

Some Principles for Influence in Counterinsurgency

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'One thing is clear to me though - and that is how hard it is to find the right levers to influence people in a district like this.' Mark Urban – Sangin, February 2010



Police Mentoring Troop from 40 Cdo FOB Jackson, Sangin on security patrol. (Si Ethell, MOD)

There is currently much talk in military circles about narratives, battles of ideas, influence and so on. The ability to influence people to your advantage is increasingly seen as vital for success in modern warfare. The UK's Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre, for example, argues that in future conflicts, 'the battle of the narratives will be key, and the UK must conduct protracted influence activity, coordinated centrally and executed locally'.¹ Similarly, the UK's new joint doctrine on Stabilisation judges that

...all military action should be assessed by its contribution toward influencing the key conflict relationship [between the local people and their government] and shaping the eventual political settlement. The perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and opinions of individuals and groups are all fundamental to this outcome, so influence is the

*guiding idea for the conduct of operations.*²

Not much is new here. War has always been a contest of wills - a struggle to bring about a desired response from the adversary. This can be achieved by changing the enemy's behaviour, or, more profoundly, by changing their underlying attitudes. Sometimes force of arms proves sufficient to influence the enemy, but in limited wars additional approaches will likely be required. The need to influence attitudes and behaviours is a central tenet of counterinsurgency campaigns. Here, both sides are competing for the attitudes of a wider population. To defeat the enemy, the counterinsurgent must persuade the wider population that his favoured outcome is both preferable and inevitable, and must also persuade the insurgent that he has no realistic chance of influencing them himself. Influence, then, is as integral to counterinsurgency as to all war.

How far, though, can you really hope to persuade others that your view of things is the right one? If victory really is a matter of favourable perceptions, how can the military practitioner get at those perceptions? The answers offered in doctrine and much of the burgeoning literature on influence in conflict are maddeningly vague. Typical is this remark from David Galula's classic text that if the counterinsurgent 'lies, cheats, exaggerates, and does not prove, he may achieve some temporary successes, but at the price of being discredited for good'.³ It sounds sage, and yet if influence were simply a matter of offering factual statements or the 'truth' about the undoubted merits of our cause, and doing so in a timely fashion, then our problems would be over. Clearly there is more to influence than that - but what?

My intention is ... to provide a framework with which to order our thoughts about influence

Happily, there is no need to reinvent the wheel, since considerable research

already exists, notably in psychology and neuroscience, on how individuals and groups form their attitudes, and how these might be changed. The literature on influence is vast, so the following brief remarks are intended only as initial guidance for those interested in the challenge set out by DCDC and in JDP 3-40. Below I describe six broad themes that aspiring influencers can use to exploit the psychological traits of target audiences. The practical ways in which these core themes can be operationalised are myriad, and I include a few real world examples for illustration. My intention is not to be prescriptive, but rather to provide a framework with which to order our thoughts about influence.

The Problem:

In a nutshell, the challenge stems from the fact is that people are not 'rational' decision-makers, making carefully considered choices on the basis of objectively valid information. They don't really perform a logical, consistent cost-benefit analysis when deciding things. The real world is much more complex, and more human. Consider the following ways in which people are not model 'rational' decision-makers, all of which shape the scope for influencing them:

- **People simplify reality** - we all apply mental shortcuts (which psychologists call heuristics) to make sense of the complex world around us. These include the use of 'scripts' (simplified schemes of reality) and 'anchors' (established baseline values).⁴ We reason by making analogies with seemingly comparable situations, which relies on having available and more-or-less relevant memories. We also seek consistency in our beliefs, and will work to reduce 'cognitive dissonance' - the uncomfortable sensation of simultaneously holding incompatible beliefs.⁵ Beliefs and attitudes, once established and internalised, can be difficult to change. People can disregard, or underemphasise inconsistent information that jars with beliefs, because they have a general tendency for consistency. They may also be susceptible to

'confirmation bias' - selecting only supporting evidence for existing beliefs and ignoring other information.

