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SOCIAL MOBILISATION IN A CONTESTED ENVIRONMENT

By Peter Layton

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Cover “Geared for victory...” (1943)
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Contents

Occasional Paper Series	1
About the Author	3
Social Mobilisation in a Contested Environment	
<i>by Peter Layton</i>	4

About the Author

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Peter Layton is a Visiting Fellow at the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University and a RAAF Reserve Group Captain. He has extensive aviation and defence experience and, for his work at the Pentagon on force structure matters, was awarded the US Secretary of Defense's Exceptional Public Service Medal. He has a doctorate from the University of New South Wales on grand strategy and has taught on the topic at the Eisenhower College, US National Defense University. For his academic studies, he was awarded a Fellowship to the European University Institute, Fiesole, Italy. His research interests include grand strategy, national security policies particularly relating to middle powers, defence force structure concepts and the impacts of emerging technology. He contributes regularly to the public policy debate on defence and foreign affairs issues and is the author of the book *Grand Strategy*.

Social Mobilisation in a Contested Environment

By Peter Layton

“Let me say at once that I will not have it that the problem of defence is simply one for 70,000 young men in arms. In the defence of Australia, which means the safety of all of us, we must all participate... Fellow Australians, this is everybody’s business and we must get on with it.”

Prime Minister Robert Menzies, 26 April 1939¹

Menzies’ words four months before Australia entered World War Two may seem strange. Today, the normal peacetime functioning of government seems sufficient to both sustain the Australian Defence Force and to meet Australia’s rather limited offshore commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Defence appears primarily the business of the professional military and the great departments of state rather than of the Australian people. This comfortable situation though is deteriorating. The emerging future is one where the Australian people may once more be involved and in perhaps unexpected ways.

The most readily apparent reason for greater involvement of Australian society is that recent conflicts have been historically anomalous. World War Two, the Korean War, the Indonesian-Malaysian Confrontation and the Vietnam War all saw the Australian people mobilised to varying degrees. Similar circumstances could happen again and require comparable mobilisation efforts. Certainly, Australia’s alliance partner, the United States, considers the future will be one of protracted global competition with China and Russia combining with threats emanating from North Korea and Iran.

There are however less apparent but more familiar drivers of a renewed interest in social mobilisation. The notion of ‘defence’ as Menzies understood it has been significantly broadened over the last decade. For the first time, there are on-going deep security concerns over potential terrorism within Australia. In contrast, during World War Two and the Cold War conflicts, violent threats were seen as originating from outside Australia. Moreover, the Department of Defence is now deeply involved in numerous diverse non-combat tasks ranging from border patrol to cybersecurity to natural disaster relief operations.

Including these broader conceptions of ‘defence’ noticeably changes the relationship between the great departments of state concerned with these matters and the Australian people. In this transformed relationship, the people are now more frequently engaged and more consequential. Today, the people are clearly being mobilised to prevent terrorism and implement cybersecurity measures but societal mobilisation

is also gaining importance when supporting less obvious activities such as border security and disaster response. In border security, mobilisation aims to gain the people’s active support and in terms of domestic disaster response through being a way to enhance societal resilience.

Such use of the term mobilisation may seem an expansion beyond its traditional meaning. Indeed, often discussions about mobilisation tend to focus narrowly on technical mobilisation involving “assembling and organising personnel, supplies and material for active military service.”² Such an understanding of mobilisation inevitably conjures up images of mass production of tanks, warships and combat aircraft however such industrial expansion is only part of the story.

Technical mobilisation activities are important but not sufficient. Mobilisation has traditionally not been simply an engineering or logistic planning exercise but one that also includes social issues and concerns. Mobilisation is a process that not only generates military capabilities but also “marshals national resources to defend the nation and its interests.”³ Australia’s greatest national resource is undoubtedly its people.

In a major change from previous situations the government’s marshalling of the Australian people is now likely to be contested, sometimes perhaps seriously. Future governments could now face purposeful external interference when they attempt to convince the Australian people of their need to undertake defence operations and activities. Foreign powers might now try to deliberately prevent mobilisation by meddling in Australian society

This shift to a contested social environment reflects a revitalised appreciation of the importance of a nation’s societies to the nation’s ability to defend itself. The ‘people’ are now becoming reconceptualised as a centre of gravity that may be exploited by others to win future conflicts, potentially without any fighting at all. An adversary may now seek to mobilise ‘fellow Australians’ for their own purposes.

The ability to effectively contest a government’s mobilisation

1 Menzies quoted in Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939–1941*, Australia in the War of 1939–1945 Series 4 – Civil, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1965, p. 118.

2 Desmond Ball, ‘The Australian Defence Force and Mobilisation’, pp. 9-24 in Desmond Ball and J.O.Langtry (eds.), *Problems in the Mobilisation in Defence of Australia*, Manuka: Phoenix Defence Publications, 1980, p.w11.

3 Australian Defence Headquarters, *ADDP 00 2: Preparedness and Mobilisation (Provisional)*, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2004, p. 3-1, para 3.1.

agenda has been made practical principally because of deep globalisation across the international system. In the last few decades, most people have become interconnected through the widespread use of innovative information technologies. In this newborn cyber-world, old distinctions between the domestic and the international have vanished. Australians are now closely linked to others around the globe exchanging words, data, images and videos at near-real time.

Authoritarian governments have been the first to fully comprehend the threats and opportunities the new globalised information technologies have wrought. The 2015 Chinese defence white paper, for example, worries about “anti-China forces... instigating a ‘colour revolution’ [that damages] China’s political security and social stability.”⁴

The ‘colour revolution’ term arose from the peaceful protests that overthrew authoritarian regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in the mid-2000s. The protesters adopted different colours to symbolise their defiance of the government: Georgia rose, Ukraine orange and Kyrgyzstan tulip. The pattern continues with today’s Hong Kong pro-democracy activists adopting yellow. Importantly, all of these movements were mobilised and coordinated using information technologies and diverse social media platforms.

While China frets, Russia military thinkers have taken the lead in examining the strategic use of information technologies against societies. Drawing on perceived lessons from the Arab Spring and the colour revolutions, Russian thinkers contend countries can now be readily destabilised, almost on command. Governments can be overthrown by external powers indirectly supporting internal protesters through the so-called information space.⁵ Such space is envisaged as encompassing both information technology and human cognitive processes; it is a newly accessible zone where battles can be fought over people’s opinions. Russian General Staff Chief Valery Gerasimov considers that:

“The information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy. In [the Arab Spring], we witnessed the use of technologies for influencing state structures and the population with the help of information networks.”⁶

Unsurprisingly, the most recent Russian military doctrine highlights that “military risks and military threats [are now shifting] to the information space and the internal sphere... .”⁷ The doctrine highlights that adversaries could mobilise the Russian people against the Russian state but also acknowledges Russia could equally develop the capability to do this against others – and given Russian interference in the 2016 US elections appears to have done so.

