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# ENLISTING MADISON AVENUE

The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular  
Support in Theaters of Operation

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Prepared for the United States Joint Forces Command

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## Summary

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*Shaping*, in traditional U.S. military parlance, refers to battlefield activities designed to constrain adversary force options or increase friendly force options. It is exemplified in the U.S. landing at the Port of Inch'on, which caused the redeployment of North Korean forces threatening the city of Pusan and dramatically altered the course of the Korean War. Recent analysis of field requirements and joint urban doctrine has expanded the concept of shaping to include influencing resident populations in military operational theaters. These populations constitute a significant component of stability operations, particularly through their decision to support friendly force objectives or those of the adversary.

Virtually every action, message, and decision of a force shapes the opinions of an indigenous population: how coalition personnel treat civilians during cordon-and-search operations, the accuracy or inaccuracy of aerial bombardment, and the treatment of detainees. Unity of message is key in this regard. The panoply of U.S. force actions must be synchronized across the operational battlespace to the greatest extent possible so as not to conflict with statements made in communications at every level, from the President to the soldier, sailor, marine, or airman in the theater of operations. Given the inherent difficulty in unifying coalition messages across disparate organizations, within and across governments, and over time, shaping efforts must be designed, war-gamed, and conducted as a campaign. The goal of such a shaping campaign is to foster positive attitudes among the populace toward U.S. and allied forces. These attitudes, while not the goal in

and of themselves, help decrease anticoalition behaviors and motivate the population to act in ways that facilitate friendly force operational objectives and the attainment of desired end states.

This study considered how the United States and its coalition partners can shape indigenous attitudes and behavior during stability operations via the character of those operations and the behavior of coalition armed forces and those responsible for communication. While successes have been achieved in this regard, U.S. forces stand to benefit from the application of select, proven commercial marketing techniques. As such, we consider successes and missteps from the marketing and advertising industries and how lessons from those events might assist U.S. military men and women. We also present recommendations based on observations and insights from previous operational endeavors, including ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. All recommendations are predicated on a discussion of the challenges posed in developing effective shaping efforts.

## **What Makes Shaping So Difficult?**

Chapter Two addresses the many challenges inherent in the conduct of an effective shaping campaign. Many challenges confront policymakers and the U.S. military in their efforts to shape indigenous populations during stability operations, including COIN undertakings such as those ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Anti-American attitudes are on the rise. U.S. foreign policy, including its support for Israel, influences the character of this distaste among some populations. U.S. forces on overseas deployments that require interaction with individuals who are so negatively inclined face an immediate obstacle to successful shaping. An adversary who is equally eager to shape public opinion further challenges U.S. military operations. Adversaries' shaping tools include intimidation, publicity for anti-U.S. attacks, disinformation, and the provision of basic humanitarian assistance in an effort to undermine U.S. assistance efforts, to name but a few. The nature of contemporary news reporting further complicates U.S. efforts. The 24-hour news cycle creates a rush to report without verification. Retrac-

tions, when made, are often weak and low profile; real bias and adversary disinformation regularly appear in the news. The military often gets a rough ride in the press when these factors are coupled with the perception of a domestic press corps acting as the people's watchdog over the government and the military. Finally, in today's global media environment, messages are spread to audiences broader than originally intended, with potentially negative consequences. Culturally based perceptions can compound these negative effects as audiences perceive messages and actions in ways not intended.

There are additional challenges to shaping that are specific to the U.S. military. First, the traditional kinetic focus of U.S. military operations often jeopardizes communication-based shaping efforts. U.S. forces are trained primarily for kinetic operations and inflicting casualties on an enemy, not for shaping noncombatant attitudes. Both force structure and mind-set can be incompatible with shaping goals. For example, collateral damage can increase popular support for U.S. adversaries. The perception of U.S. cordon-and-search operations as heavy-handed further alienates Iraqi and Afghan populations, as do violations of cultural mores. Similarly important are the relationships formed between U.S. service personnel and their indigenous counterparts. These relationships are frequently disrupted by unit rotations.

Information fratricide, or the failure to synchronize and deconflict messages, puts a great burden on U.S. shaping initiatives. Synchronization is a particular problem for public affairs (PA), civil affairs (CA), and information operations (IO) and its psychological operations (PSYOP) component. Contributing factors include overlapping PSYOP and IO portfolios, limited PSYOP access to commanders, and negative PA and CA perceptions of PSYOP. PA, PSYOP, and IO also suffer from limitations in funding and personnel. Training underemphasizes the impact these functions can have on operations and their potentially vital role. Prohibitions against even inadvertent PSYOP targeting of U.S. civilians further confound U.S. shaping efforts. Other challenges beset PSYOP efforts in the theater: It is exceedingly difficult to identify target audiences in complex and dangerous operating environments, and there is often a lack of access to segments of a population critical to conducting message pretesting.

Identification of appropriate measures of effectiveness (MOE) is a difficult task, as is delineating the specific causes and effects associated with U.S. communication campaigns. Surveys constitute a critical component of existing MOE, though some question their accuracy in complex and dangerous security environments.

