Information Warfare

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Leadership often means the difference between victory and defeat. Britain would have lost World War II without Winston Churchill. Germany probably lost the war because Adolf Hitler’s early diplomatic victories gave way to blunder after blunder, leadership mistakes compounded by a failure to organize a cohesive general staff, and often-freewheeling, tactically talented generals fearful of disclosing to Hitler what they really thought. That the American North was led by Abraham Lincoln and the South by Jefferson Davis clearly affected the outcome of the American Civil War and the future of U.S. history. President Dwight Eisenhower’s knowledge of national security quashed recommendations on several occasions to employ nuclear weapons. Whatever the merits of the 2003 Iraq War, it gave rise to the emergence of a new generation of highly talented U.S. officers who might not otherwise have had the opportunity to become recognized; they made a difference in that conflict.

History offers many illustrations of why and how leadership matters. Napoleon’s admirers thought of him as a hero, able to “seize hold of opinions, of opportunities, and of fortune.” Napoleon’s close collaborator, Claude-Francois de Meneval, declared that the emperor “took not only the initiative in thought, but also attended personally to the detail of every piece of business.” Armand-Augustin-Louis de Caulaincourt, who served as Napoleon’s ambassador to Russia, characterized his leadership as the product of applying “all his faculties, all his attention to the action or discussion of the moment,” a keen edge, as “few people are entirely absorbed by one thought or one action at one moment.”

Napoleon was no shrinking violet about himself. “In war men are nothing, it is one man who is all,” he declared. Napoleon liked to rant about the moral force of a disciplined army in which one soldier could overcome three. He claimed that the secret of success lay in the personal touch between officers and their troops. He had a point, although Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and George Patton offer strong examples.

Today, we do not need heroes of the moment—the ideal to which French revolutionaries aspired—or the Roman ideal of “great men.” We need smart, disciplined, organized leadership that motivates, encourages, and inspires leadership from below.
Great leaders motivate by providing a role model. They articulate and personify a cause and why that cause matters; this inspires people to follow. Loyalty to leaders and the ability and energy of a leader matter. However, there is a reason that causes more often spark revolutions, rather than the personal ambitions or personalities of those who lead revolutions.

An excellent study of the Fallujah battles by the Joint Special Operations University illustrates the difference between the Napoleonic approach to strategic thinking and the excellence of U.S. military leadership—which relied on strong leadership from the top, but team collaboration—at its best.

**Leadership Models**

In forging an effective campaign team in politics, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and his senior counselor, Joe Gaylord, set forth a leadership model rooted in four characteristics. Their model also applies to information warfare. These characteristics look beyond the capacity of those in a hierarchical organization, such as the military, to pull rank. Such behavior is a poor motivator. The best campaign leaders “listen, learn, help and lead.” In *Campaign Solutions*, Gaylord defined what those notions mean. The following principles draw on his thinking, which Gingrich also preached:

**Listen.** Ask questions, listen to what people say, and understand and appreciate why they are saying it. The worst mistake you can make is to kowtow to conventional wisdom, or presume that solutions that worked in the last campaign or war will work in the current one.

**Learn.** Check what you hear for accuracy and meaning, whether the source is a so-called expert or insider, a broadcast or print story, a discussion with an interested stakeholder, or some other source. Always consider the implications and options of what you learn. This book discusses the impact of rumor later, but it is important to understand how powerful rumor can be in molding or shaping attitudes and opinions. Rumor, often derived from street talk or perhaps undependable human intelligence (HUMINT) or signals intelligence (SIGINT), is inherently questionable, but this does not render it valueless.

During the Iraq War, a classified email newsletter, *The Baghdad Mosquito*, distributed to an elite group of military officers and policy planners provided interesting insights collected from a weekly panel of prominent Iraqi locals who reported to the Coalition Provisional Authority on a variety of social, economic, and political issues. It was useful to read the language in which issues were discussed as well as to pick up possible intelligence in formulating strategies and the language employed in delivering themes and messages.

