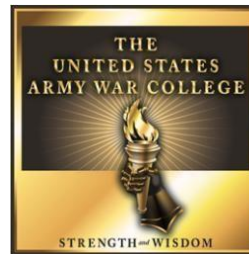


Strategy Research Project

Strategic Communication Strategy to Defeat Islamic State Recruiting and Propaganda

by

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United States Army War College
Class of 2015

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Abstract

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The United States requires a strategic communication strategy to counter ISIL influence, recruiting, and propaganda. President Barack Obama outlined Operation Inherent Resolve, the recent strategy to defeat and ultimately destroy ISIL using a coalition counterterrorism methodology and a critical strategic communications effort. ISIL operates a professional propaganda campaign that leverages the full spectrum of social media, websites, and blogs to distribute their messages and recruit militant followers. After 14 years of conducting strategic communications against terrorists, the U.S. has failed to establish an effective strategy to combat these threats to national security. This study examines U.S. propaganda strategy during World War II in order to distill best practices that are applicable to modern strategic communications to defeat ISIL. A new strategy requires consolidated leadership for the numerous organizations involved in countering ISIL. Additionally, this strategy must geographically disaggregate the enemy to specifically address the at-risk populations and underlying regional factors. Finally, the U.S. strategy must be rooted in the truth. The U.S. must address these shortfalls in strategic communication strategy or the efforts to defeat ISIL will fail.

Strategic Communication Strategy to Defeat Islamic State Recruiting and Propaganda

The United States requires a strategic communication strategy to counter ISIL influence, recruiting, and propaganda. Such a strategy will marginalize terrorist actions, control the narrative, and build & strengthen the coalition force that will ultimately defeat and destroy ISIL. After nearly 13 years of conducting strategic communication against terrorists, the U.S. has failed to define a strategic communication strategy to defeat extremist recruiting and propaganda. President Barack Obama recently announced the U.S. strategy, dubbed Operation Inherent Resolve, to defeat and ultimately destroy ISIL. The President's call to action highlights the absolute necessity for a global, concerted, and consolidated effort. "This is not our fight alone...America will lead a broad coalition to roll back this terrorist threat."¹ The President's guidance broadly outlined a counterterrorism strategy predicated on support from U.S. friends, allies, and Arab partners and suggested a critical strategic communications facet to the strategy. "We will continue to draw on our substantial counterterrorism capabilities to prevent ISIL attacks. Working with our partners, we will redouble our efforts to cut off its funding; improve our intelligence; strengthen our defenses; counter its warped ideology; and stem the flow of foreign fighters into and out of the Middle East."²

The prospects of launching a new strategy to defeat ISIL will fail without fundamental changes to the strategic communications status quo. Over the past 100 years, the U.S. has conducted strategic communications during war with astounding success and effectiveness, but has tended to discard and forget many of those best practices and lessons learned. There are three areas of improvement that we can

identify from WWII strategic communication case studies and can then apply to modern strategy.

First, the current strategic communication effort is inadequate because it lacks consolidated leadership of disparate organizations that comprise the Information Instrument of Power. There is no lead agency or individual for coordinated strategic communication in the information war against ISIL. Centralized leadership and authority are imperative to develop policy, drive strategy, and to make critical adjustments in the strategic communications strategy. Second, the current strategic communication effort is inadequate because it fails to disaggregate the enemy into the geographic areas and specifically address the at-risk populations using recognizable spokespersons, regional leadership and tailored messages that resonate with affected youth. Propagating a consistent U.S. message in multiple languages to a global audience will not reach the at-risk demographic. Defeating ISIL will require regional non-U.S. spokespersons that can address specific grievances and issues using the same familiar language and technology that ISIL leverages. Third, and most importantly, the comprehensive strategic communication strategy must be fundamentally rooted in the truth. Only a truth-based narrative can dismantle ISIL's extremist ideology. History teaches that misinformation campaigns have fueled public distrust and skepticism for strategic communication lines of operation since WWII.

A strategic communication strategy to counter ISIL influence, recruiting, and propaganda must incorporate three forgotten strategic principles from WWII: consolidated leadership, disaggregation of the target audience, and a truth-based

narrative in order to marginalize terrorist actions, control the narrative, and to build and strengthen the coalition force that will defeat & destroy ISIL.

