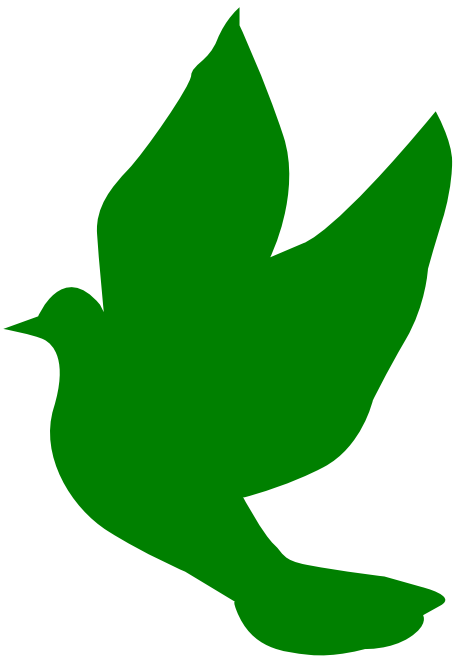
INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE OPERATIONS

Strategic Communication: A Political and Operational Prerequisite for Successful Peace Operations

ROBERT GORDON
PETER LOGE



Occasional Papers
No. 7
NOVEMBER 2015

THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE OPERATIONS

The Challenges Forum is a strategic and dynamic platform for constructive dialogue among leading policymakers, practitioners and academics on key issues and developments in peace operations. The Forum contributes to shaping the debate by identifying critical challenges facing military, police and civilan peace operations, by promoting awareness of emerging issues and by generating recommendations for solutions for the consideration of the broader international peace operations community. It is a global network of Partners representing 47 peace operations departments and organizations from 22 countries.

www.challengesforum.org

Strategic Communication: A Political and Operational Prerequisite for Successful Peace Operations

ROBERT GORDON
PETER LOGE

Occasional
Papers
No. 7
NOVEMBER 2015

ISBN 978-91-87927-09-6

Also available at http://www.challengesforum.org

Suggested citation: Robert Gordon, Peter Loge, *Strategic Communication: A Political and Operational Prerequisite for Successful Peace Operations*, Challenges Forum Occasional Papers 2015:7 (November 2015).

Editors: Jibecke Joensson and Nick Birnback.

Printed in Sweden 2016 by Allduplo, Stockholm.

Contents

Preface

The world of UN peace operations is changing. Widespread and violent conflict is challenging a range of countries—from Mali and the Central African Republic, to Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo The international community's peacekeepers are charged to stave off humanitarian catastrophes and brutalities in the most complex and challenging environments.

The Challenges Forum Partnership in its Report on *Designing Mandates and Capabilities for Future Peace Operations*, which was presented to the United Nations Secretary-General in January 2015, includes an extensive assessment of these changing conditions for peace operations.

New and social media have the potential to improve both the scope and effectiveness of peace operations if integrated into the UN's planning process. A more strategic approach to communication in peace operations is fundamentally important for two interrelated reasons. Strategic communication is decisive in the process of gaining the trust and support of the host country population. A public information approach, where information is accessible to the public ensures mission transparency. It should also, however, enable the public to communicate with the UN, asking questions and commenting on the information that is put out there; thereby providing a space for dialogue that would otherwise be recondite. In this way, communication serves the important purpose of building trust and installing confidence among the people on the ground. Further, strategic communication can help the UN strengthen its situational awareness, which by extension contributes to reducing the vulnerability of UN field personnel.

The UN Secretary-General's High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations presented its findings in June 2015 and made it clear that in 21st century missions, both conventional and unconventional means have to be adapted and combined to fit the specific conditions on the ground. The need to enhance strategic communication in peace operations was raised. A few days later, the Challenges Forum Partners, United States Institute of Peace and Folke Bernadotte Academy, in cooperation with the United States

Department of State, United States Department of Defence, the US Army War College Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute and the United Nations Department for Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support Public Affairs Section, hosted a workshop dedicated to *Strategic Communications for the New Era of Peace Operations* in Washington DC, resulting in eight recommendations which the Challenges Forum Partnership works to implement either through its own efforts or supporting and/or advocating for others. This Occasional Paper is one of the related outcomes of this work.[1]

The Challenges Forum Partnership will continue to explore how strategic communication can strengthen UN peace operations. A project to tell the story of UN Peace Operations through exploring different narratives of the difference that UN peacekeepers have done, and continue to do, in people's lives are currently under way.

On behalf of the Challenges Forum Partnership, I would like to thank Major General (Retd.) Robert Gordon, Senior Adviser of the Challenges Forum and Former Force Commander, UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), and Mr Peter Loge, Vice President for External Relations at the United States Institute of Peace, for writing this timely occasional paper. We are also grateful to Mr Nick Birnback, Director of Public Affairs, United Nations Departments for Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, and Dr Jibecke Joensson, Acting Head of Policy and Best Practices, Challenges Forum, for their invaluable comments and contribution to the paper. Finally, thanks are extended to Ms Andrea Rabus and Ms Johanna Muhrbeck in the Challenges Forum Secretariat, for their contributions to the publication process.

