

A Brief History of Propaganda During Conflict:

Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications

There is a tendency in scholarly and strategic-policy fields to see the propaganda produced by groups like so-called “Islamic State” (IS) and al-Qaeda (AQ) as historically unheralded. As evidence, slickly produced communiques and a penchant for using social media are typically highlighted. This narrow perspective, in placing the current phenomenon into an historical and thematic vacuum, infers that history has little to offer contemporary efforts to understand and confront extremist propaganda. This Research Paper explores the history of propaganda during conflict and draws out key lessons for improving counter-terrorism strategic communications. Overall, history suggests that a strategic communications campaign during conflict is more likely to succeed if it based on a multifaceted approach characterised by the deployment of a diversity of messages that leverage a variety of target audience motivations, uses all pertinent means of communication (not just the latest), and synchronises this messaging with strategic-policy/politico-military actions.

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Author:
Haroro J. Ingram

About the Author

Haroro J. Ingram

Dr. Haroro J. Ingram is an ICCT Associate Fellow from the Australian National University (Canberra). Ingram's Australian Research Council funded research analyses the role of propaganda in the strategies of violent non-state political movements with the Afghan Taliban and Da'esh as major case studies. His research draws heavily on primary source materials, most of which is collected during periods of fieldwork in South Asia and the Middle East where he has interviewed current and former activists and fighters as well as civilians. This field research has included interviews with current and former counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operatives. Ingram is also a visiting fellow with the Naval Postgraduate School's Defense Analysis Department (Monterey, California). To contact the author, please send an e-mail to haroro.ingram@anu.edu.au.

About ICCT

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism. ICCT's work focuses on themes at the intersection of countering violent extremism and criminal justice sector responses, as well as human rights related aspects of counter-terrorism. The major project areas concern countering violent extremism, rule of law, foreign fighters, country and regional analysis, rehabilitation, civil society engagement and victims' voices. Functioning as a nucleus within the international counter-terrorism network, ICCT connects experts, policymakers, civil society actors and practitioners from different fields by providing a platform for productive collaboration, practical analysis, and exchange of experiences and expertise, with the ultimate aim of identifying innovative and comprehensive approaches to preventing and countering terrorism.

Foreword

The ICCT's Counter-Terrorism Strategic Communications (CTSC) Project tackles one of the most pressing national and global security issues facing the world today: how to understand and confront the propaganda messaging of violent extremists like al-Qaeda (AQ) and the so-called "Islamic State" (IS). The success of propaganda efforts by these and other groups is, at least in part, reflected in the number of Islamist-inspired foreign fighters traveling to the Middle East and other regions as well as the surge in similarly inspired home-grown terrorists across the globe including in the West. This project adopts strategic communication as the overarching term for any messaging that is deployed with the intent of informing or persuading a target audience in support of strategic-policy and/or politico-military objectives. Consequently, the CTSC Project aims to explore the full gamut of counter-terrorism messaging strategies via a series of articles that offer different disciplinary and analytical perspectives on this crucial issue. Fusing the latest scholarly research with primary source analysis, each article is accompanied by a Policy Brief that outlines the key strategic-policy implications of the empirical research.

The purpose of this Research Paper is to look back at the history of propaganda during conflict to draw out lessons for effective counter-terrorism strategic communications. From the Ancients to the American War of Independence, the Great Wars and the War on Terror, it offers a distinctive perspective of history through the lens of evolving propaganda strategies. What emerges from this study is that the evolution of propaganda during conflict has been driven by three factors: (i.) developments in communication technology, (ii.) advancements in military technology and strategy, and (iii.) the shifting relationship between the political elite and the populace. Important themes and trends have emerged during this evolution and it is a history we ignore at our peril. This Research Paper places the 21st century battle against extremist propaganda into the context of this millennia-long history and draws out key lessons for current and future strategic communications campaigns.

On the surface it may seem that much of this study is not directly related to counter-terrorism. But look deeper and there are pertinent lessons for counter-terrorism strategic communications throughout this history. As the first article in the CTSC series, it provides a broad foundation for the articles that follow and reflects an overarching principle of the project itself: to develop a body of empirically-based and policy relevant analyses that does not necessarily fixate on current threats but identifies principles for shaping counter-terrorism strategic communications strategic-policy.

Introduction

“How has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world’s greatest communication society?”

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, November 2007.¹

“The defilement of the human soul is worse than the destruction of the human body”.

Lord Arthur Ponsonby, Falsehood in wartime (1928).²

“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 in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma”.

Letter from Ayman Al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, July 2005.³

After over a decade and a half of confronting the threat of Islamist extremists at home and abroad, many governments in the West and elsewhere are facing the reality that the terrorism threat is greater now than it has been in recent years.⁴ For evidence, one need only look to both the unprecedented number of foreign fighters who have travelled to Syria and Iraq, many to fight with either IS or AQ affiliated Jabhat Al-Nusra (JN),⁵ and the surge in Islamist-inspired terrorist plots and attacks in the West since 2014.⁶ Beyond the West, jihadist groups in Africa (e.g. Mali, Nigeria, Libya), the Middle East (e.g. Yemen) and Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh) have used propaganda as a means to magnify their presence and influence to local, regional and global audiences. These trends are indicative, to varying degrees, of the effectiveness with which groups like IS and AQ have used propaganda to appeal to and mobilise supporters. Most concerning is that these dynamics have not occurred in a vacuum of inaction but rather a period where counter-terrorism has dominated national and global security attention. The implications are stark because it is not just the

¹ R. Gates, ‘Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, Landon Lecture, November 26, 2007’, 2007, <https://www.k-state.edu/media/newsreleases/landonlect/gatext1107.html>.

² A. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in wartime: Propaganda lies of the First World War*. Project Gutenberg Australia, 1928, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks10/1000011.txt>.

³ Letter from Ayman Al-Zawahiri to Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, 9 July 2005, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Zawahiris-Letter-to-Zarqawi-Translation.pdf>

⁴ See *Countering the terrorist threat in Canada: An interim report*. Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/412/secd/rep/rep18jul15-e.pdf>; “Terrorist threat assessment Netherlands”, *National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism* (Ministry of Security and Justice), <https://english.nctv.nl/publications-products/Terrorist-Threat-Assessment-Netherlands/>; “Review of Australia’s counterterrorism machinery”. *Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet*, January 2015, http://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/190215_CT_Review_1.pdf.

⁵ B. Boutin, G. Chauzal, J. Dorsey, M. Jegerings, C. Paulussen, J. Pohl, A. Reed, and S. Zavagli, “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union”, *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 7, no. 2 (2016), <http://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report-Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU-1-April-2016-including-AnnexesLinks.pdf>; P. Neumann, ‘Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s’. *The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence*, 26 January 2015, <http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>; The Soufan Group, *Foreign Fighters: An updated assessment of the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq*. December 2015, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG-ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf>.

⁶ For more see K. Yourish, T. Wallace, D. Watkins and T. Giratikanon, “Brussels is latest target in Islamic State’s assault on West”, *The New York Times*, 25 March 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/03/25/world/map-isis-attacks-around-the-world.html>; T. Hegghammer and P. Nesser, “Assessing the Islamic State’s Commitment to Attacking the West”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4 (2015), pp. 14-30.

effectiveness of extremist propaganda that has contributed to the current malaise but the ineffectiveness of counter-messaging strategies to confront it.⁷ Indeed, of all the issues facing the counter-terrorism research and strategic-policy fields, perhaps the most pressing concerns how to counter the propaganda of Islamist militant groups. The purpose of this article is to analyse the evolution of propaganda strategy during conflict and identify lessons from that history that are applicable to counter-terrorism strategic communications efforts.

This article covers a large historical and conceptual breadth. It is neither constrained by a particular historical period nor thematically to the counter-terrorism field. What emerges from this analysis is the recurrence of fundamental themes through the millennia long history of words and imagery being used to shape the perceptions and influence the behaviour of friends, neutrals and enemies during conflict. These patterns are largely rooted in the evolution of propaganda during conflict being driven by three key factors: (i.) advancements in communication technologies, (ii.) developments in military technology and strategy, and (iii.) shifts in the relationship between the political elite and the people.

This Research Paper also tracks the evolution of the terminology associated with propaganda in war and how the complex interaction of organisational, political, ideological, socio-historical and conceptual factors has shaped that lexicon. Far from mere semantics, these lexicological transitions and diversification reflects both advancements in messaging strategies and conceptual and organisational changes that have sometimes hampered the efficacy of these efforts. The terminology used throughout this paper will largely be dictated by the historical period being referenced. For much of the analysis, the term 'propaganda' will be used and, despite its implicitly negative connotations in popular culture, it is used here objectively and pragmatically as messaging designed to influence the behaviour and attitudes of a target audience to achieve politico-military ends during conflict. Ultimately, what emerges from this article is that the potential success of a messaging campaign is optimised if it: (i.) produces a diversity of messaging that leverage rational-choice (based on a cost-benefit consideration of options) and identity-choice (decisions based on one's identity) appeals which are deployed both defensively and offensively (with an emphasis on the latter), (ii.) messaging is cohered by some core themes or, ideally, a grand narrative, (iii.) various means of communication are used to maximise the message's reach, timeliness and targeting, (iv.) all of which is calibrated to maximise the desired effects of one's own strategic-policy/politico-military efforts and nullify the effects of the adversary's activities.

⁷ For example, see A.M. Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks", *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings*, October 2015, p 1, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/10/combating-isis-propaganda-fernandez/is-propaganda_web_english_v2.pdf.

From the Ancient World to the 'Wars on Terror'

"...the study of relevant historical events and trends can help guide the search for information strategic concepts in our time and in the years ahead. Even a cursory backward glance quickly reveals the value of such an exercise and calls us to be mindful that information strategy did not spring forth fully formed, like Athena from Zeus's head. It has formed and reformed, shifted shape and emphasis, for millennia. We ignore this long experience at our peril".

Professor John Arquilla (Naval Postgraduate School), 'Thinking about information strategy.'⁸

The Ancients to Gutenberg

The intentional and strategic use of visual (e.g. gestures, pictures or written word) or aural (e.g. spoken words) communication to influence the opinions and behaviour of a target audience in an effort to achieve politico-military ends during times of conflict – an apt pragmatic definition of 'propaganda' for our purposes – probably finds its historical roots in the primordial clashes of the Mesolithic and Epipaleolithic periods. Cave paintings depicting groups of men fighting other men with weapons suggests that, certainly by the Neolithic period, organised warfare was being practised and would very likely have been partnered by some type of propaganda effort. Indeed, if the intent of those Neolithic cave paintings was to publicly commemorate a certain battle, and in doing so remind friends of glorious victory and intimidate enemies, then such art is, as Philip M. Taylor suggests in *Munitions of the Mind*, "perhaps the earliest form of war propaganda".⁹ Put simply, for as long as human beings have formed hierarchical collectives – led by a leader or leadership group that exerts power over the people and resources ('the political') – and fought other similarly organised people, persuasive communication has been used to boost the morale and fighting spirit of friends, convince neutrals of one's cause and dishearten foes.

With the Ancient Mesopotamian Empire, the cradle of civilisation, propaganda strategies were already starting to be shaped by the interplay of advancements in communication technology, developments in military technology and strategy, and the relationship between the political elite and the people. Imagery, particularly as depicted on buildings and walls through advancements in architecture, sculpture and painting, played a crucial role in glorifying the gods and revelling in military victories. Given that almost all of the population was illiterate, oration was an important mechanism for the Ancients to shape how their audiences understood the world, their place in it and what was required of them to achieve glory in this life and the next. This was typically achieved by drawing on an array of deities woven into mythological narratives. While war remained largely the 'sport' of the elite, propaganda helped to recruit and mobilise militaries while playing an essential role in ensuring the masses supported the status quo. As different systems of government emerged in response to the need to govern

⁸ J. Arquilla, "Thinking about information strategy", in J. Arquilla and D. Borer (eds.), *Information Strategy and Warfare: A guide to theory and practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

⁹ P. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A history of propaganda from the ancient world to the present day* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p.20.

larger and more complex societies, the changing relationship between the ruling elite and the people required increasingly nuanced approaches to how best to appeal to and mobilise the population.

Some of the greatest minds of Ancient Greece grappled with, for example, issues of censorship and how best to persuade the people of the *demokratia*. In Plato's *The Republic*, Socrates presents the case for censorship of the poets to ensure that 'The Guardians' (i.e. the warrior class) are not exposed to descriptions of the protagonists in the 'epic poems' as having undesirable traits (e.g. being prone to laughter)¹⁰ nor dire tales of the afterlife:

We must assume a control over the narrators of this class of tales as well as over the others, and beg them not simply to revile but rather to commend the world below, intimating to them that their descriptions are untrue, and will do harm to our future warriors.¹¹

In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle presents the case for three types of persuasion: *ethos* (based on the speaker's authority or traits), *pathos* (based on emotional appeals) and *logos* (based on the argument's logic).¹² Clearly the pioneers of democracy had a deep interest in how to balance the messy requirements of a 'government of the people' (*demokratia* literally translates as 'people-power') with the unforgiving realities of governing and warfare.