ISIL Situation

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is the leader of the Sunni Muslim Islamic State and also the proclaimed caliph and living successor to Prophet Muhammad.³ ISIL's primary objective is to build a territorial state that can conquer the Shiite state of Iran and also fight and defeat the West.⁴ The ISIL-controlled area is currently estimated at 35K square miles along the Syria/Iraq border where the fighting is most intense.⁵ The center of gravity is their field force and so ISIL's ability to recruit and replenish those forces is absolutely critical. ISIL is adept at strategic communication and actively influences, recruits, and distributes propaganda to a global audience with impunity. Strategic communication is a foundational component to ISIL's terrorist activity because ISIL relies on information distribution and propaganda to propagate its ideology to new recruits. "ISIL believes that media warfare is equal to importance to military warfare."⁶ The Islamic State employs several media divisions who leverage popular social media outlets, online videos, and chat rooms to reach their audiences using cutting-edge technology. Their most popular recruiting themes are the YouTube videos depicting the perception of military success, such as ISIL YouTube videos showing U.S. weapons that were air-dropped into ISIL hands and video showing ISIL fighters riding in U.S. tanks, MRAPS, and Humvees.⁷ Thousands of foreign fighters from across the globe have joined ISIL, mostly Arabs, but also Europeans, Americans, Canadians, South Asians, Australians, and Africans.⁸ For example, recruitment videos in English and subtitled in Hindi, Urdu, and Tamil are posted to Twitter...depicting a young Canadian Muslim who explains, "Life in Canada was good. I had money, I had a good family...but

at the end of the day, you cannot obey Allah as fully as you can by living in a Muslim country and an Islamic State. How can you answer to Allah when you live on the same street with the Kafir and you use their lights and pay taxes that are used to wage war on Islam.”⁹

Matt Olsen, director of the National Counterterrorism Center said that “ISIS operates the most significant global propaganda machine of any Islamist extremist group...no group is as successful and effective as ISIL at using propaganda, particularly social media.”¹⁰ It seems that ISIL uses a multitude of tactics and techniques to attract the angry teenagers in poor neighborhoods to prey on their resentment, alienation, injustice, and marginalization.¹¹ The media content is certainly one aspect of their successful recruiting, the shock propaganda and beheading videos of American journalists, mass executions, public crucifixions attract new recruits and instill fear in their opponents. Some argue that ISIL recruits are more influenced by the psychological factors and social forces than by the ideological tenets and hard line interpretation of Islam.¹² There is evidence to support that ISIL offers \$1500 per month to join the fighting, a clear indicator that some youth are potentially motivated more by money than ideology.¹³ Additionally, ISIL is using the lure of sex to recruit foreign fighters, promising these young men the girls and women that ISIL holds as sex slaves for their legions. The combination of these enticing factors with the social media communication techniques has proven a successful recipe for recruiting.

There is fear by members of the coalition, shared by President Obama that these battle-hardened, trained, and radicalized fighters might return to their homelands to carry out jihad.¹⁴ This point adds to the list of reasons why the strategy to defeat ISIL

includes a comprehensive strategic communication element to defeat and destroy the extremists effort to recruit and distribute propaganda. President Obama stated, “It is America that has the capacity and the will to mobilize the world against terrorists.”¹⁵ Unfortunately, popular opinion doubts the effectiveness of the ISIL campaign, claiming that the Obama strategy is not working. The first issue that we must address regarding the ISIL strategy is leadership, specifically, who will lead the strategic communication effort to defeat ISIL?

