

dr Greg Simons
Szwedzki Uniwersytet Obrony
Centrum Studiów nad Zagrożeniami Asymetrycznymi
gregmons@yahoo.com

PONOWNE PRZEMYŚLENIA NAD KOMUNIKACJĄ W GLOBALNEJ WOJNIE Z TERRORYZMEM

RETHINKING COMMUNICATION IN THE GLOBAL WAR WITH TERRORISM

Streszczenie: Artykuł przedstawia przemyślenia autora na temat problematyki komunikacji w wojnie z globalnym terroryzmem. Pokazuje przebiegłą politykę terrorystów islamskich, którzy swoimi działaniami wpędzają Zachód w geopolityczną pułapkę. Polega ona na pokazaniu wojny, nie jako walki z organizacjami terrorystycznymi, ale jako starcia cywilizacji Islamu z cywilizacją Zachodu w myśl klasycznej koncepcji Samuela Huntingtona.

Słowa kluczowe: wojna z terroryzmem, starcie cywilizacji, strategie komunikacyjne, informacja.

Summary: The article presents reflections on the problem of communication in the war with the global terrorism. It shows shrewd politics of Islamic terrorists, who are pushing the West into a geopolitical trap with their actions. It consists in showing the war not as a fight against terroristic organisations, but as a clash of Islam civilization with the Western civilization, compatible with the classical concept of Samuel Huntington.

Keywords: war with terrorism, the clash of the civilizations, communication strategies, information.

*In the information age,
success is not merely the result of whose army wins,
but also whose story wins.*

Joseph Nye

Narratives determine our perception of a problem and the reality within the specific environment which it resides (Zalman, Clarke, 2009; Esch, 2010). This in turn, affects the means and the approach to solve that issue. One side effect of an established narrative and is to limit how a particular issue is constructed and viewed, often at the expense of alternative explanations and views. This can be to the detriment of solving the problem/task at hand. "The central fallacy at the heart of the current narrative is that it employs a single prism to view a complex world" (Zalman, Clarke, 2009, s. 111). This is clearly

seen within the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT) that was launched in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the US mainland by terrorists linked to Al Qaeda.

In the ensuing battle for hearts and minds that has taken place since, between the Western world and Islamic-based extremism, messages and counter-messages of these opposing sides have been flooding the information space and especially social media. Conventional wisdom postulates that the appeal of Islam has been drawing a steady stream of sympathy and recruits to the cause of the insurgent and terrorist forces (McClanahan, 2002; Fernandez, 2016). However, now may be the point in time to reconsider this basis after numerous efforts to unsuccessfully communicate with different narratives based on this assumption. Is religion (namely Islam) the foundational basis for those insurgent and terrorist forces engaging the Western world in armed conflict or is it 'merely' an excuse for legitimacy? If religion is not the basis for drawing sympathy, support and recruits to the side of the insurgents/terrorists, then what is drawing people to their cause?

Narratives and Their Significance

Information and how it is conveyed is critical to all societies. "The telling of stories lies at the heart of human communication and underpins the development and cohesion of all societies and cultures. [...] Stories, quite simply, are one way of depicting reality and of revealing what lies beneath the surface of events" (Brophy, 2009, s. IX). Therefore narratives are more concerned with meaning rather than pure 'facts', and therefore indicate what is significant and important in our environment. However, a narrative is not merely the objective conveying of the meaning of events and people that take place in a particular society. They can also be posed and used as a means to prime and call a target audience to political action.

The political call for action can be seen within the framework of advocacy networks that operation across borders in international affairs, which impact upon perception and relations. Actors not only include state-based actors, but non-state actors too. They use high value content based upon norm and value-based appeals in an environment of informational uncertainty. Information exchange is the central basis of the relationships that are created by various actors.

What is novel in these networks is the ability of non-traditional international actors to mobilise information strategically to help create new issues and categories and to persuade, pressure and gain leverage over much more powerful organisations and governments. Activists in networks try not only to influence policy outcomes, but to transform the nature of the debate (Keck, Sikkink, 1998, s. 2).

Non-state actors can gain additional influence value with their target audiences by serving as an alternate source of information and ideas. Credibility and drama are key elements in the communication strategy, powerful messages (often emotional rather than rational in nature) influence perception and reaction by the audience. As noted by Payne (Payne, 2005) media are the conduit of the information flows, the significance being the outcome of wars is decided by political factors (as opposed to individual battles being decided by military factors) that is driven by information and perception.

Communicating a Narrative in Political and Armed Conflict

The information sphere is in an intangible existence and reality, however, it plays a critical role. Failure to control or at least manage information flows can gradually result in negative impacts upon the operational environment. One of the key determinants of success is the ability to colonise and occupy the information sphere, which bestows privileges and advantages to those that are successful. "Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups have been enormously successful in using the Internet as a means of occupying that battle space, issuing statements and assertions of fact that largely have gone unchallenged" (Eder, 2011, s. 11). By being inactive or through using the wrong tactics, an actor essentially yields to their opponent.

In addition, Lord (Lord, 2006) argues that there needs to be matching and supporting physical deeds to reinforce the rhetoric to ensure and enable a greater sense of credibility of the communicator. He used the lessons ideological conflict embedded in the Cold War to reinforce this particular point, and especially the public diplomacy efforts of the United States in Eastern Europe. In his opinion, communication and influence played a key role in the eventual outcome of the Cold War, but sees a number of problems in the current conflict, which he refers to as being a war.

