

Empire Maintenance in the Information Age: Influence of Mediaverse on Strategy

by

Lieutenant Colonel Christopher S. Lohr
United States Air Force



United States Army War College
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Lieutenant Colonel Christopher S. Lohr
United States Air Force

Dr. J. Sherwood McGinnis
Department of National Security and Strategy
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Abstract

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The proliferation of mobile Internet technology grants the average global citizen immediate access to information and the ability to posit opinions, i.e. influence, at near-real-time speed. The amalgam of 24/7 news networks, mass media, the Internet, and social media (the mediaverse), coupled with mobile technology, influences strategy in three ways. First, it is a national security challenge and opportunity. Second, it influences the character of war. Third, it is forcing an evolution of the strategic environment. The successful strategic leader must be not just aware but au courant on the challenges and opportunities presented by the mediaverse. Improved processes, tools, and education are required to adapt to mediaverse influencers. The most significant systemic improvement is the addition of a robust strategic feedback loop in the strategy formulation model. This can be accomplished by better integrating information operators into campaign planning and mission execution to surveil the mediaverse to assess content and on-going events to provide a robust assessment of the information environment. Formal developmental education should expand current media training to include skillful reconnaissance of, and engagement in, the mediaverse.

Empire Maintenance in the Information Age: Influence of Mediaverse on Strategy

Wilkes College, Wilkes-Barre Pennsylvania, January 17, 1991. Three students returned from break a little early; they were the only ones in the campus dorms. On this night, the drinking games and laundry were put aside because they were glued to the television. They were watching the opening waves of OPERATION DESERT STORM play out live on CNN.

DESERT STORM was fought with unprecedented news coverage. This coverage was different than in previous wars. The message was not shaped by the United States government as it was in World War II, and reporters did not have to make their own way to the aftermath of a battle as they did in Vietnam. In DESERT STORM, reporters were embedded with the soldiers and the news cycle was 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was CNN's coming out party, the greatest media event in history!¹ Reporters had access *and* mobility, and the Department of Defense held daily press briefings. The Pentagon carefully chose its spokesman, Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly, because he had experience with the media from the invasion of Panama and was blunt, humorous and down to earth. CNN presented images of the well-polished general verbally jousting with inquisitive reporters. These briefs were so popular and successful that they were parodied on Saturday Night Live.

Fast-forward 20 years to Sunday, May 1, 2011. A family in Waco Texas is watching the Philadelphia Phillies play the New York Mets at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia. The game is aired live on ESPN and this military family is tuned in because these teams represent a household rivalry. The game is tied at 1 in the top of the ninth inning when cheers of "U-S-A. U-S-A. U-S-A." break out across the stadium. As the cameras scan the crowd, America sees fans on their phones, while others are

waving flags. Back in Waco, one of the family members opens the Facebook app on her iPhone and discovers why the fans are cheering. On the field in Philadelphia, the Phillies huddle on the mound, not understanding, not knowing what the fans do, that Osama bin Laden is dead.



Figure 1 – A Phillies fans learns of Osama bin Laden’s death²

From CNN to social media, the world is getting smaller and more connected. “Social networking didn’t start a revolution [that] Sunday night in Philadelphia. But it did bring an entire stadium of people – and the nation – together in one single unifying moment.”³

Empire Maintenance and the Information Age

Does the media carry influence in the strategic environment? Since OPERATION DESERT STORM in 1991, 24/7 news networks exploded in number;

social media, enabled by cell phone technology, put information and the power to influence in almost everyone's hands. This research project initially addresses the "CNN Effect" because it provides a chronological, as well as anecdotal, starting point. However, the intent is to focus more on the influence of the Internet and social media rather than cable news networks. The term *mediaverse* is coined to allow the intellectual freedom of movement to maneuver within the realm of the television news networks, mass media, the Internet, and social media without bogging down in the details of the specific transfer medium. Particular attention to and recognition of the specific source or type of media is used as required to provide clarity or context.

This research project seeks to examine the influence of the mediaverse on strategy. The grand strategy of the United States from 1980 to the present, a period during which the United States emerged as the sole global superpower, is used to set the strategic context. The term *Empire Maintenance* is used to capture this strategy. Specifically this paper looks at the mediaverse 1) as both a national security challenge and an opportunity for the United States in the 21st Century; 2) and its role in the theory of war and strategy; and 3) as a critical element, enabler, and process that defines the strategic environment in peace, conflict, and war.

Empire Maintenance

Grand strategy is the sectional chart national leaders use to navigate the turbulent airspace of the complex global environment; it defines our collective national purpose. It is based on national values and mores, and it is the determinant on how the nation will employ the instruments of power to preserve national existence and way of life. Grand strategy drives national policy and international engagement.

The concept of *empire maintenance* provides a contextual framework for United States grand strategy since 1980. The term, admittedly somewhat cynical in nature, is used intentionally to express the view that the preponderance of conflict for the United States in the late and post-cold war era consisted of wars of choice. The notable exception was the United States invasion of Afghanistan that began as a retaliatory military action for the attacks of 9/11.

