

**Australia's Defence White Papers  
by the Numbers**

Graeme Dobell

## **Social Media in the Modern Security Environment**

**#jihad:  
Understanding Social Media as a Weapon**

Levi J. West

**A Fragmented Audience:  
How to Remain on Target**

Andy Ruddock

**Soldier Morale:  
Defending a Core Military Capability**

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**Countering Violent Extremism:  
From Defence to Attack**

Sharyn Rundle-Thiele and Renata Anibaldi

**The Australian Defence Force's  
Embrace of [Un]Social Media**

Jason Logue



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## Editors' Introduction

In November 2015, Monash University and the Australian Army co-hosted a conference on Social Media and the Spectrum of Modern Conflict. A variety of practitioners and academics attended, and five of their revised papers are included in this special edition of *Security Challenges*. We would like to thank the conference organisers and particularly Al Palazzo and Kevin Foster for their help preparing papers from the conference for this journal. Submissions are now open for special editions for 2017, and we invite scholars from Australia and the Asia-Pacific to contact the editorial team with their proposals.

Two of the papers from the Social Media and the Spectrum of Modern Conflict conference are included as articles in this edition. Levi J. West from Charles Sturt University examines how terrorist groups use social media to encourage violent action by radicalised individuals in the West. Andy Ruddock, from Monash University, considers modern media-military relations in the era of WikiLeaks.

The remaining three conference papers are included as slightly shorter commentary pieces. Sean Childs argues that social media needs to be used to defend and enhance soldier morale. Sharyn Rundle-Thiele and Renata Anibaldi argue that for violent extremism, marketing processes might be used to shift social media efforts 'from defence to attack'. Jason Logue reviews recent Western military use of social media, and contrasts this with the savvy and proactive efforts of terrorist adversaries.

This issue also includes a commentary piece by Graeme Dobell, a journalist fellow at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. In his piece, Graeme examines how the prominence of certain countries and key concepts has differed in each of Australia's seven Defence White Papers.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that Dr Gregory Raymond has joined the journal's Editorial Team. Greg is a Research Fellow at the Australian National University's Strategic and Defence Studies Centre.

*Andrew Carr, Gregory Raymond and Iain Henry*  
Managing Editors  
September 2016





## **Australia's Defence White Papers by the Numbers**

Graeme Dobell

An Australian Defence White Paper is analysis framed by numbers. For forty years, White Papers have been the ultimate public expression of Australian strategy and Defence understanding of the world. More than dollars and equipment, the simple statistics of Australia's seven Defence White Papers reveal meanings and mental maps. What does a word count of key countries and concepts reveal about those understandings and how they evolved across the seven White Papers? This commentary maps that mental topography from the typography.

The crudest measure is to rank countries by the number of times they're mentioned. The country count is employed by embassies to check out official statements. How often did we appear compared to everyone else? The reference count is useful for calculation and comparison. And it produces hierarchies. Apply the topography-from-topography test to the Australia Defence White Papers of the twentieth century—in 1976, 1987, 1994 and 2000—and the three White Papers of the twenty-first century, in 2009, 2013 and 2016.<sup>1</sup> Note that the first White Paper in 1976, in the age of typewriters, got the job done in sixty pages; all those that followed went well beyond 100 pages. The count attests to a simple and obvious fact.

The United States ranks first in Australian strategic thinking. In six out of seven papers the United States got the most White Paper mentions. The single exception to the top-ranking rule was 1976 when Australia fretted the United States was departing after the Vietnam defeat. On the 1976

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<sup>1</sup> The seven Defence White Papers are: Department of Defence, *Australian Defence* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1976); Department of Defence, *The Defence of Australia, 1987* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1987); Department of Defence, *Defending Australia: Defence White Paper 1994* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 1994); Department of Defence, *Our Future Defence Force* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2000); Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009); Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2013); Department of Defence, *2016 Defence White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2016).

Subsequent references to the White Papers are included as in-text citations with date and page number. This departure from the normal *Security Challenges* style reflects the nature of the article.

numbers, Australia was more worried about Indonesia and the Soviet Union than reassured by the alliance.

#### United States

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
12	62	60	43	80	86	129

**China:** China throbs powerfully today giving worrying answers to what were once only questions. The cautious yet upbeat tone for the final quarter of the twentieth century was set by the 1976 paper:

There has been a major re-assessment of China. China's earlier isolation has been much modified and it has entered into widespread relationships with other governments. It plays an important role in world affairs. We welcome the opportunity to develop our relations with China; but we recognise the important differences in our political attitudes. (1976, p. 1)

In the 1987 White Paper, China dropped to four mentions (two of them on maps). The 2000 White Paper was when Australia stepped beyond three decades of relative optimism and considered the possibility of conflict. China's relationship with the other big players was "the most critical issue for the security of the Asia Pacific" (2000, p. ix). The 2009 White Paper was a not-so-polite rendering of Kevin Rudd's private description of himself to Hillary Clinton as "a brutal realist on China".<sup>2</sup> For the first time, China got more mentions than Indonesia. Even when discussing the United States, the thinking now is often about China. Julia Gillard's 2013 Defence White Paper expressed this in its Strategic Outlook chapter, with one section headed 'The United States and China'—the 2016 White Paper does the same. Today, you can't have one without the other.

#### China

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
10	4	20	13	34	65	64

**Indonesia:** While China has been a slow build, Indonesia always ranks. What is striking over the seven papers is how the temperature of Australian thinking on Indonesia jumps all over the place. This is the roller coaster relationship—always important, often problematic. The first White Paper noted how the two neighbours have "weathered occasional sharp differences" while stating the abiding geographic reality that any military threat will come from or through the archipelago:

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<sup>2</sup> 'Wikileaks—US Embassy Cables: Hillary Clinton Ponders US Relationship with Its Chinese "Banker"', *The Guardian*, 5 December 2010, <[www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/199393](http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/199393)>

The Indonesian archipelago, together with Papua New Guinea, would be an important factor in any offensive military strategy against Australia. This consideration alone gives Australia an enduring interest in the security and integrity of the Indonesian Republic from external influence. (1976, p. 3)

The 1987 Paper saw a stable Indonesia as an important factor in Australian security and offered the positive judgement that Indonesia “forms a protective barrier to Australia's northern approaches” (1987, p. 15). The 1994 Paper said the stability and cohesion delivered by Suharto after the turbulence of the 1950s and 1960s had “done much to ensure that the demands on Australia's defence planning have remained manageable” (1994, p. 87). The paper looked to a day when Suharto was no longer in power with a hint of trepidation: “Indonesia will undergo an important leadership transition at a time of rapid economic growth and social change.” (1994, p. 10)

By 2000, Australia couldn't repeat the claim in the 1994 Paper that the “defence relationship with Indonesia is our most important in the region” (1994, p. 87). Suharto had fallen, Australia had led the intervention to save the East Timor vote and Jakarta had torn-up the 1995 security treaty negotiated by Keating and Suharto. The 2000 Paper worried that Indonesia faced a series of challenges “at a critical point in its history” (2000, p. 20). Picking up the pieces, Australia would work to get “a new defence relationship” with Indonesia (2000, p. xi). The chance of “adverse developments” in Indonesia threatening the whole region had to be expressed: “While not regarding developments of such seriousness as likely, Australia needs to recognise the possibility that, were they to occur, Australia's security could be affected” (2000, p. 20).

In 2009, Indonesia got the least number of mentions since 1987. The relief at Indonesia's “remarkable gains in the past decade” was tempered by gloom about where Indonesia's new democracy could go awry. Australia fretted that “a weak, fragmented Indonesia beset by intractable communal problems, poverty and failing state institutions, would potentially be a source of threat to our own security and to Indonesia's other neighbours” (2009, p. 35). Nearly as bad as failure, “an authoritarian or overly nationalistic regime in Jakarta would also create strategic risks for its neighbours” (2009, p. 35). The shift from Kevin Rudd's 2009 Paper to Julia Gillard's 2013 Paper brightened the mood. Indonesia was back as “our most important regional strategic relationship”. The partnership was “strong” and “continues to deepen and broaden in support of our significant shared interests” (2013, p. 11). The 2016 White Paper called the relationship “vital” (2016, p. 59).

#### Indonesia

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
20	13	25	33	20	32	32

**Papua New Guinea:** If Indonesia is the roller coaster, the same fundamental questions on PNG recur in various guises in all seven White Papers. What must we do? What can we do?

**Papua New Guinea**

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
13	18	10	29	11	7	24

**Japan:** In the twentieth-century White Papers, Japan was the biggest trade partner. In the twenty-first century, Japan's trajectory is to become a strategic partner in the trilateral with the United States. In the 2016 White Paper, Japan for the first time gets more mentions than Indonesia.

**Japan**

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
11	3	14	14	18	20	36

**India:** The 1987 Paper mentioned the Indian Ocean nine times while India itself got zip. The astigmatism in the way Canberra and New Delhi viewed each other is tracked in the twentieth-century White Papers. This century, India's numbers zoomed. Can't have the Indo-Pacific as the defining strategic frame without India in the picture.

**India/India Ocean**

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
3	9	8	11	32	68	51

**Soviet Union/Russia:** The bear fades from view. A set of prosaic numbers chart a profound shift in Australia's understanding of power and what will matter in Asia.

**USSR/Russia**

1976	1987	1994	2000	2009	2013	2016
23	16	3	8	2	6	4

## Geography

After the country count, turn to the geographic constructs that Defence uses to describe what it sees. In the first two White Papers, Defence ignored the word 'Asia' as a single construct, preferring South East Asia and North East Asia (or North Asia as it has become of late). In the 1987 Paper there was one reference to the Asian mainland. The Defence hardheads didn't think there was an Asia system worth considering (a criticism today levelled at Defence's concept du jour, the Indo-Pacific). As the immediate

neighbourhood, Southeast Asia always gets more mentions than North Asia. The big actors in North Asia are so distinctive they demand individual treatment. The centripetal effects of ASEAN consolidate the idea of South East Asia, while North Asia tends to the centrifugal.

In 1994, Defence got a big dose of the Paul Keatings—Asia was everywhere in the document. Defence got the Asia-Pacific memo, but never wanting to be slavish about following fashions elsewhere in the bureaucracy rendered it twenty-seven times as 'Asia and the Pacific' and three times as Asia-Pacific. By 2000, Asia Pacific didn't even need a hyphen, and it got more mentions than South East and North East Asia combined. In Kevin Rudd's White Paper, 'Asia Pacific' was in the document title ('Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030') but not in the text. 'Asia Pacific' was at the foot of every page in 2009 as part of the title, but the usage appeared only three times in the text (twice for Rudd's vain bid to create an Asia Pacific Community). The 2013 paper also had three Asia Pacific mentions; by 2016 it got a donut.

In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Indo-Pacific has replaced the Asia-Pacific as the reigning geographic construct of Australian Defence policy. And Defence has had the Indo-Pacific embraced by Labor and Coalition governments in successive White Papers. Australia is widening its geo-strategic lens. The nation with its own continent has an Indian Ocean coast as well as a Pacific coast. Yet the adoption of the Indo-Pacific is also an intensely Canberra tale, reflecting a Defence view of the world. The Indo-Pacific replaced the Asia-Pacific as Defence waged bureaucratic push-back against Canberra's adoption of the idea of the Asian Century during the Gillard government. In the 2013 White Paper, Defence managed to give ten mentions to Julia Gillard's 'Australia in the Asian Century' White Paper;<sup>3</sup> this was necessary Defence obeisance, not obedience, to the Asian Century.

Rather than 'Asian Century', Defence preferred the Indo-Pacific because it was explicit about the continuing US presence in the system. The Asian Century label gives no specific acknowledgement to the role of the United States, straying close to China's 'Asia run by Asians' language. The Asia Century can be read as cutting across the understandings offered by either the Asia-Pacific or the Indo-Pacific. Refer to the country count to recall where the United States ranks in Australia's strategic universe to see why this caused conniptions at Russell HQ. Australia, Japan and plenty of others built the Asia-Pacific model because it gives an explicit role to the United States. It aligns Australia's strategic and economic interests. To shift from the Asia-Pacific Century to the Asian Century is to reframe the power

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<sup>3</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australia in the Asian Century: White Paper* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2012).

equation and the hierarchy. All this matters for politics and government, for bureaucracy and the chattering classes.

#### **South East Asia**

<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>
11	20	25	31	29	39	53

#### **North East Asia/North Asia**

<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>
5	0	4	6	7	6	17

#### **Asia Pacific**

<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>
0	0	30	44	3	3	0

#### **South China Sea**

<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>
0	3	1	1	0	6	9

#### **South Pacific/South-West Pacific**

<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>
5	30	13	10	18	33	21

#### **Indo-Pacific**

<b>1976</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2016</b>
1	0	0	0	0	58	68

On winning office in 2013, Tony Abbott quickly discarded Gillard's 'Asian Century'. Gillard's Asian Century White Paper got the flick while a key thought in Gillard's Defence White Paper lived to serve another government. The Indo-Pacific construct is a continuity linking Labor's 2013 White Paper and the Coalition's 2016 remake. The figures show just how new it is. The 1976 White Paper used the term Indo-Pacific once, but then it fled the scene for three decades. After zero appearances in four White Papers, the Indo-Pacific was everywhere in 2013 and did a repeat performance in 2016. Defence embraces the Indo-Pacific as the defining geographic expression of strategy and seeks a new India dimension.

## **Ideas**

Now to the themes and memes that flow through the seven White Papers. Australia's defence thinkers are ever worried about self-reliance and order. The Rs reign: rules and self-reliance and region. On the order front, the 1976 White Paper described the demise of colonialism producing "a new world order" (1976, p. 1), while the Communist victories in Indo-China made for an uncertain regional future (1976, p. 2). The White Paper said the

United States wanted “a peaceful and stable world order” while USSR ideology sought “disruptive political change” (1976, p. 4). The 2016 White Paper worries repeatedly that the old order is cracking. The United States is still seen as central to a stable world order. One guess about the identity of the big player suspected of seeking disruptive change (hint: starts with C, ends with a—not Cuba—and it got sixty-four mentions in the 2016 Paper). The seven White Papers track the rise and fall of the stated commitment to self-reliant defence of Australia.

The phrase ‘self-reliance’ was put at the heart of Australian strategic thinking by one of the great Canberra mandarins, Arthur Tange, Defence Secretary from 1970 to 1979. He described “self-reliance” as “the nearest I ever got to launching a political idea” to detach Australian policy statements from dependence on the United States:

I wanted to have self-reliance recognised as having a necessary place in the posture of an independent self-respecting country. While in later decades the concept became regularly used in the language of all political parties, I believe I was the first to make it part of the language of discussion. Much defence policy lies in the mind; and what may seem no more than a slogan can be made a powerful directing influence on more material matters. In a talk with the editor of a Sydney periodical [Donald Horne of the *Bulletin*], I tried out the idea that this concept might provide an escape from the sterile political argument between ‘forward’ and ‘continental’ defence.<sup>4</sup>

Donald Horne described that same meeting:

Arthur Tange came to my office, sat in a remote chair, forcibly immobile, like a statue of a nineteenth-century statesman in a frock coat, and asked me if I had a new phrase that could replace ‘Forward Defence’. ‘Fortress Australia?’—never. ‘Self-reliance?’—perhaps.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1976 White Paper, ‘self reliance’ or ‘self reliant’ appeared in the text only six times (once as a heading). This was enough to make it “seminal”.<sup>6</sup> The number of mentions is not the only measure of the importance of a key idea—although the usual White Paper habit is instruction and injunction by multiple iterations. Say the same thing repeatedly so everyone gets the point. The full rhetorical flowering of the idea that Australia could defend itself came in Labor’s 1987 White Paper. Australian ‘self-reliance’ got forty-three mentions and ‘self-reliant’ defence got a further thirteen goes. By 1994, self-reliance/reliant was worth twenty-four mentions. The Cold War was gone. Asia would “increasingly” determine its own affairs and “a new

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<sup>4</sup> Tange, Arthur, *Defence Policy-Making: A Close-up View, 1950-1980—A Personal Memoir*, edited by Peter Edwards (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), p. 40; <[press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/strategic-and-defence-studies-centre-sdsc/defence-policy-making/](http://press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/strategic-and-defence-studies-centre-sdsc/defence-policy-making/)> [Accessed July 2016].

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 48 fn 24 (original emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> Dibb, Paul, ‘DWP 2016: The Return of Geography’, *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 1 March 2016, <[www.aspistrategist.org.au/dwp-2016-the-return-of-geography/](http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/dwp-2016-the-return-of-geography/)> [Accessed 23/7/2016].

strategic architecture will evolve” (1994, p. 8). The new architecture was supposed to deliver order. In John Howard’s 2000 White Paper, self-reliance was given due weight with eight mentions. In Kevin Rudd’s 2009 Paper self-reliance was worth fifteen goes, while Julia Gillard gave it seven. The 2016 White Paper salutes ‘self-reliant’ twice.

Self-reliance may remain a central concept; it just doesn’t get referred to as much. By contrast, the number of times the United States gets mentioned keeps growing (from 12 times in the 1976 Paper to 129 in 2016). Arthur Tange might lament that Australia has trouble throwing off old addictions to focus on the self in self-reliance. John Howard’s 2000 White Paper is notable for delivering both process and cash. Howard created the National Security Committee of Cabinet and it put in the hours on the 2000 Paper. The Howard government boasted it was “the most comprehensive process of ministerial-level decision making about Australia’s defence policy for many years” (2000, p. v). And a big difference from all previous White Papers—the promised cash arrived in the years that followed.

As self-reliance faded in usage, the need for rules rose. Kevin Rudd’s Strategic Interests chapter had a section headed, ‘A Stable, Rules-Based Global Security Order’. There were eleven ‘rules-based’ mentions. Julia Gillard’s 2013 Paper matched it with a dozen references to the need for rules, while its heading was ‘A Stable, Rules-Based Global Order’. Come to 2016 and ‘rules’ is used sixty-four times—forty-eight of these in the formulation ‘rules-based global order’. Rules turns up in three section headings: ‘The rules-based global order’, ‘A stable Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based global order’, and ‘Australia’s interests in a rules-based global order’. Talk about hammering the point. And the point is fear of what is fraying. ‘Rules-based global order’ is a big phrase to cover such disparate forces as jihadism and China’s rise. Mostly, though, it’s about China. The ‘rules-based’ mantra is another expression of the thought that these days when Australia talks about the United States, often it’s really thinking about China. As the repeated message of the 2016 White Paper, ‘rules-based’ is the meme for an Australia proclaiming a bigger defence budget, driven by a region throbbing with political nervousness, diplomatic neuralgia and strategic angst.

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# #jihad: Understanding Social Media as a Weapon<sup>1</sup>

Levi J. West

This article will argue that social media in the hands of terrorist groups constitutes a weapon, and has become increasingly capable of contributing to the facilitation of consequential harm against identified targets. In doing so it will first clarify the communicative nature of terrorist action and provide an overview of the various contributions made by jihadist strategists to the evolution of terrorist practice, and in particular the re-emergence of the practice of individual terrorism. It will then identify the intersection of individual terrorism and social media and the development and deployment of a *system of social media jihad*.<sup>2</sup> The article will explain the mechanisms by which terrorist groups exploit and deploy social media platforms, and inflict various harms, with a specific focus on individual and small cell terrorism in Western jurisdictions. Finally, a brief case study analysis of Anwar al-Awlaki will demonstrate the gravity with which governments have conceived of this problem, in part by highlighting the substantiveness of their responses.

The exploitation of information and communication systems by terrorist groups has always been a vital component of their operations. Communicating their ideological agendas has always constituted, and continues to constitute, a core purpose for undertaking terrorist violence. The use of social media by Islamic State (IS), and a range of other terrorist and violent non-state actors, represents the most recent evolution in the relationship between terrorist organisations, media platforms, and information and communications technology. This article will argue that social media offers, to those terrorist organisations that are effective in exploiting it, a specific capability to inflict substantive harm upon their adversaries. IS, through a combination of the incorporation of pragmatic jihadist strategic doctrine, the refinement of a novel and multifaceted narrative, and a willingness to permit a high degree of autonomy amongst its individual operatives in Western jurisdictions, have established themselves as the most proficient terrorist group deploying and exploiting social media. This deployment and exploitation serves to reinforce their narratives to multiple audiences, contributes to recruitment and radicalisation, and of most

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally presented at the symposium *Social Media and the Spectrum of Modern Conflict*, at Monash University, co-hosted by the School of Media, Film and Journalism and the Faculty of Arts, Monash University, and the Strategic Plans Branch of the Australian Army, 13 November 2015.

<sup>2</sup> This term is a specific reference to the doctrine authored by Abu Musab al-Suri. The chapters on military theory and organisational theory include the Arabic slogan *nizam, la tanzim* (system, not organisation), and are contained in the closing chapters of his *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, available in English in Brynjar Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaida Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007), pp. 347-484.

consequence to Western security agencies, is increasingly responsible for substantially contributing to terrorist attacks in Western countries.

