

## **Effective Engagement in Anti-Terrorism Starts Within: Quest for a Well-Informed Public**

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### **Abstract**

Anti terrorism is being perceived as a war of ideas, with its end hinges significantly on effective strategic communication. While both sides adopt identical set of principles and similar modes of practices, it is noticeable that “our” side is performing unimpressively. This is because we have been focusing on demising the enemy’s credibility and hoping, by doing so, to undermine their capability of waging both idea and material wars. The rationale is mis-focused, and induces far-reaching policy implications that we cannot afford to ignore.

Foci of strategic communication studies have shifted increasingly from “need to share” information among government agencies, effective targeting of the audience, to due attention on cultural variations and legitimacy engineering. In appearance, we are paying prime attention to the audience. In reality, we rarely consider the public of our host society as the true and active beholder of perspectives about enemies and enmity. This deficiency can be explained by three elements:

1. Inadequate conceptualization of the “audience”;
2. Lack of legitimacy construction; and
3. Inadequate comparative analysis of the effectiveness of information dissemination from the government to the general public. Arguably, it can be remedied with improvements in all three areas.

### **The Public as the target—our perspective**

The diffusion of terrorism<sup>1</sup> from one place to another received scholarly attention in the early 1980s (Hubbard, 1983; Oots and Wiegele 1985). It became salient in the past decade because of the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack on World Trade Centers, New York in 2001. Over time, there are numerous published articles, books, journals and multimedia material that address the issue. So we could have exhausted all possible issues about terrorism. Yet, it seems that the more explore into it, the more questions instead of answers were generated. One would have to wonder, why?

The U.S. Department of State defined terrorism as “politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (Ruby 2002:10) The definition itself obviously longs for

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<sup>1</sup> Terrorism, in this article refers not to state terror (sometimes called democide) but those activities defined by the FBI or State Department. For detailed discussions, see Nacos 2006: 16-35.

information on the perpetrator's motivations and intentions, which, as Tilly correctly pointed out, has been rarely available, at least not in solid forms, for collective violence (Tilly, 2003:234). I would argue that we are facing up to a political enemy wherein the enemy party's conflict strategy, rather than the category that they are being labeled, is much more relevant to collective violence. The crux of the issue, however, is that conflict strategy of terror groups often goes hand in hand with our reactions toward their acts. To put it in a theoretical perspective, the way we perceive and construct our political enemy may serve to nurture the growth of our enemy. The implication of this observation, pending more supporting evidence, is that we need to move away from the traditional reasoning of constructing the enemy which holds "that the dramaturgy of enmity is consolidating public support for regimes, for causes, and for inequalities" (Edelman 1988:83), and head toward a more effective line of thinking: since the terrorists are actually calibrating their actions in accordance with the general public's perceptions of them and reactions toward their conducts, any policy that predominantly focuses on the government is at best out of synch, and indeed could be fruitless at worst. As such, it is imperative to inform the public to the full and in the most comprehensive manner if we wish to erase the hotbed for more terrorist activities.

Defense specialists in many countries think they have answers to this concern: Strategic Communication. Strategic communication was defined by US Department of Defense as "a variety of instruments used to understand global attitudes and culture, engage in a dialog of ideas between people and institutions, advice policy makers, diplomats and military leaders on the public opinion implications of policy choices, and influence attitudes and behaviors through communications strategies." (US Senate 2008). The deficiencies of the concept as well as its application at the national and international level have already been documented. Among other things, reliance on one-way model of influence and inability to prepare for global terrorist media campaign received particular harsh criticisms (Bud Goodall et al, 2006; Jeffrey Jones 2008; Steven Corman et al, 2007). Indeed, the inadequacy and, therefore, incompetency, of the current strategic communication design as such that the RAND corporation finds it merits a meta-analysis of current proposals and recommendations to help find out the problems (Paul 2009). The RAND report, after surveyed 36 selected documents, articulated in more than a dozen interviews with experts, and induced the results into 22 categories, has summarized four major guiding principles that were proposed to improve the effectiveness of strategic communication:

- A call for "leadership"
- Demand for increased resources for strategic communication and public diplomacy
- A call for a clear definition of an overall strategy
- The need for better coordination and organizational changes (or additions) (Paul 2009: 4)

Meta-analysis of this type has been urged by experts of strategic communication, such as Magnus Ranstorp (2006) and StevenCorman et al. (2006:8-9) for quite a while. Christopher Paul's report, even though not performed by the responsible government agencies, was a timely

and valuable response to that urge. He actually reviewed documents that are relevant to both strategic communication and public diplomacy<sup>2</sup>. The author of this article has no intention of engaging in a definitional debate concerning these two terms, although differences in definitions sometimes really carries important policy implications. The focus here, rather, is on strategic communication, which was singled out as one of the cornerstones of US government's overall national security framework. Yet, its conceptualization never properly addresses the actual target that is supposed to be protected by national security networks – the public. This apparent deficiency in the strategic design, ironically, did not just happen to the Americans. More ironically, even the RAND report did not point to anything even close to the point, by applying its 22 categorical constructs, that attests the centrality of the general public in strategic communication.

Indeed, policy makers in the US, as well as in other countries, do recognize the centrality of the general public—as a target to be controlled and mobilized for continuous support toward government operation, but not as the focal core of the whole matter.

### **The Public as the target—the enemy's perspective**

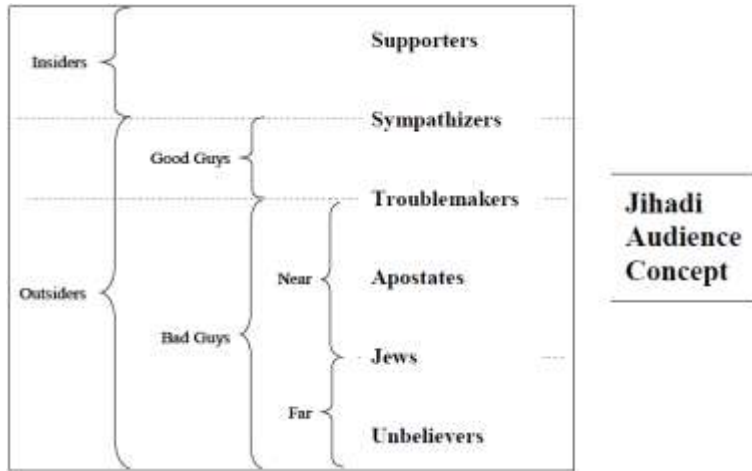
Not long ago, in the discussion of how best can the U.S. and the West in general resist Jihadist movement, it was stated that the role of communication practices in promoting jihad “has been systematically undervalued” (International Crisis Group, 2006, p. 4). More recently, the role of communication management in terrorist movements was granted due attention. Still, this author finds it disturbing that “our” experts continue to think that they can demise the enemy's strategic communication campaigns by doing something differently instead of similarly. To elaborate my point, it is imperative to note beforehand how does our enemy actually perceive of their target audience.

For terrorists in general, strategic communication is a vital part of their asymmetrical war against the West. The strategic effectiveness of their asymmetrical warfare hinges on the level of panic and fear generated by their combination usage (or threat of use) of ideas and material warfare. According to Carsten Bockstette (2009), terrorists (Jihadist and Taliban terrorists, in particular) know well how to apply strategic communication management techniques in disseminating their messages. For them to engage in asymmetrical warfare, the Internet and mass media have become the preferred enablers that can significantly compensate their weaker military power (ibid.). Bockstette (2009: 2) noted, “They craft their strategies based on careful audience analysis and adapt their messages and delivery methods accordingly adhering to the fundamental rules underlying any communication or public relations campaign. Their skillful use of the mass media and the Internet to compensate for asymmetrical disadvantages has enabled them to keep generating new generation of Jihadist terrorists.” He then went on described the historical evolution of terrorist use of communication technologies and their increasing professional sophistication in carrying out media campaigns.

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<sup>2</sup> For some experts, strategic communication and public diplomacy are essentially the same thing. Others consider them as distinct activities. For conceptual discussion, see Paul (2009: 2-3), Tatham (2008), Josten (2006).

