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## The Art of Declaring Victory and Going Home: Strategic Communication and the Management of Expectations

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Whether in three months, three years, or three decades, the U.S. will have to withdraw from Iraq and Afghanistan *some day*. At this particular juncture, the Washington commentariat should be less concerned with the precise *timing* of any withdrawal than with the exact *manner* in which – when the time comes - the U.S. can convincingly “declare victory and go home.”

Contrary to a naïve belief, actions rarely speak for themselves. The choice of a communication strategy determines whether a military build-up is perceived as a temporary “surge,” or an open-ended “escalation,” and this initial perception, in turn, determines whether a future withdrawal will be perceived as “mission accomplished,” or “lack of resolve.”

At its most sophisticated, strategic communication is the art of managing *expectations* of friends and foes alike in a *timely* fashion. If there is only one lesson of Vietnam that the Obama Administration should meditate at this point, it is that unexpected *cascading effects* can make the most seemingly-cautious *incremental strategy* unravel in no time. In 1968, it took only two months from the beginning of the Tet offensive (January 31) for a President Johnson, overtaken by events, to announce that he would not seek re-election (March 31).

While it is hard to quarrel with those who argue today that America’s initial goals in Afghanistan have been met, it is still too early to heed calls to “declare victory and go home.” If nothing else, the continued presence of U.S. troops on Iran’s Western and Eastern borders has a nice way of “concentrating the mind” of the ayatollahs.

But it is not too early to realize that managing expectations over Afghanistan *today* is the most effective way of salvaging America’s reputation (not to mention the President’s own re-election) *tomorrow*. Irrespective of the future course of action in Afghanistan, the White House should not wait much longer before coming up with an “inoculation strategy” (as they say in comspeak) that will *pre-empt* future foreign attempts to equate an American withdrawal with a U.S. retreat or a U.S. defeat.

The U.S. military, in turn, would be well inspired to develop a *communication strategy* aimed at *lowering the expectations* of their civilian masters regarding what Counterinsurgency and/or armed Nation-Building can accomplish. To put it differently: Just like there is a need for an Obama Doctrine at the political level, there is a need for a Mullen Doctrine defining the optimal

*strategic* “rules of engagement,” so that U.S. troops never again find themselves in the situation of having *all security responsibilities* and *no political power*.

### **Avoiding the Chinarabia Trap**

“Nothing is more important than us no longer borrowing \$700 billion or more from China and sending it to Saudi Arabia,” presidential candidate Barack Obama repeatedly argued during the final months of the 2008 campaign. (1)

To this day, the Obama Formula remains the most graphic way of capturing the irrationality of the “grand strategy” of the Bush era, during which America kept borrowing money from Beijing to wage wars increasing the price of oil, thereby strengthening the Muslim countries propagating the very ideology against which these wars were being waged.

During the electoral campaign, to be sure, the Democrat candidate could not afford to appear weak on defense and, for tactical reasons, had no choice but to pretend that, while the Iraq campaign he had voted against was the “bad war,” Afghanistan was the kind of “good war” he fully supported. But the electoral campaign is now over, his declaratory support for the Afghan war was never the reason why he got elected in the first place, and President Obama should not let candidate Obama’s *tactical* exercise cloud his *strategic* vision.

A grand strategy does not have to be defined in positive terms. Sometimes, a negative definition will do just as well. At a time when the dollar is slowly but surely losing its “exorbitant privilege” as the world’s reserve currency, at a time when the White House economic adviser himself is warning about the prospect of “unacceptably high” unemployment in America for years, the grand strategy of the Obama administration could boil down to this: whatever else you do, avoid the Chinarabia trap at all costs.

What are the implications at the theater-strategic level?

The short answer to that question would be to quote David Kilcullen, the closest thing we have today to a Clausewitz of Counterinsurgency: “We must recognize that against the background of an Al Qaeda strategy specifically designed to soak up our resources, paralyze our freedom of action and erode our political will through a series of large-scale interventions, counterinsurgency in general is a game we need to avoid wherever possible. If we are forced to intervene, we now (through much hard experience) have a reasonably sound idea of how to do so. But we should avoid such interventions wherever possible, simply because the costs are so high and the benefits so doubtful.”(2)

The long answer would start by reminding U.S. policy-makers of Sun-Tzu’s precept twenty-five hundred years ago: attacking the enemy’s *strategy* is always smarter than attacking the enemy’s *army*. While Al-Qaeda’s tactics may have shifted over time, its strategy has remained constant between 2004 and 2009:

*2004*: “All that we have mentioned has made it easy to provoke and bait this [U.S.] administration. All we have to do is to send two *mujahidin* to the furthest point East to

raise a cloth on which is written al-Qaeda, in order to make the [U.S.] generals race there to cause America to suffer human, economic and political losses without achieving for it anything of note...so we are continuing this policy of bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy." (3)

2009: "The worst inheritance is when someone inherits a long guerilla war with a tough patient enemy that is financed by divine loans so if he withdraws from the war, it would be a military defeat and if he continues the war, he will drown in the financial crisis and it is even worse when he inherited two wars and not just one and he is incompetent in continuing them." (4)

For al Qaeda, then, "victory" is not defined by a conventional routing of U.S. troops, let alone by a political takeover of the Afghan sandbox, which would deprive them of the "power of statelessness"(5) they currently enjoy, and force them to have a modicum of accountability. Al Qaeda's grand strategy is simply to try to draw America in as many theaters as possible to exhaust it morally and bankrupt it economically, while using the discontent generated by the very presence of U.S. troops on the ground to aggregate local grievances into a Global Jihad.

In the highly unlikely event that America succeeds in turning Afghanistan into a Muslim Switzerland, this victory at the theater-strategic level could still be synonymous with a defeat at the national-strategic level if the U.S. ends up "winning" the Afghan war the same way Britain ended up "winning" the Great War – i.e. as a financially bankrupt country.

But while U.S. financial bankruptcy is a distinct possibility if America continues to "stay the course" of the past eight years, is it equally true, as Bin Laden claims, that the unavoidable outcome of a withdrawal would be the loss of America's credibility?

