

Applying Madison Avenue Principles and Recent Operational Experience to Counterinsurgency and Stability Operations

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It has long been recognized that, in counterinsurgency and other stability operations, it is essential to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the local population. To secure the peace in Iraq and Afghanistan and ultimately win the global war on terrorism, the United States must conduct more effective and better coordinated campaigns to shape local attitudes and behavior.

In a new study, RAND considered how the United States and its coalition partners can improve shaping campaigns during stability operations. RAND's study examined successes from the commercial marketing industry and how those lessons might assist the U.S. military. The study team also presented recommendations based on observations and insights from operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, and what they reveal about the challenges to developing effective shaping campaigns.

Challenges to a Coherent Shaping Campaign

Many challenges confront policymakers and the U.S. military in their efforts to shape indigenous populations during stability operations. Some of these challenges are largely beyond the military's control, such as the international rise in anti-American attitudes, adversaries' aggressive measures to shape public opinion against the United States, and a global media environment that enables messages to spread to an array of audiences broader than those originally intended.

There are additional challenges to shaping that are specific to the U.S. military. A key issue is a relative lack of U.S. force training in shaping noncombatant attitudes. The military's predominant warfighting focus can jeopardize otherwise successful shaping efforts due to unintended

Abstract

Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation extracts lessons from business practices and adapts them to U.S. military efforts in a unique approach to shaping the attitudes and behavior of local populations in a theater of operations. Foremost among these lessons are the concepts of branding, customer satisfaction, and segmentation of the target audience, all of which serve to maximize the impact and improve the outcome of U.S. shaping efforts. *Enlisting Madison Avenue* also offers insights based on previous operational endeavors to provide a much-expanded blueprint for shaping target audiences.

civilian casualties. In addition, regular unit rotations frequently disrupt the valuable relationships formed between U.S. personnel and their indigenous counterparts. Information fratricide, or the failure to synchronize messages across agencies or functional groups, puts an additional burden on U.S. shaping initiatives. Finally, U.S. responses to operational mistakes (e.g., rules of engagement violations, prisoner abuse) can either mitigate the extent of damage or exacerbate the problem, hindering shaping operations.

Applying Marketing Principles to Shaping

The RAND team identified a number of business marketing practices that could provide a useful framework for improving U.S. shaping efforts. First, the U.S. military should consider adopting the marketing strategies of segmentation and

targeting to better understand the indigenous population and identify audiences based on their level of anticipated support for coalition presence and objectives.

Branding concepts may also hold great value for the U.S. military. Brands are the associations that people make with a product name. Properly managed brands have a unique and clear identity that is developed through each and every interaction people have with a product line and its representatives. Like any organization or product, the military has a brand identity. Branding principles suggest that every action, decision, and message of a military force shapes the local population. Achieving a unified message, in both word and deed, is consequently fundamental to success. To achieve this unity, the military should create a clear brand identity and seek to inculcate this identity through operations, soldier-civilian interactions, and communication.

The fundamental principle of commercial marketing is that businesses must first learn the wants and needs of their customers. Only then is an organization empowered to deliver products or services that satisfy the customer. The military, in its conduct of day-to-day operations, civil affairs activities, and communication, can err when it makes decisions based on assumptions. The military should first seek to understand the preferences and needs of the local population. These local perspectives will ideally be incorporated into the decisionmaking processes that influence indigenous welfare. Proper management of civilian “satisfaction” with U.S. force presence also requires that the military carefully manage expectations, as unfulfilled promises will breed resentment. In addition, the military should carefully monitor local satisfaction with U.S. force presence and activities so that problems can be identified and corrected early.

Limited credibility of U.S. forces among the indigenous population demands that they rely partly on local influencers. Internet-based tools enable individuals to broadcast their messages to the broader population. Businesses credibly enlist fans and employees to share their opinions online. The U.S. military should likewise empower indigenous government

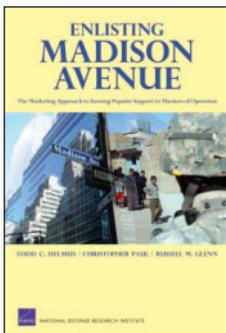
employees and soldiers with blogging tools so that they can advocate on behalf of coalition objectives.

Shaping Solutions Based on Recent Operational Experiences

In addition to applying private-sector marketing principles, the study recommends that the United States improve shaping efforts by leveraging recent operational experiences. First among these, U.S. forces should pursue anticipatory shaping activities that positively influence local attitudes and behavior before a crisis emerges. These activities include training indigenous security forces, engaging in civil affairs activities, and providing humanitarian assistance. The U.S. military also should ensure that there is effective publicity for successful civil affairs and civil-military initiatives.

U.S. forces should strive to preserve their credibility among indigenous audiences. The United States should minimize civilian casualties and other collateral damage as much as possible while simultaneously demonstrating U.S. commitment to security. U.S. commanders also should carefully consider the potential consequences of deceptive shaping efforts and the credibility threat that they pose. The military can enhance its credibility by preparing responses in advance of anticipated mistakes, such as rules of engagement violations or civilian casualties, which could have negative shaping effects. Likewise, the United States should be prepared to admit mistakes as early and as completely as possible.

Internal to military planning, greater emphasis and greater resources should be devoted to shaping efforts during all phases of an operation. Training exercises should regularly integrate maneuver, psychological operations, and civil affairs units, focusing on shaping concerns as an elemental part of operations for all organizations. In addition, public affairs and psychological operations personnel should be involved in the planning and war-gaming for warfighting and other relevant operations to identify potential positive and negative shaping opportunities and to develop effective strategies to help mitigate adversaries’ shaping efforts against the United States. ■



This research brief describes work done for the RAND National Defense Research Institute documented in *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theaters of Operation*, by Todd C. Helmus, Christopher Paul, and Russell W. Glenn, MG-607-JFCOM (available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG607/>), 2007, 240 pp., \$30.00, ISBN: 978-0-8330-4156-2. The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND’s publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

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