More importantly, as Corman and Schiefelbein (2006) pointed out, the real target audience is neither the radical Muslims nor the general public in Western nations. Instead, they look to convert the mostly neutral or sympathetic “outsider” Muslims into “insiders” (supporters and followers) of “Ummah” (Community of Believers) (see figure below). To achieve this end, Corman and Schiefelbein (2006: 6) maintained, the terrorists resort to “social legitimacy,” which means “having the community in which they operate know their story, share their goals, and accept and support their efforts.” That is to say,



(source: Corman and Schiefelbein 2006: 11)

The way Jihadists categorizes their audience actually fits into their narrated goals: the ultimate establishment of an Islamic state that will engage with the non-believers and achieve a definitive victory. What is rarely appreciated is the different conception of time and space involved in their narrations, compared to their Western counterparts. As Fouad Hussein proposed in his book *Al-Zarqawi – al-jil aljadid lil-Qa’idah* (Qaeda’s Second Generation), al-Qaeda’s grand strategy of struggle extends into seven phases and is expected to last from 2001 until 2020, at least<sup>3</sup>. The significance of this difference is well put by Magnus Ranstorp (2006:5): “Unlike the West’s proclivity to categorize and create sharply delineated boundaries and hierarchies to achieve structure and order, the creation of al-Qaeda represented not only a ‘solid base’ but a norm, a principle to follow.” Its theoretical importance, to which I will return later, could serve as a useful reference point for those experts trying to fight al-Qaida effectively. For now, there are two points to be highlighted: one is that the long-term struggle conception commensurate with the core meaning of jihad in the sense that one need to purify one’s inside before one can take up arms against external enemies. The other is the fact that these terrorists recognized the necessity of creating a network to legitimize their cause. By comparison, authors of some of the leading surveys in this new field of study do not seem to duly appreciate the significance and implication of this point.

<sup>3</sup> See Allan Hall, “Al-Qaeda chiefs reveal world domination design”, *The Age*, 24 August 2005; Yassin Musharbash, “What al-Qaida Really Wants”, *Spiegel online*, August 12, 2005.

It has been observed repeatedly that Al-Qa'ida actually runs a great risk by basing its legitimacy on its own contentious interpretations of key religious concepts (Veness 2009; Corman 2006). Nevertheless, the fact that it has managed to evade from confronting 1.5 billion members of a major religion for such a long period of time can be considered a measure of its success. That success, in my opinion, does not derive from religious authority of its leaders because, as Veness (2009: 33) has pointed out, none of the Al-Qa'ida leaders “has the training or learning to pose credibly as a legitimate religious scholar.” Rather, pending on more empirical evidence, I would argue that it derives mainly from their effective dissemination of selected information to their targeted audiences through all kinds of communication channels.

Elsewhere, scholars such as Corman (2006) described this communication management scheme as a form of “social legitimacy.” Furthermore, Corman, Hess and Justus (2006: 12) suggested that terrorists’ reliance on social support “should be viewed as a weakness in the Jihadi network,” hence it should be a priority for U.S. media strategy to attack the consistency of their view. In my opinion, nothing can be more misleading than making that suggestion on the basis of such a view. Opposite to Corman et al.’s suggestion, I would argue, reliance of social legitimacy is a requirement, rightly recognized as such by the terrorists, that the U.S. and Western nations should try to acquire among all other things. This is my fundamental point, to which I am now turning my attention in the next section.

### **The public per se—missing in action**

Now the missing link is getting clearer: the terrorists targeted the majority of Muslim public, not the enemy public. We did the reverse. They have carefully analyzed their audience, which most of the time happen to be “their” general public, and responded to their needs. What about us? What makes people think that we should, or could afford to, do something otherwise?

Categorization, perception and politics go hand in hand, be it for identify the “us group” or for the “them group.” Indeed, according the Edelman (1988:82), “The political uses of enemies are closely linked to the social groupings with which people identify. As linguistic and other cues induce people to define themselves as members of different groups, the perception of enemies changes accordingly.” That is to say, without understanding people among us, there can be no realistic understanding of our enemies. If we push this argument a bit further, the elitist mindset among anti-terrorism leaders might have explained this tendency of setting the general public aside. The theoretical point is not complex, but it tends to be more slippery when trying to apply this concept to actual policy or policy initiatives.