Empire maintenance falls into the primacy framework of grand strategy. Just like primacy, it is characterized as an “active and assertive posture that reflects the offensive realists worldview of an international system characterized by ongoing power struggles.”⁴ Primacy requires significant forward presence across the globe, and the ability and willingness to use force in the pursuit of national interests. Thucydides expressed this sentiment when he wrote, “Right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.”⁵ For the United States, empire maintenance legitimizes challenging and checking potential political, military, or economic rivals and keeping plausible near-peer competitors from stifling American influence and dominance; a clear tendency of primacy.⁶ This concept supports the thinking that use of force is a legitimate option to secure national interests, even in the absence of a direct threat. In other words, empire maintenance, just like primacy, may necessitate preventative war.⁷

The CNN Effect

In 1980, 52 American hostages remained captive in Iran. At home, *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* and Blondie’s *Call Me* topped the movie and music charts, the Philadelphia Phillies won the World Series, the number one threat to the United States was global thermonuclear war with the Soviet Union, and the Internet did not yet exist.⁸

CNN first raced across the airwaves in this year as well. Its constant news cycle let people get the news when they wanted it.⁹ In sharp contrast to the major networks that only carried regimented morning, evening and late-night news, CNN brought current events programming to the consumer 24 hours a day. In those days it was, “a runty communications organization, with big ambitions and a small audience.”¹⁰ Today, CNN’s staff of over 4000 people brings continuous news programming on multiple channels and the Internet in numerous languages across the United States and around the world.¹¹

To the extent possible during the 1980s, CNN reporters covered America’s small wars in Panama, Grenada, Libya, Lebanon, and elsewhere, along with their network colleagues. The difference between the two was that, because of its 24-hour news cycle, CNN was getting the story first, and repeating and updating it much more often. It was not long before CNN became a household name. As the channel’s coverage and reach extended, so did its influence. The *CNN Effect* was born from this success and the associated success of other fledgling 24/7 news companies in the 1990s. This phenomenon extended the supposition that global, real-time media outlets like CNN have the ability to affect foreign policy and national response to crises.¹² Today the CNN Effect is subsumed by a broader *Internet effect* that challenges traditional thought about the relationships among media, foreign policy, and public opinion.

CNN founder Ted Turner said, “My main concern is to be a benefit to the world, to build up a global communications system that helps humanity come together.”¹³ His vision came true in ways he could not possibly have imagined. His idea of 24/7 news television spawned innumerable other news channels broadcasting from countries

across the globe in almost every language. These channels didn't just bring world news to America; they brought American news to the world, and along with it, various interpretations of America's activities abroad.

By the early days of the 21st century, the Internet connected homes worldwide. Shortly thereafter, cellular technology and smartphones introduced the Internet to countless mobile consumers across the globe. The 24/7 news cycle was taken to the next level by Web-based news content, which provide a nearly infinite variety of news products available at all times. The Internet allows more people to become part of the "culture of information."¹⁴

Welcome to the Mediaverse

The plethora of 24/7 cable news networks have the power to inform, the Internet adds access and the power to inspire, and social media adds the power to enliven; collectively, the mediaverse has the power to move people both emotionally and to action. "As robust as the expansion of satellite television has been, it is nothing when compared to the growth of Internet-based media."¹⁵ The Internet enables access to virtually limitless content, news, and ideas; it facilitates communication with individuals or the masses, next door or across the globe.¹⁶ Add the mobility associated with cellular technology and smartphones and people now have instant access to information, ideas, and a means to communicate and rally. Thus, the mediaverse, the amalgamation of television news networks, mass media, the Internet, and social media, is a powerful influencer, limited only by the imagination and the will of those operating within it. A brief examination of each element is worthwhile to reinforce the concept of the mediaverse.

From CNN's launch in 1980, to the multitude of news channels across the globe today, 24/7 news channels are here to stay. A cursory review of the local television channel lineup reveals no less than 20 24/7 news channels available in high-definition, multiple languages, and tailored to the consumer's interests, be it, breaking news, business news, political news, sports news, or weather news.¹⁷ As information becomes more available, consumers become increasingly astute and aware of the global environment. 24/7 news channels bring entertainment, sports, politics, or military actions, relentlessly to American households everyday.

Just as 24/7 news channels deliver news when people want it, the Internet delivers *everything* when people want it. This is a paramount feature in the "instant gratification" society of the United States today. The information resources of the world are available to anyone with access to the Internet, and almost everyone has access.

