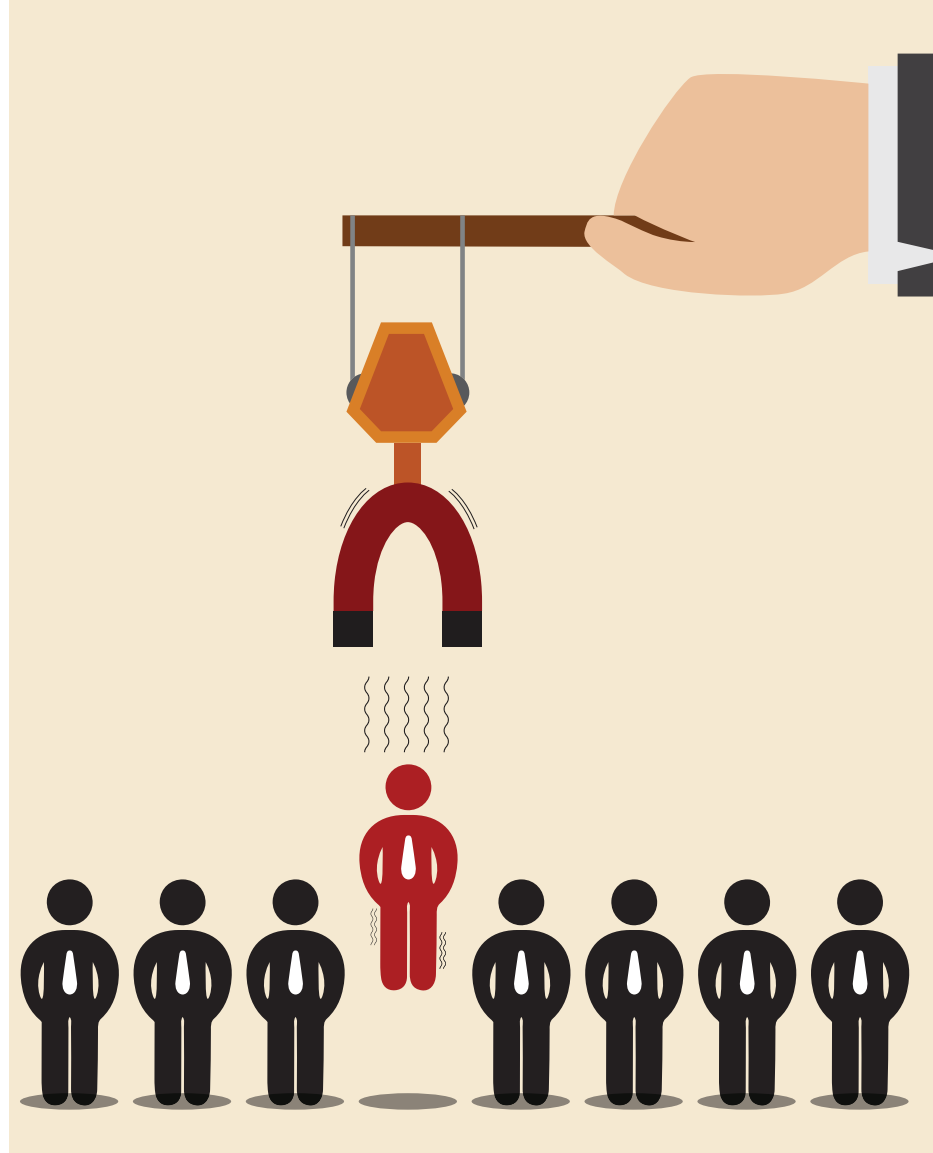


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TARGET AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

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THERE is a great (and true) story about the inventor of the jet aircraft engine, Englishman Frank Whittle. Whittle, a Royal Air Force officer, took his first design for a jet engine to the British Government in 1929. It was turned down for funding on the grounds of impracticality (displaying the same long-term strategic vision that the British Admiralty showed in 1901, when they turned down a design for submarines, proclaiming them "underwater, underhand and damned *un-English*"). Thankfully, Whittle persevered, and in 1930,

he patented the design himself, having sunk all his personal funds into research. In 1934, with the patent up for renewal, he again applied for the British government sponsorship, and again he was declined. Luckily, he managed to raise £2,000 in private finance and continued his research. In 1937, after eight years of further research and development, he again offered the project to the British Government, which again declined to assist him. It was only in 1939 that a single government official, at personal risk to his career and reputation, backed Whittle's invention and lobbied in the corri-

dors of Whitehall for its funding. The result of all of this procrastination was that the British jet aircraft only finally entered operational service at the end of the Second World War but rather scarily, and very nearly, did not enter at all.

