Information Warfare

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This chapter builds on the first five and provides a checklist of the key steps you should consider in building an effective strategic communication plan. The author’s political campaign colleague, Joseph Gaylord, whom the American Association of Political Consultants has named a campaign manager of the year and who was a founder of the National Republican Congressional Committee’s college for candidates and campaign managers, merits credit for shaping political consulting industry thinking on this topic.

Twenty-four Characteristics of a Communication Campaign Plan

1. **Written down.** Plans that are too complicated lead to miscommunication and confusion. Writing down a plan instills disciplined, clear thinking. You can revise, enhance, or deviate from it operationally, but a written plan provides a roadmap for prudent thinking. A written plan can be distributed to necessary parties to ensure they understand the commander’s intent and operational details. It helps avoid confusion or misunderstanding. You can refer to it again and again and reduce the risk of word-of-mouth misinterpretations, enhancements, or oversimplification.

2. **Engages with stakeholders.** Once a plan is written down and distributed, commanders at relevant levels should visit with the operators to make certain they understand, to answer questions, and to entertain suggestions. Input from stakeholders maximizes the opportunity to spot and correct flaws, gain new perspectives, learn new options, and improve the plan.

3. **Oriented toward winning.** General George S. Patton is reputed to have declared: “America loves a winner and will not tolerate a loser. This is why America has never, and will never, lose a war.” Vince Lombardi put it this way: “Winning is not a sometime thing; it’s an all time thing. You don’t
win once in a while, you don’t do things right once in a while, you do them right all the time. Winning is a habit. Unfortunately, so is losing.” A winning attitude inspires everyone around you. If you do not play to win, do not play. A strategy must exude that attitude and always aim to succeed.

4. **Realistic.** There is no point in executing a strategy that sets unrealistic goals. You need to assess the strategic situation objectively, examine the strengths and weaknesses of your narrative, measure how they stack up against those of the adversary, and devise an actionable, realistic plan. Plans that are confusing, unclear, too broad, untimely, or impossible to carry out become self-defeating. Plans need to be as simple as possible. Using a football analogy, Vince Lombardi won acclaim for an approach to coaching that focused on top-notch execution of what he termed the *fundamentals* in coaching, starting with making sure his players got fit and mastered the art of blocking and tackling. Campaigns that employ too many contingencies and too many elements risk failure through lack of coordination, integration, and cohesion.

5. **Divisible, with assigned responsibilities.** Information warfare plans often involve many moving pieces at many levels. The Fallujah battles offer a good example. Those involved in information operations and public affairs had to coordinate closely in communicating a narrative, story, themes, and messages to a broad range of Iraqi citizens—insiders and outsiders to politics and the military—local media, the international media, the international community, to those involved in the operations, and to Coalition forces generally. You have to divide the tasks, assign them with clear lines of responsibility for performance and clear lines of reporting, and ensure accountability.

6. **Measurable to ensure progress.** As much as possible, it is essential to know what parts of a plan are working, with whom, when, and why. Gaining that information enables you to either persevere with the current plan or improve on it with necessary adjustments to ensure success. Detecting problems enables you, at a minimum, to know what deficiencies are in your plan and hopefully solve them.

In Iraq, Coalition leaders terminated the First Battle of Fallujah amid pressure levied by Iraqi political leaders and unfavorable media. They calculated that the cost of military victory outweighed the benefits, and as a result insurgents scored an enormous propaganda victory. Under new leadership later in 2004, the Coalition studied what had gone wrong in April and applied those lessons to win the second battle of Fallujah in November.

The presidential election in 2012 offers an appropriate analogy. Voters responded positively to candidate Mitt Romney’s performance in the first debate and poorly to incumbent Barack Obama. Obama went into the debate without making a serious effort to properly prepare. Obama is an extremely intelligent individual, but it strikes this author that he fell victim to conceit and underestimated his opponent. He did not articulate his ideas in a compelling or clear manner and did not seem presidential, and it appeared as though the debate was a nuisance to him.
President George H. W. Bush made a similar mistake in debating candidate William J. “Bill” Clinton in 1992 when he betrayed ignorance about the price of milk and kept looking at his watch. The message he conveyed was that he was too important to bother with explaining his record, views, or vision to voters. Bush was commonly regarded as one of the most gracious and talented individuals to occupy the Oval Office, but the president’s behavior during this debate turned off voters.

In 2012, Obama’s savvy team recognized that he needed to do better in the next two debates. They did not let hubris further obstruct the execution of the campaign. That held true for the candidate, as well. His team objectively assessed what Obama needed to do to improve and worked closely with him to correct the flaws evident during the first debate. Although some on his team maintained after the election that the outcome was never in doubt, the president took no chances. His preparation for the second and third debates was intensive, and he more than held his own with Romney in them.

7. Shared with and distributed to relevant parties so everyone is on the same page.
The failure to share key information with stakeholders and decision makers can turn success into a debacle. It produces gaps in information critical for decision making. It leaves unanswered key questions that make all the difference in whether or how an operation is carried out.

Consider Operation Eagle Claw, the failed Iranian hostage rescue attempt in 1980. It illustrates the consequences when the plan is not shared with every party involved and the right questions are not asked—or answers by those in the know are withheld in deference to the military hierarchy of decision making. This operation lacked unified command and an integrated mission rehearsal. The operational plan called for six helicopters. Lieutenant General Charles H. Pitman did the final briefing for Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General David C. Jones. Pitman revealed years later that Jones had failed to ask whether the mission could be carried out with only five helicopters. Pitman failed to volunteer that information. That prevented Jones from communicating it to the White House and it proved a missing piece of information that governed whether the White House gave the green light or aborted the mission.