The present paper argues that strategic communication should be at the centre of 21st century UN peace operations. Supported by key assumptions of communication theory, the authors elaborate on why strategic communication is required for successful peace operations. It is my hope that this paper will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the applicability of strategic communication in peace operations. The conclusions drawn by this paper is intended to generate concrete results, but also to encourage dialogue on, and greater support for, the development of truly strategic approaches to communication in support of peace operations. It is a call for the international community, the UN and its Member States, to

[1] For more information including the six recommendations, please visit www.challengesforum.org.

increase resources and strengthen competences for the benefit of UN peace operations' strategic communication.

Annika Hilding Norberg
Director, Challenges Forum

November 2015

Executive Summary

This paper argues that strategic communication theory can help explain the success of those who call for violence, can help improve the success of those who promote peace operations and is itself the core of successful peace operations. The power of language to incite violence and inspire peace has long been recognised. New and social media, the diffusion of mobile technology and the speed of communication have recently driven home both the perils and promise of powerful rhetoric. At the same time, as UN peace operations continue to reach record levels, those who engage in the difficult and dangerous work of making, keeping and building peace are faced with the need to justify their approach to a, sometimes sceptical, audience of the public, press and policymakers. In these increasingly hostile and complex environments, it is perhaps more important than ever for UN peace operations to be able to communicate strategically with both its local and international audiences. This occasional paper explores and demonstrates how the tools of communication theory, which date back at least as far as Aristotle, can help explain the current success of violent extremists online, and also can help those who engage in peace operations better explain and promote their work, as well as better do their work. The authors therefore call for communication strategies to be hard-wired into the UN's planning processes as well as for senior practitioners to be more conversant with the principles and instruments of communication theory and doctrine.

Abbreviations

BCE	Before Common/Current/ Christian Era
DPA	Department of Political Affairs
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
UN	United Nations
UUAV	Unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles

1. Introduction

There is a growing recognition that United Nations (UN) peace operations require more and better strategic communication, but there is little clarification of what precisely it is that people ought to be doing more of, or be better at.

Peace operations are essentially about persuading people to use means other than violence to resolve conflict.[1] They are about the strategic use of politics and persuasion rather than the strategic use of force and violence. Those who traditionally think and write about peace operations are steeped in international relations theory and foreign policy analysis but do not tend to have a deep understanding of communication or persuasion theory. We suggest that supplementing traditional theoretical approaches to peace operations with approaches informed by communication and persuasion theory can help both policymakers and peace practitioners better understand, prevent and respond to violence.

It has become well-rehearsed that contemporary UN missions increasingly face a range of violent threats and risks. As the Report of the UN High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations states, peace operations struggle in 'more complex political contexts and difficult operating environments […]A growing number of violent extremist and terrorist groups represent a particularly malignant threat to international peace and security. Their use of shocking violence, exploitation of distorted but powerful religious symbolism and absolutism presents a grave challenge to peace. […] These militant groups

[1] In this paper the term peace operations is used as defined by the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations to include: a broad suite of tools and instruments that range from special envoys and mediators, political missions (including peacebuilding missions), regional preventive diplomacy offices, observation missions (both ceasefire and electoral missions) to small, technical specialist missions (such as electoral support missions), multidisciplinary operations both large and small drawing on civilian, military and police personnel to support peace process implementation (and have included even transitional authorities with governance functions), as well as advance missions for planning. United Nations, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People*, Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, A/70/95-S/2015/446, 17 June 2015, p. 20, para. 18.

harness localized grievances to radical transnational agendas, and use today's global connectedness to move information, money, fighters and weapons across states and into and between conflict areas.'[2] It has therefore become a much quoted and stark truism that peacekeepers today are not just caught up in the cross fire of conflict but actually sit in the cross hairs of those willing and keen to target them. They are attacked for what they are and not just for where they are, or for what they do. The result is that 'approximately two thirds of UN personnel are now operating in contexts of significant levels of ongoing violence.'[3] UN mission personnel face attacks and threats in a wide range of missions from Afghanistan and Iraq through to North and East Africa and the Sahel.