Russian interest in this field continues to deepen. In early March 2019, General Gerasimov declared that:

“The information sphere, without having clearly defined national borders, provides opportunities for remote, covert influence...on the population of the country, directly affecting the state’s national security. That is why the study of issues of preparation and conduct of informational actions is the most important task of [contemporary] military science.”⁸

Other authoritarian states might also reach this conclusion. Iran seems to already be actively exploring such possibilities.⁹

The Russian perspective represents considerable thought about how to use globalised information technologies to favourably shape the international environment, at least from the Russian state’s point of view. Such a concept though has some relevance to non-state actors as well. Smaller groups can also potentially negatively influence the societies of large nations through clever use of information technologies and in particular social media. Islamic State, for example, has been able to project an impression of outsized strength and inspire fear in distant populations through carefully manipulating diverse types of social media globally.¹⁰

This paper discusses social mobilisation in a contested environment. Such social mobilisation can be potentially used in the implementation of most types of strategies a nation could adopt. Social mobilisation techniques could be used in an aggressive manner in another country to promote an external nation’s interests; for defensive purposes such as mobilising the people against external aggression; and in a supportive posture that mobilises the people in support of a nation’s offshore military efforts.

4 China’s Military Strategy, Beijing: The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 26 May 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/05/26/document-chinas-military-strategy> [Accessed 4 March 2019]

5 Andrew Monaghan, *Russian State Mobilization: Moving the Country on to a War Footing*, London: Chatham House, 2016, pp. 18-20.

6 Valery Gerasimov, translated by Robert Coalson, ‘The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations’, *Military Review*, January-February 2016, pp 23-29, p. 27. Note Gerasimov’s article was originally published in *Military-Industrial Kurier*, 27 February 2013.

7 *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, Approved by the President of the Russian Federation on December 25, 2014, No. Pr-2976, <https://theatrum-belli.com/the-military-doctrine-of-the-russian-federation/> [Accessed 14 January 2019]

8 General Valery Gerasimov, *Vectors of Military Strategy Development*, Speech at the Academy of Military Sciences, 2 March 2019, Translation by Google Translate, <http://redstar.ru/vektory-razvitiya-voennoj-strategii/?attempt=2#content> [Accessed 5 March 2019].

9 Sheera Frenkel, Kate Conger and Kevin Roose, ‘Russia’s Playbook for Social Media Disinformation Has Gone Global’, *New York Times*, 31 January 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/31/technology/twitter-disinformation-united-states-russia.html> [Accessed 3 February 2019].

10 Peter Layton, ‘Bringing the Transnational into ‘new wars’: the case of Islamic State’, *International Review of Social Research*, Vol. 5, Issue 3, October 2015, pp. 193-196.

In that regard, a recent study found that there seemed to be two distinct approaches to mobilisation: larger countries saw mobilisation as a means to expand their military forces in times of crisis while smaller countries conceived of mobilisation as fostering resilience and greater social cohesion against unconventional threats and natural disasters. Australia as a middle power seems to sit, uneasily perhaps given the country's limited resources, straddling both approaches.¹¹

Social mobilisation in a contested environment involves not a clash of material as in traditional conceptions of armed conflict but instead a clash of ideas. The first part of the paper accordingly considers the role of ideas in mobilisation, some basic ideational concepts and the strategic importance of social mobilisation. The second part examines emerging challenges that may damage Australia's ability to mobilise the people in time of crisis and finds three possible threat strategies: societal disruption, manipulating existing grievances and changing people's minds.

The third part discusses possible responses including the building of legitimacy and the place of strategic narratives. The final section discusses media and governmental concerns that arose in mobilising the Australian people during World War Two and have relevance in our time. Importantly, while this paper takes a particular interest in the Australian Department of Defence's potential role in social mobilisation the issue is inherently a whole-of-government one. If Menzies argued defence was 'everybody's business', so social mobilisation is a cross-governmental responsibility.

Such a contention is intrinsically troubling. As was realised during World War Two, social mobilisation is a difficult topic to ponder in a democracy where the government responds to the people, not the reverse as in authoritarian states. Purposeful, whole-of-government, social mobilisation carries dark overtones in seemingly implying propaganda, biased information promoting a particular political cause, or even worse: fake news involving false claims made to deliberately mislead.¹² Social mobilisation however, cannot be neglected simply because it is troublesome. To do so, cedes the field to less scrupulous forces and the detriment of our 'fellow Australians'. The age of an externally contested social environment requires a reconsideration of social mobilisation and how the issues are debated.

An Ideational Field of Battle

Strategies require resources to be implemented. Personnel, materiel and money must in most cases be expended to make a strategy tangible. At the national level, such resources come from the nation's people, but for this they must be motivated to support the national strategies the state is advocating. This support can be coerced but this is a short term and inefficient solution that simply creates civil unrest.

Accordingly, authoritarian and democratic states alike try to generate and organise popular support. The intent is not just to gain passive acquiescence but rather active backing to "not only make citizens more willing to approve expensive state programs but also stigmatize free-riding as evil or treasonous."¹³ Indeed gaining popular support may be as essential for success as materiel means. Military thinker Liddell-Hart declared: "to foster and fortify the will to win and to endure is as important as to possess the more concrete forms of power."¹⁴

Societal cooperation may though be hard to garner for several reasons: the population generally has only limited knowledge about international circumstances, faces competing claims for attention, is more focused on immediate domestic issues rather than longer-term international concerns and is inherently reticent about making the monetary and personal sacrifices new strategies may demand.¹⁵ Such reticence is at its highest when wars loom and the costs in blood and treasure are expected to be especially high.

In Clausewitzian thinking the importance of popular support to a successful national strategy in the modern era makes the people a key centre of gravity, particularly in times of major wars.¹⁶ Today however, with easy societal access using widespread globalised information technology, this centre of gravity designation has arguably grown to include times of minor wars and even peacetime – at the least in Russian strategic thinking.¹⁷ Hostile actors may now aggressively try to de-motivate the people, make them withdraw their support for the national strategy and convince them to passively - or even actively - work against their government's chosen strategy. To achieve this outcome, adversaries will devise their own strategies just as one's own state will devise strategies to gain popular support.

11 The larger countries considered were the US, China and Russia; the smaller: Sweden, Japan, Poland, Canada and New Zealand. Japan appears an outlier however its geography, history and political factors may explain its focus on national and community resilience. Sasha Vukoja, *Defence Mobilisation Comparative Study*, 2019, Canberra: Department of Defence, p. 5.

12 Axel Gelfert, 'Fake News: A Definition', *Informal Logic*, Vol. 38, No.1, 2018, pp. 84–117, p. 110.

13 Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict 1947-1958*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996, p.20.

14 B.H. Liddell-Hart, *The Decisive Wars of History: A Study in Strategy*, London: G. Bell & Sons, 1929, p.150.

15 Christensen, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-19.

16 Carl Von Clausewitz edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *On War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p.89.

17 Valery Gerasimov, *Vectors of Military Strategy Development*, *op.cit.*

A way of thinking about this is that our and the adversary's strategy are competing against each other within an all-enveloping social context (also termed structure). In this intangible, ideational 'field of battle' the terrain consists of the ideas that people use to understand new events and emerging situations.¹⁸ In social mobilisation, norms and identities are particularly important ideas. Norms are shared understandings of what kinds of actions are appropriate while identities define an entity's characteristics in relation to others.

National strategies are more effectively and efficiently advanced when compatible and well matched with the social structure they operate within. If the strategy accords with the people's ideas of right and wrong they will be innately supportive. Conversely, if the strategy is in contradiction to the social structure, there will be on-going friction and difficulties in implementation. People will push back. A strategy in this situation might acknowledge the people's disapproval but press on regardless, attempting to overcome this structural drag through building and using greater material resources.