Shaping activities have very extensive intelligence requirements related to target-audience analysis. The existing intelligence apparatus has been slow to fulfill these requirements.

U.S. personnel will make mistakes (e.g., rules-of-engagement [ROE] violations or prisoner abuse) that pose significant obstacles to U.S. shaping operations. U.S. responses to these mistakes can either mitigate the extent of damage or exacerbate the negative situation.

The communication assets available to assist shaping need to be allocated to that function by force commanders. This can create several challenges, such as commanders lacking sufficient information or interest to effectively use communication assets under their control, commanders failing to recognize that shaping can be very time-consuming, and commanders failing to accept accountability and responsibility for shaping.

## **Applying Marketing Principles to Shaping**

Business marketing practices provide a useful framework for improving U.S. military efforts to shape indigenous audience attitudes and behaviors. This framework and its application to U.S. military contingencies are reviewed in Chapter Three. First, the U.S. military should adopt the business strategy of segmentation and targeting whereby it would partition the indigenous population into selected groups based on their level of anticipated support for coalition presence and objectives. Positioning is another marketing tool of potential value, one used to create an intended identity for each product that is meaningful, salient, and motivating to the consumer marketplace. Such a process may assist U.S. efforts to craft end states for indigenous audiences.

Branding concepts potentially also hold great value for the U.S. military. Brands are the associations that people make with a prod-

uct name. They are formed through each and every interaction people have with a product line and those who stand behind it. Properly managed brands have a unique and clear identity and are defined by an explicit set of associations. Virtually every organization and product has a brand identity or reputation. The U.S. military is no different. Like commercial firms that must update unattractive brand identities, so too should the United States consider updating its military's brand identity to suit current and future operational environments.

Businesses that are referred to as *branded houses* offer a line of products under a single brand identity (e.g., Apple<sup>1</sup> computers, digital music players, and software). These businesses seek brand identities that are clear and nonconflicting. A business' brand is hurt when it overreaches and offers poorly synchronized products, as was the case when BIC,<sup>2</sup> the maker of disposable pens, attempted to launch a line of BIC-branded perfumes. Strategies that help businesses craft their line of products can help the U.S. military ensure that operations do not conflict with shaping-campaign goals. To this end, the military should thoroughly explain the necessity for kinetic operations, place the burden for such operations (and their negative consequences) on the adversary, rebuild damaged infrastructure, and monitor the impact such operations have on civilian attitudes toward the U.S. force. They should similarly monitor the impact of U.S. government policies and statements that contradict shaping-campaign themes.

Interactions between U.S. service personnel and civilians drive popular perceptions of the U.S. force. Business practices that help align customer service representative actions with the intended brand identity can benefit the U.S. military. These include training for U.S. force–civilian interactions, addressing civilian complaints quickly, conducting an inventory of all U.S. military–civilian points of interaction, and carefully selecting and training U.S. personnel charged with negotiating with key indigenous points of contact.

Customer satisfaction refers to the level of contentment consumers experience after using a product or service. Popular satisfaction

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<sup>1</sup> Apple® is a registered trademark of Apple Inc.

<sup>2</sup> BIC® is a registered trademark of Societe BIC.

with U.S. force presence can similarly determine allegiances. There are three overarching principles related to customer satisfaction. First, the management of expectations plays a prominent role in customer satisfaction; unfulfilled promises leave dissatisfied customers. The U.S. military should be wary of making promises to civilian populations at the strategic (e.g., improved standard of living upon U.S. force arrival in the theater), operational, and tactical (e.g., promising a CA visit) levels unless shaping messages assist in managing related expectations (e.g., improved standards of living will not be noticeable for some time, and improvement depends on specified public support) and those promises will be met. Second, the most successful business endeavors are those premised on meeting customer needs and desires. The U.S. military should seek to tailor CA and reconstruction activities around projects that meet civilian priorities. Third, businesses frequently monitor customer satisfaction via surveys in an effort to improve operations and products. They also utilize customer advisory boards and complaint lines. Coalition forces can use these techniques to gauge populace attitudes and opinions about U.S. force actions and determine modifications that can increase popular support.

Businesses use influencers and word of mouth to credibly convey their messages. The U.S. military can use business word-of-mouth tactics in several ways. For example, it can cultivate partner-based relationships with important influencers in the indigenous area of operation (AO), then reinforce their procoalition appeals with further information and access to coalition commanders. It could further harness the influencing power of indigenous government employees and security forces by having them keep blogs about their experiences with coalition forces and the indigenous government. Third, it could consider the benefits of enhancing Internet access to indigenous populations.

Social marketing is the application of well-grounded commercial marketing techniques to influence noncommercial behavioral change (e.g., quitting smoking and giving blood) in a target audience. Social marketing practices provide a template for U.S. military efforts to motivate specific behaviors in the indigenous population.