Blogger Rusty Barber noted that rumors reported at one point included:

- “Ice vendors in Baghdad are selling ice blocks made of contaminated water.”
- “Iraqis now call the current Baghdad security ‘Enforcing the Terrorism.’”
- “Citizens, especially Sunnis, cannot go to Sadr City to pick up their ration card items as it is too dangerous of a journey. This was purposely done so that their rations can be sold by individuals who will funnel funds to the Mahdi Army.”

Obviously, more concrete intelligence derived from HUMINT or cyber tools, and the analysis derived from those, factor into assessments on the accuracy of information.
General McChrystal described in detail the efforts of Task Force 714 in evaluating intelligence that enabled Coalition forces to track down and eliminate terrorist Abu Musab al Zarqawi.11

Help. Leadership requires the articulation of vision and offering direction. It is about encouraging a communication team to think unconventionally and make clear that all ideas are welcome. Any indication that an idea or suggestion would be scoffed at, especially by a higher-ranking authority, has a chilling effect. No team can afford that; in military and government hierarchies, in particular, that is a sensitive issue. A mid-level State Department official once stated to the author that putting forth a major idea that is rejected could impair prospects for promotion. That attitude is precisely the mindset that kills creative thinking.

Lead. Leading follows listening, learning, and helping. Gaylord correctly states that you need to say to the team: “Here’s my vision, my suggested strategy, projects, and tactics. But what do you think? So, then the cycle of listen-learn-help-lead begins again.”12

Leadership Traps to Avoid

Effective leadership requires avoiding four major traps.

1. Thin skin. In any large or small organization, people will have different ideas. Do not be afraid of criticism. Those who devise plans easily lose objectivity about them. Criticism should be welcomed, evaluated, and factored into planning, especially when it comes from members of the same strategy team.

2. Big head. Self-confidence inspires others to see you as a strong leader. Arrogance suggests that you are self-centered. Gaylord puts it this way: “If you hear that you are coming across as too full of yourself, it’s time for a reality check. Ask friends or staff why you are perceived that way. Or maybe it’s just something in your manner that can be easily corrected.”13

3. Weak vision. An effective communication strategy requires knowing and understanding what constitutes success and forging a vision that can achieve it. The United States’ early efforts in Iraq after toppling Saddam and during much of the Afghanistan conflict have drawn wide criticism for lacking a clear vision of what U.S. forces wanted to achieve. No communication strategy can effectively support unclear policy decisions about mission or the commander’s intent.

4. Lack of courage. You must be able to challenge or offer alternatives to conventional wisdom or higher authority’s ideas. The best communication strategies can provoke vicious turf battles or cause conflict with other commanders or authorities who see their own ideas undercut, diminished, or challenged.

In Iraq, Paul Bremer banned all but the lowest members of Saddam’s Baath Party from holding government jobs and disbanded the Iraqi Army just as U.S. officers had painstakingly succeeded in setting the stage to reassemble it.14 It took a strong leader like General David Petraeus to stand Bremer down, as he persuaded him that the order banning Baathists—which would even cover teachers and throw tens of thousands of Iraqis out of work—would shatter the efforts and progress Petraeus and his team were making in Mosul.

Tact and discretion are hallmarks of dealing with high authorities. But the death knell for forging and executing any strategy is succumbing to
the fear of challenging conventional wisdom or doctrine. Figure out how to adroitly promote your ideas and persuade relevant authorities to buy into them.

**Turf Among Leaders**
Protection of turf often raises concerns and obstructs the exchange and flow of information. In Iraq, General McChrystal reported, a disconnect between senders and receivers presented serious issues in gaining a clear picture of the enemy and inspired internal distrust within our own forces. Outstations rarely saw the benefits of intelligence collected, while analysts lacked context to evaluate it. Breaking down walls of mistrust and ensuring that information and analysis is shared is critical for communication strategy, as well as broader military, political, and diplomatic strategy. The fusion of efforts by the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Defense Intelligence Agency, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and other elements of the military was essential to the remarkable success that his forces achieved.