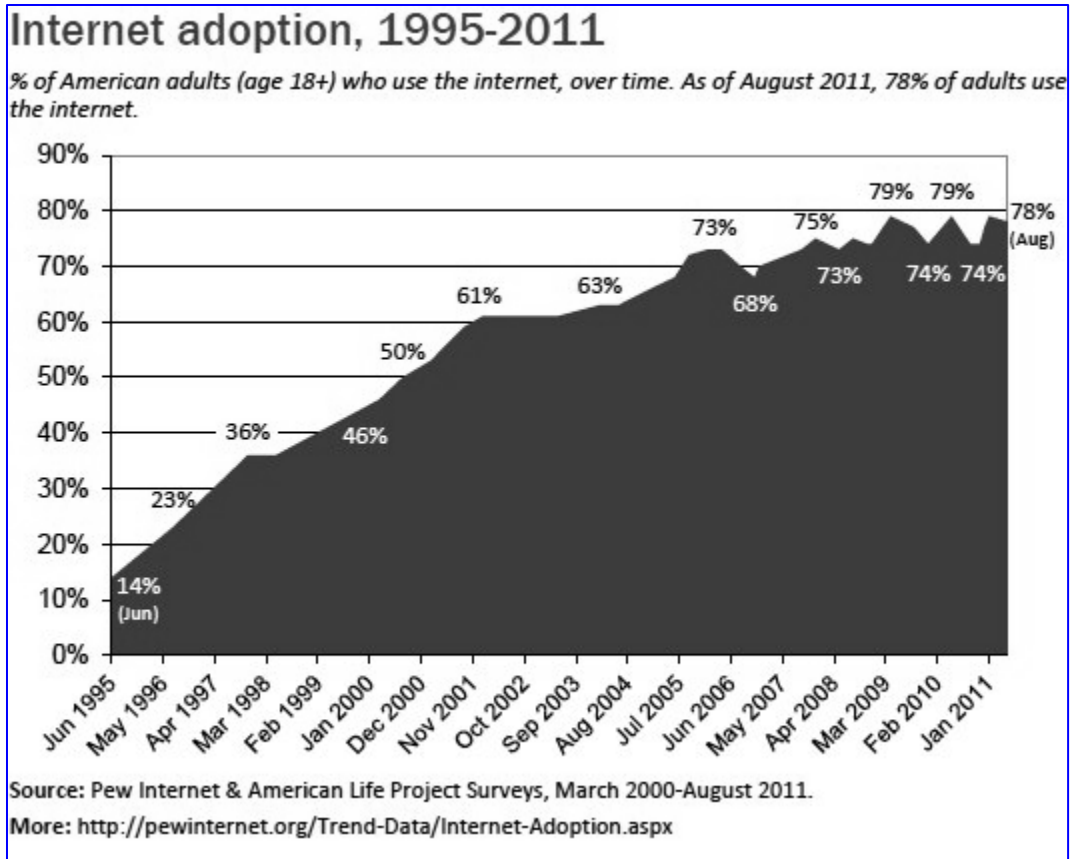


Figure 2 – US Internet Adoption, 1995-2011¹⁸

“The Internet is for many the 21st century's newspaper. Arguably, the greatest change brought about by the Internet is a vast increase in the circulation of messages and meanings that make up agendas for the media, the public and government.”¹⁹ The Internet affords individuals access to information previously unavailable to them. It offers ways to communicate via email, chat, videoconference, etc., and it provides a forum for on-line collaboration, commerce, and opens the doorway to social media.

The consumer is not the only one leveraging the Internet. Those 24/7 news channels beaming into American homes have expanded their presence to include digital news websites, thereby easing access to ideas and information. Virtually every major news organization is moving towards interactive news because new communications

technology and the Internet accelerate the flow and global accessibility of news.²⁰

Today the Internet experience is made more personal by enabling mobile technology that allows users to bring the Internet with them. Cellphones, smartphones, e-readers, and tablets are commonplace among adult Americans.

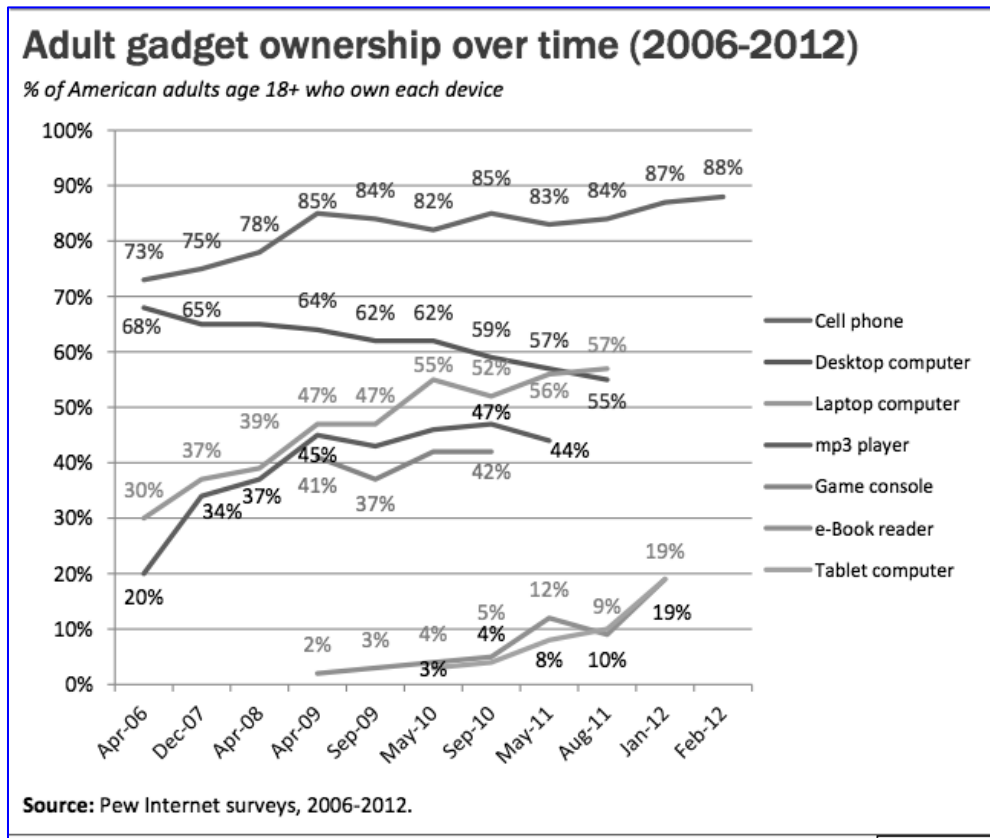


Figure 3 – US Adult Gadget Ownership²¹

Social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Tumblr are connecting people with loved ones abroad and exposing them to content beyond their individual sphere of influence. Social media is an attractive petri dish for ideas because the concepts of speed and transparency are intertwined.²² Of interest is a look at what social media sites are most used by Americans:

Table 1 – US Social Media Users by Site²³

| Who Uses Social Media | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|
| % of Internet users within each group who use the specific social media source identified un each column | | | | | | |
| | Facebook | LinkedIn | Twitter | Instagram | Pinterest | Tumblr |
| All Internet Users (n=799) | 66% | 20% | 16% | 12% | 12% | 5% |
| Men (n=393) | 63 | 21 | 17 | 11 | 5 | 4 |
| Woman (n=406) | 70 | 19 | 15 | 12 | 19 | 7 |
| Age | | | | | | |
| 18-29 (n=140) | 83 | 16 | 27 | 27 | 16 | 11 |
| 30-49 (n=224) | 72 | 25 | 15 | 8 | 12 | 4 |
| 50-64 (n=229) | 56 | 22 | 12 | 6 | 13 | 2 |
| 65+ (n=182) | 40 | 11 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 1 |
| Annual Household Income | | | | | | |
| Less than \$30,000/yr (n=195) | 73 | 7 | 15 | 8 | 11 | 6 |
| \$30,000 - \$49,999 (n=156) | 75 | 20 | 14 | 14 | 8 | 6 |
| \$50,000 - \$74,999 (n=128) | 68 | 24 | 15 | 9 | 16 | 2 |
| \$75,000+ (n=218) | 57 | 34 | 19 | 16 | 12 | 3 |
| Education Level | | | | | | |
| High school grad or less (n=238) | 73 | 7 | 12 | 8 | 8 | 3 |
| Some college (n=230) | 63 | 17 | 21 | 15 | 15 | 7 |
| College + (N=329) | 64 | 36 | 16 | 12 | 14 | 5 |
| Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, Omnibus Survey, Aug. 2-5, 2012. N=1,005 adults ages 18 and older, including 405 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. The survey was conducted in English. Margin of error is +/-3.8 percentage points for internet users (n=799). | | | | | | |

