

RESPONSE TO “WHY RAND MISSED THE POINT”

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In their paper, “Why RAND Missed the Point,” Major General Andrew Mackay, Commander Steve Tatham and Dr. Lee Rowland criticize the methods, conclusions and recommendations of the RAND publication, *U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan: Effectiveness of Psychological Operations 2001-2010*.¹ They also criticize a 2007 RAND report, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theatres of Operation*.² Their paper, which this response will refer to hereafter as “the critique,” raises several important issues which merit further discussion.³ An exchange of differing views concerning this multi-faceted topic should benefit those charged with planning, implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of Information Operations (IO) and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) – the latter redefined since the research was completed by the Department of Defense as Military Information Support Operations (MISO). Underlying the differences of opinion to be discussed in this response is a common assumption that IO and PSYOP do need to adapt more effectively to the Afghan environment and can be improved to more effectively accomplish missions in future operating environments.

The central argument in the critique posits that the attitudinal approach, which it defines as the basic approach of U.S. military IO and PSYOP, should be discarded in favor of a strictly behavioral approach. The critique suggests that the U.S. military has a blind faith in the attitudinal approach and ignores behavior in favor of a futile effort to influence attitudes in target audiences. RAND is criticized for not pointing that out. Moreover, RAND analysts are described as naively backing U.S. military adherence to a discredited marketing/advertising model: “If there is one single area more than any other in which this is obvious, it is in the over reliance of IO and PsyOps on commercial advertising and marketing strategies – substituting

¹ Arturo Munoz, *U.S. Military Information Operations: Effectiveness of Psychological Operations 2001-2010*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2012 at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1060.html>

² Todd C. Helmus, et al, *Enlisting Madison Avenue: The Marketing Approach to Earning Popular Support in Theatres of Operation*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2007 at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG607.html>

³ Major General (rtd) Andrew Mackay, et al, “The Effectiveness of US Military Information Operations in Afghanistan: Why RAND missed the point,” at <http://home.iosphere.org/?p=5>

NATO and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) for the ‘product’ and Afghans for the ‘consumer’.⁴

This response endorses the critique’s recommendation that more attention should be given to behavior, but it does not accept the insistence on ignoring attitude, partly because it does not accept the supporting claim that social science research has debunked conclusively the link between attitude and behavior. This response also does not accept the view that U.S. military IO and PSYOP have been bereft of innovation for the last 90 years nor does it accept the assertion that RAND studies, like the U.S. military, are wedded to a marketing/advertising model of communication. Although there is much to be said in favor of greater emphasis on behavior, the sharp dichotomy the critique creates between attitudinal and behavioral approaches is counterproductive.

Undoubtedly, there have been PSYOP personnel who have made too facile a connection between attitude and behavior, but this does not reflect U.S. military doctrine, nor does it reflect the content of the *U.S. Military Information Operations*. The ultimate objective of a PSYOP campaign is to influence behavior.⁵ According to U.S. military manuals cited in the RAND study: “PSYOP are planned operations designed to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and, ultimately, the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals. PSYOP seek to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator’s objectives.”⁶ In other words, PSYOP seek to integrate attitudinal and behavioral approaches, a strategy with which the RAND study concurs. Various examples of PSYOP campaigns aimed at producing specific behaviors are presented, to include the 2004 and 2009 presidential election campaigns, with their concrete get-out-the-vote goals, the IED campaign, weapons turn-in and rewards for information on terrorists. Successes and failures are discussed, with extensive discussion of contextual factors that go far beyond the question of attitudes.

In waging a counterinsurgency campaign, there is no point in winning the “hearts and minds” of the populace if they are not going to do anything about it. The critique raises that

⁴ Mackay, 4.

⁵ See the different functions of PSYOP summarized in the April 2005 U.S. Army manual, FM 3-05.30 Psychological Operations at <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-05-30.pdf>

⁶ Munoz, 12

issue several times and I do not think that anyone at RAND or the U.S. military would disagree. In his 2009 *ISAF Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance*, General Stanley McChrystal emphasized the interplay between attitude and behavior in counterinsurgency – referring to the attitudes of both the civilian population and friendly forces:

We need to understand the people and see things through their eyes. It is their fears, frustrations and expectations we must address. We will not win simply by killing insurgents. We will help the Afghan people win by securing them, by protecting them from intimidation, violence, and abuse, and by operating in a way that respects their culture and religion. This means that we must change the way that we think, act and operate. We must get the people involved as active participants in the success of their communities.⁷

General McChrystal considered Afghan attitudes as something that could be understood and manipulated to promote pro-government behavior. The critique argues that to achieve his objectives, General McChrystal would have been better served forgetting about influencing attitudes and instead focusing on shaping behavior, asserting repeatedly that there is no linkage between attitude and behavior.