Take the US Joint Chief of Staff’s “Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept” (October 2009) for instance. In this most updated reconceptualization of strategic communication, the DOD has finally come to terms with complexities of communication and accepted the notion that “Sources must compete for the attention of their intended audiences, who will tend to select and decode those signals that appear to suit their purposes and conform to their existing frames of reference. Any given signal is likely to reach more than one receiver,

intentionally or not, and may be interpreted differently by each when it does.” (ibid: 16). As encouraging as this statement may sound, it quickly turns out to be disappointing again when, in the later section of the document, the joint staff strongly implies, “*Formulate and produce tailored, resonant and culturally attuned signals that reach intended audiences through the surrounding noise.*” (ibid: 26, italic original), that their target audience is the non-Western audience. Not only so, their focal target audience is even smaller: the opinion leaders of the target audience as deemed by the joint force commander. How viable can this view be in supporting a population-wide confrontation of ideas and material warfare?

Whether that guiding principle is operationally viable is open to debate. This author has no desire to argue about the feasibility of the relevant military procedures. The more important question here is the rationale underlying that guiding principle. When it comes to strategic communication management, the terrorists are obviously doing a comparatively better job by attempting to target on the majority of neutral or sympathetic Muslims. To put it into our perspective, these neutral or sympathetic members of the Islam World are “their own people.” The terrorists have taken to their heart all the fundamental principles of effective communication plus something we have chosen to evade so far: to create and maintain a strong social support towards their cause and course of action.

The joint staff, as well as military and civilian planners of this “war of ideas” no doubt have adequate and improved understanding of the fundamental principles of effective communication. What happens, as it appears to be, is that they are not targeting the right audience. This shortcoming, in turn, was caused by misplaced theory application. The terrorists perceive of themselves as victims of both material and cultural imperialism perpetrated by West nations and states. We consider ourselves victims of radicalized Islamic fundamentalism. Each side is viewing the other side as an enemy fundamentally from an ideological point of view, then assessed at the operational level. If we were misguided at the initial stage, it would be unrealistic to expect satisfactory outcomes in the next phase. Ironically, however, we were misguided by ourselves, not by our enemies. Granted, enemy’s credibility can be and should be undermined. The enemy’s legitimacy even faces with internal challenge (Veness 2009), hence can be manipulated. Still, undermining the enemy’s legitimacy does not automatically enhance our own legitimacy and credibility, either in the eyes of the general public of most Western countries or members of the Islam world. We have consistently failed to grasp this reality because, among other things, we have never truly based our preparation for the war of ideas on a holistic level of analysis.

Historically, we seldom find a reasonable match between an identifiable enemy and the treatment we accorded them. This can be explained either theoretically (Edelman 1988:p.76-77) or empirically (Wang 2002). “To define the people one hurts as evil is to define oneself as virtuous” (Edelman 1988:76). Nazi Germany did this to the Jews, Stalin’s Soviet Union did this to the Gulags, Mao’s China and, later on, Pol Pot’s Cambodia did this to “people enemies.” Categories of enemies were constructed by the ruling elites, legitimized by official ideology,

propagated through intense campaigns and finally weeded out through the administrative apparatus of the government that claims to have, and indeed enjoys a significant degree of, popular support (Wang 2002). Constructing an enemy category, and beforehand by constructing a political spectacle to help achieving that end, is no more than a political move of enhancing a particular ruling elites' world view and political legitimacy. Moral concern is irrelevant to the actual decision making under this circumstance. Therefore, let us toss aside our self-defined moral virtuousness and the subsequent rejection of the proposition of learning from our enemies while fighting them. Let us also face right up to the very challenging reality that no matter how evil our enemy is being labeled and accepted as such, we still need to construct and maintain our legitimacy painstakingly.