Alexander the Great, who was taught by Aristotle as a young man, would emerge as one of the greatest military and political strategists of the Ancient world. However, his empire, which stretched from Greece into North Africa and deep into the subcontinent, was built on not just a military and political genius but brilliance as a propagandist. Alexander deployed a range of propaganda strategies including PSYOPS ('psychological operations') against enemies, narratives that framed Alexander as at one with the gods, ensured Greek culture and even the Greeks themselves were part of the conquered societies, while cities were afforded his name ('Alexandria') and their buildings and art his image. Put simply, Alexander the Great deployed a multidimensional propaganda campaign to not just help him achieve victory but sustain his influence long after leaving. It would be unfair to interpret this as simply the crude products of a conqueror's narcissism. There was often a nuance to his approach evidenced in how he would shape messaging to suit the target audience. For example, currency was a potent way for a leader of the Ancient world to demonstrate their power and reach. Alexander coins were inscribed with the words 'of Alexander the King' for populations outside of Greece but simply 'of Alexander' in Greece so as not to upset his countrymen.¹³ While the Ancient Greeks exhibited an intellectual and practical sophistication in their use of persuasive communication as a politico-military tool, they did not have a monopoly on its use. Indeed, few empires of the Ancient world did not deploy propaganda in support of their politico-military aspirations. Even the Roman Empire's successes, which were undoubtedly a direct consequence of their extraordinary advancements in military technology, tactics and strategy, cannot be fully

¹⁰ Take the following excerpt for example: "Then persons of worth, even if only mortal men, must not be represented as overcome by laughter, and still less must such a representation of the gods be allowed", See Plato's *The Republic*, p.242.

¹¹ Ibid, p.239.

¹² Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, p.8.

¹³ For more see M. Price, *The coinage in the name of Alexander the Great and Philip Arrhidaeus*. (London: British Museum Press, 1991).

understood without consideration of how Roman propaganda was used to lionize its successes amongst citizens, frame Roman citizenship as an aspiration for those outside the empire and intimidate enemies.

The great empires of the Ancient world were arguably not the 'propaganda masters' of their time. That title must surely go to the founders of Christianity and Islam. Although separated by six centuries and thousands of kilometres, both Jesus and his disciples and the Prophet Muhammad and the *sahabah* (companions) were armed with little more than zeal and a powerful narrative. But they sparked movements that would eventually rise to dominate the 'West' and 'East' respectively. The proselytising of early Christians was often met by Roman persecution which created the 'martyrs' who, in dying for their beliefs, committed powerful acts of 'propaganda by deed'. Early Christianity added to the martyr narrative of its founder with each new 'local' martyr helping Christian teachings resonate with new generations in new localities. These Christian martyrs began to impress their Roman persecutors culminating in Constantine the Great becoming the first Christian Roman Emperor. If propaganda was central to Christianity's mainstreaming and winning the support of political elites, it would be equally important in its expansion and popularity amongst the masses.¹⁴ Simple messaging combined with symbolism – from the cross to Church architecture and Christian art – were powerful means to communicate with almost entirely illiterate audiences. With the spread of Christendom, the veneration of martyrs and saints remained an important way for the Church to create 'local' connections between its central message and disparate populations. On the other hand, censorship was also an important part of the Church's strategy and vernacular translations of the Bible were banned for centuries. Controlling access to Christianity's sources would be essential if the Church was to win the 'hearts and minds' of the masses. This would prove crucial through the Middle Ages when the Church played a central role in mobilising support for war – first during the Crusades (1096-1487) and then the period of extraordinary unrest in Europe sparked by The Reformation.

The Crusades are a crucial period in the evolution of propaganda during conflict. The clash of Christendom and Islam provided a fertile environment for propagandists on either side to frame the war as a 'cosmic battle' pitching soldiers of God against the forces of evil. Atrocity stories were rife as both sides sought to fill the upper-ranks of their armies with nobility (e.g. Knights) and mobilise the masses as foot-soldiers.¹⁵ It would be wrong, however, to assume that only ideological motivations were leveraged in Crusade propaganda. For many fighters, the Crusades represented an armed pilgrimage from which participants could be relieved of their debts and even return with wealth thanks to the 'spoils of war.' Pope Innocent III's *Quia Maior* in 1213 proclaiming the fifth crusade advised clergy of the best way to 'sell' yet another crusade. While it contains all the ideological appeals one would expect, e.g. 'eternal salvation' for those participating in the Crusades and the need to "fight in such a conflict not so much with physical arms as with spiritual ones", it also features rational-choice appeals such as "if any of those setting out to that place are strictly held by oath to repay usuries we order [...] that their creditors be compelled by the prelates of the churches to refrain from enforcing the oaths [...] and to stop exacting usuries".

¹⁴ For more see P. Brown, *Power and persuasion in late antiquity: Towards a Christian empire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); P. Brown, *Authority and the sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman world*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ For more see C. Maier, *Crusade propaganda and ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

More broadly, the Crusades heralded transitions in military technology and strategy that had important implications for the relationship between the people and power. With the Crusades, the population were not only increasingly expected to help fight the wars of the political elite but they were often the direct victims of war as 'siege tactics' became popular. Put simply, populations had a growing stake in war and those in power (or who wanted it) would have to invest more resources and time to winning their support. Two other trends had a significant impact upon the evolution of propaganda during this period: literacy rates started to climb and paper replaced parchment significantly reducing costs of production. As more people were able to read and as technology increased the speed of producing written materials while reducing its cost, the written word became a way to reach larger and more disparate audiences. With the introduction of Gutenberg's printing press in the mid-1400s, propaganda would be revolutionised.

When Martin Luther distributed 'The ninety-five theses on the power and efficacy of indulgences' in 1517, he triggered 'The Reformation' and with it the first great 'propaganda war' of the Modern period.¹⁶ While the primary focus of Luther's publication was his criticism of the Catholic practice of selling 'indulgences,' his message leveraged festering disenchantments with the Church's perceived Crusader warmongering, corruption and elitism. The printed word did not have a monopoly as a means of communication because, despite increasing literacy rates, widespread illiteracy meant that oration remained an important means to spread the Reformation's message. Nevertheless, without Gutenberg's printing press, Luther's criticism may not have extended beyond the city of Wittenberg. Instead, Luther's ideas sparked an intellectual revolution that rocked not only the Church but Europe.¹⁷ As the persecution of Protestants drove their reformation underground – especially during the Inquisitions – the printing press became even more important as a means to covertly spread the Reformation's ideas. The Catholic Church responded with counter-propaganda and censorship which included efforts to control the printing presses. Indeed, the Catholic Church would create the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) – the origins of the word 'propaganda' – as a new papal department responsible for reviving the Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Reformation.

A period of extraordinary unrest in Europe emerged in the wake of The Reformation – a period which included the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and English Civil War (1642-1651) – reflecting shifting relationships between the public and the political elite. During this period, modern military technology began to effectively harness the devastating capabilities of gunpowder. Another crucial factor emerged that would come to play a crucial role in shaping the relationship between the political elite and the people: the media. While the media would be a device to keep government accountable for its words and deeds, those in power inevitably saw it as a mechanism requiring intermittent intercession, if not censorship, under certain circumstances. Advancements in communication technology with the invention of the printing press and the opportunities it created (e.g. media, commentary, etc.), developments in military technology thanks to gunpowder, and populations fundamentally questioning

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¹⁶ For more see M. Edwards, *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1994); H. Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (London: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ For an analysis that frames the Protestant reformation as a social media campaign see "Social media in the 16th century: How Luther went viral", *The Economist*, 17 December 2011.

their relationship with the ruling elite would combine across the Atlantic in an extraordinary propaganda campaign that helped birth modern democracy.

The American Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

As with any revolution, the factors that contributed to the American Revolution and its (remarkably rapid) success are diverse and complex. However, it is telling that in John Adams's reflections on the success of the American Revolution in a letter to Hezekiah Niles dated 13 February 1818 he declares: "But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The revolution was effected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people".¹⁸ He goes on to argue:

The people of America had been educated in an habitual affection for England, as their mother country [...] But when they found her a cruel beldam, willing like Lady Macbeth, to 'dash their brains out', it is no wonder if their filial affections ceased, and were changed into indignation and horror. This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.

To this end, it is greatly to be desired, that young men of letters [...] would undertake the laborious, but certainly interesting and amusing task, of searching and collecting all the records, pamphlets, newspapers, and even handbills, which in any way contributed to change the temper and views of the people, and compose them into an independent nation.¹⁹

Adams' reflections are significant because they highlight the fact that the colonists saw themselves as British citizens and were loyal to the Crown in the decades preceding the War of Independence. Certainly, with the end of the Seven Years War in North America (1756-1763)²⁰ discontent was emerging in the thirteen American colonies due mostly to Britain increasing taxes and enforcing post-war land policy with the stationing of a small standing army in the west. Nevertheless, early political manoeuvrings by the Americans sought to negotiate with the British (e.g. the First Continental Congress, 1774);²¹ a reflection of enduring British loyalty in the colonies and, perhaps, a recognition of the benefits of aligning with the world's greatest superpower at the time.²² As the political elites of the American colonies began to champion independence, they knew that winning popular support across their colonies would be essential but so too would garnering transnational support. As evidenced by Adams' letter, propaganda would be crucial to their campaign strategy.

¹⁸ John Adams' letter to H. Niles, 13 February 1818, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/john-adams-to-h-niles/>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ For more on the French and Indian Wars in North America see W. Nester, *The First Global War: Britain, France, and the fate of North America 1756-1775* (Westport: Praeger, 2000).

²¹ For example, the *Petition from the General Congress in America to the King, October 26, 1774* begins by stating: "Most Gracious Sovereign, We your majesty's faithful subjects [...] <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/Petition%20to%20the%20King%20broadside.pdf>

²² For more on the transformation of the American colonies from British loyalists to revolutionaries see J. Ferling, *A leap in the dark: The struggle to create the American republic*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2003).

The American Revolutionaries' propaganda campaign offers some important principles for using messaging to win 'minds and hearts' during conflict.²³ First, a variety of messaging was deployed that leveraged both rational- and identity-choice appeals. Speeches such as Patrick Henry's 'Give me liberty or give me death' (23 March 1775)²⁴ and Thomas Paine's pamphlet 'Common Sense' (1776)²⁵ are examples of appeals that contributed to an emergent American identity. However, appeals to the pragmatic benefits of independence or the pitfalls of keeping the status quo featured prominently in Revolutionary messaging (e.g. 'no taxation without representation'). Of course, some of the most powerful messaging produced by the Revolution, including Henry and Paine's pleas, fused identity- and rational-choice appeals.

Second, all available means and formats of communication were used to spread the Revolution's message from pamphlets and speeches to the print news media, cartoons, art and even musical ballads. This diversification was designed to not only *reach* as broad an audience as possible in a timely fashion but reflected an understanding that *how* a message is delivered can be just as important as *what* it says. Put simply, using various technological means of communication is important for the *reach* and *relevance* of one's message but the format of the communication (e.g. spoken word, image, song) can greatly enhance its *resonance*.

Third, while the American Revolution had powerful core themes, its overarching grand narrative, eloquently captured by Thomas Jefferson in the *Declaration of Independence* (4 July 1776),²⁶ cohered the entire propaganda effort. Moreover, messaging efforts were synchronised with politico-military actions to boost the impact of both. For example, military operations into Canada were accompanied by a propaganda campaign, such as George Washington's 'Address to the inhabitants of Canada' (14 September 1775),²⁷ and Revolutionary PSYOPS targeted British troops with pamphlets and songs.²⁸ Demonstrating that America was capable of independent government was essential to the Revolutionary cause and messaging was used to promote these efforts too.

It is important to, albeit briefly, consider the international theatre of the American propaganda campaign. Winning support in continental Europe was vital to the Revolutionary cause and this delegation was led by none other than Benjamin Franklin. The core principles applied in the domestic theatre were similarly applied transnationally with messaging that leveraged both anti-British sentiments (i.e. identity-choice appeals) *and*, for example, the pragmatic value of continuing trade with the American colony (i.e. rational-choice appeals). The Revolutionaries also deployed both 'attributed' (i.e. 'white propaganda' in which the author is correctly identified) and 'unattributed' (i.e. 'black propaganda' whereby the author is falsely or not identified) messaging drawing on intelligence to maximise its reach and impact.²⁹ There is little doubt that winning the support or neutrality of other nations was important for

²³ For a comprehensive collection of American Revolutionary propaganda see J. Waller, *Founding political warfare documents of the United States* (Crossbow Press, 2009).

²⁴ Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death", 23 March, 1775, <http://www.earlyamerica.com/bookmarks/give-me-liberty-or-give-me-death-speech/>.

²⁵ Thomas Paine's "Common Sense", 1776, <http://www.ushistory.org/paine/commonsense/>.

²⁶ *The Declaration of Independence*, 4 July 1776, http://www.constitution.org/us_doi.pdf.

