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# The Eagle 2012



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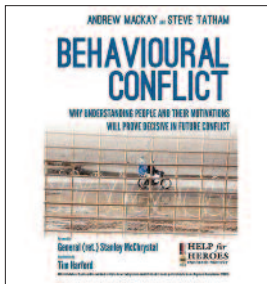


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Andrew MacKay and Steve Tatham (2003),  
*Behavioural Conflict: Why understanding people  
and their motivations will prove decisive in future  
conflicts* (Military Studies Press, 2011).

Pp. 203 ISBN: 978-1780394695

**Reviewer: Professor Robert Hinde is a former Master of St John's whose research interests include the application of biological and psychological data to understanding the bases of religion and ethics. He is also Chair of British Pugwash – the UK arm of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, an international network of scientists and others concerned about the social impact of science, with particular emphasis on abolishing weapons of mass destruction and war.**



This book addresses the questions of how to influence both the home population and the enemy in times of conflict. Aimed primarily at service personnel and politicians, it can be read by a much wider audience as an elementary introduction to the science of communication. It includes a chapter on 'The science of influence' by Lee Rowland.

Analysing the nature of conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq and Afghanistan, largely on the basis of personal experience, the authors describe the use (or misuse) of communication. Messages and policies crafted in Whitehall often proved irrelevant on the ground.

Communication is never simple. The message sent by the sender (S) may have a different meaning to the recipient (R) to that intended by S. Attempts by US soldiers to stop Iraqi youths throwing stones at them by distributing leaflets demanding that the children should stop did not work because the children interpreted the message as indicative of their own success. The success of a message depends not only on accurate transmission but also on what R expects, desires and does, and may be influenced by a larger communication system in which S and R are embedded.

As economists are slowly realising, people are not simple rational actors, seeking to maximise their gains. In interpreting a message we often use shortcuts and

rules of thumb that are effective for much, but not all, of the time. And we prefer a dividend now to a larger dividend later. Thus the prospect of the Kajaki dam in Helmand that would produce electricity in several years time was almost meaningless to the Afghans who would profit. They were already caught up in the problem of staying alive and accustomed to armies that came and went, and to promises seldom kept.

Again, it is essential for a sender to frame the possibilities correctly; the prospect of democracy to Afghans requires a great deal of explanation and framing to people who have never known democracy and to whom the question of who to vote for seems remote from real life.

Of major importance are the narratives current in the cultures of S and R. The world we live in is already a world of stories that are part of our culture, or are put out in propaganda by government or advertising agencies to change our behaviour. In Islamic communities, the narratives may go back to the Crusades and indicate that the West is at war with them. The importance of the ways in which both S and R are contextualised by the other is illustrated by the way in which the West, proclaiming its own values of justice and democracy, recognises a number of dubiously democratic regimes in the Middle East, yet fails to recognise democratically elected Hamas. How can the West be seen as anything other than hypocritical?

MacKay and Tatham recommend, as one way out of such difficulties, the use of Target Audience Analysis. This involves finding out what matters to R before communication is attempted. Do the Afghans really want democracy? Are tribal loyalties predominant or do they see themselves as a nation? Do they mind foreign boots on their soil? If S's message seems to be of little relevance to R, can it be made relevant by linking it to something of importance to R? The authors give the hypothetical example of a CEO trying to double his firm's output of mushy peas. High-pressure advertising of mushy peas is unlikely to be successful, but advertising fish and chips, with which mushy peas are traditionally associated, might be. The authors hope that 'influence science' will augment and even substitute for firepower and technology in future conflict situations.

It is of some interest that Target Audience Analysis, which they recommend for future use by the military, has been used for some years by the Pugwash organisation to convince the British public of the immoral nature, ineffectiveness and wastefulness of nuclear weapons: the money spent could more usefully be used for social purposes. It is nice to find that those who seek for peace not only share views about techniques with these two senior officers, but also share a goal – 'Preventing conflict is infinitely more desirable than engaging in it' (p. 136).





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