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**U.S. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AGAINST
ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISTS**

by

Dustin J. Schouten

March 2016

Thesis Advisor:
Co-Advisor:

Carolyn Halladay
Tristan Mabry

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FUNDAMENTALISTS**

Dustin J. Schouten
Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy
B.S., University of Washington, 1998

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March 2016**

Approved by: Carolyn Halladay
Thesis Advisor

Tristan Mabry
Co-Advisor

Mohammed M. Hafez
Chair, Department of National Security Affairs

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Strategic communications play a vital role in the fight against terrorist groups, especially in Muslim nations. This thesis analyzes the United States' policies and strategic communications in the post-September 11, 2001, war against Islamic fundamentalists to determine if U.S. strategic communication policies have been effective in countering Islamic extremism. From the findings, it is evident that U.S. strategic communications have failed in countering radicalization and moderating the minds of Muslim populations overseas—or among diaspora populations in Western countries. Marginalization and poor assimilation strategies; awkward distribution of competencies between the Central Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon, and the State Department; a lack of global perspective; and failure to learn from past military operations are some of the factors that have contributed to the problem. Reinstatement of a central agency for strategic communications, modeling of solutions for specific groups, and analysis of historical war successes and failures are important in ensuring the effectiveness of strategic communications in the fight against terrorist groups.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
IO	Information Operations
IS	Islamic State
MND-B	Multi-National Division - Baghdad
NSC	National Security Council
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
RCT	Rational Choice Theory
TAI	Tactical Areas of Interest
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIA	U.S. Information Agency
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction

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I. INTRODUCTION

Even though major combat operations have ended in Iraq, and the United States started drawing down forces in Afghanistan in 2014, the global war on terror is far from over. Although crippled after more than ten years of U.S. military actions, Al Qaeda and its affiliates are not defeated, with elements still operating in Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, and Southeast Asia. Up until now in the global war on terror, the United States has relied principally on hard power—the use of military and economic forces to coerce others—to press its goals. While these measures have been effective insofar as causing regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan and materially disrupting the terrorist operations of Al Qaeda and other such radical Islamic groups the world over, they have not garnered much support for U.S. priorities in the Muslim world.

With the United States now looking to minimize its physical armed presence in these places, and with the local populations increasingly mobilized against U.S. hard-power measures such as the use of drone strikes, a new approach and new methods may be necessary. Arguably, it is time for the United States to reacquaint itself with soft power—the use of a nation’s economic, cultural, foreign policy, and political influence (the core elements of strategic communications) to co-opt others—to finish the job that started on September 11, 2001, and to bring lasting results in the fight against radical Islam.

The 21st century has seen a spread of extremist ideology in Asia and Africa. For instance, Somali-based and Al Qaeda-affiliated Islamist terrorist group, Harakat Al-Shabab al-Mujahideen, which was an offshoot of the Islamic courts union, has strengthened on the Horn of Africa. The group spreads messages similar to those of Al Qaeda and has attacked American and Western interests in other African countries such as Uganda and Kenya.

In Asia and the Middle East, the Islamic State (IS) has undergone a 15-year evolution since its inception in 1999. IS is currently based in Iraq and Syria, but its roots lie in Afghanistan and Jordan. IS has advanced considerably, transforming from a few

small and sloppily structured terror cells nearly eradicated by Western forces to a large organization fixated on leading an Islamic caliphate across current national borders. In this progression, IS and its predecessors have experienced a substantial process of organizational and operational learning. Through its remarkable advances across large regions of Syria and Iraq in 2013 and 2014, IS has debatably proven a more effective organization than Al Qaeda.

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis analyzes the U.S. strategic communications and foreign policies in the war against Muslim violent extremists from September 11, 2001, until the present to determine if U.S. policies—which have focused on hard power—have been effective, or if they have helped to increase the radicalization of Muslims around the world. What is the public message and the public response? This effort is vital because many terrorist organizations and insurgencies rely on the support of the public for financing, manpower, and sanctuary, among other things.

In the current fight against Al Qaeda, IS, and other groups affiliated to them in various parts of the world, “the public” includes not only America, but also Muslim nations and diaspora populations around the world. Therefore, U.S. policies and their implementation may need to take into account the thoughts, feelings, and social impressions of each group of citizens.

B. IMPORTANCE

Strategic communications are at the heart of any successful, long-term U.S. counterterrorism campaign. The U.S. government must understand, according to Christopher Paul, that “perceptions and understandings of images, policies, and actions matter, that the success of many policies is contingent on the support they receive from various populations, and that perceptions are influenced both by what you do and what you say.”¹ So, for example, when the U.S. government advocates spreading democracy to the world, yet continues to support despotic regimes in the Middle East, this disconnect

¹ Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 1.

gives Al Qaeda the impetus to call out U.S. duplicity and weakens support for the United States in the region.

Washington also has relied heavily on its hard-power capabilities in the fight against Al Qaeda, with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the use of drone strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan and Yemen. Each of these actions provided U.S. enemies with a substantial amount of propaganda to use in their own strategic communication efforts. Therefore, it is vital that the United States refocus its policies and strategic communication efforts to regain the support of the Muslim populace so that it can better use the appropriate counterterrorism tools and capabilities at its disposal.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

Perhaps the most immediate problem in this research is the following question: What is strategic communications, and what capabilities does it comprise? Part of the definitional issue is due to the fact that the term, strategic communications, is relatively new. It first appeared in the *2001 Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Managed Information Dissemination* as an evolution of the term public diplomacy. “Public diplomacy,” first used by U.S. Ambassador Edmund Guillion in 1965, is used to describe how governments use dialogue that is designed to inform and influence foreign citizens.²

Looking to the U.S. government to help rectify this disconnect only leads to more confusion. The DOD defines strategic communication as the

focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.³

² Ibid., 71–2.

³ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (JP1-02), 266. Last updated November 15, 2015. http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf

The problem with the DOD definition lies in the fact that it views strategic communications as merely a process. Paul points out an important problem with the DOD's process-only mentality. That is, no other government agency views strategic communications as only a process. Instead it is viewed as, or includes, a capability.⁴ Therefore, the DOD, even if using the same definition as another agency, will conduct strategic communications differently.

Meanwhile, the Department of State (DOS), the lead agency on strategic communications in the U.S. government, lacks an official definition—though the 2007 National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication states that “public diplomacy and strategic communication should always strive to support our nation’s values and national security objectives.”⁵ The document then lists four requirements for all communication and diplomacy activities: “underscore our commitment to freedom, human rights and the dignity and equality of every human being; reach out to those who share our ideals; support those who struggle for freedom and democracy; counter those who espouse ideologies of hate and oppression.”⁶ However, this list is not a definition of strategic communications, but a playbook of actions that the DOS wishes to accomplish.

The last major government definition comes from the President in the 2010 National Framework for Strategic Communication:

By “strategic communication(s)” we refer to: (a) the synchronization of words and deeds and how they will be perceived by selected audiences, as well as (b) programs and activities deliberately aimed at communicating and engaging with intended audiences, including those implemented by public affairs, public diplomacy, and information operations professionals.⁷

⁴ Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 21-2.

⁵ Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, June 2007, 2.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The White House, *National Framework for Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC, March 2010), 2.

The problem with the White House's definition is not in its content—the definition is similar in scope to the one provided by the DOD; it is in its tone. As Paul also points out, it does not come across as defining and directing the whole of government on how the United States will conduct strategic communications. Instead, the tone of the definition suggests that the White House is attempting to provide, internal to the document, clarification on what it believes strategic communication is. Failing to mandate a direct and clear definition for the whole of government, the White House's definition appears only valid when discussing the term within the White House.⁸

Lacking a common definition from which to begin makes it hard to communicate not only between U.S. government agencies but also with the foreign public which U.S. strategic communicators intend to influence. The confusion has been so great that in December 2012, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs George Little released a memo stating that the DOD was going to stop using the term strategic communications because it “actually added a layer of staffing and planning that blurred roles and functions of traditional staff elements and resulted in confusion and inefficiencies.”⁹ That is not to say that the DOD is now out of the strategic communication business; they just no longer utilize the term officially or place as much emphasis on the processes they had built up to conduct it in their version. Instead the DOD intends to focus on influencing others through its actions, not through messages crafted by strategic communication staff.¹⁰

The research already shows that strategic communications is a vital element in conducting a successful counterterrorism plan, but what actions and capabilities make up the process? Again the field is rife with conflicting opinions. One side of the debate believes strategic communications is just about messaging; the other side believes that strategic communications is made up of all activities that communicate. The editors of *Influence Warfare* and academics like Phil Taylor argue that strategic communications is made up of “four pillars”: information operations (IO), psychological operations

⁸ Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 20-1.

⁹ “Pentagon drops ‘strategic communication.’” *USA Today*. December 3, 2012. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/03/pentagon-trims-strategic-communication/1743485/>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

(PSYOPS), public diplomacy, and public affairs.¹¹ Arguably these four actions along with a state's values, culture, policies, and institutions make up what Joseph Nye calls "soft power," which is the ability to have influence over others by co-opting them to share your values.¹² "Hard power," in contrast, uses the sticks and carrots of a state's economic and military power to force or coerce others to follow your will.¹³

The opposing camp argues that an organization's actions are also important in crafting the message. Paul believes that strategic communications is composed of at least four basic elements. First, "informing, influencing, and persuading the public is important. Second, effectively informing, influencing, and persuading the public requires clear objectives from the state. Third, coordination and deconfliction are necessary to avoid information fratricide amongst state entities. Last, actions communicate," as the uproar over the photos from Abu Ghraib showed.¹⁴

The DOD definition mentions synchronizing both words and actions of all facets of the nation's power, including not only all "soft power" capabilities but "hard power" as well. As Major Marshall Ecklund wrote, "policy actions ultimately speak louder than any words in a communication strategy, but both should be mutually supportive."¹⁵

Second, in this "war of ideas," it is vital to understand that the enemy will make the most of every American misstep. As a consequence, for the United States to achieve its intended goals, it must better synchronize its words and actions. If the United States can formulate and execute its message better than Al Qaeda, it will go a long way in reducing Al Qaeda's ability to sway the Muslim populace toward radicalism. But to do so, Washington needs to recognize what causes someone to radicalize and either become a terrorist or support Al Qaeda's cause. If the United States cannot determine what drives

¹¹ James J. F. Forest, and Frank Honkus, III, eds. *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Fight to Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas*, (Westport, CT: Pentagon Press, 2010), 7; Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 27.

¹² Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 31.

¹³ Joseph Nye, *Power in the Global Information Age: From Realism to Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5.

¹⁴ Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the enemy and its supporters, it is bound to make policy decisions and statements that help the enemy formulate its own strategic communications plan.

Finally, understanding the importance of strategic communications and the radicalization process will allow the United States to determine if it should continue its muscular projection of hard-power primacy in its counterterrorist strategy. Although U.S. counterterrorism strategies have toned down some of the kill-and-destroy rhetoric since the first strategy was released in 2003, the increased use of drone strikes to kill suspected terrorists even after the drawdown of military operations in the region plays into Al Qaeda's message of Western imperialism. Opinion polls conducted by Pew suggest that U.S. favorability in Muslim nations has been negatively affected by its hard-power actions since 9/11, as the populations in such important allies as Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt have seen U.S. favorability drop from highs of 52 percent, 25 percent, and 30 percent between 2000 and 2006 to 15 percent, 12 percent, and 19 percent, respectively, in 2012.¹⁶ It is true that these same highly controversial actions have been responsible for capturing or killing most of Al Qaeda's leadership and militant supporters. But as former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld once asked, "[A]re we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?"¹⁷ So far it seems the enemy is arguably producing more fighters and supporters than the United States can kill or capture—in no small part because of the failure of its strategic communication policies.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

In his book *Strategic Communication: Origins, Concepts, and Current Debates*, Christopher Paul attempts to unify not only the broad government definitions but aspects and definitions from the private sector as well, to come up with what he views as a more complete definition. Paul believes that strategic communication is the "coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling or engagement intended to

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, *Global Attitudes Project*, October 27, 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/06/13/chapter-1-views-of-the-u-s-and-american-foreign-policy-4/>.

¹⁷ "Rumsfeld's war-on-terror memo," *USA Today*, May 20, 2005, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/washington/executive/rumsfeld-memo.htm>.

inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences in support of national objectives.”¹⁸ This thesis utilizes Paul’s definition because, unlike those offered by the U.S. government, Paul’s definition revolves around four core elements necessary for effective strategic communications. First, “informing, influencing, and persuading is important. Second, effectively informing, influencing, and persuading requires clear objectives. Third, coordination and deconfliction are necessary to avoid information fratricide. Last, actions communicate.”¹⁹ While the DOD’s definition comes closest to Paul’s, it lacks a defined core of principles by which to operate, which may explain why the DOD stopped using the term altogether in 2012.

Whatever the definition, many scholars acknowledge that a successfully implemented strategic communications plan will aid in gaining the public’s trust of the organization conducting the effort—domestically as well as internationally.²⁰ In a fight against violent extremists, gaining the trust of the public is vital, and in the fight against radical Islamists, the public includes both American and foreign audiences. Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Morrison-Taw argue that point in their work *A Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism*. Two of their four crucial elements of a successful counterterrorist campaign are first, “‘legitimizing measures’ must be taken by the government to build public trust and support, combined with anti-terrorist legislation sensitive to public sentiments” and second, a requirement for “collaboration among governments and security forces of different countries.”²¹ Accomplishing both of these tasks requires a state to have an effective strategic communication plan that incorporates Paul’s core principles.