### **Strategic Paradoxes and Others Conundrums**

Whether it be a military strategy, a development strategy, or a communication strategy, the logic of strategy, Edward Luttwak reminded us long ago, is often less linear than paradoxical.(6)

This is nowhere more true than in the case of counterinsurgency (COIN), and the new COIN Field Manual has by now popularized some of the most counterintuitive truths at the tactical and operational levels: "sometimes, the more you protect your force, the less secure you are;" "sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is," etc. As for the strategic level, as P.W. Singer pointed out, the most vexing conundrum concerns the U.S. military's dependence on private contractors: you can't go to war without them, but you can't win a COIN campaign with them either. (7)

And that's only for starters. For as Kilcullen pointed out, Iraq and Afghanistan are more than just regular COIN campaigns: "If we were to draw historical analogies, we might say that operations in Iraq are like trying to defeat the Vietcong (insurgency) while simultaneously rebuilding Germany (nation-building following war and dictatorship), keeping peace in the Balkans (communal and sectarian conflict), and defeating the IRA (domestic terrorism). These all have to

be done at the same time, in the same place, and changes in one part of the problem significantly affect the others.” (8)

In addition to the paradoxes inherent to COIN at the tactical and operational levels, then, an assessment of the Afghan situation has to factor in the conundrums inherent to nation-building at the theater-strategic level. In a nutshell:

The first paradox of nation-building: sometimes, the most effective way to make a country “safe for democracy” is to delay democratic elections as long as possible. Be it in the Balkans yesterday or in Afghanistan today, the “culminating point of victory” for U.S. troops will always be Election Day - after which things begin to unravel. As soon as America honors its pledge to be a liberating (rather an occupying) force by holding elections, U.S. troops find themselves in the self-defeating position of having all security responsibilities without the concomitant political power, while the newly-elected officials have all the power without any responsibility.

If the local elected officials happen to be extremely irresponsible, they will feel free to take six months to form a government (Iraq), or they will fail to take advantage of a “breathing space” generated by a successful military surge to settle their political differences (Iraq), or they will play games with ballot-boxes at election time (Afghanistan), etc.

If they are just “moderately” irresponsible, they will at least do what elected officials do in any democracy the day after the elections: namely, they will focus primarily on their re-election - and if blaming U.S. troops for everything that goes wrong happens to be the surest way to boost their popularity, so be it (a Karzai, for instance, has been in campaign mode since at least January 2007).

The second strategic conundrum of nation-building is known as the ‘legitimacy vs. effectiveness’ dilemma, and boils down to the following: sometimes, trying to get the broadest legitimacy at the global level is also the surest way to lose legitimacy at the local level.

Enlisting just about every existing International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in a so-called “comprehensive approach” may well give the U.S. intervention the greatest international legitimacy, but it is also the surest way to maximize ineffectiveness on the ground. For while the multiplication of players may increase resources *arithmetically*, the net effect of too many cooks working at cross-purpose is invariably an *exponential* increase of “fog and friction,” not to mention fraud, waste, and mismanagement.

The idea that there is such a thing as a JIM spectrum (joint, interagency, multinational) is a fallacy. “Unity of effort” is a realistic assumption only in the context of a whole-of-government approach, since all interagency players ultimately report to the same government.

“Unity of effort” within a whole-of-alliance context is already more elusive, if only because of well-known paradoxes inherent to “alliance politics.” In particular, an alliance of democratic countries like NATO is hostage to the electoral imperative. Since bashing one’s allies for the

lack of progress in a military campaign is part and parcel of every self-respecting electoral campaign strategy, and since NATO members have twenty-eight different electoral cycles, the guaranteed outcome of any COIN-by-Coalition campaign is that, sooner or later, it will morph into Operation Infinite Recrimination. By the time your COIN campaign (which lasts on average nine years) is finally over, chances are your Alliance is beyond repair.

As for “unity of effort” beyond an Alliance context, it is simply a pipe dream. After two decades of rhetorical self-intoxication about “Global Governance,” International Relations theorists are only beginning to realize the pervasiveness of the most under-reported fact of international life: namely, the “Clash of International Organizations.”

Though the study of the pathologies of IGOs and NGOs is still in its infancy, it is clear that these organizations are no different from any other bureaucracies when it comes to self-preservation, turf battles, and zero-sum game rivalries – which explains, among other things, why only ten percent of foreign aid actually reaches the average Afghan.<sup>(9)</sup> In short, the only guaranteed outcome of the much-touted “Comprehensive Approach” involving a myriad of IGOs and NGOs is the exponential increase of local corruption, and the resulting resentment of the local population.

The third paradox of nation-building may be the hardest to swallow for U.S. policy-makers who, unlike the military, remain unaware of the need to be anthropologically savvy: sometimes, the best way to modernize a country is to start by preserving (Mac Arthur in Japan) or even restoring (Franco in Spain) the constitutional monarchy.

This is particularly true of Afghanistan since, from the natives’ standpoint, the only real alternative to dynastic legitimacy is religious legitimacy (Taliban). Yet, few U.S. officials will be willing to concede that the single biggest American mistake in Afghanistan has been the stubborn refusal to even consider the possibility of a restoration.

As Naval Postgraduate School professor Thomas Johnson reminded us recently: “Nearly two thirds of the delegates to the loya jirga in 2002 signed a petition to make the aging King Zahir Shah the interim head of state, and only massive US interference behind the scenes in the form of bribes, secret deals, and arm twisting got the US-backed candidate for the job, Hamid Karzai, installed instead.” American policymakers then compounded this initial mistake by pushing for the adoption of a *presidential* constitution when it is by now well-established that a *parliamentary* regime offers the best prospects for a democratic transition. (10)

Last but not least, in addition to paradoxes inherent to both COIN and Nation-Building, policy-makers also have to factor in the paradoxes inherent to Strategic Communication proper.

In and of itself, saying and/or signaling we are there “for the long haul” is as likely to elicit greater cooperation from the natives as to generate greater alienation (at least in Muslim lands). Over time, the problem only gets worse, given the existence of the COIN Gap pointed out by General Caslen: on the one hand, studies have shown that it takes on average nine years to successfully put down an insurgency; on the other hand, studies have also shown that the American people’s support begin to wane after three years. “That leaves you a six-year gap,”

Caslen remarked. During those six years, Western policy-makers will be increasingly tempted (as they are now) to hype the meaning of what is at stake in order to shore up a waning domestic support.

The problem is, the more you hype the meaning of any COIN campaign, the more you make it hard for yourself to succeed. Define the Afghan war as just another policing action in the middle of nowhere, and the stakeholders will be limited to local players. Define the Afghan war as the “frontline of the GWOT,” or the “Germany of the Long War,” and the stakeholders now include all sorts of transnational jihadists. Last but not least, define the Afghan war as a “litmus test for NATO” and suddenly, new players - who could not have cared less about Afghanistan proper but have a vested interest in seeing NATO fail - appear on the horizon to complicate things further (even as they swear they only want to help).

### **“Victory” and “Credibility” Re-examined**

Managing expectations is what strategic communication ought to be about. But though just about every assumption of ‘development theory’ has been demolished since 1968 at least (11), each new generation of U.S. politicians feels compelled to reinvent the development wheel and develop unrealistic expectations as to what a U.S. intervention can accomplish. In these conditions, it is no wonder that policy-makers rarely pay attention to the need to manage expectations of public opinion regarding U.S. interventions abroad.