The topic of IS's use of social media has received substantial articulation both in the scholarly literature and in broader analytical discourse. Valuable scholarly and analytical contributions to the discussion have focused on topics such as the quantum of output produced by IS,<sup>3</sup> specific purposes for which IS utilise social media,<sup>4</sup> or on usage by a particular cohort.<sup>5</sup> While there has been substantial literature on the subject of jihadism and the online environment broadly, and specifically in regards to social media,<sup>6</sup> Ingram's work is particularly valuable for contributing substantially to both conceptual understandings, and for the use of both Arabic and English language primary material.<sup>7</sup> This analysis, through the citation of select primary material, seeks to contribute to the broader conceptual body of work that is emerging in relation to terrorism and social media. In doing so, it provides an analysis of the mechanisms by which IS achieves effects through social media and, in the process, weaponises an otherwise relatively benign tool. Furthermore, it focuses on the development of a specific system for the facilitation of individual terrorism in the West. By exploring the manner in which IS use social media, and how these complementary processes contribute to the overall impact of IS's social media deployment, a more comprehensive understanding of their social media strategies is achieved, in particular those deployed for the purpose of operationalising strategic thinking related to individual jihadist terrorism. This analysis will be contextualised by an argument regarding the strategic thinking that pertains to individual jihad and how its fusion with social media results in a substantial alteration to the domestic terrorism and counter-terrorism ecosystem in Western jurisdictions.

The primary argument advanced here is that IS, through the deployment of English-language content that seeks to facilitate acts of individual terrorism, have developed a *system of social media jihad* that is specifically designed to result in *action* being undertaken by individual terrorists in Western jurisdictions. This system has proven increasingly capable of inflicting significant harms against IS targets in the West. The operative components of this system are contextualised by the broader multidimensional

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<sup>3</sup> J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter*, Analysis Paper no. 20 (Washington, DC: Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, March 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (New York: Regan Arts, 2015), pp. 170-79.

<sup>5</sup> Jytte Klausen, 'Tweeting the Jihad: Social Media Networks of Western Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 38 no. 1 (2015), pp. 1-22.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace: The Next Generation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Philip Seib and Dana M. Janbek, *Global Terrorism and New Media* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011); Thomas Rid and Marc Hecker, *War 2.0: Irregular Warfare in the Information Age* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Haroro J. Ingram, 'The Strategic Logic of Islamic State Information Operations', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 69, no. 6 (2015), pp. 729-52.

information campaigns of IS<sup>8</sup> as well as the now well-established and relatively refined jihadist master narrative which has been built and reinforced since 2001. Through the distribution, largely via social media,<sup>9</sup> of specifically designed content, IS is able to achieve operational penetration into jurisdictions well beyond its key area of operations, while also imposing significant costs upon the 'far enemy'. This article will argue that this system is the culmination of the principles of individual jihad conceived and articulated by Abu Musab al-Suri and others, articulated and propagated by Anwar al-Awlaki and others, and operationalised and made accessible via social media. Ultimately, this system effectively weaponises social media.

Prior to undertaking the substantive analytical component of this article it is necessary to identify the significance and centrality of communication to terrorism, and the role of various interpretations and manifestations of the maxim of *propaganda of the deed*. This maxim, generally attributed to Mikhail Bakunin,<sup>10</sup> is recognised as a significant component of modern terrorism. Undertaking acts of terrorist violence without consideration of how various audiences will be informed of the violence, and the necessarily embedded ideological component of the violence, limits greatly the utility of the action. For example, the beheading of Western journalist James Foley by IS in 2014, symbolically dressed in an orange jumpsuit reminiscent of those worn by inmates of Guantanamo Bay, would have had greatly diminished impact in the absence of video footage of the incident and, in particular, in the absence of open source distribution through online media.<sup>11</sup> Schmid articulates the spirit of this maxim, when he states that

Terrorism cannot be understood only in terms of violence. It has to be understood primarily in terms of propaganda. Violence and propaganda, however, have much in common. Violence aims at behaviour modification by coercion. Propaganda aims at the same by persuasion. Terrorism can be seen as a combination of the two. Terrorism, by using violence against one victim, seeks to coerce and persuade others. The immediate victim is merely instrumental...<sup>12</sup>

This instrumentality is essential to understanding why and how IS and other terrorist entities deploy social media and other communication tools. If terrorism is to be fully understood, particularly in its modern context, then a

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<sup>8</sup> Haroro J. Ingram, 'Three Traits of the Islamic State's Information Warfare', *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 159, no. 6 (2014), pp. 4-11.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that as of the time of writing, much Islamic State (IS) output is released via both Twitter and the encrypted application Telegram.

<sup>10</sup> The original quote is "we must spread our principles, not with words but with deeds, for this is the most popular, the most potent, and the most irresistible form of propaganda". Mikhail Bakunin, 'Letters to a Frenchman on the Present Crisis', (1870), in Sam Dolgoff (ed.), *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 195-96.

<sup>11</sup> The 4 minute, 40 second video 'A Message to America' was distributed via social network Diaspora on 19 August 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Alex P. Schmid, 'Frameworks for Conceptualising Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2004), pp. 205-10.

fulsome understanding of how and why it interacts with social media is essential. Merely analysing the violent actions of groups such as IS provides a limited perspective on the phenomenon, and risks missing the broader ideational aspects of why a certain terrorist entity achieves a degree of traction and salience. While the conventional approach to terrorism analysis—involving a focus on characteristics such as tactics and targeting, leadership, or organisational structure—are essential and rightly prioritised, incorporating an analysis and understanding of the non-kinetic practices of terrorist entities is both necessary and worthwhile. This work seeks to highlight the linkages between the non-kinetic activities of terrorist organisations and certain manifestations of kinetic action.

It is also important in undertaking any analytical exercise to ensure that appropriate definitional boundaries are established, particularly as it pertains to key concepts underpinning the analysis. While the focus of this article does not necessitate significant engagement with the ongoing definitional questions regarding terrorism, it will seek to establish parameters for the discussion regarding social media, and regarding the notion of a weapon. It is possible to rely on existing definitions of both terms throughout this analysis. Social media, generally understood by reference to the two most prominent manifestations, namely Facebook and Twitter, can be better understood by utilising a conceptual definition. Ahlqvist et al. provide a definition of social media, which states that “social media refers to the interaction of people and also to creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks”.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, the definition of weapon will be drawn from the work of Thomas Rid, who has contributed substantially to contemporary debates on cyber-related issues. In his article, ‘Cyber-Weapons’, he defines a weapon as “a tool that is used, or designed to be used, with the aim of threatening or causing physical, functional, or mental harm to structures, systems, or living things”.<sup>14</sup> These two definitions provide a platform upon which to build the analysis below, and provide a necessary reference point upon which to assess the claim that social media is deployed as a weapon by terrorist entities.

## **A Global System of Online Radicalisation and Recruitment**

IS and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) both utilise similar mechanisms to leverage the information environment. This section will describe the primary components of this activity, namely propaganda, recruitment, and decentralised command and control. In particular, it will highlight the synchronous manner in which the various activities complement

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<sup>13</sup> Toni Ahlqvist, Asta Bäck, Minna Halonen and Sirkka Heinonen, *Social Media Road Maps: Exploring the Futures Triggered by Social Media*, VTT Tiedotteita Research Notes 2545 (Vuorimiehentie: VTT [Valtion Teknillinen Tutkimuskeskus], 2008), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Rid, ‘Cyber-Weapons’, *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 157, no. 1 (2012), p. 7.

each other, creating a complex whole more substantial than the individual components. Additionally, this section will make brief reference to the doctrine that underpins this action, and which provides guidance for the overall *system* which AQAP pioneered, and which IS have arguably mastered.

### **A NOTE ON RADICALISATION AND MULTIFACETED COMPLEXITY**

Radicalisation is recognised as being an inherently complex process that does not lend itself to simplistic or generalisable explanations, and is fundamentally context dependent. Horgan states that “involvement in terrorism is a complex psychosocial process”.<sup>15</sup> In relation to the role of the online environment and its part in the radicalisation process, Von Behr et al. noted that “the internet is not a substitute for in-person meetings but, rather, complements in-person communication”; however, they also noted that the online environment “does create more opportunities for radicalisation”.<sup>16</sup> Nothing in this analysis seeks to suggest that the deployment of social media by IS or any other terrorist group, in a sophisticated manner or otherwise, is likely to result, in and of itself, in the radicalisation of an individual to the extent that they engage in acts of terrorist violence.

### **Al-Suri’s Strategy of Decentralisation**

The strategic theory authored by Abu Mus’ab al-Suri, and articulated in the closing chapters of his tome *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, is the intellectual basis that informs much of the contemporary manifestations of jihadist terrorism. The importance of al-Suri and his thinking to contemporary terrorism is articulated by Bourke, who states that:

If al-Awlaki was the propagandist who did most to shape today’s threat against the West, and al-Zawahiri and al-Baghdadi are currently the most influential commanders, then al-Suri is the strategist of greatest relevance.<sup>17</sup>

Numerous authors on jihadism broadly, and on IS specifically, recognise the influence of al-Suri’s pre-eminence amongst jihadist strategic theorists. While Lia’s *Architect of Global Jihad*<sup>18</sup> and Ryan’s *Decoding al-Qaeda’s Strategy*<sup>19</sup> are the most comprehensive treatments of al-Suri’s strategic thought, a more focused body of work has begun to identify the influence

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<sup>15</sup> John Horgan, ‘From Profiles to *Pathways* and Roots to *Routes*: Perspectives from Psychology on Radicalization into Terrorism’, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 618, no. 1 (2008), pp. 80-94.

<sup>16</sup> Ines von Behr, Anais Reding, Charlie Edwards and Luke Gribbon, *Radicalisation in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2013); <[www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND\\_RR453.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf)> [Accessed 24 November 2015].

<sup>17</sup> Jason Bourke, *The New Threat from Islamic Militancy* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), p. 164.

<sup>18</sup> Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*.

<sup>19</sup> Michael W. S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda’s Strategy: The Deep Battle against America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

these ideas have had on IS. For example, Lister highlights the legacy of al-Suri's concepts regarding individual jihad,<sup>20</sup> while McCants identifies the less recognised importance of al-Suri's focus on the apocalypse and Islamic eschatology,<sup>21</sup> and Stern and Berger identify the founder of the original incarnation of IS, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, as being influenced by al-Suri. Atwan states in reference to al-Suri that "his prolific writings about tactics and the ideology of war still influence the online generation of jihadists, including the leaders of Islamic State".<sup>22</sup>

Further evidence of the influence of al-Suri can be found in the online magazine *Inspire*, published by AQAP, and distributed widely via the internet and social media. All excluding two of the fourteen editions of *Inspire* contain extracts from al-Suri's work in a section entitled 'The Jihadi Experiences'. Complementing the reproduction of al-Suri's strategic thought is the 'Open Source Jihad' section which seeks to operationalise much of al-Suri's thinking, and which can be found packaged into the 2013 publication *Lone Mujahid Pocketbook*.

At the core of al-Suri's thinking is a twofold process. First, is the abandonment of the traditional pyramid structured organisation for a decentralised system which seeks to enable individual and small cell operations. Second, is the empowerment and education of operatives and potential operatives. This overall model, which reflects the leaderless resistance model advocated by white supremacist Louis Beam,<sup>23</sup> is analysed at length in the jihadist context by authors such as Sageman,<sup>24</sup> and Ryan.<sup>25</sup> The parallels between al-Suri's proposed system of individual terrorism and the deployment of social media by IS are substantive. *Inspire* magazine and its successor, *Dabiq*, as the primary English-language publications by jihadist organisations seek in part to manifest the strategic, decentralised thinking of al-Suri. Social media—as a platform for the dissemination of propaganda and education in jihad; as a recruitment platform for drawing participants into jihad; and to facilitate and motivate those seeking to participate in individual and small cell operations, particularly within Western jurisdictions—is unique in its scope and reach. In the words of al-Suri himself:

The link ... is confined to the common aim, a common name, the common doctrinal jihadi program, and a comprehensive educational program,

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<sup>20</sup> Charles R. Lister, *The Syrian Jihad: Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and the Evolution of an Insurgency* (London: C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 2015), p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Will McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York, US: St. Martins Press, 2015), p. 29.

<sup>22</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate* (London: Saqi Books, 2015), p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> Louis Beam, 'Leaderless Resistance', *The Seditonist*, vol. 12 (1992), <[www.louisbeam.com/leaderless.htm](http://www.louisbeam.com/leaderless.htm)> [Accessed 24 November 2015].

<sup>24</sup> Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy*, pp. 193-255.



whereas the necessary programs and all the needed materials for the completion of their self-preparation are made available to them, so that they are informed of a clear and disciplined program for pursuing [jihad] activities.<sup>26</sup>

The work of al-Suri is of importance to IS, and in particular to their development of a social media system for the purposes of inciting individuals within Western countries to undertake acts of individual jihadism. Jihadist strategy expert Michael Ryan has made the case extensively for the importance of both al-Suri's work and *The Management of Savagery* by Abu Bakr Naji to IS's overall strategic thinking, and has stated that "like the current al Qaeda organization, ISIS is influenced by two major jihadist authors, Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji".<sup>27</sup> Suggestions, for instance, that the ongoing competition between Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)<sup>28</sup> and IS, or the disavowing of IS by al-Qaeda (AQ) leader Ayman al-Zawahiri results in core strategic doctrine of the jihadist movement being disregarded are misplaced. Georgetown University's Bruce Hoffman has articulated this meta-influence and identifies a number of key arguments that suggest the similarities are far more substantial than the differences, and in particular points out that "the two groups embrace the same strategy".<sup>29</sup>

Contemporary jihadist use of social media is not the product of an organic, emergent process, but is best understood as the calculated and considered adoption of a platform ideally suited to the strategic and organisational approach undertaken by many contemporary jihadist entities. The synchronous distribution of material for the purposes of propaganda, recruitment, and decentralised command and control, operationalises the thinking of al-Suri, and suits the objectives of groups such as IS in relation to targeting the West. A capacity to achieve multiple objectives through a variety of complementary content types provides efficiencies to groups which possess relatively limited resources and lack traditional broadcasting capability.

## PROPAGANDA

A predominant purpose for which social media platforms are utilised is the distribution of propaganda. All other aspects of online strategy depend on this, in that it provides meaning and context to all other forms of content.

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<sup>26</sup> Al-Suri, *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, cited in Lia, *Architect of Global Jihad*, p. 445.

<sup>27</sup> Michael W. S. Ryan, *ISIS: The Terrorist Group That Would be a State*, Case Study (Newport: Naval War College, Center on Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups, 2015), p. 8; <[www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/Departments---Colleges/Center-on-Irregular-Warfare---Armed-Groups/Publications/ISIS\\_-Michael-W--S--Ryan-Final.pdf.aspx](http://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/Departments---Colleges/Center-on-Irregular-Warfare---Armed-Groups/Publications/ISIS_-Michael-W--S--Ryan-Final.pdf.aspx)> [Accessed 24 November 2015].

<sup>28</sup> At the time of writing, Jabhat al-Nusra have declared that they have disaffiliated from al-Qaeda, and are now known by the name Jabhat Fath al-Sham, and will be focused solely on Syria.

<sup>29</sup> Bruce Hoffman, 'The Coming ISIS-al Qaeda Merger', *Foreign Affairs*, 29 March 2016, <[www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-29/coming-isis-al-qaeda-merger](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-03-29/coming-isis-al-qaeda-merger)> [Accessed 10 August 2016].

The distribution of propaganda by terrorist entities is neither novel nor revolutionary; however, the use of social media constitutes a substantial evolution of propaganda distribution capabilities. What social media facilitates is the perpetual distribution of audio, video and static content on an unprecedented scale, enabling the establishment and reinforcement of a master narrative. This narrative provides context, meaning and purpose to the violence undertaken by a terrorist group. Berger and Morgan conservatively estimate that between September and December of 2014, IS had some 46,000 Twitter support accounts,<sup>30</sup> and Berger has estimated that there are something in the vicinity of 200,000 tweets per day being generated by both the official and supporting IS accounts.<sup>31</sup> This retweeting is important as it decentralises the distribution capability, enabling resilience and broader audience penetration. The role of this global distribution capability in establishing and reinforcing the IS narrative is crucial in providing an overarching sense of meaning and purpose to those acts of violence undertaken in the name of IS specifically, or by those with more tenuous commitment to a specific organisation but a broad subscription to the overall jihadist narrative. The importance and sophistication of the narrative that is told via social media is important to the overall perception of IS, but also plays a key role in informing the recruitment process, and contextualising individual and small cell jihadist operations.

Effective propaganda depends substantially on an effective narrative. In the absence of an established and broadly understood narrative, propaganda's impacts are less impactful than they otherwise might be.<sup>32</sup> The substantive advantage that IS possess is the fifteen years of narrative development that has taken place since the attacks on the United States in September 2001. In the period since these incidents, there has been consistent messaging by al-Qaeda, and a diversity of other entities supportive of jihadist ideas, that has led to a set of well-established, well-understood symbols pertaining to jihadism, particularly in the West. Additionally, to the audiences of IS in the Arab and Islamic world, their propaganda draws on a master narrative<sup>33</sup> which is much broader and harks back to the so-called 'Golden Age of Islam', while citing the broad swathe of historical experience, largely through a lens of oppression and defeat.<sup>34</sup> The propaganda machine of IS, and its use of social media as its means of distribution, communicates this master narrative through all its external communications, and it supports the various purposes for which the propaganda is distributed. The management of what

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<sup>30</sup> Berger and Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Jon Greenberg, 'Does the Islamic State Post 90,000 Social Media Messages each Day?', 19 February 2015, <[www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2015/feb/19/hillary-mann-leverett/cnn-expert-islamic-state-posts-90000-social-media/](http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2015/feb/19/hillary-mann-leverett/cnn-expert-islamic-state-posts-90000-social-media/)> [Accessed 24 November 2015].

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Payne, 'Winning the Battle of Ideas: Propaganda, Ideology, and Terror', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2009), pp. 109-28.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffery R. Halverson, H. Lloyd Goodall and Steven R. Corman, *Master Narratives of Islamist Extremism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 13-14.

<sup>34</sup> Weimann, *Terrorism in Cyberspace*, pp. 197-98.



effectively constitutes a global brand is a powerful weapon, capable of causing substantial harm through both recruitment and inspiration. As detailed in the 2015 Global Terrorism Index,

strategic messaging and use of media as a psychological weapon in war is used tactically to magnify its power, attract foreign fighters and new citizens, and win greater economic resources. It has not only populated social media platforms but has attracted a global network of supporters that articulate, magnify and circulate its violent extremist messages worldwide.<sup>35</sup>

This body of propaganda contains both overt and more subtle references to, and justifications for, individual jihadist actions. The September 2014 audio release by IS spokesperson Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, entitled 'Indeed, Your Lord is Ever Watchful', is an example of the type of overt call for individual jihadist terrorism within Western jurisdictions. In the three month period after this release, seven individual jihadist terrorist attacks took place in Western countries, including the attack on two law enforcement officers in Melbourne by Numan Haider, only two days after the release.

The deployment of propaganda, both for the purpose of reinforcing the IS narrative, and for more specific targeting and incitement purposes, causes significant harm to a multitude of target audiences. The overall impacts of propaganda on both the specific audience that it seeks to either radicalise to join IS in theatre, or that it seeks to radicalise to commit acts of individual jihadist terrorism within their country, are substantial. The broader impacts on the families and communities from which these individuals are drawn and the costs imposed on the governments responsible for them further advance the objectives of IS. The costs imposed on the targets of the actions taken are in many cases fatal.

## RECRUITMENT

In addition to propaganda distribution for broader communicative and intimidation purposes, IS uses social media to communicate with potential recruits to its cause. An estimated 30,000 foreign fighters have entered Syria and Iraq since 2011.<sup>36</sup> The deployment of refined, contextualised and targeted content has been a component of recruiting, in particular of Western foreign fighters. As explained by Gates and Podder, IS recruitment via social media involves content that

tends to use video rather than text, takes full advantage of the linguistic skills of members (sometimes translating statements and videos into European languages), and makes good use of music...<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2015* (New York: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2015), p. 77.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Scott Gates and Sukanya Podder, 'Social Media, Recruitment, Allegiance and the Islamic State', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2015), p. 109.

The power and subtlety of recruitment content can be witnessed in video releases such as July 2014's *Join the Ranks*,<sup>38</sup> in Bahasa, with Indonesian fighters encouraging Indonesians to come and participate. Additionally, videos such as the June 2014 *There is No Life without Jihad*,<sup>39</sup> featuring British and Australian fighters, demonstrate specific audience targeting. Producing content in a diversity of languages remains a powerful tool for IS. Social media provides an interactive and dynamic platform that enables targeted distribution of fit-for-purpose content to specific audiences.