Leadership

There is no single leader or organization responsible for U.S. strategic communication and counter-ISIL efforts. Without centralized leadership, the strategic communication strategy can only expect to maintain or lose the narrative against ISIS, but never control it. The United States Information Agency (USIA) was the last organization responsible for the “information” instrument of power. This division of the State Department was disbanded in 1999 under President Bill Clinton’s administration because its Cold War information focus was no longer necessary. Since 1999, there has been no department solely responsible for the information instrument of power. The State Department has performed a critical role in counter-terrorism communications since 2001, but it shares responsibilities with other disparate organizations who deal with the U.S. strategic communication narrative. Two organizations share primary leadership for the U.S. strategic narrative against ISIL. The Center for Strategic Counter-Terrorism Communications (CSCC) within the State Department and the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) within the Defense Intelligence Agency are co-leads on the strategic communication strategy. Several other organizations and agencies play critical roles in the overall strategic communications strategy, such as the

Department of Defense, the media, and other coalition countries and their militaries. The benefit of having a singular leader or lead organization is the ability to coordinate, modify, and adjust the strategy as necessary among the stakeholders and contributing organizations. U.S. strategic communication coordinated under a unified leadership structure is a concept used in WWII, but has not been employed successfully since then.

WWII Case Study

The Office of War Information (OWI), created in June 1942 by Executive Order 9182, represented the unified organizational structure for managing the US propaganda campaign.¹⁶ Elmer Davis was the OWI director and provided oversight for the Domestic and Overseas Branches.¹⁷ OWI came into existence as a conglomeration of several predecessor agencies that brought a multitude of competing functions.¹⁸ The Overseas Branch grew from the Foreign Information Service (FIS), so the transition was simple, compared to the Domestic Branch, and many personal relationships continued.¹⁹ Organizational integration with the military was different in each theater of war. In Europe, the integration of OWI into the military operations was contingent upon one commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, but in the Pacific, there were several commanders who gave OWI an icy reception and made integration of propaganda difficult.²⁰ President Truman abolished OWI in August 1945.²¹

This case study of organized strategic communication in WWII demonstrates a proactive strategy rather than a reactive and defensive one. The strategy to counter ISIL recruiting is further complicated by the fact that the U.S. is leading a coalition effort to defeat ISIL; therefore the coordination extends beyond the myriad of U.S. organizations to international entities, governments, and militaries. During the NATO

summit, NATO allies and partners pledged their support to a broad, international effort to combat the threat posed by ISIL.²² The U.S. must provide the coalition leadership among the regional allies, Sunni majority states, and Arab states both militarily and specifically in the strategic communication strategy to usurp ISIL recruiting.²³

The establishment of a single lead for U.S. strategic communication similar to OWI in WWII is much easier said than done. The White House National Security Council was not originally interested in making the Center for Strategic Counter-terrorism Communications a robust part of the State Department's public diplomacy apparatus, even after 9/11 the political establishment was not in favor of leadership in strategic communications.²⁴ Secretary of State Hillary Clinton personally intervened with President Obama to explain the importance of the Center for Strategic Counter-terrorism Communications as the lead organization for strategic communications.²⁵ Not surprisingly, the National Counter-terrorism Center (NCTC) provided resistance to CSCC as the lead organization for strategic communications citing a direct infringement on their area of responsibility.²⁶ The strategic communications mission area has been plagued by turf battles, contrasting goals, and disagreements about their respective responsibilities since disbanding USIA.²⁷ The U.S. has operated without a single lead agency in strategic communications since USIA disbanded in 1999 and the effectiveness of the strategic communications strategy to defeat Al Qaeda has been marginal. The coalition strategy to defeat ISIL is contingent upon consolidated leadership much like the OWI in WWII. Centralized leadership and authority are imperative to develop policy, drive strategy, and to make critical adjustments in the strategic communications strategy.

Regionally Disaggregate the Enemy Recruiting Effort

The current strategic communication effort is inadequate because it fails to disaggregate the enemy into the geographic areas and specifically address the at-risk populations using recognizable spokespersons, regional leadership and tailored messages that resonate with affected youth. A blanket strategy will not be effective against ISIL recruiting efforts because the youth in India for example, are motivated differently than youth in the United States. Propagating a consistent U.S. message in multiple languages to a global audience will not reach the at-risk demographics because the message will not resonate universally across all the at-risk recruits. Defeating ISIL must rely on regional non-U.S. spokespersons that can address specific grievances and issues using familiar language and technology that ISIL leverages.