A lack of knowledge in political anthropology is only compounded by a lack of literacy when it comes to communication studies. The current obsession of so many Western policy-makers with the idea that a withdrawal would ipso facto lead to a loss of credibility of NATO in general, and of America in particular, is misguided on at least two counts:

1. Public perception of victory and defeat (or success and failure) is never as simplistic as policy-makers assume. Among public opinion at large, as communication research has shown, the metrics used to reach a verdict can often be unpredictable. To this day, French public opinion considers the Great War a great victory, even though 1,5 million Frenchmen died in order to recover a province inhabited by 1,5 million people. To this day as well, American public opinion considers the 1975 Mayaguez incident a success, even though 41 Americans died in the process of rescuing 39 hostages, but still views the 1992-94 Somalia intervention as a colossal failure, even though only 43 Americans died in the course of a mission that actually saved tens of thousands of Somalis. (12)

For professional strategists themselves, the victory/defeat question is never clear-cut, even in the case of conventional wars. A victory at a tactical-operational level (Pearl Harbor) can be the surest way to defeat at the strategic level, a total military victory can easily translate into a total political defeat (France in Algeria), and a political victory can be so pyrrhic as to be synonymous with economic suicide (Britain in 1918). To make things more complicated, in coalition warfare, the same event (Dunkirk 1940) perceived as a providential miracle by one ally (Britain) can be perceived as an unmitigated disaster by another (France).

The victory/defeat question is all the more so complex in case of irregular warfare. To begin with, there is an asymmetry in terms of timelines. The 1968 Tet offensive was a game changer for someone like Johnson, who had promised a “victory in two years’ time” only a few months earlier, and was up for re-election a few months later. It was not a game changer for someone like Ho Chin Minh, whose “long march” – we have forgotten - had actually begun as early as 1919 at the Versailles Conference.

Then there is the *incommensurability* of metrics between Westerners and non-Westerners when it comes to defining victory: “Without exploring what winning means from *their* perspective – essential to deconstructing the culture of global jihad at its weakest points – Western bureaucratic, technical, and predominantly secular inclinations may give rise to tactical victories and strategic failures.”(13). Bin Laden’s Global Jihad is not unlike Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution: keeping the Jihadist spirit alive is a metric that is not linked to any particular theater. If they lose in Afghanistan, they’ll just move to Algeria or Sudan.

In the case of a generational Long War that is neither totally conventional nor irregular but “hybrid,” the very question of an “objective” definition of Victory/Defeat simply becomes meaningless. At the end of the day, as Joseph Nye argued, victory is defined by whose story wins.

2. As communication research in the past 30 years has shown, the obsessive fear, common to all great powers, of losing “credibility” is in fact unfounded. Be it America in Vietnam or the Soviets in Afghanistan, the reputation for resolve of great powers is rarely affected by this or that particular setback. Interestingly enough, though, to the extent that their reputation suffers at all, it tends to be more pronounced among allies than among adversaries (14)

In that respect, U.S. policy-makers would do well to remember that the SEATO alliance did not survive Vietnam. Making sure that the Afghan campaign does not destroy the NATO alliance should be the Obama Administration’s second most important priority after “avoiding the Chinarabia trap.”

As NATO embarked on devising a new Strategic Concept for the first time since 9/11, Alliance leaders should make it clear to their respective public opinion that, while there will be other COIN campaigns down the road, COIN as such (and especially *Extreme* COIN) will never become the main *raison d’etre* of NATO.(15)

## **How to Do Things with Words**

While “perception management” is a concept that has a vaguely Orwellian flavor and can be safely dispensed with, “managing expectations,” by contrast, has always been at the core of traditional statecraft.

The importance of strategic communication in closing the “expectation gap” between public opinion and presidential performance has been a mainstay of political science and

communication studies since the publication of Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* in 1960, to the point where presidential strategic communication has become a field of study in its own right, with titles like *The President as Interpreter-in-Chief*, *The Acting President*, *The Prime-Time Presidency*, or *The Image-Is-Everything Presidency*. (16)

The Vietnam War, which took place at the time of the Television Revolution, gave particular salience to the importance of managing expectations, in that it was the first time that a "limited war" (which does not allow for the kind of hyperbolic rhetoric used in a world war) was waged in a new media environment marked by "unlimited visual narratives" (against which the White House's sporadic verbal messages simply could not compete). As one communication scholar defined President Johnson's predicament:

"Deprived of the moral imperative of all-encompassing wars efforts, a limited military involvement thus presents all the rhetorical hazards of a wartime situation – a perceived drain on the nation's resources, the loss of young lives, and policies subject to debate – without the rhetorical advantages of a fervent patriotic appeal with clear-cut heroes, villains, and victories...The dilemma is only heightened by the power and prevalence of contemporary media: television brought the gore and violence of the Vietnam conflict into American living rooms night after night, juxtaposing plans for economic development of the Mekong Delta against pictures of defoliated jungles, and contrasting optimistic statements of progress with casualty rates superimposed on maps showing Vietcong advances."(17)

In such a context, it is unrealistic to expect the government bureaucracy to carry the communication water. The dissemination and reiteration, 24/7, of any given message through the greatest number of available media will more often than not remain an exercise in *tactical-operational* communication that does not rise to the level of *strategic* communication. Amidst the information "noise," the only way to send strategic "signals" is through the presidential bully pulpit. The U.S. President is not only an Interpreter-in-Chief, he also is the Signaler-in-Chief. In the context of an Inaugural Address or a Presidential Doctrine, which are what communication scholars call "speech acts," the President even becomes the Performer-in-Chief.

As shown by J.L Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), which popularized the concept of "speech act," *speech*, far from being simply a passive activity describing or interpreting factual reality, is at times a form of *action* in its own right. A declaration of war, or a pledge of assistance, are not *constative*, but *performative* utterances, in that they create a new reality – one that *engages* the locutor. When the locutor happens to be the U.S. President, a "speech act" engages his administration and, by the same token, the country that elected him. (18)

Before Kennedy, the American Way of "Engagement" was fairly straightforward: show us that you are willing to help yourself, and we will help you. Whether it be economic or military aid, U.S. assistance to post-war Europe had followed that logic: show us that you are willing to integrate your economies (Monnet/Schuman Plans), and we will help you with reconstruction (Marshall Plan); show us that you are willing to come to each other's defense (the 1948 Brussels Treaty), and we will pledge to come to your defense (the 1949 Washington Treaty).