The enemy has realized the importance of strategic communications as well, as Thomas Hammes has observed: “Insurgent campaigns have shifted from military campaigns supported by information operations to strategic communications supported

¹⁸ Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9; James J. F. Forest and Frank Honkus, III, “Introduction,” *Influence Warfare*, ed. James J. F. Forest (Westport: Praeger, 2010), 1.

²¹ Bruce Hoffman and Jennifer Morrison-Taw, *A Strategic Framework for Countering Terrorism* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1992), 9, 10.

by guerrilla and terrorist operations.”²² If the enemy has realized the importance of strategic communications and the need to refocus on soft power over hard power to sway supporters, then the U.S. government may want to take note.

1. Radicalization

After a decade of battling violent extremists, Americans are beginning to understand that more can be done to stop the recruitment of new terrorists.²³ As such, policymakers and operators alike need a better understanding of how and why someone radicalizes. Early research in the field mainly focused on the psychology of terrorists, with scholars such as Jerrold Post, John Crayton, and Frederick Hacker arguing that terrorism was the result of psychological and behavioral deviance.²⁴ This viewpoint began to fall out of favor in the 1980s and 1990s due to a lack of any empirical data backing many of the claims.

Additionally, following extensive interviewing by himself and others, John Horgan concludes in *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 2005, that the required characteristics of terrorist leaders and members were opposite of the traits generally found in psychopathic individuals.²⁵ Whereas a psychotic killer’s reasons for his actions are “personal, fuelled [sic] and maintained by their elaborate fantasies,” terrorists are typically driven by motives independent of their particular victims.²⁶ Donatella della Porta also notes that research has shown there is no specific personality trait “typical” of terrorists, and that terrorists are impelled to engage in destructive acts for a variety of

²² James J. F. Forest, “Introduction,” 1.

²³ “Rumsfeld’s war-on-terror memo,” *USA Today*; Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories,” *Journal of Strategic Study* 4, no. 4 (2011); Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 1.

²⁴ J. W. Crayton, “Terrorism and Psychology of the Self,” in *Perspectives on Terrorism*, edited by L. Z. Freedman, & Y. Alexander, (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1983), 33–41; F.J. Hacker, *Crusaders, Criminals, Crazies: Terror and Terrorism in Our Time*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976); J. M. Post, “Notes on a Psychodynamic Theory of Terrorist Behavior,” *Terrorism* 13, no. 1 (1990), 241–256.

²⁵ John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, (London: Routledge, 2005), 51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

reasons.²⁷ She also points out that past research has shown that there is no typical pattern in terrorists' family socialization being the cause of radicalization either, countering the idea that a dysfunctional or abusive upbringing was a sure path to radicalization.²⁸

Instead, research on radicalization has progressed along what is now called "push" and "pull" factors first described by Martha Crenshaw in her often cited work, "The Causes of Terrorism," 1981, as preconditions and precipitants of radicalization. Preconditions or "push" factors "set the stage for terrorism," such as lack of democracy or civil liberties, experiences of discrimination, and repression by foreign occupation, or what Crenshaw called enabling or permissive factors.²⁹ Precipitants or "pull" factors are forces that appeal to the individual from outside sources, typically from propaganda or perceived assaults on a group, such as contested elections, police brutality, and even peace talks. Crenshaw states these two factors are compounded by modernization, where sophisticated networks of transportation and communication favor the emergence of terrorism.³⁰

Still, no clear consensus prevails among scholars on the motivations of an individual who radicalizes. Karen Keys-Turner summarizes the various model types as global, situational, social, and psychological or behavioral motivators and factors, but points out that most of the models and theories lack a synthesis of multiple disciplines and factors.³¹ Crenshaw agrees with that assessment and also warns that "terrorists cannot be considered in isolation from their social and political context," because radicalization may occur either as a group process or individually, so no one process can adequately explain how someone radicalizes.³²

²⁷ Donatella della Porta, "Introduction: On Individual Motivations In Underground Political Organizations," in *Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organizations*, ed. D. Donatella (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1992), 7.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (Jul, 1981), 381.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Karen D. Keys-Turner, *The Violent Islamic Radicalization Process: A Framework For Understanding* (Monterey, CA: NPS, 2011).

³² Martha Crenshaw, "The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century," *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (Jun, 2000), 418.

Although there is no single theory that can explain the radicalization process, many psychologists and social scientists have viewed similar markers or stages in the radicalization process that motivate extremists. Crenshaw suggests that “the opportunity for action, the need to belong, the desire for social status, and the acquisition of material reward” are common motivators for radicals and terrorists;³³ whereas Dr. Randy Borum points to perceived injustices, the need for identity, and the need to belong as the common vulnerabilities and perceptions shared among many radicals and terrorists.³⁴ Even though both scholars identify similar markers in the radicalization process, it must be pointed out that not everyone who holds or shares these vulnerabilities or perceptions becomes a terrorist.³⁵ Yet as Fergal Keane and the U.S. Army point out, even those radicals that do not become active terrorists can assist in the actions and success of a terrorist organization by becoming active or passive supporters.³⁶ Understanding what can drive someone to radicalize, or to support those who do, provides the state the opportunity to address and attempt to reduce those motivators.

Successful terrorist groups understand this dynamic and actively recruit in areas where the perception of injustice is high by utilizing social networks and interpersonal relationships to impart a sense of urgency and need for action. The terrorist organization increases the number of active and sympathetic members, which increases the group’s financial, political, and popular support enabling the group to conduct and sustain their operations. Therefore, by reducing the radicalization process, Borum concludes that this will reduce the capability and effectiveness of terrorist organizations’ operations and longevity.³⁷

³³ Martha Crenshaw, “An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism,” *Orbis* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1985), 466.

³⁴ Randy Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, 2004), 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*; U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army, 2007).

³⁷ Borum, *Psychology of Terrorism*, 29.

2. Hard Power versus Soft Power

The debate between hard- and soft-power advocates rarely devolves into an all-or-nothing discussion. Advocates on both sides of the issue realize the benefits and utility of elements of both hard and soft power in fighting violent extremists and their supporters. The differences in opinion revolve around which aspect of national power should be at the forefront in what the Bush administration called the “war of ideas.”

Many hard-power advocates, especially in the Bush administration, insisted—and continue to insist—that the world faces a newer and deadlier form of terrorism, one that sought the acquisition and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Therefore, the tactics of the past no longer sufficed to defeat the enemy. Instead they stated that “the United States, with its unique ability to build partnerships and project power, will lead the fight against terrorist organizations of global reach. By striking constantly and ensuring that terrorists have no place to hide, we will compress their scope and reduce the capability of these organizations.”³⁸

Although the Bush administration also promoted spreading democracy to the Middle East and greatly increased the use of economic aid and incentives in the hopes of helping the United States to “win the war of ideas and diminish the underlying conditions that promote the despair and the destructive visions of political change that lead people to embrace, rather than shun, terrorism,” it was the “with us or against us” philosophy leading up to and during the invasion of Iraq that cemented the perceived hard power first strategy of the United States in the region and around the world.³⁹ Although there was anticipation for a change in U.S. hard power philosophy with the election of President Barack Obama, the end of the Iraq War, and the drawdown of troops in Afghanistan, the

³⁸ The White House, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, February 2003 (Washington, DC: White House, 2003), 2.

³⁹ The White House, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 29.

U.S.'s increased use of unmanned drone strikes to target terrorists has continued to erode U.S. support in the region.⁴⁰

However, the Bush administration was not alone in recommending a hard-power-first philosophy in fighting terrorism. Michael Scheurer, the former head of the CIA unit charged with tracking Osama bin Laden, notes that based on the unchanging U.S. foreign policy in the Muslim world, the only recourse would be military force along the scale of World War II, fast-paced and with large body counts.⁴¹ Scheurer also rejects relying on our allies for help, because according to him, they will not do the “dirty work” for us.⁴² Yet another proponent of hard power, but with the assistance of diplomacy, is Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister of Israel, who also advocates strong economic sanctions against terrorist-sponsoring states, as well as actively pursuing terrorists wherever they go, among other tactics.⁴³

Yet not one of his ten recommendations looks to solve the rudimentary cause(s) of the terrorist actions, and he, like the Bush administration's 2003 National Strategy, lays the blame of international terrorism at the feet of state sponsorship.⁴⁴ Hard-power advocates, however, failed to realize that Al Qaeda, like other successful terrorist groups, was well mobilized and enjoyed both active and passive support among a widespread group of Muslim constituencies, making them very resistant to the decapitation strategy being pushed by the United States and its allies.⁴⁵

Soft-power advocates such as Rik Coolsaet, Christopher Paul, Paul Pillar, Audrey Cronin, and Robert Gates all note that focusing on hard-power techniques (especially in

⁴⁰ Pew Research Center, “America's International Image Slipping,” July 26, 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/07/26/americas-international-image-slipping/>; Pew Research, “Obama and drone strikes: Support but questions at home, opposition abroad,” August 19, 2013, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/05/24/obama-and-drone-strikes-support-but-questions-at-home-opposition-abroad/>.

⁴¹ Michael Scheurer, *Imperial Hubris* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 2004).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Benjamin Netanyahu, *Fighting Terrorism: How Democracies Can Defeat the International Terrorist Network, 2001* ed (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Audrey Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

the invasion of Iraq) instead of promoting the old ‘classic’ methods of counterterrorism actually gave Al Qaeda renewed vigor and support from many in the Muslim world.⁴⁶ Pillar notes that military retaliation after a terrorist strike is usually motivated by a desire to “do something,” instead of a belief that a particular action will actually reduce future terrorism. But he strongly advises against an overt preemptive and even reactive use of military forces against terrorists, as history has shown that in many cases both the physical and nonphysical effects of the attack are detrimental to the attacking nation.⁴⁷

Cronin argues that the West must realize that Al Qaeda will not achieve its goals, and that continued military force to crush it and attempts to decapitate its leadership will also fail. The organization will merely continue to evolve and the hatred bred by the West’s actions will continue to fill it with willing volunteers. In Cronin’s opinion, the United States must stop treating Al Qaeda as an existential threat, and “accept some level of risk and resist being provoked into ill-considered policies that accelerate the movement and are destabilizing.”⁴⁸ Paul and Gates also refute the primacy of the capture or kill policy advocated by individuals such as Daniel Byman, because they contest that if you do not attack the perceptions and motivations that drive the terrorists and their supporters in the first place, the organization and network will simply reconstitute itself as Al Qaeda has done.⁴⁹

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

To review, this chapter introduced the problems that the United States has faced since 9/11 in implementing a viable and effective dialogue with citizens of U.S. allies and Muslim nations. Next, Chapter II discusses strategic communications, what it is, useful tools necessary to conduct it, and why it is important in the fight against violent extremists. In Chapter III, this paper analyzes the U.S. efforts during the Cold War,

⁴⁶ Martha Crenshaw, “The Debate Over ‘Old’ vs ‘New’ Terrorism,” in *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences*, ed. Rik Coolsaet (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 57-68.

⁴⁷ Paul Pilar, *Terrorism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2001).

⁴⁸ Cronin, *Terrorism*, 195.

⁴⁹ Paul, *Communication*, 1; Daniel Byman, *The Five Front War: The Better Way to Fight Global Jihad* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008).

Vietnam War, and the “surge” of the Iraq War as a reference of successful and unsuccessful implementations of strategic communications in waging and winning a “war of hearts and minds.” Chapter IV discusses the radicalization process, because it is important to understand why and how someone becomes radicalized so that proper policies and antiterrorist tools can be implemented to minimize and defeat the threat. Finally, Chapter V provides recommendations to improve U.S. strategic communications policies that will be more effective in defeating the current enemy.

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II. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

In the war against Al Qaeda, IS, and other extremist organizations, the ability to communicate ideas and promote positive perceptions to other states and their citizens is at the tactical forefront.⁵⁰ If the United States is to properly wage what has been termed the “war of ideas,” then an effective transmission of its national strategy to the world may aide in that endeavor.

Four capabilities are repeatedly cited as the core elements of strategic communication. They are information operations, psychological operations, public affairs, and public diplomacy. Information operations is a relatively new term that evolved from command and control warfare in the late 1990s. IO is a DOD-specific function in strategic communication and is defined as “the integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.”⁵¹ This new definition changed the old definition by eliminating a focus on a select group of military capabilities by utilizing the term “information-related” to broaden the scope of what IO is responsible for, noting that “as the strategic environment continues to change, so does IO.”⁵²

When used effectively, IO allows a military commander to use and influence information of all varieties to inform, influence, or persuade the perceptions and attitudes of the target audience in the information environment, which is the “aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.”⁵³ At its core, IO is the epitome of soft power utilizing, but not owning, the following capabilities as a force multiplier to meet the military commander’s desired effect: “joint interagency coordination groups, public affairs, civil-military operations,

⁵⁰ James J. F. Forest “Introduction,” in *Influence Warfare*, 1.