It is time to recognise that public diplomacy and strategic influence are similarly broken, and for our political leaders to begin to address how to fix them. Particularly in the kind of war that we are engaged in, these instruments could well prove to make the difference between victory and defeat (Lord, 2006, s. 13).

Western governments need to be able to make their case to a multi-varied target audience, it concerns the need to align messaging, with counter-messaging and physical deeds. (Waller, 2007, s. 38) notes that "words and images are the most powerful weapons in a war of ideas. Used skilfully, they can serve the cause well. Used carelessly, they cause collateral damage and the equivalent of death by friendly fire." This is to say that words and images shape the reality of the information space, whether a reality is real or not is secondary to whether it is believed or not. Therefore it is necessary to not only know oneself, but how the 'Other' communicates and interprets people and events. Possible impediments to achieving these ends "include ignorance, political correctness and the unwillingness of officials to make words work to help win the war" (Waller, 2007, s. 75).

Social Media and Geopolitics in the GWOT

The mechanisms of geopolitical mobilisation through communication have been gradually evolving along with the developments in New Communications Technologies. Mathew Fraser speaks of *geopolitics 2.0*, he notes three significant shifts: 1) States to individuals; 2) real world to virtual world mobilisation and power; 3) old media to new media. He also notes that states have reacted to these changes by either censoring and/or deploying web platforms to achieve their goals and assert their influence (Fraser, 2009). This has already had a noted and significant impact upon the nature of the foreign policy

process. Henry Kissinger (Kissinger, 2015, s. 330-360) has noted that there is much less concrete and unified knowledge for policymakers in the age of social media as there is an instantaneous deluge of information available. Thus the days of shared accounts of knowledge are fading as knowledge is being increasingly contested. Another point being the nature of the instantaneous communication, which often carries selective and emotionally based material forces a more rapid and less reflective reaction to people and events in the world. This increases the risk of applying inappropriate or incorrect remedies to global problems, such as terrorism.

New media communication is dialogic in nature, a many-to-many form of message flow, which witnesses the simultaneous sending and receiving of messages between numerous individual via platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (Cunningham, 2010, s. 111). The new media environment differs from the traditional media (print and broadcast) as it is a rapid paced and interactive environment that has implications. "A dialogic new media communication strategy must be persistent and adaptive over time. It represents at a conceptual level a war without end, although it is a war waged in the information sphere" (Cunningham, 2010, s. 113). As influential as social media's role is in communicating and spreading dissent, the role should not be overstated and nor should the role of traditional media be completely discounted in the process (Khondker, 2011).

Insurgent and terrorist groups have been adept at social media communication, which concerns not so much about dictating to an audience how to think, but more what to think about. "The siren call of ISIS, promoted through its now-infamous use of social media, is, like that Wahhabism before it, a worldview that has motivated tens of thousands toward extreme action, caused extreme suffering and dislocation, is extraordinarily ambitious and aggressive" (Fernandez, 2016). Fernandez notes that ISIS messages revolve around three core concepts – religion, grievance and utopian vision. Those that draw the hearts and minds of certain segments of social media users are the grievances and utopian vision. Recent research has shown that isolated and marginalised groups and individuals are more likely to be lured by the messages of vengeance (perceived social and political justice) and a utopian life of the Caliphate (perceived sense of belonging and purpose) (CVE, 2016; Simons, 2016)¹. In this regard, religion may play a different role in the communication plan.

An astute observation by Waller (Waller, 2007) is that the insurgent and terrorist forces use Islam as a means of legitimising their political and armed struggle against the West, by adopting this approach and characterising the GWOT and subsequent conflicts as a war against Islamic extremism the West in fact runs the risk of entering the geopolitical trap of framing the conflict as between the West and Islam in terms of a Huntington-type clash of civilisations (Simons, 2010).

¹ This is in keeping with research conducted by Dr Noha Bakr from Egypt, she identified perceived grievances among youth from relatively well to do families was a significant motivating factor to join an organisation such as ISIS (correspondence via email on 6 March 2016).

Conclusions

In the insurgent and terrorist narratives, the different rhetoric aspects play a critical role in the overall picture and effect of the message. *Logos* is the logical appeal to the audience, even if the logic is false, it only needs to be believed. This plays a role in capturing influence from the target group. *Pathos* acts as an emotional primer for the audience to carry out physical acts that serve the political agenda of a group. *Ethos* is featured in the use of Islam and the Quran, which play the role of providing a façade of ethical justification for what may otherwise be unthinkable, let alone doable.

Given that the current communication strategies seem to be addressed at the underlying ideological legitimacy of terrorist and insurgent groups, it may be a case of administering the right medicine to the wrong problem. Undermining the perceived legitimacy of an opponent is certainly important, but should not be the only task. This is one of three necessary tasks. The other two messages of the narrative should also focus on shaping and engaging audiences in their perception of grievances and anger, and lastly to reduce the vulnerability and susceptibility of marginalised and isolated groups in society through active communication. This should align defensive communication (protect own information space), offensive communication (attack opponent's information space) and deeds (to support and engage communication with target audiences).

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