In contemporary societies, certain political and religious beliefs, such as belief in democracy and/or belief in God, are socially communicated and usually unquestioned. The areas of politics and religion, therefore, are most deeply immune, for most of us, to rational reasoning. This tendency is even more evident in our fight against terrorism, arguably a combination of both politics and religions. We question a lot about credibility of enemy propaganda, but rarely challenge the reliability of information disseminated by our own government. We do this because most of us think the boundaries of politics, religion, and our everyday mundane lives have clearly been drawn. Social order is not fundamentally threatened unless the boundaries among these three pillars of order are in question. Unfortunately, they are in question, at the system level, because our protracted battle against terrorism, especially when we deem the use of ideas is more important than firearms in the battle. In a sense, this boils down to an identity war fought with media weapon.

Names, categorizations and generalities are all important factors of media framing. According to Entman (1993: 51-58), a *frame* functions to select and highlight some features of reality while obscure others in a way that tells a story about problems, their causes, moral implications, and remedies. Depending on the media frame used, therefore, an act might or might not be considered terrorism. This will be an endless debate that no one needs to engage here.

Rather, let's ask "Who has the power to frame?" Intuitively, one would like to think that the general public has been empowered to be rid of the framing effects created largely by the media. Realities simply tell us this is not the case. Even if the audience selectively exposes themselves to, memorize and comprehend only part of the information they received, the information was nonetheless filtered beforehand by the media and, in most of the cases of anti-terror propaganda, by government agencies.

Approaching the subject matter largely from a psychological perspective, Juergensmeyer (2000) observed that militant activists in Belfast, India, or Gaza would portray themselves to be activists, soldiers, martyrs, or any other term than "terrorists." These militants sought to legitimize their actions, even though many were contrary to the very religious and societal principles they sought to promote. Therefore, if most armed political groups rely heavily on the news media to disseminate their political message, influencing the frames adopted to describe the

armed groups becomes an important function of any opposition media and central concern for communications strategy. Political communication theorist Wolfsfeld's "political contest model" deserves some notes here. This model rests on five major arguments:

1. The political process is more likely to have an influence on the news media than the news media are on the political process
2. The authorities' level of control over the political environment is one of the key variables that determine the role of the news media in political conflicts.
3. The role of the news media in political conflicts varies over time and circumstance.
4. Those who hope to understand variations in the role of the news media must look at the competition among antagonists along two dimensions: one structural and the other cultural.
5. While authorities have tremendous advantages over challengers in the quantity and quality of media coverage they receive, many challengers can overcome these obstacles and use the new media as a tool for political influence. (Wolfsfeld 1997)

To sum it up, the process of political contest is neither linear nor constant. The concept itself coincides with Niklas Luhmann's proposition of "double contingency" in communication systems (1995, English version). In the simplest system wherein only two participants are involved, neither party will have sole control over the message and process. Instead, both are locked in a relationship of simultaneous, mutual interdependence. Indeed, when proposing a 21<sup>st</sup> century model for communication in the global war of ideas, the Consortium for Strategic Communication (Corman, Trethewey and Goodall, 2007: 9-10) based their "pragmatic complexity model" precisely on this "double contingency" thesis. It is safe to say at this moment that there are growing numbers of students of strategic communication harboring the idea that sending the right message to the right people is not enough. What constitute the "right" stuff should not be deemed by the authorities alone. Instead, we should incorporate the perceptions of our target audience (i.e. the general public in our host society), made available through vigorous research, as an integral and most important part of our messages. After all, all messages and their meanings are to be interpreted. How else can we acquire public consent on the meaning of our messages if we do not even know how they actually perceive of the enemy (or the political antagonists)?

I do not make this point lightly because past histories have repeatedly recorded administrative practices that try to put these words into actions in a counter-productive fashion.

Public consents on overseas enemies, or political antagonists, can be manufactured. Noam Chomsky (1989) argues that, while the US news media are adversarial towards the US government on foreign policy, institutional filters operate to ensure that the criticisms made generally stay within narrow bounds set by the US political elite. There, media conveyed the image of the world in a way that tends to formulate the frame for those entering the political elite, manufacturing public consent for U.S. foreign policy and make it difficult for the public to

have access to information necessary to challenge the interests of the elite. More importantly, to the extent that there is continuous presence of both left-wing and right-wing radicals in the mass media trying to set up boundaries for moral narratives, the U.S. foreign policy, according to Chomsky, simply lies outside of that boundary (Eric Herring and Piers Robinson, 2003: 555). Admittedly, Chomsky's arguments only attracted a small minority of followers. That does not, however, undermine that fact that he is correct in his observation.