The critique states that its “behaviourally-led approach” is based on “proper, proven, social and behavioural science.”⁸ To launch this argument, the authors cite La Pierre’s famous 1934 study concerning the discrepancy between voiced attitudes towards Chinese people among a random sample of Americans and actual behavior. They also cite other studies arriving at similar conclusions and declare that today “the unequivocal consensus is that attitudes are very poor predictors of behaviour.”⁹ Furthermore, the critique states that social science research has debunked the influence of attitude over behavior. This is inaccurate. The state of the art is much more complex. Extensive research has been conducted since the 1930s; to speak of an “unequivocal consensus” on the often contradictory research findings over the last eighty years does not reflect the diversity of thought on the matter. On balance, refining the concepts of attitude and behavior, the contemporary consensus is that attitudes can influence behavior in significant ways.

⁷ http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/official_texts/counterinsurgency_guidance.pdf

⁸ Mackay, i

⁹ Mackay, 5.

In his review of 88 studies on the question of attitude and behavior, “Attitudes and the Prediction of Behavior: A Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Literature.” Stephen J. Kraus concludes:

The relationship between attitudes and behavior has been the topic of considerable debate. This article reports a meta-analysis of 88 attitude-behavior studies that reveals that attitudes significantly and substantially predict future behavior... Relatively large and significant moderating effects were found for the attitudinal variables of attitude certainty, stability, accessibility, affective-cognitive consistency and direct experience.... A smaller but significant moderating effect was found for self-monitoring... Methodological factors associated with high attitude-behavior correlations included self-report measures of behavior... the use of nonstudents as subjects... and corresponding levels of specificity in the attitude and behavior measures.

In retrospect, Allport’s (1935) words seem prophetic: “Whether the [attitude] concept is being overworked to such an extent that it will be discarded along with the past shibboleths of social science remains to be seen. It seems more probable that the ever increasing number of critical and analytic studies will somehow succeed in refining and preserving it. (p.804). Indeed since Allport’s time, there has been a definite shift in general approaches to thinking about the attitude-behavior relationship. The “crisis” was in large part predicated on the conception of behavior as a criterion variable against which the validity of the attitude concept could be tested; a lack of extremely strong and consistent attitude - behavior correlations was thought to invalidate the concept. An increasing number of analytic studies were conducted and these have indeed contributed to the refinement and preservation of the concept. Clearly, attitudes are not synonymous with behavior; attitudes should not be used as an easily measured substitute for behavior, nor does attitude theory suggest that attitudes will be the sole determinant of behavior. Today, the attitude-behavior relationship is thought of more as a substantive relationship of interest, which will sometimes be large, sometimes be small, and which is influenced significantly by other variables; perhaps most important, the dynamics of this relationship are informative about the nature of human social conduct. The question, “to what extent do attitudes predict future behavior?” is complex and multicoated and does not readily lend itself to any simple answer, to quote Plutarch, “hard questions must have hard answers.”¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://psp.sagepub.com/content/21/1/58.full.pdf+html>

In their comprehensive review of research on the question of attitude and behavior titled, “The Influence of Attitude on Behavior,” Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein, take as their point of departure that there are different types of attitudes and that attitudes are multi-dimensional. Their review of research findings, including the studies cited by the critique, observes that at one time the predominant thinking in social science held that attitudes indeed exhibited no relation to behavior. However, that thinking changed over time as new research yielded a more nuanced understanding of attitudes and how they relate to behavior, as illustrated by the following excerpts from their review:

The problem of low attitude-behavior correlations was resolved in part when it was realized that, although general attitudes are poor predictors of single behaviors, they correlate strongly with multiple-act criteria or behavioral aggregates. In a parallel fashion, it was shown that single behaviors can be predicted quite well from compatible measures of attitudes, that is attitude toward the behavior.

The principles of aggregation and compatibility, the work linking general attitudes to specific actions, and the reasoned action approach to the prediction of specific behaviors have advanced our understanding of the attitude-behavior relation and have demonstrated the importance of attitudes as determinant of behavior.