The perpetrators of such violence have a range of motivations including terrorism, violent extremism and transnational and national criminal activity. In response, the UN has found itself obliged to deploy increasing levels of security capacity in order to protect its mission, its personnel and the people embraced by its mandate. Notwithstanding the technical and technological shortcomings inherent in any *ad hoc* multinational operation, there are intrinsic political limitations to how much success the UN can hope to achieve in such an, often asymmetrical, environment by the use of hard power alone. UN peace operations, based as they are upon the principle of consent, will always remain an essentially political process requiring the skilful use of soft power. It is axiomatic that the deployment of such power requires good communications and when in support of a strategic political endeavour such as a peace process, this communication needs to be strategic. But it also works the other way around. People around the world have recently been reminded about the power of strategic communication to marshal forces for violence. One scholar bluntly calls the online efforts of ISIS and its wider operations in the Middle East a 'Cyber Jihad'.[4] The UN is not alone in needing to respond to such threats, which appear to emerge through the artful manipulation

[2] UN, *Uniting Our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnerships and People*, A/70/95-S/2015/446, 2015, p. 19, para., 12.
[3] David Haeri, Director, Policy, Evaluation and Training Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, United Nations, delivering remarks on behalf of Hervé Ladsous, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations, on 'New Challenges and Priorities for UN Peacekeeping', during the Challenges Annual Forum 2014, held on 14-16 October 2014 in Beijing. For more information please visit the Challenges Forum website; challengesforum.org (accessed 14 September 2015).
[4] Christina, S., Liang, 'Cyber Jihad: Understanding and Countering Islamic State Propaganda', *GCSP Policy Paper 2015/2* (2015), 1-12. See also her presentation delivered at the Challenges Forum Workshop on *Strategic Communications for the New Era of Peace Operations*, held on 23 June 2015 in Washington DC available for download on the Challenges Forum website; challengesforum.org (accessed 14 September 2015).

of social media. Unsurprisingly, much of the international community's discussion about how to respond has focused on social media. Certainly, the extremist tactic of using social media to promote violence is worthy of close attention. Indeed, such attention brings its own rewards in terms of better environmental awareness as well as improved staff safety and security. Tapping the seams of the social media gives those who have that capability a rich source of information about social and cultural attitudes, intentions and behaviour. It also can provide empirical evidence of changes in these parameters and therefore can play an important role in the measurement and evaluation of effectiveness, as well as in the tailoring of messages to key audiences. But it still begs the larger question of the role that strategic communication plays in promoting and preventing violent conflict and in the conduct of international peace and security policy more broadly.

Strategic communication plays a critical role in both the promotion and the practice of foreign policy. Strategic communication is how those who conduct foreign policy in international capitals and on the ground in conflict zones both *talk about* their work and how they *do* their work. This is as true for peacekeepers working to implement complex mandates and prevent violence as it is for diplomats negotiating peace treaties. As such, the successful promotion and delivery of peace operations requires an understanding of both the theory and practice of strategic communication.

Against this background, this paper first asks why we need to think about strategic communication at all. Second, it defines strategic communication drawing upon some of the classics. Third, the paper looks at how to communicate strategically and fourth, look deeper into how to communicate the work of peace operations strategically. Finally, some concluding thoughts are presented on why the UN needs to communicate more strategically in order to be both politically and operationally equipped to meet the threats of today, and perhaps even more so, the threats of tomorrow.

2. The Why of Strategic Communication

When people talk about strategic communication, they typically have in mind techniques for promoting something. In fact, it is often seen as the ancillary but necessary task of selling one's ideas to otherwise under- or ill-informed policymakers, reporters, donors and to what is often a sceptical public. For many, strategic communication is done by the clever on behalf of the smart.

Strategic communication within peace operations is more often regarded as a thing to do, rather than as a holistic way of thinking about doing things. And even when strategic communication is seen as necessary, it is often viewed as a tactic that needs to be deployed rather than as an intellectual framework and approach that needs to be applied. In other words, it is perceived to be about the use of Twitter, and not about the role of social media in policy formation or in the construction and maintenance of communities. In this context strategic communication is too often seen as a set of actions without a unifying theory or logic, a series of ends that hopefully add up to another result rather than being a conceptual framework that drives both understanding and results.

This limited view of strategic communication is a missed opportunity for the UN and for peace operations. The theories that explain *how* communicating *about* the work is effective are the same theories that explain *why* the work *of* communication is effective. The same tools used to *promote* the work are those that *do* the work. This is neither new, nor controversial. However, those who study strategic communication, often, do not consider the applications and connections to the work of peace operations. They tend to go into jobs that require them to explain things (public relations, for example) without having thought much about international relations or conflict resolution theory. Similarly, those who have jobs that involve conflict resolution and peace and security issues have typically spent much of their education focusing on political science, foreign policy or peace studies, but little time reading. Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric* or Kinder and Iyengar's *News that Matters*.[5]

5 Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric* (Penguin Classics: London, 1991) and Donald R. Kinder and Shanto Lyengar, *News that Matters* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1989).