Clearly, the domestic audience is active and engaged in the mediaverse, and Americans are increasingly liberated from the Internet access points in their homes and offices by the availability of ever improving cellular, smartphone and tablet technologies. The American public is taking advantage of mobile access to Internet news and social media connections and associated content.

Table 2 – US Social Networking via Mobile Phone²⁴

| Social Networking on Mobile Phones | |
|---|------------|
| <i>% of cell phone owners who use a social networking site on their phone</i> | |
| All cell phone owners (n=1,954) | 40% |
| Men (n=895) | 39 |
| Women (n=1,059) | 41 |
| Age | |
| 18-29 (n=340) | 67*** |
| 30-49 (n=562) | 50** |
| 50-64 (n=587) | 18* |
| 65+ (n=429) | 5 |
| Race/ethnicity | |
| White, Non-Hispanic (n=1,404) | 36 |
| Black, Non-Hispanic (n=234) | 48* |
| Hispanic (n=180) | 49* |
| Annual household income | |
| Less than \$30,000/yr (n=447) | 38 |
| \$30,000-\$49,999 (n=316) | 40 |
| \$50,000-\$74,999 (n=272) | 48* |
| \$75,000+ (n=538) | 45* |
| Education level | |
| No high school diploma (n=156) | 33 |
| High school grad (n=542) | 37 |
| Some College (n=490) | 42* |
| College + (n=752) | 43** |

Source: Pew Internet Spring Tracking Survey, March 15 – April 3, 2012. N=2,254 adults ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. Margin of error is +/- 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone owners.
* Statistically significant difference compared with others in the same grouping

The fascination with social media is not simply a US phenomenon; social networks are connecting people of all ages across the globe. The world is embracing the mediaverse in general, and social media in particular. The tools of the Information Age are changing every aspect of life on our planet, especially how people establish and maintain contact and share knowledge.²⁵ The by-product of information sharing is influence, and in this sense, the strategic ramifications of the networked, instant-access

world are only marginally understood. To paraphrase Larson and Livingston the media can affect strategy in different ways: 1) as a policy-agenda-setting agent; (2) as an impediment to the achievement of desired strategic goals; and (3) as an accelerant to strategic decision-making.²⁶

Information Operations (IO)

This research project is about the speed, agility, and pervasiveness of social media and the mediaverse; it is not about “Strategic Communications” writ large. For the military, the specific utility of this realm falls under *Information Operations*. Joint Publication 3-13 (JP 3-13) defines Information Operations as,

The integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.²⁷

JP 3-13 aims to lay a foundation for the employment of the national instruments of power in the information environment. The document defines this environment as, “the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information.”²⁸ JP 3-13 is notable for two important reasons: 1) the fact that there is a joint publication defining information operations and its role in the battlespace signifies an awareness of the importance of the mediaverse as a domain; and 2) JP 3-13 prescribes a framework to include inform and influence activities in the Joint Operational Planning Process and the strategy formulation process.

Strategy Formulation

Strategy evolves from policy. The civilian leaders of the United States lay the foundations for strategy development through various formal and informal means. Formal mechanisms include things such as the National Security Strategy and the

National Defense Strategy; informal foundations are often derived from presidential speeches such as the State of the Union Address. These sources bound the problem for strategists by providing definition and policy objectives. The nation's military leaders then develop subordinate guidance and objectives to be used for planning. The National Military Strategy, signed out by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is one such example. Military planners use this direction to develop theater strategies and, further down the chain, operational plans. While the particulars of the military planning process are beyond the scope of this paper, it is useful to understand the top-down nature of how strategy is crafted and translated to military objectives.

Before analysis of the influence of the mediaverse on strategy, it is necessary to set a contextual framework for discussion by first defining what is meant by *strategy*. Robert Dorff defined strategy as the relationship among ends, ways, and means.²⁹

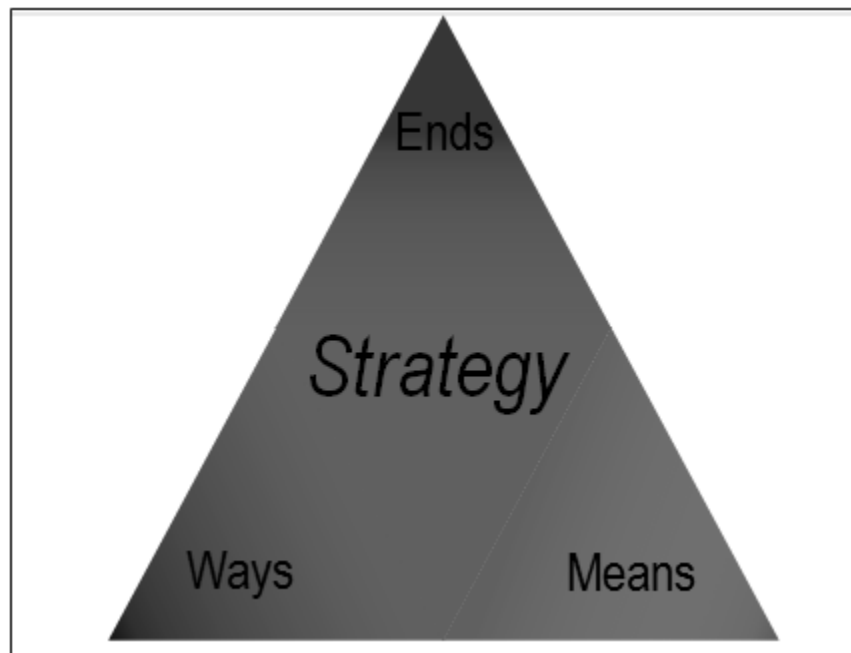


Figure 4 – Strategy is a function of Ends, Ways, and Means

Because strategy is a function of ends, ways, and means, it is important to have an accurate understanding of the terminology. Arthur Lykke developed the strategic components definitions below:

Table 3 - Strategic Components Defined³⁰

| Strategy = Ends + Ways + Means. | |
|--|---|
| <i>Component</i> | <i>Definition</i> |
| Ends | Objectives towards which one strives |
| Ways | Course of action |
| Means | Instruments by which some end can be achieved |

The starting point for any strategy is the desired end-state. When crafting strategy, one assesses the environment, and then determines what that environment should look like in the future. This future state is known as the **ends**. This is typically the easiest portion to develop because it is quite often communicated in the documents highlighted above. In short, the ends define where you want to go, but not how to get there.

Knowing where to go is a good start, but it is necessary to determine how to get there. The **ways** describe the strategic approach to achieving the end-state, which is how resources will be applied to achieve the conditions desired.³¹

After determining where to go, and how to get there, it is still necessary to determine what tools or resources will be used to get there, these are known as the **means**. Means can be tangible, such as forces, equipment or money, or intangible such as the “will of the people.”³² The familiar national instruments of power, Diplomacy, Information, Military, Economics, or DIME, are the starting points in an assessment of available means.

The strategy formulation model in Figure 5 is a useful tool to help visualize these concepts. The model starts with national purpose and interests that are communicated through the strategy documents or presidential words and actions previously referenced. The interaction between ends, ways, and means is shown within the context of Strategy Formulation Process.

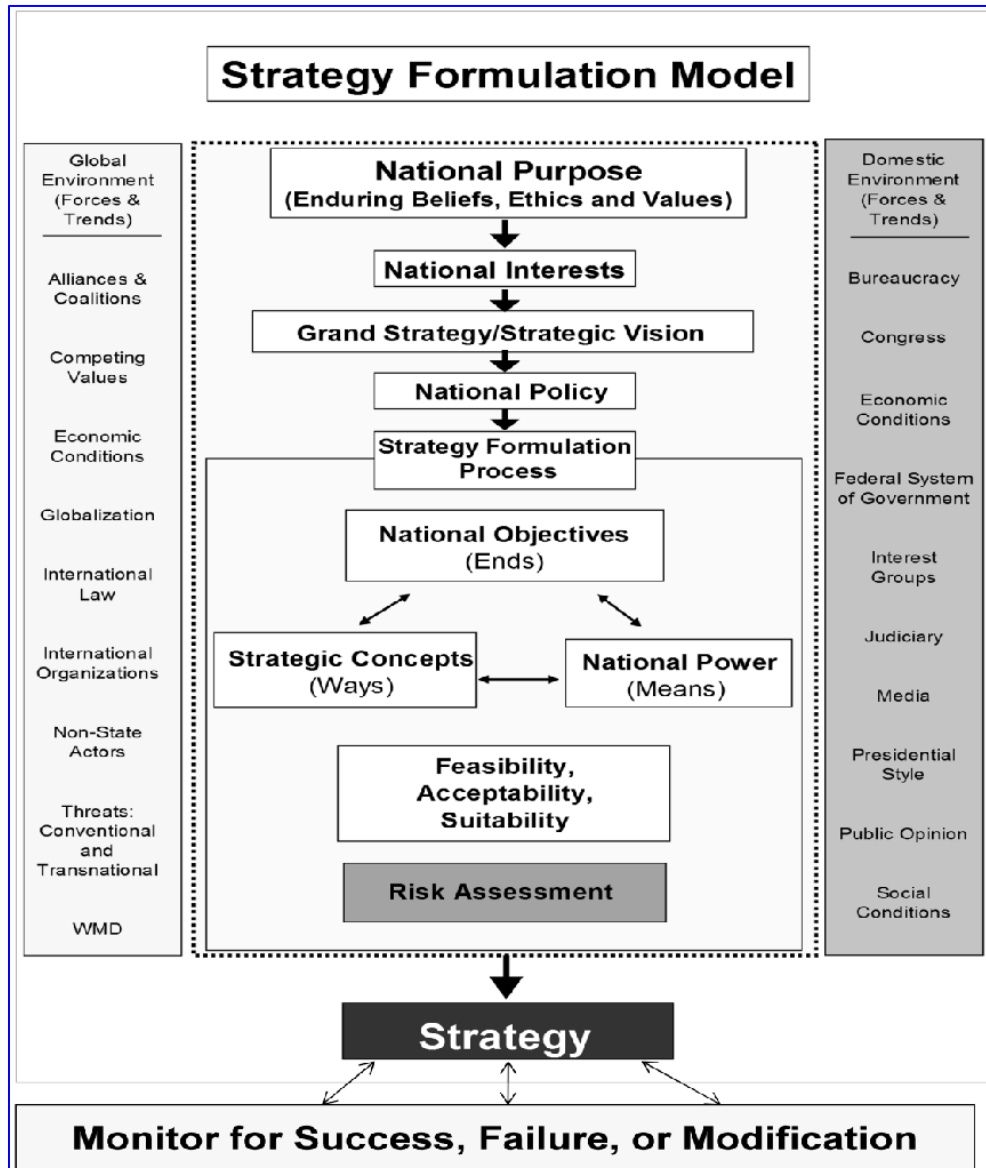


Figure 5 - Strategy Formulation Model³³

Of particular interest is the “National Power” block, or the means. As detailed above, instruments of power, or DIME, are assessed here. In general, the mediaverse falls under the informational element of power, but it can be used as a military asset as part of information operations. In either realm, it can be used as a tool (opportunity) for the United States. Unfortunately, it is likewise a threat or challenge to the United States if the enemy leverages the mediaverse and forces a reactive rather than proactive stance. This, unfortunately, is the position in which the United States quite often finds itself. In this context, the mediaverse can also fit as an element on the bottom block, “Monitor for Success, Failure, or Modification.” The ambiguity and complexity of the mediaverse is changing the character of war and strategy (to some extent) and is therefore redefining the strategic environment.

