

# ***Framing the Problem: Challenges to Successful Psychological Operations***

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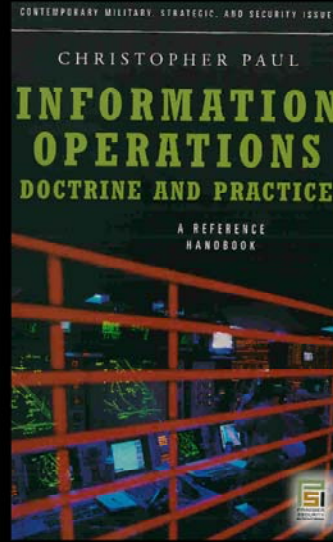
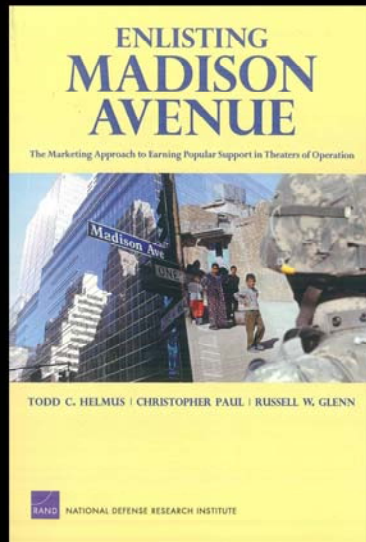
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Today I'll discuss findings from work published in 2007: the report I coauthored with Todd Helmus and Russ Glenn: *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation* .

The concept for this study was born of joint urban operations lessons learned work regarding operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and conducted between October 2003 and September 2005.\* In conducting this research, the difficulty with which U.S. forces were effecting shaping or influencing civilian populations quickly became apparent.

•The relevant studies, released in April 2007, are *People Make the City: Joint Urban Operations Observations and Insights from Afghanistan and Iraq* (Glenn, Paul, and Helmus) and *A Tale of Three Cities: More Joint Urban Operations Observations and Insights from Afghanistan and Iraq* (Glenn and Helmus).

## *This Presentation Draws on Two Sources*



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In *Enlisting Madison Ave.*, my co-authors and I suggest solutions to shaping challenges based on concepts from commercial marketing and from lessons learned from the contemporary operating environment.

Prior to making suggestions, chapter 2 lists challenges facing shaping efforts both for the whole USG and those specific to the DoD. This attempt to enumerate challenges broadly frames our solution recommendations and also serves as an invitation to continued thinking about the challenges that remain.

## *What Do I Mean When I Say "Shaping"? The Evolution of the Shaping Concept (1)*

- Traditionally understood as activities that constrain adversary or increase friendly force options
- 2002 joint urban operations doctrine expanded shaping to encompass civilian populations
  - **Influencing civilian populations has dramatic importance in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the wider war on terror**



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First, however, let me be perfectly clear about my terminology. While I'm not going to try to deliver the end-all be-all definition of strategic communication, I do want to make sure we're all on the same page when I say "shaping."

Militaries have used fires, maneuver, and even information to shape adversary behavior and their will to fight since the dawn of warfare,

In 2002, joint urban operations doctrine expanded the shaping concept to include civilian populations

We now know from Iraq and Afghanistan that earning the support of indigenous populations is fundamental to success.

## The Evolution of the Shaping Concept (2)

From our *People Make the City: Joint Urban Operations Observations and Insights from Afghanistan and Iraq*

- Every action, message, and decision by a force shapes the operational environment
- Unity of message is an impossible goal to achieve, but a worthy one to pursue



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With the publication of *People Make the City*, we further expanded the shaping concept by highlighting that every action, message, and decision by a force shapes the operational environment, as can actions not taken and decisions not made.

Strategic communications, meeting or failing to meet expectations, treatment of civilians at vehicle checkpoints, and the accuracy of air bombardment are among the components of an operation that send a message to a civilian population. Themes of American good will mean little if actions convey otherwise. Consequently, unity of message via word and deed is fundamental to success.