We have seen in this chapter that general attitudes can provide useful information to predict and explain broad patterns of discriminatory behavior. However, as in earlier research, investigators in this domain have tried to relate these general attitudes not to broad patterns of discrimination but rather to single behaviors or judgments in a particular context. Theory and research regarding the attitude – behavior relation suggest that such an approach is bound to produce disappointing results. Indeed, theorists have again had to invoke moderating variables, suggesting that the effect of broad implicit attitudes on specific behaviors depends on the nature of the behavior (spontaneous or deliberative) and on such individual differences as motivation to control prejudiced reactions... Our understanding of the attitude-behavior relation could perhaps be advanced if researchers used the progress made in social cognition to focus on such proximal determinants of specific actions as attitudes toward the behavior and behavioral intentions rather than on general attitudes toward an object.¹¹

¹¹ See https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:5mnnpqUE-iQJ:web.psych.utoronto.ca/psy320/Required%2520readings_files/4-1.pdf+Influence+of+Attitude+and+Behavior&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiljxCYcK9VsduLEzunDhF8dno1OFH-d9yM-6vv9ZGF-orIb2w8eW-

The Ajzen and Fishbein review shows how the views of social scientists towards the problem of attitude and behavior have changed over time, adding new concepts, variables and caveats to past postulates. The critique states that “indeed, one very influential social psychology text proclaims that: “The original thesis that attitudes determine actions was countered in the 1960s by the antithesis that attitudes determine virtually nothing.” That is correct. An antithesis was expounded during that period, but, if we are to maintain the Hegelian context, a synthesis did occur. That synthesis is evident in the citations above from the Ajzen and Fishbein review. It is not evident in the critique.

Similarly, Allen E. Liska, in his study, “The Impact of Attitude on Behavior: Attitude-Social Support Interaction” concludes:

This paper deals with what might be termed one of the perennial controversies of social psychology: the relationship between attitude and behavior. We have noted the efforts of various sociologists and social psychologists to solve the controversy by reconceptualizing the simple bivariate problem (whether or not attitude relates to behavior) into a multivariate problem (identifying those conditions which affect the direction and extent of the relationship). For the most part such research has focused on the additive effects of social support, while little research has been aimed at isolating attitude-social support interactive effects. In this paper we examined the relationship between attitude, social support, and behavior as reported in three studies and found the relationship between attitude and behavior to be strongest at a high level of social support in two studies and at a low level of social support in the other study, although in the latter the relationship was not consistently statistically significant. Finally, in attempting to explain the apparent discrepancy between the studies, we noted that in the former two studies the attitude object refers to a general category of people, and in the latter study the attitude object refers to specific behavior patterns. On the basis of the relevant literature we then hypothesized that when attitude refers to a general category of people, a high level of social support may function to activate certain attitudinal behavior implications, but when attitude refers to specific behavior patterns the potential for an activation effect is limited.¹²

As is evident in that conclusion, the relationship between attitude and behavior sometimes correlates and sometimes does not, depending on situational and other factors. In contrast, the critique makes a one-sided argument concluding that “to expect that there should be any

[DONDt0xe13H9NtPfoUW27GkvZVWmwzVAexG0UastUiCh86U9o3Df31LfKICP5AiKR-BRqNsD2mFeEyhs&sig=AHIEtbTaDc9claW28-FW Cz7IDgQzrQf5Q](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1388599)

¹² See <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1388599>

straightforward relationship between attitude and behavior is farcical.”¹³ The research cited in this response does not suggest that any particular interpretation of the data is “farcical.” Instead it shows that there is a complex and sometimes contradictory relationship between attitude and behavior lending itself to varying interpretations.

Social science research also underscores the importance of contextual factors in shaping behavior, which *U.S. Military Information Operations* repeatedly points out need to be taken into account. Applying this to the evaluation of PSYOP effectiveness, “the study assumes that it is usually not possible to make cause and effect relationships between PSYOP actions and products on the one hand and observed behavior on the other. Other factors, unknown to observers, could account for the particular behavior in question – for example, providing information to the USMIL on IED placements, which might have little to do with the PSYOP leaflet urging that action.”¹⁴

The critique brings up the valid point that behavior may affect attitudes and gives as examples the effect of British laws on cigarette smoking and wearing seat belts. However, it can be argued that these examples are irrelevant in the current Afghan environment because U.S. and NATO forces do not exert the control over the population that the British government enjoyed. Moreover, as with many of the examples given in the critique, contrary interpretations can be made. It can be argued that, because the British population had a positive attitude about the government, and had been predisposed to accept coercion regarding cigarette smoking and seat belts by extensive public information campaigns, the laws were effective and the majority complied willingly. This in turn created an environment in which the behavior influenced attitudes. On the other hand, if the British people had a negative attitude about the government, or a negative attitude about the ban on cigarette smoking and the requirement to wear seat belts, they might have demanded that their politicians change the laws, or the politicians would not have enacted these laws in the first place.

One of the salient points in the critique is that U.S military PSYOP are hopelessly mired in the past, to wit: “In World War I the allies dropped MISO/Psy/Ops leaflets. In Afghanistan ISAF drops MISO/Psy/Ops leaflets. Unlike any other current military capability MISO/Psy/Ops has not evolved in any substantial concept during the past 90 years. This

¹³ Mackay, 11.