3. Defining Strategic Communication

The term 'strategic communication' is frequently used, but rarely defined. A clear definition of the term can go a long way to help locate strategic communication at the centre of peace operations, and ensure that the work of both strategic communication and peace operations are as effective as possible. The first issue of the *International Journal of Strategic Communication* defines strategic communication as, 'the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission.'[6] The Journal has been published for less than a decade, but the idea of strategic communication is ancient. One of the first communications texts is Aristotle's *The Art of Rhetoric*, in which he defines rhetoric as 'the power to observe the persuasiveness of which any particular matter admits.'[7] He explains that rhetoric is persuasive and uses a range of tools to achieve its persuasive ends; the core tenants of what we now call strategic communication. Out of the three parts of a speech that he defines, Aristotle points to the audience as the most important one, before both the speaker and the subject.[8]

Successful strategic communication uses a range of tools (print, radio, social media, one-on-one conversations, speeches and so forth) to try to get a specified person or group to take a defined action. The UN's own Staff College teaches 'Communication is strategic when it supports and promotes a management objective. The ultimate goal of communication is to facilitate a change of behaviour rather than merely to disseminate information'. As Hallahan et al write, 'central to the issue of strategic communication is the idea of influence [...] persuasion is the essence of strategic communication.' Just as there is concern today that clever persuasion can be used to manipulate or hurt people or undermine society, Aristotle, Plato and other ancients

[6] Kirk Hallahan, Derina Holtzhausen, Betteke van Ruler, Dejan Vercic and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, 'Defining strategic communication', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, vol. 1/Issue 1 (2007), p. 3.
[7] Aristotle (1991), p. 74.
[8] Aristotle notes that rhetoric is not persuasion but rather figuring out what is persuasive – he then goes on to explain what those elements are and provides a textbook on how to be persuasive. See Aristotle (1991), p. 80.

were concerned that those who were good at public speaking but who were unethical would use their powers for evil rather than good. Moreover, just as political consultants and public relations practitioners get criticised for favouring the slick over the substantive, Plato accused the sophists (who advised people on how to construct persuasive arguments) of 'poisoning the soul'.[9]

Theory and practice of strategic communication has been both at the centre of democratic governance and at the heart of revolutions for centuries. The technologies and pace of communication may change but the messaging, approach, challenges and opportunities fundamentally have not. That rhetorical skill and adept use of the communication mechanisms of the day are central to war, peace and social transformation has long been recognised. One of the most famous examples of an examination of war rhetoric is Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, written about 431 BCE.[10]

More recently, Bernard Bailyn opens *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* by quoting a letter from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson: 'The Revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen years before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington.'[11] The revolution, for Adams was won in pamphlets and newspapers, the popular media of the day, calling for a change in government. Bailyn goes on to quote Orwell on the pamphlets of the time, analysis that could just as easily apply to blogs, vines and other social media today. 'One has complete freedom of expression, including, if one chooses, the freedom to be scurrilous, abusive, and seditious…[A pamphlet] can be in prose or in verse, it can consist largely of maps or statistics or quotations, it can take the form of a story, a fable, a letter, an essay, a dialogue, or a piece of 'reportage.' All that is required of it is that it shall be topical, polemical, and short.'[12] The pamphlet then was what Twitter is today– anyone could say anything (and often did) in support of an official or an action, and anyone could call for peace or violence in the name of a strong belief.

[9] J. B. Skemp, *Plato* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1976), p. 52.
[10] Janet Hart, 'Cracking the Code: Narrative and Political Mobilization in the Greek Resistance', *Social Science History*, vol. 16/Issue 4 (1992), pp. 631-668.
[11] Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University press: Cambridge, Mass., 1967), p. 1.
[12] Bailyn (1967), p. 2.

4. How to Communicate Strategically

With a definition of the term and a bit of historical context, it is possible to understand how to do strategic communication better, and how better strategic communication can lead to a stronger consensus for, and understanding of, what constitutes more effective peace operations.

From the varied definitions of persuasion and strategic communication, it is possible to derive a multi-step process for successful strategic communication: i) define a clear goal or outcome; ii) determine who has power to effectuate or block that outcome; and iii) learn what those with power find persuasive and from whom they find it persuasive. This conceptually simple approach keeps the focus on those with power over the decision to take or block a given action. The approach also encourages thinking broadly about how to reach a decision, without presupposing a specific tactic, or favouring one approach over another.