**Integrate Communication Strategy with Kinetic Strategy**
As noted earlier, you must align communication and kinetic strategies. The failure to integrate information strategies properly into the assault on Fallujah—a failure attributable to Lieutenant General Sanchez and Paul Bremer—is a perfect example of this precept. Let us examine the First Battle of Fallujah. Triggered by the murder of four U.S. contractors in the city, there followed two battles for the city, in April and November 2004. The U.S. Marine-led attack on the city was instigated to signal resolve. The first battle provided propaganda victory to the insurgents and, as Dr. Carter Malkasian of the Center for Naval Analyses wrote, “renders a cautionary lesson on using military force to signal resolve in an unconventional conflict.”

One reason that Operation Eagle Claw, aimed at rescuing hostages, failed in Iran was competition among Services that led to the establishment of the U.S. Special Operations Command to ensure cohesion. U.S. Africa Command and U.S. Southern Command represent efforts to integrate civilian and military leadership.

An ongoing struggle persists within the Department of Defense between the public affairs officers, who incorrectly perceive themselves as the stewards of communication and apply their espoused notion of “informing but not influencing” inconsistently, and the psychological operations (or, military information support operations) personnel over whether or where to draw the line between their activities. It is a draining, useless debate. Both should aim to influence target audiences.

Similarly, DOD often takes the position that the State Department holds the lead on communication strategy. But the State Department has shown time and again its reluctance to engage target audiences outside the category of statecraft and public diplomacy, through which foreign publics are engaged, informed, and influenced. This reluctance stems partly from the cultural hesitations within that department; it is also partly due to resources. These issues need to be worked out for any strategy that raises issues of turf.
Endnotes

1. See Naveh, In Pursuit of Military Excellence, chapter 4. Naveh’s searing exposition of German strategy, operations, and tactics portrays famous generals such as Heinz W. Guderian and Erwin Rommel as tactically brilliant but strategically flawed. Historian Richard Overy points out that Hitler did not form a general staff as that notion is generally understood, but acted as his own chief of staff—a decision that Overy argues proved disastrous. See Richard Overy, Why the Allies Won (London: W. W. Norton, 1997).


7. See Jack Weatherford, Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World (New York: Crown, 2004). Khan was a political and military genius who inspired extraordinary affection and loyalty. Napoleon was amazingly erratic. He was on his game at Austerlitz and Friedland but off it amid fiascos like Waterloo, Leipzig, and the entire invasion of Russia. Napoleon’s flaws became evident when he commanded larger armies, whose movements he was unable to properly control and maneuver. It bears noting that he won Marengo thanks to Gen Louis Desaix and Jena thanks to Louis-Nicolas Davout, two of his greatest commanders.


12. Gaylord, Campaign Solutions, 8.

13. Gaylord, Campaign Solutions, 10.

14. Kaplan, The Insurgents, 74; and Packer, Assassin’s Gate, 190–95.

15. McChrystal, My Share of the Task, 105–6, 117, 149.

16. See also Christopher J. Lamb and Evan Munsing, Secret Weapon: High-value Target Teams as an Organizational Innovation (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2011). Lamb and Munsing describe how cross-agency efforts were vital to success and the need for the kind of fusion that McChrystal has also written about. British journalist Mark Urban reported in Task Force Black that the JSOC operations killed approximately 3,000 insurgents and captured between 8,000 and 9,000. British Special Forces captured or killed 3,500. He notes: “Dead men’s shoes are quickly filled. What happened in Iraq was very different. By insisting that each of his five or six task forces carry out multiple take-downs every night, McChrystal set a pace of operations that probably removed from the streets (by arrest or elimination) most of the membership of AQI.” Urban, Task Force Black, 270–71.

17. Malkasian, “Signalizing Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah.” Malkasian served as an advisor to I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) in Iraq from February 2004 to February 2005. The discussion on the history of the first battle for Fallujah draws on his commentary. He points out that in Vietnam, Viet Cong successes in Long An enabled the Communists to execute propaganda that brought new people into the movement. He argues that in 2000, the hasty withdrawal from Lebanon of Israeli Defense Forces may have caused Palestinians to perceive violence as a useful means to attain their aims. Malkasian, “Signalizing Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah,” 425–26. See also Race, War Comes to Long An, 191; and Bloom, Dying to Kill, 125.