Importantly, while social structures in being intangible cannot be possessed by a single actor they can be deliberately shaped, influenced and exploited by them.¹⁹ In considering social mobilisation in a contested ideational environment it is then useful to consider the problem as one involving duelling strategies operating within and upon the social structure. To simplify discussion, three general types of hostile strategies can be imagined.²⁰

Hostile Ideational Strategies

Societal Disruption

The simplest way to damage the support a society might give a strategy is to induce chaos. There seem two broad approaches to achieve this. The Russian approach has been to amplify divisive social issues by employing a wide-ranging disinformation attack across a nation's political spectrum. Whether certain groups are supportive of Russian policies is immaterial, the aim is to drive them to being more confrontational towards other groups.²¹ The tactics appropriate to such a strategy were recently described:

*"Russian operatives associated with the Internet Research Agency (IRA) impersonated Americans online and created fake personas and groups on social media to pit different segments of U.S. society against each other. The IRA relied especially on Facebook and Instagram to create fake "activist groups" on divisive social issues, including the Black Lives Matter movement, religion, immigration, and others. It also created Twitter accounts that spread disparaging stories about Hillary Clinton, misinformation about voting, and divisive content. The IRA also purchased political ads and organized political rallies in battleground states."*²²

Others have discerned a similar strategy being implemented to disrupt the Swedish, Estonian and Bulgarian populations and in the Russian hacking of France's TV5 television channel in April 2015.²³

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange advocates a different approach. Assange considers that there is a hidden conspiracy manipulating global affairs and that this resides in the American political mainstream. Societal disruption is then to be achieved not by attacking society but by weakening the American government, making it markedly less able to govern and thereby unleashing currently repressed forces. Assange looks at the issue through an information technology perspective in holding that: "Conspiracies are cognitive devices. They are able to out think the same group of individuals acting alone. Conspiracies take information about the world in which they operate (the conspiratorial environment), pass it around the conspirators and then act on the result."²⁴

Accordingly, cutting the links between the conspirators can end the conspiracy. The conspiracy will be unable to think and so be "powerless to preserve itself against the opponents it induces". The 2016 Wikileaks timed release of damaging Democratic Party emails and data was then intended to cut the links between the perceived conspirators as they would then be forever fearful of being revealed. Assange had written a decade before:

18 Edward Lock, 'Soft Power and Strategy: Developing a 'Strategic' Concept of Power', in Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds.), *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*; Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, pp. 32-50, p. 44.

19 Susan Strange, *States and Markets*, 2nd Edn, London: Pinter, 1994, pp. 24-25.

20 These are derived from Barnett and Duvall's seminal work on power in international politics. See: Peter Layton, *Grand Strategy*, Brisbane: Createspace, 2018, pp. 41-51.

21 Such a campaign is detailed in Philip N. Howard, Bharath Ganesh, Dimitra Liotsiou, John Kelly and Camille François, *The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018*, Oxford: University of Oxford, 2018. Also see: Renee DiResta, Dr. Kris Shaffer, Becky Ruppel, David Sullivan, Robert Matney, Ryan Fox, Dr. Jonathan Albright, Ben Johnson, *The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*, Austin: New Knowledge, 2018.

22 Alina Polyakova and Spencer P. Boyer, *The Future Of Political Warfare: Russia, The West, And The Coming Age Of Global Digital Competition*, Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2018, p.5.

23 For Sweden and France see: Mark Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War In Europe*, London, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017, p.7. For Estonia see: Linda Robinson, Todd C. Helmus, Raphael S. Cohen, Alireza Nader, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson and Katya Migacheva, *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018, p.103. For Bulgaria see: Dimitar Vatsov, Milena Iakimova, *Co-opting discontent: Russian propaganda in the Bulgarian media*, STOPFAKE.ORG, 27 October 2017, <https://www.stopfake.org/en/co-opting-discontent-russian-propaganda-in-the-bulgarian-media/> [Accessed 7 January 2019].

24 Julian Assange, *State and Terrorist Conspiracies*, 10 November 2006, p.3, <https://cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf>, [Accessed 14 January 2019].

“consider two closely balanced and broadly conspiratorial power groupings, the US Democratic and Republican parties. ...what would happen if one of these parties gave up their mobile phones, fax and email correspondence — let alone the computer systems which manage their subscribers, donors, budgets, polling, call centres and direct mail campaigns? They would immediately fall into an organizational stupor and lose to the other.”²⁵

Assange considered that the election of Donald Trump would usher in a “weak structure” less able to govern, especially vulnerable to societal turbulence and less able to implement global strategies.²⁶ He was not interested in Candidate Trump’s policies as such, simply that his election would weaken the American government’s power over society. Societal disruption would be induced through undercutting electronic linkages.

Strengthening Useful Groups

Rather than disrupting society as a whole, the other main alternative is to support some group useful to the adversary’s ambitions. This approach was particularly favoured by the Soviet Union in the early stages of the Cold War when it supported leftist groups throughout the world. The Soviets though gradually shifted to a broad disinformation campaign aiming to sow general global discord to shape the environment in case a hot war broke out.²⁷

Supporting particular groups is technically more difficult to do remotely than sowing chaos as the Russians and Assange envisage. The particular individuals who compose the useful interest groups need to be both located and engaged, now mainly in cyber space. Certainly, terrorist groups like ISIS have been able to discern and target useful individuals but this has been on a small scale and using human-intensive techniques.²⁸ Now though the emerging era of big data is making the large-scale manipulation of sizeable interest groups readily feasible and normal.

Today, there are many entities actively collecting data on vast numbers of individuals that are then on-sold to commercial companies wishing to target their advertising campaigns.²⁹ The now infamous Cambridge Analytica claimed to have

created profiles on 240 million Americans, using this to micro-target voters during the 2016 American election.³⁰ Distinct groups holding particular views can be readily identified for potential exploitation in cyberspace at the individual level.

In such a strategy social media is used to reinforce and strengthen the views the members of the group being supported already have. The group is made more coherent and united in the correctness of its beliefs. This is achieved by insulating the group from outside ideational influences that might disturb its internal mono-perspective. This has a self-referential ‘majority illusion’ effect. If all a group’s members seem to believe in something then the belief becomes increasingly credible simply because many believe it; conversely, opposing views become increasingly less credible.³¹

The deliberate creation of such self-referential groups has been greatly assisted by particular social media characteristics. There is a tendency for on-line social media dialogue between rival camps to polarise opinions and reinforce prejudices.³² People ‘like’ and ‘follow’ those they agree with, views harden and opponents gradually appear more and more extreme and dangerous. This echo-chamber effect is exacerbated as the algorithms used in Google, Facebook, Twitter and various other social media deliberately try and connect ‘like’ people together.³³ People become effectively locked into the group. Their imaginations are annexed and are now open to being steered.