The author interviewed former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski about what the White House knew about the operational plan. Brzezinski confirmed that he had not known the mission required only five helicopters. Although at the time of the interview and reflecting back on events, he was philosophical, at the time of the incident he had made clear that he would have urged President James E. “Jimmy” Carter to greenlight the rescue had there been a basis for doing so. There was one; he just did not know about it.

Ironically—here is a mystery—both the Delta Force commander, Army Colonel Charles A. Beckwith, and the Desert One commander, Air Force Colonel James H. Kyle, seemed unaware that the mission could be carried out, in Pitman’s view, with just five helicopters. Pitman worked with the helicopter teams and in interviews with the author,
he was adamant that the rescue attempt using only five helicopters had been successfully rehearsed. This fact was never disclosed to the White House by either Jones or Defense Secretary Harold Brown. The White House deferred to Beckwith, who decided to abort the mission. The issue is not whether Beckwith made the correct decision; it is the fact that vital information relevant to how decision makers viewed their options was not shared with them at a critical point.

Perhaps Beckwith made the right call. That debate is for others to resolve. But hypothetically, presuming the mission had gone ahead and succeeded, a successful hostage rescue might have changed the outcome of the 1980 presidential election. It may have affected whether U.S. Special Operations Command, created in the wake of the operation’s failure, was established. Sharing information with those who matter makes a decisive difference.

8. Ensure unity of command and control. In the military, unity of command means that forces fall under one responsible commander who has the authority to direct all forces in pursuit of a unified purpose. In the words of one soldier, “one mission, one boss.” The principles of unity of command are well known. It produces a better relationship between superiors and subordinates; clear authority, responsibility, and accountability; reduces duplication of work; facilitates rapid decision making; fosters good discipline; encourages teamwork; boosts morale and inspires a positive attitude; and leads to higher productivity.

It seems common sense, but Iraq and Afghanistan illustrate where command and control was not unified. In Iraq, the ground commander, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, did not get on with Coalition Provisional Authority chief Paul Bremer. No one is willing to state exactly who empowered Bremer to do what. Not surprisingly, Coalition efforts between military and civilian officials were poorly coordinated and did not work well.

One reason that the Iraq surge worked well was that General David Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker joined forces and worked cohesively as a team to provide coordinated leadership.

In Afghanistan, Ambassador Karl Eikenberry was generally at odds with military commanders. Journalists Mark Mazzetti and Rajiv Chandrasekaran reported strong differences between White House officials and Afghanistan-Pakistan envoy Richard Holbrooke. USAID had different ideas about civil reconstruction in Afghanistan than other officials. The U.S. Marines maintained control over their forces independent of General McChrystal. Chandrasekaran reported that Marine independence posed challenges in mounting a coordinated, winning effort in Afghanistan, although on-the-ground experts such as Jack Guy reported that he was unaware of Marines ever responding negatively to McChrystal, a highly admired and respected commander whose work in Iraq and the results he and his team produced are legendary.

Eagle Claw was a mess because it lacked unity of command, to which the response afterwards—a good response—was the establishment of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) to cut through
inter-Service issues and assure unity of command for special operations. Failure to mount a cohesive effort for much of the time has been a challenge for the United States in Afghanistan.

9. Integrated with relevant command authorities. This is a corollary to the above precept. Lack of cohesion is self-defeating at all levels.

10. Forward-thinking and avoids fighting the preceding campaign. The changes that are sweeping the world are effecting a massive transformation. Terrorism and violent actors have become horizontally dispersed over distributed networks. Cyber capabilities, such as those employed in Iraq by Task Force 145 to track down Zarqawi and in Afghanistan to find and eliminate bin Laden, have transformed the capacities for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), and the way warfare is conducted. The emergence of adversarial networks has mandated that U.S. forces develop their own networks, because it takes a network to beat one. The strategy to deal with those foes differed from the strategy used in Fallujah, although all efforts employed some of the same capabilities.

Future conflicts are likely to be asymmetrical, not set battles between two armies on a conventional battlefield. They will be, as British general Rupert Smith astutely has written, wars among people. 

In the future operating terrain, special operations forces (SOF) are shifting, as Admiral William H. McRaven (Ret) has stated, away from direct missions to focus on indirect missions. Strategies need to account for the new operating terrain and the challenges that new adversaries—or existing ones such as al-Qaeda—will present.

Strategies and tactics need to keep pace with how the world is changing and how technology is evolving. World War I arguably offered the most dramatic example of leadership that failed to keep pace with changing technology. Millions of soldiers died or were wounded when nineteenth-century tactics confronted twentieth-century weapons.

11. Defines the keys to success. Communication strategy requires the development of a narrative, story, themes, and messages. These will be addressed below. They require understanding what factors provide the cutting edge that spells success, such as

- Integrating narrative, story, themes, and messages into the variables that frame successful information warfare.
- Identifying the key points that strike a responsive chord with target audiences.
- Recognizing that audiences may not be a single, unified target. They may consist, as Colonel Thomas X. Hammes wrote, “of fragmented interest groups that shift sides depending on how a campaign affects their issues.”
- Identifying the most credible messengers.
- Identifying the most credible channels of communication.
- Anticipating how an adversary will articulate messages advocating its ideas while discrediting yours.
- Anticipating and preparing to rebut adversary actions/responses.
• Anticipating media coverage and how to address it. Hammes has described how, during the First Intifada in 1987, the Palestinians relied on the power of the international media to neutralize Israel’s military power and political process.\textsuperscript{16}
• Recognizing that an organization’s or nation’s image can be shifted.\textsuperscript{17}
• Recognizing that different sides may see a different message, even witnessing the same dynamics.\textsuperscript{18}
• Understanding and allocating available resources to ensure the success of your communication strategy.
• Forging a clear plan that lays out your communication strategy.
• Defining metrics to evaluate success or failure.
• Recognizing that success does not require achieving 100 percent of your goals. A chance at 51 percent success may be all you can achieve, and it may be highly desirable.\textsuperscript{19}

12. Defines team management and how the plan will be implemented. Effective communication strategy requires cohesive efforts by a team to achieve a clearly defined set of objectives. Identify:
• Who is on the team?
• Who is in charge of/leads the team?
• Who does the team leader report to, how, and when?
• What are they going to do; what are their responsibilities?
• Who will give instructions to various members of the team?
• Who will supervise what each team member does?
• How will performance be monitored?
• How will corrections or changes to strategy be made?
• How will communication within the team be facilitated?
• What timeline governs execution of the plan?
• How will the plan be integrated with efforts by other parties outside the team?
• How will monitoring be accomplished, and by whom?
• How will metrics be developed and applied, and by whom?

