CHAPTER 15

INFORMATION: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INSTRUMENT
Frank L. Jones

Information and the various technologies that disseminate it to people throughout the world are critical to modern life even though some people take it for granted while others resist its impact with Hutterite vigor. The very nature of our personal lives including the means of social interaction as well as the conduct of commerce and government have been changed dramatically by the use of computers and telecommunications equipment. The technological revolution that we have witnessed since the 1970s forced us to coin the term "Information Age" to provide the context for the influence that the computer and the silicon chip have had on our daily activities. The means by which we communicate today are decidedly different from the methods used even a decade ago and the technological advances that are likely to be developed in the next several decades cannot be readily understood or appreciated except by a few visionaries. Nonetheless, we now readily grasp that the methods used to communicate are in constant transformation.

The repercussions of this spectacular and perhaps radical change in technology are numerous. Nonetheless, for the national security professional it has strategic implications. States now must not only deal with other states, but with a variety of sub-national and non-state actors. Diplomacy in a wired world is far different in its conduct than it was even a few decades ago. This is because of the capacity of the global media to transmit information and images throughout the world with astonishing speed but also because the nature of communication today is transnational, domestic audiences cannot be isolated from foreign ones. We live in an increasingly connected world. The other two elements of power, military and economic, have been changed substantially by the wired world as well.

U.S. military doctrine addresses the concept of "information dominance," which is defined as "the degree of information superiority that allows the possessor to use information systems and capabilities to achieve an operational advantage in a conflict or to control the situation in operations short of war, while denying those capabilities to the adversary."[1] Military theorists argue that information dominance is essential to military operational success and relies on a sophisticated understanding of what information is required as well as a capacity to manage the use and dissemination of that knowledge to the right place, at the right time, and for the desired purpose.[2]

Economists talk about information production and use as a modern measurable inventory of assets, a medium of exchange and the target for growth.[3] In other words, knowledge and information are understood as commodities that can be moved thousands of miles in fractions of seconds. Yet, despite this recognition of information as an integral facet of contemporary society and its inclusion as an element of national power by many scholars and strategic thinkers, this element's unique role is often misunderstood.

Since the 1990s, many political scientists and international relations scholars have identified and advocated information as a fourth element of power. Bartlett, Holman, and Somes have argued that the dynamic security environment that we confront today and in the future will alter the relative utility of the other three elements—economic, diplomatic, and military. They suggest that strategists must increasingly consider additional forms of influence, including the growing use of information media to shape the battle

space.

Defining Information as an Instrument of Power

Nonetheless, a common understanding of information as an instrument of power is necessary before proceeding. Information as an element of power has taken on a new meaning in the past decade with the introduction of such concepts as information operations (IO) and information warfare (IW). Unfortunately, both of these terms have disputed and convoluted meanings that encompass numerous aspects of warfare ranging from computer network attack to psychological operations. Consequently, our understanding of information as an element of power is often confused or so ambiguous as to be meaningless to the strategist. We need a more refined definition.

In his seminal article, "Soft Power," Joseph Nye argues that the notion of power is changing in world politics. He contends that displays of power do not reside in resources but in the ability to change the behavior of states, to control the political environment. Military power and economic power have their limitations because of unintended consequences and the costs associated with using these instruments as well as the diffusion of certain equalizers such as technology. Power is being transferred from the "capital rich" to the "information-rich" and that power in world politics has now another dimension, what Nye calls "co-optive power" or "soft power" whereby "one country gets other countries to do what it wants" rather than using force to order other countries to act in a certain manner. He continues by stating that soft power is designed to shape beliefs and preferences of other countries based on the attractiveness of culture and ideology. To succeed in this endeavor, a state must have the ability to communicate its messages to other countries.[4]