There are clear commercial benefits gained by companies that can develop and exploit this echo-chamber effect by using micro-targeted campaigns. Their customers cannot conceive of leaving – a vital attribute for freely accessible websites that rely on advertising revenue or online product sales. However, in terms of social mobilisation there can be wider impacts. An analysis of 1.25 million stories associated with the 2016 US Presidential election revealed that:

“a right-wing media network anchored around Breitbart developed as a distinct and insulated media system, using social media as a backbone to transmit [its] perspective to the world. This...media sphere appears to have not only successfully set the agenda for the [wider] conservative media sphere, but also strongly influenced the broader media agenda....”³⁴

25 Julian Assange, *Conspiracy as Governance*, 3 December 2006, p.5, <https://cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf> [Accessed 14 January 2019].

26 Jim Rutenberg, ‘In Election Hacking, Julian Assange’s Years-Old Vision Becomes Reality’, *The New York Times*, 8 January 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/08/business/media/assange-wikileaks-dnc-hacks.html?_r=0 [Accessed 7 January 2019].

27 KGB general Oleg Kalugin quoted in: Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, New York: Institute of Modern Russia, 2014, p.9

28 Peter Layton, ‘Bringing the Transnational into ‘new wars’: the case of Islamic State’, *op.cit.*, pp. 191-201, pp. 193-195, 197-198.

29 Alina Polyakova and Spencer P. Boyer, *op.cit.*, p.11.

30 Carole Cadwalladr, ‘British courts may unlock secrets of how Trump campaign profiled U.S. voters’, *The Guardian*, September 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/01/cambridge-analytica-big-data-facebook-trump-voters> [Accessed 15 January 2019].

31 Caitlin Dewey, ‘One in four debate tweets comes from a bot. Here’s how to spot them’, *Washington Post*, 19 October 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2016/10/19/one-in-four-debate-tweets-comes-from-a-bot-heres-how-to-spot-them/?utm_term=.114a3efde089, [Accessed 7 January 2019].

32 Laura Marcus, ‘Is Twitter anything more than an online echo chamber?’, *The Guardian*, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/aug/22/twitter-online-echo-chamber-leftwing> [Accessed 14 January 2019].

33 Alan Martin, ‘The web’s ‘echo chamber’ leaves us none the wiser’, *Wired*, 2013, <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-05/1/online-stubbornness> [Accessed 14 January 2019]

34 Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris, Hal Roberts, and Ethan Zuckerman, ‘Breitbart-led right-wing media ecosystem altered broader media agenda’, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 3 March 2017, <https://www.cjr.org/analysis/breitbart-media-trump-harvard-study.php> [Accessed 7 January 2019].

A strongly unified group can shift a society in a particular direction. Such an outcome is one a hostile strategy may seek to achieve.

Changing Minds

The third strategy is to change people's minds; this is not easy technically although recent developments in artificial intelligence may revise this assessment. There are two general approaches.

Firstly, the easier approach is an indirect one: create a false reality. Given this seemingly new circumstance, people will themselves mentally adjust to meet it. Russia has been especially active in this field particularly in those nations bordering the country. Such geographical proximity means a wide array of overt and covert means can be easily used including social media platforms, think tanks, political parties, civil society groups, religious organisations, language schools, nativist clubs and paid TV advertisements that all send a mutually reinforcing message.³⁵ The results can be remarkable, within a year of targeted influence operations beginning, more than half of Estonians believed that Estonia was incorporated into the Soviet Union voluntarily in 1940.³⁶ Creating such new realities though is both resource intensive and relies on extensive, diverse cross-border linkages including trans-border ethnic groupings. It would be harder – but not impossible – to achieve beyond border countries.

Secondly, a modified form of agentic constructivism presents another pathway to changing people's minds. Agentic constructivism is a modified form of social constructivism devised by International Relations scholar Kathryn Sikkink and as the name suggests “focuses on the role of human agency in the origins of new norms and practices....”³⁷ The idea can be extended to encompass two connected stages: ideational collapse and replacement.³⁸

A suitable environment is essential if trying to change people's minds; the old ideas must be understood to have collapsed. Existing ideas are not simply eliminated when they fail. They had a social purpose that remains and which must be actively restored. The new ideas then need to be introduced and advanced by advocates who are prominent and authoritative in terms of the ideas being advanced, and able to make use of their organisational platforms to give the desired rules credence and authority.³⁹

This strategy involves acting top-down through ideational elites, but determining whom these individuals are can be problematic. Partly offsetting this is that the target audience may not be large. Moreover, the new approaches of big data, data mining and micro-targeting potentially offer technological solutions to finding and influencing chosen individuals. Recent developments in so-called deep fakes may further support such a strategy. Deep fakes use artificial intelligence to produce highly realistic videos that seemingly can show anyone making any statement desired – or indeed acting in particular ways: “political leaders can be made to appear to say anything at all, and they will sound and look exactly as they do in real life.”⁴⁰

Response Strategies: Foreground Measures

The three broad strategies for damaging social mobilisation in the modern era all need to leverage off the target society. They require an accessible and malleable audience to succeed. At least theoretically, the defender has the simpler task.

Note that this paper does not delve into technological solutions that try to cut off an attacker's access to a society such as through using firewalls and cybersecurity measures. Instead, the focus in this paper is on the less-often discussed non-technical solutions. In practice, the technical and non-technical means would both complement each other, working together to counter adversarial counter-mobilisation strategies.

Response measures may be usefully divided into foreground and background. The foreground measures are short-term and in response to a crisis. Such measures are those in which the Australian Department of Defence potentially has some real agency and choice. In contrast, the background measures are long-term and aim to create a favourable environment. Such measures are more those where political leaders and perhaps other departments – including the Australian Department of Home Affairs – are better placed to be involved. Even so, the Department of Defence could usefully propose and support appropriate activities as they have a vital interest in their success. The foreground measures involve building legitimacy and crafting a strategic narrative.

In terms of social mobilisation, legitimacy mainly concerns an assessment by individuals within a society of specific actions that their state is undertaking. If the actions are deemed legitimate, their implementation will be significantly easier. The people will at least passively support such actions and accept demands made by the state on them. Importantly, the people as a whole will not act against the state's particular actions and indeed will generally ‘police’ individuals to ensure they do not

35 Andrew Wilson, ‘Four Types of Russian Propaganda’, *Aspen Review*, Issue 4, 2015, <https://www.aspenreview.com/article/2017/four-types-of-russian-propaganda/> [Accessed 9 January 2019], p. 4/8.

36 Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *op.cit.*, p.24

37 Kathryn Sikkink, ‘Beyond the Justice Cascade: How Agentic Constructivism Could Help Explain Change in International Politics’, *Princeton IR Colloquium*, 21 November 2011, Princeton University.

38 Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Power*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998, pp. 887-917. Kathryn Sikkink, *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions Are Changing World Politics*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.

39 This strategy is detailed further in Peter Layton, *Grand Strategy*, *op.cit.*, pp. 48-49, 84-88. Also see relevant case studies pp. 171-216.

