Waging Communication War

KENNETH PAYNE

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States is fighting wars in which the effective communication of ideas and information is vital. Strategists in both these conflicts increasingly share with classic counterinsurgency theorists a keen appreciation that they are fighting for the support of the population, and that communication is a key part of the struggle.

This article sets out to explore the ramifications of this feature of modern war. Communications may be vital, but how should the operational and tactical commander use them to best advantage? Why have US military and civilian authorities found effective communication so difficult in the current struggle against militant Islamism?

The US military has now formally incorporated what might be called communication war into doctrine, both in its dedicated counterinsurgency field manual and in its newly updated operational field manual, cornerstone of overall doctrine.[1] Both manuals go into some detail about the importance of communication and related concepts, such as the media, public affairs, psychological operations, and information operations. While the manuals offer compelling advice on what should be achieved in the information domain, guidance on how to achieve it is somewhat lacking. This distinction reflects the complexity of communication in warfare, particularly in wars involving irregular forces engaged in insurgency. Many actors and variables are involved, and few of them are under the direct control of those in the operational chain of command.

Consider some of the factors: The strategic direction, which greatly influences popular attitudes toward conflict, is formed largely in the political stratosphere of Washington, and partly in conjunction with allied governments. Politically savvy senior leaders can certainly influence the direction of this strategy, but there are also other powerful actors involved. Likewise,

the actions of the host nation government, though perhaps amenable to military influence by theater commanders, are not wholly, or even largely, within their control. In the world of the diffuse, fragmented media, the people themselves have increasingly become players in shaping the terms of debate, as part of the noisy discourse in both traditional and new media. Lastly, of course, the enemy also has a stake in the information contest.

As for process, the means of communicating with audiences are, to a large extent, in the hands of an independent-minded media—some of which may be inimically opposed to the commander's strategic and tactical efforts or may simply follow less than professional standards of objectivity and impartiality. Then the audiences with whom the commander hopes to interact are fragmented, geographically and socially. Reaching them with a coherent and credible message is far from straightforward.

The only communication levers firmly within the commander's grasp may be forces and associated civilian personnel serving in theater, but many of these may lack the training, equipment, and cultural awareness necessary to communicate effectively in support of the overall campaign. The complexity is such that even Frank Kitson, stellar reputation in the counterinsurgency field notwithstanding, effectively threw up his hands when it came to the processes of winning over populations. "It is in men's minds that wars of subversion have to be fought and decided," he declared in his landmark study of low-intensity operations, before ruefully concluding 170 pages later that "the question of men's attitudes is an interesting one, but although in a sense relevant to the purpose of this study, it is so hedged around with imponderables that no useful purpose would be served by further speculation in this context. Perhaps some qualified person will take the matter up later on, and research it in a scientific way."[2]

The situation now is even more complicated than Kitson found in Malaya and Kenya. The classics of counterinsurgency and guerrilla writing evoke nostalgia for a world of flickering projectors and rough propaganda sheets rolling off inky jungle presses.[3] The world, however, has moved on apace since this first wave of counterinsurgency writing. The rapid evolution of irregular warfare and the modern media have together transformed the process of waging war, leaving the western military and civil institutional structures lagging behind.

Dr. Kenneth Payne is a visiting fellow at Oxford University's Reuters Institute and a teaching fellow at the United Kingdom's Joint Services Command and Staff College. Previously he was a BBC journalist, specializing in security and defense issues. His Ph.D. is in US defense policy.