¹⁴ Munoz, 28.

paper...attempts to bridge that 90 year gap...”¹⁵ Regarding this purported archaic orientation, leaflets indeed were air dropped during the 2001-2010 period, as the front cover of the RAND study illustrates, but this was done in conjunction with various other forms of message dissemination, especially face-to-face communication, described in the study as the most effective form of PSYOP. *U.S. Military Information Operations* devotes considerable attention to the analysis of the content of leaflets disseminated in Afghanistan as a part of the exercise to determine the effectiveness of messaging. It concludes that some leaflets were effective and others were not. Given the time-warp that some Afghan villages find themselves in, air-dropped leaflets may have been seen as new technology. Their potential effectiveness should not be dismissed automatically because they have been used for ninety years. The critique decries “ages-old methods of communication now proven moribund,” but the Taliban use them on a daily basis to great effect.¹⁶

Regardless of how effective leaflets may or may not be in a particular situation, for the critique to focus solely on them, while failing to take into account the various other innovative measures implemented simultaneously, is to miss the point. For example, *U.S. Military Information Operations* mentions creative PSYOP use of social-networking sites, specifically Facebook and YouTube, commenting that “the new effort in Afghanistan is evidently the first in a war zone to try to harness the power of social networking sites as a primary tool to release information.”¹⁷ Moreover, rather than disseminate print products themselves, the RAND study notes that PSYOP personnel increasingly seek to establish relationships with Afghan journalists and newspaper editors in order to provide them with relevant information. In that manner, the final product written by the Afghans themselves will have greater credibility and impact.

U.S. Military Information Operations places considerable emphasis on the argument that the behavior of troops on the ground is more important in influencing attitudes and behavior of the local population than any mass media operation. There was much innovative thinking among U.S. military leaders and IO and PSYOP specialists along these lines, to include the high priority given to key leader engagements (KLEs) and meetings with councils of local elders (*jirgas*). The RAND study highlights the behavior of troops as a form of communication, as

¹⁵ Mackay, 1

¹⁶ Mackay, 4

¹⁷ Munoz, 102.

well as the need to exploit traditional Afghan tribal forms of word of mouth communication.

Relevant excerpts from the RAND study follow:

PSYOP should enjoy wide leeway in the manner in which selected information is conveyed and in the specific actions taken to influence the emotions, reasoning, and behavior of target audiences. This can be accomplished through multi-media propaganda, by medical civic action programs (MEDCAPS) and other types of civil affairs (CA) projects, and by face-to-face communication with local leaders. In this respect it is a mistake to compartment the psychological effect on the civilian population of U.S. military (USMIL) operations exclusively to officially designated PSYOP activities. It can be argued that everything a military force does in a conflictive zone has a psychological impact, favorable or negative, whether intended or not...

Current ISAF leadership has admonished repeatedly the manner in which military convoys drive on the roads has an impact on how those soldiers are viewed, as do hiring practices for locals and myriad other activities. Seen in this context, the everyday activities of troops among the population can have more impact than propaganda disseminated by leaflets or other media.

It is important to note that many operations do not fall neatly into one category or the other. For example, a security patrol may have the power to apply force (a kinetic approach), but over time, if its consistently professional conduct earns it the respect of local populace, its presence can become a non-kinetic effect...The difference between kinetic and non-kinetic becomes ambiguous...

Another factor bearing on the confusion in terminology is that influence is not just what is said. It is very much about what is done. While words can be drafted and communicated in very short order, the deeds of individuals, organizations and even the nation tend to have the strongest and most enduring message that is understood by audiences. A key lesson of the past decade is that what we do is often more important than what we say: the presence of an aircraft carrier in the Gulf, the use of female screeners on raids in traditional Muslim communities, or an airstrike on a suspected enemy location all send "messages." The messages received will depend on the audiences and will not always be the messages we intended to send¹⁸

A central frame of reference for *U.S. Military Information Operations* is the Afghan perspective. Therefore U.S. military behavior is not seen only in positive terms. Evidence of negative behavior, or, most importantly, Afghan perception of negative U.S. behavior is presented:

"In interviews conducted for this monograph with Pashtun tribal leaders and former Taliban members in Afghanistan between April and May 2009, the same, unprecedented bitterness

¹⁸ Munoz, 11-15.

among all those interviewed was apparent. Throughout the Pashtun belt of southern and eastern Afghanistan, it was repeated that intense resentment has developed against U.S. and coalition forces because of their tactics. These tactics are considered violations of the Pashtunwali (code of the Pashtun). The most common accusations include those listed here:

- Searching private homes, breaking down doors, terrifying and humiliating Pashtun families
- Nighttime raids, entering bedrooms and women's quarters at night, sometimes resulting in shootings of innocent villagers who try to fend off these assaults
- Frisking of women in their homes and in public places
- Arbitrary and indefinite detentions of local villagers taken to U.S. military bases outside the jurisdiction of Afghan national law, Islamic law and tribal law
- Frequent killings of innocent civilians during air strikes and combat operations
- Disarmament policies that leave villagers vulnerable to bandits and insurgents¹⁹

U.S. Military Information Operations argued that until these concrete issues were resolved, no amount of propaganda was likely to convince aggrieved Pashtun villagers to support U.S. and coalition forces. How the critique transformed this argument into part of a “Madison Avenue” marketing approach is perplexing.