The best strategic communication efforts have three additional characteristics: i) they exploit the multidimensional nature of issues; ii) they remind rather than tell; and iii) and they work from strategy to tactics. A helpful explanation of the difference between strategy and tactics comes from the world of chess, where strategy is explained as a long-term plan or idea. While a tactic is a single action meant to make an immediate gain—a move without intent beyond the square to which the piece is pushed—a strategic move is one taken to set up other moves.[13]

Peace operations work towards a strategic goal or vision, articulated by the international community as represented by the UN. The delivery of this strategic goal is the business of the specific missions working at their operational level and managing a broad range of tactical activities. The use of Twitter, like a pushing a pawn, is only a tactic. Strategy explains why

[13] Chess for novices, *The difference between chess strategy and tactics,* http://www.chessfornovices.com/chessstrategyvstactics.html, (Accessed 6 April 2015).

that pawn was moved to that square at that moment, and what the player will do with the other pieces as a result. Setting up a Twitter account is similarly a single move or activity in a higher level effort, and should be seen in the context of other communication activities such as establishing a radio station, holding meetings/briefings with policymakers and target audiences, running press conferences and public outreach events, etc. However, it is worth noting that such, more traditional communications are linear; an objective is identified, an audience is targeted, a message is constructed, and then appropriately transmitted downwards and outwards. The phenomenon of social media, which is new and with which peace practitioners currently struggle, is that the process is circular. Debates are generated by anyone, however ill informed or malevolent, and feed on themselves. They become a running dialogue. If you are not positively engaged in this dialogue 'truths' become rooted and widely circulated, which may have no basis in fact. In other words, this part of the communication playing field can become damagingly uncontested if some element of counter-messaging is not included. It also constitutes an underdeveloped area in terms of proactive messaging that can serve preventive purposes.

In successful peace operations, the best communication strategies do not respond readily to single sector approaches. Any given issue is 'about' a range of different things that are similarly complex and often in tension. What the issue is about, its policy frame, determines the range of policy options available. For example, capital punishment can be about murderers and innocent victims on one hand, or about fair trials and innocent people on death row on the other hand. If the debate is about the former, then the policy outcomes are almost certain to be more executions; if the debate is about the latter, then the policy outcomes are almost certain to be fewer executions.[14]

Improving human rights and gender equality, developing a rule of law and fostering a climate of no impunity has to be managed alongside working with an (often corrupt and predatory) host nation government, furthering a political peace process and dealing robustly with violent non-state actors. All these activities themselves require good communication. There is tension here and compromises are inevitable, but ideally they are made within an overall mission strategy. This strategy provides the overarching

[14] Baumgartner Frank R., Suzanna de Boef and Amber Boydstun, *The Decline of the Death Penalty and the Discovery of Innocence* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2008).

and integrating narrative or story. Developing and then articulating that story in an understandable way is one of the prerequisites of good strategic communication. Former UN Under Secretary General of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and Member of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, Lynn Pascoe has referred to this as: first developing and then selling the (good) product of UN peace operations.[15]

The most effective persuasion reminds people of what they believe to be true rather than trying to get them to believe something new. A smart analysis of any policy framework, be it an understanding of the world, a judicial system or a peace process will find the policies that reinforce an existing belief and use the new policy or point of discussion to advance that existing view. This approach has its roots in Aristotle, who wrote that it is easy to 'praise Athens among Athenians' and that people like to hear that which they agree with.[16] An explanatory, if probably apocryphal, example comes from a strategic communications professional who was asked to help a group block a planned expansion of a local airport. The group was concerned about the impact of the expansion on a local, endangered frog. The consultant noted that the expansion would also increase traffic. People already do not like traffic, so reminding them of how bad traffic is and that more flights meant more traffic would be more effective than teaching residents about the impact of the airport expansion on the rare frog. The most effective argument (traffic) was not the one that brought the advocates to the effort (frogs); both are true (something can be bad for traffic and frogs at the same time). The question was which approach would work best with those whose views mattered (the target audience).

Accordingly, the best strategic communication campaigns determine the policy framework most likely to most resonate with the policymaker and target audience, and then find the best ways to fill in that framework. This is as true for communication efforts opposing airport expansions as it is for multidimensional efforts in support of complex peace processes. It is important to note that this approach does not rely on head-to-head debate,

[15] Challenges Forum Workshop on *Strategic Communications for the New Era of Peace Operations*, held on 23 June 2015 in Washington DC. For more information including a policy brief summarising the discussion and identifying eight recommendations for the next steps and to watch the workshop discussions in full, please visit the Challenges Forum website; challengesforum.org (accessed 14 September 2015).
[16] Aristotle (1991), p 108. See also Aristotle on enthymemes and maxims, for example: '[listeners]…are delighted if someone in generalizing should arrive at opinions that they hold in the particular case', Aristotle (1991), p. 194.

but rather on identifying non-contradictory arguments, one of which is more compelling than the other. Both frogs and traffic matter, both are 'true' impacts of expanding the hypothetical airport—one is just more compelling than the other.[17]

[17] For more on non-contradictory arguments, see for example Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan, D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1993).