²⁷ George Washington's "To the inhabitants of Canada", 14 September 1775, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0358>.

²⁸ For more see J. Waller, *Founding political warfare documents of the United States* (Crossbow Press, 2009), especially the chapter on 'Military PSYOP', pp.297-306.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

America winning its independence over the British. More broadly, it reflected a trait that would only grow in significance: the importance of shaping perceptions and winning the support (or neutrality) of transnational actors even for achieving largely local ends.

The propaganda campaign by the American Revolutionaries did not, by itself, win American independence from Britain. But it did act as an important ‘force multiplier’ for American politico-military efforts and ‘force nullifier’ against the British. The American campaign was not without its faults. British messaging certainly had its successes too. Indeed, to such an extent, that on one occasion General Washington described British PSYOPS against his troops as an ‘insidious art.’³⁰ Nonetheless, the American Revolutionaries provided the world with some of the most eloquent political speeches and written works ever produced. It was a revolution that would change not just a country but the world.

Back across the Atlantic, the American Revolution helped inspire the French Revolution (1789-1799) and, in its aftermath, the rise of Napoleon.³¹ Governments by and for the people had a military implication. As Clausewitz declared, with the French Revolution “suddenly war again became the business of the people”.³² Through the 19th century, growing literacy rates created a viable market for print news. In 1896, the next communication revolution emerged with the invention of wireless telegraphy and the first commercial screening of moving picture cinema. Meanwhile, the industrial revolution was in full swing causing a quantum leap in not just advancements in military technology but the volume and rate of its production. Given the historical forces at the time, it seems with hindsight that World War I was destined to be fought as a ‘total war’. Propaganda, too, would be deployed on an unprecedented scale. For the Allies, propaganda would play a key role in their victory. However, like the Allied victory itself, propaganda’s victories would ultimately come at a heavy cost.

World War I

The 20th century presented World War I propagandists with challenges that, although fundamentally similar to those of previous generations, were larger and more complex than at any other time. Propaganda always had to understand and cater to target audiences, but now those audiences could be local, regional or transnational. New technologies meant faster and broader communication but the message itself remained crucial and older methods (e.g. pamphlets, posters, speeches) remained as important as ever. Both attributed and unattributed propaganda had to be deployed but in ways that were mutually beneficial and gave consideration to media reporting. Consequently, the bureaucratic apparatuses responsible for supporting the propaganda war effort became increasingly complex with different civilian and military departments responsible for different jurisdictions and types of messaging. For the British, Wellington House, the legendary propaganda agency led by Charles Masterman, was responsible for largely ‘unattributed’ messaging designed to polarise international opinion in favour of the British. Wellington House also produced materials

³⁰ G. Washington, *The writings of George Washington from the original manuscript sources 1745-1799* (Greenwood Press, Westport), p.299.

³¹ See R. Palmer, *The age of the democratic revolution: A political history of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

³² C. Clausewitz, *On War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989 (1832)), p.592.

such as a magazine called *The War Pictorial* that featured stories and colourful imagery published in ten languages and with a circulation of 700,000 per month a year after its 1916 launch.³³ Lord Beaverbrook led the Ministry of Information which was responsible for propaganda targeting allies and neutrals while Lord Northcliffe led the Department of Enemy Propaganda from Crewe House.³⁴ Balloons and aircraft from the Royal Flying Corps were often used to disseminate PSYOPS messaging behind enemy lines which, by 1918, were being produced by Northcliffe's Crewe House.³⁵ The picture that emerges is of specialised units focused on specialist aims: communications and the bureaucracies responsible for it would only get more complex.³⁶ The scholarly field is filled with comprehensive analyses of Allied and Axis propaganda strategies and their impact on the outcome of World War I.³⁷ For the purpose of this article, the technological and moral battles at the heart of the British propaganda campaign are worth exploring because they proved decisive in shifting the balance of the war towards the Allies.

The Zimmermann Telegram

When Germany invaded Belgium, prompting the British declaration of war on 4 August 1914, a British ship soon severed underwater telegraph cables – the fastest means of transcontinental communication at the time – which directly connected Germany to, amongst other countries, the United States. Without a direct transcontinental line, Germany had to use the cables of neutrals, like Sweden and the United States, which the British were able to intercept and, thanks to captured German cipher documents, decode. Both Germany and Britain were keen to transform American neutrality into support for themselves and the latter's technical advantage proved crucial. In January 1917, British intelligence intercepted a coded message – the infamous 'Zimmermann Telegram' – which was sent by the German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to his counterpart in Mexico. It stated that German submarine combat operations would soon recommence and if the United States did not remain neutral: "make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona".³⁸

While it was a propaganda coup for the British because it served as 'proof' of an aggressive German foe, making this information public by notifying the Americans of the telegram would expose British intelligence activities, potentially damage British-American relations and risked reversing growing anti-German sentiment in the United States. Ultimately, it was too good of an opportunity to let pass. The British presented

³³ B. Wintour, *Britain and the Great War, 1914-1918: A subject bibliography of some selected aspects* (Englefield: Greenangle Publishing, 2014), p.238.

³⁴ For a post-war assessment of the British propaganda campaign, see "British propaganda in enemy countries", *The Times history and encyclopaedia of the war*, Part 270, vol. 21, 30 December 1919, <https://www.psywar.org/psywar/reproductions/TimesWWIPropaganda.pdf>.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p.331.

³⁶ The increasing organisational complexity that emerged from World War I was the inevitable product of bureaucratisation and the diverse requirements of effective messaging during total war. This trend would persist and get more complex in the decades to follow acting as a catalyst for organisational, ideological, jurisdictional and personal differences often hampering the efficacy and efficiency of messaging campaigns.

³⁷ See H. Lasswell, *Propaganda technique in the World War* (Mansfield: Martino Publishing, 2013); J. Mock, and C. Larson, *Words that won the war* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939). The British Library has published a collection of short articles exploring different aspects of propaganda in World War I, <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles>.

³⁸ For more see B. Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram: America enters the war, 1917-1918*. (New York: Random House, 2014). Also see D. Kahn, *The Codebreakers* (New York: Scribner, 1996).

the telegram to President Woodrow Wilson on 24 February 1917 and, within two months, America declared war on Germany and then, by year's end, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. American involvement on the side of the Allies proved *the* decisive event of the war. Britain's ability to disrupt and intercept German communications afforded it a significant advantage. However, this example also highlights the advantages and pitfalls of using intelligence in propaganda messaging.

Despite the impact of the 'Zimmermann Telegram' on shifting American neutrality, it is important not to isolate its impact from the effects created by Allied propaganda more broadly. It was Allied messaging condemning German U-boat operations, especially after the sinking of the *Lusitania*, which worked to force Germany to revise and then temporarily cease operations. In many respects, the 'Zimmerman Telegram' is a product of German apprehensions about not only re-commencing operations that had been, at least militarily, successful but testimony to broader British propaganda successes. Indeed, growing anti-German sentiment amongst neutrals reflected the success with which Allied propaganda had constructed Germans as barbaric warmongers – 'The Hun' – fuelled by bloodlust and dreams of world domination.

Atrocity Propaganda

Winning the moral high ground in the opinion of domestic and international audiences was a crucial aim of both Allied and Axis propaganda efforts. While atrocity propaganda was used by both sides, it was a specialist industry in the hands of the British; an effort helped along in the opening months of the war by Germany's invasion of France and neutral Belgium in August 1914. The *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (1915)³⁹ prepared by James Bryce, former British Ambassador to the United States, was an 'independent' report into German attacks on civilian populations during the invasion of Belgium. Also known as the Bryce Report, it found that the German Army had engaged in "deliberate and systematically organised massacres of the civil population", arguing that "murder, rape, arson, and pillage began from the moment when the German army crossed the frontier".⁴⁰ It was explicit in parts, even describing "the dead body of a boy of five or six with his hands nearly severed" and "two young women [...] One had her breasts cut off".⁴¹ According to Bryce's report, atrocities in Belgium reflected German military culture: "It is a specifically military doctrine, the outcome of theory held by a ruling caste who have brooded and thought written and talked and dreamed about War until they have fallen under its obsession and been hypnotised by its spirit".⁴²

Published in thirty languages in May 1915, the Bryce Report helped to shape how the Germans would be perceived by not only populations allied with the British but amongst many neutrals too. Wellington House disseminated thousands of copies of the Bryce Report in the United States. A key component of British messaging targeting allies and neutrals was the fusing of atrocity propaganda with representations of Germans as 'the Hun'.⁴³ The British flooded its target audiences – friends and neutrals,

³⁹ J. Bryce, *Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages (The Bryce Report)*, 1915, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/brycereport.htm>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ For more on British portrayals of the Axis in its propaganda see D. Wench, "Images of the Hun: The portrayal of the German enemy in British Propaganda in World War I" in *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

domestic and international – with attributed and unattributed messaging (often accompanied by powerful imagery) that presented ‘The Hun’ as a global threat. British propagandists were quick to leverage German acts that reinforced this image, such as the 7 May 1915 sinking of the RMS Lusitania by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland and the ‘Zimmerman Telegram’, often blatantly manipulating ‘the truth’ to suit the message.⁴⁴ Atrocity propaganda and demonization of the enemy are timeless propaganda strategies and it was used incessantly during World War I to great effect. In a world without the internet and instantaneous transnational communication, it could have been easy for public opinion to become distracted by the daily grind of the war effort. British atrocity propaganda operated as a central theme of its messaging campaign, compounding in both impact and duration the ‘blowback’ (negative repercussions) on public opinion for the enemy and helped the Allies take the perceived moral high ground that proved essential for recruitment and winning over neutrals.

The Cost

World War I ended on 11 November 1918. The cost was immense: almost 17 million killed and about 20 million injured. Propaganda had proved vital to the Allied victory at both strategic and operational levels. While this article has focused more on strategic initiatives, Northcliffe’s PSYOPS messages dropped behind enemy lines were seen as crucial in shortening the war’s duration. A report to the British Foreign Office in September 1918 stated that, “if the Entente knew what poison these leaflets etc, were working in the minds of German soldiers, they would give up lead and bombard with paper only in the future”, while an article in *The Times* (31 October 1919) declared: “Good propaganda probably saved a year of war, and this meant the saving of thousands of millions of money and probably at least a million lives”.⁴⁵ In August 1918, Commander Hindenburg said in a message to the German army, “Besides bombs which kill the body, his airmen throw down leaflets which are intended to kill the soul”, and Ludendorff famously commented that “We [Germans] boggled at the enemy propaganda as a rabbit stares transfixed at a snake”.⁴⁶ But this victory also came with a price.

Propaganda is deployed with the intent of achieving a particular effect (i.e. a first order effect) but, just like politico-military actions, can have inadvertent counter-productive second and third order effects. For example, as the war was ending, Allied messaging made promises regarding post-war policy (e.g. nationalism and independence) that was yet to be written which latter had repercussions in Central Europe and the Middle East that are still being played out today. The most explicit example of such ‘blowback’ is probably the effects of British atrocity propaganda. With its portrayals of ‘The Hun’ designed to win the moral high ground and rally supporters, the post-war effects (i.e. second and third order effects) of atrocity propaganda would see anti-German

⁴⁴ For example, when Karl Goetz produced a medallion designed to satirically commemorate the sinking of the Lusitania but mistakenly dated the sinking as ‘5 Mai 1915.’ British propaganda manipulated the production of the medallion and the error to reinforce their image of ‘The Hun.’ As Dutton argues, ‘British propaganda thus originated the myth that Goetz’s ‘Lusitania Medallion’ was an official commemorative of the sinking and in the process implied national approval for the act itself.’ For more see P. Dutton, “How a German medallion became a British propaganda tool”, originally published in the *Imperial War Museum Review*, 1986, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-a-german-medallion-became-a-british-propaganda-tool>.

⁴⁵ In *R.A.F. Against Goebbels: The story of the Great truth offensive over Europe*: p.5, <https://www.psywar.org/psywar/reproductions/RAFag.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Ibid. It should be noted that German praise of Allied propaganda should be read within the context of emergent post-war conspiracy theories that Germany lost due to treachery and the deviousness of enemies as opposed to flawed politico-military strategies.

sentiment persist for decades after the cessation of violence. As the glow of victory and the self-congratulations abated, reflections on the war effort raised questions about the truthfulness of Allied messaging during the war perhaps none more scathing than Lord Ponsonby's *Falsehood in wartime*.⁴⁷ Atrocity stories had been a feature of Allied appeals to friends and neutrals but now, with the fog of war cleared, it appeared that inaccuracies and lies had been reported as truths. U.S. isolationists felt that the nation had been manipulated into a costly war while debate raged about whether free and open societies engage in propaganda. The term itself would lose its objective connotations and, at least for those in the West, would be used as an insult, a synonym for manipulative lies. For democracies, propaganda would not just be the practice of enemies, it was the enemy. A complex lexicon would emerge that was motivated, in part, by avoiding this taboo term.