Empire Maintenance in the Information Age

The United States faces increasing challenges as it maneuvers to secure its interests across the globe. Some of these challenges are physical, such as advances in weaponry of near-peer competitors. Some of these challenges are indirect, including a decline in United States prestige and economy over the first decade of the 21st century. Other challenges result from progress in communications technology. One example of this is the mediaverse and the tension it can cause between the government and those it governs, and between competing actors on the global stage. With respect to national security, the mediaverse introduces complexity to three specific areas: 1) it is both a national security challenge and opportunity; 2) it influences the character of war; and 3) it is forcing an evolution of the strategic environment.

The Mediaverse as a National Security Challenge and Opportunity

The sheer speed and transparency of information flow is a key factor in its ability to influence actions and perceptions.³⁴ The mediaverse is a challenge and sometimes a liability because it may force a strategic hand or expedite the decision-making timeline resulting in adoption of a reactive posture. This reactive stance presents a challenge that must be recognized and transformed into opportunity. The mediaverse presents national security opportunities because it acts as a force enabler by allowing immediate messaging, and by association, influence or coercion, if executed correctly in a timely fashion.

A cursory review of key United States military operations since 1980 reveals a powerful United States political and military machine being matched and sometimes bested by emerging media outlets. Coming off the painful lessons of the Vietnam War and the media-fueled lack of popular support, President Jimmy Carter found himself between a rock and a hard place when Iranian students stormed the United States Embassy in Teheran, capturing and holding 52 Americans hostage. The sharp contrast between this crisis and the decade of fighting in Vietnam was that the people of the United States understood the situation and did not like it. Print and television media kept the story at the forefront, rightfully so, but in doing so, they applied unrelenting pressure on President Carter to attempt OPERATION EAGLE CLAW, the ill-fated military rescue attempt executed in late April of 1980.³⁵ This vignette, the first empire maintenance military action of the information age, laid the foundation for limited media access to the military for the remainder of the decade.

As a result of the pressure put on President Carter, and the dramatic operational failure in the Iranian desert, the media was in essence kept out of covering military

operations in Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989. However, a few enduring images such as the American medical student from Grenada kissing U.S. soil after landing at Andrews Air Force Base; and Manuel Noriega holed up in the Vatican Embassy in Panama, helped convince senior military leaders that media access was a crucial part of strategic planning.³⁶ However, the fusion of strategic planning and media access is not without both benefit and risk.

The United States government was the recipient of beneficial media exposure during OPERATION RESTORE DEMOCRACY in 1994. As the military prepared to launch a joint invasion of Haiti to restore exiled President Aristide, the diplomatic and informational instruments of national power were hard at work. Former President Jimmy Carter led a behind the scenes negotiation team that included retired general and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, and Senator Sam Nunn, to persuade Gen Raoul Cedras to cede his illegal control of the country, which he ultimately did. United States Army Lieutenant Colonel Margret H. Belknap writes, "Senator Nunn has often stated that live reports of American paratroopers lifting off from Fort Bragg enroute to invade Haiti directly led to General Cedras' decision to step down."³⁷

In sharp contrast, the United States' strike on Libya in 1986, OPERATION EL DORADO CANYON, is a case where media coverage exacerbated military planning. This retaliatory airstrike against the regime of Muammar Qaddafi was the culmination of mounting tension after Libyan attacks on United States aircraft and personnel and the determination that Libya was behind terrorist attacks in West Berlin and on TWA flight 840.³⁸ As tension increased, media coverage, apparently fueled by high-level leaks in

the White House, negated any hope of achieving the element of surprise.³⁹ The intensity of the coverage drove allies away and nullified existing operational plans. Both operations offer clear examples of media acting as a force multiplier or liability in executing, strategy but not every military/mediaverse scenario is so unequivocally clear.

The United States' efforts in OPERATION DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM in 1990 and 1991 are striking examples of the strategically positive and negative influence carried by the media. The United States mission to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein "was the most widely and most swiftly reported war in history."⁴⁰ Indeed, it is estimated that 600 million people across the globe watched the war on television as it played out.⁴¹ Media coverage at home led to overwhelming public support for military operations and much of the beddown and human drama of the path to war was broadcast on television and in print media. Americans understood and supported why they were going to war. When operations shifted from deployment to employment, the world watched live on CNN. In sharp contrast to the events in Grenada and Panama, the media was granted access across the range of operations from briefing rooms to foxholes. The military/media collaboration peaked with news footage of the "Highway of Death." Unfortunately, the images of Iraqi forces in retreat being picked off by U.S. Air Force A-10s left an unpalatable taste in the mouths of many Americans. Ultimately the United States left Iraq having completed its basic objectives, but without marching on to Baghdad. On this specific issue, Gen Colin Powell attributes the decision not to take Baghdad as being a result of the Highway of Death footage on CNN.⁴² Thus, the CNN effect on strategy was born.