How to Communicate

Declaring that the population is central to victory is a staple of counterinsurgency studies, almost invariably featured in the first few pages of the classic texts. Robert Taber, for example, writes that the population is the key to the entire struggle. Indeed, although western analysts seem to dislike entertaining this idea, it is the population which is doing the struggling.[4] While for Roger Trinquier, "the sine qua non of victory in modern warfare is the unconditional support of a population."[5]

Many authors also consider the idea of persuasion, and some feature a brief outline on the role of propaganda, or communication more broadly. Rupert Smith, for example, writes: "If you are fighting for the will of the people, however many tactical successes you achieve, they will be as naught if the people do not believe you are winning." This belief must be cultivated; the population has to be won over, and communication of information is essential to accomplishing that. "It is by communicating through the media that this understanding is in large measure achieved," Smith concludes.[6]

The literature, like modern doctrine, has less to say about the practicalities of communicating effectively. Some ideas are floated; most are focused on the means of delivery: radio, newspaper, and so on. A few studies go further, notably a recent RAND report, *Enlisting Madison Avenue*, which suggests that the US military should learn from the marketing industry, particularly its concepts of branding and audience segmentation.[7]

There are indeed some similarities between marketing and communication in irregular warfare, and RAND's study is worth close reading. Marketing, after all, is about persuading people. But communication in war is a tougher business than marketing. Paul Linebarger, an American soldier-scholar, argued in the 1950s that "advertising succeeds in peacetime precisely because it does not matter," whereas "allegiance in war is a matter of ideology, not of opinion."[8] Ideology may be the wrong word, since populations can be loyal for other reasons, but Linebarger was right to suggest that the stakes are higher when choosing sides than when choosing toothpaste.

Strategy and Communication

Communication is an important part of strategy, but in winning over populations, it is clearly subordinate to strategy. Underpinning all the radical changes in warfare and the media are some long-established principles of war. For all its novelty, counterinsurgency warfare remains a contest of wills, in which victory will normally go to the side with the best strategy. Luck plays a part too, of course, but sound strategy is still the cornerstone of counterinsurgency, as of all warfare. As H. R. McMaster writes, "Military operations

not connected to a fundamentally sound comprehensive strategy are unlikely to succeed even if the stakes are low and the objectives modest."[9] Commanders cannot simply talk their way to victory, no matter how slick their media campaign.

The problem for many military communicators is that a great deal of communication happens at the tactical level, conducted by officers and soldiers with little influence on or understanding of the strategic setting. These tactical commanders can influence their local population through behavior and communication, even when strategy is poorly devised or imperfectly executed at another level. But their impact will necessarily be constrained by the bigger strategic picture. Still, as McMaster and the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment discovered in Tal Afar, tactical experience can sometimes have strategic impact, especially once it gets communicated.

In the war currently under way in Iraq, strategy has developed from policy goals that have variously included preventive war, counterterrorism, democratization, and regional stability. It has also reflected a political desire to wage war with a faster, lighter, more lethal force. Above all, it came out of a political and military tradition that emphasized force protection and abjured the complexities of nation-building.

The communication effort deployed in support of this strategy has for the most part faithfully reflected these evolving themes. If it fared badly, this was not simply the result of poor communication, though in the early years, particularly during the period of the Coalition Provisional Authority, it was often poor, but was so primarily because of the stark gap between policy goals and the strategy and resources applied to achieve them. The situation changed somewhat with the articulation of a more credible counterinsurgency strategy in late 2006, designed to meet the new strategic priority of achieving security for most of Iraq's urban population, and with the deployment of sufficient resources to make inroads in achieving it.

Communication in this period became a force multiplier—reassuring local populations and building productive information relationships, and helping to shore up support for the policy goals with domestic American audiences. General David Petraeus's appearances before Congress, ostensibly about oversight, were useful for building domestic support for a costly deployment and a revitalized counterinsurgency strategy.

Sound strategy, then, is an essential prerequisite of effective communication. But the relationship should not only be in one direction. Strategists would do well to reflect on the opinion of audiences, leveraging them in pursuit of policy goals, and working with the grain of the audience rather than against it. If war is conceived as a violent struggle of wills between opposing forces, and moreover, one in which these forces are competing for the will of a

population, then shrewd commanders should reflect on the characteristics of the audiences with which they are communicating. To persuade an audience, one ought to have a persuasive message, and this makes understanding the audience vital.

