Farwell approaches the topic of strategic communication from many angles, historically chronicling tactics and stratagems from author to recipient, and analyzing the concepts and policies that helped shape some of the best, and worst, communications in history. Persuasion and Power addresses the “art of strategic communication” by examining its elements and principles through historical anecdotes.

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**

The book begins by outlining the different forms of strategic communication, carefully detailing the subtle differences between psychological operations, propaganda, public affairs, and public diplomacy. Farwell is careful to note the large grey areas that have always existed between these designations, for both public figures and countries. The author uses historical examples that highlight relevant scenarios in recent history and the tactics individuals and states employ to influence and manipulate (a key term Farwell uses throughout the book) the opinions and attitudes of others. Examples from Liberia, the Korean war, Iraq, and the U.S. Congress bring color to the vague Pentagon doctrines that set standards for U.S. public communications.

Farwell cites Abu Ghraib prison and the consequent communications between the Bush administration and the media as a carefully shaped, thoughtfully articulated message aimed at minimizing damage done to U.S. credibility. In press conferences and official statements from the White House, the campaign theme quickly and drastically evolved into “the U.S. army is committed to ensuring all soldiers live up to the army values and the laws of land warfare regardless of the environment or circumstance.” The official purpose was to “inform and educate our internal and external audiences,” but as Farwell insists, the real purpose was to influence and expedite the diffusion of the controversy entirely. Farwell also notes that Donald Rumsfeld’s assistant secretary of public affairs castigated editorial writers who suggested that Abu Ghraib was more than a rare and tragic aberration of U.S. moral standing. The inconsistency between “informing” and “influencing” is a common motif in the first section of the book, and the subject is developed more fully in later sections.

**WORDS, IMAGES, AND DEEDS**

The second part of the book focuses on the words and specific rhetoric that has characterized some of the most successful public communications in history. Thucydides’ epic tale of the Peloponnesian War in Ancient Greece is the classic example of
calculated rhetoric. The leaders of Corinth beseech Sparta to declare war on Athens, appealing to their mindset of security and conservative expansion by insisting that Athens was an aggressive imperialist city-state on the verge of being too powerful to defeat. It goes without saying that the consequences of Corinth’s message, and hence Sparta’s decision to go to war, echoed throughout the next 2,000 years of Western civilization. Modern examples abound, as well, with references to successful and unsuccessful communicative efforts by European and American politicians. Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Adolph Hitler, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, and Barak Obama are discussed in terms of their strengths and weaknesses in style and rhetoric.

Farwell elucidates with equal focus the complexity of audiences that are the subject and target of strategic communications. In discussions of the changing disposition of American domestic politics to Arab and revolutionary tendencies toward public messages and figures, the detailed examples are informed by Farwell’s familiarity with the subject. He quotes Henry Kissinger saying that revolutionaries “rely for their success on charisma and on an ability to mobilize resentment and to capitalize on psychological weaknesses of adversaries in decline.” Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Zapatistas are cited as examples of using manifesto successfully. Anyone who has seen politics in action will find the relevance of these examples obvious. To be successful, political messages must create a robust emotional response. The historical examples Farwell provides provide insights into motives, situations, and details, helping the reader understand how to best use and interpret the political signaling that surrounds us.

Images and symbols tend to exemplify causes and campaigns. Farwell delves into the ways colors, architecture, and art have contributed to effective communication throughout history. Examples include the Phrygian cap of the French Revolution, the Iwo Jima flag photograph of World War II, the hammer and sickle of the Soviet Union, and, most recently, the iconic multi-tone “Hope” poster of Barack Obama. These images, or “brands,” and their representations of people and movements typify political discourse and symbolize the narratives of people and events. They have played a major role in shaping policy climates worldwide, from local government to the United Nations, and in writing history one movement at a time.

CAMPAIGNS OF INFLUENCE

Action is, of course, equally important to successful strategic communication, and leaders and institutions are often called on to personally demonstrate their principles. Military posturing is an obvious example of a situation that allows credibility to be questioned, but Farwell touches on civilian stories as well. Pope John Paul II’s June 1972 visit to Poland, where he fell to his knees and kissed the ground, marked an unmistakable turning point in Polish politics. In that instance, the “power of personal presence set the stage for the collapse of the country’s communist dictatorship,” Farwell writes. The larger point is that even small gestures can have a big effect.

Chapter 10, “The Marks of Leadership,” begins a transition from historical survey to a useful guide for understanding the theoretical and practical concepts that shape successful communications in government. Beginning with the classic tenants of fostering strength and integrity and echoing the values of those who are represented, Farwell specifies 11 core precepts that have governed campaigns of influence. Exhibit 1 shows a useful table from the book, “The Maxwell Strategic Message/Action Grid,” which organizes messages and actions clearly to help readers visualize differences among competing interests, parties, and policies.

Chapters 13 and 14 address strategy and tactics. Once again, Farwell provides a number of examples to illustrate his points. For instance, Ronald Reagan’s determined strategy to “revitalize the political authority of the presidency” meant that his early focus was on getting results, and doing so quickly. This included budget negotiations with the Democrats and ending an air traffic controller strike early in his term. Reagan stuck to his strategy and, “to the chagrin of his critics, showed an ability for excellent presidential leadership,” Farwell writes. He also cites international examples such as Mexican President Felipe Calderon’s public talks with drug cartels, an issue of critical national importance. Of course, hindsight makes it easier for historians and theorists to evaluate and encapsulate such. Fortunately, Persuasion and
Power distills the big issues that occupy news cycles and punditry teleprompters, and goes about answering questions such as: “How do you frame the issues, define players, and define the stakes?” “What audiences are critical to achieving our strategic goals?” “What language is most effective?” and “When do we start?”

**CONCLUSIONS**

The historical analyses that fill the pages of *Persuasion and Power* are relatable and relevant, enhancing the study of the social fabric of making policy. Strategic communication, from Julius Caesar to Hugo Chavez, is a complex but useful art. Farwell’s book draws a continuum from the past to the present, through the fiber of communication, highlighting the precepts that are truly valuable.

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