13. Defines how information strategy will coordinate with and be integrated into military (kinetic) operations. Define how the plan integrates communications and kinetic operations. Define the challenges both sides confront.
• What obstacles to success are posed?
• What information strategy, operations, and tactics can overcome the obstacles, including enemy propaganda?
• How will these integrate with kinetic operations envisioned by the military?
• Who are the points of contact between kinetic and information aspects of an operation?
• How will these parties coordinate their actions?
• What processes or channels will be used to ensure coordination?

14. Integrates information and intelligence. Actionable information and intelligence are critical to communication strategy. Importantly,
not all relevant intelligence affecting communication strategy is classified. Social media intelligence and open source data are often more valuable. So is grasping how the media may cover a story, and anticipating challenges and opportunities.\textsuperscript{20} Researching opinions and knowing what is flowing through the rumor mill matter.\textsuperscript{21}

It is important to get your facts straight. The most effective communication strategies are rooted in facts and truth. Identify enemy lies and distortions; knowing their tactics offers keys to discrediting their narrative, stories, themes, and messages. In fact, rumors may be your medium.

Integrate information about key political players: where do they stand on specific issues and what are their likely or intended roles and responses? Both Fallujah battles provide a case study for why this information matters.

15. Provides for ongoing iteration and updates of information and intelligence. No strategic communication plan is set in stone. It should evolve and modify as events change. The iterative process requires keeping an open mind, reaching out for information, and forging a process to ensure that the communication team digests and processes new information and acts on it.

16. Addresses efforts to overcome language barriers. Translation proved a barrier in Iraq and Afghanistan. Bing West suggested using Skype or other technology to link back to Americans who are fluent in particular languages or dialects with whom forward-deployed personnel could connect in real time.\textsuperscript{22} He argues that in Afghanistan, units in the field “were not linked in real time with equally talented interpreters.”\textsuperscript{23} The United States failed to capitalize on the availability of thousands of Afghan-Americans fluent in tribal dialects who could have been linked. In his words, when a unit went outside the wire, every “farmer could be greeted by a friendly Pashto voice over a headset, while the patrol leader on another headset asked questions.” In West’s view, the United States squandered a significant high-tech advantage.\textsuperscript{24} The approach might have enabled the military to identify key leaders and players at the local level and create an actionable database about every male in every district. Solutions will vary according to time and circumstances. The key point is that mistakes in language translate into miscommunication. That can spell disaster in forging a communication strategy. Identify, anticipate, and devise a plan to surmount this challenge.

17. Cites helpful examples. This book has used examples throughout to illustrate challenges and solutions. Communication plans should do the same. They provide context and help the team to make sense of the narrative, story, themes, and messages that drive the strategies.

18. Has a vision. What kind of campaign are you creating? Is it tailored to the realities of the situation? Will it help achieve success?

19. Defines the key players. Who is indispensable to success; important to success; helpful to success; unnecessary? Distinguish between these groups and tailor strategy and tactics for each.

20. Defines the need for collaboration and identifies collaborators. Whose help do you need to make the plan work? How are you going to get them on board? Who will be the points
of contact? How will communication be facilitated? How will you establish and maintain operational security with them?

21. **Defines the obstacles to success.** Who presents them? What is behind the obstacles? Where do they occur? How do the obstacles manifest themselves? How tough are the obstacles to overcome? Why might the obstacles frustrate achievement of success? What has the opponent done in the past, what is he doing now, and what he is likely to do that creates obstacles? What sources and credible information inform you about the obstacles?

22. **Defines how each action step in the plan connects to and helps surmount the identified obstacles, considers targets of opportunity, and makes provision to address unanticipated or new obstacles.** Message discipline and focused messaging connect action in a way targeted to surmount obstacles. Events, distractions, and unanticipated problems can distort action. Communication strategy may look easy on paper, but execution can prove fragile. Focus on the objective and overcoming defined obstacles. Deal with other issues separately. Important to note is that most influence activities do not take place overnight. These programs take time, tweaking, and constant evaluation. Senior leaders must recognize that reaction to a specific event will normally come from the public affairs staff, in conjunction with the IO plan and operators.

23. **Budgets the resources a campaign requires.** Define financial costs and define the resources required: people, assets, technology, and transportation—everything a plan requires. Define communication requirements in terms of physical assets to get the job done, from cameras and recording devices to cyber capabilities.

24. **Lays a strong foundation for an information campaign.** Like building a house, without the foundational roots, your plan will wobble and eventually crumble under pressure.
   - Understand what comprises success.
   - Create a series of steps that build visibility and awareness for an issue.
   - Take steps to ensure that a target audience understands the issue or action you are addressing. Only believable or credible actions or messages create support, motivation, and mobilization of support.
   - Define the objectives.
   - Conduct thorough target audience analysis.
   - Get organized.
   - Think through the plan carefully.
   - Identify where you will acquire the knowledge required to forge a winning campaign and how you will access it.
   - Obtain as many ideas and as much input as possible.
   - Understand how, if it becomes visible, different parts of the news media will cover the story and how to drive a positive message about why and what is being done, and the results achieved.
   - Set a timeline. When do you want what portion accomplished?