In their introduction to the critique, the authors state that “this paper shows why marketing and advertising must now be considered as an **utterly failed model** for IO and MISO/PsyOps...” However, it is difficult to equate this “utterly failed model” with the increasing reliance on Afghan journalists and key communicators, face-to-face communication, key leader engagements, meetings with *jirgas* and the overriding importance placed on behavior of troops, and personal interaction of friendly forces with civilians, as well as innovative use of social-networking internet sites described in the RAND study. Likewise, it is difficult to discern adherence to a failed marketing/ advertising model in the extensive citation from Commander LeGree in the recommendations section of the study:

It's in the delivery. Clear examples of poor target audience analysis abound. The devil is certainly in the details, and these details can offend an audience if handled improperly. Adhere to the principles of immersion knowledge and local legitimacy...

Our IO are often unsophisticated and clumsy.... We frequently forget to listen to our audience and don't give them enough credit; or worse, we target the wrong audience... Remember, just

¹⁹ Munoz, 115

because the people live simply does not mean they are simple. Focus information engagement strategies on that which the people care about and don't give unintended relevance to the enemy.

Seek a local opinion. Do not disseminate IO or MISO products without a sanity check from Afghans in the area. Ask them questions, knowing that you will often get an answer of "what they think you want to hear." Wade through that and get a straightforward assessment.

Use a credible voice. The best information operations come from respected Afghans with local credibility, not coalition forces. Quit falling in love with the guy who speaks English and deal with members of the community who command respect.²⁰

Commander LeGree's emphasis on good target audience analysis should be highlighted because it is a major theme of the RAND study, as reflected in the evaluation of leaflets and other PSYOP products in terms how well they conformed to local cultural perspectives.

U.S. Military Information Operations contains five references to the bête noire of the authors of the critique, *Enlisting Madison Avenue*:

Nonetheless, as has been noted in previous studies, IO has become a substitute for PSYOP.²¹

With PSYOP subordinate to IO, an IO representative gets direct access to the commander, while PSYOP representatives report to the IO chief. Unless the IO chief also is an expert in PSYOP, this means that relevant shaping expertise is one step removed from the commander.²²

The behavior of every soldier, sailor, airman and marine in a theatre of operations shapes the indigenous population... Because of the globalization of media, how a single soldier handles a tactical situation in an out-of-the-way location still has the potential to make global headlines and have strategic impact... Indigenous individuals with whom troops interact form favourable or unfavourable impressions... and spread those impressions by word of mouth throughout surprisingly large networks.²³

The biggest problem is connecting the shaping action or message with some measurable quantity or quality that is not confounded by other possible causes. For example, many Iraqi soldiers surrendered at the outset of OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom). Was this due to PSYOP leaflets dropped instructing them to do so? Was it instead due to the coalition's massive military might? Were there other causes? What was the most likely combination of causes that resulted in the desirable end? In this case, the possible causes are highly conflated; even though

²⁰ Munoz, 146.

²¹ Munoz, xiv.

²² Munoz, 8.

²³ Munoz, 14-15.

the objective being measured – surrender – is an observable behavior. It would be even more difficult to assess the multiple causes underlying other objectives, such as creating positive public attitudes toward the coalition.²⁴

The complaints about the approval process and its inherent delays are typical of PSYOP as well. In *Enlisting Madison Avenue*, the authors write, “The process for approving PSYOP products has been criticized for its lack of timeliness. By the time some products are approved, fast-paced events have too often negated their value.”²⁵

The content of these citations is fairly self-evident. They all take a clear-eyed approach to the problems under discussion; none of them propose conducting PSYOP campaigns in Afghanistan as if they were selling Coca Cola.