40 Alina Polyakova and Spencer P. Boyer, *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13

either. Gaining legitimacy ensures societal compliance with a particular action of the state at the lowest cost in terms of coercion and material inducements. As political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote: “The strongest man is never strong enough to be master all the time, unless he transforms force into right and obedience into duty.”⁴¹

Crucially, legitimacy is a quality that others grant. Scholar Ian Hurd writes that: “While actors may make all manner of legitimating claims, ultimately the audience is the judge of the legitimacy of a rule or an actor.”⁴² In this legitimacy should not be confused with legal, judicial or moral norms, rather it is how an act is assessed by others that decides if it is legitimate or not.⁴³ An action may still be considered by individuals as legitimate even if in opposition to domestic or international laws.⁴⁴

In seeking to build legitimacy for a particular action, it may not be necessary to convince the whole society. Being a matter of opinion and persuasion, the audience from whom legitimacy is sought is directly related to the specific planned or ongoing state action. Chris Reus-Smit observes that:

*“Where one needs legitimacy will depend, therefore, upon where one seeks to act, and the relevant constituency will be determined by that realm of political action.... These constituencies can be...broad cross-sections of national societies...or they can be sectoral or issue based. The crucial thing is that for an actor to attain a comprehensive legitimacy dividend, its realm of political action (which itself may be geographic or sectoral) and its social constituency of legitimation need to be [broadly] coextensive....”*⁴⁵

This allows the building of legitimacy to be carefully targeted and limited in scope. To build legitimacy in this selected group involves five steps: claiming an action is in accordance with group’s social norms and identity; asserting that the institution taking action is built on core principles justifiable under these social norms and identities; stressing that the institution has suitable expertise; avowing that the actions being taken are demonstrably effective in addressing the issue; and lastly emphasising that the reasons for claiming legitimacy are persuasive. The latter is vital for “legitimacy is about providing persuasive reasons as to why a course of action, a rule, or a political order is right and appropriate.”⁴⁶

Gaining legitimacy then requires an appropriately focused and carefully structured approach. As this is an ideational claim, some real intellectual effort would be necessary to build a robust case able to persuade the chosen constituency.

The process further suggests it is an activity that in some circumstances could be devised and fully or partly implemented by the Australian Department of Defence depending on the actions for which legitimacy is sought. Clearly if the action being undertaken is a major national event such as committing to war or involves the use of armed force then it is an issue for which only Australia’s political leaders can seek legitimacy. Even so, to assist these leaders in such a step, the legitimisation process might be usefully fleshed out by the Department of Defence. In many cases, legitimacy will be an issue of crucial importance to the successful achievement by the Department of Defence of its assigned tasks.

Importantly however, concern over legitimacy is not just a matter for the Department of Defence but would include many other departments depending on the issue and especially the Departments of Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs and Trade. There would generally need to be extensive whole-of-government consultation.

In this the legitimisation process may fail. It is after all a question of being adequately persuasive to influence individual opinions. If the action is deemed illegitimate by the chosen constituency and Defence remains required by government leaders to implement the action, further material resources such as additional personnel, equipment and funding are likely to be needed. Extra resources may in some circumstances compensate for lack of popular support.

There is an important exception to the legitimisation process that falls under the general term of securitisation. This is a particular kind of rhetorical device used to attempt to legitimate policies and actions as being security issues.⁴⁷ Securitisation involves an acknowledged actor telling a relevant and accepting audience that a particular entity or issue is now a security threat.⁴⁸ Consent to such labelling then legitimates urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat without further discussion. Securitisation does not operate through providing persuasive reasons but rather through the legitimacy accorded an acknowledged actor. Accordingly, it is to some extent a one-way dialogue.

41 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, London, UK: Penguin Books, 1968, p.52.

42 Ian Hurd, ‘Breaking and Making Norms: American Revisionism and Crises of Legitimacy’, *International Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2-3, 2007, pp. 194-213, p.197.

43 Christian Reus-Smit, ‘International Crises of Legitimacy’, *International Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 2-3, 2007, pp. 157-174, p.160.

44 Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, ‘The Sources of American Legitimacy’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 6, 2004, pp. 18-32, p.18.

45 Reus-Smit, ‘International Crises of Legitimacy’, *op.cit.*, p.164.

46 Andrew Hurrell, ‘Legitimacy and the Use of Force: Can the Circle Be Squared?’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 31, Supplement S1, 2005, pp. 15-32, pp. 23-24.

47 Juha A. Vuori, ‘Illocutionary Logic and Strands of Securitization: Applying the Theory of Securitization to the Study of Non-Democratic Political Orders’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.14, No. 1, 2008, pp. 65-99, p. 71.

48 Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 21-36.

The problem for at least some Western countries is that securitisation was the rhetorical device used to justify the 2003 Iraq War. It relied upon the people trusting their political leaders and when the claims were found to be lacking substance suspicions crept in, leading in the UK to the Chilcot Inquiry. For the foreseeable future, Western political leaders will find it difficult to employ securitisation without energising some active pushback.

In the US, the impact was different. There was a popular belief that the media was at fault in uncritically accepting politicians' claims and thus traditional American media sources could no longer be trusted. This ideational collapse, as the earlier discussion about changing minds suggests, opened up cognitive space for individuals to accept the assertions by alternative media sources that they were as competent as long-established ones.⁴⁹ Unsubstantiated claims made in Facebook posts now ranked equal in veracity with the New York Times.

The second foreground measure involves crafting a strategic narrative. This activity runs in parallel with and supports building legitimacy. Strategic narratives became fashionable as an approach to win the 'hearts and minds' of the Afghan people in the very protracted war against the Taliban. Such narratives though also have real utility in building domestic social mobilisation. A study of four countries involved in the Afghan War found that two states (Denmark and the UK) crafted narratives that mobilised their populations successfully while two states (the Netherlands and Canada) failed in the attempt.⁵⁰

The approach to building legitimacy involved determining the relevant constituency; strategic narratives are similar in trying to influence the thinking of specific 'strategic' audiences. In moving to consider strategic narratives in the Australian context, a somewhat complicated picture emerges.

Australia is a multi-cultural society with many people born overseas and holding multiple citizenships. Moreover, within Australia there are considerable numbers of people who are permanent residents, have long-term work visas or are studying at tertiary institutions for extended periods. Extending this, there are also many Australian citizens living, working and studying offshore. The support of all these various 'Australians' would be very useful in a time of crisis. Ideally, a strategic narrative would be able to gain this. For this the narrative would have to be crafted to appeal to a very diverse transnational social grouping and build sufficient cohesion within it.

A strategic narrative tells a story about the strategy being implemented in a way that places issues and policies within a consistent conceptual framework. The narrative provides an interpretive structure that people can use to make sense

of historical facts, current problems and emerging issues.⁵¹ The strategic narrative thus provides a framework that connects events as they unfold. It features a strong sense of time and of our deliberate progress through it, while including a consistent logic chain that appeals to both the rational and emotional components of human cognition. Including this emotional 'hook' engages audiences and brings life, meaning and legitimacy to an otherwise abstract logic chain. The visionary nature is thus accentuated in the search for achieving greater coherence of actions and behaviours across the targeted audience. Several important aspects are embedded in this description.⁵²

Firstly, strategic narratives must be conveyed in an engaging style and able to be readily understood by all, not simply policy wonks. As a guide, they probably need to be anchored around a few big ideas rather than swamp the audience with minutiae.

Secondly, there needs to be a clear association between the real-world and the narrative. The narrative that based the need to invade Iraq in 2003 around the country's purported WMD build-up later collapsed when reality revealed differently, which had a serious impact on public support for both the nation-building needed after the invasion and fighting the insurgency that subsequently developed. There is an argument that the narrative was adequate to gain public support for overthrowing Saddam Hussein and had Western forces withdrawn swiftly after this and Iraq remained peaceful then the discrepancy between the narrative and reality would have been less consequential. Even so, the narrative would still have been exposed as false and arguably created political difficulties in the intervening powers. The issue highlights that narratives need to be devised cognisant that all the facts may not be known and so leave some space for uncertainty.