⁵¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Information Operations: Joint Publication 3-13*, November 27, 2012, I-1, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_13.pdf.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

cyberspace operations, information assurance, space operations, military information support operations, intelligence, military deception, operations security, special technical operations, joint electromagnetic spectrum operations, and key leader engagements.”⁵⁴

Psychological operations are a subset of IO conducted primarily by the U.S. military as well as select intelligence agencies to affect foreign audiences. The DOD defines PSYOPS as “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence the emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.”⁵⁵ The intended goal of PSYOPS is to influence or reinforce foreign behavior so that it is favorable to the U.S.’s military and/or political objectives. Knowing that, policymakers should realize that every action has psychological implications that may be leveraged in the battle to influence a foreign target audience.

When PSYOPS are properly employed, they can help save the lives of friendly forces by reducing the enemy forces’ morale and efficiency. They can also discourage or reduce “aggressive actions and create dissidence and disaffection” within the enemies’ military and civilian populace, with the intended goal of inducing surrender.⁵⁶

The U.S. government currently conducts PSYOPS at three levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. Strategic-level PSYOPS are handled at the international level by U.S. agencies to positively persuade foreign mindsets and actions toward U.S. objectives. Strategic-level missions are typically conducted within the civilian arena, but DOD personnel and assets may be used. Operational-level PSYOPS missions are designed by doctrine to strengthen the United States’ capability “to conduct military operations in the operational area and other missions across the range of military operations.”⁵⁷ Tactical-

⁵⁴ Ibid., II-5–13.

⁵⁵ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations: Joint Publication 3–53*, September 5, 2003, I-1, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_53.pdf.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

level PSYOPS are conducted on a small scale by tactical commanders to support immediate or near term operations against the enemy.⁵⁸

At each level, PSYOPS employ various mediums such as radio, social media, print media, television, and leaflet drops on adversarial territory, which have only been enhanced by the expansion of mass communications capabilities in the modern world. However, the effectiveness of these various communication methods is dependent on the enemies' opinion of the United States' ability to execute its promises or actions.⁵⁹

Where PSYOPS are conducted to influence foreign audiences, public affairs are conducted to inform and communicate with both foreign and domestic audiences. It is important to note that to maintain the credibility of military public affairs, PSYOPS and public affairs operations should be planned separately even though they can reinforce each other and also involve close collaboration and coordination in their planning phases.⁶⁰ To ensure the separation, the DOD has directed that public affairs may not be used in any military deception or any other disinformation campaign, nor can any propaganda designed to sway or influence domestic or foreign public opinion be used in DOD public affairs programs.⁶¹ The DOD conducts public affairs “through the responsive release of accurate information and imagery to domestic and international audiences, public affairs puts operational actions in context, facilitates the development of informed perceptions about military operations, helps undermine adversarial propaganda efforts, and contributes to the achievement of national, strategic, and operational objectives.”⁶²

Unlike IO and PSYOPS, however, public affairs is conducted by all aspects of the U.S. government, with the DOS providing overall direction, coordination, and supervision of all the U.S. government's overseas activities. The Bureau of Public Affairs in the DOS is responsible for engaging both “domestic and international media to

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Public Affairs: Joint Publication 3-61*, August 25, 2010, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_61.pdf.

⁶² Ibid..

communicate timely and accurate information” as well as to coordinate and help with other government agencies’ foreign public affairs. Its mission is to help communicate and educate audiences on U.S. foreign policy and national security interests and help spread American values abroad.⁶³ In support of furthering U.S. national strategic policy, the DOD, the DOS, and other government agencies use a wide variety of methods and sources to distribute their information. These include news releases, social media, regional media hubs, public announcements, press briefings, government websites, community relations, audio-visual products, speaking tours, and town-hall meetings.⁶⁴

Public diplomacy differs from public affairs in that public affairs deals mainly with the press and tends to be short-term, reactive, and informative, while public diplomacy is pro-active and tries to influence and persuade the attitudes of the targeted audience. In that sense, public diplomacy is closer to PSYOPS in action, but like public affairs, in that it requires a whole-of-government, and in certain cases, a whole-of-society approach to carry it out. It also differs from traditional diplomacy in that it focuses on building relationships with foreign citizens instead of governments. Another difference is that to effectively implement public diplomacy, there must be a long-term plan and commitment. Unlike the other three strategic communication tools discussed, public diplomacy is based on building relationships that require trust and consistency from both sides of the engagement.⁶⁵

Once run by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) during the Cold War, public diplomacy is now predominately carried out and coordinated by the DOS. The DOS states that the mission of public diplomacy “is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the

⁶³ U.S. Department of State, “Bureau of Public Affairs,” <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.; Joint Chiefs, *Public Affairs*.

⁶⁵ Hiram Henderson, “US Public Diplomacy: Waiting for the War of Ideas,” in *IO Sphere*, Fall 2008, date accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.au.af.mil/info-ops/iosphere.htm>; James J. F. Forest “Introduction,” in *Influence Warfare*, 8.

rest of the world.”⁶⁶ The DOS and its partner agencies carry out this mission utilizing three basic instruments. First, they use international information activities, which are a mix of traditional public affairs products and services designed to inform, influence, or persuade foreign audiences with a localized perspective of U.S. messages. Second, education and cultural exchanges with foreign academic, professional, and military personnel designed to build personal and institutional relationships between U.S. and foreign citizens are utilized. The last instrument, international broadcasting, utilizes a mixture of independently-managed and operated radio, satellite television, and Internet services to promote an open dialogue of information and ideas throughout the world.⁶⁷

Although public diplomacy is a whole-of-government approach, the majority of its efforts are carried out by the White House, DOS, DOD, Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The government is also assisted in this endeavor by numerous private sector corporations, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. After the passage of the *Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998*, the DOS inherited most of the functions and responsibilities of the USIA for conducting public diplomacy. Now the lead federal agency for the process, the DOS coordinates and conducts all public diplomacy efforts through the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. The Under Secretary is assisted in this sector by four bureaus and offices: the Bureaus of International Information Programs, Educational and Cultural Affairs, Public Affairs, and the Office of Policy, Planning and Resources for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. This new framework allows the DOS to blend its original foreign policy oversight with public diplomacy utilizing the first two instruments of public diplomacy. The BBG assists the DOS with the third instrument, international broadcasting, as the BBG inherited the oversight of all non-military international U.S. broadcasting responsibilities from the USIA. The DOD aides in the public diplomacy front by conducting theater security engagements, including military-to-military training exercises, U.S. Navy port

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs,” <http://www.state.gov/r/>.

⁶⁷ Henderson, “US Public Diplomacy,” 32.

calls, military exchange programs, and humanitarian and disaster relief operations. The USAID assists the process by coordinating and conducting foreign assistance programs that aim to improve foreign nations' agricultural, social, health, economic, and government sectors.⁶⁸

Although the four tools discussed make up the core elements of strategic communication, if they are not effectively combined with the state's other soft and hard power elements, the strategic communication effort can be counterproductive. In the war against Al Qaeda, managing perceptions has become a vital effort, one that requires a concerted effort to harness U.S. "smart power."

⁶⁸ Ibid., 32–3; Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/>; Defense Science Board, *Task Force on Strategic Communication*, January 2008, (Washington, DC: OSD, 2008), Ch. 5; USAID, "What We Do," <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do>.

III. HISTORICAL WARS

There are various historical wars that offer insight into strategic communication and how to deal with failures of the present practices. The Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the Iraq War offer very important insights into the practice of strategic communication. Insights into use of propaganda, public policy on waging war, and use of local forces in highlighting the atrocities and intentions of terrorist groups or insurgents are important descriptions and sources of information. This chapter reviews this experience.

A. THE COLD WAR

The Cold War was a four-decade-long ideological battle between the United States and the former Soviet Union and their respective allies. The United States and its Western allies developed and executed a plan of containment first proposed by George Kennan in his “long telegram” message and later ratified by President Truman signing the National Security Council (NSC) Paper 68 (NSC-68). The West’s containment strategy combined the hard power elements of military deterrence with the soft power tools of public diplomacy, psychological warfare, open media, cultural influence, and the economic advantages provided by its capitalist societies.⁶⁹

This approach was in direct contrast to the Soviets whose strategy was the spread of the communist ideology through state-controlled media propaganda, economic and military aid to socialist path states, and the use of military force to maintain coercion, as was seen in Korea, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. Nye summed up the Cold War as four decades of the West containing the Soviet Union as the United States ate away at the U.S.S.R.’s “self-confidence with broadcasts, student and cultural exchanges,

⁶⁹ Carnes Lord and Helle C. Dale, “Public Diplomacy and the Cold War: Lessons Learned,” *Backgrounder* 2070, September 18, 2007, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2007/09/public-diplomacy-and-the-cold-war-lessons-learned>; Daniel Baracskey, “U.S. Strategic Communication Efforts during the Cold War,” in *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Fight to Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas*, ed. James J.F. Forest (Westport: Pentagon Press, 2010), 253–267.

and the success of capitalist economics.”⁷⁰ The U.S. strategic communication efforts during the Cold War, according to Nye, were the epitome of smart power, effectively combining both elements of U.S. soft and hard power tools to meet the state’s strategic objectives.⁷¹

The effectiveness of U.S. strategic communication during the Cold War had much to do with the passage of the National Security Act of 1947, the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, and NSC-68. The National Security Act greatly restructured the U.S. military bureaucracy, as it brought all individual services under the leadership of the newly created Secretary of Defense, created the National Security Council, and reinstated the old World War II Office of Strategic Services and renamed it the Central Intelligence Agency. This act had the long-term effect of uniting the formerly disjointed military services under the leadership of one department, creating the backbone of the future U.S. foreign policy decision-making apparatus in the NSC, and establishing the CIA, an organization that was tasked with conducting the covert and psychological operations that became prevalent in the Cold War era.

Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948, which legalized and formalized the use of public diplomacy, propaganda, and communication strategies to influence foreign audiences. This act was the basis of President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s creation of the USIA in 1953, bringing all aspects of public diplomacy within the responsibility of one organization under the executive branch. Until its dissolution in 1999, the USIA was responsible for promoting the United States’ national interests by increasing the dialogue between Americans, U.S. institutions and their foreign counterparts through understanding, informing, and influencing foreign publics. Key instruments of this dialogue were organizations such as Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and the various student and cultural exchange programs between the U.S. and foreign nations, including Soviet Bloc countries.⁷²

⁷⁰ Joseph Nye, “Soft Power and the Struggle against Terrorism,” Project Syndicate, date accessed September 12, 2013, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/soft-power-and-the-struggle-against-terrorism>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Lord and Dale, “Public Diplomacy,” 2; Baracskey, “U.S. Strategic Communication,” 258–261.

The strong backing of U.S. strategic communication programs received by the Harry S. Truman and Eisenhower administrations was continued by President John F. Kennedy. President Kennedy appointed well-known journalist Edward R. Murrow as the director of the USIA, provided him direct access to the Oval Office, and allowed him a seat on the NSC, giving the public diplomacy mission greater importance in U.S. foreign policy decisions. President Kennedy also created the Peace Corps and the U.S. Agency for International Development, which provided both American volunteers and money to assist developing nations. Another area that received increased focus was in the creation and development of U.S. military Special Forces. These units combined aspects of both hard and soft power and gave the U.S. greater flexibility to counter communist threats in developing countries utilizing guerrilla warfare.⁷³

Although the United States had many early successes with its strategic communication plan, there were failures as well. The U.S. response to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the shoot-down of the U.S. U-2 spy plane over the Soviet Union, and the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion led U.S. policymakers to stop what were deemed as aggressive and provocative measures. Instead, policymakers pushed for a lower-key and longer-range strategy that focused on winning the Cold War by utilizing greater cultural and economic influence, with the assistance of informational programs to emphasize the greater benefits associated with the American way of life. The U.S. strategic communication plan also suffered the negative effects of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, as well as the détente policies under President Richard Nixon, which placed more emphasis on traditional diplomacy to reduce the classical confrontational Cold War propaganda. Détente also led the United States to stop openly opposing Communism and the legitimacy of the Soviet Union.⁷⁴

President Jimmy Carter began to reinvigorate U.S. strategic communication to counter the Soviet Union by focusing on the U.S. defense of human rights and individual liberties to contrast against the Soviet's military aggression. But as the Soviet Union continued to rebuild its armed forces amid the easing of the U.S. pressure during détente

⁷³ Ibid., 2–3; 262.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 3; 263–4.

and fund insurgencies and terrorism around the world, it was evident that a stronger effort was required.

President Ronald Reagan, following the footsteps of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, understood the importance of strategic communication in carrying out national objectives. He placed renewed emphasis on PSYOPS and public diplomacy in conjunction with ending détente policies by embarking on a large military buildup. President Reagan also increased the resources available to the United States' strategic communication organizations with orders to reengage the Soviet Union. The USIA was assisted in this endeavor by modernizing its capabilities to take advantage of the increased ownership of televisions throughout the world and the reciprocity agreed upon by President Reagan and Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, where a series of exchanges between the two leaders were aired in the United States and the Soviet Union. Gorbachev also stopped the jamming of USIA and other foreign broadcasts inside the Soviet Union, allowing greater access to information for citizens of the Eastern Bloc countries. President Reagan's increased economic, cultural, and political pressure utilizing all of the U.S. strategic communication tools, in conjunction with decades of erosion of the Soviet system in the hands of cultural exchanges, accelerated the demise of the old Soviet Union.⁷⁵ As Carnes Lord and Helle C. Dale surmised: "in the end, ideas made a difference" in ending the four-decade-long Cold War.⁷⁶

In the era of the Cold War, propaganda spread in the United States confirmed that the enemies of the country were legitimate, justified, and genuine. The potential of psychological warfare was undisputed in the wake of technological advancement and realization of the importance of IO in war. Organization of the American people was deemed as important as the strategic planning required for troops in the war. The CIA and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 4; 264–5.