Kennedy's inaugural address of January 1961 marks a significant departure from this traditional pattern: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay *any* price, bear *any* burden, meet *any* hardship, support *any* friend, oppose *any* foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

As Kennedy quickly discovered, there were limits in what the U.S. could do abroad, be it in Vietnam or elsewhere. In 1961, though, Kennedy's unconditional pledge appeared to be all benefits (in terms of global public relations) and no costs (the U.S. had no combat troops in Vietnam, only a few military advisors). (19) In a rapidly changing environment, this kind of pledge cannot but come back to haunt whoever makes it. No one can tell how JFK would have adapted to the new situation in Vietnam had his presidency not been cut short so dramatically in 1963, nor can anyone criticize Johnson for feeling morally bound to uphold his predecessor's commitment as long as he himself was nothing more than an "accidental" president (December 1963-November 1964).

After the November 1964 elections, though, LBJ was a president in its own right. In light of both the rapidly deteriorating situation in Vietnam and of his desire to implement his 'Great Society' domestic agenda, LBJ could have easily proclaimed a Johnson Doctrine downplaying the *any price, any burden* rhetoric of his predecessor, and reasserting the longstanding American Way to help others *only so long as* they were willing to help themselves.

Had LBJ adopted such a doctrine, the 1965 build-up could have been framed as a tactical and temporary "surge" rather than the open-ended strategic "escalation" it became. By the fall of 1967 at the latest, Johnson could have decided that the initial U.S. goals in Vietnam had been met, and that the lack of significant land reforms, the endemic corruption, and the political infighting in Saigon were the proof that Vietnamese elites were no longer "willing to help themselves" in any sense other than 'filling their pockets.'

With a Johnson Doctrine in place, LBJ would have had the *freedom of action* to decide to "declare victory and go home" and start disengaging on time before the 1968 elections. Such was, in essence, the proposal put forward as early as October 1966 by Senator George Aiken who, contrary to the legend, was not advocating an immediate withdrawal, but a gradual scaling down of operations in the form of an "enclave strategy." (20)

To this day, it is not clear why LBJ chose escalation in February 1965 – all the more so that he was already convinced, by then, that there was "no way of winning this war." No doubt did he sincerely believe, like many of his contemporaries, in the then-fashionable "domino theory," or at the very least in the idea that America's credibility was more at stake by leaving than by staying. Be that as it may, the biggest mistake of Johnson was not so much one of military strategy (the military build-up as such) as one of communication strategy (abdication of the role of Interpreter-in-Chief, and adoption of a "don't-mention-the-war" media strategy).

In October 1967, LBJ decided to use General Westmoreland as a surrogate interpreter, but Westmoreland's media blitz only raised unrealistic *expectations* by announcing "victory in two years' time." As a result, the *unexpected* Tet offensive only a few months later was all the more traumatic for U.S. public opinion.

From the beginning of Tet (January 31) until Johnson's announcement that he would not seek re-election (March 31), a series of cascading effects quickly unraveled what had appeared until then a "safe" incremental strategy: his predecessor's brother Robert Kennedy felt compelled to challenge him for the presidential nomination, and his own Defense Secretary Robert McNamara offered his resignation – two clear signs that his policy no longer enjoyed legitimacy in his own party, let alone in the country.

In addition, on February 27, CBS anchor Walter Cronkite, to whom the role of Interpreter-in-Chief had devolved by default, made his famous pronouncement:

"To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion...But it is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honorable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could."

By March 31, when Johnson made his speech about a "de-escalation," the announcement was too close in time from these three events (Kennedy, McNamara, Cronkite) for his change of policy to be perceived as anything other than an admission of "retreat" at best, of "defeat" at worst.

At the policy level, this interpretation was reinforced by the fact that the announcement of a coming de-escalation was coupled with the announcement that he would not seek re-election. At the rhetorical level, it was reinforced by the fact that Johnson felt compelled to include in his speech a reference to Kennedy's "pay any price, bear any burden" line, rather than take the opportunity to distance himself from it, and re-assert the validity of the more traditional, conditional American Way.

In short, had LBJ opted in the fall of 1967 for a Johnson Doctrine instead of a Westmoreland media blitz, there would have been no unrealistic expectations to begin with; the meaning given to the Tet offensive would have been closer to the factual truth (i.e. a military victory for the U.S.); and that, in turn, could have prevented negative cascading effects in terms of challenge (Kennedy) and/or defection (McNamara). One thing is sure: there would have been no "Cronkite moment" for a Johnson Doctrine, by bounding the interpretation of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam in terms of a *conditional-therefore-always-revocable* commitment, would have made any discussion in terms of "defeat," "victory" or "stalemate" simply irrelevant.

It was not until July 1969 that President-elect Nixon would come up with the kind of Doctrine that should have been adopted four years earlier:

"The political and economic plans that they [the non-Communist Asian states of the Pacific Rim] are gradually developing are very hopeful. We will give assistance to those plans. We, of course, will keep the treaty commitments that we have. But as far as our role is concerned, we must avoid that kind of policy that will make countries in Asia so dependent upon us that we are dragged into conflicts such as the one that we have in Vietnam. This is going to be a difficult line to follow. It is one, however, that I think, with proper planning, we can develop."

Some elements of the new doctrine had in fact already surfaced in Nixon's October 1967 article in *Foreign Affairs* on "Asia after Vietnam" (a remarkable historical and geopolitical tour d'horizon worth re-reading today) which had put the ongoing Vietnam war in proper perspective. When it came out in 1969, though, the Nixon Doctrine came so late in the day for America itself that it could not but appear as a "doctrine of necessity" rather than a "doctrine of choice," thus weakening much of its positive effects. In addition, the total absence of a *communication strategy*, and the incremental, almost "accidental," way in which the Nixon Doctrine was unveiled throughout between July and November 1969, guaranteed that the Nixon Doctrine would become a "saga of misunderstanding." (21)

### **The Post-Modern President and Absurdistan**

From the standpoint of strategic communication, waging a limited war in the context of unlimited media coverage remains as problematic as ever. For a brief time, the "prime-time" presidency of Ronald Reagan managed to reduce the media power asymmetry between the White House and the Washington press corps, before the advent of 24/7 news and the multiplication of electronic media made the idea of setting the agenda of the media unworkable.