Thirdly, the strategic narrative needs to show a clear pathway to success – however defined. If the strategic narrative does not offer a path to success, then it arguably needs to be reconsidered. Asking the people to expend blood and treasure to purposefully achieve a failure - or in some cases a draw - is unlikely to be tolerated. While the future is uncertain, the strategic narrative must offer some assurance that victory however defined can be achieved.

Fourthly, the strategic narrative needs to be more convincing than other competing narratives. The state's narrative is unlikely to go unchallenged particularly given the contemporary contested social environment and the techniques described earlier that are now available to influence domestic audiences. Crafting a compelling strategic narrative is accordingly an intellectually challenging task that requires time and appropriately skilled staff. Canada's experience with devising a narrative offers cautions; Justin Massie writes that:

49 Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *op.cit.*, p.35.

50 Jens Ringsmose & Berit Kaja Børgesen, 'Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power: NATO, Afghanistan and the use of strategic narratives', *European Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 2011, pp. 505-528, pp. 515-523.

51 Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First-Century Combat as Politics*, London: Hurst, 2012, pp. 179-226.

52 Several of the issues discussed here draw on Jens Ringsmose & Berit Kaja Børgesen, *op.cit.*, pp. 513-514.

“Recognizing that its Afghan communication strategy was failing to win Canadians’ hearts and minds, the Harper government hired a polling firm [called The Strategic Counsel] to help it weather the storm. The Strategic Counsel notably recommended that the government stop referring to ‘fighting terrorism’ to better convince Canadians of the value of its combat role in Kandahar. Instead, it argued Ottawa should emphasize defensive internationalist buzz-words (for example, the UN, women and children, peacekeeping), and abandon trying to get Quebecers’ support. The Harper government followed most of the agency’s recommendations [but this still] failed to mitigate public contestation to the war.”⁵³

Fifthly, it is a long-argued position that a strong external threat will drive the various sub-groups that comprise a country together to meet the common enemy. A strategic narrative then should include a clear statement of who the adversary is. Problems arise though if the threat does not menace all the sub-groups. If there are sub-groups that feel excluded from the nation as a whole, or that consider they may gain if the adversary wins, then social mobilisation will be more difficult and perhaps unachievable.⁵⁴ Strategic narratives need to be crafted with a realistic understanding of the country’s various sub-groups whatever the basis for each group. The possibility of fragmented social cohesion is a difficult issue to acknowledge in a democracy. However, the matter cannot be avoided as Canada’s experience again highlights:

“The lack of attention paid to the deeply entrenched Canadian subcultures resulted in the failure of Ottawa’s efforts to win Canadians’ hearts and minds. In short, Canada’s weak social cohesion was not fully taken into consideration by the government’s strategic narratives. Because of specific cultural, historical, and socioeconomic circumstances, Quebecers and Albertans hold a diametrically opposing set of collectively held attitudes with regards to the use of military force abroad. Albertans tend to support US-led military initiatives notwithstanding their lack of multilateral backing. Quebecers, on the other hand, are renowned for their anti-imperialist attitudes since the British Conquest of 1760.”⁵⁵

Unsurprisingly given Quebecers’ entrenched attitudes the polling research firm, The Strategic Counsel, advised the Federal Government to give up trying to win Quebecers’ support. Even so the Government continued its efforts albeit the level of public support continued to decline.

Lastly, strategic narratives are word pictures that present the strategy the organisation has devised in a more engaging manner. This however presupposes that the organisation has a strategy. The official historian of the home front during World War Two was startled to find that in the middle of the war, in the first half of 1943, strategy development was neglected:

“at no time does it appear that at the highest level the over-all question was considered:...what can Australia best do to help win the war? There is no sign of a single mind rising above the detail to consider the whole problem. The material before the War Cabinet at this stage bears the signs of diversity of origin and there is ‘confusion of counsel’. The successive decisions of the War Cabinet were neither comprehensive nor constant. They answered a number of little questions as they arose and never faced the big question. They revealed no over-all view.”⁵⁶

Like legitimacy, crafting a strategic narrative is a task which might be reasonably led or at least include the Australian Department of Defence. The Department after all will have been deeply involved in developing the strategy on which it is based. Indeed, there may be some feedback from the strategic narrative into the strategy to improve its design and implementation. In this the strategic narrative is intended for a broad audience and different aspects may be highlighted when being delivered to different groups. Its delivery is likely to involve multiple actors at several levels across government not solely the highest political leaders albeit their approval and active endorsement is essential.

The strategic narrative in most cases would not be a matter solely for the Department of Defence but would involve many other departments depending on the issue but especially the Department of Home Affairs. Extensive whole-of-government consultation would generally be needed. Inherent in this process are the problems of coordination across government and the impact of reconciling the differing cultures and perspectives of the various departments. The American strategic narrative for the Iraq invasion earlier noted was purportedly built around the WMD issue because that was the only matter that all involved agreed on.⁵⁷ There is also a matter of timeliness. The government may need a strategic narrative faster than the inter-departmental processes can deliver. In such circumstances, the politicians will simply cut the departments of state out and devise one themselves.

53 Justin Massie, ‘Public Contestation and Policy Resistance: Canada’s Oversized Military Commitment to Afghanistan’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2016, pp. 47–65, p.57.

54 Randall L. Schweller, ‘Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing’, *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Fall 2004, pp. 159–201, pp. 175–180.

55 Justin Massie, *op.cit.*, p.57.

56 Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942–1945*, Australia in the War of 1939–1945 Series 4: Civil, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1970, pp. 296–297

57 David Osborne, ‘WMD just a convenient excuse for war, admits Wolfowitz’, *Independent*, 30 May 2003, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/wmd-just-a-convenient-excuse-for-war-admits-wolfowitz-106754.html> [Accessed 5 March 2019]

Timing is also important strategically. Ideally legitimacy will have been sought from the people and a strategic narrative delivered before adversarial contestation strategies are activated. Having to play catch-up will simply make adversarial success more likely. Preparing the battlefield however, is a well-known political and military technique. Counter-social mobilisation strategies may be implemented before any formal decision has been taken by an adversary to undertake military action.

Given this, some foundational legitimacy building perhaps needs to be continually underway to be later refined and strengthened as a crisis looms. The strategic narrative may need to be similar. This is an area where the Defence White Paper development process may be able to be adjusted to provide support. The White Paper now seeks to build the material capabilities of the ADF and perhaps it should also seek to build ideational capabilities related to social mobilisation. In its own way and appropriate to the national context, that is what New Zealand has sought in its recent Strategic Defence Policy Statement and the emerging National Disaster Resilience Strategy.⁵⁸ The New Zealand approach offers a thought-provoking model about how to include social mobilisation issues within governmental white paper processes.

Timely preparation may also be important when responding to a hostile ideational strategy intent on changing people's minds. For this strategy to succeed, a new idea must be awaiting deployment by the adversary, ready to emerge as the old belief crumbles. Such a progression means the defending state can have some time to counter the undesirable idea the adversary is advocating. Recent examples of ideas collapsing include the Iraq War justification disintegration with consequent loss of trust in political leadership in some Western countries and in the traditional media in the US, and the Global Financial Crisis that gravely damaged neoliberal ideas seriously eroding confidence in business.