The current U.S. strategy to defeat ISIL relies on a variety of counter-recruiting and counter-propaganda means such as removing recruiting websites, monitoring chat rooms for intelligence, and establishing social media sites and posting messages on social media. The State Department monitors ISIL recruitment and propaganda efforts and removes terrorist websites and content based on intelligence gain/loss and counter-propaganda value. Additionally, the State Department set up an English language Twitter and Facebook account called "Think Again, Turn Away" that generated 2500 posts and garnered a less impressive 12,500 followers.²⁸ Think Again, Turn Away account is openly operated by the Center for Strategic Counter-terrorism Communications to counter terrorist propaganda and misinformation across a variety of interactive digital environments such as Twitter.²⁹ Interestingly, the CSCC was not operating on Twitter until 2012 because they felt that social media outlet was not a

lucrative medium for strategic communication and thus they fell behind the power curve in social media.³⁰

President Obama acknowledges that strategic communication is critical to our comprehensive counterterrorism strategy and that our efforts to counter radical ideology must address the underlying grievances of the at-risk demographics.³¹ The underlying grievances are diverse and varied, so the strategic communication strategy must be tailored to address the regional-specific issues such as extreme poverty, sectarian hatred, lack of education, lack of jobs, scarce food and water. The current strategy relies on a singular narrative that is translated into several languages and propagated into at-risk regions.

The information campaign in WWII was a textbook example of regionally disaggregating the target audience to capitalize on the narrative that resonates with a specific audience.

WWII Case Study on Target Disaggregation:

Several distinct audiences received focused and deliberate propaganda during WWII. Domestic audiences comprised a critical target set for propagandists.³² Within the domestic audience, OWI campaigned to all demographics for support, contribution, labor, and sacrifice.³³ Peoples liberated from Axis powers received specific propaganda to capitalize on the period of vulnerability and set conditions for post-war US relations.³⁴ OWI used propaganda to influence Occupied France and the French Resistance movement in addition to the Vichy French Government.³⁵ In the Pacific, OWI targeted the Philippines before the invasion and continued targeting both the Filipinos to keep them informed and morale high, and Japanese to encourage their surrender.³⁶ OWI paid special attention to propaganda specifically intended for German citizens to ensure

the people could distinguish between the Allied propaganda intended for the German government and not them.³⁷ Similarly, propaganda targeted the Japanese people and the government independently.³⁸ The OWI targeted Allies, military personnel, and Europeans to keep morale high through timely, accurate, and relevant information.³⁹

These case study examples illustrate the necessity of target audience disaggregation and they contrast the current strategic communication effort. A successful strategic communication strategy to defeat ISIL must specifically address the at-risk populations using recognizable spokespersons, regional leadership and tailored messages that resonate with affected youth. A blanket strategy will not be effective against ISIL recruiting efforts because at-risk youth are motivated differently in different regions. The strategy must propagate a consistent message to a global audience that resonates with the at-risk demographics. Defeating ISIL must rely on regional non-U.S. spokespersons that can address specific grievances and issues using familiar language and technology that ISIL leverages.

Truth-Based Strategic Communication Strategy

The U.S. strategic communication strategy must be firmly rooted in the truth to defeat ISIL's propaganda and disrupt their recruiting. The current narrative exploits ISIL's universally condemned actions such as executing prisoners, killing children, enslaving and raping women, and threatening a religious minority with genocide. A truthful strategic communication strategy that emphasizes ISIL's inhumanity, brutal behavior, and anti-Islamic actions reinforces international resolve and counters their heinous propaganda campaign.⁴⁰ ISIL is extremely adept at distributing propaganda and reaching a seemingly endless recruiting base through on-line social media such as Twitter. The State Department is admittedly behind the power curve on countering ISIL

on social media, but given ISIL's current tactics and narratives, they are now keenly interested and invested in this battle space. "We believe countering our adversaries in this space is critical. We must contest the space by confronting distortion with reality and lies with the truth and provide alternative perspectives to the misguided ideological justifications for using violence."⁴¹ The Coalition's collective narrative must propagate a truthful message that no religion condones the killing of innocents to demonstrate ISIL's brutality and contradict its distorted ideology. The truth-based narrative must also advocate the development of jobs, education, and opportunity for young men who see ISIL as a better alternative, much like an anti-gang messaging campaign.⁴²

The propaganda strategy during WWII is a compelling case study example of the importance of a truth-based strategy that provided information to their target audiences and allowed them to make informed decisions. Truth-based information strategies were important during this period because of the sinister reputation that propaganda earned during WWI. Additionally, the truth-based strategy would stand in stark contrast to the German propaganda machine during the war.