Beyond the pitch for foreign fighters, IS have diversified their recruitment drives and sought to appeal to a range of potential recruits for civilian roles. In his first public comments after establishing the caliphate, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the self-proclaimed Caliph of the Islamic State, called for a range of professionals to participate in the State-building component of the caliphate. In his statements he called for

scholars, fuqahaa' [Islamic jurisprudence experts], and preachers, especially the judges, as well as people with military, administrative, and service expertise, and medical doctors and engineers of all different specializations and fields.<sup>40</sup>

The appeal and salience of this articulation of the narrative, focusing on the state-building aspect rather than solely the military is evidenced by the high profile case of Tareq Kamleh, the Australian doctor who moved to Syria to work in a hospital.<sup>41</sup> In addition to this there is the case of nine British medics who entered Syria to work in hospitals there,<sup>42</sup> as well as reports of targeted recruitment by IS in Uzbekistan, particularly of doctors.<sup>43</sup> In the Uzbekistan case it is worth noting that in addition to the IS release of the video featuring Tareq Kamleh, and announcing the establishment of the Islamic State Health Service, a concurrent recruitment call was issued by a

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<sup>38</sup> 'Indonesian Fighter Promotes IS, Calls to Join Its Ranks in IS Video', SITE Intelligence Group, 22 July 2014, <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/indonesian-fighter-promotes-is-calls-to-join-its-ranks-in-is-video.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>39</sup> 'Australian, British Nationals Incite for Participation in Jihad in ISIS Video', SITE Intelligence Group, 19 June 2014, <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/australian-british-nationals-incite-for-participation-in-jihad-in-isis-video.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>40</sup> A. Agron, 'Wanted: Western Professionals to Join the Islamic State (ISIS)', Jihad and Terrorism Threat Monitor, Inquiry & Analysis Series, No. 1159, Middle East Media Research Institute, 15 May 2015, <www.memrijtm.org/wanted-western-professionals-to-join-the-islamic-state-isis.html#\_edn1> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>41</sup> Clark Jones and Greg Barton, 'New-look IS Video with Perth Doctor Tareq Kamleh but Same Old Radicalisation Techniques', *The Age*, 28 April 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Marga Zambrana, Hazar Aydemir and Emma Graham-Harrison, 'Nine British Medics Enter Isis Stronghold to Work in Hospitals', *The Guardian*, 22 March 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Joanna Paraszczuk, 'Is IS Recruiting Doctors from Uzbekistan?', Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 8 September 2015, <www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-uzbekistan-recruiting-doctors/27233287.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

Chechen fighter, via the Russian social-networking site VKontakte.<sup>44</sup> The use of both specific languages and culturally affiliated fighters, as well as utilising target audience centric platforms, demonstrates the sophistication of the effort by IS.

Further to the broader recruitment effort, and demonstrating the overall synchronised effort of IS output, the third edition of *Dabiq*, entitled *A Call to Hijrah*, specifically appealed to a range of professionals, declaring that the IS project was in need of “experts, professionals, and specialists, who can help contribute in strengthening its structure and tending to the needs of their Muslim brothers”.<sup>45</sup> The theme of *hijrah*<sup>46</sup> is used extensively in IS recruitment materials and is portrayed as an obligation. By linking the recruitment argument back to aspects of the master narrative portrayed across the full spectrum of IS propaganda, the recruitment process builds on already established propositions and assumptions conveyed through other content. This integrated approach greatly strengthens the capability of the material being distributed, and increases the capacity to recruit fighters, but also a broader spectrum of participants to the conflict.

The physical and mental harm on both the specific targets of the recruitment effort and the broader society from which they are drawn, and potentially return to, is significant. It is evidenced by the measures that nation states have undertaken,<sup>47</sup> as well as multilateral organisations such as the United Nations.<sup>48</sup> The secondary harm that foreign fighters inflict both whilst active, but also beyond the conflict further extends the harmful impacts of this aspect of the IS social media weapon.

## DECENTRALISED COMMAND AND CONTROL

The title of the AQAP’s online magazine speaks to the mechanism by which contemporary jihadist entities seek to facilitate operations beyond their immediate geographic reach. Through social media they are able to easily distribute material that is specifically designed to ‘inspire’ al-Suri’s individual and small cell jihadist, as well as reaching a broader range of potential recruits. It is this process that most clearly weaponises social media and

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<sup>44</sup> Joanna Paraszczuk, ‘IS Recruiting Medics for Battlefield First Aid, Treating Foreign Militants’, Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, 26 April 2015, <[www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-call-for-medics-doctors-battlefield/26979105.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/islamic-state-call-for-medics-doctors-battlefield/26979105.html)> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>45</sup> *Dabiq*, vol. 3 (Al-Hayat Media Center, September 2014).

<sup>46</sup> According to the Oxford University Dictionary of Islam, *hijrah* generally refers to migration or withdrawal. It typically refers to the migration of Muhammad and his Companions from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E., the first year in the Islamic calendar, and symbolises the willingness to suffer for faith and the refusal to lose hope in the face of persecution.

<sup>47</sup> Library of Congress, ‘Treatment of Foreign Fighters in Selected Jurisdictions: Country Surveys’, <[www.loc.gov/law/help/foreign-fighters/country-surveys.php](http://www.loc.gov/law/help/foreign-fighters/country-surveys.php)> [Accessed 27 November 2015].

<sup>48</sup> United Nations Security Council Committee on Counter-Terrorism, ‘UN Documents on Foreign Fighters’, <[www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/news/2015-03-11\\_UN\\_documents\\_FTF.html](http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/news/2015-03-11_UN_documents_FTF.html)> [Accessed 27 November 2015].

has the most direct link to harm. Through the decentralised distribution of the pertinent components of an entire, integrated and synchronised system designed to provide all the necessary permissions, guidance and inspiration, jihadist entities are able to reach into Western jurisdictions and have tangible effect. Ryan encapsulate this process and argues that this aspect of the system is

the real basis for al-Suri's *Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, the end point of his theory. It contains individuals and small units that are prepared and ready to devote themselves to terrorism ... propaganda and recruiting is intended to *inspire individual jihadists to strike priority targets identified by the disconnected and hidden leadership as strategic prizes...*<sup>49</sup>

It would be simplistic to argue causal relationships between the distribution of radicalisation material via social media and the actions of the individuals who have undertaken the plethora of individual or small cell terrorist operations that have occurred in Western countries since 2009.<sup>50</sup> However, an overwhelming majority of these cases have demonstrated substantial engagement with online jihadist material in varying forms. In the case of the Boston bombings, the surviving Tsarnaev brother confessed to investigators that he and his brother had obtained instructions for their pressure cooker bombs from *Inspire* magazine.<sup>51</sup> A substantial number of these incidents involved the operatives accessing via social media a diversity of jihadist material. Additionally, the tactics used and the targeting decisions made are in keeping with the suggestions and guidance provided by the jihadist movement broadly, through their online magazines and a multitude of video and audio releases. Overwhelmingly, this content is distributed via tweeted links. In a recognition of the substantive refinements that IS have made to the system originally deployed by AQAP through *Inspire*, there were nine individual or small cell jihadist attacks in the West prior to the release of al-Adnani's *Indeed, Your Lord is Ever Watchful* in September 2014, which occurred only one month after the beheading of James Foley, and only three months after the declaration of the Caliphate and the associated re-branding of IS. In the aftermath of the declaration of the Caliphate and the release of

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<sup>49</sup> Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy*, p. 245 (emphasis added).

<sup>50</sup> Little Rock Recruitment Centre shooting; Fort Hood shooting; Stockholm bombings; Frankfurt Airport shooting; Toulouse and Montauban shootings; Boston bombings; Woolwich stabbing; La Défense stabbing; Jewish Museum of Belgium shooting; Endeavour Hills stabbing; Vaughan Foods beheading; Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu ramming attack; Ottawa Parliament Hill shooting; Queens hatchet attack; Sydney siege; Joue-les-Tours stabbing; Charlie Hebdo shootings and Dammartin-en-Goële hostage crisis; Fontenay-aux-Roses and Montrouge shootings and Porte de Vincennes siege; Copenhagen shootings; Saint-Quentin-Fallavier attack; Chattanooga shootings; Parramatta shooting; Marseille teacher stabbing; Sarajevo shooting; San Bernardino shooting; Paris attempted meat cleaver attack; Philadelphia police shooting; University of California stabbing; Marseilles teacher stabbing; Orlando shooting; Facebook streamed police stabbing; Ansbach suicide bombing; Wurzburg train stabbings; Rouen priest killing.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Isikoff, Pete Williams and Erin McClam, 'Search of Tsarnaevs' Phones, Computers Finds no Indication of Accomplice, Source Says', NBC News, 23 April 2013, <[usnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/04/23/17877288-search-of-tsarnaevs-phones-computers-finds-no-indication-of-accomplice-source-says?lite](http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/04/23/17877288-search-of-tsarnaevs-phones-computers-finds-no-indication-of-accomplice-source-says?lite)> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

this audio command, there have been approximately twenty-five attacks of the same nature.<sup>52</sup>

It is important here to recognise the influence of Anwar al-Awlaki, who is generally regarded as having effectively operationalised and popularised al-Suri's ideas of individual, decentralised jihad. Through his English language content and web savvy distribution methods, Al-Awlaki made these concepts accessible to those who lacked Arabic language skills or a sophisticated understanding of Islamic theology. Al-Awlaki provides this audience with a 'pop' version of the justifications for jihadist violence that has been built on by IS through the production of *Dabiq*, but also through the distribution of a multitude of outputs in English and in other non-Arabic languages.

There are instances that have begun to demonstrate more direct relationships between social media calls for action and operational outcomes. The incident that occurred at the Curtis Culwell Center in Garland, Texas, where two operatives unsuccessfully attacked a cartoon competition focused on depicting Mohammed is a useful example. In this incident, numerous IS-sympathetic twitter users had been calling for attacks on the cartoon competition. Tweets issued in the days prior to the attack such as "Brothers in Garland Texas Please go to there with your weapons, bombs or with your knives. Threaten your enemies & the enemies of Allaah" and "I think thy forgt the previous attack done by our french bros, walahi we wil kill u if u dare to insult our Prophet"<sup>53</sup> were designed to encourage individuals or small cells to launch violent operations on the cartoon competition. Directly referencing and leveraging the post-incident atmosphere of the Charlie Hebdo attacks provided additional weight to the call for action. Immediately prior to the attack, one of the operatives, who maintained an active Twitter presence and engaged with IS supporters via social media, tweeted a pledge of allegiance to IS on behalf of himself and his co-conspirator. His tweet read "The bro with me and myself have given bay'ah to Amirul Mu'mineen. May Allah accept us as mujahideen fighters. Make dua #texasattack".<sup>54</sup> Half an hour after this tweet the two operatives launched their failed attack on the Culwell Center, being killed in the process. Immediately following the incident, high profile jihadist Twitter user Junaid Hussein retweeted the operatives pledge of allegiance, as well as an IS claim of responsibility, which stated "2 of our brothers just opened fire at the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) art exhibition in texas, They Thought They

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<sup>52</sup> Counting these types of operations is an imperfect exercise as, in some instances, motivations and intent are unclear. The attacks cited here reflect tactics and targets suggested by jihadist material. In a majority of the cases some form of digital evidence has suggested an affinity with jihadist ideology.

<sup>53</sup> Anti-Defamation League, 'Alleged Garland Shooter Indicated His Intent Online', 4 May 2015, <[blog.adl.org/extremism/alleged-garland-shooter-elton-simpson-isis-shabaab-twitter](http://blog.adl.org/extremism/alleged-garland-shooter-elton-simpson-isis-shabaab-twitter)> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Was Safe In Texas From The Soldiers of The Islamic State".<sup>55</sup> His further tweets made reference to the attack and used #texasattack, which the operative had been savvy enough to include in his original tweet of allegiance. The attack was subsequently celebrated in an al-Bayan news bulletin of 5 May,<sup>56</sup> and in the ninth edition of *Dabiq* magazine<sup>57</sup> published later that month.

The decentralised approach of al-Suri's system is exemplified in the audio release by al-Adnani, cited earlier,<sup>58</sup> which specifies a broad list of Western nationalities as permissible targets, including military and law enforcement personnel, as well as civilians. The speaker provides potential operatives with a broad range of permissible tactics, all of which are low risk from an operational security perspective, requiring limited resources and minimal capability. Significantly, al-Adnani commands that potential operatives do not require specific authorisation or advice, providing ongoing religious permissibility to likely operatives. It is in this aspect of the overall social media effort that harm becomes most directly linked to online content. By linking tactical and targeting suggestions, as well as religious permission into an ongoing overall master narrative that seeks to justify and encourage actions, both religiously and politically, jihadist groups have effectively been able to undertake in-country operations with minimal risk and maximum impact. Through social media, jihadist entities successfully achieve harm and disruption that would otherwise incur much greater risk, and offer greater likelihood of disruption or interdiction.

## Encryption and System Improvements

The weaponised use of social media by terrorist groups has been an aspect of their operations for some time. Terrorist organisations are adaptive by their nature, and have effectively sought to find solutions to the exposure that unencrypted communications presents. Increasingly, terrorists and terrorist entities are utilising encrypted platforms, such as Telegram, Surespot or Kik, as their primary means of communication.<sup>59</sup> In addition to

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<sup>55</sup> Site Intelligence Group, 'IS Fighter Forwards Alleged Claim of Shooting in Texas', <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/is-fighter-forwards-alleged-claim-of-shooting-in-texas.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>56</sup> Site Intelligence Group, 'IS Claims Texas Shooting, Identifies Perpetrators as "Soldiers of the Caliphate"', <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Statements/is-claims-texas-shooting-identifies-perpetrators-as-soldiers-of-the-caliphate.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>57</sup> Site Intelligence Group, 'IS Releases Issue 9 of English Magazine "Dabiq," Calls Texas Shooting "Inspiration"', <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Periodicals/is-releases-9th-issue-of-english-magazine-dabiq-calls-texas-shooting-as-inspiration.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>58</sup> Site Intelligence Group, 'IS Spokesman Rallies Fighters against U.S.-Led Coalition, Threatens Enemy and Calls Individual Muslims to Launch Attacks', 21 September 2014, <ent.siteintelgroup.com/Multimedia/is-spokesman-rallies-fighters-against-u-s-led-coalition-threatens-enemy-and-calls-individual-muslims-to-launch-attacks.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>59</sup> 'Islamic State Prioritise Telegram App to Spread Propaganda', BBC News, 9 October 2015, <www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-34478695> [Accessed 25 November 2015].



the diversity of platforms available to terrorists and terrorist entities for their communication, various individuals have authored guides and provided advice on the merits or otherwise of various platforms and applications.<sup>60</sup> IS have gone as far as co-opting and distributing a manual authored by a cybersecurity firm to advise journalists on protecting their identity.<sup>61</sup> The manual<sup>62</sup> provides advice and access to a range of products and services that assist in encrypting communication, but also in maintaining anonymity online, and for secure data storage. According to Stalinsky and Sosnow,

Since January 2015, followers of ISIS and other jihadi groups have been advertising their Kik and Surespot, and also Wickr account information in their other social media accounts, largely Twitter. This phenomenon has expanded exponentially, especially for Western supporters.<sup>63</sup>

This adaptability, and increased awareness of the vulnerability of conventional social media platforms enables terrorist entities to remain ahead of law enforcement and intelligence agencies in their communications. Increasingly, social media is reserved for propaganda distribution, which by its nature is open and public, while platforms such as Twitter are used to provide details on how to access encrypted platforms.<sup>64</sup> This shift represents a substantial alteration in the counter-terrorism environment, and presents substantial challenges to authorities seeking to counter the range of terrorism-related outcomes that social media are deployed to promote.

### **Anwar al-Awlaki: Propagandist *par excellence***

In seeking to identify the gravity of the problem analysed above, it is worth briefly discussing the case of Anwar al-Awlaki. Al-Awlaki can be described as a contemporary, digital propagandist *par excellence*. The measures that his government undertook in seeking to neutralise his capabilities were significant in providing an indication of the seriousness and gravity given to those individuals who play substantive roles in the operational aspects of the online terrorism environment. Al-Awlaki was a citizen of the United States, and the decision to undertake lethal action against him was not risk or controversy free. The preparedness to wear the political fallout, and the possible legal challenges post fact, further evidences the dangers attributed to weaponised social media in the hands of terrorists. Al-Awlaki was an

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<sup>60</sup> Steven Stalinsky and R. Sosnow, 'Encryption Technology Embraced By ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Other Jihadis Reaches New Level With Increased Dependence On Apps, Software—Kik, Surespot, Telegram, Wickr, Detekt, TOR: Part IV—February-June 2015', MEMRI, 16 June 2015, <[www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/8610.htm](http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/8610.htm)> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>61</sup> Kim Zetter, 'Security Manual Reveals the OPSEC Advice ISIS Gives Recruits', *Wired*, 19 November 2015, <[www.wired.com/2015/11/isis-opsec-encryption-manuals-reveal-terrorist-group-security-protocols/](http://www.wired.com/2015/11/isis-opsec-encryption-manuals-reveal-terrorist-group-security-protocols/)> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>62</sup> 'Several Cyber Security to Protect Your Account in the Social - :Networking Twitter', 14 September 2015, <[www.wired.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ISIS-OPSEC-Guide.pdf](http://www.wired.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ISIS-OPSEC-Guide.pdf)>.

<sup>63</sup> Stalinsky and Sosnow, 'Encryption Technology Embraced By ISIS'.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

English speaking, self-styled jihadist preacher and American citizen who has been implicated, to greater or lesser degrees, in numerous domestic terrorist plots and attacks in the West. As former Director of Research at West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, Jarret Brachman, commented in 2012,

Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan would not have been able to accomplish what they did without Suri's body of work ... But he was painting by number on a worksheet that had been already drafted by Suri.<sup>65</sup>

The influence that Al-Awlaki has had on AQAP-inspired terrorists has been substantially detailed elsewhere<sup>66</sup> but his influence on IS-related terrorism is less direct and informed more by the narrative that he delivered, the accessibility of his work, both in terms of language and the online format in which it is archived, and the operationalisation of al-Suri's strategic thought. Hoffman has stated in reference to Al-Awlaki's particular form of supra-influence that he "has a timeless and even universal message of radicalization and resistance that is completely separate to whatever organization he hitched his fortunes to".<sup>67</sup>

Al-Awlaki's specific impact on terrorism, particularly in the West, is substantial. He is understood to have had substantial email correspondence and influence on Nidal Hassan, the Fort Hood shooter, and with Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab, who attempted to blow up a Detroit-bound plane in 2009.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, al-Awlaki is alleged to have inspired Faizal Shahzad, who attempted to detonate a car bomb in Times Square, New York,<sup>69</sup> and Mohammad Youssef Abdulazee, who undertook a shooting at a military recruitment centre in 2015.<sup>70</sup> His influence has been linked to the San Bernardino shooting,<sup>71</sup> and to the Charlie Hebdo attack in France.<sup>72</sup> A recent study surveyed 287 jihadist plots since 2007 and found al-Awlaki's presence, in varying manifestations, in 65 of them. Karen Greenberg, Director of the Fordham Law School's Center on National Security, stated that

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<sup>65</sup> Jarret Brachman, 'Abu-Musab al-Suri—Released?', 11 January 2012, <jarretbrachman.net/abu-musab-al-suri-released/> [Accessed 10 August 2016].

<sup>66</sup> Scott Shane, *Objective Troy: A Terrorist, a President, and the Rise of the Drone* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Hoffman, cited in Greg Miller, 'Al-Qaeda Figure Seen As Key Inspiration for San Bernardino Attacker', *The Washington Post*, 18 December 2015, <www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/al-qaeda-figure-seen-as-key-inspiration-for-san-bernardino-attacker/2015/12/18/f0e00d80-a5a0-11e5-9c4e-be37f66848bb\_story.html> [Accessed August 2016].

<sup>68</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, *After Bin Laden: Al Qaeda, the Next Generation* (New York: The New Press, 2012), p. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Scott Shane and Mark Mazzetti, 'Times Sq. Bomb Suspect Is Linked to Militant Cleric', *New York Times*, 6 May 2010, <www.nytimes.com/2010/05/07/world/middleeast/07awlaki-.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>70</sup> Chattanooga Shooter Listened to Awlaki, *The Daily Beast*, 21 July 2015, <www.thedailybeast.com/cheats/2015/07/21/tn-shooter-listened-to-radical-cleric.html> [Accessed 25 November 2015].

<sup>71</sup> Miller, 'Al-Qaeda Figure Seen As Key Inspiration for San Bernardino Attacker'.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



His influence is laced through these cases in a way that is more powerful in the aggregate than is readily apparent in individual cases and that has enabled his influence to last way beyond his death...<sup>73</sup>

During the parliamentary inquiry into the death of Lee Rigby in 2013, British intelligence agencies provided written testimony that commented on the operational impacts of Al-Awlaki's *Inspire* magazine, while noting that it was one of numerous publications available online.

