



Operations Research Seminar

Tools for Identifying and Countering Extremist Narratives in Contested Populations

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Thursday, September 24, 2009
15:00-16:00 in GL-115
Refreshment 14:45-15:00 in GL-239

In his recent Joint Force Quarterly article, Admiral Michael Mullen called for making strategic communication more about listening than talking. A crucial aspect of listening is understanding *narrative* and how enemies use it to motivate followers and attract sympathizers. Unfortunately, in academic usage narrative is a slippery and abstract concept that is not very useful to operators in the field.

The Consortium for Strategic Communication recently began an ONR funded project to make the narrative concept more useful to operators, and to make narrative resources available for analysis and modeling efforts elsewhere in the DoD. This talk will detail the two main tasks of the project, development of an applied narrative model, and development of a model of message traction.

The first task involves development of a four-element model comprising archetypes, story forms, stories (including actors and relationships), and narratives. It defines the structure of a relational database that will catalog extremist narratives that can be used by operators, analysts, and modelers. The database will be populated using two approaches, based in the methods of the humanities and linguistic science, respectively.

It is also important to recognize whether and how a particular narrative is getting “traction” in a population, spreading quickly through media and person-to-person communication. So the second task reviews existing literature on message spread, considering theories like memetics, diffusion of innovation, ideodynamics, and so on. Factors identified in these various theories will form the basis for an agent-based model. The goal of this model is to identify the most parsimonious set of factors for recognizing a fast-spreading narratives or other type of messages.

Steven R. Corman (Ph.D. 1988, University of Illinois) is a Professor in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University where he directs the Consortium for Strategic Communication, and blogs at the Consortium's COMOPS Journal (<http://comops.org/journal>). Since 2001 he has served as an invited participant on numerous national and international workshops and symposia on counterterrorism, strategic communication and public diplomacy. In 2003-2005 he was a member of the Scientist Panel for the Strategic Operations Working Group at U.S. Special Operations Command. He has recently given invited presentations and briefings for the NATO Center of Excellence for Defense Against Terrorism, USJFCOM/USSOCOM, Asia Pacific Program for Senior National Security Officers, Marshall Center for European Security Studies, Army War College, and the State Department, among others. Corman is also co-editor of the book *Weapons of Mass Persuasion: Strategic Communication to Combat Violent Extremism* (2008, Peter Lang). Corman's other research interests include organizational communication systems, text and conversation analysis, social networks, and computational modeling/simulation. He is also Co-founder and Chief Technology Officer of *Crawd Technology, LLC*, an ASU spin-out that develops and markets advanced text analysis software and services. He is past Chair of the Organizational Communication Division of the International Communication Association, and serves on the editorial boards of *Human Communication Research*, and *Management Communication Quarterly*.