Information, as an element of soft power, is a strategic instrument within the context of grand strategy. As an instrument, it relies on the "understanding and use of graphic, intellectual, or sensory imagery, drawing on historical, cultural, linguistic, religious, ethical, and other issues of substance and belief which affect people as individuals or groups within the strategic environment."[5] Thus information as an element of power should be understood as a psychological dimension of warfare, not to be confused with psychological operations which is a component of the information element of power. Therefore, for the U.S. Government, the informational element of power is its ability to employ its information capabilities to influence the attitudes and behaviors of foreign elites and publics. Unfortunately, the informational element is often viewed as a component of the diplomatic or political elements of power, but to view information solely as a subordinate tool is myopic since information is an instrument in its own right. The increasing reach of regional and global communication systems has made it an autonomous tool of statecraft.

It is important to differentiate information as an element of power from the diplomatic and military elements. Regarding the former, the diplomatic element tends to focus primarily on state-to-state communication through the auspices of foreign ministries and other governmental institutions.

The military use of information has largely been placed under the umbrella term "information operations." As mentioned earlier, the functions that constitute IO have been a subject of debate for several years. The definition in Army Field Manual 3-0, June 2001, will suffice for our purposes: "Actions taken to affect adversaries' and influence others' decisionmaking process, information and information systems while protecting one's own. . . ."[6] Consequently, this definition could include such practices as computer network operations (attack and defense), deception, and psychological operations. For most people, however, information operations are synonymous with computers. This meaning is inconsistent with the objective of influencing foreign audiences. It confuses the technology that is used with the intention.

Instead, there must be some basic principles to define information as an element of power. William Kiehl, a U.S. public diplomacy expert, offers a useful term—influence and perception management. Influence and perception management may be defined as "the use of the tools of influence and perception management in peace or in war to influence positively the perceptions, attitudes and actions of publics to advance the interests of a nation."[7] Kiehl makes no distinction between foreign and domestic audiences. Such a distinction must be noted because of U.S. law. The Smith-Mundt Act, which was enacted in 1948, prohibits the domestic dissemination of any "information about the United States, its people, and its policies" prepared for foreign dissemination.[8] In essence, the Congress was concerned about U.S. Government agencies propagandizing the American public. Therefore, in the U.S. context, the emphasis is on influencing foreign publics although many practitioners argue that this distinction is no longer realistic, given the transnational nature of information dissemination by the global media.[9]

Regardless, Kiehl's term is more apt as it speaks to the outcomes that a strategist wants to effect in utilizing information as an instrument of power, that is, influencing the behaviors and actions of allies, friends, neutrals, and enemies in order to attain national security objectives while at the same time recognizing that to influence publics one must make use of various tools. The U.S. Government uses four tools for influence and perception management. They are public diplomacy, public affairs, international broadcasting, and psychological operations.

The Four Components of the Informational Element

The ability to influence the attitudes and behaviors of foreign audiences historically has been a government's ability to further its national strategic goals through an integrated, synchronized interagency process using the aforementioned tools as its channels.

Public diplomacy is one of the earliest tools that the founders of this nation used in attempting to influence foreign publics. One can argue that the Declaration of Independence is not only a statement of the aspirations of some American colonists to break from England and create a new philosophy of democratic governance, but it is also a well-crafted propaganda document directed at the English and European publics to justify their actions against the monarch and Parliament.

There is no generally accepted definition of public diplomacy. In fact, its meanings have changed over the years and with various presidential administrations. Nonetheless, it is generally understood to be the careful engagement primarily of targeted sectors of foreign publics (individuals and groups) in order to promote U.S. national interests through understanding, information, and influence.

Public diplomacy activities are carried out by the Department of State and consist of two elements. The first are information activities. These activities include publications and electronic media, overseas information resource centers, speakers, and specialists who meet with foreign publics and governments in various venues, and various video and teleconference programs. The other aspect of public diplomacy is educational and cultural exchanges such as academic exchanges, the Fulbright program, and international visitors programs, to name a few.