## *What Are We Trying To Accomplish With Shaping At The Theater Of Operations Level?*

- Support operational goals
- Two types of theater shaping – specific behaviors and attitude enablers
  - **Specific behaviors**
    - Primarily “compliance” behaviors (curfews, etc.)
  - **Attitude enablers**
    - Attitude toward US Government, US Forces, and coalition partners
    - Attitude toward perceived endstates
    - Attitude toward transitory states
    - Attitude toward indigenous government
    - Attitude toward adversary



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While “shaping” traditionally refers to efforts to constrain RED options or increase BLUE options, shaping heads toward its conceptual pinnacle when it is expanded to include non-combatants. In contemporary operations (and many of the types of operations that are likely in the future), shaping aimed at civilians takes pre-eminent importance because civilians are critical to U.S. policy goals.

Effective shaping of civilian attitudes should always connect to support of U.S. policy goals. This can be tight and explicit and connect to behaviors such as curfew compliance, election participation, tip line use, etc., or can be more broadly supported through attitude influence. Attitudes are most important as enablers. Because attitudes lead to and connect to behaviors, most effective attitudinal shaping impacts attitude areas which connect to behaviors which connect to policies.

So, when I say, “shaping” it is meant to be shorthand for, “efforts that influence the attitude or behavior of populations in theater.”

## *Where Do PSYOP Fit Into Shaping?*

- Shaping is an enterprise level undertaking
  - Every action and utterance of every soldier, sailor, airman and marine in theater contributes to shaping
  - Core communicators are in PA, PSYOP, and CA
- This working group is focused exclusively on PSYOP
- PSYOP personnel are the only trained influencers not only in DoD, but in the whole USG
- PSYOP are a critical subset of broader shaping efforts



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## ***What Makes Shaping Hard (In General)?***

- **Anti-American sentiment**
- **Adversary shaping efforts**
- **News and newsmedia**
- **The information environment**
- **Culture**
- **The US is an unattractive messenger with unattractive policy goals**



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In the full report, we list these six challenge areas for USG shaping efforts in general.

## ***Anti-American Sentiment Makes Shaping Hard***

- **Hatred for policies, or hatred for Americans?**
  - **Either is problematic, but the former is much more open to redress**
- **“Clash of civilizations”?**
  - **Much more concerning, if real**
  - **If just a perception, is a perception worth trying to shape against**



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## ***Adversary Shaping Competes in the Information Environment***

- **Intimidation, propaganda, disinformation**
- **Intimidation of journalists, special relationships with other journalists**
- **Provision of services**
- **Education/indoctrination of children**
- **Use of all media imaginable**



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In many cases, the adversary is way ahead of us on shaping. From a Hezbollah with an organizational motto that amounts to “If you haven’t captured it on film, you haven’t fought,” to sophisticated intimidation and cajoling of journalists, adversary shaping runs the full gamut AND goes places we cannot ethically also go.

Beyond just competing in the information environment, adversaries and potential adversaries shape from within the social fabric. Be it food or services provided to the needy or provision of education (that comes with a dose of indoctrination), groups around the world with interests opposed to US interests shape over the full spectrum.

## **The Nature of News and Newsmedia Present Shaping Challenges**

- **The negative, detached, technical, and official nature of news**
- **Bias in the news**
- **Adversary access control**
- **Media double standards**



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Media scholar Michael Schudson notes that modern news is “negative, detached, technical, and official.” This is a product of OUR culture, and isn’t something we should seek change, but does make shaping challenging. The opening of a multi-million dollar hospital isn’t news; a shooting in front of that hospital *is* news.

Bias is a concern, especially in international media. Even in the domestic media, unintended bias through ignorance can result when reporters do not (or cannot) take sufficient time to adequately understand and contextualize what they see. Bias becomes more likely when an adversary will only allow those likely to give them a favorable hearing to operate safely in a given area. Selective intimidation of journalists impacts the ultimate content of news.

Finally, there is a perception that the media, particularly the Western media, hold DoD and U.S. forces to an impossible or unreasonable standard while practically giving the adversary a free pass.