**Narrative, Story, Theme, and Message**

**Key precept:** control the debate and discourse by positioning your narrative, from which flow story, theme, and message.
Narrative provides the broader context. For example, in World War II, America fought for the four freedoms—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The stories that flow from that narrative involve character, time, space, events, and objective placed in settings and recounted for rhetorical purposes. The United States invaded Normandy to free Western Europe from the Nazis and open a second front to crush Hitler. The themes included the notion that American forces stood against tyranny and evil, while one message was that America would fight until the Nazis were defeated.

In Iraq, al-Qaeda invoked the crusader narrative: Christian crusaders arrived to oppress Muslims, killing more than 200,000 until the heroic Saladin drove them out. The core narrative was that “non-Arab, non-Muslim invaders” steal riches from Arab lands “while proclaiming allegiance . . . to a more righteous religion.” Modern crusaders, allied with Israel, had returned to plunder Iraqi resources, torturing Iraqis and keeping them weak, using the government as a puppet. Iraqis must do something—rise up in opposition and kill Americans. The theme was American oppression; the message was that Americans would stop at nothing to oppress Islam and steal Iraqi wealth.

Similarly, in 1994, Republicans won control of the U.S. House of Representatives. They invoked a narrative: taxes, spending, and big government deprive America of its future. Their story was that Democrats wanted to raise taxes to fund big spending programs that benefited other people. The theme was that Republicans supported a contract with America to save the future. The message was that Republicans stood for the middle class, less government, lower taxes, and a balanced budget while Democrats stood for special interests, big government, higher taxes, and an out-of-control deficit.

Each strategic situation was different, but the requirements for communication strategy in each was the same. Communication strategy needs a strong narrative, stories, theme(s) and message(s). To define these, ask:

**What are the issues?** Frame the issues. What is this conflict or engagement about? What cause are you fighting? People need something to believe in—people, ideas, concepts. Information strategy should explain these and make them clear to build motivation and support.

**Who are the players?** Who are the stakeholders? Who does the outcome affect? Who are the potential winners and losers—and why? For what cause or outcome are the players fighting? This includes the host nation.

**What are the motivations and choices?** Define the stakes and the choices. People must decide. A communication plan should make clear what winning and losing means to affected audiences. Such choices may impact different audiences differently.

**Example:** in countering violent extremism, the United States has pushed a message that it stands for a future rooted in hope, jobs, opportunity, and security while violent extremists offer one rooted in fear, poverty, repression, and violence.

**Example:** al-Qaeda in Iraq drew on the narrative of the Crusades to argue that the new war was a continuation of an old one, reviving past ambitions of infidel foreigners to subdue Muslims and pillage their wealth. Therefore, the stakes were Iraqi pride, culture, security, religion, and integrity versus brutal occupiers who exploited Muslims. The Taliban has argued a similar choice.
Example: during the 2012 presidential campaign, President Obama defined the election as a test for whether voters would elect a president for the rich and powerful, who admits he ignores 47 percent of the people, or one who will promote social justice and prosperity for all Americans.

Example: historian Steven Casey has documented the remarkable challenges that confronted Franklin Roosevelt in mobilizing Americans for war even after Pearl Harbor. People were angry at Japan (not Germany), but the cry to go after the Japanese was far more muted than films portray. As Casey put it, the attitude of most Americans was “permissive rather than pressuring,” and few Americans were “calling vehemently for an immediate attack.” Even in late 1942, Casey observes, Roosevelt worried about uniting Americans behind the war effort.

As late as July 1942, Winston Churchill was arguing for an offensive in the Mediterranean. The Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to forget about fighting Germany and strike at Japan. Roosevelt overruled them and insisted on action against Germany in 1942. His firm decision making led to Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. But first, he had to persuade Americans that Germany was a problem. People recognized that Hitler and the Nazis were evil, but that sentiment did not transfer to the Germans as a people. Indeed, Roosevelt took care to distinguish between the two, but—perhaps surprisingly—stirring up Americans to fight Hitler as an evil monster bent on world domination was a challenge.

His strategy is relevant to operations today. Here is how Roosevelt—a smart leader who played his cards close to the vest—went about solving the problem. He understood that the key to demonizing Hitler lay in making his evil understandable. There was no CNN at that time, and many Americans found the scale of German atrocities that were unfolding hard to believe. There was surprising (for modern audiences) support for a compromise peace if the German Army tossed out Hitler and agreed to stop the war and discuss peace.

How did Roosevelt make the truth understandable? In June 1942, he selected a single event, the Nazis’ brutal retaliation in Lidice for Reinhard Heydrich’s assassination, to illustrate evil. The administration’s plan included five elements:

1. Used prominent, credible voices including Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, and Rex Stout to attest to German barbarity, countering skepticism among many Americans who doubted the Germans were capable of such atrocities.
2. Used experts who discussed how the Nazis were desecrating religion and using slave labor.
3. Avoided exaggeration and let the facts—which were compelling—speak for themselves. They avoided over-dramatization.
4. Focused on Nazi atrocities against civilians in occupied countries. They cited the Nazis’ own figures for those executed—in the hundreds, rather than the thousands—being slaughtered, as the smaller figure would provoke outrage and was more comprehensible and believable.
5. Named names, and let the culprits know the world was watching. It is surprising how often those who commit atrocities—including al-Qaeda and the Taliban—point the finger at other parties. That was also true of the Nazis. They tried to conceal, not publicize, their worst atrocities.
All of these strategies are applicable to wars such as in Iraq and Afghanistan and conflicts in East Africa with terrorist organizations like Al-Shabaab.