Public affairs is the second component. It is the provision of information to the public, press, and other institutions regarding the goals, policies and activities of the U.S. Government. It seeks to foster an understanding of these goals through a dialogue with individual citizens, groups, and institutions, as well as the domestic and international media. Nonetheless, the focus of public affairs is to inform the U.S. domestic audience.

The primary departmental offices concerned with public affairs as it related to the conduct of national security policy are the Department of State's office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs.

The third component, international broadcasting, is conducted under the auspices of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), which became the independent, autonomous entity responsible for all U.S. Government and government sponsored, non-military, international broadcasting in October 1999. This was the result of the 1998 Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act (Public Law 105-277), the single most important legislation affecting U.S. international broadcasting since the early 1950s.

The Board consists of nine members, eight private citizens and the Secretary of State (the director of the U.S. Information Agency represented the U.S. Government on the board until that agency was abolished in 1999). Congress intended the composition of the BBG to protect the integrity of the journalists working in international broadcasting and to maintain their ability to operate under the Voice of America Charter.

The Voice of America Charter, which was drafted in 1960 and later signed into law in July 1976 by President Gerald Ford, provides the principles that guide U.S. Governmental international broadcasting. The Charter indicates that the long-range interests of the United States are served by communicating directly to the peoples of the world and by gaining the attention and respect of these listeners. Therefore, three principles pertain to achieve this end:

- VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.

- VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought.

- VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.

The U.S. Government's international broadcasting programs are transmitted directly to a mass audience rather than through an embassy. These programs are disseminated on a daily basis by the individual BBG international broadcasters: the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Sawa, Radio Farda, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Radio Free Asia (RFA), Radio and TV Marti, and WORLDNET Television, with the assistance of the International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB), which provides administrative and other support for the broadcasters.

The final component of the informational element of power is international military information (IMI), better known as overt psychological operations. Psychological operations are defined as operations to induce or reinforce attitudes and behavior that are favorable to U.S. foreign policy or military objectives in selected foreign audiences through planned operations to convey selected information in order to influence emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately behavior and to accomplish this end through truthful means.[10] Historically, psychological operations have been conducted at the operational and tactical level by designated psychological operations units and less at the strategic level since the modes of information dissemination at that level belong to the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Experts typically view IMI as having two facets. The first is information communicated to foreign audiences through the execution of the regional combatant commander's Theater Security Cooperation Plan using such measures as forward deployments, military-to-military contacts, unit visits, exercises, and conferences. IMI also includes overt peacetime psychological operations programs (OP-3), which was established in the early 1980s. OP-3 are annual programs that regional commanders have coordinated with

the chiefs of U.S. diplomatic missions to support and provide for the conduct of overt psychological operations in support of U.S. regional objectives.

Using the Power of Information—The U.S. Historical Experience

As indicated earlier, influence and perception management has been understood as an important aspect of American foreign policy since the founders declared their independence from Great Britain. However, it was not an institutionalized or a highly developed tool until the American experience in World War I, with the creation of the Committee on Public Information in 1917. It was at this time that the U.S. Government first comprehended and valued the importance of communicating with foreign publics and opinionmakers to promote its foreign policy goals, dismiss rumors, and counteract disinformation and propaganda. Over the succeeding decades, it has created a number of organizations, usually of limited duration, and utilized a variety of media to communicate with foreign audiences. Media have ranged from the technologically simple such as printed materials, to the more sophisticated such as radio broadcasts, film, television, Internet websites, and direct satellite broadcasting. The purpose for establishing these organizations and using these media is to inform and influence foreign audiences, whether friendly or not, to understand and accept and support, or at least tolerate, U.S. activities and policies. Yet, the U.S. Government's overall investment in these media has been minimal, and its attention to the importance of this instrument has been sporadic at best.