⁷⁶ Lord and Dale, "Public Diplomacy," 4.

the USIA were mandated to integrate other mechanisms in influencing friendly countries, alienating enemies, and wooing neutrals in the Cold War.⁷⁷

The reasoning behind using propaganda was identical to what had been applied in previous total wars. The only difference is that in the Cold War there was a strong aspect of public opinion in policy making. Policymakers formulated strategies to woo the support of the public for various warfare policies. The psychological strategy sought to influence beliefs, thoughts, actions, and perception of home and the outside population.⁷⁸

A distinct change was made in the era of the Cold War by U.S. authorities regarding differentiating between information and propaganda. Objective transformation of facts was evident from the onset, and this ensured that containment policies succeeded. Information that was being passed was customized for different target populations that included local and foreign communities. Objective transformation during the Cold War was used to skillfully encourage other countries into alliances. Success from the application of strategic communication was realized as a containment strategy and the inclusion of cultural vigor served to enhance collaboration between hard and soft powers.⁷⁹

B. THE VIETNAM WAR

The Vietnam War occurred from November 1955 to 1975, as a proxy war during the Cold War. The U.S. policy in Vietnam came under scrutiny during the war in 1968 when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee met to respond to strategic narrative applied by the United States. The Viet Cong's effectiveness in launching an offensive operation against the United States was another reason for the Senate meeting.

⁷⁷ John Stuart Cox and Athan G.Theoharis, *The Boss: J. Edgar Hoover and the Great American Inquisition*, (Philadelphia, PA:Temple University Press. 1988), 312; John S Bardellati and Tony Shaw, "Booting a Tramp: Charlie Chaplin, the FBI, and the Construction of the Subversive Image in Red Scare America," *Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (November 2003): 495–530.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Monroe E. Price, "Strategic Communication in Asymmetric Conflict," in *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 6, no. 1–3 (2013): 135–152.

It was important for the country to understand what was going on, according to Senator Albert Gore Sr. of Tennessee. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution had escalated and thousands of young men had died or were crippled for life.⁸⁰ The senator indicated that prestige and moral position had been lost and predicted that consequences would be considerable. Though there were certain liberties that were taken with intelligence in the Tonkin incident, there was skepticism and Senator Fulbright asked for the U.S. population to be informed of what was going on in the Vietnam War.⁸¹

In the course of the Vietnam War, new stories cropped up from time to time as PSYOPS were diverted from the traditional battlefield to the modern information environment. There had been suggestions that the propaganda war in Vietnam had to be fought on a domestic front and not in the theater. Kennedy's administration was very successful in the management of domestic flow of information. Public knowledge about the casualties in Vietnam was limited, but as the death toll began to rise, the information control strategy started fading. From 1963 to 1968, the United States' purpose in Vietnam was not certain as policymakers struggled to stimulate Kennedy's vision after his assassination.⁸²

Now President, Lyndon B. Johnson had a strategy that was aimed at pursuing incremental levels of military buildup that masked the fact that major combat operations were occurring. During Johnson's presidency, public diplomacy and other kinds of domestic propaganda became more prominent. There was a lot of secrecy in formulation and implementation of Vietnam policy. The public was not informed about most of the policies and war was waged quietly. All of these secret strategies were aimed at preventing probable dissension and losing public support due to war hysteria in order to protect Johnson's Great Society Programs.⁸³

⁸⁰ P. Schlesinger, "From Production to Propaganda?," in *Media, Culture & Society* 11, no. 3 (Jul, 1989): 288.

⁸¹ Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda from the Philippines to Iraq*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 189.

⁸² Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, (New York: Random House, 1988), 269.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 280.

A disaster in wartime strategy was realized when quiet waging of the war plan was implemented. Neither Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's proclivity for numbers nor Johnson's preferred approach brought much to the task of preventing the expansion of communists in Vietnam—certainly not in the minds of the domestic audiences in the United States and its allies. The Johnson government did not portray the Vietnamese and the Viet Cong as enemies for their act of killing young American men. Instead, the strategic communications battle was controlled by North Vietnam while the United States continued to waste its resources and manpower on fighting insurgents who utilized strategic communications in influencing the local population to support them. New cadres were inserted to keep guerilla efforts active as insurgents built regular forces in their sanctuary. Moreover, the U.S. forces ignored the efforts of the Viet Cong on the information front and failed to analyze the operations of North Vietnam. Instead, the United States particularly focused on eliminating the insurgents. However, the efforts of the United States' soldiers failed due to poor application of strategic communications.⁸⁴

The Vietnam War and the strategic communication about it were both revealed as failures with the 1971 publication of the so-called Pentagon Papers, which proved the DOD's plan to use propaganda to assuage Americans about the critical situation of the Vietnam War. Daniel Ellsberg, a high-level official who had opposed the decision to fudge the state of the war, ultimately leaked the report to *The New York Times*, which published the document amid increasing public skepticism about U.S. aims and action in Vietnam. Taken from the papers, the National Security Action Memorandum was perceived as the pivotal document that marked President Johnson's acceptance of offensive ground combat operations in Vietnam. However, the president in 1965 had denied having knowledge of any strategies in Vietnam that were being promulgated by the United States.⁸⁵

Meanwhile, additional troops were being dispatched and casualties mounted significantly—to no obvious strategic gain for the U.S. side. A credibility gap was

⁸⁴ Ibid., 282–83.

⁸⁵ U.S. Senate, "Senate Foreign Relations Committee Releases Volumes of Previously Classified Transcripts from Vietnam Era Hearings," date accessed May 13, 2014, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CPRT-111SPRT34737/pdf/CPRT-111SPRT34737.pdf>.

created by the lack of results and keeping the public in the dark about the Vietnam War, and by the time Nixon came into control any government information project was met with distrust, if not open opposition, from the American public.⁸⁶

C. IRAQ, DECEMBER 2007 TO FEBRUARY 2009

There are various case studies in which the United States achieved success in the application of strategic communications in war or security operations. Following the Vietnam War, there was the war in Iraq, and of particular interest the period between December 2007 and February 2009. According to the Pentagon, the political situation in Iraq had led to the deterioration of security. With the so-called surge of forces ordered in January 2007 by President George W. Bush, five brigades were deployed, and there was a significant improvement in security in Iraq by Fall 2007. However, there was a strong information environment that was being utilized by the insurgents as they continued to dominate information operations in the region. This was despite the enormous amounts of financial and technological resources possessed by the brigades from the United States.⁸⁷

Strategic communications by the U.S. government were applied in trying to avert the impending deadly terror attacks as many civilians had already been killed in the war. IO of the insurgents was paralleled by campaigns and involvement of the international media and devised by experts. Propaganda campaigns were aimed at modeling moderates among the public and improving passive support of the U.S. forces.⁸⁸

One principal coalition in Iraq was Multi-National Division—Baghdad (MND-B). The commander of this division was Major General Jeffrey Hamond, and he regularly emphasized IO for the military operation in Iraq. Targeting meetings that were held by the G-7 Department, there were briefings for all IO support for every operation by U.S. forces. Major General Jeffrey Hamond started an offensive and aggressive campaign and application of strategic communication to quell the superiority of the insurgents on the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Andrew Joseph Polsky, *Elusive victories: the American Presidency at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 273.

⁸⁸ Peter A. Kiss, *Strategic Communication in Asymmetric Conflicts*, date accessed May 18, 2015, http://www.academia.edu/696260/Strategic_Communications_in_Asymmetric_Conflicts, 13–14.

information front. The offensive commenced in December 2007 and served to break the grip the insurgents had on the local population.⁸⁹

Twelve billets that had been allocated to G-7 IO were tripled after they were deemed insufficient. There were more IO specialists as battalions and brigades were increased. G-2 (Intelligence) and G-7 intelligence operations were in close cooperation to improve IO and allow more integration of resources. It is from this cooperation that the United States was able to access background information aimed at enhancing psychological warfare operations. Use of psychological warfare operations was a scheme in strategic communications that aided in modeling of efficient methods of developing moderates among the population in Iraq.⁹⁰

Detailed information about the audience of IO was sufficient for specialists to model various strategies to garner support for the U.S. operations in Iraq. Through intelligence reports, the strengths and weaknesses of particular IO were identified early enough, and necessary changes made in time. Varying levels of sensitivity of the target groups was information that was readily availed by intelligence operations in the region and used in devising customized strategies for different groups. Before the collaboration between the United States and other G-7 members, IO were misguided and targeted to a mixed population. The IO resources were also limited, and their utilization was fragmented. After the collaboration and realization of the importance of IO by Major General Jeffrey Hamond, unsatisfactory results were reversed through improvement of intensity and prevention of dilution of messages.⁹¹

Major General Jeffrey Hamond saw to change the ‘floodlight approach’ to a ‘spotlight approach’ with more specific target populations for customized IO strategies. The illumination involved a well-defined area that was targeted for intensive IO. The spotlight was then moved to another area and executed. During this war, the IO was centralized with coordination of resources and operations emanating from the Divisions

⁸⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

headquarters. The brigades planned and executed the spotlight approach in tactical areas of interest (TAI) that were designated.⁹²

After the institutionalization of the spotlight approach, the information environment was dominated by MND-B. The spotlight approach was successful through concentrated and continuous operations that made sure that insurgents were “outshouted.” One of the most important tasks of the MND-B was to communicate with the Iraqi population and information on potential threats was, therefore, important to achieve this objective.⁹³

Information on identified risks and imminent threats was distributed to the local population through leaflets and handbills. The information served to inform the locals about the threat of insurgents and develop moderates regarding the operation by the United States. Leaflets were later distributed by Iraqi soldiers and policemen leading to an improvement of the opinion toward foreign security forces and the reigning government. The presence of soldiers from Iraq among the security forces and their use in the distribution of the leaflets enhanced perceived credibility by the local population. The first spotlight IO plan was executed to destroy Al Qaeda cells, and IO messages used in this operation were aimed at leveraging opinion about Al Qaeda among the populace. Loudspeakers, handbills, and posters were used to deliver the intended messages with detailed information on Al Qaeda crimes. This operation was instrumental in validating the spotlight approach and made the TAI a zone in which insurgents had no say.⁹⁴

In an operation to regain control of the Thawra district, MND-B dedicated all its strategic communication resources so that operation and information dominance was quickly achieved. Messages used in the Thawra operation passed information about the legitimacy of government and operation of security forces. At the same time, Al Qaeda group operations were demonized. Involvement of U.S. strategic specialists in major

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Steve Tatham, *U.S. Governmental Information Operations and Strategic Communications: a Discredited Tool or User Failure? Implications for Future Conflict* (Carlisle Barracks: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), 43.

economic, social, and political business served to sufficiently inform the residents about the intentions of security forces and the reigning government.⁹⁵

From intelligence reports during the war, the distribution of handbills, leaflets, and posters and the use of local security forces in IO greatly affected the opinion of the local population. Their opinion was gradually changed from supporting the activities of the militia to seeing signs of stability and security from U.S. security operations. Additionally, billboards were erected to push further on the IO and the residents began observing the results of the operation.⁹⁶

The success of strategic communication was based on residents changing their opinions about the operation by U.S. and coalition forces. Messages from the forces were perceived as more credible and conceptions of “foreign occupation” were fast fading away. The United States was regarded as the key player in the operation, and its IO plan and execution was a major step toward freeing the locals from the impositions of the insurgents. A bonus success of strategic communications was that after the withdrawal of the foreign forces, the government and Iraqi military maintained contact with residents and continued informing them about their policies and plans to ensure security.⁹⁷

There was a close correlation between the events and messages in the war, and this was critical in convincing the locals about the aims of the insurgents. For instance, handbills had been distributed about the operations of insurgents in Thawra and later the insurgents were seen handcuffed. Arrest of the insurgents enhanced understanding of the leaflet messages among the local population. From August 25 to November 30, 2008, Operation Ironhorse Blizzard marked one of the most effective amalgamations of strategic communication, intelligence, combat operations, and non-lethal operations in elimination of the enemy groups and capturing of their leaders. The Iraqi army distributed printed materials with information on affiliation of insurgent leaders with foreign governments and the incompatibility of their activities with ethics of the Islamic religion.

⁹⁵ Ibid.; Kiss, *Strategic*, 15–16.

⁹⁶ Kiss, *Strategic*, 15–16.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 17.