## *The Information Environment Makes Shaping Hard*

- Global communications and the intermingling of audiences
- Small things can “go global” when you don’t want them to
- What media are preferred varies by context



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## *Culture Complicates Shaping Efforts*

- Culturally specific media
- Variations in culture
- Lost in translation and cultural insensitivity
  - See examples next two slides



Culture and context matter for shaping. Information environments vary; there is variation at the regional level (“tabloids” appear in Europe, but not so much in Africa), at the national level (Americans watch CNN or Fox News; Saudis watch Al Jazeera), and within different parts of a country (Los Angeles has 20 FM radio stations; Pittsburgh has 15). Variation operates in the information habits among groups at any of those levels. For example, college students in Los Angeles may listen predominantly to two or three FM radio stations while area Hispanics choose others. Area sports enthusiasts may prefer AM to FM radio. There may be regional differences in how those media are displayed and what they are used for, even where a particular medium is fairly ubiquitous (newspapers, posters or flyers). Europe, for example, more so than the United States, tends to have kiosks on which to post notices.

## *Lost In Translation (1): Different Meanings To Different Audiences*



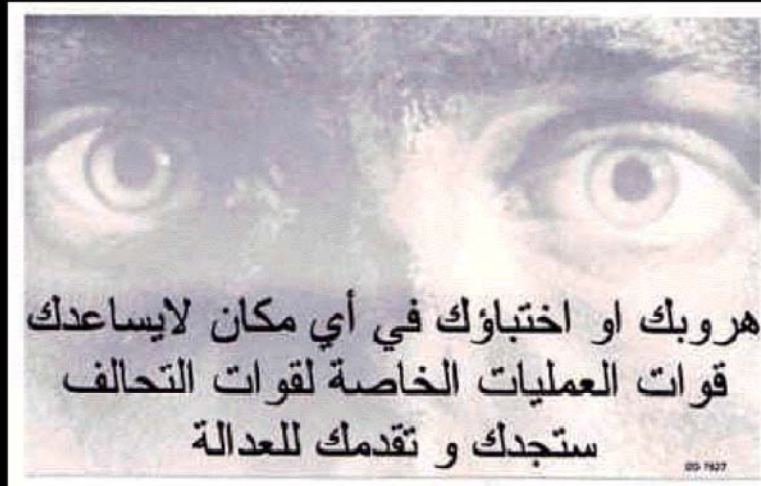
While Pres. Bush's gesture is easily recognized by the domestic audience as a salute to a victorious home state football team, in different cultures he is variously making "the sign of the devil" or indicating that someone has "grown horns" and has an unfaithful wife.



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Here is a perfectly innocent example of content designed for one audience bleeding over into another audience with unanticipated cultural implications. The President, a Texan, makes "hook 'em horns" for the home-town team. Internationally, this gesture has various negative pejorative implications. Does this mean the President shouldn't have made the gesture? No. Was anyone actually offended internationally by this image? No. Slightly confused or amused, perhaps, but not offended. This just highlights the complexity of cultural variation and the challenges inherent in the unavoidable merging of audiences in the global information space.

## Lost In Translation (2): Coalition Leaflet Dropped Over Fallujah



Coalition Special Operations Forces will find you and bring you to justice.

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[Note this slide has a build in it and appears to be overlapping text when printed. The two overlapped captions read:

Translation: No matter where you run, no matter where you hide, Coalition Special Operations Forces will find you and bring you to justice.

Cultural translation: The U.S. is giving everyone who picks up this leaflet the “evil eye.”]

This example highlights some of the risks inherent in communicating in foreign cultures and the risk of messages designed for a narrow audience (insurgents) being received more broadly (the general population under the leaflet drop).

## Slide 14

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**CP2** This slide has a build in it. While it looks like I've typed over text in preview mode, it works fine in "slideshow" mode.