Nonetheless, beginning with the Cold War, some Presidents have understood the value of an information campaign directed at foreign audiences. For example, in 1951, President Harry Truman created the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) to provide for more effective planning, coordination, and conduct of psychological operations within the structure of approved reporting directly to the National Security Council.[11]

This belief in the use of information as an instrument of power was not necessarily shared by the administrations that followed. In some instances, the use of this instrument became too narrowly focused because a national-level strategic vision was lacking or was beleaguered by bureaucratic resistance and poor operational coordination among the responsible agencies. Scholars and practitioners have maintained that these problems manifested themselves during the Vietnam War and festered through the 1970s and into the 1980s as a foreign policy consensus in the United States unraveled. It can be argued as well that within the Department of Defense starting in the late 1950s, psychological operations, then called psychological warfare, became an element of the Army's special warfare mission and therefore lost its strategic focus, becoming instead a device for use in counterinsurgency. Regardless of these reasons, what does seem clear is that the post-Vietnam war era signaled the beginning of a long period of decline and ultimately degeneration, until President Ronald Reagan's election.[12]

President Reagan, the "Great Communicator," appreciated and used information as a fundamental part of his administration's national security strategy to destroy the Soviet Union. National Security Decision Directives 45, 77, and 130, which were signed in 1982, 1983, and 1984, respectively, emphasized the importance of public diplomacy, particularly, international radio broadcasting and psychological operations. Public diplomacy programs were acknowledged as a strategic means of implementing U.S. national security policy and not merely supplementary to diplomacy.[13] Carl Builder concluded in his book, *The Icarus Syndrome*, that the barriers of the Cold War were "breached not by military forces, diplomacy, alliances, or economic power, but by information spewing out of television sets, telephones, audio and video tapes, computers, and facsimile machines, into the minds of the individuals."[14]

President William Clinton recognized the importance of strategic information dissemination and signed Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 68, International Public Information, in 1999. The objective of this directive was to use international public information activities to improve the ability of the U.S. Government to prevent and mitigate crises and to promote understanding and support for U.S. foreign policy initiatives around the globe. PDD-68, however, was not directed against a particular adversary in order to defeat that opponent. Instead, it was developed in response to primarily the horrors of Rwanda and the use of "Hate Radio" by Hutu extremists to incite violence against Tutsis and moderate Hutus, but also because of the U.S. peacekeeping experience in Haiti and Bosnia. Although the directive had its flaws, the absence of senior official support for timely implementation of its provisions, insufficient staff, and no funding specifically targeted for its purposes ensured that it remained a half-measure. Yet, like its predecessor directives, with a change in administration, what little progress had been made in underscoring the importance of influence and perception management was lost since there was no organizational structure in place to ensure continuity.

Diplomats, members of Congress, and others recognized this situation in the aftermath of September 11. Shortly after those tragic events, members of Congress, practitioners, and scholars wrote opinion pieces decrying the U.S. Government's inability to communicate its message to foreign audiences. Congressional committees held hearings dedicated to understanding the U.S. Government's public diplomacy role in the war on terrorism. The Department of State enlisted the Advertising Council to assist in the creation of public service announcements to be used overseas. This measure only highlighted that the U.S. Government had no strategic information policy or plan that had been forged in the interagency process and that would synchronize the efforts of the Departments of State and Defense as well as other agencies that can contribute to this effort. Instead, the administration was reacting to events as many of its predecessors had done, and when it did act, it did not always tailor its message to foreign audiences accurately. Eventually, the Bush administration recognized that it needed to implement several actions in the "War on Terrorism" to include reestablishing media and information capabilities that had been eliminated because of limited resources and implementing a formal interagency coordination process at the senior level.[15] President Bush also established by executive order an Office of Global Communications in the White House to advise the President and other U.S. Government leaders on how to achieve the most effective means for the U.S. Government to ensure consistency in messages that will promote the interests of the United States abroad, prevent misunderstanding, build support for and among coalition partners of the United States, and inform international audiences.[16]

It is too early to determine if such measures will be long lasting. Historically, the U.S. Government's awareness of information as a critical element of power has been uneven, always receiving more attention during crises. Nonetheless, the events of September 11, as well as the "War on Terrorism," have sensitized strategic leaders to the importance of not only having a more effective apparatus for disseminating the U.S. Government's message but the creation of specialized programs primarily aimed at communicating with the Arab and the wider Muslim community. Yet, even these efforts are not panaceas, as there are limitations due to the complexities involved to how successful the U.S. Government can be in influencing foreign audiences.