All very interesting but, so what? Well, one could just as equally apply this story to the tortuous journey that NATO and western Strategic Communications (StratCom) have taken over the last few years. Like Whittle's jet engine, the huge number of naysayers has nearly drowned the concept, which I think is incredible, con-



sidering its highly effective use by Russia in Crimea, and Da'esh (I refuse to call such murderous criminals "Islamic State") — in Iraq and Syria, not to mention its hugely ineffective use by NATO in Afghanistan, and the wider, so-called Global War on Terror.

But, StratCom has languished for some time now. In the United States, the term was even abandoned, albeit unilaterally, by George Little, then Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, who banned the term, proclaiming it has: "added a layer of staffing and planning that blurred roles and functions of traditional staff elements and resulted in confusion and inefficiencies."

Indeed, one of the problems for StratCom is that it has not really worked very well. NATO is currently undertaking a full review of ISAF's StratCom efforts in Afghanistan, which may well conclude that NATO (and western StratCom) were unhealthily wedded to advertising and marketing techniques (and companies) that costed a fortune and delivered, as the U.S. Government Audit Office (GAO) has observed, almost nothing of worth — aside from big profits for their shareholders.

As early as 2012, the U.S. GAO had concluded that: "the [U.S. StratCom] programs are inadequately tracked, their impact unclear, and the military doesn't know if it is targeting the right foreign audiences." What is needed now is a "divorce" and at last this is happening in the newly established Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Strategic Communications in Riga, Latvia, where the vision and focus are very much on the "audience" and its actual behaviour, not on the synchronisation across varied themes and perceptions. By courtesy of a CAD \$1-million donation to the StratCom CoE, the Centre will soon be an accredited training facility using Behavioural Dynamics Institute's "Target Audience Analysis Methodology" through a Train the Trainer Programme — a purpose-built NATO course developed and delivered by the Strategic Communications Laboratories Group (SCL) and Information Operations Training and Advisory Services Global (IOTA-Global) of London, UK.

Verified and validated by government scientific organizations globally, and coincidentally cited as best practice by the U.S. GAO, the TAA programme will be delivered by the UK company SCL, who have spent over \$40



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million and 25 years, developing this group behaviour prediction tool. In June and July of this year, upwards of 20 students from across the NATO Alliance will begin an eight-week training programme in Riga; Lesson 1, Day 1, Week 1 will explain to the assorted PsyOps, StratComers and Intelligence Analysts from across the NATO Alliance why attitudes are such poor precursors to behaviours and why trying to make the audience "love us" ("us" may be substituted by ISAF, KFOR, U.S., UK or NATO, etc.) using mass advertising techniques is destined to fail.

AT THE heart of TAA is the ability to empirically diagnose the exact groupings that exist within target populations. Knowing these groupings allows them to be ranked and the ranking depends upon the degree of influence they may have in either promoting or mitigating constructive behaviour. The methodology involves the comprehensive study of a social group of people. It examines this group of people across a host of psycho-social research parameters, and it does so in order to determine how best to change that group's behaviour.

Crucially, it goes much further than opinion polling, which can only examine attitudes. TAA is the decision-maker's tool, which will explain and forecast behaviour — and make scientifically justifiable recommendations to implement programmes to change problematic behaviours. Indeed, it is not simply research for the sake of greater understanding, but TAA achieves many of the crucial tasks that the planners require. Indeed, when undertaken properly, TAA employs innovative and rigorous primary research, drawing together qualitative, quantitative and other methods. This data is then triangulated with extensive expert elicitation and secondary re-