The Audience

Understanding the audience requires research. The goal, in the end, is to segment the audience and deliver a tailored message to each segment, since a relevant message is more likely to be persuasive. Audiences can be divided up in a multitude of ways, from global right down to the individual. Three broad population groups do, however, stand out: local, regional, and domestic. Many practitioners, whether in the media, the communications business, or the military, view the audience in these terms.

The Local Population

Counterinsurgency theory prioritizes the local population; those actively involved in the conflict. These individuals interact regularly with counterinsurgency forces, are within more-or-less ready reach of the forces' communication specialists, and ultimately are the people for whose hearts and minds the insurgent and counterinsurgent are contending. In order to win, this local population has to be persuaded that the counterinsurgent offers the most compelling and credible vision for the future.

How then to appeal to that audience? Andrew Krepinevich, writing in his landmark study of how the US Army failed to adapt to counterinsurgency warfare during the Vietnam conflict, provides the answer: "Winning the hearts and minds of the people is as desirable for the government as it is for the insurgent. This objective can only be fully realized, however, after control of the population is affected and its security provided for."[10]

Krepinevich gets to the crux of counterinsurgency theory; the counterinsurgent attains victory not through the deployment of conventional force, or by mirror-imaging the unconventional tactics of the guerrilla, but rather through the sustained provision of security for the affected population. Second-order concerns may include some prospect of economic stability and effective government—perhaps even a representative government. All have a place in an effective communication strategy, but security is paramount.

This theory bears up empirically well in the case of Iraq. Polls of the Iraqi population show consistently that security is their primary concern. In an ABC/BBC poll conducted in March 2007, as the surge was getting under way, 48 percent of respondents said that security issues were the biggest single problem in their lives, economic issues rated with 17 percent, and political

issues with only 13 percent. Seventy-five percent rated their ability to go where they wished safely as quite or very bad, and 77 percent rated their ability to live where they wished without persecution as quite or very bad.

As for representation, a key theme in US government communications regarding Iraq, many Iraqis do favor democracy, but significant minorities advocate other types of government. Forty-three percent of the Iraqis polled in March 2007 thought that democracy would be the best political system for Iraq, trending down from 57 percent in 2005, while 34 percent favored a strong leader, and 22 percent an Islamic state.[11]

What is the counterinsurgent to make of this target population, and how should he shape his communication campaign? Communicating the effort to achieve lasting security ought to be fairly straightforward, particularly once some tentative progress has been made. At the local level, soldiers can communicate on an individual basis—this insurgent has been detained, that reliable local representative has been given extra responsibility. At the operational level, public affairs staff and senior commanders may communicate about how communities in a particular area prioritized by the counter- insurgency effort have benefited—increased security, markets reopened, etc. At the political level, communications might be about the agreements made with insurgents and how they are prepared to reach an accommodation with the authorities.

Above all, there is the element of time. Security counts for little if it is not sustained and if the population does not believe it will be sustained. The local Iraqi audience understands this. American forces, understandably, are not popular with most Iraqis. They score very poorly in polls when asked about their effectiveness. But when asked how long the United States and its international allies should remain, the picture changes, with a clear majority favoring a prolonged stay.[12] The challenge for the communicator is to reassure the local audience that any stability is not temporary.

The Home Front

That is a tricky communication challenge given the views of a large segment of the domestic American audience, where a slim plurality favors bringing forces home quickly, and with whom the war in Iraq is becoming increasingly unpopular.[13] This domestic audience is vital for the counterinsurgent, but is typically neglected in studies of counterinsurgency. Sooner or later, as the French discovered in Indochina and Algeria, lackluster domestic support produces tangible battlefield results—resources may not be forthcoming, the public is no longer prepared to accept the price in blood, treasure, and prestige of sustaining the unpopular defense of nonexistential causes.[14]

Democratic states have proved to be poor counterinsurgents. They lack the repressive brutality that totalitarian regimes demonstrate in sup-

pressing political dissent; they operate on a democratic cycle that is much shorter than the timeline typically required for counterinsurgency; and the attitudes of the domestic audience have the ability to definitively shape policy, by means of the ballot box or by exerting pressure on elected officials.