Controlling the Information Environment

Control of the information environment at the strategic level has always been a critical requirement for U.S. political leaders. Every act of government has a psychological effect on the nation's foreign relations whether it is a trade delegation visit, a diplomatic summit or a military training exercise conducted with

allies and friends. Numerous administrations have attempted to consolidate strategic information capabilities and develop an information strategy, but the task is difficult for a number of reasons ranging from the mundane—such as competing bureaucratic demands and interests and the availability of resources—to the more complicated elements of time, image, and ideas. These three elements, according to Professor Barry Fulton, underscore that a government's ability to influence the attitudes and behaviors of foreign audiences is difficult and limited.

There is a decided belief that if an information campaign is well designed and directed toward the correct audience, it will change attitudes and behavior. As Fulton points out, time past is often forgotten, that is, any message will be filtered through culture, history, and experience, and these variables have a tendency to distort the message. Further, he argues that governments tend to concern themselves with today's message or with short-term goals while changing attitudes and behaviors takes years to accomplish. Thus few government leaders are in office long enough to sustain a information campaign over an extended period, and few want to dedicate resources to address problems that may be decades away.[17]

The second element is image, that is, we act on the pictures that we perceive and retain, not on the complex reality of which these pictures are a part. In other words, how people perceive images is individualistic and it is difficult to predict how broadcasted images will be received, what reality they may represent.[18] As Carnes Lord has pointed out, success in psychological warfare is more than the conflict of ideas, ideologies, and opinions. It is also about cultural and political symbols, about perceptions and emotions. The informational content of television pictures is low or nonexistent, and they are often "torn out of any intelligible context" so as to arouse emotions that hinder rational discussion.[19]

Lastly, ideas are more than the messages. Ideas are best nurtured in dialogue—listening is as important as speaking. Fulton refers to the work of two RAND Corporation researchers, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, who suggest that there are three realms of information. The first is cyberspace—the global network of electronic connectivity, primarily the internet plus electronic information held by corporations and governments. The second is the infosphere, which consists of cyberspace and broadcast, print, and other media, as well as command, control and communication systems of the military. The third is noosphere, the realm of knowledge and wisdom. If one focuses on cyberspace and the infosphere, then the tendency is to concentrate our attention on the media and the message. Fulton argues that the contemporary strategist must go beyond these two dimensions and become comfortable in the more abstract noosphere where he must learn to think in terms of ideas and values.[20]

Conclusion

Clearly, the times warrant a greater recognition of the distinctiveness and importance of information as an element of national power given the technological advances in communications that have occurred over the past three decades. These advances have furnished new tools of communication, influenced not only the structures and processes of public and private sector organizations, but also given rise to a multitude of non-state actors that now wield power in international affairs, and transformed political and economic relationships domestically and globally. In short, information is now understood to be an essential instrument of power and influence that when used strategically can be effective in achieving national interests.

Senior leaders and strategists who do not comprehend that information is a strategic element surrender the advantage to those who do. As General Wesley Clark underscores in his book, *Waging Modern War*, the efforts of NATO and the U.S. Government to tell their story during Kosovo and to counter the Serb media

campaign were inadequate. He declares that the importance of attending to media coverage was not lost on the military and political leaders in the West.[21] The validity of his pronouncement is subject to debate. His experience is not. Strategic leaders must understand the value that the components of the informational element of power can bring to the strategic art. Using information effectively is more than networks and hardware. Instead, the synchronized and timely dissemination of a relevant message consistent with the audience's values is critical to achieving national security objectives.

Notes - Chapter 15

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