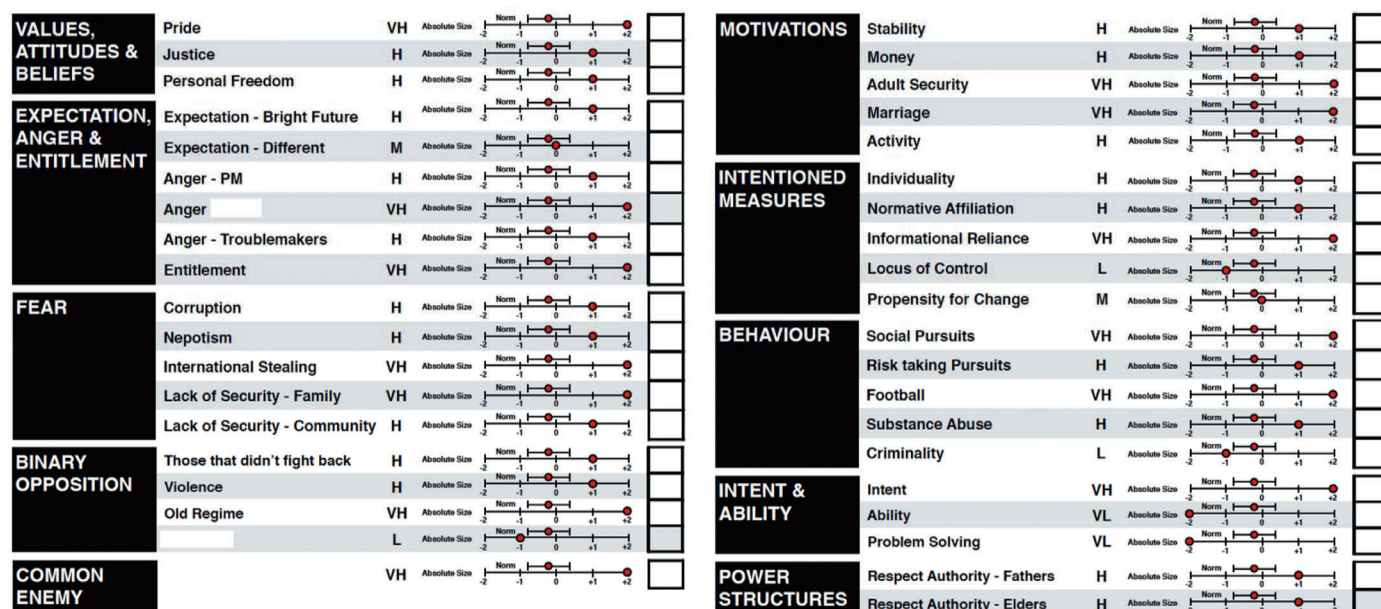
search. It builds up a detailed understanding of current behaviour, values, attitudes, beliefs and norms, and examines everything from whether a group feels in control of its life, to who they respect, and what radio stations they listen to. TAA can be undertaken covertly. Audience groups are not necessarily aware that they are the research subjects and government's role and/or third parties can be invisible. In short, it is a tried, tested and proven methodology.

IF THERE is one lesson that Afghanistan must drum into everyone in the NATO community it is that understanding the audience is not a "nice to have" but an imperative pre-requisite for success. Matt Cavanagh was a special adviser to the UK Labour Party. In an article for the RUSI journal, he writes: "No one inside the British [government] system knew much about the insurgency, the opium trade, or the local politics and tribal dynamics — or, just as importantly, how these different elements fitted into each other. Planners and policy makers [in 2006] did not know much about the human or even physical geography of Helmand."

The Pentagon's paper *Five Lessons We Should Have Learned In Afghanistan* notes: "what deploying soldiers really need to learn is how and why Afghans do certain things," whilst retired British Army Captain Dr Mike Martin wrote in his book *An Intimate War: An Oral History Of The Helmand Conflict 1978-2012*, that "We [UK] often made the conflict worse, rather than better. This was usually as a result of the Helmandis' manipulating our ignorance (...) outsiders have most often misunderstood the struggle in Helmand."

TAA, therefore, aims to fill this Population Intelligence gap by constructing a robust profile of the audience and how it can be influenced by an appropriately conceived and

YOUNG UNMARRIED MALES PARAMETERS



deployed message campaign. One key feature of this approach is that messages are developed in a bottom-up fashion, with them being constructed from a process of measurement and research, and subsequently derived from reliable knowledge of the audience. This is a significant change from the way the big PR and marketing companies work, in that their approach is a creative one and based on sending pre-determined messages in volume to mass audiences in the hope that they will resonate with some portions of that audience. This, of course, fits with the traditional way that the military conducts its business, where themes and messaging are crafted centrally and distributed downwards to theatre troops.

