. However, that liability is offset by the fact that (1) print's detail can more than make up for a slight delays and (2) with the rise of the Internet, print has gone online and become much more timely, competing with the 24-hour televised news cycle.

Social Media

> *I never realized that when I signed up for my Facebook account that I was signing up to finish Mubarak.*
>
> —Hisham Kassem
> Egyptian journalist and publisher

In late 2012, Air Force staff sergeants Chris Pyles and Bradley Sisson, broadcasters working at the Defense Media Activity, created a new social media news program designed to "change the way the military communicates with its audiences."[28] Their social-media-only show, though still under development, has garnered much complimentary feedback in its limited run. Intended to deliver news of interest in a humorous manner and to combat the traditional "passive" method of receiving information by engaging the audience, the show makes for an interactive and engaging experience—a key attribute in today's communication environment, in which more than half of the US population gets its news from the Internet.[29] Furthermore, nearly one-third of Americans younger than 30 depend upon social media for news.[30] Additionally, for those concerned about the humorous aspects of a news program, one must note that even as far back as 2009, nearly a quarter of Americans aged 18–29 got their news from satirical sources such as the *Daily Show* or even *Saturday Night Live*.[31]

As Sergeant Sisson observes, "everyone has opinions and thoughts, so why not listen to them, talk to them? We are at an adolescent stage of social media communication, and things will change *very* quickly in the next couple of years on how audience members consume and in-

teract with their information."[32] A recent poll by George Washington University found that during the 2012 election, nearly two-thirds of voters believed that social media was at least on par with, if not of a higher quality than, traditional media outlets. The numbers were even higher for those under 25 years of age.[33]

But social media entails more than simply engaging with the American public. It has a wartime mission as well. Recently, *Yahoo! News* ran a story about a 26-year-old lieutenant in the Israel Defense Forces who is running a "virtual smackdown" against Hamas by using Facebook and Twitter.[34] His team's mission is to employ social media to fight the war of worldwide public perception, responding to Hamas posts, countering their claims, and showing the world the other side of the story. Doing so is vital, for as Michael Oren, Israel's ambassador to the United States, points out, "Hamas . . . has a media strategy. Its purpose is to portray Israel's unparalleled efforts to minimize civilian casualties in Gaza as indiscriminate firing at women and children, to pervert Israel's rightful acts of self-defense into war crimes."[35]

Nontraditional

> *I come here for a simple reason, on behalf of the president and myself, to say thank you. Thank you not only for saving thousands of lives. Thank you for making America look as good as we are.*
>
> —Vice President Joseph Biden, after the tsunami in Japan

> *We're putting the band back together.*
>
> —Jake Blues

Many nontraditional methods of communication are already in place, ranging from humanitarian operations to teaming with foreign militaries to military bands. One of the more innovative programs under way—the Navy's Africa Partnership Station, which began in 2007—seeks to "bring partnerships into action through cooperation among many different nations and organizations."[36] Perhaps not considered a

"communication" effort, communication is nevertheless occurring through this partnership, which permits the United States to engage with African publics in a personal manner.

Also not generally perceived as such, visits by hospital ships to remote parts of the world, as well as full-scale responses to disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, and nuclear incidents, are other communication events. Providing relief while at the same time engaging with multiple publics offers a prime opportunity to communicate—and, even more importantly, a chance to ensure that actions match words.

Often neglected in discussions of communication is the important role of military bands both at home station and deployed. In US Central Command, the Air Force Band "functions as an element of soft power in support of the US national security strategy, leveraging its unique access and reach to interact with audiences where a traditional U.S. military presence would be much more difficult to achieve."[37] These uses of the band, whether directed towards military morale and civilian education or utilized in a more general soft power role, can pay huge dividends.

In Central Command's area of responsibility, military communicators worked with US embassies to schedule and even fund

> targeted engagements in the communities. This happened on several occasions, including several Fourth of July weekend performances in two strategic, and rarely visited, CENTCOM priority nations—Egypt and Jordan. Force protection concerns were mitigated in coordination with US Embassy recommendations, and the AFCENT Band performed as an "American Band" in civilian clothing, using only the band name without specific reference to AFCENT. This allowed the band to positively represent the United States and help expand upon the . . . mission and US outreach efforts even where a military presence might be less acceptable. In this way, the band's performances created a cross-cultural bridge despite language barriers while accounting for security concerns—key in supporting the widest range of areas and countries of interest.[38]

Online Considerations

The cyber world combines all of these aspects. Whatever the communication element used to engage with a public initially, there exists the very real possibility that it could go viral and become a subject of interest to people all over the world. Once released, these products can explode into online discussions that can multiply their original communication effects, reaching out to many publics at the same time. This prospect requires that a proactive communication team actively monitor the social media battlespace and engage when needed—not in a duplicitous manner to steer the conversation but as legitimate representatives correcting the record. Maintaining credibility is key in any social media engagement.

For example, a communication team could post a print story to a blog or upload photos to a website. Then, as more people begin to read and view, online discussions take place. Either through ignorance or malfeasance, people could then post and attempt to steer the dialogue away from or counter to the communication team's objectives. Others might also attempt to take their messages viral, spreading their countermessages. A proactive team watches for these events, engages and steers the conversations back on track, or at least presents its views instead of letting others take control of the narrative. "Fire and forget" is not a good option in the online world.

Multiple Paths to Reach Desired Result

You talk the talk. Do you walk the walk?