[W]e can now say that Inspire has been read by those involved in at least seven out of the ten attacks planned within the UK since its first issue [in 2010]. We judge that it significantly enhanced the capability of individuals in four of these ten attack plots...<sup>74</sup>

The nature of the online environment and of social media has greatly enhanced the capacity of charismatic individuals such as Al-Awlaki to have significant impacts well beyond their deaths. Increasingly, Al-Awlaki's influence beyond AQAP-affiliated terrorists or even AQ-affiliated terrorists is being witnessed. For example, Syed Farook, one of the shooters in the San Bernardino attack of December 2015, had consumed lectures by al-Awlaki and materials informed by al-Awlaki's ideas. Shortly after the attack, Tashfeen Malik, Farook's wife and the other shooter in the attack, pledged allegiance to IS on their behalf via Facebook.<sup>75</sup> This phenomenon of transcending specific organisational affiliation and only evidencing surface level understanding of the broader ideological content that seeks to justify jihadist terrorism is increasingly common, and has been evidenced by many of the Western foreign fighters who have travelled to join IS, as well as many of those undertaking attacks in the name of IS. Bruce Riedel, a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analyst and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, captures this phenomena eloquently when he states that

I think you can be a supporter of Awlaki and Baghdadi at the same time ... the difference matters a lot if you are in Syria. I don't think it matters that much when you are in San Bernardino or Paris.<sup>76</sup>

Al-Awlaki's simplified operational model of al-Suri's strategic and organisational theory has shaped the contemporary jihadist milieu

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Windrem, 'Dead Cleric Anwar al-Awlaki Still Sways Terror Wannabes', NBC News, 25 July 2015, <[www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/dead-cleric-anwar-al-awlaki-still-sways-terror-wannabes-n397506](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/dead-cleric-anwar-al-awlaki-still-sways-terror-wannabes-n397506)> [Accessed 22 November 2015].

<sup>74</sup> Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, *Report on the Intelligence Relating to the Murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby* (London: William Lea Group, 2014), p. 60. <[isc.independent.gov.uk/files/20141125\\_ISC\\_Woolwich\\_Report\(website\).pdf](http://isc.independent.gov.uk/files/20141125_ISC_Woolwich_Report(website).pdf)> [Accessed 20 November 2015].

<sup>75</sup> United States Department of Justice, 'Riverside Man Charged with Conspiring to Provide Material Support to Terrorism, as well as Being 'Straw Purchaser' of Assault Rifles Later Used in San Bernardino Attack that Killed 14', 17 December 2015, <[www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/riverside-man-charged-conspiring-provide-material-support-terrorism-well-being-straw](http://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/riverside-man-charged-conspiring-provide-material-support-terrorism-well-being-straw)> [Accessed July 2016].

<sup>76</sup> Bruce Riedel, quoted in Miller, 'Al-Qaeda Figure Seen as Key Inspiration for San Bernardino Attacker'.

substantially. His importance both specifically in regards to AQAP and plots associated with that organisation, but more importantly to the overall jihadist movement, is difficult to overstate. In response, al-Awlaki was removed from the battlefield by a Hellfire missile, launched from an American operated Predator drone in Yemen on 30 September 2011. Regardless of the justified or otherwise nature of this operation, it reinforces the seriousness with which the counter-terrorism community treated al-Awlaki, and his ideas.

## Conclusion

The above analysis has provided an articulation of the mechanisms through which IS and the broader jihadist movement have effectively weaponised social media. Through the acceptance of the principles of the strategic and organisational theory of al-Suri, and by benefitting from the popularisation of al-Suri's ideas by al-Awlaki, IS have been able to build a system for the synchronised deployment of content, via social media, that explicitly seeks to inspire individuals to undertake jihadist terrorist attacks in Western jurisdictions. By producing a diversity of content types, in a multitude of languages, IS has been able to mobilise a substantial number of individuals to either make *hijra* or to remain in-country and undertake jihad.

The consequences of this new found capability for domestic counter terrorism are being felt across the Five Eyes, and across continental Europe. The dramatic increase in the number of disconnected, individual jihadist attacks in the period post the declaration of the Caliphate has created a substantial challenge for counter-terrorism agencies, both in the intelligence domain and in law enforcement. The transnational nature of the online environment, the ongoing echo of al-Awlaki, and the ubiquity of social media platforms and connected devices provides an ideal operational environment for this system. The resonance of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, and the re-establishment of a caliphate continues to contribute to a domestic counter-terrorism environment that is likely to worsen before it improves. The digital domain means that the contributions of individuals like al-Awlaki will continue to resonate with those who seek out his content, and that groups such as IS will find benefits in continuing to distribute radicalising content.

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# A Fragmented Audience: How to Remain on Target

Andy Ruddock

This article considers how the role of social and digital media in combat reflects the multiple forms of stakeholder agency that conditions of mediatisation have created in modern warfare. The 'chaos' apparently threatened by the intrusion of digital media into military operations can be explained in reference to social desires that have been ever present in media history. This article explains how we can understand the current state of military/public media relations in reference to the history of audience research, paying special attention to feminist research.

This article introduces themes from the history of audience studies to discussions about the role of social media in military affairs. 'Audience' is a fluid concept that does two things; first, it helps to explain how centralised media power can be conceived in situations where many stakeholders contribute to the public framing of conflict. Secondly, an audience's perspective also shows how the concept of 'arrested war' sits in a history of media scholarship, where the relationship between the military, the media and various audiences epitomises changing ideas about the political impact of media.<sup>1</sup> In illustration, the essay focuses on two figures who encapsulate alternative perspectives on media/military relations. One is Chelsea Manning, the infamous US army intelligence specialist who sent classified materials to WikiLeaks. The other is Lisa Smith Molinari, a blogger who won more modest fame by writing about being the matriarch of a military family. Like all historically significant people, their notoriety reflects structural social shifts; in this case, the move toward 'mediatised' worlds, where public discourse is shaped by media industry practice.<sup>2</sup> Understanding how each captured specific ideas about the relationship between media, audience and public life contributes to a research trend noting the "appropriation and control of previously chaotic dynamics by mainstream media".<sup>3</sup>

The argument involves the following steps. First, I explain why fears about the subversive power of social media might be exaggerated. Next, I show how military interests have featured in four 'epochs' of audience studies. Finally, I make the case that military blogging is an exemplar of the fourth age, which reflects the concept of mediatisation; crudely, the notion that social life and social institutions are significantly guided by media business

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Hoskins and Ben O'Loughlin, 'Arrested War: The Third Phase of Mediatisation', *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 18, no. 11 (2015), pp. 1320–38.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 'Arrested War', p. 1320.

strategies.<sup>4</sup> By some accounts, mediatisation has ‘arrested’ the chaos that social media threatened to wreak among the authority of State armed forces and mainstream media alike, since both parties have learned to absorb the energies of media users. It bears noting that this line of thought connects the study of media/military relations to developments in thinking on the nature of media power, as they have evolved in relation to media audiences.<sup>5</sup> Putting all of these elements together, it makes sense to regard global media operations as the foundation for any potential ‘disruption’ to military operations that might seem to come from media users, largely since the nature of media power rests in some respects on the ability to ‘lend’ that power to diverse groups who contribute in various ways to the mediatisation of conflict.

### ‘Staying on Message’: Precautionary Observations

Initially, audience research offers three lessons informing discussions on social media and the armed forces. First, one of the main media effects at play in our world is the *impression* that media influence what people think. The third-person effect suggests that most audiences see themselves as immune to persuasion, but believe that others are far more susceptible.<sup>6</sup> This model, developed by W. P. Davison, emerged from combat. Davison was inspired by an anecdote from the Pacific theatre during World War II. The Japanese, so the story went, had dropped propaganda leaflets encouraging black soldiers to rebel against a segregated army. A terrified white officer withdrew some black units from the line, despite the absence of any insurrection.<sup>7</sup> His actions became the prelude to an enduring observation about media effects; that media affect society by convincing us all that they matter.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps there are echoes of this phenomenon in concerns about the mutinous power of social media.

Second, the key word in social media is, of course, social. Evidence suggests that the main impulse for media use is the desire for companionship, and this has more to do with making a niche within established social hierarchies than ‘changing’ anything, as such.<sup>9</sup> That idea was around long before Facebook et al.

These points are made to redefine the terms in which media power is understood. Arguably, *the* lesson of audience research is that media businesses colonise ordinary life, by making themselves integral to almost

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<sup>4</sup> Anders Hepp, *Cultures of Mediatization* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Stig Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Hoskins and O’Loughlin, ‘Arrested War’.

<sup>6</sup> W. Phillips Davison, ‘The Third Person Effect in Communication’, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 1 (1983), pp. 1-15.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Herbert Blumer, *Movies and Conduct* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

every occasion that one can imagine. This renders the desire to integrate with media culture the defining principle of contemporary political life. It is this desire that affects military and publics alike, as they struggle with the reality of fighting alongside social media.

## The Four Ages of Audience Studies: A Military History

The challenge facing military organisations today reflects the general dimensions of mediatised societies, where private, social and institutional life are coloured by corporate media interests.<sup>10</sup> Intriguingly, military needs have featured in changing the focus of audience research, from asking what exposure to particular messages does to particular viewers, to analysing how corporate storytelling subtly coordinates the actions of media users.

### STAGE 1. PERSUASION

The issue of how social media practices affect military morale inherits a rich history. 'On message' concerns reflect early interests in how media changed thoughts and behaviours.<sup>11</sup> Media research as we know it started with the Great War, and the impression that allied propaganda had convinced the public that sacrifices were needed in the face of a bestial enemy. In *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, Harold Lasswell challenged media researchers to discover if these impressions were true.<sup>12</sup>

Fighting exigencies led the testing, and dismantling, of the idea that media messages alone could persuade audiences to change. The Second World War challenged the US Army to persuade an isolationist public to re-engage with tumultuous European politics; confronting some conscripts with the prospect of shooting at their own relatives. Hollywood director Frank Capra was enlisted to make the case for war through the *Why We Fight* documentary series. Social scientists were similarly drafted to conduct experiments on the films' success. The results of the latter played a major role in ending the first stage of audience studies.

The mobilisation of men and movies presented social scientists with a novel opportunity to examine how propaganda stoked fighting spirit. Carl Hovland led a team that examined the impact of the *Why We Fight* series on male conscripts.<sup>13</sup> The most enduring outcome of these studies was the specification of how difficult it is to define and research persuasive effects. The question of whether these films improved combat morale was dismissed as unanswerable, given the impossibility of following research subjects into

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<sup>10</sup> Hepp, *Cultures of Mediatization*; Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory or Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Harold Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1927).

<sup>13</sup> Carl Iver Hovland, Arthur A. Lumsdaine and Fred D. Sheffield, *Experiments on Mass Communication* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

battle. Moreover, the combination of information, persuasion and entertainment in the films made it hard to assess what their 'message' was in the first place. It was possible that their success depended on the extent to which they *entertained* soldiers, but this issue was not interrogated.<sup>14</sup> Subsequent studies have emphasised the mistake of seeing the series as simply a set of information films, rather than aesthetic landmarks in the history of cinema.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, studies of what films 'did' to soldiers were instrumental in specifying the difficulty of equating media influence with persuasion, and hinted that entertainment was a factor to be reckoned with in any desire to harness media to instrumental ends.

## STAGE 2. ENTERTAINMENT AND IDEOLOGY

The relationship between entertainment and impact was a key theme in a second stage of audience studies, focusing on how media seduced audiences into accepting ideological arguments as common sense. The 'incorporation/resistance' paradigm, as described by Abercrombie and Longhurst, focused on how media entertainment subtly encouraged audiences to regard contestable political arguments as statements of fact.<sup>16</sup>

Military interests took centre stage again. In the mid-1990s, renowned media scholar George Gerbner explained how media/military relations during the 1991 Gulf War concretised his thesis on the political effects of television violence.<sup>17</sup> Gerbner was a military man, having won the Bronze Star during World War Two while serving in the US Office of Strategic Services (a career highlighted by the arrest of Ferenc Szálasi).<sup>18</sup> GI bill-funded PhD in hand,<sup>19</sup> Gerbner commenced an academic career studying how television affected American postwar political discourse.<sup>20</sup> His core thesis was that television, a global storyteller of unparalleled power, taught audiences that consumption and obedience mapped the path to happiness. Curiously, violence was a main theme in this story.<sup>21</sup>

From the late 1960s, Gerbner and his colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania compiled annual 'violence profiles', enumerating acts of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Andre Bazin, 'On Why We Fight: History, Documentation, and the Newsreel', *Film & History*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2001), pp. 60-62.

<sup>16</sup> Abercrombie and Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*.

<sup>17</sup> Hamid Molwana, George Gerbner and Herbert I. Schiller, *Triumph Of The Image: The Media's War In The Persian Gulf, A Global Perspective* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> John A. Lent (ed.), *A Different Road Taken: Profiles in Critical Communication* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Michael Morgan, *George Gerbner: A Critical Introduction to Media and Communication Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> George Gerbner, 'Cultivation Analysis: An Overview', *Mass Communication and Society*, vol. 1, nos. 3-4 (1998), pp. 175-95.

violence on prime-time US television. They also used surveys to establish relationships between television consumption and political attitudes.<sup>22</sup> In combination, evidence from these studies suggested that television entertainment relied heavily on violence-based stories, which had a chilling effect on audiences. Heavy television viewers overestimated their chances of being a victim of violence, were distrustful of others and pessimistic about the prospects for social change.<sup>23</sup> Strangely, though, Gerbner argued that screen violence had become a medium for winning consent for the values of consumer society. Its prevalence reflected the need to win global markets for American advertisers, since action genres 'travelled' better than others. The main effect of this brutal diet was the impression that there was little for the viewer to do about the world other than consume.<sup>24</sup>

The Gulf War sharpened Gerbner's thesis. Gerbner argued that the American armed forces and news media collaborated to produce a tightly controlled, entertaining 'story' about the war that bombarded international audiences with images of smart weaponry. These were accompanied by spectacular shows of public war enthusiasm in mega-events such as the Superbowl. The coincidence of interests between armed forces, news companies who showcased new 24-hour global networks and audiences who had the chance to become part of the show had profound political outcomes. One survey found an association between television watching, the underestimation of Iraqi casualties, and support for the war.<sup>25</sup> Gerbner's likening of Gulf War coverage to entertainment summarised the essential argument about media and 'incorporation'. Collaboration between military and media quickly transformed battlefield events into an entertaining picture. The partnership was so successful that it spawned a trade in commemorative DVDs. Politically speaking, this had the effect of writing the war's history, literally before the dust had settled.<sup>26</sup>

### **STAGE 3. PARTICIPATION**

Prima facie, Gerbner's observations do not seem to address the subversive potential of social media. Gerbner focused on how the combined interests of global news industries and post-Vietnam military media operations wrapped audiences in a single narrative about the capacity of sophisticated weaponry to exercise responsible and effective foreign policy. Blogging appears to some writers to unravel this project. According to Hellman and Wagnsson,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Jackson-Beck, Steve Jackson-Fox and Nancy Signorielli, 'Cultural Indicators: Violence Profile #9', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1979), pp. 176-207.

<sup>24</sup> George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nancy Signorelli, 'The Mainstreaming of America: Violence Profile #11', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 30 (1980), pp. 10-29.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Morgan, Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally, *The Gulf War: A Study of the Media, Public Opinion, and Public Knowledge*, Research Report (Amherst: Center for the Study of Communication, University of Massachusetts, 1991).

<sup>26</sup> Molwana et al., *Triumph of the Image*.



the thrust of writing on blogs “suggest that the new media activism gives rise to counter-hegemonic narratives that thrive on and through social media sites”.<sup>27</sup> This conclusion is at odds with the view that, when it comes to conflict at least, “user-generated content and its chaotic dynamics ‘out there’ have been absorbed and appropriated”.<sup>28</sup> According to this line of thinking, there are reasons to believe that user agency solidifies the effects that Gerbner observed, and that military blogging is a symptom of the suspicion that social media do little to rearrange the balance of power between media industries, institutions and publics. Certainly, some audience researchers characterise ‘users’ as a misnomer that loses an important sense of subordination, where most political imaginations remain within the boundaries of mainstream media narratives.<sup>29</sup> This point of view gels with studies of how the nuanced relationships that armed forces share with their citizens, their political masters and even their own personnel are contained by an overarching media logic. This ‘logic’ is based on the recognition that modern warfare works best when it is allied with conventional media, and their capacity to gather audiences whose support is integral to success.<sup>30</sup> Either way, blogging keeps military affairs at the heart of debates on how media dictate the terms of social participation, and how the process can be understood in relation to the audience concept.

So far, this essay has accounted for only one side of the ‘incorporation/resistance paradigm’. Where Gerbner was concerned with incorporation, others saw popular media as more of a staging ground for conflict. People like popular culture because it lets them imagine a different social order.<sup>31</sup> Political communication, for example, becomes much more fun thanks to voracious news cycles bent on catching politicians with their trousers down—literally and metaphorically.<sup>32</sup> According to journalism scholar Brian McNair, the proliferation of news making devices, many now held in the hands of the people we used to call audiences, heralds an era of ‘cultural chaos’, where the sort of centralised power enjoyed during the first Gulf War is now impossible.<sup>33</sup>

This brings us to Chelsea Manning; the low-ranking soldier who caused the kind of uproar that elite journalists dream about. One can regard Manning

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<sup>27</sup> Maria Hellman and Charlotte Wagnsson, ‘New Media and the War in Afghanistan: The Significance of Blogging for the Swedish Strategic Narrative’, *New Media & Society*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2015), pp. 6-23.

<sup>28</sup> Hoskins and O’Loughlin, ‘Arrested War’, p. 1321.

<sup>29</sup> S. Elizabeth Bird, ‘Are We All Producers Now?’, *Cultural Studies*, vol. 25, nos. 4-5 (2011), 502-516.

<sup>30</sup> Sarah Maltby, ‘The Mediatization of the Military’, *Media, War and Conflict*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2012), pp. 255-68.

<sup>31</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London; Methuen, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Brian McNair, ‘WikiLeaks, Journalism and the Consequences Of Chaos’, *Media International Australia*, vol. 144 (2012), pp. 77-86.



as the archetypal 'produser'. This term, coined by Axel Bruns, describes a radically decentred media world where:

The creation of shared content takes place in a networked, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

Bruns' words and Manning's actions capture the ethos of Julian Assange's 'scientific journalism'; a form of news where universal access to primary documents allows audiences to check journalists' claims against primary evidence.<sup>35</sup>

However, the extent to which produsage is a meaningful reality, and that Manning's actions represented a counter-hegemonic landmark, have both been hotly contested. The case has been made that most online media actions recycle mainstream media material, and that there is little evidence to support the impression of public enthusiasm for sustained content creation.<sup>36</sup> Added to that, people who have the most interest in changing the global political order have the least access to the media means to do so.<sup>37</sup> Finally, where creativity and participation do occur, it is often because people want to work with media industries; that is, social media have created the means whereby audiences can enter into new partnerships with established media industries.<sup>38</sup> Ironically, Manning's atypicality is a testament to mediatisation in action and, with it, the value of holding on to the audience idea.

Manning's contributions to WikiLeaks' video expose, *Collateral Murder*, became the subject of an academic debate that reflected diverging views on the political weight of audience action. One line in this story notes how 'unruly' audiences have been incorporated by commercial interests; that is, apparently 'disruptive' moments where audiences seem to go 'off message' are far less radical than they may appear, if we take that 'message' as being that commercial media can embrace all cultural needs in the twenty-first century. Manning and *Collateral Murder* help to explain what this means.

Ostensibly, Manning embodied 'chaos', or:

The most dramatic example to date of the capacity of digital communication networks to subvert the control of official information once enjoyed by

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<sup>34</sup> Axel Bruns, 'Produsage.org: From Production to Produsage: Research into User-Led Content Creation', 2007, <produsage.org/node/9> [Accessed 12 October 2015].

<sup>35</sup> Graham Meikle, 'Continuity and Transformation in Convergent News: The Case of Wikileaks', *Media International Australia*, vol. 144 (2012), pp. 52-59.

<sup>36</sup> Nick Couldry, Sonia Livingstone and Tim Markham, *Media Consumption and Public Engagement: Beyond the Presumption of Attention* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Bird, 'Are We All Producers Now?'

<sup>38</sup> Mark Andrejevic, 'The Kinder, Gentler Gaze of *Big Brother*. Reality TV in the Era of Digital Capitalism', *New Media & Society*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2002), pp. 251-70.

political and other elites, and to shape the news agenda in ways that have the potential to seriously disrupt the exercise of power.<sup>39</sup>

However, critics characterised this 'drama' as a smokescreen for WikiLeaks' utterly conventional media business model, an approach that underwrote the mediatisation of politics.

One line of criticism ran that 'scientific journalism' was an underhanded way to turn 'transparency' into a brand value. Manning's revelations only became so thanks to partnership with mainstream news organisations.<sup>40</sup> Assange's 'method' was quickly adopted by other news organisations seeking to gain leverage in a competitive news market.<sup>41</sup> Scientific journalism might be bad for the military but it was good for media business, important not so much as a way to empower audiences but to buy and sell their attention to advertisers.<sup>42</sup>

In this version, the Manning episode was a parable for how corporate media dominate the cultural logic of ordinary life. Transparency has been transformed from a political value to a corporate friendly media practice, highly effective in putting audiences to work in the interests of media businesses.<sup>43</sup> Far from representing a new age of audience power, Manning was a spectacular example of a pervasive, mundane reality, that media industries have sophisticated methods for channelling audiences' desires in commercial directions.<sup>44</sup>

Ironically, the 'democratisation' of whistleblowing, according to some accounts, has defanged investigative journalism as an institutional threat. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about *Collateral Murder* was how little impact it had on public opinion. Certainly, the revelations were met with alternative accounts about what had happened on that day from the US Army.<sup>45</sup> The battle over what the words and pictures really meant reflected the ambiguities of what Mark Andrejevic has termed 'post truthism', a condition where the proliferation of storytelling resources means the ability to tell an entertaining tale has superseded an interest in truth. Consequently, "strategies of debunkery and information proliferation can work to reinforce,

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<sup>39</sup> McNair, 'WikiLeaks, Journalism and the Consequences Of Chaos', p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Bart Cammaerts, 'Networked Resistance: The Case of WikiLeaks', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2013), pp. 420-36.