WWII Case Study on Truth-Based Narrative

President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a speech to Congress nearly a year before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and outlined his "Four Essential Human Freedoms."⁴³ Roosevelt underscored the freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear as fundamental American aims during this period of history.⁴⁴ Additionally, the Atlantic Charter agreement between the US and Britain outlined a post-war world vision of self-determining nations with equal trading rights within a system of general security.⁴⁵ The propaganda ideology between 1939 and 1941 reflected those basic American values of freedom and democracy in a

global struggle against fascism.⁴⁶ President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9182 creating OWI in June 1942.⁴⁷ The Office of War Information (OWI) propaganda campaign adhered to a strategy of truth in the foreign and domestic arenas.⁴⁸ The domestic strategy was to *influence* American opinion through a delicate process of providing truthful information and letting the people make their own decisions.⁴⁹ OWI strategists attempted to shape the political beliefs and actions of their target audiences through their words and information campaign.⁵⁰ The fight for democracy connected man's belief in liberty of mind and spirit, with a willingness to sacrifice comforts and earnings to protect democracy from fascism.⁵¹ This people's war affirmed to the world that the principles of democracy would defeat fascism wherever it existed.⁵²

After the attack on Pearl Harbor and the US commitment to the war, the public demanded more information and required a stronger domestic propaganda effort.⁵³ The propaganda ideology between 1942 and 1945 reflected a foreign and domestic information campaign that provided news and information support to military operations in Europe and the Pacific.⁵⁴ OWI abandoned the ideology of propaganda for action in a people's war between democracy and fascism to a propaganda campaign that provides news and information fully and faithfully as possible.⁵⁵ Redefining propaganda as information transformed the OWI strategy into broadcasting the maximum quantity of news to foreign and domestic audiences.⁵⁶

OWI compromised their ideological political democracy that resisted the evils of fascism for an information-based ideology that supported a military victory.⁵⁷ The political reality that military occupation would win the war over shaping political beliefs and winning the peace through words was a difficult transition for OWI.⁵⁸

OWI lacked clear responsibilities, guidelines, and authorities from its beginnings.⁵⁹ The purpose was to educate the public and inform the American people about what the war was about, where it was going, and how the government was conducting it.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, before President Roosevelt's decision to seek unconditional surrender, the U.S. initially lacked clear policy regarding the purpose of the war and the war aims, making the OWI public education task more difficult.⁶¹ OWI provided truthful information to the American public and overseas audiences to promote Allied solidarity.⁶²

The WWII propaganda campaign encompassed three integrated objectives. First, the domestic campaign mobilized the population for war, boosted morale, and generated the necessary publicity to orient the troops and civilian populace.⁶³ Specific propaganda campaigns directed at US women sought to recruit laborers to engage in heavy-duty war work in positions traditionally identified with men.⁶⁴ Other domestic campaigns focused on securing specific public actions such as buying bonds to finance the war.⁶⁵ Civilian support for salvaging materials used for war production, fuel conservation, and food sharing initiatives represented other OWI domestic campaigns.⁶⁶ The domestic propaganda convinced each American to make a meaningful difference in the war effort and that combined effort established the prerequisite for victory. Second, the propaganda campaign in neutral countries targeted populations liberated from Axis powers. Winning the hearts and minds of liberated people and reacquainting Europeans with the heritage, history, and fundamental make-up of the US shaped post-war relationships.⁶⁷ The OWI campaign needed to stop the spread of Nazi influence in neutral countries and defeat Nazi propaganda.⁶⁸ Third, the foreign

campaign concentrated efforts to counter German and Japanese propaganda to the Allies.⁶⁹ The propaganda campaign aimed to undermine German will to resist the Allies.⁷⁰ In the Pacific, the propaganda efforts focused on driving a wedge between the people and the Japanese government to set the conditions for surrender.⁷¹ OWI needed to prepare the world for the role America intended to play during WWII.⁷² The message “We are coming, we are going to win, and in the long run, everybody will be better off because we won” established a sense of confidence that a US victory would prove to be a good thing for the whole world.⁷³