**What is your rationale?** Define a credible rationale relevant to target audiences. Credible rationales answer the following questions:
1. Why are we doing what we do?
2. How are we doing it?
3. What does it mean to targeted audiences? How do they benefit?
4. Why should they support our cause—or at least stay neutral and avoid supporting the enemy?

**Is your message clear?** Ensure message clarity so that audiences will better hear and understand. Apply the tenets of the Maxwell Grid, developed by nationally renowned political consultant John Maxwell. The message grid asks five confluent questions:
1. What do we say about ourselves?
2. What do we say about our adversary?
3. What does the adversary say about itself?
4. What does the adversary say about us?
5. Do we do what we say we do?

Compare and contrast judgments. Then make judgments as to which messages define a credible rationale and provide a foundation for a strong narrative, story, theme, and message that support a cause.

Caveat: do not allow ideology fostered by politicians to blind your strategy to an objective analysis. U.S. forces entered Iraq in April 2003, and by October–November 2003, violence against them had begun to escalate. U.S. Central Command commander, General John Abizaid, correctly termed the situation a *classical guerrilla war*. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his close advisors rejected reality, insisting the violence was a product of Baathist “dead-enders” trying to regain power or by foreign fighters who had aligned with the Baathists. Effective communication strategy requires a clear-eyed, objective assessment of what is happening, not political fantasy.

**Does your message resonate?** Reason persuades, but emotion motivates. The key to motivation is using images, symbols, or stories that tap into the emotions and experiences in an audience, stimulate a response, and channel that response in support of your cause. This is why thorough target audience analysis with ongoing revision is so important.

**Example:** The “Daisy” television advertisement created for President Lyndon B. Johnson’s reelection campaign in 1964 was shown only once to a national U.S. political audience during a broadcast of “Monday Night at the Movies.” It opens with a little girl picking petals off a daisy. She counts aloud. As her count reaches 10, the image freezes. The camera zooms to her eye as an off-screen announcer calls the countdown. As it reaches one, the viewer is in the center of her pupil, where a nuclear explosion is overlaid. The voice of Johnson pronounces, as mushroom clouds rise, “These are the stakes: to make a world in which all God’s children can live, or to go into the dark. We must either love each other or we must die.”

The advertisement wrecked the campaign of Republican candidate Senator Barry M. Goldwater, about whom voters felt uncomfortable in the face of accusations that he had an itchy finger on the nuclear trigger. The creator of the advertisement, formally titled “Peace, Little Girl,” Tony Schwartz, said that Goldwater could and should have countered it by endorsing it and offering to pay for it—coopting the message. Instead, the Gold-
water campaign cratered, became defensive, and never regained lost momentum.

**Example:** al-Qaeda tried to enforce its rule by ruthlessly beheading opponents. The goal was to instill fear. It achieved that goal masterfully. Unfortunately for the terrorist organization, this backfired, rousing the anger and hatred of Iraqis and helping motivate them—especially tribes in al-Anbar Province—to oppose them. Similarly, in Somalia, the violence of Al-Shabaab perpetrated on Somalis for even simple things like ringing a bell—which the al-Qaeda group said reminded people of Christianity—instead rang a bell in the hearts of citizens and helped turn many Somalis against it.

**Example:** prior to the Second Battle of Fallujah, U.S. forces took Iraqi counterparts to see the iron mountain of logistics built up to support the looming November 2004 attack. The sight had a great emotional impact, boosting morale and persuading Iraqis that they were on the winning side.

**Do you have credible messengers?** Fallujah illustrates the need to use messengers who have credibility with target audiences. During the November 2004 battle, Coalition leaders put Iraqi leaders out front, to report and to articulate the narrative, story, themes, and messages. They correctly judged that Iraqis were more credible messengers to Iraqis than Americans. The same lesson has been applied in the Philippines, where U.S. special operations forces have maintained a low profile in favor of Filipinos, who have taken the lead in combating violent actors like the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) on the island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago. Host nation spokespersons make the best messengers, in words and actions.  

On the other side of the coin, the fact that Zarqaawi and a lot of his fighters were foreigners, not Iraqis, hurt their credibility in appealing to Iraqis, who perceived that despite a common Arab ethnic background, the foreigners shared different beliefs and values. That helped undercut al-Qaeda’s credibility.

**Are you using the right channels of communication?** Choose channels of communication that your target audience accesses and trusts. The most effective way to communicate with target audiences is face-to-face. That helps build bonds of trust. You have to have friends before they are needed, not just when they come in handy. In many cultures around the world, tribal cultures facilitate and accentuate the importance of kinship ties and personal engagement and communication. In al-Anbar Province, that engagement was integral to the success of U.S. Marines in forging bonds of trust with Iraqi tribes. To build the necessary trust, you must:

1. Identify the channels through which target audiences receive information. In Africa and many developing nations, radio is an important channel through which people receive information. That has been notably true in Somalia. But avoid hasty generalization. You need to ascertain how credible the radio station is. If audiences perceive that it reflects the views of a particular party or ideology, they will make allowances. The Rwandan genocide proved that radio in the hands of racial extremists—there, the Hutu—could be a deadly weapon.

2. The internet offers important channels of communication. It is especially useful in disseminating information to the media. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has been adept at exploiting the internet to distribute videos of its purported successes to online media to.
reach urban audiences while depending upon radio to reach those in rural areas. Looking ahead, internet access is exploding exponentially, especially among younger populations in the southern and eastern regions of the globe. There were more than 4.1 billion internet users as of December 2018, compared to 3.9 billion in mid-2018 and 3.7 billion in 2017. Asia has the most internet users, accounting for 49 percent of all internet users (down from about 50 percent in 2017). Europe is a runner-up with 16.8 percent of all internet users. China has the most users: 802 million; it accounts for one-half of the users worldwide, trailed by India, with more than 500 million users.

