USING TARGET AUDIENCE ANALYSIS TO AID STRATEGIC LEVEL DECISIONMAKING

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The end of conflict in Afghanistan, and the reignition of fighting in Iraq must now cause policymakers to take a long hard look at what went wrong. At the top of that list must be the inability of Euro-Atlantic governments and their militaries to understand the behaviors of groups within the areas of operations and a naivety in believing that those groups could be influenced by simple attitudinal communication campaigns. Across Eastern Europe, the Maghreb, the Middle East, and on the continent of Africa, unpredicted behaviors—some state initiated, some society initiated—have demonstrated a massive strategic deficit and an unpreparedness for "black swans." The first challenge for policymakers is to accept that existing policy structures have not met the challenges of an increasingly interconnected and complex world; all too often, the mechanisms to meet challenges are obscured by politics, process, received wisdom, complacency, and fear of change. Our structures need to adapt: watchwords must be agility; risk; adaptation; innovation, and delegation to the lowest possible level and to the highest possible discomfort. Yet, it seems there is no existential scrutiny of strategic communication and information operations efforts because today the same outdated techniques and ideas are being deployed in support of U.S. Aid programs, in the military response against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and in other conflicts globally.

This Paper argues that millions of U.S. dollars are being squandered on programs that have no chance of working because they pay no attention to the realities of the audiences against whom they are deployed. Instead, they project images and themes decided upon by bureaucrats, politicians, and military leaders far from the reality of the conflict designed to project a positive image of the United States in the hope that violent behavior will somehow be reduced. The author uses numerous examples to show how this approach has failed in the past and will continue to do so in the future. He demonstrates that the very basics of communication theory are either misunderstood or ignored; he shows how proper behavioral profiling is almost completely ignored despite its widespread use in law enforcement, security, and commercial sectors; he shows how social media is a new "must have accessory" with millions of dollars being pumped into it and yet the evidence base for its effect, particularly in regard to the Arab Spring, is far from conclusive.

The author opines that process, rather than strategy, is the key deliverable in many departments of government throughout the Euro-Atlantic community, and, in keeping the process alive, strategic thinking and innovation inevitably takes second place. The result is that policy is almost exclusively reactive. The pattern is repeated over and over; little or no resource is applied to understanding up-stream population based threats, and, as issues develop in a particular region, staff who often have little understanding or knowledge of the country concerned are sucked into crisis teams to "firefight" issues. Those teams come under intense political and public pressure to deliver; resources are suddenly made available; the lure of public relations and marketing based campaigns which promise quick delivery becomes irresistible, and the more slow and considered process of researching and actually understanding the problem from the perspective of the groups involved

is subjugated to the need to demonstrate delivery—Measures of Performance, rather than Measures of Effect. The author offers an alternative strategy, where proper behavioral profiling would lead to considered strategy options with measurable outcomes but opines that this is highly unlikely to ever happen.

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