<sup>41</sup> Mohamed Zayani, 'Al Jazeera's Palestine Papers: Middle East Media Politics in the Post-WikiLeaks Era', *Media, War and Conflict*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2013), pp. 21-35.

<sup>42</sup> Christian Fuchs, 'WikiLeaks: Power 2.0? Surveillance 2.0? Criticism 2.0? Alternative Media 2.0? A Political-Economic Analysis', *Global Media Journal: Australian Edition*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2011), pp. 1-17.

<sup>43</sup> Luke J. Heemsbergen, 'Radical Transparency in Journalism: Digital Evolutions from Historical Precedents', *Global Media Journal: Canadian Edition*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2013), pp. 45-65.

<sup>44</sup> Jack Bratich, 'Amassing the Multitude: Revisiting Early Audience Studies', *Communication Theory*, vol. 15, no. 3 (2005), pp. 242-65.

<sup>45</sup> Marouf A. Hasian Jr, 'Watching the Domestication of the Wikileaks Helicopter Controversy', *Communication Quarterly*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2012), pp. 190-209.

rather than threaten, relations of power and control”.<sup>46</sup> The upshot is that the question of how the military can keep its publics on message is meaningless in isolation from a more foundational matter; both parties are kept ‘on the message’ of media industries.

In summary, the Manning affair punctuated a history of audience studies where military matters have frequently dramatised key junctions in the development of thought on media, audiences and political power. Far from being a harbinger of an intelligence apocalypse, the events that enveloped her actions demonstrated the need to move beyond matters of persuasion toward asking how media industries manufacture social ties. This leads to a change of focus. Instead of asking how social media give people power, what about concentrating on how they become indispensable as resources for social contact? Such is the core concern of mediatisation research.

#### **STAGE 4. MEDIATISATION**

According to Hjarvard, “mediatisation refers to a long-term process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of media’s influence”.<sup>47</sup> When it comes to audiences, this suggests a growing dependency on media resources as facilitators of social life. If the age of participation was characterised by the concept of people doing things with media, mediatisation describes a scenario where people do almost everything with media. This change has been in train for some time, and has been especially clearly traced in studies of women and media. This explains why Molinari’s blogging career is an evocative symbol of this new age of audience studies, which examine how media industries capitalise on the social ambitions of the public.

If we are looking for a figure who encapsulates the meaning of social media for military affairs, the history of audience research suggests that Molinari represented a conceptually valid counter point to Chelsea Manning. In 2015, Molinari topped a list of twenty-five best military blogs, as voted for by the online community ‘Circle of Moms’.<sup>48</sup> Molinari’s ‘The Meat and Potatoes’ offers “a heaping helping of hilarious stories about marriage, parenting and military life”.<sup>49</sup> Significantly, Molinari’s success is based on her experience as a military spouse, combined with a career as a journalist whose blogging content has been recirculated by mainstream media outlets. She also epitomises how media serve and profit from the social desires of audiences and how these desires are managed in the interests of political stability.

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<sup>46</sup> Mark Andrejevic, *Infoglut: How Too Much Information Is Changing the Way We Think and Know* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), Kindle pp. 306-8.

<sup>47</sup> Stig Hjarvard, *Mediatization*, Kindle pp. 560-63.

<sup>48</sup> Circle of Moms, ‘Top 25 Military Family Blogs’, <[www.circleofmoms.com/top25/military-families](http://www.circleofmoms.com/top25/military-families)> [Accessed 12 October 2015].

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Molinari sits squarely in another audience history narrative, where women have defined the social grip of media forms. They have done this by ingeniously using media technologies to solve the challenges of social isolation. Canny as these strategies have been, they have cumulatively placed media use—and the businesses that make it happen—at the centre of social life, and Molinari is a symbol of what this means.

Her evolution has been a long time in the making. Shortly after the *Why We Fight* studies, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld's *Personal Opinion* surveyed over 800 women in the American Midwest regarding their media use.<sup>50</sup> Their most intriguing finding was that talking about media content had become a vital source for social contact, community and prestige in postwar American consumer society. Although the project began by asking how advertising and political communication influenced women, the researchers soon found that the question of how, why and to what effect women *shared* media content through *talk* became a much more significant indicator of the media's emotional purchase. In the context of a debate that has included how one of history's great security breaches may have been motivated by loneliness,<sup>51</sup> it is significant that one of the landmark studies in the history of audience research concluded that, in the main, what women wanted from media was the chance to find companionship and respect by participating in the circuit of media communication. Talking about movies, advertising and political campaigning became a way for some of the women to demonstrate leadership capacity.

The desire for comfort, belonging and voice continued as a theme in studies of women audiences. In the process, this literature has, like no other, demonstrated how political effects of the media channel through the desire for sociality and autonomy. An alternative history of audiences presents women media users as the vanguard for the social transformations that changing media landscapes invoke, and the practice of military family blogging can be explained as one manifestation of this history. Since women have borne the brunt of global postwar economic and social changes, so too have they played a leading role in developing popular culture as an 'ideological seam' through which it becomes possible to articulate the political tensions and contradictions of ordinary life.<sup>52</sup> Over the last forty years, studies of how women engage with magazines,<sup>53</sup> romance

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<sup>50</sup> Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence* (New York: The Free Press, 1955).

<sup>51</sup> Paul Lewis, 'Bradley Manning Trial Revealed a Lonely Soldier with a Troubled Past', *The Guardian*, 22 August 2013, <[www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/21/bradley-manning-lonely-soldier-childhood](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/21/bradley-manning-lonely-soldier-childhood)> [Accessed 12 October 2015].

<sup>52</sup> Janice Radway, 'Identifying Ideological Seams: Mass Culture, Analytic Method, and Political Practice', *Communication*, vol. 9 (1986), pp. 93-123.

<sup>53</sup> Angela McRobbie, and Jenny Garber, 'Girls and Subcultures', in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), pp. 209-22.

novels,<sup>54</sup> television soaps<sup>55</sup> and mobile telephones<sup>56</sup> have all shared the idea that these media practices shape how women make sense of their social identities through using media with their peers. The 'new' practice of military family blogging belongs to this history.

Themes of identity and community at play in these studies have taken a marked turn in more recent work on reality television, and this research also plays an important part in understanding the political purchase of military blogging. Skeggs and Wood argue that reality television matters as a genre that has encouraged women to think less about the social world, and more about the self.<sup>57</sup> Reality television is, according to the authors, an exercise in self-disciplining. Audiences are shamed into accepting that the individual is solely responsible for her own fate. There are a couple of reasons why these observations are relevant to mediatization as a phenomenon that touches issues of military and social media. The first is that the authors see the genre as typifying a general thrust in political discourse that encourages people to take control of their own lives. The second is the role that media play in encouraging audiences to discipline themselves within existing media and social hierarchies. The authors do not think that these tendencies represent a *fait accompli*, but do feel that the focus on individual self-monitoring within the dominant status quo of media-based consumer society is a force to be reckoned with.

## **From Television to Blogging: Military Perspectives**

Feminist audience research suggests that media mainly 'work' by filling the space between individual and collective identity. This connects leisure with the political debate over well-being and personal responsibility. Synergies exist between conservative ideologies, consumer culture and media industries that all have vested interests in addressing publics as autonomous individuals. Seen from this perspective, there are reasons to argue that contemporary media practices are biased against 'disruptive' readings of established hierarchies, based on the logic that personal challenges are to be personally managed. This view offers that the main media 'effect' is to encourage self-disciplining among audiences who police themselves, rather than joining together in collective action.<sup>58</sup> The question is, how does this state of affairs transfer from reality television to military blogging?

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<sup>54</sup> Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1985).

<sup>56</sup> H. Hijazi-Omari, and R. Ribak, 'Playing with Fire: On the Domestication of the Mobile Phone among Palestinian Teenage Girls in Israel', *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2008), pp. 149-66.

<sup>57</sup> Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood, *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

The key to making this connection is appreciating how opportunities for social action afforded by the media are premised on the perception among audiences that making things happen means coordinating action with structures of institutions and media practices as they exist.

To explain how this works, let us begin with reality television. During the war in Afghanistan, British actor turned investigative reporter, Ross Kemp, made a series of well-received programs about life on the frontline for British soldiers. I reviewed reactions to the show posted to a dedicated online viewer forum. The research found that *Ross Kemp in Afghanistan* was applauded for uncovering largely unacknowledged problems that British army soldiers and their families faced in managing frontline service. Alongside the combat insights that one might expect, surprising domestic realities—like the fact that many soldiers had to take out their own life insurance to protect their families—came to light. Having opened the door to the issue of the unseen hardships of family life, some forum users chose to discuss other off-camera hardships. One writer complained about the lack of post-combat aftercare that led to her own experiences of domestic violence. In response, other viewers with military connections advised the woman how to seek help from established lines of military welfare.<sup>59</sup> The net effect was that cooperation between the military and the evolving structures of reality entertainment offered an effective means of educating families on how to manage their own affairs through media-based communities.

Thinking about the lessons of *Personal Influence*, this particular incarnation of media's organising power gave a firmer materialisation of an idea that remained inchoate in Katz and Lazarsfeld's piece, that media matter as a *primary* means of organising social groups.<sup>60</sup> Under some circumstances, people are organised as media audiences or users before they can take social action: in a mediatised world, this condition applies across a significant number of social circumstances.<sup>61</sup> Communication and critique are facilitated by the ability to speak media languages.

The ramifications of these insights become sharper when applied to social media. The Ross Kemp study suggested that controversies could be managed by providing consensual lines of voice that suit institutional arrangements, military and media. That is, the lesson is personal and community needs are most powerfully addressed when they learn to speak in official languages. This insight had been used to temper the claims made

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<sup>59</sup> Andy Ruddock, 'Cultivation Analysis', in Virginia Nightingale (ed.), *Handbook of Media Audiences* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 340-59.

<sup>60</sup> Katz and Lazarsfeld, *Personal Influence*.

<sup>61</sup> Sonia Livingstone, 'Exciting Moments in Audience Research: Past, Present and Future', in Helena Bilandzic, Geoffroy Patriarche and Paul J. Traudt (eds.), *The Social Use of Media: Cultural and Social Scientific Perspectives on Audience Research* (Chicago: Intellect, 2012), pp. 257-74.

for democratised conditions where almost anyone can create and share media content.

Critics have observed that it is one thing to be able to make alternative media content, but finding an audience for it is quite another.<sup>62</sup> The fact remains that the media world continues to be dominated by professionally produced content, and most audiences seem to prefer its glossy attractions—even when it comes to social media.<sup>63</sup> All of this explains why, when it comes to the question of what social media mean for the military, it makes as much sense to look at Molinari and ‘Circle Of Moms’, as it does Chelsea Manning. Molinari is an archetype of the idealised media user whose success represents the interlocking trajectories of audience studies and feminist media research. Historically speaking, Molinari’s success is the product of changing media ecologies.

According to Molinari’s biography, ‘The Meat and Potatoes of Life’ represents the synthesis of personal experience, professional training and a media landscape that is ripe for the popularisation of her personal reflections. She enjoys double accreditation: as a spouse who abandoned a legal career for the love of a naval husband, and a blogger welcomed into the fold of professional journalism. Molinari describes the turning point as follows:

One winter, while her husband was deployed to Africa for a year, Lisa began jotting down her observations as a way of coping with the chaos of handling the three kids, the dog, and the household alone. Before she knew it, one of her essays got published in *The Washington Post*, and the rest is pretty much history.<sup>64</sup>

That ‘history’ shows how the networked culture of blogging, and its synthesis with mainstream journalism, has created a position of considerable clout for an authoritative figure who organises military related communities, including the American ‘Military Spouse of the Year’ award. As different as the outcome of her actions have been—actions that have drawn her closer to military and media institutions—there are also some striking parallels with the Manning case, not least converting isolation into a sellable story—and an entertaining, useful one at that. Molinari’s writing was praised for its combination of humour and good advice, exemplified in a report on why Hooters restaurant is a great venue for Navy families during holidays when a partner is at sea.

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<sup>62</sup> Jean Burgess and Josh Green, *YouTube* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Paula Cavagnaro, Zach Niles, Emilie Reiser and Banker White, ‘This is Our Generation: Sierra Leonean Youth Views through Film’, *Youth Media Reporter*, 1 February 2011, <[www.youthmediareporter.org/2011/02/this\\_is\\_our\\_generation\\_sierra.html](http://www.youthmediareporter.org/2011/02/this_is_our_generation_sierra.html)> [Accessed 12 October 2015].

<sup>64</sup> Lisa Smith Molinari, ‘The Meat & Potatoes of Life’, <[themeatandpotatoesoflife.com/about/](http://themeatandpotatoesoflife.com/about/)> [Accessed 12 October 2015].



The popularity of Molinari's light-hearted yet respected advice on how to manage the frequently painful challenges of service family life epitomises core lessons of feminist audience studies. Communities of women have found many creative ways to use media as a solution to social isolation. Often, these uses are a conscious attempt to cope with the demands placed upon women by economic and political policy, and articulate where they 'are' in history. At the same time, these strategies have created a historical trend where the ability to 'find' oneself depends on the knack of fitting in with media industries (in this case, Molinari's ability to relate ordinary military family life to the languages of professional journalism and consumption).

The point here is not to suggest that Molinari is somehow more typical than Manning; it is to claim that both extraordinary stories are guided by the logic of media culture and media users. Both exemplify how social media provide easily accessible outlets for social and personal tensions and how, as a result, media logic has worked its way into the management of military relations on the micro and macro levels. Further, this is a continuation of a trend whereby media have monopolised the desire to be social, affording media businesses gravitational power over individuals, communities and organisations. Molinari and Manning are part of the same media-based sentiment, that the only life worth living is a mediated one.<sup>65</sup> Whether seeking fame, infamy, or just the chance to be part of the media world, media users only count when they can articulate their experiences in the language of media brands—be that *WikiLeaks* or *The Washington Post*—and it is this reality that anchors the apparent 'chaos' of the digital age.

## Conclusion

Publicly, the threat that social media pose to military operations has been widely noted.<sup>66</sup> Restrictions on serving bloggers have attracted media attention, and bloggers fret about loose lips sinking ships.<sup>67</sup> To many, Chelsea Manning embodied the fear that digital ecologies render sophisticated intelligence operations vulnerable to transgression in the ranks.

Academic studies of media/military relations, on the other hand, paint a more sophisticated picture, where media become influential by lending their power to various organisations who all seek to influence different audiences—publics, politicians and personnel—with different ends in mind.<sup>68</sup> This notion of 'loaned power' suits influential views on mediatization and audience

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<sup>65</sup> Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Xeni Jardin, 'Military Tightens Rules on Military Bloggers', NPR, 30 October 2006, <[www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6405962](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6405962)> [Accessed 8 October 2015].

<sup>67</sup> Douglas Yeung and Olga Oliker, 'Loose Clicks Sink Ships: When Social Media Meets Military Intelligence', The Rand Blog, 14 August 2015, <[www.rand.org/blog/2015/08/loose-clicks-sink-ships-when-social-media-meets-military.html](http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/08/loose-clicks-sink-ships-when-social-media-meets-military.html)> [Accessed 8 October 2015].

<sup>68</sup> Maltby, 'The Mediatization of the Military'.

research.<sup>69</sup> The matter of how militaries use social media to cultivate productive relationships with their personnel, families and publics is a subset of larger questions about how media industries gain influential by offering agency and sociality. To make this argument, this article has explained how the questions we ask of military blogging can be informed by the historical development of audience and feminist media studies. In particular, it has explained how blogging by military spouses exemplifies key trends in the political economy of the media. Historically, the development of audience studies suggests that media industries have been spectacularly successful in capturing the energies of audiences.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, it makes sense to consider the circumstances that make military blogs exercises in self-policing, where radicalism lags behind desires among writers and readers to 'fit in' with military organisations and media industries.

But more than this, it is wise to ask how military organisations and media users alike are both subject to the influence of commercial media businesses that are increasingly adept at seamlessly blending business imperatives with social and institutional needs. The challenge of social media to the armed forces is but a subset of wider dynamics where media industries have assumed a powerful 'brokering' role in the conduct of public discourse. From the history provided here, it can be seen that conflict has played a major role in showcasing the artistic, political and commercial potential of changing media forms—from Capra's films through to Assange's efforts to build a new world information order and, perhaps more tellingly, the gaming industry's military partnerships that popularise novel game designs in the guise of addressing virtual gaming needs.<sup>71</sup> Bearing this in mind, the constant feature in changing relations between militaries, publics, political elites and enemies is a growing social dependency on access to mainstream media resources that offer an intoxicating brew of influence, company and pleasure.

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<sup>69</sup> Sonia Livingstone, 'On the Mediation of Everything: ICA Presidential Address 2008', *Journal of Communication*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2009), pp. 1-18.

<sup>70</sup> Bratich, 'Amassing the Multitude: Revisiting Early Audience Studies'.

<sup>71</sup> Robertson Allen, 'The Unreal Enemy of America's Army', *Games and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2011), pp. 38-60.



# **Soldier Morale: Defending a Core Military Capability**

Sean Childs

Can social media strengthen soldier morale? In the spectrum of modern conflict, social media and its democratisation of information distribution has changed the historical character of soldiers' morale or the *will* to fight. Never before has the influence of information on morale been so pronounced. This is a powerful development given strength of *will* is central to victory in armed conflict. If the West is not to lose its *will* to defend democracy's ideals in the face of extremist Islam's onslaught, then information as image and perception must be privileged above information as data and commodity. Proactive use of information is needed to defend and strengthen soldier morale. In the realm of modern conflict, social media and morale; attack is the best form of defence. Rather than being overly shielding we must facilitate and encourage soldiers to take up social media and get deep into the discourse it richly enables.

Within our global Western 'rules-based' democracies, society's *will* to uphold and defend international norms is being challenged by the proliferation of social media and its detribalising effect. In this sense then, the role of the individual within the military institution and its use of social media is ever more important in order to defend the military capability of morale. If we agree with the military axiom that the character of war is constantly changing, then in the spectrum of modern conflict social media has changed and continues to change the character of morale or *the will to win*. To understand why this is so, one must appreciate morale's history, its varied definitions, its determinants and its relationship with strategy. Armed with that information, military institutions will be in a better position to understand social media's impact on morale in the spectrum of modern conflict; and hence expand the discourse on how best to defend it.

## **Morale's History**

Broadly speaking, morale relates to confidence, enthusiasm and discipline at a given time. That is, the self-assurance to undertake a given task, the level of passion for that task and the degree of will-power in relation to that task. When speaking of morale in the military setting, its attributes take on far greater meaning and relevance—for 'soldier morale' is a core element of military capability. Importantly the use of information to influence morale pervades military history. Morale and attempting to undermine an opponent's morale has always been a key consideration within military operations. One can at least trace the centrality of military morale to the student of Socrates, historian and fourth-century soldier, Xenophon. In his famous work *Anabasis*, Xenophon observed "in action, the sustaining of

morale was an imperative".<sup>1</sup> Leaping forward to 1512 and Thomas More's renowned *Utopia*, one sees a lesson on the importance of undermining an opponent's morale. *Utopia's* Book Two under the heading of 'Warfare' explains that war should be waged "in such a way as to avoid danger, rather than to win fame and glory".<sup>2</sup> To support the case, *Utopia's* main protagonist, Hythloday, describes the fictional Utopian state's rational use of psychological warfare and information operations. "As soon as war is declared ... secret agents set up overnight many placards ... in the most conspicuous places throughout the enemy territory."<sup>3</sup> The placards which are "bidding for and buying the life of an enemy"<sup>4</sup> are a form of psychological warfare aimed at causing Utopia's enemies to "quickly come to suspect everyone, particularly one another; and the many perils of their situation lead to panic".<sup>5</sup> More highlights here the desired psychological effect of targeted realist communication in war by revealing it "enable[s] [the Utopians] to win tremendous wars without fighting any actual battles".<sup>6</sup> Should incitement to assassination not work, Utopians then turn to information operations external to their enemy's environment by "rous[ing] up the neighbouring peoples against the enemy, by reviving forgotten claims to dominion".<sup>7</sup> More here is demonstrating the power of strategic communication to invoke memory to mobilise action. *Utopia's* psychological warfare and information operations affirm that strategic communication in war is beneficial for degrading an opponent's morale. It provides the greatest opportunity for targeted audiences to receive, acknowledge, understand, think and act in a way that reduces the cost of war, whilst effectively achieving the desired outcome. Push forward another 300 years to the early nineteenth century and we come to Napoleon's belief that "the moral outweighs the material by three to one",<sup>8</sup> and that "a man does not have himself killed for a few half-pence a day or for a petty distinction ... you must speak to the soul in order to electrify the man".<sup>9</sup> And the list goes on through history to the modern era—from Clausewitz's belief that the moral elements were "among the most important in war",<sup>10</sup> Liddel Hart's observation of "the predominance of moral

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<sup>1</sup> Godfrey Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command* (London: Greenhill Books, 2000), p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas More, *Utopia*, 2nd edn, Robert M. Adams (ed.) (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Napoleon to his brother Joseph advising him on how to rule Spain, 27 August 1808. Quoted in Trevor N. Dupuy, 'Theory of Combat', in Franklin D. Margiotta (ed.), *Brassey's Encyclopaedia of Military History and Biography* (London: Brassey, 1994), p. 967.