Unlike Reagan, whose media virtuosity was never tested by a limited war, Bush 42 did face a limited war, but not only was it a limited *conventional* war, but this "1,000 Hour War" was so limited in time that managing expectations was never a central issue.(22)

With the Clinton presidency, the (much-hyped) CNN Effect put the White House in reactive mode again, but Clinton was savvy is enough to frame the deployment of U.S. peace-keepers to Bosnia as a temporary "surge" of sorts explicitly limited to twelve months (in very fine print: "renewable indefinitely"). As for Bush 43, the Bush Doctrine of pre-emption was, initially at least, an original "inoculation strategy" in its own right that allowed the White House the greatest freedom of action. By the end of his second term, though, the Bush Administration had begun to adopt a Nixonian Doctrine in all but in name. (23)

While Obama's limited war in an unlimited media coverage environment is not unlike Johnson's, Obama has to face the extra conundrum associated with what Richard Rose, in a prescient book published at the end of the Reagan era, called the post-modern presidency:

"Today, a president must think not only about how a policy will play in Paris, Illinois, but also in Paris, France; in Tokyo, Texas, as well as in Tokyo, Japan, and in the Moscow Kremlin as well as in the bowling alleys of Moscow, Idaho. One of President Reagan's press secretaries, Larry Speakes, got it half right when he said that at every White House meeting there should be someone asking how a decision will play on the TV news and the next morning's newspapers. His error was limiting his thoughts to ABC, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. The White House forgot the BBC, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *Ashai Shimbun* in Tokyo." (24)

One would be tempted to say that the conundrums associated with an *Urbi et Orbi* (local and global) communication strategy has turned the American Presidency a modern-day Papacy –

where it not for the fact that, in a post-9/11 environment, the White House has to manage expectations not only within “Christendom” itself, but in a “cross-confessional” context and that, in the process of pandering to the Muslim Street in the hope of winning hearts and minds, the U.S. president always runs the risk of losing the hearts and minds of its European flock.

So much for the global conundrum. At the theater-strategic level, the President’s predicament is increased in that Afghan campaign is beginning to look like the “theater of the Absurd.”

The Afghan August 20 election appears to have been a game-changer, though not of the kind anticipated by most Washington observers. Coming so soon after the Iranian precedent, the brazenness of the Karzai Ballot-Box offensive has generated an unhealthy momentum not unlike the Tet offensive, and where the Taliban to launch a spectacular Kandahar offensive, this momentum would only accelerate, with cascading effects quickly unraveling the most cautious incremental strategy.

As of this writing (September 15), rumors of impending civil war are today growing louder in Afghanistan. In Europe, America’s key allies (UK, France, Germany) are experiencing an “Aiken moment,” and are close to breaking ranks with America. In Washington itself, a growing number of influential opinion-shapers are having their “Cronkite” moment while in, the heartland, support for sending additional troops is down to a meager 25 percent. Last but not least, even the most dispassionate military experts are undecided as to whether pursuing the Afghan war is “worth it.” (25)

Though Obama is a charismatic leader who, like Kennedy and Reagan, could make optimal use of the presidential bully pulpit, his increasing “don’t-mention-the-war” attitude makes him look like a modern-day LBJ. Like Johnson, Obama could soon find out that, in and of itself, an incremental military strategy coupled with a minimalist communication strategy is not necessarily the safest way to preserve his freedom of action and will not, at any rate, make the subject go away.

As with the Johnson Administration in Vietnam, the Obama Administration at this point appears to believe that America’s credibility would suffer more by leaving than by staying. Yet, the main problem of the past seven years is not so much that the Taliban has grown stronger, as the fact that, the longer we stay in Afghanistan, the more the mission - once defined as democracy-building - seems to morph into its opposite: making the Hindu Kush safe for sharia law. Back in 2002, there may have been a difference in kind between the Karzai regime and the Taliban; today, there is only a difference of degree.

It is hard to see how America’s credibility is not seriously weakened when U.S. officials declare that the Afghan election was a “success” on account that - the voting process was not significantly disrupted by the Taliban (!). It is harder still to imagine that America’s credibility will be significantly enhanced the day the White House Spokesman begins to sound like Saddam’s Information Minister

No one can dispute the claim, made in many quarters, that the U.S. has actually achieved its initial goals in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and that Washington could indeed declare victory and

start going home. That said, it far from certain that a military build-up would *unavoidably* turn Afghanistan into “Obama’s Vietnam.”

At the end of the day, then, it all boils down to is this: irrespective of whether, in the coming months, the President decides to surge, stay the course, or withdraw, the White House should not wait too long before proclaiming an Obama Doctrine which, more forcefully still than the Nixon Doctrine, would make it clear that the *U.S. is willing to help only those willing to help themselves*, and that *we* remain the sole judge - at any given time - as to whether *they* remain willing to do so or not.

When it comes to “maintaining credibility,” the onus should squarely be on *them*, not on *us*. This is the only way to pre-empt *any* foreign attempt to interpret *any* U.S. withdrawal, *anywhere* and *at any time*, as a U.S. retreat or a U.S. defeat.

In his June 4 Cairo speech, President Obama leaned over backward to show he was willing to pay any price, swallow any pride, utter any half-truth and any nonsense (26), in a one-time attempt to “reset” the relations between America and the Muslim world. As disconcerting (to put it diplomatically) as the whole exercise was at times, there is no doubt that, from the standpoint of strategic communication, it *had* to be done.

Now that it has become clear to everyone that this tactical pandering has produced little positive effects, President Obama should not wait to remind the Muslim world that that no one has a divine right to U.S. assistance; that present and future “overseas contingency operations” should in no way be confused with Operation Infinite Freebie; and that America is not going to keep borrowing from China to give to Saudi Arabia in order to help make the Hindu Kush safer for sharia law.

Failure to proclaim today an Obama Doctrine only increases the chances that, somewhere down the road, the Obama presidency will experience the same fate as the Johnson presidency.

### **Strategic Communication and its Discontents**

“Communications dominate war; broadly considered, they are the single most important element in strategy, political or military,” Admiral Mahan wrote a hundred years ago, at the time when the emergence of the wireless finally emancipated “communication” from “transportation.” For all his reputation as a Luddite, Mahan himself was keenly aware of the implications of this communication revolution for both military operations (the birth of electronic warfare at Tuschima) and diplomatic negotiations (the Portsmouth spin campaign which, to the dismay of the Japanese party, turned a Russian military defeat into a diplomatic victory).

Mahan’s time was the real beginning of the “information revolution” which continues to this day, and gives an unprecedented centrality to strategic communication in wartime as well as peacetime. What is the state of strategic communication today, and what issues should concentrate the mind of the drafters of the upcoming Quadrennial Review?

At the national-strategic level, it is now clear that the top military leadership has to get more involved in the “expectation management” business. JCS Chairman Admiral Mullen, who has been candidly warning for the past two years about the deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan, is a clear example to follow, as surely as General Westmoreland remains the example of what *not* to do. At the end of the day, though, nothing can replace a greater involvement by the White House itself.