Our best hope, therefore, is to refine our schemes of strategic communication by instilling into it such important propositions as contingency of meaning, and centrality of home audience and social legitimacy. Most important of all, the principle of "audience comes first" must be firmly established in the overall scheme. These steps spell something close to a policy overhaul in the area of strategic communication.

### **A quest for well-informed public**

So do we even need a new policy? Not an entirely new one, perhaps. Leadership, the law, lack of private-sector involvement and the need for better use of research had been named as strategic elements of the overall strategic communication plan (Paul 2009). For instance, the U.S. Information and Education Exchange Act of 1948 (the Smith-Mundt Act) has been restricting government agencies from disseminating public diplomacy materials domestically. The DoD may have considered itself engaging in a combat with one hand tied. Nonetheless, the difference between information dissemination and propaganda campaign is a fine line. Marketing the military to domestic American audiences with heavy-handed advertisement campaigns meets every aspects of being propaganda. Neither Congress nor DoD have had problem with it. Even when the military engages with foreign audience, with both hands free, the actual performance was still deemed unimpressive at best.

Communication is still fundamentally about who, says what, to whom, when and how. Nevertheless, what should concern the policy makers as well as plan executioners, and now more than ever, is the question of "with what effects". To answer that question concisely, we would have to be guided by appropriate conceptualization at the policy level, followed then by effective operations at the tactic level. Indeed, the propaganda warfare in the occupied Iraq during the past years offers a good glimpse of American failure in devising an effective war hypothesis.

Cora Goldstein (2008), in her comparative analysis of postwar Germany and postwar Iraq information control policy, offered some useful insight for our discussion here. According to her analysis, there has been no coherent policy of information control in postwar Iraq because the U.S. commanders failed to "plan for the complexity of the technological challenge" of communication technologies. In addition, they conceive the American mission there "as a liberation, not as the occupation of an enemy country" (Goldstein, 2008:63-64). As a result, the Bush administration spend \$100 million a year to establish the *Alhurra* (The Free One) TV station, which modeled after a conventional American station, to compete with other anti-

American satellite television stations, only to find that it failed to achieve its goals. *Alhurra* was only one example of failure. The U.S. also failed in newspapers, radio, internet and even the most traditional black propaganda (Goldstein, *ibid.*). Goldstein argued that the reason why the U.S. was successful in shifting postwar German political culture was, in addition to successful information control, because the military authority back then had established a policy principle that stated that Germany “will not be occupied for the purpose of liberation but as a defeated enemy nation” (Goldstein, *ibid.*: 63). Neither conditions were achieved in Iraq. That is, a correct conceptualization of the enemy leads to effective subsequent operational practices.

Information management in a (former) enemy territory certainly is not the same as strategic communication that aims at a huge population that resides in multiple countries. However, important clues were revealed, but not pursued, in Goldstein’s article. Let us take the *Alhurra* as an example. According to Goldstein, the station offered cooking and fashion shows, geographic and technological programs, documentaries and news. The Iraqis, the target audience, were not impressed at all because what they really cared about was coverage of issues facing Iraq, the Arab world and the Middle East. By comparison, Goldstein cited studies by Pintak (2007) and others in pointing out that one of the most effective weapons of the Islamic Army of Iraq, *Al-Zawraa* station, utilized the same satellite broadcasting technology to deliver non-stop anti-American propaganda to the entire Arab world. The station actually intends to extend its reach next to the European satellites and eventually to the American viewers (Goldstein, *ibid.*: 62). What is being demonstrated here is, in my opinion, legitimacy engineering. Unlike the U.S. government, whose has been targeting the “enemy people” for deliberate information dissemination, the enemy starts by attracting the neutral and sympathetic audience in the Arab world into their pact.

Condemning the *Al-Zawaraa* propaganda as morally and factually wrong is irrelevant here. Propaganda has never been about truth but about the political effects it may produce. For that matter, the CIA has been conducting those activities for a long time. Technological conditions have shifted and created new difficulties. Still, targeting the right sector at the policy level is the key to success.