On the other hand, other messages informed the population about humanitarian assistance, captured criminals, economic development, and arms caches that had been discovered.⁹⁸

Involvement of local leaders in the reconstruction of Iraqi infrastructure opened further application of IO in identifying areas supporting insurgents. Operation capabilities of the insurgents were degraded by the use of IO in conjunction with combat operations. Insurgents lost much of the local population support, and their combat vulnerabilities increased. Opinions about the reigning government and support by U.S forces improved significantly in addition to an 80% reduction of attacks in Iraq. On January 31, 2009, provincial elections took place peacefully.⁹⁹

D. COMPARISON

The Vietnam War caused the fragmentation of the U.S. society and damaged its reputation and its power to influence citizens at home and abroad. There were anti-nuclear and anti-war protests as the public felt that they were denied their right to information. Secretly waging of the war damaged the economy, demonstrating the American power limitations and plunged the country into a period of economic recession. Realist scholars argue that the neo-conservative approach adopted in the Vietnam War was likely to be used by states which had fallen into “hubris” leading to the pursuit of a self-harming “moral crusade” coupled with consumption of resources.¹⁰⁰

Defensive orientation reconciled with military strategy could have served to plan and implement the deployment of U.S forces along the Thai border with Vietnam across Laos. These strategies may have helped in sealing South Vietnam from the infiltration of communists from North Vietnam. It may have served to reduce the deaths of American soldiers and the huge amounts of money it cost to wage war. Conventional capabilities of the U.S. military forces could have also been leveraged through counter-insurgency

⁹⁸ Ibid., 16–7.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Ned Lebow, “Classical Realism,” in *International Relations Theories*, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68–9.

bestowed upon the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) with support from other forces such as the Australian forces. A counter-insurgency plan was floated by both ARVN and some U.S. officers but was rejected by Johnson, who was unwilling to mobilize reserves. Failure to mobilize resources hindered effective strategic communications during the Vietnam War. The insurgents used their strategic communications more effectively than the U.S. government and thus gained the support of the local population.¹⁰¹

In the Vietnam War, the United States had large failings in strategic communications and policy formulations. The failure was not realized until the end of the war. The coherent objectives of IO in war were lost which led to a plunge into strategic defensive posture. Containment doctrine was applied wrongly in Vietnam, and it became a fatal war effort as it led to more killings as the insurgents gained more control. Harmonization of political and military objectives in any war through strategic communications is important in achieving success, as it was in the Cold War. In the Cold War, the United States strategized about how to influence undecided nations and woo neutral forces. Wooing the local population was important in Vietnam; the U.S operation failed in its tentative utilization of IO, which was well used by the insurgents who gained control of the war pattern and strategic locations from which they were able to utilize to kill more U.S soldiers.¹⁰² Convoluting war policies in Vietnam by U.S. officials led to the strategic defensive that was not realized in time to adopt an operation that was supported by strategic communications. Another mistake made by the United States in the Vietnam War is that tactical offensives aimed at eliminating the guerrillas were not sufficient due to a lack of information strategies. The main effort of the enemy was not identified and instead U.S. forces fought to eliminate the guerillas, which failed. The larger strategy of

¹⁰¹ Kate Tietzen, "They Were Hard Nuts: The Australians in Vietnam, 1962–1972: A focus on the American failure to make maximum use of the Australians' counterinsurgency tactics in South Vietnam, *NCSU Graduate Journal of History* 2 (2014), 5.

¹⁰² Ibid.

the North Vietnamese was not analyzed by the United States when formulating its operation policies.¹⁰³

There were very notable differences between the war in Iraq and the one in Vietnam especially in terms of application of IO on the war front. In the Vietnam War, even IO in the local population were not facilitated, which sparked protests in the whole country on how the resources were being utilized and the approach that led to more deaths. In the Iraq War, there was a group of professionals who were involved in policy making and providing expert analysis of IO. This made most of the operations successful as there was a plan for each. In addition, collaboration with G-7 members enabled access to various information materials and coordination of operations from a central position. Moreover, in the Iraq operation there was faster analysis of the success of IO, and necessary changes were made in time. This was enabled by regular intelligence reports that helped identify weaknesses in IO. On the other hand, the approach to the Vietnam War was not coordinated as no intelligence reports were analyzed to guide it, and little collaboration with the South Vietnamese government occurred. Waging of war was done in secret especially during the Johnson era. The addition of troops to fight in Vietnam was a decision made solely by the President without any consultation. Reports on individuals who had died in the Vietnam War were kept secret limiting the revision of approaches and specialization of duties. In contrast, superiority of insurgents on the information front was realized early enough in Iraq, and various countermeasures were formulated including IO campaigns to reduce radicalization in the populace.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, each IO strategy in Iraq was aimed at a specific group with historical information being a major determinant of the strategy. Approach changed from floodlight approach to spotlight, and there were identified TAI. The approach in the Vietnam War was haphazard with no plan on how to outdo guerillas that were dominating on the information front. There were no specific plans for groups and all the strategic points were controlled by guerillas which gave the enemy the competitive

¹⁰³ James M. Bright, *A Failure in Strategy: America and the Vietnam War 1965–1968*, (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2001), 32.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 46–7; Kiss, *Strategic*, 14–17.

advantage of striking at any time and controlling the pattern of the war.¹⁰⁵ In Iraq, the strategic communications succeeded as professionals gave guidance, and there was a close correlation between messages sent to the local population before any operation and the events that unfolded during and after any operation. This worked to convince the residents about the evils of the insurgents. In Vietnam, the approach was to eliminate the enemy through combat operations, but due to the control gained by the guerrillas, the death toll of American forces increased daily which resulted in the need for a defensive strategy for the U.S forces.¹⁰⁶

Double bluff and counter-bluff were used in the terror climate in the Cold War supporting the application of IO in the Cold War. Strategic communications assisted in winning the ideological battle in the Cold War. Spreading propaganda was explored to try and moderate other countries in the war. Additionally, in war that involved many countries, information application in winning the war was very important. Professionals and politicians were used to form a group of experts to guide IO in the Cold War. The policymakers made plans and approved expenditures through a formulation of different frameworks. In the Vietnam War, there lacked a specific plan indicating how resources were to be used. Troops were sent to the battlefield without any prior IO plans leading to the death of many young men from the force as the guerillas already dominated the information front. In the Vietnam War, the United States did not have any group experts, and the Senate was the body that made decisions on war strategies.¹⁰⁷

During the Cold War, the United States clearly identified the Soviets as a threat. Use of effective propaganda at home and abroad changed the paradigm of the war. The United States was able to portray the Soviets as a justified, genuine, and legitimate enemy.¹⁰⁸ In the wake of technological advancement and dynamism of all aspects of war, the U.S government realized that the Cold War had to be approached with all strategic

¹⁰⁵ John M. Gates, *The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare* (Wooster, MA: The College of Wooster, 1998), 76.

¹⁰⁶ Bright, *Failure*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Sheehan, *Bright*, 282–3.

¹⁰⁸ Price, “Strategic,” 135–52.

communications angles. Psychological warfare was instrumental in convincing neutral countries and eliminating the enemies. Support of the American people was very important in the Cold War, and that is why the authorities sought to influence the beliefs, thoughts, perceptions and actions of the U.S. population. The CIA and the USIA were mandated to integrate mechanisms to influence friendly countries and to seek their collaboration, as well as the Soviet population. Information about the Cold War was relayed to the public, contrary to the Vietnam War where waging war and sending of additional troops was secret. An objective transformation of facts was conducted at the start and during the Cold War to ensure success of containment strategies. Encouragement of other countries into alliances was instrumental in obtaining more resources and controlling strategic points in the Cold War. This improved collaboration and application of strategic communications.¹⁰⁹

In Vietnam, the strategy was combat operations to eliminate the enemy with no collaboration with local forces and residents. There was insufficient information about the enemy limiting the United States' power of the forces in terms of information. Guerillas dominated the information front, and this was instrumental in the success of the enemy's operations. The United States lacked prior information on the enemy in the Vietnam War and worked primarily to eliminate guerillas through combat operations only. In the Vietnam War, the U.S. government had limited information on the guerrillas in the country and did not have any IO to try and create moderates and gain support from the local population. U.S forces were outdone in the information front by the guerillas.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Sheehan, *Bright*, 282–3.

IV. RADICALIZATION

Ideally, U.S. strategic communications would counter terrorism before it even starts, reaching people before they opt for radicalization and, thus, making them immune to recruitment by terrorist organizations or movements.¹¹¹ “Radical” means as many things to as many people as “terrorism” does, however. President Woodrow Wilson, for example, took a dim view, noting “by ‘radical,’ I understand one who goes too far.”¹¹² Paulo Freire, in contrast, finds something laudatory, if not admirable, in the pushing of boundaries:

The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.¹¹³

In essence, one man’s radical (or terrorist) is another man’s freedom fighter.

This dual perception of radicalism begins to explain a key shortcoming in U.S. strategic communications in the Global War on Terrorism. The United States tends to view itself as the bastion of liberty at home and the champion of freedom abroad—called again and again to make the world safe for democracy, in another of Wilson’s turns of phrase. Not all of those on the receiving end of U.S. intervention share this view, but the United States has been slow to recognize, let alone remediate, this gap in and through its strategic communications. Instead, as this chapter argues, faulty U.S. strategic communications, if anything, fuel the current radicalization process in much of the Muslim world.

¹¹¹ “Rumsfeld’s war-on-terror memo,” *USA Today*; Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories,” *Journal of Strategic Study* 4, no. 4 (2011).

¹¹² BrainyQuote, “Woodrow Wilson Quotes,” date accessed November 22, 2013, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/woodrowwil135820.html>.

¹¹³ Goodreads, “Paulo Freire Quotes,” date accessed November 22, 2013, http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/41108.Paulo_Freire.

A. ROOT AND TRIGGER CAUSES

The current scholarship on radicalization, including theoretical work and interviews with terrorists and radicalized Muslims, sheds important light on the reasons that people radicalize. The radicalization research that has evolved from the earlier first generation research that focused on psychological abnormalities now focuses on the “root” or “push” and “trigger” or “pull” causes of radicalization. First described by Martha Crenshaw as preconditions and precipitants of radicalization in her often cited article “The Causes of Terrorism,” prevailing research today focuses on the individual, group, and societal causes that can motivate a person to radicalize. Preconditions or “push” factors are the “forces that can alienate people or cause them to reject mainstream society,” what Crenshaw called enabling or permissive factors.¹¹⁴ For instance, the Internet is a platform that is accessible and powerful for sharing and reinforcement of radical ideas.

Precipitants or “pull” factors are forces that appeal to the individual from outside sources, typically from propaganda or perceived assaults on a group. Crenshaw states these two factors are compounded by modernization, where sophisticated networks of transportation and communication favor the emergence of terrorism.¹¹⁵

Yet there is no clear consensus among scholars on the motivations and pathways of an individual who radicalizes. However, Karen Keys-Turner offers a comprehensive framework that enhances understanding of the radicalization process and deeply integrates the push and pull factors. In her thesis *The Violent Islamic Radicalization Process: A Framework for Understanding*, Keys-Turner summarizes the various model types developed as global, situational, social, and psychological or behavioral motivators and factors, and places them in what she calls micro-, mid-, and macro-level process theories. Micro-level processes are personal factors that motivate radicalization and are permissible by culture, ideology, and aligned with personal identity.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” in *Comparative Politics* 13, no. 4 (Jul, 1981): 381.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Karen D. Keys-Turner, *The Violent Islamic Radicalization Process: A Framework For Understanding* (Monterey, CA: NPS, 2011), 49.

Push factors are integrated in Keys-Turner's mid-level process as they explain ideological and psycho-socio factors. Motivational framing issues are contained in macro-level processes together with foreign policies and global factors. These augment the precipitant factors as they include outside forces. Macro-level models face the same problem with theories as those in the micro-level models: a lack of analysis utilizing multiple disciplines or factors, which Crenshaw warns about as "terrorists cannot be considered in isolation from their social and political context."¹¹⁷

1. Micro-Level Processes

Keys-Turner describes the micro-level as processes that focus primarily on the factors particular to the individual, motivated by rational choice, with socio-cultural permissive factors that include ideology, culture, and identity as the basis for radicalization. Theories that she includes in this process include social identity theory, rational choice theory, and the staircase to terrorism metaphor.¹¹⁸

Henri Tajfel and John Turner first proposed social identity theory in 1979 to help describe an individual's interactions within a social environment based on their group membership(s) as a psychological basis for intergroup discrimination. Tajfel and Turner argue that groups are what give an individual a sense of social identity and belonging in the world, and therefore individuals strive to increase the status of their group(s) to increase their own self-image. In the desire to increase their group(s) status, individuals will then divide the world into "us" versus "them," or the in-group versus the out-group, where the in-group will then discriminate against the out-group to increase the in-group's self-image.¹¹⁹

Keys-Turner argues that social identity theory helps "facilitate an understanding of the socio-psychological dynamics of individuals and groups" going through the radicalization process.¹²⁰ It is important to understand this dynamic; she cites Schwartz et

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁹ Saul McLeod, *Social Identity Theory - Simply Psychology*, Simply Psychology, date accessed November 22, 2013 <http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html>.