In theory at least, communication with this audience ought to be primarily the responsibility of the political leadership that develops the strategy. In practice, however, that distinction is difficult to sustain, as viewers of General Petraeus's periodic testimony in Congress will recognize. A senior commander is judged by his success in implementing strategy, and by association becomes an advocate for that strategy. Their views, given added credibility by the stars on their shoulders, are likely to have an impact on the public debate.

More broadly, all operational and tactical commanders have the ability to impact this audience. Their actions and comments are featured in news reports and documentaries; while their position carries connotations of integrity and professionalism that resonate with audiences in ways that partisan political commentators lack.

Neighbors

A third population grouping can also have a decisive bearing on the campaign. Neighboring populations can supply fighters, sanctuary, and ideological support to insurgents. They can also provide support for their own governments, who may oppose efforts at counterinsurgency and the establishment of sustainable state institutions. Like the local population, these people and their governmental organizations should be persuaded at a minimum to not actively oppose the counterinsurgent's efforts.

Communication with these populations has traditionally been the responsibility of public diplomacy specialists. Though it might not be highlighted in the field manuals, once again operational and tactical commanders are increasingly on the front line of communicating with regional audiences, just as they are with the domestic audience. The military is at a minimum as influential in shaping regional perceptions of the United States as are the professional diplomatists in the State Department or the partisan politicians in Washington.

Public diplomacy is concerned with reaching beyond the traditional, government-to-government channels of formal diplomacy, and speaking directly to the people: "Nation shall speak unto nation," as the motto of the BBC World Service succinctly puts it. Changes in the media ought to have enhanced the ability of the diplomatists to communicate effectively with their target audiences: the expansion of satellite television, particularly in the Arabic world, which is difficult for repressive governments to censor; and the

*"The real problem for the United States has been
  its inability to communicate effectively
  with regional audiences due mainly
  to conflicting messages."*

rapid growth of the Internet, coupled with its transition into a medium capable of carrying audio and video.

Nonetheless, the experience of American public diplomacy in the years since 9/11 has been poor. The standing of the United States abroad, particularly in the Middle East, has been sliding. In addition, there is a strongly conspiratorial element to public opinion, in line with al Qaeda communications, with citizens in some Mideast countries directly blaming America for the ills of their society. The ostensible commitment to spreading democracy abroad by the United States lacks credibility when viewed alongside its continued tolerance for, and alliance with, some particularly repressive regimes in the region.

The response has been to revamp America's public diplomacy infrastructure that was severely downgraded in the post-Cold War era characterized most notably by the mothballing of the US Information Agency. But while institutional know-how is an important aspect of communication, the real problem for the United States has been its inability to communicate effectively with regional audiences due mainly to conflicting messages related to democracy and political Islam. This conundrum is another lesson on the difficulties of adopting the proper tactics in support of the wrong strategy, or lipsticking the foreign policy pig, as Phillip Carter bluntly puts it.[15]

Audience Research

These three categories are a crude way of dividing up the myriad of audiences who receive communications from the counterinsurgent, and whose beliefs can have a bearing on the conflict's outcome. These groups are not, of course, made up of homogenous blocks of opinion. Within the first block of affected locals, for example, there may be groups that esteem representative government, while for others democracy represents a real threat, in particular to the protections afforded minorities. Beyond these groups, com-

munications may be targeted directly at a particular party, tribe, or militia; or even more narrowly, at individuals.

To communicate effectively with these niche audiences requires significant and sustained investment in audience research, with the goal of identifying segmented groups and targeting communications directly at them. In the 1990s, when the Revolution in Military Affairs was the buzz concept in shaping strategy and force structure, the idea that information superiority held the key to military success was highly popular. Times have changed, but information is still at the heart of today's battle for the will of the people.