At the end of the war, the British shut down the Ministry of Information. And so it is, with the end of the First World War that the modern love-hate relationship democracies have with 'propaganda' begins. A varied lexicon would emerge, evolve and expand through the 20th and into the 21st century: 'information', 'strategic communications', 'PSYOPS', 'psywar', 'influence' and 'perception management' amongst others. This terminology reflected not just the growing complexity of messaging during conflict and the intricate organisational apparatuses responsible for engaging in it but a need to find alternatives to the term 'propaganda'. During crisis and war, persuasively communicating to friends, neutrals and enemies was still seen as an indispensable tool. But once the crisis subsided, it would be seen again as an unnecessary practice best left in history. Unfortunately, it is during such lulls that future adversaries evolve their messaging strategies forcing governments to have to 'catch-up' in response. This is what happened between the 'Great Wars.' Future adversaries in Europe had closely observed Allied propaganda successes and endeavoured to perfect them.

World War II

To understand the importance of propaganda to the Nazi campaign strategy, it is essential to return to its raw intellectual roots in the writings of Adolf Hitler. In *Mein Kampf* it is clear that Hitler admired the efficacy of the Allied propaganda strategy:

In 1915 the enemy started his propaganda among our soldiers. From 1916 onwards it steadily became more intensive, and at the beginning of 1918 it had swollen into a storm flood.... Gradually our soldiers began to think just in the way the enemy wished them to think.⁴⁸

Hitler believed that, "from the enemy, however, a fund of valuable knowledge could be gained by those who kept their eyes open, whose powers of perception had not yet become sclerotic, and who during four-and-a-half years had to experience the perpetual flood of enemy propaganda".⁴⁹ These experiences solidified in Hitler's mind the belief that propaganda was central to the success of any political or military campaign, even declaring: "I was tormented by the thought that if Providence had put the conduct of German propaganda [during World War I] into my hands, instead of into

⁴⁷ A. Ponsonby, *Falsehood in wartime: Propaganda lies of the First World War* (Project Gutenberg Australia, 1928), <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks10/1000011.txt>.

⁴⁸ A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1933, p.162.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.157.

the hands of those incompetent and even criminal ignoramuses and weaklings, the outcome of the struggle might have been different".⁵⁰

Propaganda played a key role in the rise of the National Socialist German Workers' Party and it would be given top priority once they reached power.⁵¹ Indeed, upon Hitler becoming Chancellor in January 1933, the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was established in March. Headed by Joseph Goebbels, the propaganda ministry was responsible for ensuring that every means – from radio, film and media to education, art and rallies – was used to effectively communicate Nazi messaging. As the Nazis prepared for war in the late-1930s, propaganda was seen as essential to the war effort. Professor David Welch, an expert in 20th century political propaganda, has analysed how Nazi propaganda aims were pursued via interconnected messaging themes with, for example, the overarching narrative of 'building the *volksstaat*' tied to sub-themes of 'solidarity', 'need for racial purity', 'hatred of enemies' and '*Führerprinzip*' which were in turn tied to broader aims like 'psychological preparation' and 'morale'.⁵²

The Nazi's strategic appreciation for propaganda meant that it permeated every aspect of German life using all available means of communication. The narratives were carefully crafted, especially during the early years of the regime. Goebbels and his fellow propagandists also understood the power of imagery and symbolism – whether in the form of Nazi uniforms, Speer's architecture or the carefully orchestrated '*parteitag*' (rallies) – in enhancing the appeal of their message. Nazi films, such as Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), brought together all of these elements in an effort to cohere Germans around their government and intimidate foreign rivals. Hitler would be central to Nazi propaganda as its primary messenger, the epitome of Nazi ideology and thus a powerful symbolic vehicle that seamlessly fused narrative and imagery: Hitler and Nazism were one and the same. Thanks to the emergence of radio as a new communication technology and advancements in cinema, Hitler's powerful rhetorical performances would not be isolated to those in the room but could be experienced across borders. The Nazi propaganda machine may have been impressive but the head-start it enjoyed over the Allies would soon be dashed.⁵³

When Britain's Ministry of Information publicly re-emerged in September 1939, it had been engaged in planning since 1935, and its responsibilities were limited to censorship and information campaigns for domestic, allied and neutral countries. Still confronting the 'blowback' from World War I, its bumbling beginnings were captured in the fact that within two years four ministers had been replaced or sacked.⁵⁴ As Cull asserts: "So disastrous was the MOI's start to the war that it came close to being disbanded altogether. In the event it relinquished some of its responsibilities: a Press and Censorship Bureau was set up [...] reporting to the Home Office rather than the MOI,

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 163.

⁵¹ For analysis of Nazi propaganda see D. Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and propaganda* (London, Routledge, 1993). For samples of Nazi propaganda see R. Bytwerk (ed) *Landmark speeches of National Socialism*. (Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

⁵² For more see D. Welch, "Today Germany, Tomorrow the world': Nazi propaganda and total war, 1943-45", In: *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), p.97.

⁵³ For a comprehensive analysis of British and German World War II propaganda see M. Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

⁵⁴ For more on the Ministry of Information see J. Chapman, "'War' versus 'cultural' propaganda: Institutional and ideological tensions over the projection of Britain during the second World War", In *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion*. (London, I.B. Tauris, 2015), p.80-92; N. Cull, "MOI (Ministry of Information)", In N. Cull, D. Culbert and D. Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion*, (Santa Barbara, ABC CLIO, 2003): p.251.

while responsibility for propaganda to enemy countries was transferred to the Foreign Office".⁵⁵ Given the dismantling of the MOI post-World War I, it was little wonder these problems emerged. With the bureaucracies responsible for the 'information war' becoming more complex, relationships between departments were often tense (e.g. the MOI and the British Council.)⁵⁶ Moreover, the repercussions of lies and atrocity propaganda haunted World War II efforts. Sir John Reith, the second of four ministers of the MOI, insisted that British information efforts must tell "the truth, nothing but the truth and, as near as possible, the whole truth".⁵⁷ Atrocity propaganda was used sparingly and, in another 'blowback' from World War I, reports of atrocities in Europe committed by the Nazis would be slow to resonate with the public.

Despite the time lag and some obstacles, the 'information war' unleashed by the allies in Europe and then in the Pacific would be crucial to winning the war.⁵⁸ Film and radio emerged as crucial means of engaging in mass communication and, with that rise, entertainment value captured in the format of a message became a significant consideration in efforts to capture the attention of audiences and maximise a message's resonance. Movies were commissioned by all sides of the war in an effort to boost morale, win support for the war effort and drive recruitment. The *Why we fight* series, by multiple Oscar winning director Frank Capra, is still considered one of the greatest counterpropaganda movies of all time. Initially produced for recruitment purposes, it was soon released for commercial consumption in America and other Allied nations. Radio programming, for example through the BBC, also used entertainment to shape audience perceptions of the war. Radio also allowed for the leaders of the warring powers – particularly Churchill, Roosevelt and Hitler – to use their different rhetorical styles to appeal to their audiences (e.g. Roosevelt's fireside chats).

While deploying a variety of messages using all available means of communication was important, it is the content of that messaging that is essential to shaping audience perceptions and mobilising support. In *Persuade or Perish* (1948), former Deputy Director of the Office of War Information during World War II, Wallace Carroll, argues that the transition from *defensive* messaging (e.g. counterpropaganda) in the early stages of the war to *offensive* messaging (e.g. themes of Allied dominance and Nazi defeat) shifted the balance of the 'information war' towards the Allies.⁵⁹ Britain's Political War Executive, established in September 1941, played an important role to these ends by engaging in both attributed – e.g. using airdropped leaflets and BBC radio – and, working closely with intelligence and military units, unattributed messaging. The synchronisation of attributed and unattributed messaging, developed and deployed by drawing on intelligence and working with military units, helped to create havoc behind enemy lines while the larger propaganda war raged on. What had at first seemed a slick Nazi propaganda machine, at least before it was properly challenged, later increasingly faltered. Its messaging became out-of-sync with realities on the ground, especially after

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⁵⁵ J. Chapman, "War" versus "cultural" propaganda", p.81.

⁵⁶ For more on the troubled relationship between the MOI, British Council and other agencies see E. Corse, *A battle for neutral Europe: British cultural propaganda during the Second World War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 39-85; J. Chapman, "War" versus "cultural" propaganda, pp. 79-95. While one may assume that the propaganda agencies of totalitarian regimes would be immune to such inter-departmental rivalries, intellectual clashes and personal tensions, it was a consistent issue for the Nazis as different personalities and visions clashed or different departments sought to gain favour from the leadership.

⁵⁷ Quoted in D. Welch, "Censorship", In N. Cull, D. Culbert and D. Welch (eds.), *Propaganda and Mass Persuasion* (Santa Barbara, ABC CLIO, 2003), p.72.

⁵⁸ For a comprehensive collection of World War II messaging see *Persuading the people: Government publicity in the Second World War*. HMSO, London: Central Office of Information.

⁵⁹ W. Carroll, *Persuade or Perish* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1948).

the disaster of Stalingrad (23 August 1942-2 February 1943). When Goebbels delivered his infamous 'Total War' speech on 18 February 1943, it was an attempt to drive politico-military strategy from the propaganda pulpit. In the early years of the war, Nazi narratives heralded the inevitability of glory as a product of Aryan superiority. From 1943, assurances of *vergeltung* (retaliation) appeared with increasing frequency and prominence in Nazi messaging as a means to frame politico-military set-backs in the field as mere fuel for the vengeance that was to come. But the *vergeltung* message could not be properly backed up by actions in the field. As Kirwin argues: "Retaliation had been, however, the only propaganda theme able – if only temporarily – to bolster German civilian morale in the dark months after Stalingrad. It was essentially the substitute for military success [...]. But it, too, was ultimately dependent on realization in the form of action".⁶⁰ In the Pacific, the Japanese resorted to explicit pornographic leaflets and radio programming by Tokyo Rose in misguided PSYOPS against Allied troops that reflected a cultural ignorance of their adversaries.

Ultimately, 'information warfare' is not a cure-all nor a substitute for real politico-military strategy and actions. At best, it can divert attention from a vacuum – whether political or military – but it cannot fill it. The British and Americans, along with their other allies, had demonstrated again that in a multi-theatre 'information war' they could defeat increasingly sophisticated adversaries. Their approach was not calibrated for a single decisive 'information manoeuvre' or mastery of the latest communication technology alone but rather the cumulative impact of a multidimensional messaging strategy synchronised with actions in the field (and vice versa). But again, with another war over, some of the information agencies that had been crucial to that victory were dismantled, downsized or absorbed into larger departments. It is pertinent to conclude with some of Wallace Carroll's reflections written in the immediate post-war years:

The military defeat of Germany and Japan brought an end to the activities of OWI [the Office of War Information] and to the parallel activities of the Office of Inter-American Affairs which had carried out the American information program in Latin America. The State Department then took over some of their employees and some of their equipment and set out to develop its own foreign information service. Every American abroad was aware by this time of the serious misconceptions of America and American policy which existed in every country.... Soviet propagandists and their Communist auxiliaries in every country were openly waging political warfare against the United States. The fiercer their attacks became, the more Congress seemed determined to wreck the machinery which had been set up to defend America's reputation abroad. By the summer of 1947 the funds for the information service had been so reduced that it could offer little effective resistance to the Soviet propaganda offensive.⁶¹

⁶⁰ G. Kirwin, "Waiting for retaliation – A study in Nazi propaganda behaviour and German civilian morale", *Journal of Contemporary History* 16, vol. 3, 1981, p. 579.

⁶¹ W. Carroll, *Persuade or Perish* (1948) pp. 8-9.

The Cold War

The clash of the Soviet-led Eastern and the U.S.-led Western blocs would cast a pall over the world for four decades (1949-1989). 'East versus West' became the paradigm through which almost all politico-military phenomena of the period was interpreted which, in turn, fundamentally shaped strategic-policy decisions. While the nuclear arms race and the intelligence wars between the two superpowers may have been best understood through this paradigm, it proved far too simplistic a 'lens' through which to understand the post-colonial independence movements that rose up in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia in the decades proceeding World War II. Of course, the nations of the Eastern and Western blocs who interpreted these nationalist uprisings as ominous indicators of the 'falling dominoes' principle cannot shoulder all the blame.⁶² Many of the independence movements themselves would contribute to this perception by framing their actions as resistance to the 'imperial' East or West in pursuit of material support from one or the other. The Cold War period is thus most accurately characterised by this duality and its interplay: the competition between two superpowers, on the one hand, and a variety of 'small wars' for independence, on the other.