Nonetheless, the critique refers to *Enlisting Madison Avenue* as the embodiment of everything it considers wrong about the U.S. military and RAND approach to IO and PSYOP:

Their paper declared that ‘business marketing practices provide a useful framework for improving US military efforts to shape attitudes and behaviors of local populations.’ In particular, the paper declared attention should be paid to ‘branding, customer satisfaction and segmentation of audiences.’ We would venture that you do so at your peril; we have absolutely got to stop looking at audiences in foreign countries, often under-developed and crisis rich, through Western rose tinted lenses. We have got to stop exporting values and beliefs that we do understand to environments that we do not in the hope that clarity will ensue. It will not.²⁶

I do not think that anyone at RAND or the U.S. military would disagree with the judgment that looking at foreign countries through “Western rose tinted lenses” is imprudent. The need to avoid “mirror imaging,” that is, producing propaganda from the point of view of the propagandist rather than that of the target audience, is a major theme in *U.S. Military Information Operations*, illustrated with various examples of failed operations, including the 25 million dollar reward offer for information on Usama Bin Ladin printed on green matchbooks.

Moreover, any competent international marketing executive would agree with the need to avoid the culture-bound approach repudiated in the critique. Those involved in selling goods or services abroad usually are not interested in exporting their own values and beliefs to potential customers. If they were, their commercial ventures would likely fail. The Chinese are very

²⁴ Munoz, 28-29

²⁵ Munoz, 121.

²⁶ Mackay, 9.

successful in selling their goods all over the world; they are not promoting Chinese cultural values. The authors of the critique seem to be dismayed by the very title of *Enlisting Madison Avenue* as well as by the marketing/advertising jargon used. Nonetheless, if we get past the jargon to what is actually being explained, I do not see a contradiction between a thorough PSYOP target audience analysis and the type of analysis marketing/advertising professionals pursue to better understand the needs and desires of their potential customers, taking into account the objectives are different.

By this token, a “satisfied customer” can be thought of as a Pashtun villager who believes U.S. forces have treated him with respect in accord with the *pashtunwali* and have actually brought about better security and economic progress to his community. Regarding “branding,” essentially it entails promoting a positive image of an individual or group. This is an ancient concept. Julius Caesar engaged in branding when he wrote *Caesar’s Conquests*. The brand he was selling was himself as a resolute commander and his Roman legions as resourceful, courageous and invincible soldiers

The critique rejects the idea of audience segmentation, even though it is a standard analytic tool used in PSYOP target audience analysis. In rejecting the idea of segmenting target audiences, the critique argues that a commercial marketing campaign needs only to convince a relatively small percentage of the population to buy its product in order to turn a profit. Thus, segmenting makes sense for them, but it does not makes sense for a military officer waging a counterinsurgency campaign because he must gain the support of the entire community in order to defeat the insurgents in the area. This certainly is the ideal, and there have been many cases where it has been achieved, particularly when U.S. Special Operations Forces take up residence in a community to implement Village Stability Operations (VSO)/ Afghan Local Police (ALP) programs. However, many other examples exist in which the entire community never does support the government. Such collective action is often impeded by endemic conflicts over water and land usage and other sources of internecine rivalries.

It is common for a certain percentage of the community to support the government, another percentage to support the insurgency, while the great majority seeks to remain neutral; the famous “fence sitter” attitude described often in the literature on Afghanistan. Whether villagers actively support the government or the insurgents may be determined by their

assessment of how that decision will affect their ability to dominate their local rivals in pre-existing feuds sometimes going back generations. This does not mean that the counterinsurgency commander should give up trying to entice the entire community to his side; it means that his chances for success would be better if he understood local divisions and calibrated his propaganda/ psychological operations to the interests of each competing faction, showing how each could benefit by backing the government.

In general terms, Afghanistan is profoundly segmented along ethnic, tribal, sub-tribal, clan and village groupings. For example, the Alizai tribe in Helmand is divided into rival Hassanzai, Kalozai and Pirzai sub-tribes. In the past, these rival groupings have fought wars amongst each other. Anyone working in that province needs to be aware of this segmentation and plan to deal with it. Knowing the *khels* and *qawms* in a particular area is crucial. In fact, most anthropologists agree that the Pashtuns organize themselves according to a segmentary lineage system in which the patrilineal segments function independently in a system of shifting alliances and rivalries. When an outside enemy appears that threatens all the segments, they unite, calling upon common ancestry as a unifying force, until the threat recedes and they go back to their normal state of internal division. Ignoring this fundamental segmentation of the target audience limits the potential impact of IO and PSYOP in Afghanistan.

Christopher Paul, one of the authors of *Enlisting Madison Avenue*, adds the following comments. First, *Enlisting Madison Avenue* advocates the use of marketing principles, not necessarily marketing practices. Second, what in industry is called “segmentation of audiences” is called target audience analysis in PSYOP doctrine and practice, one of the things the authors of the critique advocate quite strongly in virtually all of their writing, including the critique, and is one of the many areas about which we are all in violent agreement. Branding is, at its best, about synchronizing the workforce and getting the behavior of employees (soldiers) to align with goals/objectives/missions, so that the behaviors of coalition forces do not create negative attitudes among Afghan populations that led to behaviors not in coalition interests. Customer satisfaction is relevant to IO/PSYOP in two ways: first, as a reminder to monitor, measure and assess in order to see if desired attitudinal and behavioral changes are taking place, as well as being able to see what has and hasn’t worked from the PSYOP kitbag; second, as a reminder that what you want a target audience to believe and do may not be at all what they are inclined to

believe and do, and you may have better luck if you choose intermediate objectives that are not too far removed from their baseline preferences.