Information warfare, however, requires a broader understanding of enemy capabilities and the attitudes of populations than can be acquired from electronic sensors. Today, what is required is detailed cultural and psychological data, which can then be processed, analyzed, and shared using all the technology that the military can muster. Quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and interrogations can all be mapped, analyzed, and then brought to bear in shaping the communication effort and the wider strategic plan. Lieutenant Colonel Jack Marr and his colleagues from Task Force Dragon outline what can be achieved.

> Over time the staff mapped the boundaries of each tribe and the demographic makeup of every village, town, and city the enemy could possibly seek refuge in. It went on to add data about [. . .] the needs and wants of the particular populations. Mapping this political, economic, and sociological information created a common human-terrain picture that enabled more proactive initiatives.[16]

Understanding the audience in this manner is not the same as acceding to the demands of a group, or passively accepting the status quo. Neither policy nor strategy should be wholly subservient to existing public opinion, either at home or abroad. The opinions of publics, even on issues that are perceived to be vital, are malleable and capable of changing through time in response to events and communication efforts.

Narrative Credibility is Key

Considering the great variety of public opinion, and with situations varying from theater to theater, what can meaningfully be said about the substance and process of communication? Thus far, the argument is that good communication is likely to be ineffective if the strategy is flawed; and second, there are multiple audiences capable of influencing the success or failure of the strategy, and understanding these audiences is essential to effectively communicating with them. The final assertion is that effective communication rests on credibility; communications that are not believed are simply hot air.

David Galula was correct when he wrote that "when a man's life is at stake, it takes more than propaganda to budge him." The local population, he adds, has to be "convinced that the counterinsurgent has the will, the means, and the ability to win."[17] Persuading the local audience that your message is credible is the elixir of counterinsurgency. The local populace must understand your strategy and tactics, be able to see them in action, feel the results in their daily lives, and hear about them in other parts of the country.

So far so good—but how best to set about achieving credibility, given the many audiences with divergent interests, and where policies often run counter to those interests? To be credible, and therefore persuasive, messages should be grounded in verifiable fact, and moreover they need to be coherent and consistent. Consistency is the starting point, because it is perfectly possible for two factually accurate messages to be inconsistent. To achieve coherence, all the elements of the message must point in the same direction, across all audiences, and the message should be comprehensible to the target audience. The proliferation of global media means that it is no longer feasible, if it ever was, to provide contradictory messages to particular segments of an audience.

Tactical communications dissonant with the overall strategic message can have a disproportionate impact. The strategy is the strategy, whichever audience it is communicated to. Communications targeted at an Iraqi audience, for example, are very likely to wind up being reported in the United States if they clash with what is being told to the domestic audience. The same is true in the other direction. This is why the high-profile discussion in the United States regarding a timetable for withdrawal of US forces from Iraq conflicts with the operational need to show the Iraqi population a sustained commitment to effective security.

A similar example from the United Kingdom (UK) further illustrates the point. In late 2006, the Chief of the General Staff, General Richard Dannatt, gave an interview to a leading British newspaper in which he advocated the withdrawal of British forces from Iraq. Britain should, he said, "get ourselves out sometime soon because our presence exacerbates the security problems." He added, "I don't say that the difficulties we are experiencing around the world are caused by our presence in Iraq, but undoubtedly our presence in Iraq exacerbates them."[18]

Here was a message that resonated with large segments of the domestic audience in the United Kingdom, with whom the Iraq war had become unpopular. Here too was a message for his own constituency, the armed forces, hard-pressed by the operational tempo of long-term deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. There was a problem: The General's message conflicted with the declared strategy of his government, which—though it was

evolving toward a de facto retreat from the operational theater to the euphemistically titled "strategic overwatch" from Basra airport—did not envisage any complete withdrawal in the near-term, and indeed stressed that the British deployment would be sustained until such time as the Iraqis were ready to assume responsibility for their own security. In publicly articulating a strategy divergent from that of his political masters, Dannatt attracted considerable criticism. The British government might well have been considering an effective withdrawal from Iraq, but it was not discussing the matter publicly in the same manner as General Dannatt.