The main problem today would appear to be the “strategic literacy” gap between a U.S. military who now has a full knowledge of the strategic conundrums involved in COIN and Nation-Building, and their civilian masters, who continue to entertain unrealistic expectations. Against the backdrop of the upcoming Quadrennial Review, OSD/JCS would therefore be well-inspired to devise a *communication strategy* aimed at *lowering the expectations* of U.S. politicians themselves regarding what both COIN, Nation-Building and Strategic Communication itself can accomplish (27).

In addition, just like there is a need for an Obama Doctrine at the political level, there is also a need for a Mullen Doctrine at the strategic level. The Powell Doctrine is replete with no-nonsense strategic recommendations for conventional warfare, but assumes the kind of political rationality one is more likely to find in Switzerland than in America. While more realistic, the so-called Petraeus Doctrine for counterinsurgency remains, by definition, limited to tactical-operational considerations.

What would constitute a giant step forward is a Mullen Doctrine enlightening the political class as to the optimal politico-strategic “rules of engagement” of a COIN campaign, so that U.S. armed forces never again find themselves in a position where, as in Iraq and Afghanistan today, they end up with all the security responsibilities and without any concomitant political power. The conundrums inherent to COIN and Nation-Building being what they are, it is perhaps time to rediscover an older, but more effective, approach, put in practice after World War II, and which avoided this political-military disconnect: namely, Military Government.(28)

At the theater-strategic level, one can debate indefinitely as to which agency should have the lead in strategic communication. The fact remains that, for the foreseeable future, in war theaters as well as in peace theaters, the military will continue to be the *de facto* lead agency, not only because of its formidable resources, but also because DOD at large (from the Defense Science Board to the USMA Combating Terrorism Center) is way ahead of any civilian agency when it comes to grasping the importance of strategic communication.

Thus, one would be hard-press to find a diplomat (especially at the Under-Secretary level) with as crisp an understanding of strategic communication as Admiral Stavridis, the rising star of the U.S. Navy. Before his recent appointment as NATO SACEUR, Stavridis, as Commander of SOUTHCOM, elevated strategic communication to the level of a fine art, and his definition of the relations between “strategic communication”(SC) and “public affairs”(PA), in particular, remains valid across the interagency spectrum:

“A strategic communicator must stay at the strategic level and not dip down to the tactical level represented by public affairs. Strategic communication consists of a wide

variety of tools and processes within a command such as U.S. Southern Command, to include public affairs, protocol, legal, political-military analysis, medical outreach, engineer and construction support, logistics, personnel, and many more. Each has a role to play in effective strategic communication at the tactical and operational level, but none of them is a substitute for a strategic plan operating at the level of the entire theater, across time, space, language and culture. At the strategic level, the intellectual firepower of the command must be brought most distinctly to bear...For a combatant commander, the place to “organize” strategic communication is at the operational [in the sense of regional] level.”(29)

Needless to say, Admiral Stavridis’s vision of strategic communication could not fail to alarm those who are more interested in protecting their bureaucratic turf than in making things happen. Just like the Washington-based JCS is not spontaneously willing to surrender power to the regional COCOMs, the bureaucratic Public Affairs crowd is not spontaneously willing to submit to the supervision of the Strategic Communication community.

Put the two resentments together, and you begin to understand the real meaning of the puzzling manifesto recently published under the byline of Admiral Mullen. For anyone familiar with the tug-of-war between JCS and COCOMs on the one hand, and the “long war” waged by PA against SC on the other, this half-baked article is nothing more than JCS PA’s desperate attempt to force its parochial agenda down the throat of an overworked and distracted Chairman.(30)

As Talleyrand would have said, this is “worse than a crime: a mistake.” Not only does it make Admiral Mullen look hopelessly uninformed, but it misrepresents the current state of strategic communication within DOD. If anything, this clumsy attempt to play influence games (on the part of the very people who swear they never do “influencing,” they just do “informing”) constitutes one more proof that PA needs adult supervision by SC.

No one, to be sure, will dispute the assertion that, all things being equal, “we need to worry a lot less about *how* we communicate our actions, and much more about *what* our actions communicate.”

Clearly, at the strategic level, the difference between the budgets allocated to economic development vs. military assistance speaks volume about the priorities of the “liberating” country. At the tactical-operational levels, the actions of several hundred thousand U.S. troops on a daily basis - from the way they treat (or mistreat) their local interpreters to the way they supervise (or not) their Western contractors – is more decisive than what a few hundred communication practitioners can accomplish. In that sense (and in that sense only), one can argue that strategic communication is 80 percent actions and 20 percent words. (31)

But the idea that the essence of good communication is “having the right intent up front and letting our actions speak for themselves” is dangerously naïve at best, especially in a cross-cultural environment – and especially in view of the three examples provided: the Great White Fleet, the Marshall Plan, the 2004 Tsunami.

The Great White Fleet? President Roosevelt may have intended to use the cruise to signal to the Japanese the futility of entering into a war with the U.S., but the deployment spoke so little “for itself” that several members of his own Joint Army/ Navy General board were convinced it would have the opposite effect, and initially opposed the decision. In the end, it took an army of opinion-shapers (beginning with Mahan himself) to give the desired “meaning” to the whole exercise. (32)

The Marshall Plan? Far from speaking for itself, it required an elaborate covert and overt “strat comm” plan, replete with documentaries and advertising campaigns specifically tailored for each country.

The 2004 Tsunami relief effort? The geopolitics of tsunami relief being what is it, the U.S. contribution, far from speaking for itself, required an interagency communication plan at the national, regional, and global levels. In the end, it was a success at the local level, but it could not change the perception at the global level that the initial reaction on the part of the U.S. government had been rather stingy. (33)

If good deeds spoke for themselves, we could send the Peace Corps and disband the Marine Corps. Good deeds so rarely speak for themselves that even NGOs devote up to one-fourth of their budget to self-promotion, and that the greatest weakness of U.S. AID for years (compared to its EU counterpart) has been found to be its failure to advertise its own activities.

More often than not, bad deeds don’t “speak for themselves” either. What turned Abu Ghraib from a minor incident involving two dozen bad apples into a real scandal tarnishing America’s image is not so much what happened on the ground as the failure of Pentagon officials to take swift action against the flag officer nominally in charge. In this particular case, it was, if anything, the lack of action at the highest levels that was perceived as “speaking for itself.”

“Each beheading, each bombing, and each beating sends a powerful message or rather, *is* a powerful message”? Yes and no. These “effect-based operations” may be powerful, but the fact remains they are just as likely to induce compliance as to stiffen resistance.