- *Most information is socially valid* - our membership of various social groups is critical in shaping our view of the world.⁶ Social psychologists have convincingly demonstrated that people often believe something because the group they are part of believes it - much of what we believe rests on social proof. If other people are behaving in a certain way, that acts as a kind of mental shortcut for us. Oftentimes, 'truth' is not objective - hard facts may be less important than we think. There is often no logical settlement of contentious disputes, not because one group sticks stubbornly to an untrue position, but because different facts are being engaged. Instead, to see why people believe what they do, and how we might change their minds, we must study how norms form and evolve in groups. Reality, in many respects, is socially constructed.⁷

- *People are emotional* - and these emotions interact with the real world in ways that shapes 'rational' decision making. 'Hot' or emotional cognition is a key part of rationality - our human decision making is inseparable from our emotional selves.⁸ It's no good pointing to your idea of objective 'truth' and hoping that angry, frightened, or even just exhausted people will objectively appraise the validity of your message. Instead, you need to understand how emotions affect attitudes, and exploit that understanding in crafting emotionally sensitive messages.

So, the task of influencing people is difficult, but attitudes *do* change - norms and beliefs can shift quite quickly within groups, as can behaviours. Minorities and/or outsiders find ways to achieve influence. Precipitous rises and falls in insurgent violence are a good example. How do ideas get traction in communities? How does information cascade and persuade? There's no simple

answer, but the following six themes offer a jumping off point for thinking about influence.

Be an Insider



Natasha Kaplinsky – BBC Popular Presenter (Ruth Crafer and KBJ Management)

If information is socially validated, it helps to be an insider, or at least perceived as one. That means using local language, narratives, norms and messengers to craft and convey your message. A credible local authority will usually be more readily believed than a foreign soldier. People like familiarity and similarity - they tend to believe in-group information sources over out-group. Popular and attractive messengers are more readily believed. So it would be sensible to use the group's existing anchors, drawing on their established beliefs and values. That means talking with a local voice, in the vernacular, using local metaphor, idiom, and analogies.⁹ As one Second World War propagandist astutely noted, the art of propaganda is to mix your 'truth' in with theirs.¹⁰ So much the better if you can make them indistinguishable. Working with the grain like this is likely to be easier and more effective than changing the group or targeting all its norms.



William Joyce (Lord Haw Haw) lies in an ambulance under armed guard before being taken from British 2nd Army Headquarters to hospital. He had been shot in the thigh at the time of his arrest (IWM)

Beware, however, the danger of appearing as a phony - exemplified, of course, by Lord Haw Haw. Real insiders make the most authentic messengers - manufacturing credibility is certainly possible, but difficult. Frank Kitson offered this sensible advice:

*'no matter how well a person from outside the country may think that he knows the way in which the minds of the local people work, he is none the less likely to make mistakes when preparing propaganda for them.'*¹¹

In Afghanistan, this sort of thinking suggests that *Afghan Idol* will do as much work for the counterinsurgent as scores of earnest coalition spokesmen. Radio stations that mix local music with discussion programmes are a good way of mixing your 'truths' with theirs. And a quarrelsome and hostile press is an expression of group norms that allow debate and dissent - and afford plenty of scope for social influence.



Afghan Idol Grand Finale (AfghanistanTV)

If messages cross over, can you tell one group of people one message and hope that the other group doesn't get to hear about it? In a prominent example from Afghanistan, can you persuade the Afghan population that the coalition is here for the long haul, while persuading domestic populations that our commitment is limited in time? Surely, it's important not to get caught saying different things to different groups? Partly, a social psychologist would answer: the Afghan population might doubt our commitment on hearing rumblings from back home about leaving soon. But remember also that the role of social norms in shaping perceptions means that a dramatically different perspective might be put on the same information anyway. It's not a given that one group will afford the same attention to a message directed at another group, or that it will interpret it in the same way. While consistent messaging across and within audiences is rightly considered important by doctrine writers, there is still plenty of scope for emphasizing different issues to different people at different times.