From President Harry Truman's declaration on 20 April 1950 that 'this is a struggle, above all else, for the minds of men,'⁶³ to President Ronald Reagan's speech to the British Parliament on 8 June 1982 declaring "for the ultimate determinant in the struggle that's now going on in the world will not be bombs and rockets, but a test of wills and ideas [...]"⁶⁴ the Cold War was seen as fundamentally a 'battle of ideas'. This is not to diminish the military, economic, cultural and intelligence dimensions of the conflict. Rather, it merely highlights the reality that both sides framed their respective antagonisms as being rooted in an irreconcilably different way to perceive the world which rendered their respective systems politico-militarily and socio-culturally incompatible. The Cold War was as much a competition for 'control' – politico-military and economic dominance – as it was a competition for 'meaning' – a way in which to interpret, value and assess the world. Moreover, the Soviet and American nuclear arms race with its promises of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' meant that the Cold War's most overt battles *had to be* in the information theatre or risk a 'hot war'.⁶⁵

The initial dismantling of information agencies after World War II was followed by the establishment of new capabilities in the 1950s driven by a belief that a form of 'total *political warfare* – fusing overt and covert, 'hard' (e.g. military and intelligence) and 'soft' (e.g. information and diplomacy) power activities – would be crucial to defeating the Soviets.⁶⁶ The championing of communism by the East and democracy and capitalism

⁶² U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower spoke of the 'falling dominoes principle' in a 7 April 1954 press conference in response to a question regarding the strategic importance of Indochina (Vietnam). He was arguing that if Indochina were allowed to become communist then other nations in the region would fall to the communists like dominoes. See D. Eisenhower, "The President's news conference" 7 April 1954 (transcript), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10202>.

⁶³ H. Truman, "Address on Foreign Policy at a Luncheon of the American Society of Newspaper Editors", 20 April 1950, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=715>.

⁶⁴ R. Reagan, "Address to members of the British Parliament", June 8 1982 (transcript), <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/speeches/1982/60882a.htm>.

⁶⁵ For a collection of analyses exploring different aspects of Cold War era propaganda see G. Rawnsley, (ed.) *Cold War propaganda in the 1950s* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ For more see C. Paul, *Strategic Communication: Origins, concepts, and current debates* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2015), pp. 73-75; N. Cull, "The tragedy of American Public Diplomacy, 1989-1999: The last decade of

by the West, provided the ‘grand’ overarching narrative that explained their actions and place in the world.⁶⁷ To help champion this grand narrative internationally, Eisenhower established the United States Information Agency (USIA) in 1953 and it would act,

[...] as an independent foreign affairs agency within the executive branch of the U.S. government charged with the conduct of public diplomacy in support of U.S. foreign policy. Public diplomacy complements and reinforces traditional diplomacy by communicating directly with foreign publics through a wide range of international information, educational and cultural exchange activities.⁶⁸

USIA is important within the context of this analysis because its existence reflected a belief that proactively engaging with the world and using messaging and actions to champion the West’s grand narrative would be essential to defeating the Eastern Bloc. Of course, both East and West engaged in the entire gamut of propaganda activities. At times the combination of engaging in attributed and unattributed messaging risked undermining the credibility of the former due to the latter. For example, radio stations – like the *Voice of America*, *BBC*, *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty* – played a key role in transmitting attributed and unattributed messaging to target populations. However, while the *Voice of America* was essentially the radio-station of the USIA, *Radio Free Europe* and *Radio Liberty* were funded by the Central Intelligence Agency.⁶⁹ Balancing which agency would be responsible for what type of messaging, targeting which audience and how was a uniquely modern problem and one that continues to create challenges.

It is impossible to discuss this period in the history of propaganda in conflict and ignore the Vietnam War. America’s ‘mission creep’ into Vietnam – peaking in 1968 with over half a million military personnel in-country – mirrored the growing interest of the media in the conflict. Television streamed colour images of modern jungle warfare into living rooms around the world. The might of the greatest military power in history was being unleashed on what seemed to be a ragtag bunch of peasants. But those ‘peasants’ had defeated the French in the first Indochina war and saw the ‘invasion’ of America and its allies as a continuation of that history. America and its allies interpreted Vietnam through the ideological lens of the Cold War; a domino that, if allowed to fall, could see all of Asia fall to the communists. This was how the Vietnam war was understood by many politicians and strategists and so this was also how it would be sold to the electorate. As President Lyndon Johnson declared: “If this little nation [Vietnam] goes down the drain and can’t maintain her independence, ask yourself what’s going to happen to all these other little nations”.⁷⁰ As the number of American troops killed in action grew into the tens of thousands while many times that were injured, statistics dwarfed by the colossal toll of the war on the Vietnamese people, the media played a

the United States Information Agency” In *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp.113-126.

⁶⁷ The Cold War saw the nations of the Eastern and Western blocs deploy all types of propaganda using every available means of communication.

⁶⁸ “USIA: An Overview”, Overview, 1998, <http://dosfan.lib.uic.edu/usia/usiahome/oldoview.htm#overview>.

⁶⁹ The *Wilson Center* has published CIA documents regarding *Radio Free Europe’s* budget and guidelines for *Radio Liberty* broadcasts. See “Radio Free Europe budget increase approved”, *Wilson Center*, 11 January 1951, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114352>; “Radio liberty editorial policies defined”, *Wilson Center*, 22 January 1953, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114471>.

⁷⁰ President Lyndon Johnson in the documentary *The Fog of War* (2003).

central role in growing anti-war sentiments that would eventually see almost all remaining American forces withdrawn in 1973.⁷¹

In the evolution of propaganda through history, Vietnam is not only an example of the role television played in the relationship between the political elite and the people. It is also a testimony to the politico-military and communications missteps that can follow when a single paradigm, in this case the bi-polar East versus West construct of the Cold War, is used blindly to understand and respond to events in an increasingly complex world. On 28 February 1946, decades before the Vietnam war, Ho Chi Minh wrote to President Harry Truman requesting American support for independence from the French.⁷² J. William Fulbright, former chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said that Ho Chi Minh,

[...] wrote, I think it was seven letters, to this [the American] government and received no reply.... Here is a man who felt and believed that the United States would be sympathetic to his purpose of gaining his independence from a colonial power.... This is what he had read, he had been here, he had read our constitution and our Declaration of Independence. He thought surely the United States would be interested. We had testimony in the committee that his one worry was that it was so insignificant, that Vietnam was so far away and so insignificant that we would never bother about it.⁷³

This is not to imply Minh's or his movement's benevolence nor deny its communist ideology. It merely highlights how complex politico-military and socio-historical phenomena, such as revolution or terrorism, can be misinterpreted and opportunities missed when overly simplistic models are used to understand them and formulate politico-military and messaging strategies. Vietnam was not an anomaly during this period for either of the superpowers. The Soviets would have their 'Vietnam' with the Afghan-Soviet war (1979-1989). The independence movements that emerged in Latin America, Africa, Europe or Asia almost inevitably did so due to primarily local and regional factors; first and foremost, the pursuit of independent indigenous governance after decades (if not centuries) of colonial rule. Meanwhile the great superpowers interpreted these movements through the lens provided by the Cold War, a perception leveraged by the local actors for support. Propaganda would play a central role in the strategies of these violent non-state political movements as a means to not only appeal to local and regional audiences but the world. The repercussions of these trends would be felt in the decades to come, most notably with the rise of transnational terrorism.

With the Presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989), the principle of 'containment'/'peaceful coexistence' that had broadly characterised almost three decades of U.S. policy transformed into a more aggressive posture. Strategic communications would have a key role in this strategic shift. With *National Security Decision Directive 75* (17 January 1983),⁷⁴ the Reagan Administration outlined a comprehensive strategy – integrating politico-military, economic and information

⁷¹ For an in-depth analysis of the role of casualties in American public support for war see E. Larson, *Casualties and consensus: The historical role of casualties in domestic support for U.S. military operations* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1996). Larson argues that American opinion is typically shaped by the balance of casualties with the achievement/achievability of objectives not casualties alone.

⁷² "Document for February 28th: Letter from Ho Chi Minh to President Harry S. Truman, 02/28/1946", *National Archives*, <http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/todays-doc/?dod-date=228>.

⁷³ Interview with J.W. Fulbright in the documentary *Hearts and Minds* (1974).

⁷⁴ *National Security Decision Directive 75*, 17 January 1983, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-75.pdf>.

efforts – designed to rollback Soviet influence. It stated that “U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union will consist of three elements: external resistance to Soviet imperialism; internal pressure on the USSR to weaken the sources of Soviet imperialism; and negotiations to eliminate, on the basis of strict reciprocity, outstanding disagreements”.⁷⁵ *NSDD 75* placed “military strategy” and “economic policy” alongside “political action” as the three key functional arenas for shaping “the environment in which Soviet decisions are made”.⁷⁶ It was within ‘political action’ that it was stressed that “U.S. policy must have an ideological thrust which clearly affirms the superiority of U.S. and Western values[...]” adding that “we need to review and significantly strengthen U.S. instruments of political action”, one of which was “U.S. radio broadcasting policy”.⁷⁷ To these ends, *NSDD 75* recommended a focus on exposing Soviet “double standards” and preventing “the Soviet propaganda machine from seizing the semantic high-ground in the battle of ideas through the appropriation of such terms as ‘peace’”.⁷⁸ This emphasis on winning the ‘ideas war’ (via information strategy)⁷⁹ and outreach (via public diplomacy)⁸⁰ – reinforced by politico-military and economic action – were crucial pillars of the Reagan strategy.

While the demise of the Soviet Empire was due to a complex interplay of factors that exerted both internal and external pressures, even Reagan’s critics would concede that his strategy was at least a catalyst. With the fall of the Berlin Wall it must have seemed to many that with the West’s victory the world was witnessing Francis Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ and the inevitable universalisation of Western liberal democracy. In another example of the ebb and flow of information strategy’s prioritisation, with another crisis averted the USIA would be absorbed into the State Department on 30 September 1999. It was a move that reflected an intellectual and policy transition that saw the exercising of ‘soft power’ diplomacy as sufficient to achieve the information and outreach objectives that were once the responsibility of a separate agency. It also reflected a belief that the more overt championing of democracy and capitalism through direct messaging efforts was best left to the private sector and, most powerfully, the glow of the West’s example.⁸¹ Yet again, the lens through which strategic-policy decision-makers understood the world fundamentally shaped both the worth placed on strategic communications and the nature of its messaging. In this case, it seemed it was ‘mission accomplished’. Nevertheless, information strategy continued to expand and diversify in other respects. The Gulf War showcased how even with the latest military technology ‘information operations’ (IO) would be essential to not only satisfy the media but communicate with friends, foes and neutrals in the field. Military IO expanded and flourished as a concept encapsulating an increasingly diverse array of

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.1.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.2.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.3.

⁷⁸ Ibid. This emphasis on messaging that highlights the disparity between what the Soviets ‘say and do’ whilst seeking to control the narrative discourse by appropriating the language was evident in the rhetoric of the Reagan administration. It is a potentially potent messaging strategy that would have utility in countering extremist narratives see “Analyzing the Islamic State’s Information Campaign”, <http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.com.au/2015/09/analyzing-islamic-states-information.html>.

⁷⁹ See *National Security Decision Directive 130: US International Information Policy*, 6 March 1984, <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/Scanned%20NSDD%20130.pdf>.

⁸⁰ See *National Security Decision Directive 77: Management of Public Diplomacy relative to national security*, 14 January 1983, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB177/03_NSDD-77.pdf.

⁸¹ C. Lord, “Reorganizing for public diplomacy”, In J. Arquilla and D. Borer (eds.), *Information Strategy and Warfare: A guide to theory and practice*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.113-126; Cull, “The tragedy of American Public Diplomacy, 1989-1999”, pp.113-126;

information activities such as ‘public affairs’, ‘military deception’ and ‘cyberspace operations’ amongst others.⁸²

The U.S. entered the 21st century as the world’s sole superpower. From a global perspective, it may have looked to many that democracy’s superiority was a truism that required little further explanation – it championed itself through the West’s example. Besides, there was no other State that could possibly challenge U.S. political, economic or military hegemony. Yet at local and regional levels, politically-motivated movements and networks were emerging that used religion – whether Judaism or Islam in the Middle East or Hinduism in the subcontinent – as both its ideological *schwerpunkt* and a defiant rallying cry against the man-made constructs of democracy, communism and even the state itself. The Islamist manifestations of this phenomenon typically found their modern roots in the post-World War II independence movements of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. By the late-20th century, the failure of Islamist-inspired independence movements saw many of those who believed violence to be the only viable tool for achieving their Islamist vision (so-called jihadists) take to the underground whether by operating covertly in their home nations or traveling to the ungoverned corners of the world.