In the past twenty years, the findings of scholarly research on “media effects” and “audience reception” have led media theorists and practitioners alike to revise many unexamined assumptions. Even images, once considered “worth a thousand words,” are no longer seen as speaking for themselves: as communication research has shown, the most basic televisual narrative, with the most straightforward storyline, can be subject to widely differing interpretations across cultures. (34)

Strategic communication as a new “cottage industry”? The idea that communication is a sheer “process” that somehow could be delivered magically without any organizational support is ludicrous in view of the formidable spin machines that were the Committee for Public Information (WWI) and the Office of War Information (WWII) - not to mention the USIA, OCB and OPC in the early Cold War. (35)



Though interagency coordination in the past was not exactly problem-free, overall, PA staffers in those days seemed more concerned about creating synergies with PSYOP practitioners than with hyping theological distinctions (informing vs. influencing) in order to protect their bureaucratic turf. Despite PA officers' repeated claims that Public Diplomacy (PD) itself is closer to PA than to SC, the truth is that PD actually does not make this theological distinction and has always been defined by three missions: "inform, engage, influence." If the diplomatic cookie-pushers can live with it, surely the Pentagon's paper warriors can live with it too.

In the world of communication today, the "lines between strategic, operational and tactical are blurred beyond distinction," so the very notion of strategic communication becomes meaningless? Sheer sophistry.

Some media events are more strategic than others, if only because a media event is the combination of a message, a medium, and *messenger*, and that, just like a leading Jihadist is intrinsically more strategic than an anonymous blogger,(36) a presidential Doctrine is inherently more strategic than, say, a nasty little pamphlet drafted by an anonymous public affairs officer.

Similarly, some target *audiences* are more inherently strategic than others. At its most pedestrian level, strategic communication may well be about winning one heart and one mind at a time; at its highest level, though, strategic communication is, so to speak, the continuation of "command and control warfare" by non-kinetic means.

The idea that strategic communication is at best a supporting activity constitutes a formidable intellectual regression. If the West all loses so many "media engagements," it is precisely because - as Kilcullen pointed out - al-Qaeda plans its media operations first and gives a supporting role to military operations, while the West too often continues to plan military operations first, and give information operations a supporting role. (37)

Last but not least: the Muslim community is a "subtle world we don't fully understand," and only through more "listening" will we be able to supplant the extremist narrative? Don't hold your breath.

At the local level, to be sure, more listening never hurts, and in that respect, before deciding on a surge, the U.S. military would do well to ascertain whether a bigger footprint would be perceived as "showing staying power" (Mullen) or as "crowding their space" (Kilcullen).

At the global level, though, the more you listen, the more you realize that the Muslim world is also a world where the professional chattering class speaks from *both sides* of its mouth, where civil society at large is hopelessly addicted to *conspiracy* theories, and where *obfuscation* has been elevated to such a fine art as to produce a civilization-wide, Ali-in-Wonderland-like, disorientation. (38)

The more you listen to that subtle world, the more you realize there is only one constant: a not-so-subtle pattern of blaming everybody but oneself for anything bad.(39) In the end, the more you listen, the more you wonder whether trying to win Muslim hearts and minds is not the ultimate waste of time, money and energy.

The “you can put lipstick on a pig, but it’s still a pig” mantra became fashionable under the Bush Administration, and will no doubt remain the favorite alibi of mediocre communicators. But it is not too late for the Obama Administration to realize that the real problem with *any* U.S. Middle East policy could well be that “you can lead a donkey to water, but you can’t make it drink.”

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## **Endnotes**

(1) Quoted by James Fallows, “Be nice to the countries that lend you money,” *The Atlantic*, December 2008. This Chinarabia Trap was a leitmotiv in Obama’s campaign from at least May 2008 (“we took out a credit card from the Bank of China and the Bank of the Saudis in the name of our kids, borrowing money to finance this war”) to October 2008 (“if we invest in a serious energy policy, that will save in the amount of money we’re borrowing from China to send to Saudi Arabia”). The National Intelligence Estimate that came out in November 2008 only underscored Obama’s legitimate concerns: “In terms of size, speed, and directional flows, the transfer of global wealth and economic power now underway – roughly from West to East - is without precedent in modern history.” *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, National Intelligence Council, 2008.

(2) David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 267-268.

(3) Osama bin Laden, quoted in Kicullen, op. cit, p.29.

(4) Osama bin Laden, quoted in Walid Phares, “Gaza just one of many Jihadi fronts,” *Asia Times*, January 24, 2009.

(5) Jakup Grygiel, “The Power of Statelessness,” *Policy Review*, April/May 2009: “Many of today’s nonstate groups do not aspire to have a state. In fact, they are considerably more capable of achieving their objectives and maintaining their social cohesion without a state apparatus. The state is a burden for them, while statelessness is not only very feasible but also a source of enormous power. Modern technologies allow these groups to organize themselves, seek financing, and plan and implement actions against their targets — almost always other states — without ever establishing a state of their own. They seek power without the responsibility of governing. The result is the opposite of what we came to know over the past two or three centuries: Instead of groups seeking statehood through a variety of means, they now pursue a range of objectives while actively avoiding statehood. Statelessness is no longer eschewed as a source of weakness but embraced as an asset.”

(6) Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, revised and enlarged edition (2001) Harvard UP, 1987.

(7) *The U.S. Army-Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, The University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp.48-49. P.W. Singer, *Can't Win with 'Em, Can't Go to War without 'Em: Private Military Contractors and Counterinsurgency*, Brookings, September 2007.

(8) Kicullen, op. cit, p.152. If Iraq is “Counterinsurgency Plus,” as Kicullen puts, then Afghanistan itself is “*Extreme COIN*”, if only because Afghanistan has been the playground of regional rivalries (India/Pakistan, Iran/Saudi Arabia) that long predate the emergence of Al Qaeda and the Taliban, and because of the existence of an unresolved border dispute, a “narcotic-centric” economy, an illiterate army (9 out 10 recruits cannot read) unlikely to be able to be proficient in the “graduate level of war” anytime soon, etc.

(9) On aid in Afghanistan, see General, James Jones, *Saving Afghanistan: An Appeal and plan for Urgent Action*, The Atlantic Council, January 2008; Fariba Nawa, *Afghanistan, Inc.*, A Corpwatch Investigative Report, 2008; and Matt Waldman, *Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan*, ACBAR Advocacy Series, 2008. On the pathologies of IGOs and NGOs, see for instance Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, eds., *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, Cornell University Press, 2008, and Lisa L. Martin and Beth A. Simmons, eds., *International Institutions – An International Organization Reader*, MIT Press, 2001.

(10) Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason “Democracy in Afghanistan is Wishful Thinking,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 20, 2009. The only period of relative stability in Afghan history coincided with the monarchy. Clearly, while the monarchy is not a silver bullet, and some royals are more politically savvy than others, all things being equal, it still offers the greatest probability of success. It cannot be ruled out that Abdullah Abdullah’s running mate, Homayoun Shah Assefi (the brother of the former Queen, and the cousin of the late King Zahir Shah) could turn out to be the “Juan Carlos” of Afghanistan.