3. Paid media, speeches, print, flyers, night letters (e.g., unsigned leaflets distributed clandestinely)—there are endless ways to communicate a message. The key is to select what works. Be aware of accessible channels, evaluate in what context they are most credible and to whom, figure out how to gain access, and employ them properly.

**Are you using the right language to communicate your message?** Native language is one challenge. Using the correct words is another and can alter receptivity to your message.

The choice of campaign title for Fallujah in November 2004 is a good example. Prime Minister Allawi insisted on renaming Operation Phantom Fury as al-Fajr, which translates to *New Dawn*. The messages contained within the operation names were different. One suggested the use of force to achieve objectives while the other indicated that the battle was about a better future.

The Global War on Terrorism illustrates how an innocent mistake can boomerang. During remarks on arrival at the south lawn of the White House on 16 September 2001, President George W. Bush announced, “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.” Europeans whose support Bush was hoping to elicit cringed. Al-Qaeda jumped into action, quoting his statement frequently and producing a video that elicited the narrative of the Crusades to paint the invasion of Iraq as a modern sequel to repress Islam and loot Muslim lands.

**Does your message enable coalition-building and persuade new allies?** American political leaders tend to articulate messages about foreign policy in ways that appeal to domestic audiences. But it is essential to appeal to and inspire allies, as well. That is a function of words, symbols, and actions.

The U.S. Marines in al-Anbar depended on deeds more than anything else to build coalitions. We have discussed the efforts of the Marines at length. Richard Shultz provides the best account of how they succeeded in winning the trust of Iraqi tribes in al-Anbar, who united with them to turn the tide against al-Qaeda.

President George H. W. Bush demonized Saddam Hussein to galvanize support for Operation Desert Storm but was careful in his statecraft with foreign leaders to pledge that once Kuwait was liberated and Saddam defeated, American forces would halt the war. That commitment, expressed in clear language and backed by his action, enabled Bush to assemble a broad international coalition to take on Saddam. The president’s messaging was an adroit use of communication to arouse support at home—a key center of gravity for the war—while also enlisting a very wide range of support within the international community—also a key center of gravity for the war, backed by a UN Security Council resolution, which conferred legitimacy upon the war.
Can you neutralize those who will not support your campaign? The first aim of an information strategy is to win over people. The second is to deny their support to the opposition. Conflicts often do not draw every member of a population into their midst. Counterinsurgency expert David Galula pointed out that insurgents aim to win over the population, or at least keep it submissive. While Galula focused on counterinsurgency, his point applies frequently to political situations. While many people refrain from becoming politically active or taking sides, especially in controversial matters, you do not need the entire population to support your cause. One may achieve success by persuading specific elements of the population that is sitting on the cross-benches. A relatively small shift of three to five percent of the population can prove decisive to winning a campaign.

Can you persuade your adversary’s allies that you will win and the adversary will lose, to neutralize these allies or gain their support? Information strategy should motivate those aligned with the opposition to move at least to a position of neutrality, either on the merits of an argument or by persuading audiences that the opposition is going to lose. People do not like to be on the losing side. In warfare, the stakes for individuals are high for their security or survival. Motivate means *motivate to act*; behavior, not merely influencing attitudes or opinions, is the goal.

1. **Create effective themes and messages that support your objectives.** Great intentions fall flat without clarity of message to support buy-in from target audience(s).
   - **Describe, define, and differentiate your story from your narrative.** The nature of story was discussed previously. Good stories explain what is being done and why in personal terms; they are about actions people take; they must communicate that action benefits target audiences.
   - **Messages flow from narrative and story.** Keep core messages simple and concise. The themes to carry your messages should support, more concisely, what you are doing and why. Use the message grid to compare your narrative, story, theme, and message to the enemy’s and see how they stack up. Where is your edge? Where is theirs? How do you strengthen yours and overcome theirs?
   - **Frame the issue.** Define what is at stake. What are the choices? Who wins? Who loses? Define the stakes in terms that benefit your cause; this will fundamentally affect where people stand. The definition of what the United States and al-Qaeda each stand for is a good example. The issue at stake is the future. The choices include hope or pessimism; wealth or poverty; security or fear; and freedom or repression.
   - **Messaging is an iterative process.** You may start with or give emphasis to a particular message, then evolve it or shift to other messages. This holds true in the language and slogans used to help drive themes and messages, even though the content remains consistent.
   - **Create a message timeline.** Release messages on a defined timeline using media best suited for the target audience. Some are best reserved for later. Ensure you have several messages in reserve should the campaign require...
modification or should the first fail to resonate. Messaging should be supportive to operations and care should be taken not to commit message fratricide. This is why timelines are so important at every level.

- **Define the target audiences.** Different audiences may respond differently to different messages. Be consistent—especially across a theater of operations—but tailor messages to strike a responsive chord with particular audiences. The inconsistency of tactics in Iraq in 2003–4 created confused messaging and undercut Coalition credibility to Iraqis.

- **Be memorable.** Being memorable is about being concise and relevant, and striking an emotionally responsive chord. Think of messages as a bumper sticker: short, to the point, easily repeatable. In politics, these are sometimes referred to as “zingers.” The caveat: zingers lose their energy when overused. A zinger connected to a deed achieves double the impact.

- **Respond to attacks.** Unanswered negative messages become truth to audiences, especially if repeated by multiple parties in multiple channels over time. Answer attacks in the medium in which they are launched and respond quickly. Thus, if an opponent attacks on radio, use radio to answer. If the attack is done on social media, respond on social media.

2. **Mobilize your target audience(s).** Identify, define, and segment target audiences and ascertain what it will take to get their attention and mobilize their support. There is no formula. There are multiple methods for targeting, and some may need to be used in concert with one another. Use multiple channels simultaneously and activate networks that enable their use—personal contact, news media, social media, paid media, and print.