Throughout history, asymmetrical combatants have strategically centralised propaganda as a mechanism to overcome their resource and capability disadvantages. By the turn of the century, the third industrial revolution (i.e. the digital revolution) was enabling otherwise disparate jihadist individuals or groups to communicate with not only each other but the world. A small network of jihadists, with Osama Bin Laden as their front-man, committed themselves to supporting the *ummah’s* (Muslim community’s) struggle, wherever it was needed, and blamed the West for Islam’s modern decline and pledged to fight against it. They were the ‘World Islamic Front Against Jews and Crusaders,’⁸³ later known simply as ‘al-Qaeda.’ In 1998 they launched an audacious campaign, fusing both propaganda (typically with Bin Laden as mouthpiece) and ‘propaganda of the deed’ (simultaneous mass-casualty terrorism) in a strategy that became its trademark.⁸⁴ In February, Bin Laden and his leadership council announced the establishment of their new organisation,⁸⁵ followed by a press conference near Khost on 26 May and an interview between Bin Laden and journalist John Miller two days later. It was clear that Bin Laden was presenting himself as the voice and image of not just an organisation but Islamic resistance to U.S. hegemony. The dual embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998 demonstrated that Bin Laden was true to his word but the full impact of the strategy was dependent on whether it would elicit the desired response from the U.S.⁸⁶ On 20 August 1998, cruise missile strikes on Afghanistan and Sudan (Operation Infinite Reach) were soon followed by President Bill Clinton’s address to the nation which referred to Bin Laden by name on eight occasions, described him as “perhaps the preeminent organizer and financier

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⁸² IO continues to encapsulate a variety of information capabilities and types of operations see Joint Publication 3-13 *Information Operations*. 27 November 2012, Incorporating Change 1, 20 November 2014: II-5 – II-13. For an analysis of this variety and its implications see C. Paul, “Integrating Apples, oranges, pianos, volkwagens, and skyscrapers: On the relationships between information-related capabilities and other lines of operation”, *IO Sphere*, Winter 2014, pp.2-5.

⁸³ O. Bin Laden, *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement*, 3 February 1998, <http://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>.

⁸⁴ For more on this strategy and its application by Bin Laden and AQ see H. Ingram, *The charismatic leadership phenomenon in Islamist radicalism and militancy* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 171-177.

⁸⁵ O. Bin Laden, *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement*, 3 February 1998.

⁸⁶ A common principle of asymmetric warfare strategy is to use propaganda and action to elicit a particular response from one’s stronger adversary that can be leveraged for second and third order advantages.

of international terrorism”, and justified Operation Infinite Reach as necessary “to counter an immediate threat from the Bin Laden network”.⁸⁷ Furthermore, by pointing to Bin Laden’s complicity in terrorist activities all over the world, which Bin Laden himself had not taken credit for, the speech inadvertently reinforced the image of the ‘humble servant’ that Bin Laden wanted to portray. The reality was that Bin Laden’s network to that point had been based almost exclusively on his financial capital. After 1998, it was Bin Laden’s charismatic capital that would be crucial to transforming his network from an anomaly in the global jihadist milieu (most jihadist groups were locally or regionally focused) to the leaders of the transnational jihad.⁸⁸ Their most audacious strikes targeted New York and Washington D.C. on 11 September 2001 heralding the dawn of a new era in the history of propaganda in conflict.

The Wars on Terror

After the September 11 attacks, the first salvos of the messaging war for ‘hearts and minds’ came in its typical form: political rhetoric. Within days of the attack, President George W. Bush warned that what the world had witnessed was “a new kind of evil. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while”.⁸⁹ The concept of a ‘war on terror’, a phrase that Bush used again in his 20 September 2001 address to Congress,⁹⁰ would be adopted by leaders around the world as not only a rhetorical device but a paradigm through which to understand and legitimise national and global security strategic-policy discourse and decisions. The bi-polar world depicted in such rhetoric, in many ways, reinforced that presented by AQ: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists”.⁹¹ In a letter to Al-Jazeera on 30 November 2001, Bin Laden seemed to be looking to re-appropriate the discourse as a means to re-frame both AQ’s acts of terrorism and the declaration of war by the US and its allies: “the issue is one of faith and doctrine, not of a ‘war on terror’, as Bush and Blair depict it”.⁹² For evidence, Bin Laden pointed to the “evident Crusader hatred in this campaign against Islam and its people, Bush left no room for the doubts or media opinion. He stated clearly that this is a Crusader war. He said this in front of the whole world so as to emphasize this fact”.⁹³ Indeed, the ‘War on Terror’ paradigm would prove an increasingly clumsy rhetorical device through which to not just rally friends (let alone win over neutrals) but devise appropriate counterstrategies.⁹⁴

With hindsight, these early salvos were indicative of the future course of the narrative war at the heart of the so-called ‘War on Terror’. It was and remains a classic example

⁸⁷ W. Clinton, “Address to the nation by the President”, 20 August 1998, <http://clinton6.nara.gov/1998/08/1998-08-20-president-address-to-the-nation.html>.

⁸⁸ H. Ingram, *The charismatic leadership phenomenon* (2013), pp. 182-188.

⁸⁹ G. Bush, “Remarks by the President upon arrival”, 16 September 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010916-2.html>.

⁹⁰ G. Bush, “Address to a joint session of Congress and the American people”, 20 September 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/text/20010920-8.html>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² O. Bin Laden, “Crusader Wars November 3 2001”, in B. Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The statements of Osama Bin Laden*, (London, Verso Publishing, 2005), p. 135.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ For such an analysis see F. Barrett and T. Sarbin, 2007. “The rhetoric of terror: ‘War’ as misplaced metaphor”, in J. Arquilla and D. Borer (eds.), *Information Strategy and Warfare: A guide to theory and practice* New York: Routledge, 2007), p.16-33.

of asymmetric warfare in the ‘information theatre’: the technologically and resource rich but cumbersome and unimaginative power is confronted by nimbler and more adaptable foes that overcome their comparative disadvantages in strength and size through resourcefulness and innovation. In many respects, Western powers were at an additional disadvantage having ceded a ‘head-start’ to their foes. As the *9/11 Report* states: “NSC staff warned that ‘we have by and large ceded the court of public opinion’ to al-Qaeda”.⁹⁵ Two examples are broadly emblematic of the micro- (local and regional) and macro- (transnational) level dynamics that characterised the period.

The Battle for Hearts and Minds

At a micro-level, the ‘information theatre’ has proven to be a strategic weakness in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency efforts. With airstrikes in Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, the ‘battle for hearts and minds’ in the War on Terror opened a new front with Operation Enduring Freedom Afghanistan. The Taliban were swept aside within weeks of combat operations. By 2003, however, it was becoming clear that a nascent Taliban resurgence was taking root in Afghanistan’s southern provinces which, by 2006, had festered into a full-blown insurgency. It was, as former CIA Officer Bruce Riedel described, “one of the most remarkable military comebacks in modern history”.⁹⁶ While the Coalition’s reprioritisation of focus and resources to Iraq in 2003 was certainly a factor in the Taliban’s revival, the Coalition still enjoyed an enormous military and economic advantage over the Taliban. However, there was broad recognition amongst both scholars and practitioners that the Taliban enjoyed substantial advantages in the ‘information war’. For example, Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup and former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, as well as expert such as Thomas Nissen, Tim Foxley, and Arturo Munoz all, to varying degrees, identified ‘information operations’ (IO) as a source of counter-insurgency (COIN) weakness and Taliban strength.⁹⁷

The differing fortunes of Taliban and Coalition messaging campaigns reflected, at least in part, the fundamentally different role it played in their respective strategies. Like other modern insurgencies, the Taliban strategically centralise their propaganda efforts as a means to magnify the effect of their politico-military actions and nullify those of their opponents. Their messaging focused primarily on linking themselves to solutions and their rivals to crisis. This narrative is supported by practical actions: “[the Taliban] reinforce the message that they are able to ‘deliver’ help to local population as well as, or even better than ISAF [and the Afghan government] [...] namely within governance or security, in areas where ISAF [and the Afghan government] [...] are unable to maintain an effective presence”.⁹⁸ One particular way in which the Taliban effectively used propaganda for strategic effect was by using messaging designed to neutralise the Coalition’s use of airpower. As Foxley asserts,

⁹⁵ *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p.203.

⁹⁶ “Afghan expert Riedel weighs Obama’s strategic options”, *PBS Newshour*, 16 October 2009, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia-july-dec09-afghanistan3_10-16/.

⁹⁷ J. Stirrup, “Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup’s Speech 2008”, *Royal United Services Institute*, 2008 (transcript no longer available online); T. Nissen, “The Taliban’s information warfare”, *Royal Danish Defence College Brief*, Institute for Military Operations, Copenhagen, 2007, http://forsvaret.dk/fak/documents/fak/publikationer/the_talibans_information_warfare.pdf; T. Foxley, “Countering Taliban Information Operations in Afghanistan”, *Prism Journal*, Prism 1 No. 4, 2008, pp.79-94, http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_1-4/Prism_79-94_Foxley.pdf; J. Scheffer, “Speech by NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Seminar on *Public Diplomacy in NATO-led Operations*”, 2007, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s071008a.html>; A. Munoz, *Assessing Military Information Operations in Afghanistan*. RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2012.

⁹⁸ T. Nissen, “The Taliban’s Information Warfare”, 2007, p. 6.

There is perhaps little doubt that the Taliban have suffered greatly at the hands of airpower.... They may have redressed the balance th[rough] IO activities by highlighting, exaggerating, and even inventing reports of collateral damage and civilian casualties from air attacks. The domestic audiences of troop-contributing nations are particularly susceptible and sensitive to reports of civilian deaths. The Taliban clearly recognize this vulnerability. Certainly ISAF is now under continual and intense pressure to revise and further reduce its use of airpower. Perhaps what the mujahideen achieved against Soviet airpower in the 1980s with guided missiles, the Taliban are achieving, 20 years later, through the power of guided information.⁹⁹

Reflecting a fundamental principle of modern COIN thinking, the strategy in Afghanistan, as explained by the former British Chief of Defence Staff Sir Jock Stirrup, was based on the idea that “[m]ilitary activity could create the time and space within which political solutions could be forged”.¹⁰⁰ IO had a primarily supporting function in such an approach. Moreover, the messaging itself tended to be characterised by status updates and the championing of the efficacy with which economic and socio-political ‘progress’ was being made:

Much of ISAF IO work is based around the promotion of ISAF and Afghan government narratives [...]. The work highlights ‘good news’ stories: a bridge built here, a school built there, a small child taken to hospital [...]. Expounding on key military and political developments, combined with exhortations to work with the government, resist corruption and avoid poppy cultivation also form strong themes.¹⁰¹

Generally, IO tended to be similarly applied in support of COIN efforts in Iraq. From the COIN perspective, the overarching idea seemed to be that actions speak louder than words. If the local population can be given the time and space to realise what a great deal they have with ‘modernisation’ – functioning schools, markets, elections, freedoms, etc; – then support for the insurgency will abate.¹⁰² From the insurgent’s perspective, COIN actions *can* mean very little if the insurgency can be more successful at shaping how contested populations perceive those actions. With time, IO would increasingly be seen as central to devising an effective overall counter-insurgency campaign but ‘operationalising’ this intellectual and doctrinal recognition has often been difficult.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ T. Foxley, “Countering Taliban Information Operations in Afghanistan”, 2008, p.83.

¹⁰⁰ J. Stirrup, “Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup’s Speech 2008”, 2008, p.5.

¹⁰¹ T. Foxley, “The Battle for Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan”, *A paper for the Swedish Armed Forces*: 11, 2009, <http://afghanhindsight.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/battle-for-hearts-and-minds-march-2009.pdf>.

¹⁰² The dominant school of thought in COIN thinking and practice of this period, with its contemporary proponents like David Kilcullen, David Petraeus and John Nagl, find their intellectual roots in the thinking of Bernard Fall, Robert Thompson and David Galula. Cohen’s analysis of Galula’s work offers a telling insight in the (often unspoken) assumptions that underpin this COIN approach: “This is the premise of the Galula Doctrine. Once fear has been sufficiently alleviated, the population becomes free to choose the side it wishes to embrace and the cause it wishes to uphold. Here, contemporary history seems to prove that the Western democratic construct generally has the upper hand when it is intelligently presented. It follows that it is always to the West’s advantage to protect, so that free men and women may choose in its favour”. See A. Cohen, *Galula* (Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2012), p. 253.