¹²⁰ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 24.

al., who indicate that cultural, social, and personal identities may be a factor in the radicalization process. Certain cultural identities, such as collectivism in Islam, may help illustrate the propensity to accept martyrdom in the Muslim world. Social identity describes the significance of individuals in their various groups, whereas personal identity serves as an individual's selected or ascribed goals, ethics, and belief system.¹²¹

All of these aspects become important in the radicalization process as an individual or group begins to associate the good in themselves with characteristics of others, setting up the creation of the us and them groups. With this theory, scholars and analysts can better understand the dynamic occurring during an individual or group radicalization process as a normal rational occurrence, although perhaps disdainful, rather than as the result of pathological and psychological deviance.¹²²

Rational choice theory (RCT) was originally developed by economists to explain the similarities between social and economic exchanges and how individuals will strive to maximize an advantage or gain, while minimizing disadvantages or losses. Its basic tenets are that human beings are rational by nature and will make rational decisions based on the pros and cons of a situation.¹²³ Sociologists and political scientists have also used the theory to explain phenomena such as social movements, social mobility, and religion, and just like economists they assume that the actors involved will make rational choices to maximize their outcomes.¹²⁴

In terrorist studies, RCT looks at the social and political aspects of radicalization and terrorism and determines that as rational actors, individuals fully consider the various psychological and physical variables that could encourage or discourage participation in terrorist activities. Crenshaw details this process:

¹²¹ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 24–6.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ James S. Coleman and Thomas J. Fararo, *Rational Choice Theory: Advocacy and Critique*, in *Key Issues in Sociological Theory*, vol. 7 (London: Sage Publications, 1992), 3.

¹²⁴ Peter Hedström, and Charlotta Stern, “Rational Choice and Sociology,” in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, eds. Steven N. Durlauf and Lawrence E. Blume, (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) date accessed November 22, 2013, http://www.dictionaryofeconomics.com/article?id=pde2008_R000249&edition=current&q=rational%20choice%20theory&topicid=&result_number=1.

One of the most salient attributes of terrorist activity is that it involves significant personal danger. Furthermore, since terrorism involves premeditated, not impulsive, violence, the terrorist's awareness of the risks is maximized. Thus, although terrorists may simply be people who enjoy or disregard risk, it is more likely that they are people who tolerate high risk because of intense commitment to a cause. Their commitment is strong enough to make the risk of personal harm acceptable and perhaps to outweigh the cost of society's rejection, although defiance of the majority may be a reward in itself. In either case, the violent activity is not gratifying per se.¹²⁵

RCT is useful in exploring the motivations (Crenshaw's preconditions and precipitants) of the radicalization process. Keys-Turner argues that it is this point in the radicalization process that becomes most important as the pathway of radicalization leads a person to consider action. Per RCT, it is assumed that rational choices will be made based on the capabilities and opportunities to determine what action(s) will provide the most desired result.¹²⁶ Following the RCT model and Crenshaw's work, the expected rational choices would attempt to "attract attention for their cause, provoke the government, intimidate opponents, appeal for sympathy, impress an audience, or promote the adherence of the faithful."¹²⁷

In conjunction with RCT, Keys-Turner points to behavioral psychology and social movement theory as corresponding and augmenting RCT in understanding the radicalization process. Citing the work of Noricks et al. and Bartlett et al., Keys-Turner argues that behaviors are contingent upon consequences, and that individuals operating under RCT will choose actions that produce the more desirable consequences. Therefore, behaviors and actions on the pathway from radicalization to terrorism that receive financial, religious, social status, excitement, friendship, and/or ideological rewards will most likely be maintained and may possibly shape future behaviors.¹²⁸

On the other hand, Key-Turner notes along with the work of Jamie Bartlett, Jonathan Birdwell, and Michael King, that social movement theory advocates argue that

¹²⁵ Crenshaw, "Causes," 393.

¹²⁶ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 27.

¹²⁷ Crenshaw, "Causes," 396.

¹²⁸ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 28.

terrorists and terrorist groups respond to various stimuli such as social and historical conditions, “group and organizational dynamics, personal leadership, group membership, and ideological factors” that may produce discontented individuals inside a permissive community with an approving ideology.¹²⁹ All told, including the attacks on 9/11, RCT and the various corresponding micro-level theories point to terrorist violence as a rational response to the preconditions and precipitants in place as a means of primarily pursuing publicity and support of the terrorist cause, and not as a means to commit violent acts.¹³⁰

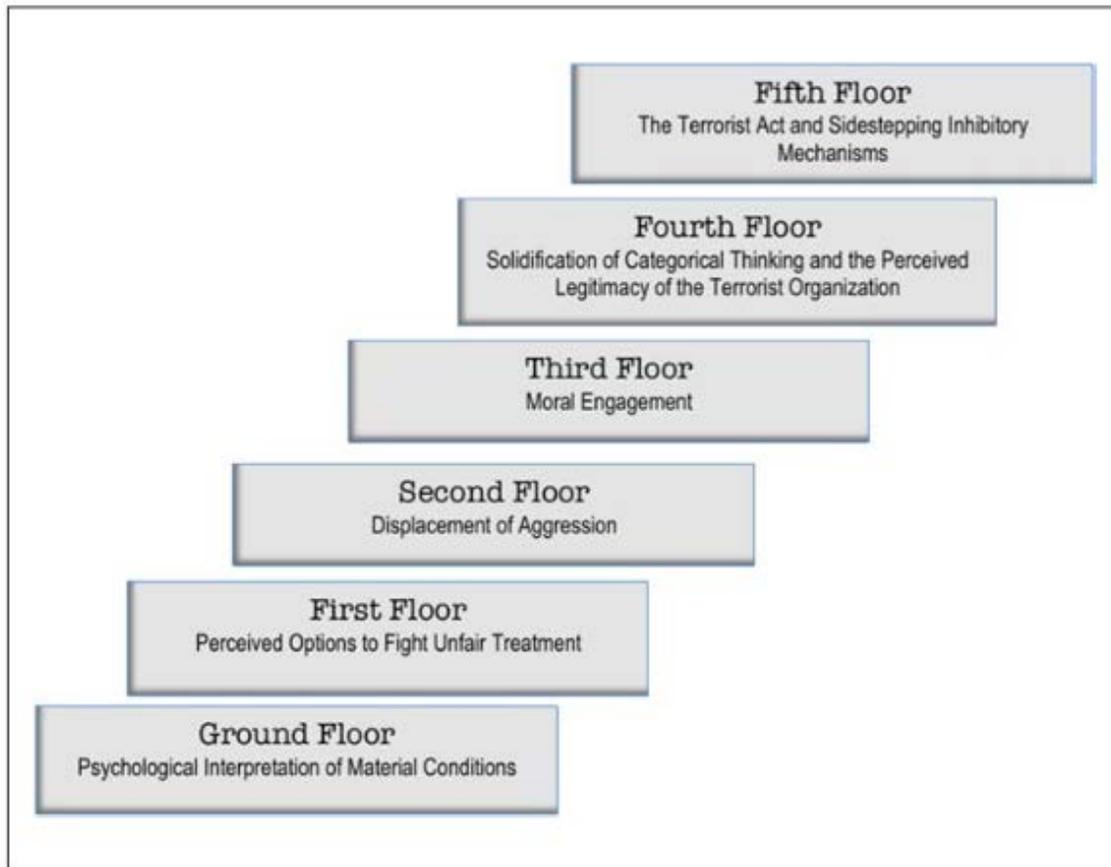
Fathali Moghaddam’s “staircase to terrorism” metaphor is a description of the radicalization process utilizing the image of a narrowing staircase inside a building as the psychological steps an individual makes on a pathway to possibly committing a terrorist act. The assumption Moghaddam made when creating this metaphor is that it only provides a general framework to organize and direct future research and policy based on current psychological knowledge of terrorists, not a formal model to be compared against others. In it, everyone starts on the ground floor, and an individual’s choice to continue to climb the staircase or get off on a particular floor is determined by how the individual perceives the building and what doors they think are open to them. Each floor, depicted in Figure 1, is characterized by a distinct psychological process in the pathway to radicalization and eventually terrorism.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Fathali Moghaddam, “The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration,” *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (Feb-Mar, 2005): 161–162.

Figure 1. Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism



Source: Randy Borum, "Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research," *Journal of Strategic Security* 4, no. 4 (2011): 40.

The metaphor envisions a step-by-step progression through each psychological process and with each step taken up the staircase the individual becomes increasingly radicalized. By the time an individual reaches the fifth floor—the terrorist act and sidestepping inhibitory mechanisms—they are “psychologically prepared and motivated to commit acts of terrorism, sometimes resulting in multiple civilian deaths.”¹³² Moghaddam argues that to understand the actions of the few who actually climb all the way to the top, researchers and policymakers must understand the “conditions of life and the perceptions of justice among the millions on the ground floor.”¹³³ So instead of trying

¹³² Moghaddam, “Staircase,” 166.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 166.

to figure out the profile of likely terrorists, Moghaddam asserts we must focus instead on the conditions that directly lead to terrorist activity in the first place.

For example, individual factors were evident in the July 7, 2005, bombing in the UK. The perpetrators were individuals who were not appropriately absorbed into the UK society and therefore were easy targets for Salafist propaganda freely and easily disseminated in the Muslim Diaspora in the UK. There had been relatively little assimilation, and their economic and ideological backgrounds had not been altered sufficiently. Individual choice to act violently or uphold radicalization in a culturally different environment explains the difficulty of prediction of radicalization behavior.¹³⁴

2. Mid-Level Processes

Mid-level theories rely on a psycho-sociological and ideological basis, emphasizing the state-level social structures that can cause radicalization motivations. The mid-level process now moves to factors that directly influence an individual in the immediate environment. These are second to individual factors in the micro-level as an individual interacts with them in making a choice.¹³⁵

McCauley and Moskalenko's model attempts to show how radicalization is "a dimension of increasing extremity of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors" across twelve "mechanisms" based on the grievances of individuals, groups, and the public.¹³⁶ They note that radicalization can occur at any of the three levels, with personal and identity-group grievances radicalizing individuals, and by conflict with states and other political groups radicalizing mass publics and groups. Their model, depicted in Figure 2, shows the twelve mechanisms that they use to describe how individuals or groups proceed down the path of radicalization.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Juan Jose Escobar Stemann, "Middle East Salafism's Influence and the Radicalization of Muslim Communities in Europe," *MERIA Journal* 10, no. 3 (Sep, 2006): 1.

¹³⁵ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 18.

¹³⁶ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 415.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 417–8.

Figure 2. Pathways to Violence: Mechanisms of Political Radicalization at Individual, Group, and Mass Public Levels

Level of radicalization	Mechanism
Individual	1. Personal victimization
	2. Political grievance
	3. Joining a radical group—the slippery slope
Group	4. Joining a radical group—the power of love
	5. Extremity shift in like-minded groups
	6. Extreme cohesion under isolation and threat
	7. Competition for the same base of support
Mass	8. Competition with state power—condensation
	9. Within-group competition—fissioning
	10. Jujitsu politics
	11. Hate
	12. Martyrdom

Source: Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization: Pathways Toward Terrorism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20, no. 3 (2008): 418.

McCauley and Moskalenko propose that radicalization is primarily a gradual process along a “slippery slope” as opposed to moving from sympathy to extremism in a single step. An example of a single step into radicalization is Wafa Idriss, the first Palestinian female suicide bomber, who carried out her mission within two weeks of making the decision to be a bomber.¹³⁸ An example of gradual radicalization is cited by della Porta who quotes a militant from Italy: “A choice [made] in cold blood, such as ‘now I will become a terrorist,’ [did] not exist. It was a step-by-step evolution, which passed through a kind of human relation that I had with Guido, and with the people I worked with.”¹³⁹

Citing the experiments of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo, McCauley and Moskalenko show the power of self-persuasion in a person’s ability to justify his or her own behavior down a path of self-radicalization. They also recognize the power of personal and political grievances, as well as the emotions of love and fear to show how various personal factors play into the radicalization process for individuals. For example, the 9/11 attack sought to energize Muslims affected by the presence of U.S. troops in

¹³⁸ Ibid., 415-8.

¹³⁹ Donatella Della Porta, *Social movement, political violence and the state: a comparative analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 168.

Saudi Arabia, as well as to strike terror in the “enemy’s” backyard as a reason for radicalization. The removal of U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia was also a reason for the attack, indicating political and personal grievances.¹⁴⁰

At the group and mass public level, McCauley and Moskalenko’s work focuses on how risk-taking, competition, cohesion, fissioning, and status influence how groups progress and evolve along the radicalization path.¹⁴¹ Risk-taking is conducted to advance causes of a large group as there are benefits of taking the risk available to all members. Hence taking the risk for the group includes letting other individuals pay the cost or benefitting from the advance of the group from the risky activity. Cohesion involves a generalization of group dynamics, increasing sanctions for deviates, respect for leaders, and idealization of norms. On the other hand, competition for the sympathizers’ base can result in more radical actions as in the case of the Armenian Secret Army. However, competition within the group may lead to fissioning with each splinter group trying to gain more sympathizers through extremist activities. Power status by different group leaders may strengthen a group in radicalization through support and provision of resources by sympathizers accorded as a result of the status of the leader.¹⁴²

The authors conclude that “the degree to which radicalization of non-state groups occurs in response to the actions of others must be the starting point for understanding these groups.”¹⁴³ They note that radicalization is the reaction of individuals, groups, and masses to the actions of the state. But its focus on internal “mechanisms” is a limitation as it does not recognize observable behavioral indicators that can be used to interrupt or stop the radicalization process.