Abeds, an Afghan local radio personality for the Voice of Maiden, conducts his radio show in the Wardak province of Afghanistan, Sept. 2009. (US Army photo - Sgt. Teddy Wade)

Pick the Sides

Promoting different social groups can help change the norms of the target population. The counterinsurgent need not stick with the groups he inherits, because he can, to some extent, influence which is the 'referent group' - the group that people identify with most strongly in a given situation. People have multiple identities - but only some are engaged depending on circumstances.¹² The task for the influencer is to engage new groups, shifting the debate by sponsoring new

group identities or prioritizing existing ones that work for him, along with their associated values and attitudes. 'Social groups are not "things,"' argued the psychologist Henri Tajfel; 'they are processes [...] The psychological existence of a group for its members is a complex sequence of appearances and disappearances, of looming large and vanishing into thin air.'¹³

We can imagine a group on any scale from tea-party to nation state, and there are some great real-world examples of how shifting the salient group produces behavioural and attitudinal change. Famously, Philip Zimbardo studied the pernicious effects of arbitrarily making students perform the roles of either prison guards or prisoners - thereby handsomely demonstrating that new groups make for new behaviours, even in spurious circumstances. He argues that the same group identities were critical in shaping malign behaviour by guards at Abu Ghraib.¹⁴ Elsewhere, the behavioural economist Dan Ariely showed the effects of engaging a moral code by invoking the Ten Commandments, and in consequence reducing cheating, even among non-believers. Just mentioning the Commandments meant that people's moral norms are engaged in ways that they might otherwise not have been.¹⁵ In his seminal work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson perceptively wrote about nation states as *imagined communities*: the idea was that the spread literacy, mass education and the opportunity of roles in state bureaucracies together fosters national identity among elites and wider populations. Growing a civil service (and an army) is important in promoting and reinforcing the idea of a nation.¹⁶

Groups come and go, in other words, and the counterinsurgent's task, just like that of the insurgent, is to help them along their way. To do so, he might leverage existing anchors and attitudes to define both the in-group and out-group as he wants them. Al Qaeda and the Taliban already do this: in their interpretations of terms like *takfir*, *jihad*, *caliphate*, and *ummah* they have adopted the vernacular of Islam to market their particular

message, and to define in and outgroups. Counterinsurgents do it too. Consider the relationship between aid and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. One recent study astutely noted 'the central importance of *process* over the product; how people are engaged is almost more important than the desired end state'.¹⁷ Delivering aid through passive, pliant local officials is no way to engage and foster new group identities. As TE Lawrence observed of the Arabs, '*better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly*'.¹⁸ Sound enough advice, especially given the counterinsurgent's notable inability to do it perfectly - but, of course, the trick lies in picking and empowering the right locals to do it tolerably on your behalf.



Emir Faisal's party at Versailles, during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919

Get Emotional

Not for nothing did Clausewitz stress the passions of the people as an elemental force in war. Emotions affect our thinking, but not as an addition to 'reason' - rather, they are an integral part of it. Neuroscientists have found that without emotion human rationality is drastically impaired.¹⁹ People are not coldly rational calculating machines, especially in uncertain, dangerous times. The mood I'm in affects the attention I give to a situation and the decision making processes with which I address it. Emotions act as a kind of cognitive bias on the way we make decisions. They interact with recall, for example, in bringing to mind previous times when we felt similarly aroused, and giving us a ready-made analogy and script for appropriate action. And emotion affects how and whether we remember specific

events - dramatic, emotional events are more likely to stay with us, and come to mind later in similarly dramatic situations. In short, emotion, memory and decision making interact, in ways that psychologists and neuroscientists are beginning to understand.

There's also a relationship between our emotions and the social world we inhabit. Emotions affect the groups we prefer - as when fear or revulsion sharpens the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. But the direction is two-way: groups also affect our emotions: we can learn what sorts of things are frightening or revolting as part of our social conditioning.²⁰ Our emotions are, in this sense, constructed by society. Appeals to our emotions are often appeals to our social selves. Who's in, who's out? - these are critical questions in counterinsurgency, and they come with emotional baggage. We hear regularly that counterinsurgency is about winning 'hearts and minds' - suggesting a distinction between rationalism and emotion. In fact the two are synonymous: our emotional 'heart', neuroscience tells us, is an essential and integral part of our reasoning 'mind'.