Experience from over 20 years of conflict communications tells me that Whitehall and Washington political messages are often a diluted and distant memory by the time they reach the tactical level, and they may actually have no relevance at ground level anyway. The huge amounts of data that are captured during this process can be daunting for policy-makers and strategists. This is why SCL's Gaby Van den Berg and Tom Wein have created a "dashboard" that quickly presents the information in a manageable format.

An early design example is illustrated: The picture above shows the various behavioural pa-

parameters associated with a real key target audience study — in this case "Young Unmarried Males", aged 18-24. The group was identified in the early stages of the TAA methodology as being the most influential from many identified groups in the area being studied. The black columns are key Behavioural Change Research Parameters, to their right you can see the various data points within those parameters and then a scoring system to assess their relevance to group behaviour. Finally, the white boxes to their right will form a basic traffic light system indicating how a particular course of action may or may not resonate with that audience. However, because this data is taken from a real life project some redaction has been made for operational security.

The picture below models the effect of an influence intervention — in this case the traffic lights quickly show that the large injection of money into the problem would resonate badly on the behavioural research parameters for the target group. Thus, using this model potential strategy can be modeled to a very high degree of accuracy.

It should therefore be clear why the empirical TAA approach is far more effective than simple marketing approaches, or even cultural understanding. There exists no universal communication model applicable to all groups and cultures. All communication efforts must be

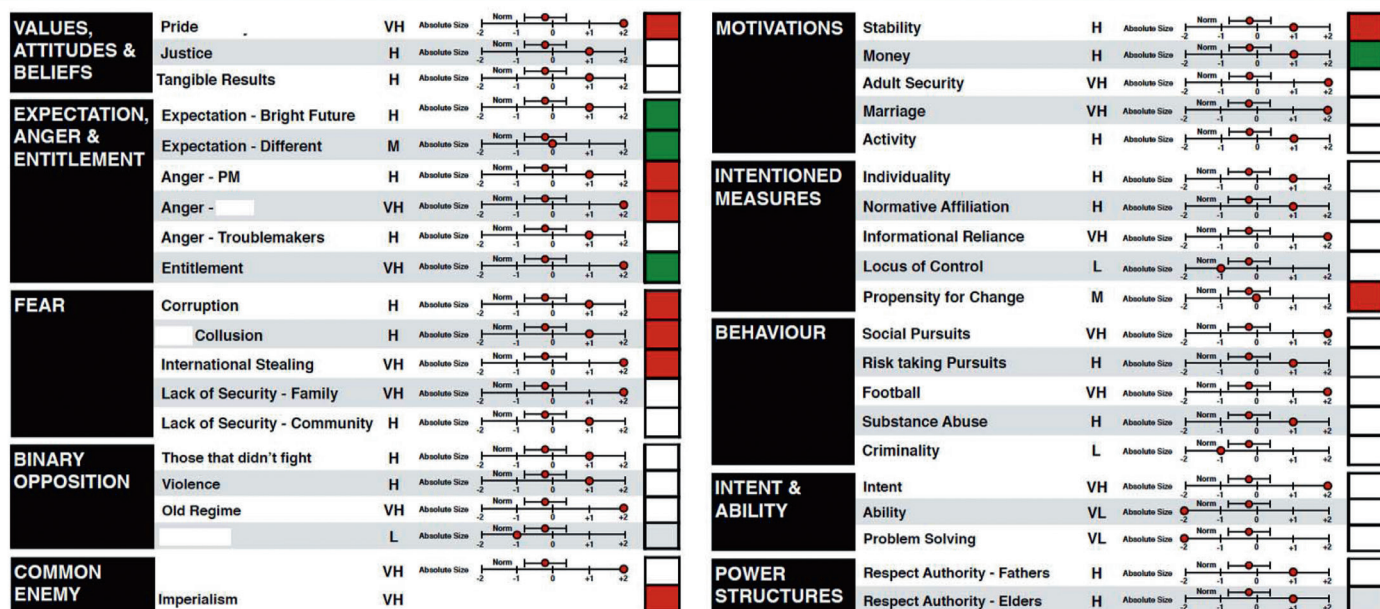
tailored to the local dynamics, and with respect to the behaviours one is seeking to change. Because audiences are multi-faceted and cannot be grouped as a population, influencing the differing component groups of a society requires precisely targeted methods and approaches: *One message — no matter how culturally relevant — does not fit all*. Working out who to influence, why, how, when, and whether it is possible, constitutes the first steps of TAA. Often, it will be necessary to influence one group in order to influence another. Above all else, the process of influencing is not necessarily to make a particular group like "us" or "our" ideas — although this is always an extra "bonus."