There are parallels between the current strategic communication strategy against ISIL and the WWII propaganda strategy. The first OWI objective, to mobilize the domestic population’s support for the war effort, can be compared to President Obama’s request to Congress to Authorize the Use of Military Force. This request to Congress will solidify the U.S. political support to the fight against ISIL and build confidence with the coalition that the U.S. is a committed partner. The second objective, to mobilize the foreign support to the war effort, is identical today. Global stakeholders in the war against ISIL must actively mobilize the coalition and global supporters to unite against ISILs extremist ideology. The final WWII propaganda objective was to counter the enemy’s propaganda and the coalition is actively countering ISIL propaganda and recruiting today. The coalition propagates a universal message that the world stands in defiance to ISIL’s ideology and their inhumane actions and the world will be better off when ISIL is defeated and destroyed. The coalition must always maintain a truth-based narrative to build regional trust, global coalition support, and provide options and opportunities for at-risk youth susceptible to ISIL recruiting. “The U.S. must assume a

leadership role, assessing the military capabilities of neighboring states and nations in the region to organize into a fighting coalition in the information war. The U.S. must bring trust into the region. Islamic extremism is spreading rapidly into South Asia and Africa...they have the initiative.”⁷⁴ Countering ISIL’s influence, recruiting, and propaganda will marginalize its terrorist ideology. The U.S. must control the narrative in order to build and strengthen the coalition force that will ultimately defeat and destroy ISIL. Only a truth-based narrative can successfully dismantle ISIL’s ideology and history’s lessons on misinformation campaigns underscore the importance maintaining a truthful campaign. The U.S. is at a technical and tactical disadvantage in this information war against ISIL, which is better equipped and organized to exploit social media, but the truth narrative is something that ISIL can never offer.

Analysis of the WWII Propaganda Case Study

There are valuable lessons distilled from this WWII propaganda case study that are applicable to the strategic communication strategy to defeat ISIL. The case study produced guidelines for organizational leadership, regional disaggregation of the target audience, and leveraging a truth-based narrative to defeat an adversary. The political and contextual factors within the case study remain key to understanding the lesson’s applicability to ISIL. There are no panaceas, only best practices within a historical context that serve to inform a new strategic communication strategy by providing guidance for consideration.

Organizational Leadership

The WWII propaganda campaign was orchestrated by a civilian-led organization dedicated to conducting propaganda. The organizational structure provided leadership and authority to conduct global propaganda operations. The Office of War Information

(OWI) remained separate from, but integrated with, military operations. During WWII, OWI established the focal point for foreign and domestic propaganda, but did not leverage the full support of President Roosevelt.⁷⁵ Roosevelt created several entities that performed a variety of propaganda like functions before consolidating all the propaganda under OWI in 1942.⁷⁶ OWI operated domestic and overseas branches under the direction of Elmer Davis.⁷⁷ Domestically, the organization provided the American people a full understanding of what the war was about and how the government was going to conduct it.⁷⁸ Overseas, OWI propaganda aimed at stopping the spread of Nazism.⁷⁹ Organizationally, the OWI was not as effective integrating propaganda and establishing relationships among other government departments. Political issues put OWI at odds with US foreign policy, the Departments of State, War, Navy, and the President.⁸⁰ Roosevelt intentionally restricted the authority of OWI, which limited the organization to suggesting rather than demanding the integration of propaganda.⁸¹ Roosevelt disbanded OWI following WWII and eliminated its organizational role in propaganda as a tool of foreign policy.⁸²

The OWI maintained independence from the military, but established close relationships for integration into military operations. OWI conducted global influence operations and distributed propaganda to foreign and domestic audiences. The organizational leadership must be linked into the political context to ensure cohesion of the propaganda to policy, but equally important is the ability and authority of the organization to take actions in a timely manner.