Much of the existing research on emotion involves studying the effects of fear and distress, both of which affect the sort of decision-making logic people apply to new situations. Fear is a primary emotion - closely linked to our survival mechanisms. It can kick in quickly and shape behaviour without higher levels of conscious cognition becoming involved. People are often afraid of uncertainty, the threat of the unknown and the alien. Or they may fear potential change or loss. All of which, of course, are characteristic of war: there can be few situations more dangerously ambiguous than being caught up in a war that hangs in the balance.

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But while fear shapes cognition, the



Afghan youths remove debris from the market place in Now Zad, Afghanistan, 2009. In the wake of a recent offensive to rid the area of Taliban influence, local Afghans have returned to the area to reclaim their homes and businesses they abandoned in 2006, when the Taliban forced thousands to flee

relationship is complex and not as deterministic as we might initially think. At one extreme, the effect of fear can be to undermine self-control and self-esteem, and so make people apathetic and biddable.²¹ Such is the impact of effective shock action on defeated troops. And the goal of the insurgent is as much an apathetic as a sympathetic population. So, some insurgent messages aim at exacerbating fear and uncertainty and thereby inducing apathy - terrorism is itself, of course, just such a type of message. When Roger Trinquier argued that success in 'modern warfare requires the unconditional support of the populace', he was mistaken: the insurgent doesn't need support from the majority of the population - he needs its apathy or submissiveness.²²

And yet, alternatively, fear may prompt people to take action, rather than subside into apathy. Fight and flight are the two classic alternatives.²³ In part the path they choose depends on how much control they perceive they have - and that gives the influencer leeway to craft messages that provide clear direction for measures that can be taken to address fear. Messages about the brutality of the Taliban are of limited utility - recipients of night letters already know the insurgents are brutal. But coupling that message with the opportunity to take positive action - through provision of information hotlines, participation in neighbourhood defence organisations and so on permits action and militates against shock, apathy and flight. In

this way, for example, fear can be used to accentuate the distinction between in and out-group, strengthening the bonds of the former and strengthening resolve to tackle the latter. All of which sounds sinister or totalitarian - the sort of things a dastardly enemy might get up to. But fear has played a part in the British tradition of counterinsurgency, as Ashley Jackson notes, 'hearts and minds was as much about creating fear as winning the socio-economic battle for the support of the general population'.²⁴ Fear of authority amongst the insurgents, of course, and their sympathisers - but fear also of the outsider, the better to strengthen the bonds of insiders.

Of course, stimulating, or even simply leveraging negative emotions is provocative, and might plausibly be considered immoral and contrary to the values of one's own side. It might also be counter-productive: emotional messaging of this sort may also undermine trust, if the audience perceives that it is being manipulated through its emotional response. The stimulation of fear, for example, is at the heart of Michael Moore's critique of US foreign policy after 9/11 - of governments using fear to sway biddable publics into acquiescing in dubious wars.²⁵ But perhaps it is less morally dubious for a counterinsurgent to draw on fear of the insurgent's brutal tactics and repressive ideological programme if he also provides a means of channelling decisive action against them.

Fear isn't the only emotion. The psychologist Paul Ekman identifies some 14 additional emotions - including fear, anger, disgust, contempt, and sadness, but also pride, satisfaction, pleasure, amusement and excitement.²⁶ All are of acute interest to the influencer. On top of these basic, distinct emotions, our conscious acts to shape more subtle emotional shades: envy, smugness and so on. All are inextricably intertwined with our cognition, not merely the result of our conscious thoughts. All affect the sorts of goals we pursue, the risks we perceive, the memories we draw on and the way in which we interact socially. And all are possibilities for the savvy

influencer on either side of a conflict.