Trying to block its access to the European and American views permanently will not be successful and legitimate. Dannis Gillmore (2004: xvi) has written that grassroots media is part of a “formidable truth squad.” In the contemporary media environment, Gilmore holds, that “information no longer leaks, it gushes through firewalls and other barriers. . . what gushes can take on a life of its own, even if it’s not true.” The crux of the issue is: our enemy is quite effective in their actions, vis-à-vis ours, of reinforcing their legitimacy. There is a real alarming sign here: our enemy is painstakingly constructing their legitimacy by informing their audience (those neutral and sympathetic people in their part of the world) of what they actually do, and plan to do, to correct American wrongdoings; yet, we are dwelling on the idea that because we were the victims we own unconditional legitimacy in dealing with the enemy. As such, we (indeed, only the government) presume that we have the full authority to make decisions

concerning who are the enemies and how the enemies should be treated. Our target audience, according to this paternalistic mindset, would passively and submissively waiting to be informed of whatever deemed as “need to know/need to share” by the leaders and then offer their support subsequently. Unacceptable as this may sound, it seems to match the actual circumstance quite realistically.

What is to be done then?

Despite a universal agreement among government agencies, NGOs, INGOs, and numerous individual scholars that attested the central role of a well-informed public in any effective anti-terrorism communication, there seems, nevertheless, very little made known about how has governments changed their way to disseminate information to the public at home. In other words, there is a lack of legitimacy engineering at the system level due to inadequate conceptualization. Moreover, there is even less made known about how effective our communication strategy, or strategy change, has been. Considering how much resources have been devoted in the field, in the name of the people, it is a fully justified demand that some evidence of accountability should be demonstrated. The authority is mobilizing all resources to the full. The most recent report on Social Media and Online Strategy (March 2010) published by the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Public Affairs has identified the importance of social media, online web services that are capable of creating virtual communities, and decided to “engage” them. Its stated purpose is: “Continuing to expand our online audience and increasing awareness about the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs should remain a primary focus of our efforts.” The purported goals for such “engagement” for the next six months are as follow:

Site	Goal for September 2010 Stats
<b>Joint Staff Website</b>	75,000 Page views/day
<b>Twitter</b>	25,000 Followers
<b>Facebook</b>	13,000 Fans
<b>YouTube</b>	2,000 views/month
<b>iTunes</b>	25,000 downloads/month
<b>Flicker</b>	50,000 picture views/month
<b>Chairman’s Corner Blog</b>	45,000 page views/day

Original

source:

[http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Fostering%20A%20Culture%20of%20Engagement%20-%20MilitaryReview 20091031 art005.pdf](http://www.carlisle.army.mil/DIME/documents/Fostering%20A%20Culture%20of%20Engagement%20-%20MilitaryReview%2020091031%20art005.pdf)

The projected goals indicated only one-way communication of old-fashioned government public relationship practices. Even the staff writer has acknowledged its ineffectiveness. To be fair, we should notice that there is no lack of awareness of the “realities” among military

leaders<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, we have not seen such awareness being incorporated in policy guidelines. Under the new strategy described above, the possibility of nurturing a well-informed public to support the policy objectives of strategic communication remains slim at best. We need a more maternal approach to achieve that goal. To quote Admiral Mullen: “We are only going to be as good as our own learning curve. And just the simple act of trying, of listening to others, speaks volumes all by itself.”(Mullen 2009:4). Quickly, I would like to add to that point: not only should we listen and learn from the people in the enemy land, but we should do the same to people in the home land in advance.