<sup>9</sup> David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), p.155.

<sup>10</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Everyman's Library, 1993), p. 216. First published in German in 1832.

factors in all military decisions”<sup>11</sup> and General George S. Patton’s recollection and assertion that in World War Two 80 per cent of a commander’s role was to “arouse morale in his men”.<sup>12</sup>

## **Morale’s Contested Definition**

In the military sense, the definitions of morale are varied. As Steven Motowidlo et al. said in their 1976 study of *Motivation, Satisfaction and Morale in Army Careers*, “there are as many definitions of morale as there are people writing about it”.<sup>13</sup> As a starting point though, it is useful to draw on the work of industrial psychologist Robert Guion who in 1958 tackled industrial morale’s problems of terminology. Guion listed seven different common definitions for morale:

1. the absence of conflict
2. a feeling of happiness
3. a good personal adjustment
4. ego involvement in one’s job
5. the cohesiveness of the group
6. a collection of job related attitudes
7. a personal acceptance of the goals of the group.

There are many more definitions, although the point here is that we can see that traditional notions of morale revolve around affective states and group dynamics, which the King’s College London’s Jonathon Fennell has claimed to be problematic, particularly in the realm of military performance.<sup>14</sup> By way of example, Fennell points out that “there is much evidence to suggest that troops can experience positive affective states while also behaving in manners that are completely contrary to the best interests of the military establishment”.<sup>15</sup> For instance, in the realm of the affective state Fennell proffers that deserting soldiers can feel happy and optimistic because they have run from battle and are now safe or that a soldier might fight with great

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<sup>11</sup> Basil H. Liddell Hart, *The Decisive Wars of History: A Study in Strategy* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1929), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Stephan J. Motowidlo, Benjamin E. Dowell, Michael A. Hopp, Walter C. Borman, Paul D. Johnson and Marvin D. Dunnette, *Motivation, Satisfaction, and Morale in Army Careers: A Review of Theory and Measurement*, ARI Technical Report TR-76-A7 (Minneapolis: Personnel Decisions, Inc., 1976), pp. 49–52.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Fennell, ‘In Search of the “X” Factor: Morale and the Study of Strategy’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 37, nos. 6-7 (2014), pp. 799-828.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 804.

determination while feeling personally miserable. In the realm of group dynamics, Fennell asserts that “strong group bonds can undermine positive military performance”.<sup>16</sup> Group desertions and mutiny can evidence small group cohesion, yet they are actions contrary to the needs of the military institution.<sup>17</sup> For example, for the United States in Vietnam the importance of group survival often outweighed the need to complete assigned tasks.<sup>18</sup> Fennell’s point here is that to link morale with motivation one must recognise that “motivation does not require the individual or group to be positive about objectives” as soldiers can be “highly motivated to carry out tasks that they are not confident in and not enthusiastic about because they are disciplined or even coerced into action”.<sup>19</sup> As today’s eminent military historian Sir Hew Strachan points out, “coercion is not always given enough recognition as a motivational tool”,<sup>20</sup> while S. L. A. Marshall remarks that soldiers have to accept “the basic philosophy governing human relationships within an army”.<sup>21</sup>

## Morale’s Determinants

Fennell groups the influences on morale into two categories, that of endogenous and exogenous factors. In other words, factors inside and outside of the military organisation. The endogenous category encompasses institutional factors such as command, discipline, training, organisation and supply; social factors in leadership, cohesion and esprit; and individual factors including an individual’s resilience, fear, confidence and fatigue. The exogenous category entails the political which includes propaganda, stated war aims and ideology; the cultural involving values, ethics, rules of engagement and attitude toward the enemy; the economic, for example technology and available equipment; the environment which includes the type of terrain and the weather; and the situational which includes available information, rumours, friction, recent successes and failures.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Westview, 1996), pp. 34–5.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen D. Westbrook, ‘The Potential for Military Disintegration’, in Sam C. Sarkessian (ed.), *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military* (London: Sage, 1980), p. 257.

<sup>19</sup> Fennell, ‘In Search of the “X” Factor’, p. 805.

<sup>20</sup> Hew Strachan, ‘The Soldier’s Experience in Two World Wars: Some Historiographical Comparisons’, in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds), *Time to Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West 1939–1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997), pp. 374–5.

<sup>21</sup> S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York: Morrow, 1966), p. 165.



## What is the Relationship between Morale, Strategy and Social Media?

Clausewitz's dictum that "war is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our *will*"<sup>22</sup> is taken to mean that belligerents mostly fight for a goal or an *end* and try to impose that *end* on their enemy. To achieve that *end* requires strategy, which fundamentally relates to the threat or use of force to achieve a policy outcome—it is *the means and ends*. What is most important here in the realm of morale is the fact that Clausewitz went on to posit that to achieve policy by use of violent means the belligerent must match effort against the enemy's 'power of resistance'. Clausewitz tells us this is "the product of two inseparable factors ... the total *means* at [the belligerent's] disposal and the strength of [the belligerent's] *will*".<sup>23</sup> In the realm of social media and the spectrum of modern conflict and more specifically soldier morale, *strength of will* is the crux of the matter. In other words, "military *means* are a product of the interplay between the material capability to fight and *the will to fight*".<sup>24</sup> Put simply, when an enemy's capability has been sufficiently reduced or when its *will to fight* no longer exists it must engage in the strategic process. It must alter its policy so that the reality of its *means* reflect its *ends*. In other words, provided rationality prevails, the enemy surrenders or enters into negotiations for a cessation to hostilities. As Colin Gray and others have observed, "strategic history demonstrates the prevalence of the loss of the enemy's *will* in deciding military outcomes".<sup>25</sup>

In the spectrum of modern conflict, social media and its democratisation of information distribution plays an integral role in influencing *the will to win*. Even more important is that its greatest influence in this spectrum is on morale's exogenous categories of the political, social and cultural. This is because of two interrelated reasons. First, because the political, social and cultural are the result of dynamic human relations and discourse; and their attendant frailties, vagaries and contested ideas. Secondly, because today's newest generation of the West's soldiers are and will continue to be Digital Natives,<sup>26</sup> immersed and fluent in the use of social media, and who "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors".<sup>27</sup> In other words, the West's modern soldiers are Netizens<sup>28</sup> who are instantly digitally connectable, hence enabled to "contribute to the whole intellectual and social value and possibilities"<sup>29</sup> that social media presents in relation to

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<sup>22</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> Fennell, 'In Search of the "X" Factor', p. 812.

<sup>25</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 18-19.

<sup>26</sup> M. Prensky, 'Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1', *On the Horizon*, vol. 9, no. 5 (2001), p.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Michael and Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the Impact and History of Usenet and the Internet*, 1993), e-book, <[www.columbia.edu/~rh120/](http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/)> [Accessed 3 November 2015].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

the factors and agendas that influence *the will to win*. This is a significant change compared to the media's traditional role in the communication model. White, in his paper 'The Gate Keeper', postulated that news published in traditional media is determined by those with the power to decide, whether that be the journalist, the editor or the publication's owner.<sup>30</sup> No such power model exists with social media. McCombs and Shaw, in their paper 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media', demonstrated that the media heavily influences what the public (hence soldiers) consider to be the leading topics within a society.<sup>31</sup> The use of social media means there is no need for these traditional models. Netizens are able to bypass the gate-keeper and create their own agenda-setting inertia.

So how can social media potentially erode morale in the spectrum of modern conflict? To answer that question let us limit our enquiry to morale's exogenous factors of the political (stated war aim) and the situational within the contemporary international security threat of Daesh.<sup>32</sup> The political is examined through the theory of social media's detribalising effect, while the practicalities of the situational factor are examined from the aspect of force protection. When imagining these scenarios it is important not to limit the application to soldiers only but to extend it to the body politic, which is an important distinction in the spectrum of modern conflict given the absence of the *levee en masse*. The West's soldiers are predominantly volunteers and like the body politic they vote.<sup>33</sup> Strategy within Western democracies is ultimately driven by *the will* of the electorate.

## Social Media's Impact on Morale's Exogenous Factors and Daesh

Australia and the West's soldiers of today are part of a globalised information age which is resulting in the West's continued detribalisation.<sup>34</sup> In other words, by today's soldiers accessing and processing knowledge from across the world they are facilitating for themselves more diverse views and opinions that challenge dominant Western paradigms and which serve to erode a consensus. Put another way, their actions potentially serve to erode *the will to fight*, a *will* which relies on a "sense of identity, belonging and

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<sup>30</sup> David Manning White, 'The "Gate Keeper": A Case Study in the Selection of News', *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1950), <[www.aejmc.org/home/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Journalism-Quarterly-1950-White-383-90.pdf](http://www.aejmc.org/home/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Journalism-Quarterly-1950-White-383-90.pdf)> [Accessed 3 November 2015].

<sup>31</sup> Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 36 (Summer, 1972), pp. 176-87.

<sup>32</sup> Daesh, an iteration of extremist Islam, is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) or, as they call themselves, the Islamic State.

<sup>33</sup> A minority of Western nations require compulsory military service (e.g. Denmark and Switzerland) while nations such as Turkey and Israel also require compulsory military service.

<sup>34</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in The Global Village* (San Francisco: Hardwired, 1997), p. 374.

cause”.<sup>35</sup> Quite simply, the already dynamic process of human relations and discourse is becoming even more dynamic. Daesh, seizing on the phenomenon, is making expert use of social media in its propaganda efforts by using it as an information weapon, and in the realm of stated war aims, social media is extenuating the strategic debate. The main allegation commentators level against the international coalition’s fight against Daesh in Iraq and Syria is its lack of strategy or, to put it another way, the purpose of its stated war aims. This is in the context of perceived previous politico-military failures in the Middle East, which many argue have resulted in the rise of Daesh. In a theoretical sense, what this means is that an already detribalising West along with its soldiers are afforded access via social media to an ever expanding, dissenting discourse which serves to lower morale. The important effect social media has here stems from the realm of memory studies and the way in which meaning is created. Put simply, meaning is created in the space between history and imagination, which in the present spectrum of modern conflict is a recipe for a decrease in the West’s *will* to fight for their ideals and values. In other words, the history of past failures coupled with proliferated online content makes for the questioning of the *ends* and a greater potential for dissent, with all of its attendant consequences. For example, the potential drop in voluntary military recruitment numbers and increase in military separations (people quitting or worse, dissenting). Social media’s detribalising effect in the spectrum of modern conflict certainly requires further research.

Turning to morale’s exogenous situational factor one can argue that in the spectrum of modern conflict social media has the greatest practical impact. Well before the notion of social media was fathomable, David Galula, a leading military and academic figure of counterinsurgency warfare, provided a prescient warning in 1968 which typifies the threat to morale posed by Daesh’s use of social media today when he said, “the insurgent [is] judged by what he promises, not by what he does ... the counterinsurgent [is] judged on what he does, not on what he says”.<sup>36</sup> Certainly the increase in the amount of information available is synonymous with the information age and social media. Certainly also the quality and authenticity of much of that information is questionable—all of which feeds the potentiality of rumour and friction in the context of success and failure.

From the Australian Defence Force’s force protection perspective, two practical examples of social media’s likely impact on the morale of the men and women of its Air Task Group (ATG) conducting combat operations against Daesh in Iraq and Syria are available. I say likely as this is an area also requiring further research. Force protection relates to the identification

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<sup>35</sup> David Betz, ‘The Virtual Dimension of Contemporary Insurgency and Counterinsurgency’, *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2008), p. 515.

<sup>36</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 9.

of threats to the force, and the mitigation and control of those threats, which is a process of risk management. In this sense then, it is not difficult to appreciate that defending morale falls within the remit of force protection. First, take the horrifically barbaric February 2015 burning-alive of the caged and conscious Jordanian pilot by Daesh in Syria, subsequently disseminated by social media and widely reported on by the Western media. That, more than likely, had a material impact on the ATG's exogenous situational factor of morale. In an already heightened force protection state it is not hard to imagine that social media's transmission of the act would have caused a high degree of increased 'home-front' friction for the families of the ATG's aircrews. In other words, an increase in the ATG's families' associated levels of concern and worry. The impact too in turn potentially feeds back into morale's political factor of the stated war aim, spurring the debate surrounding the question of 'is this really worth risking lives for an apparently uncertain end?' Daesh's use of social media in this case, as with their media content from their victories in Mosul and Ramadi, is an example of degrading the West's situational factor of morale by highlighting their perceived victory and the coalition's failure.

Separately, although related in the realm of morale, was Daesh's so called 'Hacking Division's' August 2015 publication via social media of a "hit list" containing, supposedly, around 1,400 peoples' details, including mobile phone numbers, credit card details, online passwords and private emails. Of those 1,400 the Australian Government confirmed the leak included the personal information of Australian Defence Force (ADF) employees.<sup>37</sup> If the ATG and their families were not already overly apprehensive, one imagines their perception of Daesh's domestic threat and potential reach increased somewhat if not dramatically.

### **How does the ADF Presently Defend and How Might It Better Defend against Social Media's Threat to Morale?**

From a force protection perspective, the ADF has measures in place to defend against social media's threat to morale. Personnel are educated on the use of social media and on what personal security measures should be followed and what operational security (OPSEC) measures must be followed. These are important and necessary requirements for defending the military capability of morale. From a technical perspective, however, there is not a lot else one may implement short of banning social media's use,<sup>38</sup> which like our existing approach would fall within the realm of

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<sup>37</sup> 'Islamic State Hacking Division: At Least Eight Australians Named on Internet "Hit List"', ABC News, 13 August 2015, <[www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-13/australians-reportedly-on-islamic-state-hit-list/6693374](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-13/australians-reportedly-on-islamic-state-hit-list/6693374)> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that this is not an option being considered by the ADF.

information as data and commodity.<sup>39</sup> Put another way, this relates to the military's traditional approach to OPSEC and "the information security triad of confidentiality, integrity and availability".<sup>40</sup> The important point here is that that approach, although important, fails to acknowledge the greater power of information as image and perception in the world of social media.<sup>41</sup>

Information as image and perception means information must be seen as a resource for shaping perception and imagination, which in turn is a more potent way of defending and, more importantly, strengthening morale.<sup>42</sup> In the realm of modern conflict, social media and morale; attack is the best form of defence. Rather than being overly shielding we must facilitate and encourage soldiers to take up social media and get deep into the discourse it richly enables. Soldiers must go 'waist-deep', get personal, communicate the reality, create bonds, expand networks and proactively contribute to the collective shaping of perception and image. Our soldiers need to be out-front. With clarity, simplicity, common intelligibility and realistic interpretation,<sup>43</sup> their authentic first-hand social media content should evoke identities and perceptions that create meanings, which in turn serve to boost morale. Such an approach's strength lies in the content's authenticity. In this way, akin to a constructivist approach within security studies, the *will* can be positively influenced through "behaviour [which] is always socially constructed, historically determined, and culturally contingent".<sup>44</sup> Conversely, a weakness of such an approach will stem from the tension between the opportunity for the soldier to engage independently and the strategic imperative dictated by policy, which is inherently political.

## Conclusion

Social media has and will continue to change the character of morale or *the will* to fight in the spectrum of modern conflict. More significantly, the West's 'rules-based' democracies and their body politics' *will* to uphold and defend international norms is being challenged by the proliferation of social media and its detribalising effect. What this means is that the role of the individual within the military institution and its use of social media is vital in order to defend the military capability of morale. Crucially, information as image and perception must be privileged above the twentieth-century's mentality of information as data and commodity. Information is the resource for shaping

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<sup>39</sup> Sean Lawson, 'The US Military's Social Media Civil War: Technology as Antagonism in Discourses of Information-Age Conflict', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2014), p. 232.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>43</sup> Kevin V. Mulcahy, 'The Cultural Policy of the Counter-Reformation: The Case of St. Peter's', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2011), p. 133.

<sup>44</sup> Eric Langenbacher and Yossi Shain, *Power and the Past: Collective Memory and International Relations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), p. 21.

perception and imagination, and is the most potent way of defending and strengthening morale.

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# **Countering Violent Extremism: From Defence to Attack**

Sharyn Rundle-Thiele and Renata Anibaldi

While efforts directed at countering violent extremism have increased globally, the rates of radicalisation continue to grow, which suggests that alternative change approaches warrant consideration if we are to combat terrorism. Placing the needs and wants of the target audience at the heart of strategic thinking has been used for more than a century by market leading companies. This article contends that countering violent extremism may be enhanced by adopting a marketing philosophy and continues by providing an overview of how a marketing approach would be applied to counter terrorism.

Recent figures indicate that more than 20,000 people worldwide have left to fight in Syria and Iraq, surpassing Afghanistan conflict numbers experienced during the 1980s,<sup>1</sup> and this figure is continuing to grow. Like any aspirational company, Islamic State (IS) has a clear strategic plan. Its target audience is young Muslims, aged twenty to thirty, around the world, who are feeling alienated by the society in which they live. The stated aims of IS are to create an Islamic state in the Middle East, and to recruit fighters and supporters from around the world. IS sees itself as an alternative to governments around the world, and what it offers is proving attractive to its target audience.<sup>2</sup>

The marketing tactics of IS rival that of a top advertising agency. It conducts market research, produces merchandise—including branded T-shirts—and employs a tiered social media strategy to amplify its message. For one selected target audience, values such as adventure, fighting for a good cause, becoming a hero, and hanging out with brothers are emphasised,

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<sup>1</sup> P. R. Neumann, 'Foreign Fighter Total in Syria/Iraq now Exceeds 20,000; Surpasses Afghanistan Conflict in the 1980s', ICSR, 26 January 2015, <[icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/](http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].

<sup>2</sup> Emma Reynolds, 'ISIS: Slick PR, Great Wealth and Strategies to Rival any Corporate Machine', news.com.au, 24 August, 2014, <[www.news.com.au/world/isis-slick-pr-great-wealth-and-strategies-to-rival-any-corporate-machine/news-story/256f9d838a6addc37974ed665dcb9729](http://www.news.com.au/world/isis-slick-pr-great-wealth-and-strategies-to-rival-any-corporate-machine/news-story/256f9d838a6addc37974ed665dcb9729)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].



while for western Muslims a different strategy underpins engagement.<sup>3</sup> The appeal to western Muslims emphasises

no one is helping us, America is not helping us, the West is turning a blind eye because only Muslims are being killed, we need you, we understand you're studying, you're working, you have a family, but at this point in time if being Muslim means anything to you, you have to step up and come here and help out and defend your brothers and sisters.<sup>4</sup>

The number of IS recruits clearly indicates success in more than 20,000 cases for fighters alone, suggesting IS appeals are able to engage the target audience.

With random terrorist attacks on western targets being a growing concern, the tactics employed globally to counter violent extremism (CVE) require re-thinking. In contrast to other behaviour change approaches, marketing advocates an audience-oriented approach (i.e. bottom-up philosophy), as opposed to the more expert driven, top-down approach that is prevalent in many change disciplines including policy, law, education, and so on. Drawing on commercial marketing literature, organisations that focus on target audience needs and wants may achieve better outcomes in countering violent extremism compared to less audience-oriented approaches.<sup>5</sup>

This article commences by providing an overview of recent literature on the approaches to countering violent extremism, demonstrating limited use of marketing or a bottom-up philosophy to guide strategic decision-making. A bottom-up philosophy centres the target audience at the heart of strategic thinking, ensuring that any offering is delivered to meet the needs and wants of the target audience. This article continues with an overview of marketing to demonstrate how a marketing philosophy can be employed ensuring that any tactics are delivered to effectively meet the audience's needs and wants. It concludes by arguing that marketing may offer an alternative approach that can be used to effectively engage and retain the target audience, thereby counteracting CVE.

## Countering Violent Extremism: The Current State of Play

Countering Violent Extremism<sup>6</sup> has emerged in recent years as a priority policy and practice area for governments around the world, although its

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Liddy and Colin Gourlay, 'Explained: Where do Foreign Fighters in Iraq and Syria come from?', ABC News, 6 February 2015, <[www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-06/map-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria/6052544](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-06/map-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria/6052544)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> E. M. Van Raaij and J. Stoelhorst, 'The Implementation of a Market Orientation: A Review and Integration of the Contributions to Date', *European Journal of Marketing*, vol. 42, nos 11/12 (2008), pp. 1265-93.