5. How to Communicate the Work of Peace Operations Strategically

That peace operations require good strategic communications is undoubtedly well understood by peace practitioners, but too often the requirement is less well delivered. An obstacle is that strategic communication is often viewed primarily tactically—how to use a medium to deliver a message. For example, mention has already been made of radical and extremist groups' use of social media to gain recruits and to influence behaviour. Such analysis is important in itself, but often missing is the nature of the broader message, and a consideration of how to deliver that message to those who need to hear it. The analysis tends to start with the medium (in this case Twitter), then moves to how the audience interacts with the medium (on mobile devices). Little time is spent thinking about the audience's need(s) being met by the message and how those needs could otherwise be met with other messages and through other media.

Social media such as Twitter is a means of delivering a message, just as pamphlets were long before social media existed. It is not the means that are the cause of revolutions and violent eruptions. Rather they give voice to broader dissatisfaction and channel that dissatisfaction into action. Seen through this larger lens, if the goal is to get groups in conflict to work together, the question is not; how do we tweet that individuals should support these groups working together? The question is; what are the ways in which these people see the situation? What message speaks to what audience? Once we have an answer to this question, we can then ask; if there are ways to use these views to foster peace rather than violence to resolve conflict? What is it about the audience's view of its situation that can be used to advance the goal of peace? Note that the question is not; how can we argue against the position being taken that is driving the conflict? But rather; what other position can we argue from that results in peaceful action? However, it bears repeating that to gain any traction in this debate it has to be joined and analysed. This requires a mind and resource shift from deploying mechanisms just for top down messaging to having the capability to engage in a

more client-driven, inter-active approach that enables a continuous dialogue with society and the target audience.

A related question is that of the messenger, who has the power to bring these groups together? Who can prevent them from coming together? Using our example of the hypothetical airport, someone driving a mini-van full of kids and groceries with whom the target audience can identify is more likely to be persuasive when talking about traffic than someone whose sole passion is rare frogs. Similarly in peace operations, to use an obvious example, it is always better to use women peace practitioners to talk to local women about reconciliation and human rights and their role in the peace process.[18] More broadly the use of national staff to deliver key messages and show national ownership of the issue is usually more powerful than the use of international staff who do not share the local culture.

Only when the message and the messenger have been decided should the question of the most appropriate medium then be considered. For instance, Twitter might be what ISIS is using, but it may not be the best means of delivering a message; that a medium is being used effectively does not necessarily mean that it is the best one. Would SMS texting work better or would the radio? In Africa, where the large majority of peace operations and peacekeepers are currently serving, a communication expert from the African Union notes that traditional media, particularly radio is perhaps the most important channel to reach the masses. 'Whereas the UN has achieved significant success in reaching out to global audiences through mainstream Western media, much more needs to be done in terms of strengthening the UN's communication outreach to the peoples of Africa through the channels most accessible to them.'[19]

Some good work has already been done with regards to the importance of strategic communication. For example, Garcia found that the 'Basque government has extensively used the public media over the last 30 years to create a strong identification between nationalism and citizenship in the

[18] See for example *Whose Security?: Practical Examples of Gender Perspectives in Military Operations*, 2015, edited by the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, Swedish Armed Forces, SWEDINT (Stockholm, February 2015).

[19] Marsden Momanyi, Strategic Communications Officer, Peace and Security Department, African Union, Presentation on 'Peace Operations and Strategic Communications – Challenges Today', delivered during a Challenges Forum Workshop on *Strategic Communications for the New Era of Peace Operations*, held on 23 June 2015 in Washington DC. For more information including the presentation, please visit the Challenges Forum website; challengesforum.org (accessed 14 September 2015).

Basque Country.'[20] The strategic communication happened during a time when Basque identity was being strengthened and violent separatism was waning. The negotiations to disarm the Basque separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) were happening at the same time that strategic communication was promoting peaceful national identity. Taylor similarly used strategic communication analysis to examine nation-building in Malaysia.[21] Such analysis is good and helpful, but unfortunately not a lot of it has been done and probably what has been done remains unfamiliar to many peace practitioners.[22]

There are a number of other theories of communication and persuasion that could be brought to bear on the challenges posed by violent extremism. These approaches can help explain the success of extremist groups' recruiting efforts, and can highlight opportunities for peace as well as the constraints. Potential avenues for productive research include those drawing on theories of how language creates shared understandings of how the world works and connects people to rhetorical communities. Ernest Bormann's work on 'rhetorical visions' argues that rhetoric constructs explanations of complex events and makes sense of an otherwise confusing world. These fantasies include language that identifies people as in, or out of, the group, defines threats to the group, and establishes how to respond to those threats. Such fantasies have predictable life-cycles that can be tracked.[23] Applying this analytical tool to violent and extremist social movements could provide both greater understanding of how and why they are successful and also offer insights into successful responses. Comparing the rise of ISIS to the rise of other groups using the lens provided by Bormann could help effectively respond to the threat posed by ISIS by using tools of strategic communication, but this does presuppose a capacity to track and analyse this language on social media.