Christopher Paul, 7/31/2006

## *The US Is An Unattractive Messenger With Unattractive Policy Goals*

- Taint of American involvement
- Low credibility
- Contradictory messages
- Failure to explain policies, actions, intentions



## *What Makes Shaping Hard For DoD?*

- The traditional kinetic focus of military operations
- All interactions between US forces and the indigenous population have shaping consequences
- Information fratricide at all levels
- The black reputation of PSYOP and IO
- Lack of resources for shaping
- Legal/policy barriers to shaping
- Difficulty of measuring effectiveness
- Magnified negative shaping consequences from mistakes
- Command and use of shaping assets
- Intelligence needs for shaping
- Balancing short, medium, and long term goals



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Again, in the full report we identify a host of challenges facing DoD shaping efforts. I'll cover most in this presentation, time won't permit me to cover all of them.

## *Information Fratricide Costs Credibility and Constrains Shaping*

- Lack of interagency coordination/synchronization
- Lack of coordination/synchronization with coalition partners
- Lack of coordination between military shapers



According to Army Field Manual 3-13, “*Information fratricide* is the result of employing information operations elements in a way that causes effects in the information environment that impede the conduct of friendly operations or adversely affect friendly forces.” All too often, “information fratricide” results in credibility loss, contrary messaging, or other limitations to shaping.

In addition to difficulties coordinating with the rest of the U.S. government, DoD faces the challenge of coordinating shaping efforts with U.S. coalition partners. Once again, this problem spans the spectrum, from strategic to tactical.

As an example of such failure, recall two separate press conferences in October of 2004. In one, President Bush indicated that there were over 100 allied Iraqi battalions in action in Iraq. In another, two U.S. Army generals indicated there was only one battle ready battalion of Iraqi forces. This is a clear example of failure to coordinate message. It looks like the two elements of the government are contradicting each other; such contradictions lead to skepticism and loss of credibility. The worst bit is, both the President and the Army Generals were *right*, they were just reporting different facets of the same set of numbers. At

## *Many View PSYOP and IO as Tainted by the Inclusion of Deception and Propaganda*

- PSYOP includes “black” (false or falsely attributed information) in its toolbox
- This inclusion impinges on the reputation of PSYOP, even though 99% of contemporary PSYOP are “white” (true information, correctly attributed)
- Black reputation makes some hesitant to work closely with PSYOP personnel, particularly PA and CA personnel
  - **However, many embassies love their MIST**



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## ***Lack of Communication Resources Affects Planning and Execution of Shaping***

- Funding
- Personnel
- Grade structure
- Access to the commander
- Training



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We want to promote the view that everyone in the joint force is a “shaper” so I’m not going to suggest that “shaping” is under resourced. However, while what everyone does and says contributes to shaping, there are certain specialties we rely on for communication and messaging. These specialties are under-resourced. PA and PSYOP, as well as CA.

Note that DoD is not alone in the problem. Consider DOS’ constraints. All of DOS has fewer than 1000 deployable officer equivalents. While they have a much higher proportion of their personnel trained for PA or for public diplomacy, they have almost no budgetary flexibility with which to act. Let me tell you a little story: I was at a conference recently at State, and I got to hear some states talking about MIST teams (That’s “Military Information Support Team”, basically PSYOPers in embassies). I was bracing for “black PSYOP blah” and was surprised to hear that the states love the MIST teams? Why? They view them as ambitious partners with DEEP POCKETS!

## *Legal Barriers Constrain Certain Kinds Of Shaping*

- Copyright law
- Smith-Mundt Act
- PSYOP approval process
- Difficulty of legally attacking enemy shaping means



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## *Measuring Persuasion and Influence is Not Trivial*

- The social and behavioral sciences tell us that persuasion itself is challenging
- *Measuring* effective influence is perhaps even more so
  - **Difficult to observe attitudes**
    - Behavior is easier to observe
  - **Data collection requires resources**
    - Time, money, special skills
  - **Influence takes time, and can be both subtle and gradual**
  - **Influence processes rife with causal conflation**



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## ***Command Failure to Use Shaping Assets Optimally Makes Shaping Harder***

- **Non-communications specialists trying to do communications**
- **Commanders insufficiently informed about shaping assets to use them effectively**
- **Failure to allow shaping sufficient time to have effect**



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Interviewed PA, PSYOP, and IO personnel lamented the missteps made when individuals untrained in the nuances of creating messages took the responsibility upon themselves. Part of the problem is the default assumption that developing such communications is easy; experience suggests it isn't.