McCauley and Moskalenko’s study of radicalization does not just apply to external factors and personalities. Following the attacks of September 11th, the New York Police Department went through a fundamental shift in policing efforts, switching the focus of their Intelligence Division from old crime endeavors, such as counter-drugs

¹⁴⁰ McCauley Moskalenko, “Mechanisms of Political Radicalization,” 420–430.

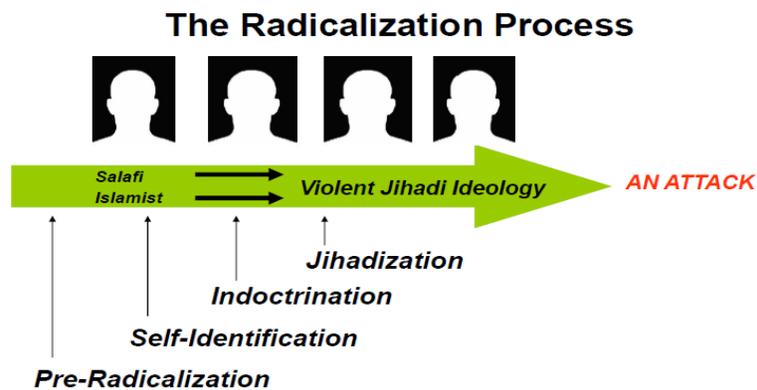
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 415–433.

¹⁴² Ibid., 427.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 430.

and racketeering, to one focused on stopping the next terrorist attack. Part of the task included the hiring of new intelligence analysts, two of whom, Silber and Bhatt, wrote a report, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat*, to try and understand the radicalization process in order to prevent future attacks. Comparing ten cases of homegrown Western terrorist plots, they developed a four-step model to describe the homegrown radicalization process, shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. The Radicalization Process



Source: Mitchell Silber and Arvin Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: New York Police Department Intelligence Division, 2007), 21.

The root cause of the process, the authors argue, is adoption of the Jihadi-Salafi ideology during the self-identification phase, where the individual is largely influenced by both internal and external factors and association with individuals who share the same views.¹⁴⁴ Political and religious views are the main factors involved in radicalization. Religious views of holy war, popularly known as “Jihad,” are a great contributor to the radicalization process. On the other hand, following the political views of an influential person has been identified as a significant reason for radicalization. For instance, Shahawar Siraj from Brooklyn was exposed to extremist literature that cemented the Herald Square plotter’s political views leading to his radicalization.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Silber and Bhatt, *Radicalization*, 19.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

The next step, indoctrination, is where an individual “wholly adopts Jihadi-Salafi ideology and concludes, without question, that the conditions and circumstances exist where action is required to support and further the Salafi cause.”¹⁴⁶ For example, Shahawar Siraj was visited by James Elshafay to seek religious guidance. Together they watched Jihad videos and read texts claiming Jews were on the verge of taking over the global economy.

Last, the Jihadization phase is where the individual fully accepts and commits to their duty to act on behalf of the cause. Muslims in various institutions in the diaspora can be engaged in IO that is exclusive to them in order to understand their religious, economic, and political views. Engaging the Muslims could offer more insights into various models of changing wrong perceptions and the spread of extremist ideas.¹⁴⁷

Strategic communication can come in at this stage by first invoking assimilation strategies and eliminating marginalization to prevent indoctrination and reversal of the biased thought. Use of these strategies could create moderate thought in diaspora Muslims and would go a long way in preventing potential indoctrination. In Jihadization, assimilation must be carried out effectively as religious identity sometimes supersedes the assimilation process. Strategic communication needs alignment into the needs of our present diverse society and in dealing with the threat from within, as homegrown terrorists pose the greatest security threat.

Silber and Bhatt caveat their theory by stating that “all individuals who begin this process do not necessarily pass through all the stages and many, in fact, stop or abandon this process at different points. Moreover, although this model is sequential, individuals do not always follow a perfectly linear progression.”¹⁴⁸ Another facet of the model was what the authors termed “radicalization incubators,” places both physical and on the Internet that provide the extremist fuel for the radicalization process. However, this as well as the model’s focus on religious behaviors earned it the term “religious conveyor

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁴⁷ Katrine Anspaha, *The Integration of Islam in Europe: Preventing the radicalization of Muslim diasporas and counterterrorism policy* (Riga: University of Latvia, 2008), 14–16.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 19.

belt” theory due to the accusation that it led to religious profiling of the Muslim community. This profiling or marginalization causes the spread of untrue perceptions and influences locals to join the line of thought increasing the danger of homegrown terrorists. Radicalization of locals is enabled by interaction between extremist Muslims in the diaspora with local community members in schools, hospitals, at entertainment events, and in other social places.¹⁴⁹

3. Macro-Level Processes

At the macro-level, such motivational issues as ideology, global factors as military affairs and foreign policy issues form the basis for radicalization process.¹⁵⁰ Globalization is the growth of international interdependence across a spectrum of cultural, economic, political, social, and technological realms. Taking the forms of Westernization, secularization, democratization, consumerism, and free market capitalism, some argue that globalization has caused an increased control by the wealthier “Western” nations, specifically the United States, over the poorer undeveloped nations of the world. Some critics also argue that globalization has undermined democracy and cultural homogenization, especially in countries with large poor populations. A feeling of being excluded from the benefits of globalization is given as a reason for involvement in radicalization in poor societies. Social segregation and discrimination induces a feeling of isolation and can be a prominent reason for radicalization.¹⁵¹

Audrey Cronin asserts that globalization can cause conservative cultures to view the changes as a corruption of their customs, religion, and language and a destruction of their cultural and social identity. For instance, integration of the Western education system into Muslim cultural practices through scholarships and a change of curriculum may be seen by fundamentalists as a plan to destroy their identity. This trend is exacerbated by another aspect of globalization, the increased use of global communications, such as the Internet, and a greater choice of media sources. With a

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 20; Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 46.

¹⁵⁰ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 18.

¹⁵¹ Tinka Velhuis and Jorgen Staun, *Islamist Radicalization: A Root Cause Model* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, 2009), 35.

greater ability to communicate, grievances from immigrant homelands and Diaspora populations can be more easily—and more widely—spread back and forth, further inflaming the notions of alienation and assaults on cultural identities in those groups.¹⁵²

Due to the perceived inundation of Western values and cultures, the feeling of being left behind by the promises of globalization, and a frustration of a populace that has not been given a feasible alternative by their own government, this “new” terrorism being waged against the effects of globalization is believed to be a response to reassert cultural identity against the threat of a homogenous world. Although social identity, as shown earlier, can be an important factor in the radicalization process, no one factor, such as globalization, is the sole cause of radicalization, and Cronin argues it would be an oversimplification to limit the motivations of Al Qaeda and others as simply an antipathy to the forces of globalization.¹⁵³

First used to describe Babylon’s dispersing of Jews after their captivity in the 5th century B.C., the word “diaspora” is now used to refer to any group that lives in a foreign country but still has a strong bond with the home nation.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, some of the same issues brought up with globalization can be present in diaspora Muslim communities as well that include Pakistani Muslims, Turkish Muslims, and North African Muslims in Western countries; these groups may thus be more susceptible to grievances from their home country as well as their host country—perhaps a double motivation for radicalization.

Muqtadar Khan and John Esposito identify the two greatest pressures on and in these diaspora populations: marginalization and assimilation. Marginalizing the Muslim diaspora disempowers and reduces their influence and rights. Special surveillance of mosques in New York City or policies and practices that single out the “Muslim-looking”

¹⁵² Ibid., 63–65; Audrey Cronin, “Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism,” *International Security* 27, no. 3 (Winter 2002/03): 30–58.

¹⁵³ Cronin, “Behind the Curve”: 30–58.

¹⁵⁴ Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. “Diaspora,” date accessed November 23, 2013, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/diaspora.

population in the United States contribute to the sense of marginalization among resident Muslims¹⁵⁵

Assimilation, on the other hand, tries to force a reformation in Islam and to secularize Muslims to such an extent that they no longer are different from their host nation. France has made an express policy of assimilation, and the idea of assimilation (as opposed to integration) has inspired lengthy and unresolved debates elsewhere in the European Union. Amid these two forces disharmony prevails and divides Muslim communities internally and also separates them from the mainstream society around them. In these neglected corners, radicalization festers and spreads, providing a source of fundraising, support, and recruitment in the very Western nations that Al Qaeda wishes to attack. In a word, the forces of marginalization and assimilation could be creating a fifth column of disaffected Muslim immigrants far more numerous and versed in Western society than Al Qaeda planners overseas could hope.¹⁵⁶

B. SUMMATION OF THE LEVELS

Mid-level process theories have helped redirect future research to focus on multi-faceted approaches that are better at answering the various motivations of radicalization. However, these theories still have failed to address all modes of radicalization, and in the case of the Silber and Bhatt model, may actually have helped to increase radicalization in Muslim diaspora communities.

Although there is no single theory that can explain all aspects of the radicalization process, many psychologists and social scientists have viewed similar markers or stages in the radicalization process that motivate extremists. Crenshaw suggests that “the opportunity for action, the need to belong, the desire for social status, and the acquisition of material reward” are common motivators for radicals and terrorists, whereas Borum points to perceived injustices, a need for identity, and belonging as the common

¹⁵⁵ Muqtedar Khan & John L. Esposito, “Islam in the West: The Threat of Internal Extremism,” *Ijtihad*, date accessed November 23, 2013, http://www.ijti had.org/Islam_in_the_West.htm.

¹⁵⁶ Keys-Turner, *Violent*, 66–8.

vulnerabilities and perceptions shared among many radicals and terrorists.¹⁵⁷ In conjunction with root causes, Dipak Gupta argues that the radicalization process is aided by certain trigger causes such as “when a leader gives voice to the frustration by formulating a well-defined social construction of collective identity and paints in vivid color the images of ‘us’ and ‘them.’”¹⁵⁸ Yet not everyone who shares or experiences one of the common markers or stages of radicalization or is exposed to a triggering agent becomes a terrorist. However, as Fergal Keane and the U.S. Army argue, even those radicals that do not become active terrorists can assist in the actions and success of a terrorist organization by becoming active or passive supporters.¹⁵⁹

Successful terrorist groups understand this dynamic and actively recruit in areas where the perception of injustice is high by utilizing social networks and interpersonal relationships to impart a sense of urgency and need for action. The terrorist organization increases the number of active and sympathetic members, which increases the group’s financial, political, and popular support enabling the group to conduct and sustain their operations. Therefore, by reducing the number of people who radicalize, many scholars conclude that this will reduce the capability and effectiveness of terrorist organizations’ operations and longevity.¹⁶⁰

C. JIHADI ROOT AND TRIGGER CAUSES

Understanding that there are certain root and trigger causes that aid in the radicalization process is a valuable first step in fighting the process. Although it will not end radicalization totally, reducing the political, social, and economic factors that are the underlying root causes can help in reducing the popular support that some Jihadi terrorist organizations enjoy. The problem is that distinguishing the root and trigger causes for terrorism is not an easy endeavor due to the complex and diverse nature of the

¹⁵⁷ Borum, *Psychology*, 24–9.

¹⁵⁸ Transnational Terrorism, Security & the Rule of Law, “Exploring Root and Trigger Causes of Terrorism,” date accessed November 23, 2013, <http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu/tekst/publications/Root%20and%20Trigger.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ Borum, *Psychology*, 24–9, 48; U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army, 2007).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

radicalization process. The first step in understanding the underlying root and trigger causes is to try and view the problem from the enemies' eyes. Prior to his death, and during the early years of the War on Terror, Osama bin Laden laid out Al Qaeda's social construction on why they were at war with the United States:

U.S. support for Israel that keeps Palestinians in the Israelis' thrall. U.S. and other Western troops on the Arabian Peninsula. U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. support for Russia, India, and China against their Muslim militants. U.S. pressure on Arab energy producers to keep oil prices low. U.S. support for apostate, corrupt, and tyrannical Muslim governments.¹⁶¹

Although not every radical or terrorist holds all of these causes as the reason why they conduct or support Al Qaeda in its attacks against the United States, interviews when available, and statistics of known terrorists seem to support bin Laden's claims. Christopher Hewitt and Jessica Kelley-Moore point to a comment from a Palestinian captured in Iraq on why he would travel such a distance when he could fight the Israelis at home: "they are one and the same enemy, and if we succeed in defeating the U.S. here, it will be the beginning of the end for the Jewish state."¹⁶²

The two authors also compared the data of suicide bombers in Iraq to the data analyzed by Robert Pape in his book *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, and concluded that Muslim nations with a high level of U.S. or Israeli military occupation produce a disproportionately higher amount of suicide bombers than Muslim nations with no occupation.¹⁶³ Hewitt, Moore, and Alan Krueger also show that Jihadists tend to originate from countries with low levels of civil liberties. They point out that Turkey and Indonesia, the two Muslim nations with relatively higher levels of civil liberties, have had the fewest Jihadists per capita, whereas countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Jordan, nations that have the strong support of the United

¹⁶¹ Michael Schuerer, *Imperial Hubris* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's., 2004), 241.