With knowledge of the process, the defenders could monitor events, surveil during periods of maximum danger, watch for collapsing beliefs, prepare a response and deploy accordingly at the correct time. Given the range of beliefs that might collapse and be exploited, the 'defenders' would be whole-of-government albeit the Departments of Defence and Home Affairs might have greater responsibilities.

Response Strategies: Background Measures

Social mobilisation strategies will mainly be focussed on the foreground measures of building legitimacy and having a strategic narrative accepted. To counter this, an adversary may implement opposing strategies as discussed earlier that can create societal disruption, manipulate existing grievances or change people's minds. The terrain of the ideational 'field of battle' though may be able to be shaped to be more amenable to our legitimisation activities and strategic narrative strategies and less receptive to adversarial actions. Background measures aim to influence the ideational battlefield's topography. In examining background measures, two areas of the Australian home front experience during World War Two are germane: the media and the relationship between the political leadership and the people.

Media Matters

A democracy relies on its citizens being well-informed so they can carry out their role of electing, influencing and changing their governments. In this, the media is the principal means by which citizens gain information to become well-informed. During much of the Second World War, the Australian official and commercial media sources were distrusted or disbelieved by many. In 1942 the Censor even found that some were placing more credence in the Axis power's news broadcasts than Australian sources.⁵⁹ Such an outcome was the combination of normal peacetime commercial media behaviours carried forward into a time of crisis and an entrenched concern in the official media outlets about the dangers of propaganda.

In peacetime the media focuses on the exceptional and the sensational, those stories that are different from the normal, generally mundane experiences of most people. Commercial imperatives reflect the adage that bad news sells, good news doesn't. In this, a focus on problems accords with a major role of the media in a democracy being to keep governments accountable by highlighting their foibles and failures. In keeping with this, the commercial media generally portrayed a poor image of Australia's overall wartime efforts. The official historian noted that: "The newspaper reader... could scarcely have avoided receiving an impression that there was an incompetent government, much bungling in administration, grave errors in the conduct of the war, and constant suppression of what was called 'the truth'."⁶⁰ In so doing the commercial media help distance the people from their government.

58 *Strategic Defence Policy Statement 2018*, Wellington: Ministry of Defence, July 2018. The draft National Disaster Resilience Strategy is online for public consultation – itself a useful approach to gain public acceptance and buy-in: *National Disaster Resilience Strategy*, Wellington: Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, 2018, <https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/plans-and-strategies/proposed-national-disaster-resilience-strategy/> [Accessed 4 February 2018].

59 Australian Censorship Report (Internal) 20 July 1942 quoted in Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942–1945*, p.750.

60 Hasluck, *ibid.*, p.628.

This approach was carried forward into reporting on the wider Australian society. The newspapers carried numerous stories of both the many scams and swindles being perpetrated by disreputable citizens and the blatant war-profiteering that some were engaged in. Such stories became widely believed and a commonly-held view developed that the war's burdens were not being fairly shared amongst all. This acted to fragment society rather than strengthen it. Social mobilisation was adversely impacted by a belief in some parts of society concerning "uniformity of sacrifice."⁶¹ It should be noted that the war followed directly after the Great Depression that itself had fragmented society on a similar basis. Australian social cohesion was already problematic when the Second World War started.

The official government-operated media did not attempt to bridge the gap between the society and the government or counter the fragmentation within society. There was a strong desire not to disturb the existing commercial media companies, as they needed to remain viable to be still in place for the post-war period. Many government media commentators discussed the Axis power's strategy, successes and failures but rarely gave talks on the needs, progress and complexities of the Australian war effort.

The government media did not include an effort to mobilise the people in its daily radio broadcasts believing this would imply a preference for one political party over another.⁶² This even-handedness extended to inspiring confidence in the nation's higher leadership. The government media focussed on elevating British Prime Minister Churchill as a national war leader rather than Menzies or Curtin when they were Australia's Prime Minister. Churchill's greater charisma aside, he was considered above domestic Australian politics and so concentrating on him would offend fewer people.⁶³

The result was that the gloomy views of the commercial media sources were not countered leaving them as the principal sources of information for the citizenry to base their opinions upon. Indeed, in a quandary about not seeming to support one party over another the Department of Information decided the best approach was to stop national morale being damaged by simply extensively censoring all news.⁶⁴ The Department of Information became the so-called 'department of suppression' endeavouring to stop news about Australian defence-related matters being released at all.

Today's principal social mobilisation issue appears the prevalence of 'fake news' distorting people's understanding. In time of crisis an adversary may build on this, seeking to leverage off the social fragmentation 'fake news' creates to disrupt national mobilisation. In the Second World War, home-front Australia suffered in being unable to readily access a balanced perspective. Then and now citizens in a democratic country need high-quality information to inform their judgements. Without such high-quality information, the ideational terrain remains at best level and at worst becomes tilted in a direction that unintentionally supports adversary counter-social mobilisation strategies.

The Government-People Relationship

The commercial media may have acted to fragment Australian society during World War Two but so did the nation's political leadership. Indeed, the leadership's public pronouncements acted to reinforce the negative view of a deeply fragmented Australia presented by the commercial media. Writing twenty-five years later, the official historian observed that a prominent feature of the Australian home front across the whole war was:

*"the lack of confidence that wartime leaders had in their people. They often complained, cajoled and even threatened, and they constantly exhorted the people to do more, but seldom did they appear to trust them. Seldom did they make the confident demand of leaders who are sure that their people are good, sound at heart and resolute."*⁶⁵

This was not just an issue for civilian leaders. General Blamey returning from the Western Desert battlefields in 1941 did not acknowledge the considerable contributions in manpower, money and material the people had made. Instead he reproached them for being apathetic and simply being "a lot of gazelles grazing."⁶⁶

In part the leadership's poor belief in the character of the Australian people reflected their information sources. These were also mainly the commercial media outlets with their noted pessimistic assessments that the people relied on; at best "there were opinions on the state of opinion."⁶⁷ In contrast to today's frequent polling practices, in the Second World War there was no ongoing professional effort made at the national level to determine the attitudes, needs or morale of the Australian people. In the absence of such an understanding, administrative imperatives prevailed.⁶⁸

61 Hasluck, *ibid.*, pp. 628-629

62 Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941, Australia in the War of 1939-1945 Series 4: Civil*, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1965, p. 384.

63 Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945, op.cit.*, p. 632.

64 Hasluck, *ibid.*, p. 402.

65 Hasluck, *ibid.*, p.628.

66 General Blamey's comments in Australian metropolitan newspapers, 17 November 1941 quoted in Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941, op.cit.*, p. 569.