—Animal Mother, *Full Metal Jacket*

Of course, all of these areas have their strengths and weaknesses. That's why the combined-arms approach to communication is so important. By using a combination of any or all of these communication tools, one can transmit messages to a variety of publics in a myriad of ways, thereby increasing the likelihood of their reception.

The first of two keys to this eventuality lies in ensuring that these efforts are coordinated. The actions of each element of the communication plan must back up the others: "What the Public Affairs office is saying, the J5 is planning and the J3 is doing."[39] By combining the various elements, engagement with multiple publics across a wide range of venues is not only likely but possible.

Second, and in many cases more importantly, one's actions must back up one's words. *If not*, the communication effort not only is wasted but also could actually result in a loss of credibility. One of the best examples of actions not matching either words or the truth involves former Iraqi information minister Mohammed Saeed al-Sahaf during Operation Iraqi Freedom. On numerous occasions, his claims about Iraqi resistance and US forces' lack of progress were grossly inaccurate—in one case even going so far as saying that the Iraqis were beating back the Americans, who were committing suicide by the hundreds, and that no Americans were in Baghdad. Meanwhile, reporters and television crews could clearly see two American tanks behind him. Because his words did not match Iraq's actions, he lost credibility and became a source of amusement, sparking multiple websites and comedians devoted to following and humorously reporting his claims. Meanwhile, this situation could not have helped the public's perception of the regime's legitimacy.[40]

Why Do This / Make the Effort?

We need to tell the factual story—good and bad—before others seed the media with disinformation and distortion, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story—only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops.

—Former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

The pen is mightier than the sword.

—Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Communication happens. There is no changing that fact. One makes the effort of creating and executing a proactive communication strategy in order to influence and direct conversations with audiences. This issue is not intrinsic to the military.

Domino's Pizza did just that in a recent advertising campaign. Realizing that the public viewed its pizza as a quickly delivered but not overly tasty meal, Domino's went on the offensive. Instead of hunkering down and just "dealing" with the issue—and the possibility of losing money and customers—the company opened a dialogue with the public by launching a "campaign acknowledging that their pizza quality suffered and putting the fans in front of the charge to fix it."[41] This is a classic example of engaging with members of the public, involving them, and turning a potential negative into a positive.

What does Domino's have to do with the military and its communication goals? Everything. Just as engaging with the public is fundamental to the continued success of a for-profit enterprise, so is engagement—communication—key to military operations. Communication is vital leading up to, during, and supporting those operations—all aspects. Sharon Hobson, a Canadian defense reporter, commented that the Canadian Navy is doing itself a disservice by its lack of communication, even as it embarks on an expensive new shipbuilding plan: "How is the Navy going to help people understand why this kind of expenditure is necessary in a time of economic restraint?"[42] Communicating its messages is in the best interest of any organization.

As Kenneth Allard notes in his book *Warheads: Cable News and the Fog of War*,

> This was the practical side of "information operations," the understanding that information had become so fundamental to warfare that to neglect it like a toddler left unattended beside a busy highway was to guarantee that disaster had also not been left to chance. Instead what the Soviets had once called "active measures" were called for, not just to "spin" a story but to shape the larger environment where the whole yarn would be received, believed, and acted upon.[43]

Clausewitz said that "military activity is never directed against material force alone; it is always aimed simultaneously at the moral forces which give it life."[44] He goes on to discuss the three elements that comprise the trinity of war: the people, the commander and army, and the government. Although the three must work together, it is people with "the passions that are to be kindled in war" that can be manipulated.[45]

Another common saying is that the enemy gets a vote. Keeping that in mind, why not influence that vote? As mentioned above, war is a mind game; if one can convince the adversary to choose a course of action more in line with one's own plan, then all the better.

Willy Stern asserts that "every first-rate commander knows how to cultivate the media, and use the press to his (or her) advantage."[46] Conversely, the inability of a commander or the professional communicator to value and cultivate that relationship can easily lead to ceding the battlefield to the adversary. Unfortunately, the United States has a culture of playing it safe regarding communication, often with negative results: "Al Queda [*sic*] is very sophisticated at telling its story. The American military is not."[47] Finally, as defense writer Otto Kreisher observes, "People are more than willing to point out your failures. Why not take every opportunity to highlight your success?"[48]

Conclusion

When you fight an action . . . in our modern media world, you are fighting it on television! It is an extraordinary thing.

—Former Prime Minister Tony Blair

I say to you: that we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.

—Ayman al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

You can't win the media battle if you don't play.

—Willy Stern

The United States possesses vast military might. However, to be successful in its endeavors, it must also synchronize the timeliness of explanations of its actions—from budget plans to coalition operations of all shapes and sizes. This is especially true in military combat operations. As former governor Mitt Romney said during one presidential debate in 2012, "We can't kill our way out of this mess."[49] Today's environment requires a more nuanced approach in order to build support and further one's aims.

No longer can the United States afford to hunker down in a defensive stance when it comes to communicating. Today's environment demands a proactive communication effort—be it for combat operations, humanitarian relief, or informing the American public. Moreover, the goal of communicating is to engage in a dialogue; it's not a one-way deal. One doesn't talk *at* an audience; rather, one talks *with* publics.

Keeping this in mind, creating *and using* a strategic communication plan can make the United States' efforts much more effective on multiple levels. Using communication as an offensive tool rather than a defense countermeasure, while employing the combined arms approach, will enable the United States to better meet its objectives and further its narrative with multiple publics—not only prepping the battlefield but also continuing support throughout the operation and well after. In the immortal words of *Star Trek*'s Capt Jean-Luc Picard, "Engage!" ✪

Notes

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