(11) Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale UP, 1968, reedited in 2006 with a foreword by Francis Fukuyama. On constitution-making and democracy- building, see Juan Linz’s classic *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: Comparative Perspectives*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

(12) Dominic D. P. Johnson and Dominic Tierney, *Failing to Win: Perceptions of Victory and Defeat in International Politics*, Harvard University Press, 2006.

(13) See Jeffrey B. Cozzens’s indispensable “Victory from the Prism of Jihadi Culture,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 52, first quarter 2009.

(14) Laura Roselle, *Media and the Politics of Failure: Great Powers, Communication Strategies, and Military Defeats*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006; Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics*, Cornell University Press, 1996), Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility*, Cornell University Press, 2005.

(15) On possible NATO missions other than Counterinsurgency, see Tony Corn, “The Revolution in Transatlantic Affairs: Perils and Promises of a Global NATO,” web special, *Policy Review*, August 2007. [www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/9179587.html](http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/9179587.html)

(16) Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, (1960), revised edition, Free Press 1991. Far from being limited to the presidency, the expectation gap became recognized as a societal problem in America in another classic study of communication published a year later: Daniel J Boorstin's *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events*, Vintage Press, 1962.

(17) Kathleen J. Turner, *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press*, University of Chicago Press, 1985, p.4. As the author points out, at the time of the Korean War, only two percent of American homes owned a television set in 1950.

(18) J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford University Press, second edition, 1976.

(19) Kennedy was too smart not to realize that any pledge to "pay any price" could quickly be hijacked by any would-be extortionist ("give us X billion dollars or we'll go communist"), so his speech did contain a discreet caveat ("we pledge our best efforts *to help them help themselves*") which, regrettably, went un-noticed.

(20) Mark A. Stoler, "What did he really say? The 'Aiken Formula' for Vietnam revisited," *Vermont History*, 46, Spring 1978.

(21) Jeffrey Kimball, "The Nixon Doctrine: A Saga of Misunderstanding," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36, 1, March 2006.

(22) Thomas A. McCain and Leonard Shyles, eds., *The 1,000 Hour War: Communication in the Gulf*, Greenwood Press, 1993.

(23) Peter Beinart, "Return of the Nixon Doctrine," *Time*, January 4, 2007. For a broader analysis of the possible relevance of the Nixon Doctrine today, see Eugene Gholtz, "The Nixon Doctrine in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *World Politics Review*, July 22, 2009 [www.worldpoliticsreview.com/Article.aspx?id=4106](http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/Article.aspx?id=4106).

(24) Richard Rose, *The Post-Modern President*, Chatham House 1988, p.29.

(25) Stephen Biddle, "Is It Worth It? The Difficult Case for the War in Afghanistan," *The American Interest*, July/August 2009: "Managing this war will pose difficult problems both in Afghanistan and here at home. The strategic case for waging war is stronger than that for disengaging, but not by much: The war is a close call on the merits. The stakes for the United States are largely indirect; it will be an expensive war to wage; like most wars, its outcome is uncertain; even success is unlikely to yield a modern, prosperous Switzerland of the Hindu Kush; and as a counterinsurgency campaign its conduct is likely to increase losses and violence in the short term in exchange for a chance at stability in the longer term. But failure is not inevitable."

(26) Muslim women, who routinely risk being stoned for adultery and flogged for wearing trousers, were no doubt surprised to learn that, from the standpoint of the White House, the real burning issue when it comes to Muslim women's rights is the *right* to wear a burka on the

Champs-Elysees (“It is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit – for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear”).

(27) For a concise statement on the limits of peace-keeping and nation-building, see respectively Edward Luttwak, “Give War a Chance,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1999, and Stephen M. Walt, “Why is Afghanistan so Hard?,” *Foreign Policy*, September 09, 2009.

(28) Hajo Holborn, *American Military Government: Its Organization and Policies* (1947), Greenwood Press reprint, 1977.

(29) Admiral James G. Stavridis, “Strategic Communication and National Security,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 46, third quarter 2007. By the same author, see also “U.S. Smart Power in Latin America,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, Vol. 32, 2, Summer 2008.

(30) Admiral Mike Mullen, “Strategic Communication: Back to Basics,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, issue 55, Fourth Quarter 2009.

(31) If the commander’s intent was to send that message to the troops, then the medium of choice would have been *Stars and Stripes*. The fact that the “Mullen” article was published in JFQ is more indication that the target was Stavridis’s earlier article.

(32) Challener, Richard D. *Admirals, Generals and American Foreign Policy, 1898-1914*, Princeton University Press, 1973.

(33) Soeren Kern, *The Geopolitics of Tsunami Relief*, Real Instituto Elcano, August 2005. On the covert and overt strategic communication campaign around the Marshall Plan, see respectively Sallie Pisani, *The CIA and the Marshall Plan*, University Press of Kansas, 1991, and the special website [www.sellingdemocracy.org](http://www.sellingdemocracy.org).

(34) See Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz’s classic *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of ‘Dallas’*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

(35) See George Creel, *How We Advertised America*, Kessinger Publishing 2008 (1920); Allan Winkler, *The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information, 1942-1945*, Yale University Press, 1978; Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad*, University Press of Kansas, 2008.

(36) Interestingly, communication research by the West Point Combating Terrorism Center has shown that the most influential jihadists in the blogo/cybersphere are not necessarily the jihadists familiar to the Western mainstream media. See William McCants, ed. *The Militant Ideology Atlas*, November 2006 [www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/atlas.asp](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/atlas/atlas.asp).

(37) Not only actions don’t speak for themselves, but only in rare instances will the military be able to identify activities around which a military strategy, a development strategy, and a communication strategy can converge. Kilcullen’s superb analysis of what “road-building” can

accomplish is also the only example he could come up with of an activity in which the requirements for success of the three strategies are not mutually exclusive.

(38) On the culture of conspiracy, see Daniel Pipes's indispensable *The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy*, St Martin's Press, 1996.

(39) Israel being the favorite scapegoat by far. Edward Luttwak recently exploded that myth in one single sentence: "Yes, it would be nice if Israelis and Palestinians could settle their differences, but it would do little or nothing to calm the other conflicts in the Middle East from Algeria to Iraq, or to stop Muslim-Hindu violence in Kashmir, Muslim-Christian violence in Indonesia and the Philippines, Muslim-Buddhist violence in Thailand, Muslim-animist violence in Sudan, Muslim-Igbo violence in Nigeria, Muslim-Moscovite violence in Chechnya, or the different varieties of inter-Muslim violence..." "The Middle of Nowhere," *Prospect*, May 2007.

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