<sup>6</sup> Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) is defined as the banner used to describe efforts of Australian governments to prevent processes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism,

definition, typology, and process have evolved and continue to evolve since it was first referred to as a discrete field in the context of broader counter-terrorism activity in the mid-2000s.<sup>7</sup> The large variation in initiatives classed as CVE—from those that aim at changing behaviour, to ones that challenge ideas and beliefs, through to activities aimed at social cohesion—has resulted in many CVE approaches being unable to define the specifics of what they are preventing, let alone how or whether they have prevented it.<sup>8</sup> Heydemann commented that as a field of practice,

despite its impressive growth, CVE has struggled to establish a clear and compelling definition as a field; has evolved into a catchall category that lacks precision and focus; reflects problematic assumptions about the conditions that promote violent extremism; and has not been able to draw clear boundaries that distinguish CVE programs from those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education.<sup>9</sup>

Partly as a result of definitional ambiguity, the evidence base on the effectiveness of CVE remains largely disorganised. However, the failure to win the ‘war on terror’, and significant developments—such as the rise of IS, home-grown terrorism, the phenomenon of foreign fighters, and the primacy of cyberspace as a tool and stage of terrorism—have led governments to reflect on and refocus CVE policy and practice efforts.

At a broad level, CVE approaches have been classified based on their methods and their purpose in countering violent extremism. The juxtaposition of hard power and soft power is a frequent theme in policy and practice approaches in CVE<sup>10</sup> and has been used as an organising conceptual framework. Hard power approaches are generally associated with offensive or defensive interventions and include military, legislative, policing, infrastructure protection, crisis planning, and border security operations. Soft power approaches to CVE tend to be more pre-emptive or preventive and include: ideological interventions that counter religious extremism, promote liberal democratic ideals and encourage pluralistic world-views; communicative interventions that disrupt or counter extremism

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including terrorism, and where possible to help individuals disengage from a preparedness to support or commit acts of violence to achieve political, social or ideological ends (Australian Government, 2015, p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Romaniuk, *Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism* (Indiana: Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle and Andrew Zammit, ‘What is Countering Violent Extremism? Exploring CVE Policy and Practice in Australia’, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2016), pp. 6-24.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Heydemann, ‘Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice’, United States Institute of Peace *Insights*, no. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 1-5.

<sup>10</sup> Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya, *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review* (Edinburgh, SA: Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, 2011).

through narrative approaches, language and rhetorical strategies; political approaches that address grievances through political processes, state building, activism, political support for civil society groups, and political support for moderate views; social interventions that address social conditions that are thought to generate support for violent extremists, providing opportunities for disengagement from violent extremism, supporting alternative pathways to joining violent extremist groups, supporting civil society and approaches that foster social cohesion.<sup>11</sup>

Echoing the different aims of offensive or defensive activities and pre-emptive activities, Romaniuk<sup>12</sup> distinguished between measures that are CVE specific and those that are CVE relevant. CVE-specific measures directly target violent extremism that is evident through behavioural and cognitive radicalisation. On the other hand, CVE-relevant measures indirectly target extremism by reducing vulnerability to factors presumed to favour extremism through education, development, and women's rights and youth initiatives.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Aly et al.<sup>14</sup> conceptualise a CVE pyramid which includes three levels of CVE, from community based prevention, to intervention, to reaction which represent a transition from soft to hard power measures with an increasingly targeted focus.

Based on a public health framework of Primary-Secondary-Tertiary (PST) intervention points, Harris-Hogan et al.<sup>15</sup> categorised federally funded and coordinated Australian CVE projects run between 2010 and 2014, based on project goals, target groups, outputs, and measures of change. Primary interventions focus on prevention by addressing conditions, behaviours, and attitudes which may be conducive to radicalisation. Secondary interventions target individuals on the periphery of extremist groups who may be engaging in social networks containing extremist influences, or expressing support for a violent extremist ideology. Secondary measures include education on the consequences of radicalisation, motivational training, family involvement, and specialised assistance to deter or reverse ideological or cognitive radicalisation. Finally, tertiary-level CVE programs are designed to de-radicalise individuals who may or may not have engaged in violent extremist behaviours. Tertiary interventions include those taking place in correctional facilities with returned fighters.

The results of Harris-Hogan et al.'s<sup>16</sup> categorisation of Australian CVE projects based on the PST framework indicated that the point of intervention

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Romaniuk, *Does CVE Work?*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Aly, Anne-Marie Balbi and Carmen Jacques, 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism: Implementing the Role of Civil Society', *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2015), pp. 3-13.

<sup>15</sup> Harris-Hogan et al., 'What is Countering Violent Extremism?'

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

for the majority of projects has been at the primary level involving broad geographic prevention which aimed to address cognitive radicalisation by building resilience at the community level and increasing social harmony, through mentoring, intercultural and interfaith education, and online resources and training. However, there is little to no independent research suggesting that social cohesion or prevention initiatives have led to an actual reduction in violent extremism anywhere in the Western world.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, conceptually linking counter-terrorism, violent extremism with social harmony and cohesion in broadly-targeted community approaches has been criticised for stigmatising Muslim communities and for being based on flawed assumptions about the role of religion in violent extremism.<sup>18</sup>

The focus on broadly targeted prevention initiatives has meant that CVE projects in Australia have rarely directly engaged with individuals on a radicalising trajectory. However, in its recent review of the nation's counter-terrorism strategy the Australian Government has committed to prioritising activities that focus on threats from individual violent extremists.<sup>19</sup> This is evident in the 'Living Safe Together'<sup>20</sup> program which emphasises diverting individuals from behavioural radicalisation and violent extremism through tailored intervention programs, education, and engagement activities and online initiatives. This program also predicts a greater role for community-led interventions which are likely to represent greater long-term solutions to reducing terrorism, as well as having greater benefits for offenders, their families and their communities. For example, the evaluation of online campaigns promoting non-violent political activism or aiming to counter violent extremism in Muslim youth in Western Sydney found that, relative to government-badged campaigns, community-developed and sponsored initiatives had better reach and acceptance.<sup>21</sup> The involvement of civil society at the grassroots level is also advocated by Aly et al.<sup>22</sup> as effective in formulating and delivering relevant and effective counter-narratives to those of extremism.

Although the greater targeting of CVE is now a programmatic priority, the identification of populations, groups or individuals at risk is a key challenge. Much of CVE programming is posited on (implicit or explicit) theories of change of how a person or group moves from non-violence to violent extremism, and vice versa. However, there is as yet little evidence or

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Aly et al., 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism'.

<sup>19</sup> Romaniuk, *Does CVE Work?*

<sup>20</sup> Australian Government, 'Living Safe Together', <[www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/pages/home.aspx](http://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/pages/home.aspx)>

<sup>21</sup> Roslyn Richardson, 'Fighting Fire with Fire: Target Audience Responses to Online Anti-Violence Campaigns', ASPI Report (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Aly et al., 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism'.

consensus on the motivational and structural factors of the radicalisation and counter-radicalisation processes, nor a representative terrorist 'profile'.<sup>23</sup>

Ali et al.<sup>24</sup> suggest that marketing strategies can enhance the development of CVE prevention initiatives that also target attitudinal and behavioural change. Concepts commonly applied in commercial and social marketing such as the theory of reasoned action<sup>25</sup> are suggested as offering a framework for understanding attitudes, behaviours and intentions in relation to violent extremism and the construction of counter narratives. In Australia, it seems marketing has not been applied to CVE, although marketing concepts are being introduced to military training in the United States as a means to 'shape' perceptions of indigenous populations in combat zones.<sup>26</sup>

## Marketing as a Combat Tool?

The application of marketing to countering violent extremism might be non-intuitive in the first instance. Marketing is mostly associated with the commercial world, to engender, promote, and support an exchange between parties, a customer who buys a product (a good, a service, or an idea) and a seller who provides the product. The effectiveness of commercial marketing is indisputable, and the tools and techniques that marketers employ cause us to knowingly and unknowingly make consumption choices each and every day.

In simple commercial marketing terms, the two parties involved in an exchange would be a customer who buys the product (a good, service or idea) and the organisation that sells the product (a good, service or idea). Marketing involves understanding the market to then design, implement and deliver a product that resonates with the wants and needs of the customer, by either offering a solution or satisfying a want. Recall that IS has been implementing a clear strategic plan that evolves over time as the organisation's needs grow. Initially, IS targeted young Muslims around the world, aged twenty to thirty, who were feeling alienated by the society in which they live; today IS has extended its targeting to young women as it actively seeks wives, accountants and a broader community to the Islamic state. For some time now, IS has been offering a solution and in doing so satisfying the needs and wants of its target audiences—fighters, wives and accountants.

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<sup>23</sup> Lasse Lindekilde, 'Introduction: Assessing the Effectiveness of Counter-Radicalisation Policies in Northwestern Europe', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 5, no. 3 (2012), pp. 335-44.

<sup>24</sup> Aly et al., 'Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism'.

<sup>25</sup> Icek Ajzen, and Martin Fishbein, *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980); Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, Vol. 607 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2007).

Marketing extends far beyond selling of product and services. Since Theodore Levitt proposed a link between a market orientation and business survival, in a paper called 'Marketing Myopia',<sup>27</sup> marketing has, indeed, become the driving force in many successful organisations.

At its core, marketing is a philosophy or a way of thinking that entails in-depth understanding of the factors that are significant in the lives of those in the target market and then the ability to design, implement and deliver a program (a good, a service or an idea) that addresses those key driving factors. The philosophy underpinning marketing can be applied in any setting. For some decades now politicians have been using marketing to win power and be elected into government. Similarly, marketing has been used to combat environmental, social and health problems such as unhealthy eating,<sup>28</sup> problem alcohol use,<sup>29</sup> water use, littering, immunisation and unsafe sex.

Marketing is an approach that puts the target audience at the heart of all decisions. Rather than asking which ideal should we communicate, marketers who adopt best practice marketing thinking ask what would our target audience value or like us to offer and then they deliver a program that meets the identified needs and wants.

Firms with a market orientation perform better than firms without a market orientation.<sup>30</sup> Research shows that companies who have a well-defined marketing strategy perform better than companies that do not have a well-defined marketing strategy.<sup>31</sup>

Marketers need to learn what the target audience wants and needs and to then deliver a solution accordingly. This is an ongoing process as target audience preferences are continually evolving and satisfaction with the offering needs to be monitored to ensure that audience expectations are met. Target audience needs and wants change with each product purchased, service consumed, magazine read, competitor action and reaction, conversation had or television program watched. Marketers must

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<sup>27</sup> Theodore Levitt, 'Marketing Myopia', *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 38, no. 4 (July/August 1960), pp. 45–56.

<sup>28</sup> Julia Carins and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'Eating for the Better: A Social Marketing Review (2000-2012)', *Public Health Nutrition*, vol. 17, no. 7 (2014), pp. 1628-39.

<sup>29</sup> Krzysztof Kubacki, Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Bo Pang and Nuray Buyucek 'Minimising Alcohol Harm: A Systematic Social Marketing Review (2000-2014)', *Journal of Business Research*, vol. 68 no. 10 (2015), pp. 2214-22.

<sup>30</sup> John C. Narver and Stanley F. Slater, 'The Effect of a Market Orientation on Business Profitability', *Journal of Marketing*, vol. 54, no. 4 (1990), pp. 20-35.

<sup>31</sup> Robert G. Cooper, Christopher J. Easingwood, Scott Edgett, Elko J. Kleinschmidt and Chris Storey, 'What Distinguishes the Top Performing Products in Financial Services?', *Journal of Product Innovation*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1996), pp. 281-99; B. C. Gosh, Teo Sock Kim, and Low Aik Meng, 'Factors Contributing to the Success of Local SMEs: An Insight from Singapore', *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*, vol. 10, no. 3 (1993), pp. 33-45.

use information to maintain their understanding. Marketers must be creative, responsive, adaptive, fast and able to develop new ideas ensuring that the offering is superior to competing alternatives. Markets are cluttered and there are many options available to the target audience. The best marketers are able to offer something over time that is more highly valued than competing alternatives for the target audience.

## **The Marketing Process**

The *marketing process* involves understanding the target audience in order to design, implement and later evaluate a program designed to overcome the problem at hand. A simplified overview of the marketing approach to counter IS is now offered. In practice, this requires vast experience and training in marketing to address social problems.

### **UNDERSTANDING**

Marketers start by understanding the target audience, the market and how they are currently situated. This involves undertaking extensive primary research to gain insights into the problem the marketer currently faces and/or reviewing data to understand what is (and is not) reaching the target audience. In terms of countering violent extremism some research exists to guide initial enquiry. Firstly, we know that Muslims around the world aged twenty to thirty may be at higher risk of feeling alienated in the societies in which they live. Armed with this knowledge the market is defined for the marketer.

Marketers need to undertake a situation assessment to understand how they are positioned relative to alternatives that are available to the target audience. First, this requires understanding what competes for time within that market. A marketer needs to undertake a competitive assessment to understand the activities, occupations and other things that occupy time for Muslims twenty to thirty years old. By understanding the activities and occupations that compete for time a marketer is better placed at developing an offering for the market that is different, and offers superior benefits to the activities that are currently being undertaken by the individuals they wish to target. Importantly, in the case of countering violent extremism marketers need to assess the attraction to IS for targets recruited. Typically, marketers seek to develop a market offering that is superior to the competition, which in this instance would require developing an activity that is more appealing than joining brothers in arms in the Middle East. A competitive assessment would assist to understand which other activities offer the motivation to join.

A key understanding in marketing is that the market is not homogenous—rather, markets are comprised of individuals who have different beliefs, backgrounds (demographic factors such as age, income, family structures, etc.), behaviours and places lived. With this understanding marketers seek to segment the market. In this case, a large scale survey of Muslims aged



twenty to thirty living in Australia offers a critical first step to arrive at a detailed understanding of the market. According to current understanding of best practice this understanding should be theoretically derived to ensure optimal outcomes. For example, the theory of planned behaviour has been successfully used to explain behavioural intention in a wide range of settings,<sup>32</sup> enhancing capability to predict behavioural intentions. Further, examples of theory driven approaches exist including socio-ecological models that take the broader environment into account to more directly account for behaviour.<sup>33</sup> Examples of segmentation studies abound resulting in descriptions of groups that inform decision-making in the design stage.<sup>34</sup> Ideally, personas are used to assist strategic and tactical thinking.

Market segmentation is underpinned by the idea that a heterogeneous market can be divided into smaller homogeneous markets based on their different product preferences and/or their different response to market offerings. At the core of segmentation lies a desire to optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing efforts to ensure the most effective use of limited resources. Individuals who share similar characteristics can be identified and grouped so the companies can target the group(s) offering most appeal with a tailored offering delivering better reach, trial and retention.

## DESIGN

Armed with an understanding of the market in which they are trying to compete and the group(s) to be targeted, the marketer then commences with the design of the program (in cases where an equivalent is not currently available) or program re-design to better meet the needs and wants of the groups to be targeted. The creative process involves developing a brand that resonates with the target audience to capture their awareness and a marketing program that encourages trial and later repeated use of the offering. For marketers, decisions need to be made around the program to be delivered to market (including pricing, human resourcing, program composition), how the program is to be communicated with and delivered to the target audience(s) recalling that different programs may be necessary for different segments or alternative approaches to reaching different segments with one program may be warranted. Recall that marketing is a bottom-up approach. Consequently, the design phase involves consultation with the

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<sup>32</sup> Lisa Schuster, Krzysztof Kubacki and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'A Theoretical Approach to Segmenting Children's Walking Behaviour', *Young Consumers*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2015), pp. 159-71.

<sup>33</sup> Julia Carins and Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, 'Fighting to Eat Healthfully: Measurements of the Military Food Environment', *Journal of Social Marketing*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2014), pp. 223-39.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Timo Dietrich, Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Lisa Schuster, Judy Drennan, Rebekah Russell-Bennett, Cheryl Leo, Matthew Gullo and Jason Connor, 'Differential Segmentation Responses to an Alcohol Social Marketing Program', *Addiction*, vol. 49 (2015), pp. 68-77; Schuster et al., 'A Theoretical Approach to Segmenting Children's Walking Behaviour'.

segment group(s) to be targeted and recently co-design methods have been detailed ensuring that program design is customer oriented.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, approaches are tested during development ensuring the target audience is favourable towards the program being designed.

### IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

During implementation and at the conclusion of a marketing program, marketing metrics and other systems can be used to *evaluate* marketing performance. Marketers seek to assess brand awareness. Ideally, brand awareness levels of at least 80 per cent are sought to ensure that the market knows the program exists. In the event that awareness is high and program uptake is low, marketers rapidly understand their program has failed to beat the competition and research is needed to understand why the target market has failed to take up the program. If the program is succeeding marketers understand that they cannot rest on their laurels as markets are dynamic. Competing marketers, in this case IS, would respond to attacks by altering their appeals in an attempt to reverse drops in recruit numbers. Armed with this understanding marketers continuously evaluate program performance to understand how programs can be further optimised to deliver what the target audience needs and wants. Program adjustments are made to continually deliver an offering that is designed to beat the competition.

The marketing cycle is best considered as an ongoing loop where marketing programs are constantly revised and refined. It is evaluation, throughout and after marketing efforts, that makes the marketing process cyclical in nature. It is also evaluation that truly enables a marketer to know, understand and respond to changes in the market.

Violent extremism in western countries has manifested itself mostly in the phenomenon of 'foreign fighters' and through acts of terrorism committed by lone wolves. Although there are reports that IS is losing ground, and evidence of a reduction of western fighters joining IS, the wars and civil unrest in Iraq and Syria, and their surrounding regions, continue. It is not possible to predict the impact of this developing situation on violent extremism in the West. However, the strife of Muslims populations in war regions, and perceptions of concerted victimisation of Muslims by the West (supported by extremist propaganda) have accompanied the rise of radicalisation and extremism in the past. Diminishing military strength of IS and persistent conflict and instability in Muslim majority countries may ultimately increase the threat of random extremist acts.

The overview of recent literature earlier in this article indicates that multiple factors may be implicated in individual and group trajectories towards violent extremism, although there is not conclusive evidence on how these factors

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<sup>35</sup> Timo Dietrich, Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Lisa Schuster and Jason Connor, 'Co-Designing Social Marketing Programs', *Journal of Social Marketing*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2016), pp. 41-61.

may combine into 'typical' profiles or pathways. Against this background, countering an extremist threat requires addressing what is known about structural and individual factors that potentially facilitate radical and extremist discourse and action, as well as providing support for sources that may have a moderating impact.

Research indicates that there are shortcomings in broadly based preventative interventions that have characterised many government-led responses to radicalisation and extremism. While there is agreement that prevention is an important element of countering violent extremism, the impact of programs that target entire groups based on religion is not amenable to measurement, is prejudicial and may actually be counter-productive.

The research evidence, while incomplete and inconclusive in several areas, points to the need for specifically targeted programs that are developed and delivered by the community in response to identified risks and needs. Programs of this type can include interventions that are amenable to being informed by cognitive and behavioural evidence-based theories, and adjusted to specific circumstances and situations. Marketing offers a theory and a practice for contributing to the development of such programs and interventions as it is founded on understanding the target audience. Communicating the advantages and disadvantages of a product (good, idea or service) is achieved by responding directly and indirectly to the wants and needs of targeted individuals. The success of IS online propaganda illustrates the power of messaging that creates and/or appeals to individual wants and needs, and countering extremist discourse with equally powerful messaging needs to be at the forefront of countering violent extremism in the future. In addition, as amply demonstrated by political and health campaigns, marketing based on social psychology can foster the emergence of common goals and norms in groups of people, pointing to the need to actively understand and involve family, friends and networks, in targeted interventions.

## **Conclusion**

At present Australia is mounting a defensive operation to counter terrorism and this must change. Given that attack is the best form of defence<sup>36</sup> the Australian counter-terrorism narrative needs to be redefined. To do this a clear understanding of the target audience values is needed if we are serious about countering violent extremism. A unified view of what it means to be an Australian in 2016 for citizens and visa holders from all walks of life needs to be ascertained. According to the Australian Government's

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew P. Dickerson, Heather D. Gibson and Euclid Tsakalotos, 'Is Attack the Best Form of Defence? A Competing Risks Analysis of Acquisition Activity in the UK', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, vol. 27, no. 3 (2003), pp. 337-57.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, commitment to the rule of law, parliamentary democracy, equality of men and women, and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need, and pursuit of the public good.<sup>37</sup> Rather than communicating Australian Government ideals, we need to ask what our target audience values and what being an Australian should offer and then we should deliver activities, employment and opportunities that make appeals from IS irrelevant. Delivering what the target audience values is needed to tackle the narrative that leads some to turn against their country.

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<sup>37</sup> Department of Immigration and Citizenship, *Life in Australia* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2007), <[www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia\\_english\\_full.pdf](http://www.border.gov.au/LifeinAustralia/Documents/lia_english_full.pdf)> [Accessed 11 January 2016].

## **The Australian Defence Force's Embrace of [Un]Social Media**

Jason Logue

The Islamic State Group has harnessed the capability and capacity of social media to support its cause. It is rapidly shifting from open social media accounts, like Twitter, to more specialised applications such as Telegram and other encrypted networks, in an effort to both focus communication and protect personnel and supporters from monitoring and targeting.<sup>1</sup> Despite the platform, the aim is the same—attract and then sustain a support base. Social media products, disseminated through social networking sites, have been and continue to be exploited by Daesh, adding more tentacles to the pernicious presence of violent extremism online.