As for the Iraqi view, there is no reason to suggest that General Dannatt was anything other than sincere about the negative impact that UK forces were having on the Shia militancy through their presence on the streets of southern Iraq. But his message conflicted with the declared desire of many Iraqis to see foreign forces stay and provide security.[19] His statements certainly conflicted with the strategy of the United States, which was in the process of gearing up for a new counterinsurgency effort prioritizing the delivery of security through the stationing of forces out in the population.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the strategic debate, the episode was an illustration of the problems in communicating effectively to different audiences at the strategic level. Unraveling these strategic tensions, along with many others at the theater and tactical levels, and presenting them in the best possible light is what effective, coherent communication is all about. There are few straightforward solutions, and many of the factors impacting tactical-level communications are determined at a level of command beyond the control of the leaders responsible for planning and implementing communication efforts.

Choosing Channels

The final stage in communications seems the most straightforward: The crafted message, having been carefully researched, deconflicted, and aligned with the overall direction of strategy, is imparted to the chosen audience. In the act of communication itself much can go awry. Messages can be lost in translation, in both the literal and cultural senses. In the current insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, linguists and cultural specialists are in short supply, whether to appear on satellite television and field difficult questions about the strategic picture for a large audience, or to interact with local inhabitants on the ground as part of a foot patrol. The insurgent, by contrast, typically enjoys much greater familiarity with the local audience.

Then there is the simple logistical challenge of connecting with the audience. Some key populations are difficult to reach. They may be illiterate

villagers in a remote location, without access to radio or television; or citizens of a repressive third country where the censor ensures only a pro-government message and seeks to restrict access to any international media. Even connecting with the home audience can be challenging, bombarded as they are with a multitude of messages, from domestic news to the cacophony of commercial advertising. The way in which the audience gets its news has changed markedly: Audience numbers for print and television media in the developed world are on a steady downward trend, whether it is the evening news, *The New York Times*, or the local newspaper. Balancing that decline has been a rise in online activity, including news consumption.[20] But the on-line audience is far more fragmented than its off-line predecessor. As narrowcasting and commentary increasingly replace broadcasting and reporting, the complexity of identifying an audience and getting its attention with a credible persuasive message increases dramatically.

An additional issue is the comparative advantage that the insurgent has based upon the power of image. Insurgent violence, particularly terrorist acts, is a media spectacle, in which the psychological effect on audiences is far more important for the terrorist than the actual impact of the violent acts. It is for this reason that the insurgents in Iraq, particularly al Qaeda, regularly deploy with combat camera teams and distribute professionally edited short films that intercut ideology and violence. The insurgent need not convert the entire population to his cause in his effort to undermine the authorities, it is enough to subdue a simple majority in order to gain control. Terrorism is an effective tool to achieve such an objective.

Dramatic images may work for the insurgent, but the same is not necessarily true of the counterinsurgent. Although the majority of such images typically focus attention on the tactical dimension—the platoon in action, the suicide car bomb—it can raise these incidents to the level of strategic importance. Consider the disturbing images of detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib which undermined US efforts to project an image of responsible authority. The goal of the counterinsurgent is to provide a secure and inherently nondramatic environment for the population. A relatively quiet security environment is typically less newsworthy than the carnage caused by an isolated violent incident; perhaps this is one reason why coverage of Iraq in the US media fell significantly during the latter part of 2007.[21]

The United States has made significant efforts to adapt to the modern media era. Military liaison teams work with Arabic broadcasters in Qatar, spokespeople trained in Arabic language and culture appear on satellite television, while still others participate in on-line discussion forums on regional websites. The US military, following the lead of al Qaeda's *As Shahab* media production group, posts edited YouTube footage of its operations.[22] On the

ground the military has made a supreme effort to understand and connect with the local audience, to include the deployment of human terrain teams, which include anthropologists, linguists, and other specialists better able to understand and deal with the intricacies of the local populace.