## Shaping Solutions Based on Recent Operational Experiences

Chapter Four presents additional recommendations for improving U.S. shaping efforts based on recent operational experiences. First among these, U.S. forces should continue anticipatory shaping activities that influence the attitudes and behaviors of indigenous populations in areas in which the United States is not presently involved (training indigenous security forces, engaging in CA activities, cultivating relationships with indigenous influencers, collecting cultural intelligence, and providing humanitarian assistance). These efforts should include fostering enduring relationships with previously U.S.-trained foreign military personnel. Similarly, humanitarian and other forms of international assistance should continue even long after the initial disaster has subsided. Such anticipatory shaping requires U.S. forces to plan and conduct shaping operations in advance of possible deployments in addition to activities conducted during and after such missions.

Beyond anticipatory shaping, the United States should better leverage CA/civil-military operations (CMO) activities in operational theaters. This includes ensuring effective publicity of U.S. initiatives while concurrently taking advantage of indigenous word-of-mouth networks. Leaders should balance short-term CMO projects and demonstrations of good will with long-term support of ultimate end states. Shaping campaigns should also incorporate CMO with a high probability of encouraging civilian behaviors that abet COIN success.

Careful management when using force must be a part of such initiatives. It is essential to minimize the number of civilian casualties and other collateral damage while simultaneously demonstrating U.S. commitment to security by vigorously pursuing adversaries who deal retribution on those who support friendly force efforts. Persuasion can be influenced by both the carrot and the stick.

U.S. forces should be careful to preserve their credibility among indigenous audiences. This requires careful consideration of deceptive communication and the credibility threat it poses. Because real and perceived deceptions have, in the past, undermined civilian views of PSYOP and IO activities, a reorganization of these entities into shap-

ing components that are completely free of deception and components that are allowed to deceive merits consideration.

U.S. government and DoD organizations should also integrate and coordinate their shaping messages across operating environments. Current plans call for a U.S. Department of State (DoS)–based coordination cell to synchronize strategic communication at the interagency level. Similar coordination entities, potentially comprised of PA, PSYOP/IO, and maneuver force personnel, should be a part of combatant command, joint task force (JTF), and other headquarters, as appropriate, depending on the mission. These coordination cells would assist in ensuring that messages are properly nested and nonconflicting throughout the chain of command, down to the soldier on the street.

Training exercises should regularly integrate maneuver and PSYOP/CA units, focusing on shaping concerns as an elemental part of operations for all organizations. A review of legal barriers that put U.S. shaping initiatives at a competitive disadvantage is in order (and should include looking at the implications of the Smith-Mundt Act,<sup>3</sup> which limits the use of the World Wide Web for shaping activities).

There is a call for supporting intelligence analysis that seeks to gain a thorough understanding of prospective indigenous audiences. This focus may require modifications to intelligence doctrine; tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP); and related training. Expansion of reachback capabilities that would facilitate field contacts with regional experts could be a component of this intelligence capability enhancement.

The United States should actively foster relationships between U.S. force personnel and their indigenous counterparts in theaters of operation. Longer rotations may be desirable, with critical personnel staying for longer periods (perhaps on accompanied tours during which families are housed in regional countries with acceptable security environments). The negative impact of unit and personnel rotations on indigenous relationships can be further mitigated by increasing overlap during reliefs in place and giving the handoff of local relationships high priority. It might be possible to further reduce the negative impact of

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<sup>3</sup> 22 USC 1461-1a, Ban on Domestic Activities by the United States Information Agency.

rotations through maintenance of contact among replaced U.S. personnel, their replacements, and local citizens via email or other means of communication.

The United States should improve the way it responds to actions that have potentially negative shaping effects. Given the likelihood of such events being made public, potential responses should include government disclosure, thereby enhancing U.S. credibility by admitting mistakes as early and completely as is feasible and accompanying these admissions with explanations regarding likely follow-on actions to address the problem. The U.S. military, and PA personnel in particular, should prepare in advance for predictable mistakes, such as inadvertent collateral damage and ROE violations. War-gaming should likewise include conducting worst-case scenario analyses for kinetic operations and developing shaping contingency plans for selected outcomes.

Adversaries fabricate stories and events that paint the United States and its armed forces in a negative light. U.S. kinetic operations, especially those that inflict civilian casualties, can provide the backdrop for adversaries' shaping efforts. Both PA and PSYOP personnel should be involved in planning and war-gaming kinetic and other relevant operations; they can help spot adversaries' shaping opportunities and assist in planning effective mitigation strategies. The United States should counter potentially damaging false allegations with fact and transparency, enlisting the help of allies and indigenous partners who may more credibly correct misrepresentations.

The United States should continue to promote close relations between its armed forces and the media, assisting reporters in their efforts to cover military operations. Improvements in U.S. efforts to reach out to indigenous media and assist in cultivating legitimate journalistic techniques are called for.

This review of challenges to shaping and related recommendations based on commercial marketing practices and recent operational experiences provides a stepping stone to improving U.S. shaping operations. It is hoped that the recommendations contained herein will contribute to improved international perceptions of U.S. forces and, thereby, to increased support of U.S. efforts in the field.