The Mediaverse and the Character of War

“All wars consist of features that are unchangeable or constant, regardless of the era in which they are fought and those that are transitory or specific to a certain era. The first category makes up the war’s “nature,” while the second comprises its “character”.⁴³ The nature of war is characterized by those intangible universal constants that have puzzled man throughout the ages: psychological factors, irrationality, violence, hatred, uncertainty, friction, fear, danger, chance and luck.⁴⁴ It is here that the enduring lessons of Clausewitz, Thucydides, and Sun Tzu reign supreme. In contrast, the character of war is evolving, shaped by contemporary forces such as technology (e.g. drones), methodology (e.g. “Shock and Awe”), and other cultural influences (e.g. religion, economy, politics). Understanding the difference between the nature and character of war allows the intellectual maturity to analyze the influence of new or emerging information technologies (read mediaverse) on modern theories of war.

While the fundamental nature of war hasn't changed and won't change, the character of war is always changing.⁴⁵ United States Army Colonel Thomas D. Mayfield III described three areas of social media that affect or change the strategic environment: 1) speed/transparency with which information is passed; 2) ability to shape social dialogue because it bypasses traditional media; 3) and ability to organize without organizations.⁴⁶ While all three of these are valid, the first two in particular describe how the mediaverse can change the conduct and character of war.

On the night of March 27, 1999, an American F-117A Nighthawk stealth fighter was shot down over Kosovo. The Serbian military was quick to exploit the speed and transparency of the mediaverse by broadcasting images of the burning wreckage for

several hours before the Pentagon confirmed the shutdown.⁴⁷ Initial facts surrounding the incident were clouded by Serbian misinformation about the engagement and the fate of the crew. The Serbs claimed two aircrew were captured, and other initial reports incorrectly identified the pilot, who was rescued within hours, because the name on the aircraft canopy in the video footage was different than the name of the pilot flying the aircraft at the time. Despite the confusion, intentional or otherwise, there was no denying the fact that the United States had lost one of its top-secret jets. The distinctive design of the F-117 was easy to see in the photos and video of the wreckage propagated by the Serbians. The shutdown itself was a significant tactical coup for the Serbians but their immediate propagandizing of the engagement was a more significant strategic event. This use of the media illustrated a perceived chink in the technologically advanced armor of the Air Force and it put the United States in a reactionary mode in the press.

The F-117 shutdown offers a strong example of the ability of mass media to get in front of the political narrative. Since that event in 1999, the mediaverse, by virtue of the Internet and cellular technology, has expanded to influence more people, quicker than ever before. If television news channels radically altered the way war is presented, the Internet opened Pandora's box. As the proliferation of the Internet usurped the influence of television, the global political and social environment expanded and grew more interconnected.⁴⁸ Social media in particular allows the bypassing of traditional media to help shape a perception.⁴⁹ This was evident on the part of both Hamas and the Israeli Defense Force in October of 2012.

The mediaverse became a battleground when Israel and Hamas faced off on Twitter and YouTube in the world's first social media war.⁵⁰ Israel announced the start of OPERATION PILLAR OF DEFENSE via Twitter. As the conflict escalated, both sides waged war in Gaza and the mediaverse by posting videos, pictures, propaganda, and Twitter taunts in an effort to reach and influence the masses directly. The ethical merits of this type of cyber war are debated but it is clear that both combatants viewed social media as an opportunity to be exploited. The mediaverse has always been part of the operating environment but the 2012 Israel/Hamas fight differs from previous conflicts because the it was the first time the world saw “the institutions heading over to the medium of the witnesses and participants.”⁵¹



Figure 6 – IDF Spokesman Announces OPERATION PILLAR OF DEFENSE⁵²

Similarly, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM presented a phenomenal spectrum of warfighting technology with the United States on one end and the Taliban and al Qaeda on the other. Indeed, as disparate as their weapon systems were, so was the recognition by al Qaeda of the mediaverse as a weapon of influence compared to the United States. When U.S. forces attacked in late 2001, a Pakistani journalist on the scene wrote that while retreating from attack, "every second al Qaeda member was carrying a laptop computer along with his Kalashnikov."⁵³ In contrast to the Israeli Defense Force's, and al Qaeda's contemporary active engagement in the mediaverse, the United States is wary and unsteady in its relationship with all forms of media.

The Mediaverse and the Strategic Environment

Just as the character of war is changing, the mediaverse is forcing an evolution of the strategic environment. James Jay Carafano captured this in his book, *Wiki at War*, when he wrote,

War in the real world is not limited to battlefields. All conflicts cross every aspect of human activity. Studying real war means looking at the economic, cultural, legal, social, and military dimensions of competition. It means delving into how social networks and conflict play out on the broad vista of human affairs from the foxhole to the home front.⁵⁴

Social media and the Internet make it easy, cheap, and safe to initiate contact with a large number of people.⁵⁵ As a result, the transforming strategic environment is more challenging than ever in three particular ways: 1) the mediaverse enables immediate public visibility/exposure; 2) the mediaverse offers anonymity and therefore questionable credibility; and 3) the mediaverse facilitates mass collaboration and the impetus to rally.

The mediaverse enables immediate public awareness and scrutiny of strategic decisions and military operations as they unfold.⁵⁶ There is no respite in today's

operational environment and the strategic leader must therefore be fully engaged at all times. Strategic leaders and warfighters must learn to make real-time decisions within the context of a complex dynamic environment that can be immediately visible to virtually anyone.⁵⁷ This environment invites not just public exposure but it may even compel intervention at the highest levels of government.

Lieutenant Colonel Belknap aptly characterized the phenomena and response of tactical actions having strategic consequences.