Regional Disaggregation of the Target Audience

Strategic communications campaigns require precision messaging and the WWII case study illustrated a diversity of target audiences. During wartime, a natural

tendency is to use propaganda to demoralize enemy forces, but a concerted effort requires domestic and neutral audience influence as well. Disaggregating the target audience by region and audience type requires applying specific propaganda techniques specifically suited to each unique audience or region.⁸³

OWI used tailored propaganda campaigns for a variety of domestic and overseas target audiences.⁸⁴ The propaganda campaign focused on garnering domestic support for the war effort, including food rationing, material and fuel conservation, and industrial labor.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the campaign targeted specific demographics, such as women, soliciting them for industrial labor.⁸⁶ The overseas propaganda effort focused on preventing the spread of Nazi influence and regime throughout Europe and imperial Japanese regime in the Pacific.⁸⁷ The OWI campaign also launched campaigns targeting neutral countries, and countries formerly occupied by Axis powers.⁸⁸ Specific propaganda targeted the German people themselves to ensure they understood that the Allied were making war against the Nazi regime and not the German people.⁸⁹

Authenticity: A Truth-Based Narrative

Allied propagandists claimed their information was invariably truthful.⁹⁰ “The first of all axioms of propaganda is that only truthful statements be made.” The greatest sin in propaganda is telling a lie and getting caught, so maintaining a truth-based narrative is absolutely critical.⁹¹

WWII counterpropaganda ideology was based on the truth.⁹² US counterpropaganda specialized exclusively in truth, in sharp contrast to the enemy, concentrating on news as its principle ammunition.⁹³ OWI was required “to tell the truth” and the target audiences would form their own judgments and opinions.⁹⁴ The

distinction between OWI's overt propaganda, based on truth, and covert propaganda conducted by the OSS was clear.⁹⁵

This historical case study represents a successful example of counterpropaganda, but the context of past wars and political situations make parallel comparisons difficult and speculative. There is no solution from the past, no template or checklist to guarantee a future outcome for defeating adversary propaganda. History can guide and inform decisions and the historical case study provides insight into guidelines for a new strategic communication strategy.

Conclusion

The U.S. has a poor track record in strategic communication effectiveness in countering extremist ideology, propaganda, and recruiting. ISIL is adept at propaganda and use of social media because it is well organized, proficient, and versed in communicating using the tools and social media where the U.S. is ill equipped. There are immediate changes that would have a profound affect on U.S. strategic communication strategy.

First, the U.S. is not organized in such a manner to conduct or lead the coalition strategy required to defeat ISIL over the long-term. The U.S. strategic communication strategy to defeat ISIL is a loose collaboration of organizations such as the Center for Strategic Counter-terrorism Communications, National Counter Terrorism Center, Department of Defense, Department of Treasury, and other disparate organizations. The U.S. needs an organization that represents the information Instrument of Power (IoP) to lead, direct, plan, and have accountability for a strategic communication strategy to defeat ISIL. Historically, the U.S. has treated strategic communications as critically important to the overall campaign strategy and assigned responsibility to a

singular organization such as the Office of War Information in WWII. Today, no such organization exists and the U.S.-led coalition's strategic communication strategy has performed abysmally against ISIL's social media effort.

Second, the strategy to defeat ISIL must regionally disaggregate the target audience and ISIL's at-risk populations to address underlying grievances. The case study provided strong evidence for disaggregating the target audiences as domestic, foreign, neutral, enemy, recently liberated, and coalition military forces to tailor the messages for the audience and contextual factors. The strategic communication strategy cannot propagate one consolidated message in multiple languages, but rather a tailored message that resonates with regional audiences. These messages must be fully immersed into the coalition effort and have regionally identifiable personalities and voices to carry the message that addresses regional grievances.

Finally, the strategy must be authentic and truth-based. Any strategic communication strategy must have credibility and the information disseminated must be authentic and truthful. Any information intended to deceive the audiences would usurp the entire strategy, since long-term credibility is a pillar propping up the strategic communication itself. Authenticity is extremely difficult to convey to all audiences because perceptions are difficult to manage.

A new strategy to defeat ISIL requires significant changes to the current strategic communications construct. ISIL's center of gravity is its ability to recruit fighters, convinced by its propaganda to fight in support of its twisted ideology or some other motivating factor. The U.S. requires a strategy that leverages successful principles from

our history to marginalize ISIL's actions, control the narrative, and build and strengthen a coalition force that will ultimately defeat and destroy ISIL.

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