Some projects have worked better than others. The Multi-National Force-Iraq Youtube channel attracts few viewers; the efforts of the Lincoln Group, contracted by the military to place stories in the Iraqi press, attracted opprobrium and undermined American credibility. Appearing on *Al Jazeera*, State Department official Alberto Fernandez offered a frank assessment of US efforts in Iraq, suggesting that the United States had shown "arrogance and stupidity" there, only to have to retract the comment when his message clashed with the views of the domestic US audience.[23]

Distributing narratives, then, remains a work in progress, with some avenues still to be exploited. Cellphone communications, for example, offer a means to reach large audiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, and throughout the region. For the tactical commander, however, the best course of action remains decidedly low-tech; interacting personally with the population he seeks to influence.

Conclusion: Victory

To what extent can a savvy communication strategy make the difference between victory and defeat in the war for the people's support? At its extreme this question suggests the unlikely prospect of spinning one's way to victory. Communication efforts can help shape perceptions, but these efforts are only one of many factors that influence how people perceive the world around them. Not even the most sophisticated commander can construct an alternative reality to compensate for a misplaced or poorly resourced strategy.

The story of the surge in Iraq is illustrative. The surge was an actual event, as exemplified by both an increase in forces and a significant adjustment in the manner in which they were deployed. It was also accompanied by a decline in the violence directed against American forces and Iraqi civilians. The surge was also a communications narrative that had real-world effects. The story of the surge and the new counterinsurgency strategy it presaged dominated media coverage and directly influenced the political debate in the United States; thereby, increasing the time available for counterinsurgents to enhance security, political compromise, and reconciliation in Iraq.

Selling the surge became a political objective of the George W. Bush Administration, and advocating its effects—not least because they bought more time for compromise—became the mission of senior military leaders

responsible for devising and implementing the strategy. Strategy and communications were at last working hand in hand.

The contrast with the early years is stark. Previously, Coalition briefers would unleash a daily torrent of statistics: the number of patrols conducted, weapons caches found, schools refurbished, electricity generated, police trained, insurgents killed. It all reflected a reality, and allowing for problems of data collection, much of it was likely to be factually accurate. The data, however, presented a very partial and unrepresentative view of the Coalition's struggle with insurgents. The number of Iraqi policemen trained said little about their quality; the number of insurgents killed and captured meant little without information on recruitment of new combatants and sympathizers.

The credibility of the Coalition briefers suffered when contrasted with the variable that mattered, the rising tide of sectarian violence. Echoes of the infamous Vietnam-era body count were hard to avoid. In the end, the communication experts, in Washington as well as Baghdad, were presenting a message that lacked credibility and reflected statistics that were fundamentally immaterial to the fortunes of war. Audiences at home and abroad were not, on the whole, convinced.

An effective narrative is a story, grounded in truth but which also includes other attributes—it is simple, it appeals to the predilections of the audience, it is factual, thereby strengthening credibility, and it is consistent with other messages. Above all, as the lesson of the Coalition Provisional Authority shows, it must reflect the actual strategy—and if that strategy is bunk, the rest is simply spin.

In modern wars such as Iraq and Afghanistan, there are no conventional enemies to be defeated on the battlefield, no opposing government from whom to formally accept surrender. Victory, in the end, is likely to involve a messy political compromise, perhaps with a remnant of low-level violence, and a more-or-less responsive government that is largely in control of its territory. To get even to that point, people need to be persuaded of the need to compromise, and of the benefits to be had from engaging productively with the constituted authority. Effective communications cannot, by themselves, win wars among the people, but it will be impossible to win them without it.

NOTES

1. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3.0 *Operations* (Washington: Headquarters Department of the Army, February 2008), especially Chapter 7, and Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* (Washington: Headquarters Department of the Army, December 2006), especially Chapter 5.

2. Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency, Peace-Keeping* (London: Faber, 1971), 31 and 201.

3. See, for example, Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1969), especially 109-111 and Robert Thompson*, Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), especially 90-102.

4. Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea: A Study of Guerrilla Warfare Theory and Practice* (London: Paladin, 1970), 12.

5. Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 9.

6. Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 391.

7. Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2007).