To that end, in my opinion, more cross-cultural analysis, with the help of institutional studies, must be conducted carefully to compare and contrast the following interconnected perceptions and conducts:

Discourses	Local community (home/abroad)	Media (home/abroad)	Government (home/abroad)
Perceptions of enemy			
Sources of perception			
Context under which the enemy term is used			
Implicated actions against the enemy			
Perceptions of legitimacy			
Actual conducts that construct legitimacy			
Perceived conducts that demise legitimacy			

Source: this author

The public is fully capable of deciding who the enemy is. What they need is information that empowers them in making sound decisions. That information, more often than not, is controlled by government agencies. By examining how do the public perceive of “the enemy,” where do they acquire the information that feeds their perception, to what extent they consider

<sup>4</sup> Admiral Michael G. Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, observed in late 2009 that “...The problem isn’t that we are bad at communicating or being outdone by men in caves. Most of them aren’t even in caves. The Taliban and al Qaeda live largely among the people. They intimidate and control and communicate from within, not from the sidelines. And they aren’t just out there shooting videos, either. They deliver. ...No, our biggest problem isn’t caves; it’s credibility. Our messages lack credibility because we haven’t invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven’t always delivered on promises.” *JFQ / issue 55, 4th quarter 2009:2-3*

the information credible, and what kinds of conducts may enhance or demise credibility of the information, we will be engaging in the full process of constructing the foundation of long-term effectiveness of strategic communication.

If anti-terrorism is a war of ideas at the strategic level. Then, at the operational level, discourse analysis must be used as an important combat weapon. The combatants, in this instance, may not be uniformed soldiers but could be the academia. The rationale? Credibility, on the one hand; and mobilization of local support, on the other hand. I should also note, words do not transform into actions automatically. It takes institutional capability as well as leadership to accomplish the task. We are already seeing signs of change at leadership level.

Two months ago, U.S. President Barak Obama unveiled his first formal National Security Strategy, wherein Strategic Communications still focuses on people in enemy land as well as non-domestic regions<sup>5</sup>. However, there is a very encouraging sign. The Strategy envisioned the centrality of “the American People and the Private Sector”: “The ideas, values, energy, creativity, and resilience of our citizens are America’s greatest resource. We will support the development of prepared, vigilant, and engaged communities and underscore that our citizens are the heart of a resilient country. And we must tap the ingenuity outside government through strategic partnerships with the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and community-based organizations. Such partnerships are critical to U.S. success at home and abroad, and we will support them through enhanced opportunities for engagement, coordination, transparency, and information sharing” (Obama 2010: 16). Earlier, the *White House Strategic Communications report to Congress* (March 17th, 2010) has already specifically indicated that “Coordinating words and deeds, including the active consideration of how our actions and policies will be interpreted by public audiences as an organic part of decision-making, is an important task.” Yet, the articulated “public” remains largely those deemed by the various organizations of the government. So, whether and how the President Obama’s vision will be transformed into policies certainly remains to be seen. At the very least, the leadership of anti-terrorism endeavors seems to have properly recognized the crux of the issue as such.

## **Conclusion**

Strategic or not, the fundamental principle that circumscribes studies of communication effects is still to determine who says what to whom in what channel and with what effect (Littlejohn and Foss 2008). The core argument of this essay is to stress this: given the current context of anti-

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<sup>5</sup> Under the section of Strategic Communication, the document states this: “Across all of our efforts, effective strategic communications are essential to sustaining global legitimacy and supporting our policy aims. Aligning our actions with our words is a shared responsibility that must be fostered by a culture of communication throughout government. We must also be more effective in our deliberate communication and engagement and do a better job understanding the attitudes, opinions, grievances, and concerns of peoples—not just elites—around the world. Doing so allows us to convey credible, consistent messages and to develop effective plans, while better understanding how our actions will be perceived. We must also use a broad range of methods for communicating with foreign publics, including new media.”

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss\\_viewer/national\\_security\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf)

terrorism as a war of ideas, knowing and understanding to whom we would communication should precede all other steps in the process. Theoretically, this particular war of ideas offers a great opportunity to reexamine our understanding of relationships between group identity and legitimacy, among other topics. That part of the issue would be pursued in separate papers. For all practical concerns here, this author argues, echoing the view of many who already work in the field, that adequate conceptualization at the policy level would greatly enhance the overall effectiveness of strategic communication operations. In my opinion, that means we target the audience at home first as a long over-due steps toward legitimacy construction. In addition, cross cultural studies that employs linguistic analytical methods should be conducted extensively to empowering of process of legitimacy construction. Some possible topics of research were proposed here with the purpose of generating discussions.

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