¹⁰³ For analysis of these issues see J. Jones, D. Kuehl, D. Burgess and R. Rochte, “Strategic communications and the combatant commander”, in *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), pp.159-166; H. Rothstein, “Strategy and psychological operations’ in J. Arquilla and D. Borer (eds.) *Information*

Campaigning for war

At a macro-level, the central theme of Western narratives during the ‘War on Terror’ – that the West is fighting to champion democracy and freedoms in the region and militant Islamists are fighting because they hate those values and aims – has often struggled to resonate due, first and foremost, to the disparity between such rhetoric and strategic-policy realities. One of the most powerful examples of this was the American and British messaging campaign leading to the Iraq war.¹⁰⁴ For six months beginning with the President’s address to the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September 2002,¹⁰⁵ the US and its allies (primarily Britain but also nations such as Australia) embarked on an intensive messaging campaign designed to rally global support behind the removal of Saddam Hussein and his Baathist regime in Iraq. The central narrative of this effort cited intelligence reports that the Hussein regime had stockpiled and was continuing to produce Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Two themes were crucial to this central narrative: (i.) the Hussein regime had committed atrocities in the past and (ii.) represented an imminent threat of committing more atrocities. As President Bush declared, “the history, the logic, and the facts lead to one conclusion: Saddam Hussein’s regime is a grave and gathering danger. To suggest otherwise is to hope against the evidence. To assume this regime’s good faith is to bet the lives of millions and the peace of the world in a reckless gamble. And this is a risk we must not take”.¹⁰⁶ Less than a fortnight later, Prime Minister Tony Blair released the UK Iraq dossier stating in its ‘Foreword’ that,

[I]t is unprecedented for the Government to publish this kind of document. But in the light of the debate about Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), I wanted to share with the British public the reasons why I believe this issue to be a current and serious threat to the UK national interest.¹⁰⁷

President Bush soon referenced the dossier describing the “danger” as “grave and it is growing. The Iraqi regime [...] could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes after the order is given”.¹⁰⁸ This pattern continued and then peaked with the US administration’s highly respected Secretary of State Colin Powell presenting the case for military intervention to the UN Security Council in February 2003.¹⁰⁹ Operation Iraqi Freedom began on 19 March 2003 and would ultimately incur huge costs in blood and treasure. Of course, the primary justification for going to war was shown to be false: the Hussein regime did not have a stockpile of WMD capabilities let alone the ability to deploy such capabilities within an hour. The case to invade Iraq was shown to be not just built on shoddy intelligence ‘cherry-picked’ by policy-makers but shrouded

Strategy and Warfare: A guide to theory and practice, (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.160-186; K. Utting, 2015. “Strategy, influence, strategic communication and British military doctrine”, in *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), p.167-187.

¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to contrast this campaign with the narratives justifying the war in Afghanistan. For example, see W. Maley, “The war in Afghanistan: Australia’s strategic narratives”, in B. De Graaf, G. Dimitriou and J. Ringsmose (eds.), *Strategic narratives, public opinion, and war*, (New York: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁰⁵ G. Bush, “President’s remarks at the United Nations General Assembly”, 12 September 2002, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ For more see, *The Iraq Dossier*, 24 September 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/02/uk_dossier_on_iraq/html/full_dossier.stm.

¹⁰⁸ G. Bush, “Radio address by the President to the nation”, 28 September 2002, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/09/text/20020928.html>

¹⁰⁹ For the full transcript of Colin Powell’s address see C. Powell, “Full text of Colin Powell’s speech”, 5 February 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/05/iraq.usa>.

in an ‘imminent atrocity’ narrative.¹¹⁰ A year later, a Pew Poll showed that majorities in France (82%), Germany (69%), Jordan (69%) Turkey (66%) and Pakistan (61%) believed US and British leaders lied about Iraqi WMDs rather than being “themselves misinformed by bad intelligence”.¹¹¹

Inevitably, the justification narrative for the war shifted towards an emphasis on the importance of bringing democracy and freedom to Iraq. As Donald Rumsfeld stated: “For if Iraq... is able to move to the path of representative democracy, however bumpy the road, then the impact in the region and the world could be dramatic. Iraq could conceivably become a model – proof that a moderate Muslim state can succeed in the battle against extremism taking place in the Muslim world today”.¹¹² This was not a new message. After all, Vice President Dick Cheney had suggested just days before the beginning of military operations that “my belief is we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators”.¹¹³ On 1 May 2003, President Bush announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq yet most of the thousands of casualties sustained by Coalition and Iraqi forces would occur *after* the speech thanks to an insurgency that would rage across the country.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the Iraq war had a deleterious impact on perceptions of the War on Terror. Pew polling a year after the war in Iraq showed support for the US-led War on Terror drop from 2002 to 2004 in Britain (from 69% in 2002 to 63% in 2004), France (from 75% to 50%), Germany (from 70% to 55%) Jordan (from 13% to 12%) and Pakistan (from 20% to 16%).¹¹⁵ Indeed, with the exception of the US, all eight of the other countries polled believed the Iraq war had hurt the overall ‘War on Terror’.¹¹⁶ Majorities in Germany (70%), Russia (53%), Jordan (56%), Morocco (66%), France (78%) Turkey (73%) and Pakistan (57%) stated they were now less confident that the US was committed to promoting democracy.¹¹⁷

Bridging the say-do gap

The Iraq war became a symbol of the disparity between what the West says (whether in rhetoric or other forms of messaging) and what it does in practice. The contrived campaign to win support for the war in Iraq – based initially on the imminent WMD threat posed by the Hussein regime and then the need to democratise Iraq – epitomised what many in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia suspected: that when Western powers promote democracy and freedom it is, at best, empty rhetoric,

¹¹⁰ Paul Pillar, former National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia (2000-2005), argued the Bush Administration deviated from the professional standard not only in using policy to drive intelligence, but also in aggressively using intelligence to win public support for its direction to go to war. This meant selectively adducing data – “cherry-picking” – rather than using the intelligence community’s own analytical judgements. In fact, key portions of the administration’s case explicitly rejected those judgements’ (P. Pillar, “Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq”, *Foreign Affairs* vol. 85, no. 2, 2006, p.19). For more also see *Report on the U.S. intelligence community’s prewar intelligence assessments on Iraq*, 7 July 2004. Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate, https://fas.org/irp/congress/2004_rpt/ssci_iraq.pdf.

¹¹¹ “Survey Report”, *Pew Research Center*, 16 March 2004, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2004/03/16/survey-report/>.

¹¹² D. Rumsfeld, “Remarks by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 27 May 2003, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/remarks-secretary-defense-donald-h-rumsfeld/p5998>.

¹¹³ “Transcript for Sept. 14”, *Meet the Press*, 14 September 2003, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3080244/ns/meet_the_press/t/transcript-sept/.

¹¹⁴ H. Fischer, “Iraq Casualties: U.S. military forces and Iraqi civilians, police, and security forces”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 2010, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40824.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ “A Year After Iraq War: Mistrust of America in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists”, *Pew Research Center*, 16 March 2004, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2004/03/16/a-year-after-iraq-war/>.

¹¹⁶ “Survey Report”, *Pew Research Center*, 16 March 2004, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2004/03/16/survey-report/>.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

at worst, a cover for ulterior motives. The tacit and active support many Western nations have provided to authoritarian regimes in the region – all the while rhetorically championing democracy and its freedoms – does not go unnoticed by these populations. The following excerpt from President Bush’s address to Congress on 20 September 2001 perfectly captures the West’s central narrative in the War on Terror – one that persists fifteen years later – but also its inherent contradictions:

Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.¹¹⁸

Neither Egypt, Saudi Arabia nor Jordan were democracies. The hesitancy with which many Western nations responded to the Arab Spring, popular demonstrations across North Africa and the Middle East typically calling for democracy over authoritarian rule, often appeared to be rooted in the tension between decades of pro-democracy rhetoric and, often equally long, relationships with those regimes.

In the battle for hearts and minds, messaging tends to resonate with target audiences when it is not only consistent but matches the actions of the messenger *and* realities on the ground. Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay would emerge as the vilest examples of the disparity between the West’s words and actions. But this disparity would emerge in other high profile cases. For example, during interviews conducted by the author with members of the Syrian opposition against the Assad regime, the sense of disillusionment and even betrayal at the West for not responding as it said it would to the Syrian government’s use of chemical weapons¹¹⁹ – what President Obama described as a “redline”¹²⁰ – was palpable. This was the sentiment expressed by one interviewee who stated: “Obama can cover the whole world in red lines. Who cares? We are dying here. And Ban Ki Moon? He is ‘worried’ all the time. Ban Ki Moon is ‘worried’, Obama is drawing red lines, everybody is talking and nobody is doing anything”.¹²¹

The West’s perceived ‘say-do’ gap was a regular source of leverage for AQ messaging. For example, Bin Laden would often highlight the hypocrisy of western nations describing him as a ‘terrorist’: “As for their accusations [that we] terrorize the innocent, the children, and the women, these fall into the category of ‘accusing others of their own affliction in order to fool the masses.’ The evidence overwhelmingly shows America and Israel killing the weaker men, women, and children in the Muslim world and elsewhere”.¹²² Bin Laden goes on to cite several examples including “the deliberate, premediated dropping of the H bombs on cities with their entire populations of children, elderly, and women, as was the case with Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Then,

¹¹⁸ G. Bush, “Address to a joint session of Congress and the American people”, 20 September 2001, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/text/20010920-8.html>

¹¹⁹ For example, see the United Nations, “Report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in the Ghouta area of Damascus on 21 August 2013”,

http://www.un.org/disarmament/content/slideshow/Secretary_General_Report_of_CW_Investigation.pdf

¹²⁰ B. Obama, “Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps”, 20 August 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>

¹²¹ Author’s interviews with Syrian Opposition media (2014).

¹²² O. Bin Laden, “The Saudi Regime”, in B. Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The statements of Osama Bin Laden* (London, Verso Publishing), p.40.

killing hundreds of thousands of children in Iraq, whose numbers [of dead] continue to increase as a result of the sanctions".¹²³ This excerpt also reflects a key terminological battle ground in the War on Terror: what and who is a 'terrorist'. In messaging specifically designed for English-speaking Muslims living in the West, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's (AQAP) *Inspire* magazine often highlighted the willingness of Western nations to implement counter-terrorism legislation that not only wound-back freedoms and undermined the rule of law but were disproportionately applied to Muslims:

[Y]our belongingness to Islam is enough to classify you as an enemy. As a matter of fact, they look at us as Muslim youth regardless of our appearance and education. They do not consider our citizenship and the childhood we spent in their neighborhoods [sic].... Our enemies treat us as Muslims only, nothing more.... We must abide by our religion and stand on our *ummah's* side, one treatment one blame.¹²⁴

Counter-terrorism agencies struggled against AQ propaganda efforts and then, with the growing prominence of AQAP, with the targeting of Muslim Diasporas in the West. Then, in May 2011, Bin Laden was assassinated in his hideout in Pakistan. A few months later, in September 2011, the American-born Anwar al-Awlaki was assassinated by drone strike in Yemen. The American born spokesman for AQAP enjoyed a strong charismatic appeal amongst disenfranchised Muslim youth, especially those in the West who saw in Al-Awlaki's life reflections of their own.¹²⁵ If the deaths of Bin Laden and Al-Awlaki were a source of hope that perhaps lost momentum in the 'information war' could be regained, it would be short-lived. Within three years, an AQ off-shoot emerged whose propaganda efforts would outshine those of its predecessor.

The IS challenge

IS has launched an extraordinary propaganda strategy that it affords a central role in its broader politico-military campaign.¹²⁶ While its messaging is characterised by a diverse array of themes,¹²⁷ it is cohered by a simple and consistent overarching narrative – that IS is the champion of Sunni Muslims and their only hope of solutions against crisis-causing enemies – and driven by a powerful strategic logic.¹²⁸ Regarding the latter, IS propaganda seeks to shape the perceptions and polarise the support of its target audiences (whether friends or foes). It does so via messaging that leverages rational-choice appeals – compelling its audience to engage in rational-choice decision-making typically by contrasting IS's politico-military aptitude against its enemies' weaknesses – and identity-choice appeals designed to coax its audiences into decision-

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Jonas the Rebel, "Dear American Muslim", *Inspire*, issue 11 (2013), p.17.

¹²⁵ For more on Al-Awlaki's charismatic appeal see H. J. Ingram, *The charismatic leadership phenomenon*, pp. 199-224. Al-Awlaki's English-language speech titled *Battle of the Hearts and Minds* warns Western audiences of 'soft' counterterrorism initiatives (e.g. de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation initiatives) designed to change Islam itself.

¹²⁶ For more see Dr Craig Whiteside's cogent analyses of IS's politico-military strategy for *War on the Rocks*, <http://warontherocks.com/author/craig-whiteside/>.

¹²⁷ For example, see excellent comprehensive analyses by scholars such as C. Winter, "The Virtual 'Caliphate': Understanding Islamic State's Propaganda Strategy", *Quilliam* (2015), pp. 22-27; Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing", pp. 11-12; A. Zelin, "Picture or it didn't happen: A snapshot of the Islamic State's official media output", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no.4 (2015), pp. 90-94.

¹²⁸ H. J. Ingram, "The strategic logic of Islamic State information operations", *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 69, no. 6 (2015), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/10357718.2015.1059799>.

making processes based on their identity. Indeed, IS propaganda often interweaves rational- and identity-choice appeals which may have the powerful effect of aligning its supporters' decision-making processes. This may help to explain the rapidity with which IS supporters appear to radicalise from ordinary citizens to foreign fighters or 'lone wolves'. In addition, IS uses intra-messaging tactics and levers too: from 'baiting' and 'social norming' to 'branding'. The picture that emerges is of a group that has a deep appreciation for the power of propaganda.¹²⁹ However, IS have also had the benefit of weakened competition in the 'information theatre'. Anti-IS strategic communications efforts have been dogged by bureaucratic disjointedness and instability and, more often than not, a strategic-policy vacuum rendering the development and deployment of messaging based on consistent themes near impossible.