8. Paul M. A. Linebarger, "The Function of Psychological Warfare," in Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, eds., *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: New and Classic Essays* (London: SAGE, 2006), 197.

9. H. R. McMaster, "On War: Lessons to be Learned," *Survival*, 50 (February/March 2008), 27.

10. Andrew Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), 12.

11. Poll conducted for ABC News, the BBC, ARD German Television, and *USA Today*, between 25 February and 5 March 2007. See BBC News, "Iraq Poll March 2007: In Graphics," 19 March 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/6451841.stm.

12. In a February 2008 poll for ABC/BBC, only 20 percent of Iraqis expressed a lot of confidence in US forces, 46 percent had none at all, and 33 percent had not very much. Seventy percent thought American and Coalition forces had done a bad job in carrying out responsibilities, and 72 percent opposed the presence of Coalition forces in Iraq. But altogether 62 percent thought they should stay longer, either until security is restored (35 percent), the government is stronger (14 percent), Iraqi forces can operate independently (ten percent), or for no stated reason (three percent). Survey conducted for ABC News, the BBC, ARD, and NHK, 12-20 February 2008. See BBC News, "Poll Suggests Iraqis 'Optimistic,'" 17 March 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7299569.stm.

13. Polling conducted by Pew shows a divided population. In spring 2008, 49 percent of Americans favor bringing troops home immediately, but 47 percent think that they should remain until stability is restored. Fifty-four percent think the decision to use military force in Iraq was the wrong one, versus 38 percent who think it was the right decision, and the population was evenly split at 48 percent each on whether the war was going well or not. See Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," 19 March 2008, http://pewresearch.org/pubs/770/iraq-war-five-year-anniversary.

14. For an excellent account, see Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006).

15. Phillip Carter, "Rumsfeld: 'Can We Talk?'" posting on *Intel Dump* blog, 26 January 2008, http://inteldump.powerblogs.com/posts/1201357073.shtml.

16. Jack Marr, John Cushing, Brandon Garner, and Richard Thompson, "Human Terrain Mapping: A Critical First Step to Winning the COIN Fight," *Military Review*, 88 (March/April 2008).

17. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), 78.

18. Sarah Sands, "Sir Richard Dannatt: A Very Honest General," *Daily Mail*, 12 October 2006.

19. In the February 2008 poll cited previously, 38 percent of Iraqis thought the British withdrawal had worsened security in Basra, 28 percent thought it had remained the same.

20. Project for Excellence in Journalism, "The State of the News Media: 2008," http://www.stateofthenewsmedia.com/2008/index.php.

21. See Project for Excellence in Journalism, "Iraq War Coverage Plunges," 25 March 2008, http://www.journalism.org/node/10345.

22. For a fascinating documentary account of US efforts to engage with Arabic media, see "War of Ideas," *Frontline*, PBS, http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/newswar/video1.html; on website discussion, see, for example: Alberto Fernandez, then Director for Public Diplomacy for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs at the State Department, engaging in debate on Islam Online, an English language website associated with the prominent Sunni theologian Sheikh Yusuf Qaradawi, 28 August 2006, http://www.islamonline.net/livedialogue/english/Guestcv.asp?hGuestID=2jgYLj; Multi-National Force-Iraq's *Youtube* channel, http://www.youtube.com/MNFIRAQ.

23. By spring 2008, MNF-I's most popular video had been watched some 2.7 million times in the year since it was posted, the other 46 videos posted on the site had significantly fewer viewers (25,000 to 450,000). On the Lincoln Group and the Iraqi media, see Mark Mazzetti and Borzou Daragahi, "US Military Covertly Pays to Run Stories in Iraqi Press," *The Los Angeles Times*, 30 November 2005; on Alberto Fernandez and *Al Jazeera*, see Neela Banerjee, "State Dept. Official Apologizes for Criticism of Iraq Policy," *The New York Times*, 23 October 2006; on the problems facing the HTT program, see Dan Ephron and Silvia Spring, "A Gun in One Hand, A Pen in the Other," *Newsweek,* 21 April 2008.