3. **Understand and potentially employ communication strategy unconventionally.** The Russian doctrine of reflexive control innovatively seeks to employ information to the enemy to exert control over him. Timothy Thomas cites Colonel S. A. Komov’s key elements to information warfare that he deemed vital. Each of these should be factored into whether they may strengthen a communication strategy:

- **Distraction,** by creating a real or imaginary threat to one of the enemy’s most vital locations (flanks, rear, etc.) during the preparatory stages of combat operations, thereby forcing them to reconsider the wisdom of their decisions to operate along this or that axis;

- **Overload,** by frequently sending the enemy a large amount of conflicting information;

- **Paralysis,** by creating the perception of a specific threat to a vital interest or weak spot;

- **Exhaustion,** by compelling the enemy to carry out useless operations, thereby entering combat with reduced resources;

- **Deception,** by forcing the enemy to reallocate forces to a threatened region during the preparatory stages of combat operations;

- **Division,** by convincing the enemy that he must operate in opposition to coalition interests;
• Pacification, by leading the enemy to believe that pre-planned operational training is occurring rather than offensive preparations, thus reducing their vigilance;
• Deterrence, by creating the perception of insurmountable superiority;
• Provocation, by forcing them into taking action advantageous to your side;

• Suggestion, by offering information that affects the enemy legally, morally, ideologically, or in other areas; and
• Pressure, by offering information that discredits the government in the eyes of its population.52

Endnotes

1. Although he fared less successfully as a political candidate, as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), Gen Wesley K. Clarke, USA, earned respect from people for doing that. The late Col Daniel D. Devlin Sr. cited a case in which Clarke and his staff had devised four options and laid them out at a meeting, after which, the room cleared; Devlin stayed behind. Clarke asked him what was on his mind, and Devlin proposed consolidating two of the ideas and substituting a new one. A flag officer also in the room tried to cut Devlin off, but Clarke told the admiral to be quiet and listened patiently as Devlin laid out his suggestion. Clarke nodded and said, “That’s a better idea than the one I had.” Clarke ordered the admiral to reassemble the staff and announced that Devlin had offered an improvement that would be incorporated into his plan. Clarke then visited all of the action officers involved in the operation to make certain that his commander’s intent was clear, to satisfy questions, and to take suggestions. That is the epitome of good leadership. Col Devlin, conversation with author, February 2008.

4. See MajGen Michael T. Flynn, USA (Ret), Capt Matt Pottinger, and Paul D. Batchelor, Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2010). Their excellent report offers sweeping changes to the way the intelligence community thinks about itself from a focus on the enemy to a focus on the population. Focusing too many resources “and brainpower on insurgent groups” has left the intelligence apparatus, they argue, “unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which we operate and the people we are trying to persuade.” Flynn, Pottinger, and Batchelor, Fixing Intel, 4. They propose specific initiatives to solve the problem using field analysts to collect information at the grassroots, much like journalists; integrating information collected by all stakeholders (civilian and military); dividing work along geographical instead of functional lines and provided district assessments covering governance, development, and stability; providing data to teams of information brokers in regional commands as part of stability operations information centers to organize and disseminate information; placing the information centers under and in cooperation with State Department senior civilian representatives administering governance, development, and stability efforts in regional commands; and ensuring that the information centers are staffed by “the most, most extroverted and hungriest analysts.” Flynn et al., Fixing Intel, 4–5.

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6. Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, interview with author, March 2016. Brzezinski says they relied on that information and deferred to Beckwith when he decided to abort the mission. But at the time, Brzezinski acknowledged deep angst about whether to recommend to President Carter to order the mission to proceed.
8. See, for example, Gaurav Akrani, “Unity of Command Principle—Meaning Example Advantages,” *Kalyan City Life* (blog), 3 February 2012.
15. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 214. Hammes’ book is essential reading. The corollary to his point in politics is that while one may expect people to take one side or another on tough issues, in reality they stand on both sides of them.
16. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, chapter 8, 89–110, 207. Hammes offers an incisive description of how the First Intifada succeeded using peaceful tactics while the second, in 1993, which employed violence, backfired. These are important case studies, superbly described and analyzed. During the First Intifada, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) published pamphlets ordering demonstrators to refrain from using weapons. PLO leaders understood that an uprising by a discontented population that could focus its anger "could not match the Israelis in a conflict based on the use of weapons. It simply gave the Israelis license to use lethal force.” Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 99. He noted that weapons would also eliminate a powerful image: that of young Palestinians armed with rocks and bottles facing heavily armed Israeli troops. The PLO formed an anonymous Unified National Command (UNC) and produced handbills warning not to use weapons and defining what the PLO viewed as achievable goals. Women and children interposed between Israeli security forces and demonstrators where television cameras were present and forged tactics to ensure their presence, providing drivers, translators, vehicles, access, passports, and contact. The Palestinians drove two messages. One portrayed the fight to the international community as a contest between a brave and oppressed people against a brutal occupier. The second argued to Israelis that there would be no peace while Israelis occupied West Bank territories. Palestinians employed well-dressed, articulate spokespeople to convey their messages through multiple channels: the media, international forums, conferences, even Israeli soldiers who, Hammes writes, had trouble reconciling the firing of rubber bullets at teenagers and women going about their business with their self-image as protectors of Israel. The impact of these tactics paralyzed Israelis, whose leadership failed to grasp the dynamics at play and thus failed to develop a coherent response. The Palestinians succeeded in persuading their side that Israel could be resisted while damaging Israel’s reputation in the international community.
17. During the Second Intifada, Israel’s shrewd prime minister, Ariel Sharon, capitalized on Palestinian violence to turn the tables on Palestinians, who turned themselves into international pariahs through use of suicide attacks and bombings. The stupidity of Palestinian tactics shifted the narrative away from peace for land to one about a battle to destroy Israel. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone*, 125.
19. This is a point Ambassador Brian Carlson stresses in teaching public diplomacy to foreign service officers, and he is correct.
20. Bremer and his team did not do this during the First Battle of Fallujah and paid a stiff price for their failure. The team that led the second battle did, and it paid huge dividends.
21. In Iraq, al-Qaeda spread rumors about vaccinations administered by U.S. veterinarians to cattle. Rumors can create destructive anxiety by making plausible connections between concrete events and real social anxieties. The bovine poisoning rumor had a narrative, story, theme, and message, which was: the Crusades were a Western attempt to pillage and destroy Islam; today, U.S. forces are repeating the pattern. This narrative provided context. The bovine story invoked the crusader narrative to tell a story about “non-Arab/non-Muslim invaders plunder[ing] Arab lands for riches while proclaiming allegiance to a high power and a more righteous religion.” This narrative defined the U.S. occupation across Iraq: that U.S. forces were poisoning cattle, using helicopters to stir up dust storms, and using technologies to cause drought as they invaded Iraq to pillage oil fields. The rumor portrayed American forces as an existential threat and the Iraq government as weak and ineffective. The message delivered was: Iraqis must rise and resist the occupation. This example is drawn from Daniel Leonard Bernardi et al., *Narrative Landmines: Rumors, Islamist Extrem-