[20] César Garcia, 'Using Strategic Communication for Nation-Building in Contemporary Spain: The Basque Case', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, vol. 6/Issue 3 (2012), 212-231, p. 220.
[21] Maureen Taylor, 'Toward a Public Relations Approach to Nation Building', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, vol. 12/Issue 2 (2000), 179-210.
[22] Waisbord uses analysis of the state of communication theory and international aid to make the larger point that, '...it is important for scholars to produce comprehensive arguments about the contributions of communication to global social change.'. See Silvio Waisbord, 'Three Challenges for Communication and Global Social Change', *Communication Theory,* Vol. 25/Issue 2 (2015), p. 159.
[23] Ernest G. Bormann, The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, 1985). For an example of an application of this theory, see Ernest G. Bormann, John F. Cragan, Donald C. Shields, 'An Expansion of the Rhetorical Vision Component of the Symbolic Convergence Theory: The Cold War Paradigm Case', *Communication Monographs*, vol. 63/Issue 1 (1996), pp. 1-28.

Another approach could be an examination of how language is used to overcome divisions among people that are the core of the human condition. Kenneth Burke posits people use language to create a shared understanding of the world; that understanding is necessarily incomplete and is best understood as a traditional drama with an act, agent, agency, scene and purpose.[24] Burke's dramatistic approach may well serve to better understand and respond to the motives of violent groups who work against a peace process. His analysis tries to explain how and why leaders may rise and fall but the model used may be transferrable.[25] Such understanding can then guide action; helping peace professionals choose the best course of action.

Locating theories of communication at the centre of theories of peace operations should also consider how communication is used to gain support for conflict. The premise of this work is that the metaphors and analogies one uses to help understand a policy situation determines how one responds to the situation itself ('reasoning by policy metaphor'[26]). As sense makers, human beings apply what we know to new things that we encounter and tend to treat the new thing as if it were the old thing; the initial choice of language determines future action. Put another way, in a very real sense, what we call something determines what that thing is and therefore what we do about it. Those interested in why a foreign policy action is or is not taken, including why a peace operation is or is not supported, would do well to look at the metaphors and analogies used to describe the situation.[27] Similarly, policy practitioners would do well to strategically choose metaphors and analogies that make preferred action (or inaction) more likely.

Finally, those who are interested in the role media play in peace operations can turn to the extensive literature on media effects.[28] There is nearly 100 years of research on how people respond to what they see on television, read

[24] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (University of California Press: Oakland, 1969).
[25] C. Welsey Buerkle, Michael E. Mayer and Clark D. Olson, 'Our Hero the Buffoon: Contradictory and Concurrent Burkean Framing of Arizona Governor Evan Mecham', *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 62/Issue 2 (2003), pp. 187-206.
[26] See for example Richard R. Lau and Mark Schlesinger, 'Policy Frames, Metaphorical Reasoning, and Support for Public Policies', *Political Psychology*, vol. 26/Issue 1 (2005), pp. 77-114.
[27] Denise M. Bostdorff, and Steven R. Goldzwig, 'Idealism and Pragmatism in American Foreign Policy Rhetoric: The Case of John F. Kennedy and Vietnam', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 24/Issue 3 (1994), pp. 515-532; Robert L. Ivie and Oscar Giner, 'Hunting the Devil: Democracy's Rhetorical Impulse to War', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, vol. 37/Issue 4 (2007), pp. 580-598; Roland Paris, 'Kosovo and the Metaphor War', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 117/Issue 3 (2002), pp. 423- 450.
[28] Jennings Bryant and Mary Beth Oliver, *Media effects: advances in theory and research* (Routledge: New York, 2009).

in the papers and hear in speeches and how they make choices as a result of their impressions. Such a review might calm fears of how and under what

conditions media are likely to impact action, while raising fears elsewhere. The analysis can also guide action, providing strategic direction to ensure that scarce resources are deployed as effectively as possible.

5. Concluding Thoughts on Why the UN Needs to Communicate More Strategically

Paying attention to how extremist and violent organisations use social media is clearly important. The speed and reach of social media are unprecedented, and those who work for peace must pay as much attention to the new media as those who are committed to violence demonstrably do. Social media may not cause violent extremism, but it certainly makes recruiting for and organizing violence easier, and in this field the UN is currently not very competitive and significantly under-resourced.