Positive emotions play a large role in establishing credibility and trust. So while distrusted outsiders may be hated or feared, leading to negative stereotyping and even dehumanization, stimulating strong positive emotions can accentuate our bond with our ingroups. Think of the small group loyalties of the squad and platoon, which in fact are very similar in emotional dynamic to the small group loyalties acting on a terrorist cell.²⁷ Larger groups - societies and nations are also emotionally entities - exciting passion and pride among group members. How might these ideas work in the field? In counterinsurgency, you need to de-legitimate the widest possible range of targets for the insurgent, by making them part of an accepted in-group. Using emotion might help with that. If the Taliban kill Afghans, get the word out - in pictures. Do they pay compensation? If not, they're not part of your shared society. Do you use local cooks, drivers, craftsmen, or source stuff elsewhere? What if getting locals involved makes you part of the community, not a parasite feeding off it? It fosters trust, credibility and liking - all good things. From this perspective, what you do is at least as important in engaging emotions as what you say:

perhaps more so, since, as one of the most durable findings in psychology demonstrates, people commonly make judgments about other's underlying attitudes based on their behaviour.²⁸

Frame the Issue

Among the more common advice given to those seeking to persuade is to keep it simple. It's a good idea. If people are 'cognitive misers', using shortcuts, or *heuristics* to streamline their decision making, that can be used to the counterinsurgent's advantage. Research shows that simple messages are more likely to be believed as true, and that repeating messages will reinforce that believability. Familiar ideas are inherently more plausible. All this is captured in the idea of '*cognitive fluency*' - we believe more readily ideas that are inherently simple to grasp.²⁹ Moreover, messages that are delivered in direct linguistic styles, using easily comprehensible vocabulary, and not hedged about with caveats, sub-clauses and close argument, are more convincing. Are simple, but incorrect descriptions of cause-effect relationships more plausible than complex but correct ones? Is a tricky to pronounce item more likely to be harmful or risky than if it were given an easily comprehensible name? As a sophisticated decision maker,

you probably believe you wouldn't be taken in by those distortions, but it's highly likely that you would.

How might these ideas play out practically for counterinsurgents? Perhaps in avoiding jargon, especially acronyms - beloved of armed forces the world over. Perhaps in the use of active verbs, punchy phrases, and compelling imagery rather than stale, fact-laden press releases. In simple, local names, like *Operation Moshtarak* (Together); simple ideas, like 'don't commute to the fight', or 'protect and serve'. Those staples of counterinsurgency, 'Hearts and minds', and 'clear, hold, build' have endured for good cognitive reasons - and have been powerful in persuading people of the merits of counterinsurgency approaches. On the other hand - why not use the opposite approach in disaggregating the enemy? The insurgent gets traction from being a brand, aggregating disparate tactical actions into one strategic campaign - but why allow that?³⁰ It's in this framing of the issue that the propagandist can have most impact - defining groups, establishing causal relationships, building empathy, credibility and trust.

Direct, simple phrases aren't always enough. This concept of fluency is just one aspect of *framing*: the notion that the way in which an issue is phrased or described greatly impacts the cognitive processes applied to it. In particular, changing the way in which a risk factor is described to people can have a dramatic effect on how we behave.³¹ For example, among the significant distortions in theoretical 'rationality' uncovered by the psychologists is our tendency to be risk averse when it comes to gambling on gains, but risk-accepting when it comes to losses.³²

The takeaway point here is that the language and phrasing that the counterinsurgent uses, and the way in which he frames risk and probability all has an impact on the way people perceive his message. The locals are making calculations all the time about how long the counterinsurgent will persevere, and in what strength. So is



An Afghan local receives medical treatment at the International Security Assistance Force Role 2 Medical Center on Camp Arena, Sept. 23, 2008. The center provides medical treatment to military personnel assigned to the camp and local residents. (ISAF photo by U.S. Air Force TSgt Laura K. Smith)

the audience at home. Consider this example of framing: if, as is commonly asserted by the UK government, three quarters of all terrorist attacks plotted against the UK originate in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, it sounds intuitively reasonable to continue with the deployment of troops there to stop it. But without knowing what constitutes a 'plot', what the likely effect of such 'plots' are, how many such 'plots' there have been, or indeed how many plots have actually been disrupted by our deployment, we lack the information needed to form a full assessment of the costs and benefits. The issue has been framed in a way to favourably shape the odds.