Further, we have repeatedly heard that there are unnecessary delays in the review of shaping products forwarded for approval.

Similarly, accountability, or going to the most appropriate source for information, is a problem. One of our interview respondents recalled an incident involving the relationship between the U.S. Army as a force provider and the COCOMs as those employing the forces in the theater. He recounted a situation in which something within the COCOMs' operational context went poorly, but questions went to Army PA, which knew far less about the incident.

## *Intelligence Needs For Shaping Aren't Being Fully Met*

- **Shaping intelligence requirements not always known or met by intel forces**
- **Traditional intel structures not designed to collect necessary cultural and audience related intel**



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Previous RAND research has shown that shaping activities have very extensive intelligence requirements. Audience segmentation, target-audience analysis, and MOE all require intelligence support. Further, many of these intelligence requirements specifically demand human intelligence (HUMINT), while, traditionally, U.S. forces have focused on technological means of intelligence gathering. This proved to be the case in OIF, in which intelligence support for IO was excellent with regard to technical sources but struggled with human and cultural intelligence.

One observer suggests that part of the problem is that “key IO intelligence requirements are not identified anywhere outside of IO doctrine.” To the extent that this is the case, shaping personnel are under an increased burden to make their needs clear to intelligence personnel.

Another factor is that gathering good cultural intelligence and other forms of HUMINT is a difficult and time-consuming task. It also differs in character from more traditional collection efforts. “Our intelligence is still geared to [maneuver warfare],” one interviewee noted. “Human analysis and human influence is a secondary skill in our sector.”

## ***Balancing Short, Medium, And Long Term Goals Is Tricky***

- **Difficult to balance short term tactical objectives with long term policy goals**
- **Short term information “success” can cost long term credibility**
- **Unanticipated second order consequences of actions**



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The final challenge facing U.S. forces with regard to shaping is the need to balance short-, medium-, and long-term goals. A major challenge of short- versus longer-term objectives involves shaping issues that differ from one phase of operations to the next. Consider a sampling of four phases of an operation: a preoperational phase (“phase 0”); a combat phase (“phase 1”); a postcombat support, stability, and reconstruction phase (“phase 4”); and a final transition to indigenous authority (“end phase”). The most significant challenge is to shape toward the end phase from phase 0 forward, but each phase contains its own shaping challenges beyond keeping the ultimate policy goal in mind.

In phase 0, access to the theater of operations may be the primary, though not insurmountable, challenge. Shaping capabilities generally lack sufficient predeployment access to target audiences for either analysis or message transmission. Since phase 0 is furthest from the end state, the end state may not be well articulated, or the path to the end state may not be clear, which makes shaping toward that path challenging.

The dilemma of force is most challenging during phase 1. General Krulak’s three-block war inherently introduces a

## Challenges Remain

- Progress is being made
  - Many reports of successes from the field
  - We identify marketing practices that can contribute
  - IO/strategic communication broadly are areas of renewed emphasis and are receiving attention and resources
- Still a lot of ground to be covered
  - Recognizing the wide range of challenges helps puts things in perspective
    - This is not an easy set of problems
  - Solutions to any of these challenges would help, but there is no “silver bullet”



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In our broader report, we make several productive suggestions based on commercial marketing principles and identify several more good ideas from existing practice. Doubtless more successful practices have emerged in the field since we completed our research.

Still, shaping non-combatant attitudes remains fraught with daunting challenges. We hope that by enumerating these challenges we can inspire thought and research toward attacking a broader range of issues. Each challenge that is resolved or minimized helps. There is no “silver bullet” (in marketing, the social sciences, or wherever) that could solve THE shaping challenge. However, by working to incrementally remove barriers and challenges the ability of our forces to shape effectively will be improved.

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