The argument can be made that promoting political ideas and action, as opposed to promoting specific products for purchase, are such different endeavors that the same jargon should not be used, much less the same techniques or even principles (per the distinction noted above by Paul). That is a reasonable objection. However, there are experts in the field who argue that modern principles for persuading audiences do cross over from commercial to political and psychological spheres, and that, most importantly, these principles are cross-cultural. A convincing example of this type of cross-over concerns political campaigns throughout the world in which strategies and tactics developed in Western countries are being applied effectively in vastly different cultural and political environments. Some well-known political campaign advisors are in high demand worldwide by governments, politicians and political parties, with a string of electoral victories to buttress their credibility.²⁷

However, the most far-reaching, recent innovation in terms of communication and political mobilization is happening on the internet. As we debate recondite issues of attitude and behavior, the world is passing us by. This is a whole new area of inquiry for IO and PSYOP specialists that may shatter long held assumptions about how to shape behavior in target audiences. The bloggers of the Arab Spring blazed new ground in exploiting popular resentments and grievances to help bring hundreds of thousands of protesters into the streets in several countries, without an organization or even leadership on the ground. It would seem that they were amazingly successful in manipulating negative attitudes about their own societies and

²⁷ See the International Association of Political Consultants (IAPC), comprised of “professional political consultants who counsel candidates, political parties, run campaigns or provide specialized services such as polling, fundraising, message development and communications, on an international basis at <http://www.iapc.org/latest-news/press-releases>; also see <http://gqrr.com/Partners/stanley-b-greenberg/>

governments in order to produce verifiable, revolutionary behavior. Could the formal IO and PSYOP establishments of any country achieve such a feat?

Having commented on the critique's references to a marketing/ advertising model, it should be stressed that this is not a theme covered in *U.S. Military Information Operations*. The main purpose of that study was to review what had been done in Afghanistan and make an assessment of its effectiveness. It was not intended to champion any particular theory or approach. Despite the passionate objections raised in the critique, there are many areas of agreement. Clearly, observed behavior is easier to measure than attitudes. IO and PSYOP specialists do need to be more conscious of the complex interplay between attitude and behavior. Some PSYOP campaigns indeed have been too simplistic about this. While reviewing the 2005 PSYOP manual in preparing for this response, I was disappointed to see so little discussion of this critical issue, as opposed to earlier versions. Instead, the manual devoted itself overwhelmingly to the process of the PSYOP bureaucracy, the chain of command, the proper format for preparing plans and operational proposals and the approvals process.

There is no doubt that contextual factors need to be taken into account and that "people's behaviour is controlled or modulated by a whole host of personal, social and environmental factors, many of which are beyond control of the individual..."²⁸ *U.S. Military Information Operations* contains various examples of that situation, some cited by the critique itself. Attitudes are ill-defined and hard to gauge accurately, especially in Afghanistan, as the RAND study points out in discussing the shortcomings of public opinion surveys. For example, Ensign Bebbler's account of his own interview activity is quoted:

During the more than 200 interviews, several practices were adopted to elicit more "honest" responses. That being said, it is important to acknowledge up front that interviews are being conducted by an individual in an American uniform, wearing body armor and carrying weapons and with other American and Afghan military and police in the area. Despite the presence of a cultural advisor who was interpreting for the IO officer, some results may have been skewed, but how much or often is unknown., After decades of brutal Soviet occupation, civil war and the repressive rule of the Taliban, most Afghans are understandably wary

²⁸ Mackay, 11.

when approached and asked if they would mind “just answering a few questions.” We must also acknowledge this limitation.²⁹

The difficulties encountered in measuring attitudes accurately should not be taken to mean that they do not exist in practical terms, or do not play a role in shaping behavior. As the critique argues, it may not matter in a given point in time if a community has a pro-government attitude but is too afraid of Taliban retribution to take corresponding action. If a successful government military offensive drives out the Taliban from the area – as has happened in many places over the past couple of years - and the people are free to act on their preferences, then it does make a profound difference if their private, unspoken attitudes are pro-government, or pro-Taliban. Regardless of the obstacles to achieving it, a good understanding of local attitudes can be critically important for counterinsurgency and for PSYOP.