67 Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945, op.cit.*, p.125

68 In contrast, in the UK a remarkable project called Mass Observation commenced in 1937 and examined the gap between how the media represented public opinion and what the general public actually felt and thought by asking them. Benjamin Jones, 'Mass Observation 75 Years On: The Extraordinary in the Everyday', *The Guardian*, 20 April 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/19/mass-observation-75-years> [Accessed 5 March 2019] The project continues see: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/>

The continual scolding note in official speeches did not reflect that proportionally Australians were as deeply involved in the war effort as its other democratic allies. This disconnect between the reality the people experienced and the leadership pronouncements (and media stories) inevitably led to a certain lack of trust. Especially in the early war years, the public had little confidence in the government albeit as events transpired it was creating a sound foundation for the major effort required when Japan entered the war. This experience mirrors that which first responders today find in managing disasters: how they communicate with those affected is crucial to fostering their trust and confidence in the activities the responders are undertaking.

Some of the early lack of confidence reflected that the Menzies government was beset by intense party infighting and divisive leadership struggles. In peacetime the result would have been the same. Beyond this however, neither party when in power wanted to take unpopular actions that might damage their pre-war electoral support base that it was assumed would be needed later to win the post-war elections. The official historian writes that:

*“Employers, primary producers and wage earners all asserted their rights. Yet this was probably, in part, a public response to the way politics was being conducted. When a nation hangs out the sign, ‘Politics as Usual’, it may expect the old customers to turn up at the usual hours with the usual requests to be served.”*⁶⁹

Taking a wider perspective, some later argued that it simply took time for governments and the people to move from the belief that Australia’s national purpose was exploiting its resources for economic gain to that of resource exploitation for winning the war.⁷⁰ Such a transition in high-level governmental and societal outlook is one that any social mobilisation to meet a future crisis will also need to make.

The background measures are important to favourably shape the ideational terrain and make society more sympathetic to the foreground measures of building legitimacy and the strategic narrative. On the Australian home front during World War Two background measures were somewhat overlooked with the result that issues with the media and the relationship between the political leadership and the people adversely impacted social mobilisation. Even so, wartime mobilisation efforts were generally successful. Background measures may accordingly be considered supporting activities to the more direct and influential foreground measures.

Background measures are those where senior political leaders and government departments other than Defence and even Home Affairs are better placed to take the lead. The Defence and Home Affairs departments though could suggest and support appropriate activities given both departments have a strong self-interest in social mobilisation in times of crisis being successful.

In this, background measures are unlikely to be considered or taken without some hefty urging. The default position of most areas of government would probably be to avoid addressing background measures given their complexity, danger of unintended consequences and politically charged nature. The need for such measures would need to be pervasively argued but this could be required. In an era where social mobilisation can be contested, background measures may be necessary to tip the balance and ensure foreground measures succeed particularly in two specific situations.

Firstly, the abilities of adversaries to undertake counter-social mobilisation strategies appear to be steadily improving as new technologies are introduced. If this is so, foreground measures could begin to need progressively more assistance to enhance the likelihood of their success. Background measures may be gaining in relative importance.

Secondly, during World War Two there was no substantial group who fundamentally disagreed with the government’s demands on Australian society albeit there were groups that used wartime exigencies for their own advantage. This situation may be different in a future conflict or time of crisis. In this, such a fragmentation of Australian society might be more likely in circumstances of minor conflict or crisis as during a major war there may be a ‘rally round the flag’ effect absent in less stressing times. In less dangerous situations, people may need a stronger case to become convinced. Mutually supporting foreground and background measures might then both be required to ensure success.

Conclusion

There’s a new problem emerging in Australian defence matters. Future governments trying to convince Australian society of the need to take actions offshore can now face interference from external parties operating domestically online. The proliferation globally of modern information technologies has opened up new opportunities for external state and non-state actors to meddle.

There are three broad types of strategy that external entities might use to prevent Australian governments’ mobilising the public. The simplest is inducing chaos. The Russian approach is to amplify divisive social issues by employing a wide-ranging disinformation attack across a nation’s political spectrum. In contrast, Julian Assange advocates societal disruption by weakening the government, making it less able to govern and thereby unleashing repressed societal forces.

The second strategy is supporting some useful group albeit technically harder. The individuals comprising such groups first need to be both located and engaged in cyber space. Big data, artificial intelligence and social media however are making large-scale manipulation of sizeable societal groupings feasible.

69 Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939–1941*, op.cit, p. 569.

70 Hasluck, *ibid*, p. 568

The third and hardest strategy is changing people's minds. This involves acting top-down through ideational leaders, a task made easier by new technological solutions such as big data, data mining and micro-targeting. Recent developments in so-called deep fakes that use artificial intelligence offer new possibilities.

All three strategies need to leverage off the target society, requiring an accessible and malleable audience for success. Theoretically, the defender has the simpler task. In this, the ensuing 'battle of ideas' can involve foreground and background measures, the later including cybersecurity techniques. The foreground responses involve building legitimacy and crafting a strategic narrative.

Legitimacy mainly concerns an assessment made by individuals of specific actions their government is undertaking. If the actions are deemed legitimate, people will at least passively support such actions and accept government demands made on them. Importantly people will not act against the government and will generally 'police' individuals to ensure others don't either. Gaining legitimacy requires a focused and carefully structured approach.

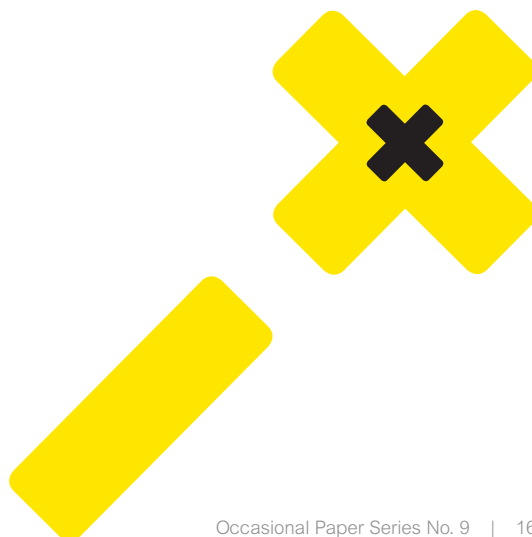
The second foreground measure involves crafting a strategic narrative to run in parallel with and support building legitimacy. The narrative provides an interpretive structure that people can use to make sense of historical facts, current problems and emerging issues. Such a narrative features a strong sense of time and of our deliberate progress through it, while including a consistent logic chain that appeals to both people's rational and emotional cognition.

The background measures aim to favourably tilt the ideational battleground, actively complementing the foreground measures. In considering these, Australia's home front experience during World War Two offers insights.

Firstly, during World War Two commercial imperatives drove the non-government media to focus on bad news while government media self-censored to avoid being dismissed as propaganda outlets. The people then did not have an information source that gave a balanced perspective. This shortcoming remains and is an inherently difficult issue but there is time now to develop solutions.

Secondly, during World War Two the leadership did not trust the Australian people and this was at times reciprocated. If future governments want to gain the people's support they might more usefully assume they "are good, sound at heart and resolute" and base their speeches and actions accordingly. This may be especially so if a balanced information source cannot be devised. The leaderships' speeches will then form the principal counter-weight to more troubling opinions elsewhere.

Social mobilisation may seem an arcane subject to military organisations in which giving assistance is not optional. Unexpectedly however, the people have returned to being a potential Clausewitzian centre of gravity. Adversaries may now seek to undertake counter-social mobilisation strategies to support their military actions or even achieve governmental change. Bob Menzies' words have become meaningful once more. Australia's defence is now again "everybody's business and we must get on with it."



Notes



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