When then US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said "how has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world's greatest communication society?"¹³⁰ he perfectly captured the frustrations that many government officials had at the time with foundering efforts to counter-AQ propaganda. Almost a decade later, the IS propaganda machine represents a slicker, more sophisticated and more ubiquitous foe than AQ ever was. As the former Director of the US State Department's Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC), Alberto Fernandez, has stated: "Efforts to blunt ISIS propaganda have been tentative and ineffective, despite major efforts by countries like Saudi Arabia, the United States and the United Kingdom, and even al-Qaida".¹³¹ A significant factor in the ineffectiveness of anti-IS counterpropaganda strategies has been that current efforts are built on intellectual and organisational legacies of failure. As Fernandez argues, "CSCC itself was a response to the perceived ineffectiveness of U.S. counter-messaging against al-Qaida in the decade preceding its founding".¹³² These problems are not isolated to the United States. In Australia, anti-IS efforts on Twitter were hampered by basic errors¹³³ while the UK's PREVENT strategy has been heavily criticised for being ineffective.¹³⁴

Ultimately, IS are more strategic plagiarists than geniuses and their propaganda efforts reflect a deep appreciation of both their own history and that of their predecessors. The propaganda strategies of extremists are constantly evolving and, just as IS learned from its predecessors before eclipsing them, IS is already influencing the propaganda strategies of friends and foes alike. From a strategic-policy perspective, focusing myopically on the most prominent current threat, in this case IS, risks leaving CT strategies ill-prepared to deal with future threats. And so this study returns to the question that started this inquiry: what lessons can be learned from the history of propaganda during conflict to boost the efficacy of counter-terrorism strategic communications?

¹²⁹ H. J. Ingram, "Three traits of the Islamic State's information warfare", *RUSI Journal* 159, no. 6 (2015), pp. 4-11.

¹³⁰ R. Gates, "Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense, Landon Lecture, November 26, 2007", 2007, <https://www.k-state.edu/media/newsreleases/landonlect/gatetext1107.html>

¹³¹ A. M. Fernandez, "Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks", *The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings*, (October 2015), p. 1. http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/10/combating-isis-propaganda-fernandez/is-propaganda_web_english_v2.pdf

¹³² Ibid, p.15.

¹³³ A. Lavoipierre, "Islamic State: ADF Twitter account used to fight propaganda sending nonsense Arabic tweets, expert says", *ABC News*, 24 September 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-23/adf-sending-nonsense-arabic-tweets-expert-says/6799874>

¹³⁴ F. Gardner, "Prevent strategy: Is it failing to stop radicalisation?", *BBC News*, 6 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31756755>

Conclusion: History's lessons

*And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding.*

Efforts to persuasively communicate with friends, neutrals and foes during conflict is probably as old as organised violence itself. The historical evolution of propaganda during conflict has been driven by the interplay of three persistent factors: (i.) advancements in communication technologies, (ii.) developments in military technologies and strategies, and (iii.) the changing relationship between the political elite and the people. Consequently, recurring themes and trends have emerged throughout that millennia long history many of which either help to explain the field's current predicament or may contribute to the design of more effective messaging strategies.

Democracies may be uncomfortable with 'propaganda' but have been historically good at it.

From the Ancient Greeks to the American Revolutionaries and the Western governments of the 20th and 21st centuries, democracies have always struggled to grapple with how to effectively develop and deploy messaging strategies without undermining democratic principles and freedoms. Of course, there is an irony to this discomfort given the centrality of persuasive communication to democratic processes. This centrality probably also helps to explain why democracies have often been so successful in this arena (e.g. during both World Wars and the Cold War). What has regularly undermined these successes is the ebb and flow of support for agencies engaged in the 'information war' – deemed essential during crisis and abandoned in the aftermath – and this trend haunts current efforts to counter IS propaganda. Nevertheless, there is every reason for positivity. After all, the slick Nazi propaganda machine soon faltered once challenged by effective Allied messaging synchronised with actions in the field.

Terminology matters but it must not be allowed to hamper messaging objectives.

In addition to the increasing complexity of messaging strategies and the bureaucracies responsible for them, the negative connotations associated with the word 'propaganda' has resulted in a diverse lexicon. Sadly, 'propaganda' is a great word with an awful reputation that cannot be ignored. It is for this reason that the CTSC Project adopts 'strategic communication' as the overarching term for any messaging that is deployed with the intent of informing or persuading a target audience in support of strategic-policy and/or politico-military objectives.¹³⁵ It is messaging deployed with the intent of

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¹³⁵ This definition draws heavily on Christopher Paul's definition in *Strategic Communication*. Its application here is more generic in the sense that Paul defines 'strategic communication' as messaging deployed '...in

having an 'effect' – whether tactical, operational or strategic – on target audiences. While 'strategic communication' is being used as a general term, assigning specific terms for certain types of messaging performed by different agencies is vital for ensuring the credibility of the overarching strategic communications campaign and these distinctions will be made where appropriate.

A strategic communications campaign is more likely to be successful if it is based on the cumulative effects of a multidimensional messaging strategy which is synchronised with actions on the ground.

A strategic communications campaign that is reliant on a narrow type of messaging (e.g. body-count reporting), uses a limited array of forums (e.g. press conferences) and/or focuses myopically on dominating a particular communication technology (e.g. social media) is not taking advantage of the full gamut of operational and strategic options at hand. This analysis suggests that strategic communication campaigns are more likely to be successful if characterised by four interrelated principles:

1. Produce a diversity of messaging that leverages rational- and identity-choice appeals which are deployed both defensively and offensively (with an emphasis on the latter).

In a trend that permeated through the entire analysis, a mix of rational- and identity-choice appeals across a strategic communications campaign is vital for catering to target audiences that are likely to be comprised of a diversity of individuals characterised by a range of perceptual and motivational drivers. A variety of messaging not only maximises the potential reach of a message – by catering to the broad 'needs' of a greater range of people – but, if synchronised effectively, can have a compounding effect on individuals by aligning their rational- and identity-choice decision-making processes. This approach should drive the formulation of both attributed and unattributed messaging, as well as defensive (i.e. counter-narratives responding to adversary messaging) and offensive communiques (i.e. messaging created to elicit a counter-narrative from adversaries), to ensure consistency across the entire strategic communications campaign.

Every message must be designed to leverage pertinent strategic, psychosocial and contextual factors in the target population and should present the information truthfully. As Sir John Reith stated during World War II: 'the truth, nothing but the truth and, as near as possible, the whole truth.' After all, credibility is crucial in a 'battle for hearts and minds'. This analysis was filled with examples of how deception or blatant lies in messaging can have a devastating effect on credibility (e.g. the British in World War I, the campaign for war in Iraq). Credibility is not only lost in the gap between one's words and the truth but one's words and actions. Consequently, using messaging to highlight the disparity between what one's adversary says and does is a powerful strategy in any campaign (e.g. Bin Laden was and IS is particularly effective at this strategy). Moreover, winning the perceived moral high ground in the eyes of public

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support of national objectives'. See C. Paul, *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011), p.61.

opinion is an essential messaging goal. Appropriating key terms from the enemy, e.g. Reagan's strategy of appropriating words such as 'peace' from the Soviets, create vital symbolic victories with real world implications.

2. Messaging is cohered by some core themes or, ideally, a grand narrative.

Designing and deploying a diversity of messaging without having core overarching themes or a grand narrative will result in the strategic communications campaign appearing ad hoc and disjointed. The extraordinary variety of messaging that was disseminated by the American Revolutionaries was broadly cohered by core themes, for example the slogan of 'no taxation without representation' was a key rational-choice theme, but also a powerful grand narrative eloquently captured in the constitution. Without an overarching narrative, anti-IS messaging touches upon a diverse range of issues – from democracy and education to IS's brutality and hypocrisy – but often appears incoherent. In contrast, IS propaganda has a simple grand narrative and overarching strategic logic that permeates almost every message it disseminates despite the range of themes it addresses.

3. Uses various means of communication to maximise the message's reach, timeliness and targeting.

Despite the lure of the latest communication technologies, drawing on all available means of communication to disseminate messaging is essential to the success of a strategic communications campaign. The means of communication needs to match both the target audience and message itself. After all, the impact of a message (and indeed the broader campaign itself) is largely dependent on maximising its *reach* (the ability of a message to access target audiences), *relevance* (the timeliness of the message and its significance within the context of immediate situational factors) and *resonance* (the message's influence on audience perceptions). Moreover, *how* a message is delivered can be just as important as *what* it says. The format used for a particular message (e.g. spoken, written, image) used to communicate a message, as well as the messenger (who is saying it), can greatly enhance its *resonance*. Throughout history new communication technologies have emerged, whether the printing press in the mid-1400s or the internet in the late-1990s, but the effective use of a technology in a communications campaign must not be measured by its use alone but whether the message itself had the desired effect on the target audience. Developing effects-based metrics of success (e.g. whether or not messaging elicits a counter-narrative response from adversaries) can help to facilitate better synchronicity with politico-military actions.

4. All of which is calibrated to maximise the desired effects of one's own strategic-policy/politico-military efforts and nullify the effects of the adversary's activities.

Messaging alone cannot win an 'information war'. A strategic communications campaign must be synchronised with strategic-policy and/or politico-military actions. Most modern warfare, especially asymmetric warfare, is fundamentally a dual competition of control (to achieve politico-military dominance) and meaning (to shape how the conflict and its actors are perceived) that requires both messaging and action to be closely calibrated for mutual and compounding benefits. Of course, this is the most powerful means by which to demonstrate one's narrow say-do gap and expose the say-do gap of adversaries. Done effectively, actions in the field soon become forms

of communication unto themselves: the practical manifestation of the message; a communication by deed. Furthermore, as evidenced by the example of British propaganda against German U-boat operations in World War I and Taliban propaganda against Coalition airpower, carefully designed and deployed messages can help to neutralise otherwise successful politico-military actions. The synchronicity of messaging and strategic-policy decisions is also vital for ensuring that the intended first order effects of any strategy are balanced against potential second and third order effects.

As censorship and information control become increasingly difficult to implement, disruption may be more effective in a counter-strategy campaign.

This analysis reveals a tendency for the status quo to hastily respond with censorship (e.g. Catholic Church during the Reformation) or to limit access to certain sources of knowledge (e.g. the Ancient Greeks and the epic poems) in response to messaging from perceived adversaries. The means of communication becomes a key target, whether it is the printing press in the 15th century, radio in the 20th century or Twitter in the 21st century, following the logic that to shut-down the communication mechanism stops the message's dissemination. A parallel trend is the diminishing efficacy of such efforts due to the proliferation of communication technologies, the multiplicity of accessible sources of knowledge and, perhaps most importantly, the fundamental nature of communication. Regarding the latter, a message does not resonate simply by existing but because it leverages important strategic and psychosocial factors in the audience. It is for this reason that controlling or censoring the sources of knowledge, such as dictating how certain texts should be interpreted (e.g. Islamic texts), can be counterproductive dependent on who is shaping the information and why. However, disrupting key channels of communication may be a more useful strategy because it hampers the timeliness and speed of adversary communication and *creates opportunities* that can be exploited via one's own effective messaging filling the void (e.g. Allied strategy in World War I). Thus the efficacy of disruption, like any counter-strategy, is dependent on not just that defensive manoeuvre but the follow-up offensive manoeuvre.

There is much to learn from adversaries and mistakes

Throughout history, non-state political actors and movements have placed a greater strategic focus on messaging strategies as a consequence of needing to overcome decisive technological and resource weaknesses compared to their stronger foes. From early Christians and Muslims, Protestant reformers and American revolutionaries to modern-day rebels and terrorists, messaging has been strategically used to *both* magnify the intended effects of one's actions and the negative repercussions of the enemies' actions. Messaging has also been central to shaping the perceptions of audiences because actions do not necessarily speak louder than words if one's adversary can effectively shape how those actions are perceived. Moreover, asymmetric actors rely heavily on the (misguided) response of their stronger adversaries for the impact of their politico-military and messaging activities to achieve their full effect. This is no better demonstrated than by how ill-informed paradigms,

such as the 'Cold War' or the 'War on Terror' constructs, were used as the overly simplistic lenses through which to not just understand complex phenomena but develop messaging and politico-military strategies. There is much to learn from the propaganda strategies of groups like AQ and IS as well as much to learn from one's errors. Defeating 21st century extremists in the 'battle for hearts and minds' will require government strategic communications to better appreciate the strategic principles of their adversaries in order to not only devise effective counter-narratives (defensive messaging) but offensive messaging too.

Final remarks

This article analysed the evolution of propaganda during conflict. In spanning an enormous historical and thematic breadth, it fleetingly touched upon subjects that have been the focus of exhaustive studies that, even with a singular focus, could not have captured the phenomenon in its entirety. Despite these limitations, what emerged were recurrent themes and trends in the history of propaganda during conflict – some were timeless while others were uniquely modern. From this history emerge lessons that could help inform better counter-terrorism strategic communications principles while offering an historical perspective on the current state of the field. As a contribution to the CTSC Project, it provides a broad historical and thematic foundation for the series of articles that follow.

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Haroro J. Ingram
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Contact ICCT

ICCT
Zeestraat 100
2518 AD The Hague
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 763 0050
E info@icct.nl