¹⁶² Christopher Hewitt and Jessica Kelley-Moore, "Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A Cross-National Analysis of Jihadism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 2 (2009): 215–9.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

States but have low levels of civil liberties and freedoms, produce higher numbers of Jihadi terrorists.¹⁶⁴

The fact that most suicide bombers emanate from countries with a heavy presence of U.S. and Israeli troops is a clear indication of failure of strategic communications in winning the war on terrorism. In addition, strong support of Islamic states by the United States is a determinant factor in the spread of terrorist activities in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and Jordan. With low levels of civil liberties, the interpretation is that the strong support accorded to these countries by the United States is not sufficiently founded on tenets of strategic communication.¹⁶⁵

Jason Burke also points to the United States' invasion and occupation as motivators for the influx of Jihadists into Iraq, pointing to the stories of two Saudis, Hizam al-Ghatani and Mohammed al-Fawzan, as examples of the diversity of foreign fighters that sought to fight the United States in Iraq. Al-Ghatani, a 26-year-old, impoverished and poorly educated shop keeper from Saudi Arabia left his family to travel to Iraq to fight against the Americans because of what he saw on television, "the aggression against civilians, the children being killed, and the air attacks."¹⁶⁶ He was not a religious ideologue, nor did he have a positive view of Al Qaeda or the attacks on September 11th, but he felt that he needed to fight the Americans in Iraq to fight what he believed was unfair aggression. Al-Fawzan, on the other hand, was a 35-year-old man from a wealthy family. A self-confessed partygoer, who was more interested in soccer than Islam, al-Fawzan also blamed the images he saw on television for his decision to travel to Iraq to fight against the United States. Clearly the United States—and its mission in Iraq—came across differently than Washington expected.¹⁶⁷

Although support for Al Qaeda and its war against the United States and the West has only garnered lukewarm support over the past decade, most Muslim countries'

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.; Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes A Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 78–87.

¹⁶⁵ Krueger, *What Makes A Terrorist*, 78–87.

¹⁶⁶ Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 168–9.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 171.

populations view the United States and its policies in the region with even less support. The bombings in Istanbul in 2003, with their Western and Jewish targets, show how U.S. and allied policies are a driving factor in the radicalization process of Muslims worldwide. Turkey, a Muslim nation that historically has prided itself on its secular pro-Western attitudes, including more than six decades as a member in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and where bin Laden's popularity has never reached higher than 15 percent, saw two synagogues, a British-owned bank, and the British consulate bombed leaving 58 people dead. During the investigation, one of the Turkish militants described the bombers' actions and their views in harmony with those of Al Qaeda. It is also telling that the planning and execution was known to at least 400 Turks, who passively acquiesced to the attack and said nothing to the authorities.¹⁶⁸

As Burke notes, "many of the precepts underpinning the extremists' worldview were taking hold on a much wider population."¹⁶⁹ The fact that extremists' viewpoints are spreading is a clear indication of a need for change in strategic communication in the war against terrorism. There is a requirement for consideration of change in strategic communicating due to dynamism of models used by extremists. Improving strategic communication and modernizing it is pivotal in ensuring a lasting solution to terrorism activities as it will serve to contain radicalization and homegrown terrorists.

D. FAILURE OF U.S. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

For the U.S. government, it is important to understand the problem from a more global perspective. Success of American global policy should be based on attitudes and views of foreign populations. There have been significant failures in the U.S. strategic communications which are evident in the radicalization and marginalization examples presented in this chapter. Pew Global Attitudes Survey indicates that 80 percent of the population in Muslim countries have negative views of the United States. The main problem is with American foreign policy; it is the main cause for negative sentiments. In

¹⁶⁸ Pew Research Center, "Osama bin Laden Largely Discredited Among Muslim Publics in Recent years," May 02, 2011, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-largely-discredited-among-muslim-publics-in-recent-years/>.

¹⁶⁹ Burke, *The 9/11 Wars*, 159.

such countries as Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco that are more moderate, negative sentiments are even higher.¹⁷⁰

The Boston marathon attack may indicate a lack of assimilation in the U.S. Muslim population aided by a failure in U.S. strategic communications. Marginalization was a major causal factor in influencing the Tsarnaev brothers, the Boston Marathon bombers, to subscribe to extremist ideologies. The eldest brother, Tamerlan, had become radicalized through a lack of assimilation in the American culture. He claimed to lack any American friends and abhorred the degradation of Western values and the lack of American's self-control. It is believed his radicalization process was cemented by traveling to Chechnya in 2012, where he was able to reconnect with family and their culture, but also with their feeling of persecution, a sentiment to which he was particularly susceptible.¹⁷¹

The Tsarnaev case thus stands in for a broader failure in assimilation and incorporation of diverse cultures and religions into foreign policies. The 9/11 attack sought to sympathize with the Islamic population affected by the presence of U.S. troops in what Al Qaeda called Muslim land in Saudi Arabia and striking terror in the enemy's backyard. Strategic communication in foreign policy had failed in changing perception and modeling a moderate mindset among the Muslim population in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, radicalized individuals had negative sentiments about military presence in Islamic states.

There is a great deal of literature in both physical and digital libraries regarding radicalization. Shahawar Siraj' from New York influenced James Elshafay into radicalization through evidence from such materials. If Elshafay had prior information regarding extremist strategies and recruiting methods, he may have opted out. Lack of information on the recruitment strategies and methods adopted by extremists, among the public, indicates a lack of strategies to inform the local populace of misleading literature

¹⁷⁰ Pew, "Osama bin Laden."

¹⁷¹ Ashlie Perry and Binneh S. Minteh, *Home Grown Terrorism in the United States (US): Causes, Affiliations and Policy Implications* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2014), 16.

used by extremists. U.S. strategic communication lacks a plan to deal with homegrown radicalization caused by extremist individuals living in the diaspora.¹⁷²

The emergence of suicide bombers from countries mostly supported by the United States and with low levels of civil liberties and those with a heavy presence of U.S. military is a clear indication of failed strategic communications to influence the perceptions of local populations regarding extremism and the objective of our support. U.S. foreign policy in such nations is only focused toward eliminating terrorists and supporting local communities without modeled communication strategies that seek to understand the religion, culture, and social paradigms important for moderate thinking. The bombings in Istanbul in 2003, with their Western and Jewish targets, show how U.S. and allied policies are a driving factor in the radicalization process of Muslims worldwide.

E. CONCLUSION

Scholars and journalists like Audrey Cronin and Jason Burke note that there is a deeper conflict at play in the Muslim community than just a hatred of the foreign policy of the United States and the West. They argue that what is really going on is a war within Islam itself being waged to determine which ideology in the faith will be adopted, and that this is not the first time it has happened. Their theories may hold some truth, as Kofi Annan said “we should not pretend that... the decision to resort to terrorism is unrelated to the political, social, and economic situation in which people find themselves. But we are mistaken if we assume, equally, that terrorists are mere products of their environment. The phenomenon is more complex than that.”¹⁷³ However, it is hard not to see that U.S. words and actions are having a negative effect on the situation. U.S. actions are aiding Al Qaeda in recruiting and radicalizing thousands of Muslims who normally would have no desire to help or aid Al Qaeda and its ideology.

¹⁷² Gordan Lederman and Kate Martin, “The Threat From Within: What is the Scope of Homegrown Terrorism,” *ABA Journal*, (2012), http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/the_threat_from_within_what_is_the_scope_of_homegrown_terrorism.

¹⁷³ Transnational Terrorism, “Exploring Root,” 21.

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V. CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzes the policies and strategic communications of the United States in the war against Islamic fundamentalists from September 11, 2001, to the present to determine if the United States' strategic communication policies have been effective in countering Islamic extremism. From the findings, it is evident that U.S. strategic communications have failed in countering radicalization and moderating the minds of Muslim populations overseas—or among diaspora populations in Western countries. It is important to tailor strategic communications from a central point but extend resources to counter radicalization in various fronts and social environments. Distribution of competencies between the Pentagon, the DOS, and the CIA can limit the faster and strategic analysis of action areas in fighting radicalization and global terror groups. There are various individuals who are involved deciding the various TAI in different countries and offering expert information about the dynamism of terror groups. The group of professionals and resources should be put together as in the Cold War to enhance coordination of both human and material resources.

Based on the findings of this thesis, the following recommendations are proposed in support of U.S. strategic communications efforts in war against Islamic fundamentalism. Reinstatement of the USIA is important for analysis of radicalization trends and prediction of future terrorists' activities. Active promotion of moderate thought among Muslims living in various regions of the globe through strategic communication is critical in reducing radicalization. From the examples highlighted in this study, it is evident that extremist worldviews are spreading across a wider population compared to the last century where extremism was particularly confined to the Middle East. This is evident in cases such as the Boston bomb attack where the perpetrator was a home-grown terrorist. The findings further indicate that it has become easier to access materials and information propagating extremist ideas either through written print or visual media. Additionally, it is evident that negative perceptions of the United States are

spreading even in countries that were thought to be moderate such as Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco.¹⁷⁴

Models applied in the Cold War to woo neutral nations and influence friendly countries should be used in obtaining support from Muslim governments in terms of human resources and building of strong bases for strategic communications. Integration of institutions of higher learning in the war against radicalization is important as its most elite can be trusted by their home population to guide them in the right way.¹⁷⁵

Collaboration with Muslim institutions can be applied in modeling curricula that develop moderate thoughts regarding U.S. involvement in fighting the global war on terror. Reversing the negative views about the United States is pivotal toward realizing the objectives of strategic communications in countering radicalization. This is because the reduction of negative sentiments about the United States will enhance the effectiveness of modeled approaches against the Al Qaeda network and in developing moderates among the Muslim population.

There are two important similarities shared between the Cold War of the last century and the current war against Al Qaeda. The first similarity is an opposing hostile ideology and the second similarity is the need of an effective strategic communications plan to help wage the war. In the fight against international terrorism, the United States and other Western countries have yet to draw important conclusions.

It is imperative for the U.S. government to restructure its strategic communications to effectively fight hostile ideologies. Hostile ideologies held by individuals in the Islamic world can be eliminated through strategic communication that is not solely directed toward countering anti-American sentiments. In the process of countering hostile ideologies, the objective should be to induce the populace involved into disregarding the pursuit of terrorist activities and destruction of the West. Strategic communications should aim at convincing Muslims that terrorist activities and

¹⁷⁴ Todd Lindberg and Suzanne Nossel, "Report of the Working Group on Anti-Americanism," *The Princeton Project on National Security*, (2007): 4.

¹⁷⁵ Alex P. Schmid, *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2013), 41.

destruction of the West only represent militant extremist ravings and such activities are unacceptable. This approach is an imperative part of information operations necessary in winning wars.

There are also some important differences. First, unlike the Cold War, the United States is not trying to contain an enemy state; rather it is countering a religiously backed movement. Second, some Muslim societies are not as receptive as citizens from the former Soviet Union and communist countries to alternative viewpoints. Third, many Muslims also feel that the U.S. presence in the Middle East is a violation of their sovereignty and is not welcome. Fourth, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups are dynamic and regularly change their tactics to counter U.S. strategic communication operations in the region. Last, today's modern communications are exponentially quicker in disseminating information while offering the user greater choices in how and what information is shared.¹⁷⁶

In addition, past IO strategies should be revised and aligned with changing war aspects. Formation of separate institutions to deal with strategic communications in religious-backed militants will facilitate integration with think tanks, foundations, and institutions of higher learning in the Islamic world. This enhances modeling of moderate thought through IO on individuals trusted by most fundamentalists.

Yet even with those differences, there are vital lessons learned from both successes and failures of the U.S. strategic communication efforts during the Cold War that can aid the United States in its current war against Al Qaeda. First and foremost, Washington must develop and implement an effective strategic communication plan that encompasses all aspects of a state's power wisely, as this will greatly assist in achieving the state's objectives. Second, sound leadership is required. The President must make strategic communication a priority and set a national strategy that will promote U.S. interests and security by focusing U.S. hard and soft power on helping the terrorists defeat themselves. The United States can utilize its strategic communication tools to succeed in this by pointing to the inherent contradictions, hypocrisies, internal divisions,

¹⁷⁶ Baracskey, "U.S. Strategic Communication," 267–70.

and other shortcomings of terrorist organizations the same way it did against the Soviet Union.

Third, establish and develop a government-wide definition and doctrine of the terms. End the confusion on what strategic communication is or is not, so that it becomes easier for the whole of government to engage in it. The definition provided by Christopher Paul and cited in this work is a good starting point, but whatever definition is decided on must include all the tools at the nation's disposal to inform, influence, or persuade the target audience. Last, understand and target the desired audience. Insurgencies and terrorism require the support of the people to survive. Identify foreign populations that are vulnerable to anti-American messages and propaganda, and focus the strategic communication efforts on them. This threat is global, and therefore so must be the scope of the U.S. strategic communication efforts.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Lord and Dale, "Public Diplomacy," 7; Paul, *Strategic Communication*, 174–83; Joshua Alexander Geltzer and James J. F. Forest, "Assessing the Conceptual Battlespace," in *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Fight to Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas*, ed. James J.F. Forest (Westport, CT: Pentagon Press, 2010), 343–54.

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