As a conservative estimate, the Islamic State Group is responsible for about 90,000 social media content posts daily.<sup>2</sup> At the upper end of estimates, Daesh propagandists and their online supporters may be responsible for more than 200,000 pieces of content daily.<sup>3</sup> On Twitter alone, noting that its popularity with Islamist terrorists is rapidly waning, there were at least 45,000 accounts linked to Daesh at the end of 2014.<sup>4</sup> A recent study identified an average of just over thirty-eight new and unique propaganda outputs from Islamic State's official channels disseminated online each day.<sup>5</sup>

The scale of adversary and potential adversary efforts is staggering, but even it is drowned out in the rapidly expanding connectedness of truly global social media. In the mid-afternoon of an Australian weekday in November 2015, approximately 10,500 tweets were sent in a single second<sup>6</sup> from accounts registered to more than 300 million monthly active users across

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<sup>1</sup> BBC, 'IS Exploits Telegram Mobile App to Spread Propaganda', <[www.bbc.com/news/technology-34466287](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-34466287)> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>2</sup> Jon Greenberg, 'Does the Islamic State Post 90,000 Social Media Messages Each Day?', 19 February 2015, <[www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2015/feb/19/hillary-mann-leverett/cnn-expert-islamic-state-posts-90000-social-media/](http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2015/feb/19/hillary-mann-leverett/cnn-expert-islamic-state-posts-90000-social-media/)> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Berger and Jonathon Morgan, *The ISIS Twitter Census: Defining and Describing the Population of ISIS Supporters on Twitter*, Analysis Paper no. 20 (Washington, DC: Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, March 2015), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Charlie Winter, *Documenting the Virtual Caliphate* (Quilliam Foundation, 2015); <[www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf](http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/FINAL-documenting-the-virtual-caliphate.pdf)> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>6</sup> Internet Live Stats, <[www.internetlivestats.com/one-second/#tweets-band](http://www.internetlivestats.com/one-second/#tweets-band)> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

multiple languages.<sup>7</sup> There are about 17 million tweets in Arabic each day.<sup>8</sup> There are believed to be about 20 million fake Twitter accounts deceiving the old and young alike.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 44 per cent of registered accounts have never sent a tweet, giving some indication of just how many are watching the conversation or were just so overwhelmed by the stream of information that they never stepped into the maelstrom.<sup>10</sup> At last count, approximately 80 per cent of the world's internet users do not even use Twitter.<sup>11</sup> Chinese-language social media behemoth Weibo, the Mandarin Twitter, currently has 212 million monthly active users<sup>12</sup> and has experienced 30 per cent growth in the past twelve months.<sup>13</sup> These users are almost exclusively conversing in Mandarin. Successful rival WeChat has 650 million monthly active users.<sup>14</sup>

Exploitation of social media and social networking sites as a vector for shaping is not confined to terrorism or violent extremist organisations. More recently, social media has been used in direct support of conventional military efforts, or what Western military forces would describe as Phase 0 or Phase 1 shaping efforts. A recent investigation into a nondescript office in St Petersburg, Russia, highlighted the workings of The Internet Research Agency,<sup>15</sup> a state-sponsored disinformation effort. It employs hundreds of young Russians to spread false material, from false accounts online, in support of President Putin's efforts. There are similar reports of an equally impressive undertaking in China, known colloquially as the 50-cent Army, focused on shoring up support for the Communist Party leadership.<sup>16</sup> None of these efforts require technically proficient cyber operators to hack accounts. Nearly all use freely available tools and an internet connection. A large amount of the communication is conducted from mobile devices. Social media offers a reach and rapidity that could not have been imagined

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<sup>7</sup> Craig Smith, 'By the Numbers: 150+ Amazing Twitter Statistics', DMR, <expandedramblings.com/index.php/march-2013-by-the-numbers-a-few-amazing-twitter-stats/> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>8</sup> Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, 'Twitter in the Arab Region', Arab Social Media Report (edn 5), <www.arabsocialmediareport.com/Twitter/LineChart.aspx> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>9</sup> Smith, 'By the Numbers: 150+ Amazing Twitter Statistics'.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> 'Leading Social Networks Worldwide as of November 2015, Ranked by Number of Active Users (in Millions)', Statista, <www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/> [Accessed on 30 November 2015]

<sup>12</sup> Craig Smith, 'By the Numbers: 50 Amazing Weibo Statistics', DMR, <expandedramblings.com/index.php/weibo-user-statistics/> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>13</sup> China Internet Watch, 'Sina Weibo News, Trends, Stats & Insights', <www.chinainternetwatch.com/tag/sina-weibo/> [Accessed on 11 November 2015].

<sup>14</sup> Craig Smith, 'By the Numbers: 50 Amazing WeChat Statistics', DMR, <expandedramblings.com/index.php/wechat-statistics/> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>15</sup> Adrian Chen, 'The Agency', *The New York Times Magazine*, 2 June 2015, <www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

<sup>16</sup> An Pei, 'China to Train '50-Cent Army' in Online Propaganda', *Radio Free Asia*, 12 March 2014, <www.rfa.org/english/news/china/propaganda-03122014184948.html> [Accessed 11 November 2015].

by those early adherents in cellars cranking out handbills on a variation of Gutenberg's famous press.

The rapidity and reach of this medium has had policymakers, law enforcement officials and military commanders all seek to inject themselves into an online effort to establish and maintain what is known colloquially as 'the narrative'.<sup>17</sup> To date, most efforts have been heavily criticised, and not without good reason. On one hand, the military's ability to generate and sustain a narrative, something that is so beholden to the policy decision framing the operation, means the military simply cannot go it alone. On the other hand, the military's understanding and use of the tools that are available is severely limited.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) still does not know what it wants to use social media for or, perhaps more importantly, how to use it in support of operations. It is struggling to understand who is responsible for this 'thing' that has captured everyone's attention. Social media content is more rigorously managed than the delivery of traditional weapon systems. Social media transcends the clearly defined boundaries of an Area of Operations. It pushes well beyond what tactical and operational commanders would consider their Area of Interest. It has no boundary between domestic audiences, the international population and the adversary, making distinctions in the roles of various information-related capability specialities born of the Vietnam era absolutely blurred. For most ADF personnel, accessing social media content from their work stations is not even possible. Corporately, social media is seen as time wasting and a security threat. By hesitating, the ADF has ceded a crucial conduit to the information environment (a construct—perhaps unsurprisingly—that does not exist in current Australian doctrine).

In contrast, current adversaries—and those that have been watching the interplay online over the past few years—have embraced a manoeuvrist approach and jumped into social media with both feet.<sup>18</sup> The rapid adoption

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<sup>17</sup> "A narrative provides the compelling foundation for communication efforts, not the communication effort itself. A narrative is a simple, credible and overall representation of a conceptual ideal designed to convey the organisation's self-concept, values, rationale, legitimacy, moral basis and vision. A narrative informs and educates internal and external audiences and therefore is 'translated' in a cultural and attuned manner." Author's definition in: Jason Logue, 'Narrative—Everybody is Talking about It but We Still Aren't Sure what It Is', The Bridge, <medium.com/the-bridge/welcome-to-the-bridge-d34315ce826e> [Accessed 8 August 2016].

<sup>18</sup> The manoeuvrist approach is outlined in Australian Army doctrine (LWD 1: The Fundamentals of Land Warfare) as a philosophy to guide warfare. "Manoeuvre accepts war as a competition between opposing wills, framed in time and understanding, rather than by physical position alone. It relies on the ability to change physical and non-physical circumstances more rapidly than the enemy can adapt. Manoeuvre seeks to understand how the enemy's strengths can be undermined. While it attempts to achieve the economic application of force, it accepts that combined arms close combat is a central and enduring feature of land warfare and is required to



and exploitation of the medium has been a lesson in adaption that Western military forces have been unable to match, let alone exceed. When al-Qaeda and other terrorists groups made their first tentative steps into disseminating videos online in the very late 1990s/early 2000s, many Western allied observers failed to recognise just how powerful the internet as a dissemination vector for propaganda would become. Analysts had to actively seek sites like Ogrish.com to find grainy, low-resolution depictions of the brutality that fills social media feeds in high-definition today.

In August 2004, staff consternation in the Baghdad Headquarters of Multi-National Force–Iraq was palpable when a five-minute video appeared in jihadist forums addressed to the European nations supporting the operation. The product was narrated in English by a man with a South African or Dutch accent and advised the European forces to withdraw from Iraq because of the financial and social costs their commitments would have at home. It was deeply critical of America in general, and President Bush in particular. The video was replete with now ubiquitous IED footage and heroic jihadist fighters. It is now lost in the vast sea of product that followed it. As a psychological operations product it was well-researched, edited and disseminated. It was clear that the team behind the production had undertaken a target audience analysis of European community fears about the Iraq operation, particularly in light of the 2004 Madrid attack. The focus on cost to national blood and treasure resonated well. The product's obvious potential impact though was overlooked because it caused very little reaction within the Western (particularly American) media covering the conflict. While it did generate coverage in Europe, most was in non-English publications. Ultimately, the Headquarters at the time was far more concerned about the media coverage from the myriad of embeds travelling with Coalition troops than they were with a piece of online propaganda. Structurally the Coalition was focused on the media, not the information environment. The lack of a media pull-factor meant this product went unchallenged. Staff Officers focused on the wider information environment recognised the impact it and the hundreds of clips that followed over the rest of that year posed but, in the face of mountains of work, hesitated. It was prudent to focus on what was being asked of them rather than pushing to expand into what may come next. The video and many like it in that time were allowed to propagate without rebuttal.

Fast forward to a different fight and different location: in 2010 the two official spokespeople for the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Qari Mohammed Yousef and his less reliable partner Zabiullah Mujahid, adopted a couple of websites and some password-protected forums to disseminate daily operational updates. An analysis of the Taliban's almost-daily claims versus

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create discrete physical destruction on an enemy that generates a greater cognitive effect, thereby reducing an enemy's will to fight. Manoeuvre occurs at all levels of command."

reality for Australian operations in Uruzgan highlighted that about 90 per cent of the time the claim was related to an incident that occurred in the general location, and at about the time indicated.<sup>19</sup> The key difference was in the metrics used to report success: the Taliban propaganda team massively overstated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) casualties and downplayed their own. The interesting aspect of 2010, and the years that followed, was that this product very rarely made an impact beyond Afghanistan and those living adjacent. The inflated claims, despite their availability, were recognised by all but the most conspiratorially minded in Australia for what they were, mostly because of the ADF's transparency on casualties. In a way, the decision to rapidly announce all casualties inoculated the Australian public against Taliban propaganda. In the villages and tribal areas where information was rapidly passed through word of mouth, however, the claims were embraced as unquestionable fact. The impact on the ADF was so low that this mechanism was left to establish a tenacious grip on locals struggling to comprehend the conflict. It was not until Zabiullah elevated his efforts to Twitter in 2011-12 and the resulting media enquiries that flooded ISAF and troop contributing nations, that any real effort on the propaganda itself commence. The ADF knows from experience that any time a tweet with a claim from Uruzgan was disseminated, a flurry of calls to Defence's media ops call centre would result. While mitigation efforts ensured the propaganda was somewhat contained, those still receiving the information in the villages and tribal areas continued to absolutely believe it. Again, the organisational focus on the media dominated the ADF and Western military thinking of the information environment.

So it is with today's efforts against Daesh. Information is being disseminated at a rate most struggle to comprehend, yet it only becomes organisationally important when it leads to a media enquiry or military elements can exploit an element of information for a kinetic action. There are small teams across the Department all engaged for their own ends—open-source intelligence collection, brand and reputation management, public information dissemination, counter-propaganda actions. None of these efforts are linked and most of them fail to grasp the true beauty of the capability exploited by our adversary, simply because of an organisational focus that is decidedly passive and almost solely on the conventional media aspect of the information environment. The ADF cannot compete if it does not put the 'social' in social media—actually communicating with individuals rather than disseminating to them. It cannot compete if it does not understand the differences in the social networking sites and how social media should be constructed for each. It absolutely cannot compete if the organisation does not understand with whom it should be communicating.

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<sup>19</sup> HQJTF633 (Headquarters Joint Task Force 633), Taliban Operations and Strategic Propaganda as a result of Australian operations or activities in Uruzgan Jan–Aug 2010, dated 19 August 2010.

Take the Australian Army's current foray into Twitter. The overwhelming majority of the content is disseminated by named senior leaders or the official corporate account. In the case of the very progressive 1 Brigade, accounts linked to the Commanding Officers of units are also active in disseminating material. All of it is focused on sustaining Army's brand by disseminating imagery of events or activities. All of it is one-way communication. The ADF uses Twitter in the same manner it uses Facebook, despite the differences in the platforms, and happily reports statistics such as number of followers as measures of success. The ADF is highly effective at reinforcing the already formed beliefs of those supporting the organisation. Very rarely does anyone associated with the accounts inject themselves into conversation streams already occurring, through appropriate hashtags. There are very limited efforts to broaden the audience reached except through inadvertent third-party exposure. The rapid uptake in branded accounts has resulted in circular reporting, as each account retweets or likes those closely associated with it. Almost no one responds to queries addressed to the accounts. The ADF is not engaging in communication—the very reason social media exists.

The ADF's current efforts were recently described as “repeatedly dropping a single PSYOPS leaflet somewhere in the world and not even giving the recipient the benefit of a piece of paper”.<sup>20</sup> Current adversaries, however, take a different tact. For Daesh, and those like it, social media is all about the conversation stream. The adversary focuses on those with unformed opinions in order to shape and manipulate them for his own ends. Our adversary looks beyond those already communicating on social media and instead creates content to attract the young and impressionable that passively ingest what they find in keyword searches. The adversary understands that his focus must be on generating inquiries from those yet to form an opinion. At this point—this tentative toe-dip into social media by the target to ask a question—he masses his capabilities, an army of online warriors, to focus on behavioural change. He exploits his narrative to persuade and influence. The ADF disseminates disparate elements of its narrative to inform and sometimes educate. We focus on social media awareness without understanding the basis of opinion formation or even the real pros and cons of various social networking sites.

The key issue for the ADF and Defence is the perceived risk of communication—it is the critical vulnerability. The ADF's focus on mission command is completely absent in its use of the information environment. Organisationally, the ADF seeks absolute control. The internet has made this notion difficult; social media has made it nigh on impossible. It is this hesitation, and that of the ADF's Coalition partners, that has enabled the adversary to generate an information advantage. Even if the military limited

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<sup>20</sup> Comment by a member of the HQJOC (Headquarters Joint Operations Command) team supporting the @Fight\_Daesh account.

itself to simply supporting the public affairs function of community relations, the inability to directly inject into conversation streams in a timely manner makes social media use decidedly unsocial. Organisationally, the focus is on what the media could use in the response rather than engaging with those attempting to communicate. Most importantly however, our efforts are insincere. Using a social platform for a monologue defeats its very purpose. A recent review of digital diplomacy efforts around the globe highlighted that

social interaction rests on two-way sharing of information. By only speaking at people, FAMs [Foreign Affairs Ministries] are breaking the "social media contract" that exists between SNS [social networking site] users. There is something disingenuous about using social media to become part of a global community while refusing to contribute to that community.<sup>21</sup>

Even if we focus on using social media as an extension of command communication we are still just broadcasting. Actually communicating with soldiers and young commanders is a two-way street. We want them to tell us what is wrong and why. We want them to query, expand and develop their professional mastery through interaction. We want to be able to engage to support our primary focus of education. A virtual barrage of tweets telling us to read something with no opportunity for real debate on that same social forum seems inherently limited. If those that have gone to such lengths to create a social media account and attract followers simply disseminate missives, evidence suggests that the popularity will soon wane.

In his study of digital diplomacy efforts, Ilan Manor suggests that:

By failing to meet the needs, and expectations, of social media followers Foreign Affairs Ministries risk losing their online audiences. Indeed social media followers who feel ignored, and who are spoken at rather than with, may soon abandon [the] profiles without bothering to return.<sup>22</sup>

Social media should be key in supporting military and security operations. It is now ubiquitous. Even the most remote regions of the world are gaining access to mobile data. We have a ready-made vector through which a multitude of effects in the information environment can be created.

Here is one example that stands as an outlier to the accepted practice of the time. A very progressive Marine Corps officer ran the Command Engagement Group for Headquarters Regional Command South-West (RC-SW) in 2012-13. Note the name of the group—it is important. The group did not undertake the then-traditional public affairs approach. Instead they focused on engagement. He sought and gained approval to put social media to the test during his thirteen-month deployment. Starting with an inherited Facebook page, he rapidly introduced supporting, branded social

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<sup>21</sup> Ilan Manor, 'The Rules of Engagement: Why MFAs Should Engage with Social Media Followers', *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, 18 April 2016, <[digdipblog.com/2016/04/18/the-rules-of-engagement-why-mfes-should-engage-with-social-media-followers/](http://digdipblog.com/2016/04/18/the-rules-of-engagement-why-mfes-should-engage-with-social-media-followers/)> [Accessed 2 May 2016].

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

media efforts on YouTube and, while he would have liked to do more, simply did not have the staff capacity to give each outlet the time it needed. He tasked his small team to focus on content that would support direct communication from the platforms they owned, rather than producing content solely for dissemination back to commercial media in the United States. Most importantly, he spent most of his day directly corresponding with those who commented on his platforms and on the comments section of media coverage about his organisation. He also focused his organisation's media engagement strategy on those agencies that allowed for online comments, to maximise the opportunity engagement offered. Good, bad or indifferent, Lieutenant Colonel Cliff Gilmore, United States Marine Corps, II MEF, engaged and communicated on behalf of RC-SW.<sup>23</sup> What he found was not surprising for those invested in communication theory. His levels of followership skyrocketed and rapidly progressed beyond just the families of those deployed to a vast cross-section of the United States and the globe. At an update brief early in the tour his Commander enquired as to the popularity of the account. The team had reached 10,000 views of a YouTube clip and the Commander—almost jokingly—asked to be advised when the team broke one million. They did so within a couple of months. The team's content was retransmitted across other social media sites and online forums. When he directly engaged with belligerent posters in that professional and polite way that only US Marines can pull off, a conversation started and in most cases resulted in the person admitting a degree of ignorance on the topic and thanking him for his assistance. When they were particularly belligerent, he found that he was repeatedly out-communicated by active supporters of the mission. His fans were engaging on his behalf which became crucially important in supporting some of the less publicly acceptable decisions required to support the draw down of forces from the area, such as the reduction in number of fresh meals served at dining facilities in the closing weeks. Embracing a qualified officer with twenty years' experience in communication, the II MEF Commander supported the talent on his staff and, through mission command, let Gilmore get on with the job. The only criticisms came from other Commands because their effort, almost solely focused on the media, was being compared rather negatively.

When Gilmore's team closed down Camp Bastion and left, no other Regional Command picked up the mantle. For a fleeting thirteen months military forces had a view of what mission command coupled with social media could achieve, albeit solely focused on generating and sustaining public support—and then it was gone. Observers also had an understanding of what communication, rather than just dissemination, could accomplish. While his higher headquarters was promoting photo caption contests of completely unrelated imagery to generate followers, Gilmore effectively and efficiently communicated, shifting more and more of those with unformed opinions to

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<sup>23</sup> Online conversations between the author and Lieutenant Colonel Cliff Gilmore, United States Marine Corps (Retd).

his side of the bell curve. For their efforts on that deployment, the Command Engagement Group were awarded all four team prizes in the United States Marine Corps Professional Communication awards that year.

It could be argued that the current Western military focus on social media and its exploitation by adversaries and potential adversaries, in what is currently framed as Hybrid War, is simply the latest manifestation of the struggle democratic nations have with information in conflict. Moreover, from a military perspective, it is the struggle to truly understand what that central line of operation in the Australian Army's famous Adaptive Campaigning diagram actually means.

While the current fight, both physically and virtually, against Daesh is dominating thinking, there is perhaps a more impressive effort already underway in many parts of Europe. The Ukraine is a fantastic case study in internet-enabled *Maskirovka*.<sup>24</sup> Social media is not solely responsible for Russia's successes, but it has become a valuable tool in both accelerating and masking the originator of these effects. If the ADF is not watching and learning now, by the time action is required it may well be too late. Key to this is a realisation that having a social media account is not enough: having smart people, dedicated to the task and working to an agreed campaign, is essential. Providing the appropriate resources is crucial. Empowering them to communicate, in the true sense of that word, is vital.

Perhaps the issues in the ADF's use of social media or operations in the information environment are seated in a broader internal conflict. Current thinking has military elements seeking to generate effects so late in the game—on the commencement of military operations—that the decisive punch may already have been thrown. Phase 0, so embraced by those executing Hybrid War, may be incompatible with modern democracies. Perhaps this is a lesson of the past decade of conflict: the form of operational commitment we make has already been so shaped by the adversary that our tenants of manoeuvre are neutered before the announcement is made. Is this why our narratives fail?

*Lieutenant Colonel Jason Logue is an Australian Army Information Operations specialist. The views expressed here are his own and do not reflect those of the Australian Army, Australian Department of Defence or the Australian Government. This article is an adapted version of his presentation to the Army Social Media Conference at Monash University in November 2015. [jason.logue@defence.gov.au](mailto:jason.logue@defence.gov.au).*

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<sup>24</sup> Russian Military Deception. See Lucy Ash, 'How Russia Outfoxes Its Enemies', BBC News, 29 January 2015, <[www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31020283](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31020283)> [Accessed 6 August 2016].





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## Notes for Contributors

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