Of course, risk isn't just calculated on the basis of probabilities and outcomes. As you would expect - it's emotional too. In fact, when the outcome of a decision carries emotional weight, our attention to 'rational' probabilities diminishes markedly. The odds we weigh are greatly influenced by our feelings: gut feelings, you might say. Framing choices in ways that appeal to emotions will impact the way people decide. The smart counterinsurgent will engage those emotional biases. Do locals trust him? Is he credible? Such things are emotional beliefs - depending on liking, fear and so on. If he can frame the issue in simple, familiar and authoritative language, in phrases constructed to tip the odds in his favour, *and* in language that has emotional resonance too, so much the better for the counterinsurgent.

Encourage Commitment

Just changing people's behaviours can bring about a shift in their underlying attitudes, because it exploits peoples' desire for cognitive *consistency*. Remember that people like dislike cognitive dissonance, a jarring sensation between mutually incompatible beliefs, which itself is yet another illustration of the way in which emotions effect cognition. And if they find themselves behaving contrary to their existing attitudes, it may not be the behaviour that changes first: 'If I am doing it, it must be right,' is the underlying principle here. Repeated behaviours form habits,

and changes underlying attitudes. Getting people to commit, even to spurious symbolism, can affect their attitudes and lead to more substantial behavioural changes.³³

People in general don't like being told what to do, a phenomenon psychologists call *reactance*. So ideally, the counterinsurgent would like people to commit to new behaviours without duress. But if he is perceived as operating *within* the group, the likelihood of reactance diminishes. That's why empowering local leaders to change behaviours is better than forcing the issue yourself, as an out-group member. That's why forming agricultural co-operatives and small loans schemes are likely to fare better than simply delivering aid to passive recipients.

As a practical example, consider the US pledge of allegiance, recited daily in schools, as a visible public commitment to the ideals of the republic. It's a demonstration of one key reason why nations have flags and anthems. In Afghanistan, roads are often held up as key tools in tackling instability.³⁴ So much the better if the people building them are locals, and better still if they are further demonstrating their commitment to the state by wearing vests or sporting banners announcing that the road is being constructed by the government and people of Afghanistan. When Afghan locals receive wheat seed, better that it comes from the local government, not the coalition, or aid agencies, and better that it be a loan of seed, or even subsidized seed rather than a gift: that way everyone is involved in a collaborative exercise that strengthens commitment to the Afghan state. And better that the seed is made conditional on a publicly made commitment not to grow opium.³⁵

Control the Hubs

Propaganda in warfare is a competition in which the network through which you seek influence is critical. Here, the burgeoning sociological literature on networks is of great interest to the aspiring influencer.³⁶ There's a tendency in modern strategy to think



Qal'eh-ye Now, Afghanistan (2 September). Colonel Martinez Trascasa- PRT Badghis Commander- shaking hand with Badghis Governor - Delbar Jan Arman- during the delivery of humanitarian aid for the most needy families in the province capital



Afghans gather fruit trees in Kapisa province, Afghanistan, Dec. 8. French Task Force La Fayette worked with the Afrane Non-Governmental Organization to donate approximately 70,000 fruit trees to the villagers in an attempt to limit erosion and provide the farmers with a consistent income. (Sgt. Maj. Jean-Charles Thorel, Task Force La Fayette)

that everything is important - in an interconnected, globalized world, crises can happen anywhere, and to manage them, we need to be on top of a bewildering array of information.

Social network theory is reassuring in that respect. Social networks are not information neutral: we are insulated from most competing ideas by our lack of attention, by lack of access to different ideas from outside our smallest social milieu, and through our inherent cognitive conservatism: our beliefs and heuristics tend to have served us well enough. Why change? Social networks tend to *cluster* - we know relatively few people, mostly on the order of several

hundred - and many of them know each other too.