I agree wholeheartedly with the central argument in the critique that social science research findings should be used more systematically as a point of departure in conceptualizing and implementing IO and PSYOP strategy and tactics. Where I differ is in the use of social science to make categorical statements of certainty. In my mind, ambiguity is inherent in social science. To begin with, it is not a hard science. The experiments of the scientific method cannot be replicated with exactitude when it comes to human behavior. Social science is an indispensable framework of analysis and should be relied on much more extensively by IO and PSYOP specialists, but it cannot “prove” anything. Social scientists routinely disagree amongst themselves over definitions and interpretations of the data. Even the definition and function of “tribe” is a matter of debate.

In this regard, the critique argues that social norms should be manipulated to influence behavior: “Another fundamental consideration in building any behaviour change campaign is that of the power of social norms. Social norms are the socially accepted standards and codes of behaviour that most people in a group or society conform to.”³⁰ Exploiting social norms for operational purposes is an excellent idea that supports a key argument in the *U.S. Military Information Operations* for IO and PSYOP in Afghanistan to be consistent with local Afghan cultural values and perspectives. The RAND study describes how the Taliban utilize this

²⁹ Munoz, 24.

³⁰ Mackay, 13.

normative approach effectively to promote their jihadist cause. It emphasizes in the text and in quotes from military personnel who served in the field the negative consequences of violating Pashtun social norms. Nonetheless, for the sake of this discussion, it should be mentioned that, as is often the case in social science, contrasting definitions can be offered with their own operationally significant nuances. For instance: “Social norms are customary or ideal forms of behavior to which individuals in a group try to conform.”³¹ This definition has two concepts, “ideal” and “try to” that gives the definition a different shade of meaning. Accordingly, social norm can be defined as ideal behavior as compared to actual behavior. Some writers deal with this discrepancy in terms of “real culture” versus “ideal culture.” Others focus on values and beliefs and the degree to which they are followed in a particular context or point in time. I see these contrasting definitions as interrelated.

For example, a Yanomamo Indian social norm calls for a fierce, very macho demeanor and comportment among men. The title of Napoleon Chagnon’s well-known ethnography on the tribe is *Yanomamo: The Fierce People*. The word *waiteri* (fierceness) is often heard in their conversations. However, some Yanomamo men are not fierce at all; there is a huge discrepancy between what they say and what they actually do. I met one who was decidedly effete. Likewise, in Pashtun society the *badal* norm of the *pashtunwali* requires revenge for being dishonored, or for suffering a physical or verbal attack. In reality, there are Pashtun men who are reluctant to get into a feuding mode, especially in today’s war-weary environment. They would rather finesse the issue than take a path inexorably leading to reciprocal violence. The norm calls for every dishonored man to seek revenge without thinking about it. The reality is that they do think about it and sometimes choose not to seek revenge and instead apply one of several face-saving measures also contained in the *pashtunwali*. In various Muslim countries, polygamy is the avowed norm, enshrined in religious doctrine, but, because of the economic costs of maintaining multiple wives, and other factors, most marriages are monogamous. Many other examples can be cited.

In each of the examples given above, it should be stressed that social norms do shape behavior; otherwise they would not be norms. There are fierce Yanomamo, vengeful Pashtuns

³¹ See <http://65.54.113.26/Publication/14153709/social-norms>

and polygamous Muslims. However, whether or not the norm is fulfilled often is an individual decision depending on the context and changing sets of factors that vary from case to case, and over time. A major thrust of modern anthropology emphasizes how an individual defines himself as part of a particular culture or group, and how he decides to conform to its norms, or not. This is a major departure from the old view in which all members of a tribe or group were seen collectively as thinking and acting in the same manner. This interplay between the ideal and the real is similar to the observed discrepancies between attitude and behavior. I consider it part of the same, multi-faceted intellectual process, but the authors of the critique evidently do not. In their view it is a good idea to manipulate social norms, but it is futile to manipulate attitudes, positing an arbitrary dichotomy between the two.

In conclusion, I believe that the critique raises worthwhile concerns that should be considered thoroughly. I agree that IO and PSYOP should pay more attention to the behavior of target audiences and that behavioral criteria needs to be an integral part of campaign planning and the evaluation of its effectiveness. This is not a new concept, it has been explored previously in RAND studies, but nonetheless it is useful to reiterate. I also believe that it is counterproductive to impose an artificial barrier between attitude and behavior. Understanding local attitudes is essential and influencing them should not be dropped from consideration in PSYOP campaign planning. As recommended in *U.S. Military Information Operations*, reviews and research currently are under way designed to improve the formulation and implementation of measures of effectiveness. I would assume that these efforts are looking at behavioral factors. If nothing else, behavior is much easier to measure than attitude. It may well be that U.S. military IO and PSYOP already are moving in the behavioralist direction espoused by the critique.