22. Bing West, The Wrong War, 176. West delivers a searing indictment of the Afghan war. He argues that talented generals such as David Petraeus, Stanley McChrystal, and others lacked required support from Washington. He believes the corrupt, incompetent Afghan government and the sanctuary provided to the Taliban in Pakistan rendered victory unachievable.

23. West, The Wrong War, 176. West observes that the Pentagon ignored Google’s assertion that it could translate voice from one language to another in less than a second. Yet, technology could prove counterproductive. West says that battlefield update assessments substituted arms-length information/intelligence input to generals for whom gaining a strategic or tactical appreciation is possible only by being on the ground.

24. West, The Wrong War, 176.

25. In academic terms, Professor Edward Branigan defines narrative as a “perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience.” It organizes events into a chain with a beginning, middle, and end that “embodies a judgment about the nature of events as well as well as demonstrates how it is possible to know, and hence to narrate, the events.” It is a way we organize events to understand the world. Edward Branigan, Narrative Comprehension and Film (New York: Routledge, 1992). 3. Politically, narrative provides the context for action that enables people to give it meaning.

26. See Chong et al., Narrative Landmines, loc. 332 of 2523, Kindle. Their explanation of the relationship between narrative and story is excellent. Edward Branigan describes story as a “mental reconstruction of some of the events of the narrative which are not witnessed by the spectator.” Branigan, Narrative Comprehension and Film, 119–20.

27. Chong et al., Narrative Landmines, loc. 456 of 2623, Kindle.

28. Chong et al., Narrative Landmines, loc. 1056 of 2523, Kindle.


30. Casey, Cautious Crusade, 78, loc. 2112 of 8464, Kindle.

31. In Joseph E. Persico, Roosevelt’s Centurions: FDR and the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II (New York: Random House, 2013), 221, the historian suggests that Operation Torch was partly motivated originally by Roosevelt’s desire to win a victory that would bolster Democratic prospects in the 1942 elections, although Dwight Eisenhower decided on 8 November—five days after the election—for the invasion. In opting for North Africa, Persico recounts that Roosevelt rejected Gen George Marshall’s preference for an early invasion of France. Persico, Roosevelt’s Centurions, 184–90.

32. Casey, Cautious Crusade, 76, loc. 2082 of 8464, Kindle.

33. Casey, Cautious Crusade, 68–70, loc. 1819–1832 of 8464, Kindle.

34. Discussed in Farwell, Persuasion and Power, 222.


39. The U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) launched Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines (OEF-P) in January 2002. The operation illustrates special warfare by, with, and through partners in working to satisfy mutual security interests. The 2002 Balikatan (shoulder-to-shoulder) exercise that killed terrorist Abu Sabaya had Philippine troops in the lead, with the United States providing only tactical training, ISR, logistical, and civil affairs support. See Mark Bowden, “Jihadists in Paradise,” Atlantic, 1 March 2007; and Maj Matthew J. Gomlak (USA) and Maj Stephen Fenton (USAF), “Real Results: Military Partnerships in the Philippines,” Special Warfare 25, no. 3 (July–September 2012): 37. The Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P), consisting of 600 SOF personnel, has continued to provide assistance to the Philippine forces.

40. See Farwell, Persuasion and Power, which examines how radio was used as a weapon to kill in Rwanda.


45. Schultz, *The Marines Take Anbar*.
48. This also holds true in U.S. politics. The Obama reelection campaign in 2012 spent nearly $1 billion. Enormous portions of these funds were directed to identifying, recruiting, and mobilizing new voters, persuading a narrow band of swing voters and emerging base voters to get out and vote. Similar tactics decided the 2012 U.S. Senate race in Colorado, and target audience analysis was equally decisive in the recount that decided the 2012 U.S. Senate race, as Al Franken’s team figured out which of the contested ballots were more likely to support his campaign and focused efforts on getting those counted. A small number of voters decided the outcome of both races. See Sasha Issenberg, *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns* (New York: Crown, 2012), a fascinating discussion of cutting-edge voter identification and turnout efforts utilizing scientific methods.
49. Convincing the al-Anbar tribes that the Coalition forces would prevail was, as Richard Shultz observed, a key element to the success of U.S. Marines. As World War II broke out, Italian Prime Minister Benito Mussolini temporized about what to do. Many of his close advisors, including his son-in-law Count Ciano and his military, were opposed to Italy’s entrance into the war on Hitler’s side. Mussolini only moved when he saw France capitulate to the Nazis, calculating that Germany would be victorious.
50. See also Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict*.