Six sailors assigned to the USS Blue Ridge, the flagship for the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet, home-based at Yokosuka, Japan, became citizens of the United States on March 8, 2010

One reason is that we're exposed to new ideas from influential actors: people in authority positions, or 'likeable' people, for example. People return to relatively few sources for validation - who do they know, who do they trust? So much the better for the counter-insurgent if those influential actors are on his side. While the links within our social clusters are certainly important - small, tightly knit groups will likely share similar norms and attitudes - the links *between* clusters are important too, in explaining how ideas spread within societies. Of these links, hubs - people with many links, including to different clusters - are of great interest to the influencer. These people may or may not be the originators of messages, but they are important in spreading ideas and introducing new ideas to social groups. That suggests that rather than map an entire society, it's more important to ascertain who hubs are, and to develop ways of communicating through them, or of isolating and bypassing them if they're not amenable.

Hubs depend on *fitness* - a term for a variety of attributes that affect why people connect with them in proportionately greater numbers than us mere mortals. The answers are to some degree obvious - are they political leaders, imams, travelling businessmen? Remember, though, that you're not necessarily after the most obviously important man - but the most connected, and therefore conduits for ideas between different clusters, or social groups.

All that suggests the importance of understanding local societies - a formidable challenge for non-area specialists on short term operations, and one that likely requires effective intelligence networks and systems of your own.³⁸ But it also suggests scope for prioritization - not every node in the network is important, and scarce resources can be directed at the key areas.



The joint press conference was held with local and international journalists to discuss Afghanistan's forthcoming general elections. (ISAF)

Influence is Total

Jacques Ellul rightly argued that propaganda is total - the propagandist is not just involved in imparting a message, but in constructing entire societies and worldviews. That sounds disturbingly totalitarian, and of course it can be. But we are, in large part, unreflective products of the milieu in which we live, and that milieu is socially constructed. The task of the influencer in wartime is to use all available resources to prompt or promote favourable attitudes. This isn't a new aspect of war, but an eternal characteristic. Influencing may conjure images from modern war of embedded reporters, satellite television, and radical websites - but these *modes* of influence reflect current societal conditions, and will undoubtedly continue to evolve. More enduring is the underlying social and cognitive psychology of influence.

Having a good story to tell is only part of the challenge; tailoring it to your audience (and, more subtly, tailoring your audience to the message) is a complicated and consuming endeavour, but essential. If the results appear poor over the short run, that reflects the scale of the challenge, not least

the conservative attitudes of people and groups: norms do change, but it takes time, absent a stupendous shock. But poor results might also reflect the expertise and understanding of those tasked with achieving influence. That is not for want of available literature on attitude change. The problem is that relevant knowledge and expertise has hitherto been concentrated among specialist military practitioners, rather than the generalist officer corps. That position, in a military whose doctrine rightly places such weight on influence, is no longer tenable. □

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22. Roger Trinquier *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London: Praeger, 1964), p. 19.
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25. Michael Moore, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Dog Eat Dog Films, 2004
26. Paul Ekman, 'Basic Emotions,' in Tim Dalgliesh and Mick Power (eds), *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion* (Chichester: Wiley, 1999); an insightful early account of emotion is Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), especially pp. 139-170
27. On the social psychology of terrorism, see especially the writing of Andrew Silke. For example, see Andrew Silke, 'Courage in Dark Places: Reflections on Terrorist Psychology', *Social Research*, 71/1, 2004, pp.177-198
28. See H H Kelley, 'The process of causal attribution', *American Psychologist* 28, 1973, pp. 107-128
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32. That is, if given a choice, we prefer the certainty of a small gain to a gamble on the chance of a larger one – but if precisely the same odds are expressed in different language – i.e. as a choice between the chance of significant losses or the certainty of a small one, we're often prepared to have a punt on avoiding any loss. Our attitude to risk, in other words, is not rational.
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36. For popular accounts see Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Publishing, 2002), and Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (London: Little, Brown, 2000)
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38. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Knopf, 1968)

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Op MOSHTARAK – An Afghan soldier begins to build relations with local villagers (S/Sgt Mark Jones)