But just because the social media tactic is new, and is being successfully implemented by extremists, we ought not to confuse the exploitation of social media with the imperative of strategic communication. Undoubtedly peace practitioners need to get their head around this new tactic and to develop policies and mechanisms to better monitor and exploit the circular phenomenon of social media for the cause of peace. There would be clear benefits from such initiatives not least in terms of improved situational awareness, information gathering, the measurement of effectiveness and enhanced safety and security of UN peacekeepers. Perhaps for reasons of culture (and age), many senior peace practitioners are both unfamiliar with and wary of such tactics.[29] To remedy this will take doctrinal development, as well as expertise and resources that currently are not being committed. But on a wider point, just because such tactics are new and unfamiliar and appear to suit extremist methodology, they are not a single panacea, nor the whole story. They must certainly be understood and adopted but fitted into a higher-level communication strategy, driven by a thorough communication analysis rooted in a communication doctrine. An analogy is the call recently within UN peacekeeping for the deployment and use of Unarmed Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UUAVs or surveillance drones). They were new and a bit sensational and therefore desirable but a UUAV is only one part of a wider requirement

[29] Cited during questions from the floor at during the Challenges Forum Workshop on *Strategic Communications for the New Era of Peace Operations*, held on 23 June 2015 in Washington DC. For more information please visit the Challenges Forum website; challengesforum.org (accessed 14 September 2015)

for a modern integrated data capture, analysis and display technology, to assist better UN senior level decision-making. However, the strategic messaging was all about drones and not about the wider technological requirement.

It is hard not to conclude that if peace operations are to be more effective, more attention needs to be paid to communication theory. Those who talk about the business of peace, who promote its activities and who try to influence the behaviour of a target audience, need to keep the larger strategies of strategic communication in mind as they do their work. This calls both 'for communication strategies to be hard-wired into the UN's planning processes'[30] and for senior practitioners to be more conversant with the principles of communication theory and all its instruments of expression, including social media; in short, an enhanced doctrinal approach to strategic communication within peace operations. If strategic communication is central to the work of peace operations and a prerequisite for their success, then communication theory and doctrine needs to be central to their research, planning and practice.

[30] This is an expression that was used by Nick Birnback, Director, Public Affairs, Department for Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support, United Nations during the Challenges Forum Workshop on *Strategic Communications for the New Era of Peace Operations*, held on 23 June 2015 in Washington DC. For more information please visit the Challenges Forum website; challengesforum.org (accessed 14 September 2015)

RECENT CHALLENGES FORUM OCCASIONAL PAPERS

2014:1 ***Challenges with Assessing Impact in International Police Reform and Assistance***, by Mark Andrew Reber (March 2014).

2014:2 ***Evaluating Integrated Peace Operations***, by Jeni Whalan (April 2014).

2014:3 ***Capacity-building and Development of Host State Police***: ***The role of International Police,*** by Marina Caparini (May 2014).

2014:4 ***Police in UN Peace Operations: Evolving Roles and Requirements,*** by William Durch (August 2014).

2015:5 ***Principles of International Police Command***, by Maureen Brown, William Durch and Henrik Stiernblad (May 2015).

2015:6 ***Impact Evaluation and Assessment of UN Peace Operations: What is the State-of-the-Art?***
by Michelle Lipner and Ann Livingstone (June 2015).

For a complete list of our publications please go to www.challengesforum.org /en/Publications

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: A POLITICAL AND OPERATIONAL PREREQUISITE FOR SUCCESSFUL PEACE OPERATIONS

The concept of strategic communication has received undeservedly little attention in relation to its frequent usage in international politics. It remains an underdeveloped, yet extremely important, concept in and for peace operations. The relevance of communication theory as a means to understand the effects of communicating strategically is largely disregarded in the planning, implementation and evaluation of UN peace operations. This occasional paper argues that this is a missed opportunity. There is no doubt that strategic communication, via the exploitation of social media, is one factor that explains the successful spread of extremist violence across the globe. It is, however, less obvious how strategic communication can be used by UN peace operations to counter such threats to peace and security. This paper untangles the concept of strategic communication and puts it into the context of peace operations. It explains why strategic communication as a practice *and* concept is necessary for the success of the new era of peace operations, but how it is also an opportunity for considerable development where the UN can draw on communication theory and doctrine, including in the mission planning process, to achieve more effective peace operations.

ROBERT GORDON

Major General (Retd.) Robert Gordon, former Force Commander of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), is a Senior Adviser to the Challenges Forum. He retired from the British Army in 2005 after over thirty years of service that included being the British Army's Director of Corporate Communications from 1996-99. Now, as an international consultant, he works with several UN Departments and Agencies, the World Bank, the British and other Governments as a lecturer, mentor and adviser on peacekeeping operations. Maj. Gen. Gordon was a key contributor to the UN's first strategic level doctrine for peacekeeping, known as the Capstone Doctrine.

PETER LOGE

Peter Loge has spent more than two decades working in strategic communications, most recently serving as the Vice President for External Relations at the US Institute of Peace. He was also a Senior Vice President at M+R Strategic Services, the founder of Milo Public Affairs, and served in senior positions with three members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the late Senator Edward Kennedy. Peter is on the faculty of the School of Media and Public Affairs at The George Washington University and is an Associate Fellow at Timothy College at Yale University.

ISBN 978-91-87927-09-6