The strategic leader and operational commander must consider the impact that information availability has on command and control...a valid concern is that the National Command Authority (NCA), as a result of the CNN effect, will have the capability and desire to micromanage the war. In a CNN War where the NCA is held accountable for tactical actions by a public media in real time, the NCA may feel compelled to become more involved as the situation develops.⁵⁸

The mediaverse not only complicates executing strategy, it offers anonymity that can seed questions of credibility. Information and ideas gain momentum in the mediaverse with such rapidity and in such complex ways, it is impossible to identify or gauge the authority of a given source.⁵⁹ In addition to the reality that adjudicating fact from fiction is time-consuming, the speed of information transfer across the mediaverse can make truth irrelevant. If an adversary can spin a circumstance before truth is propagated, the strategic leader will be forced to spend considerable energy to right the story. There is no guarantee that the truth will ever catch up, thereby becoming irrelevant. In addition to offering anonymity, the extensive numbers of people in cyberspace and virtual worlds provide a degree of security.⁶⁰

Anonymity and security further complicate the strategic environment because it can enable unintended collaboration and collective action. The mediaverse is fostering "the emergence of a visually-oriented, ideologically impulsive Internet culture with the

means to rapidly and collectively plan and act."⁶¹ This characteristic facilitates an evolving and dynamic operational environment that adds complexity to the strategic and operational environment.

Conclusions

Empire maintenance in the information age is increasingly challenged by the speed, agility, and pervasiveness of the mediaverse and its influence on strategy. As such, the mediaverse is both a challenge and an opportunity to national security. It is changing the character of war, and is transforming the nature of the strategic environment.

With respect to challenge and opportunity, James Rubin, chief spokesman for the State Department during President Clinton's second administration, captured the dichotomy of the CNN effect when Keith Porter interviewed him on the radio program, *Common Ground*, on July 14, 1998. Regarding the challenge of responding to world events solely because they are broadcast on TV, he said, "The short answer is yes, there is a greater urgency to respond," but he also added, "The harder question is does it change your response."⁶² While he did not specifically address the latter, he did highlight the opportunity presented by the media:

When you don't have pictures and you don't have real-time information about something that's going on in the world, it's often much more difficult to convince people that something matters...so to the extent that it makes, brings to bear public opinion in a way that is activist, generally speaking that's a good thing.⁶³

It is the responsibility of the strategic leader to manage the challenges and exploit the opportunities presented by the mediaverse in conflict. Military commanders must learn to see the media as potential allies rather than as enemies.⁶⁴ The successful strategic leader must be not just aware but *au courant* on the challenges and

opportunities presented by the multitude of 24/7 news channels and social media. In an era where wars can be won or lost in the mediaverse or the battlefield, strategic leaders and warfighters must be proactive and innovative in dealing with the media.⁶⁵

The mediaverse is changing the character of war. Because media coverage of tactical events has strategic implications, war is much more visible and public than ever before.⁶⁶ The speed and transparency of the mediaverse is blurring the lines between the actors and the audience, making war more easily accessible and deliverable; it is becoming an audience-participation event. The conflict between Israel and Hamas in October of 2012 is a perfect example. This aspect of war requires improved processes and tools to manage it.

Just as the character of war is changing, the mediaverse is forcing a transformation of the strategic environment. The reality today is that technology enables almost instant access to any event to any person. Short of censorship, there is nothing that can be done about this directly. Furthermore, the culture of the Internet and new media is also changing the traditional notion of credibility.⁶⁷ However, it may be possible to *mitigate* risk in both of these areas through education and the purposeful exploitation of the mediaverse.

Recommendations

How can the effectiveness of a strategic leader be improved in an environment of a pervasive mediaverse? The first step is to understand and appreciate that the mediaverse can, in fact, influence strategy. Once that premise is accepted, it is possible to mitigate that influence through conceptual improvements to strategy formulation; a doctrinal improvement to planning and execution; and through improved education and training.

The most significant systemic improvement that can be made is the addition of a robust strategic feedback loop during the development and execution of strategy. The Strategy Formulation Model (Figure 5) includes a block entitled “Monitor for Success, Failure, or Modification.” This concept needs to evolve to a more assertive “Strategic Feedback Loop” that encourages active *environmental scanning and maneuvering* at the strategic level to adapt to mediaverse influencers. This novel competency encompasses the skills of environmental scanning, envisioning, skillful coordination and cross-cultural savvy. In short, “environmental scanning and maneuvering” is interpreting the environment, culling the essential factors or requirements, and acting across organizational or national bounds, as appropriate, to achieve the desired effect. This active and iterative process will provide the illumination necessary to develop and evaluate an effective strategic flight plan, and to provide course corrections as required.

The backbone of a robust strategic feedback loop is the integration of information operators into strategy formulation. In general, information operators are public affairs specialists, and practitioners of military information support operations and inform and influence activities. At the theater and operational level, information operators must be truly integrated into not just planning, but also mission execution. At present, the doctrinal assessment of IO and the information environment is focused on the performance and effectiveness of activities in order to provide feedback to modify activities that *achieve desired results*.⁶⁸ There must be a more robust assessment of the information environment that analyzes: 1) activities that *failed* to achieve desired results in order to modify operations, and more importantly; 2) enemy activities in the mediaverse that shape local perceptions and popular support. These more difficult

cognitive effects are typically analyzed through the Intelligence function rather than the IO function. This limits accessibility to information and analysis of specific IO objectives. The solution is to employ information operators to surveil the mediaverse to assess content and on-going events to develop not only actionable responses, but also proactive messaging.

Finally, military and civilian education, at all levels, should include some content to increase awareness of the opportunities and pitfalls associated with the mediaverse. Pre-deployment training for all expeditionary forces should reinforce this understanding with the aim to prevent, or at least minimize, a tactical environment that enables the “strategic corporal” to inadvertently take action that may be counter to strategic objectives. Mid and senior level developmental education programs should expand current public affairs training to include skillful reconnaissance and engagement in the mediaverse. This should be a core institutional learning objective and not merely an elective offering.

Properly cultivated, understood, and exploited, the mediaverse is a powerful weapon in the arsenal of war but it does not distinguish between friend and foe, belligerent or bystander. It is essential to dominate in this realm because as James Jay Carafano explains, “As an instrument of war, the power of mass mobilization through social networks represents a potentially dominant competitive advantage.”⁶⁹

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