There are some further issues with TAA that merit consideration. If we think of TAA as the process of identifying the "*right*" audience, we must also be mindful that there are other audiences also present. We might think of them in four groups, and the messages that we deploy may well cast a shadow upon them. They are:

- The target audience;
- A group who may react positively to the messaging applied to the target;
- A group who may react negatively to the messaging applied to the target; and,
- A group who will be ambivalent and who might even be best left alone.

YOUNG UNMARRIED MALES PARAMETERS

FINANCIAL AID



THERE HAS BEEN A GRADUAL REALIZATION THAT TAA IS A KEY COMPONENT IN FUTURE OPERATIONS.

There has been a gradual realization that TAA is a key component in future operations, and commercial companies are increasingly making claim to these skills. To understand TAA capabilities better, one of my final tasks in the UK Ministry of Defence last year was to define three tiers of TAA capability: Tiers 1, 2 and 3, which are presented briefly below:

Tier 3 TAA is the least detailed TAA and is almost exclusively secondary research. This is typical remote, open source analysis of target groups, but these analyses are done in the language of the analyst as opposed to that of the target group. This may be an internet-based research project on a specific group — for example, Alawites in Syria or the Kurds in Iraq. Invariably, it will try to find third party studies, perhaps academic or NGO, and aggregate the information for military usage. Although this is invariably open source, it may also involve classified intelligence. The UK has defined output of **Tier 3 TAA** as *assumed information*.

Tier 2 TAA is any primary research involving actual contact with the audiences of interest but, critically, it does not follow any specific scientifically verified deductive methodology. It may be conducted in-country or remotely and is largely attitudinally-based. The output of **Tier 2 TAA** is information recorded from interactions with target audiences. An example of **Tier 2 TAA** is a patrol report or a shura, where soldiers ask locals what they think is going on and what actions might positively change attitudes and behaviours. A refined variation might be Cultural Advisors (CULAD) on patrol. This type of TAA is typically undertaken by coalition PsyOps forces and it may with time become quite detailed. It provides another layer of data over and above that of **Tier 3**.

By far the most useful TAA, however, is **Tier 1**. This is a multi-source, scientifically verified, diagnostic methodology undertaken in-country and in host language, and it is used to identify specific motivations for behaviour. The output of **Tier 1 TAA** is information deduced from methodically gathered data, which is tested against a scientifically derived hypothesis.

So, for nearly eight weeks this summer, students from across NATO will study at the Latvian Defence Academy and learn how to undertake **Tier 1 TAA**, and with those skills return back to their

respective commands and HQs with the mission of improving organic StratCom capabilities. Leon Wieseltier, American writer, critic, philosopher and magazine editor once wrote that "The doctrine of 'exit strategy' fundamentally misunderstands the nature of war and the nature of historical action. The knowledge of the end is not given to us at the beginning." But, perhaps, better armed with science-based TAA in the future, maybe that knowledge will be with us at the start, not just at the end like the jet engine, and our joint communication efforts will then be truly strategic. ✦

Dr Steve Tatham is the contracted Subject Matter Expert for StratCom and TAA at the NATO CoE for Strategic Communications in Riga. He served for 26 years in the UK Armed Forces, commanding the UK PsyOps Group on operations and, in his last appointment, as the Special Project's Officer in the MoD's Military Strategic Effects Department. Dr Tatham holds a Ph.D. in "Strategic Communication in Conflict" and, with Generals Andrew Mackay and Stanley McChrystal, he is the author of "Behavioural Conflict", the seminal text book on how to conduct information operations in conflict.

Anyone wishing further guidance on TAA is invited to contact the author by email on: steve.tatham@iota-global.com

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