DARPA looking to master propaganda via 'Narrative Networks'

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Sometimes you just don't know whether to laugh, cry or be alarmed when hearing about what the boys in secretive back rooms are doing in the name of antiterrorism, or homeland security, or whatever else they wish to call it. This time it seems, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the semi-secret agency charged with coming up with new and cool ways to protect the citizens of the United States from foreign bad guys, wants to hire someone to figure out how vulnerable some people are to "narratives" (oral stories, speeches, propaganda, books, etc. that cause people to think) and then, supplant such messages with "better" messages to head off the path that for such people might lead them to becoming a terrorist.

Called the "Narrative Networks" project, DARPA has released a solicitation for research proposals by those that have both the know-how

and the technology to implement such a program, which is divided into two parts. The first part would involve analyzing what happens to people when they hear or see a message. It's thought that certain messages or images actually cause a change in the brain to accommodate the new ideas.

The second part of the study, quite naturally, would involve developing a means for taking advantage of what is learned in the first part. Or, in other words, to come up with a way to find out who is vulnerable to messaging, and then to blast them with a message that would overwrite any undesirable brain changes that occurred as the result of that person being subjected to "bad" messages, so that they would behave themselves.

At first blush, such a program would appear to be scary as all get out; after all, if our government gets its hands on technology that could reprogram people who have come to feel things the government doesn't like, it seems like a really good way to control them, including its own population. On second thought though, as reality starts to kick in, it appears that while some research in this area might bear some fruit, it's highly doubtful that any such program would meet with much success. After all, governments (and other entities) have been trying to figure out how to brainwash people for thousands of years with very little to show for their efforts.

On the other hand, the folks at DARPA seem to think that new advances in technology might have changed the game a little bit. New types of brain scans can, for example, can actually show a brain being changed due to a received message. And new highly sophisticated electronic sensing devices are able to pick up even the slightest nuances in facial expressions. If the two technologies could be brought together, the thinking goes, perhaps people could be scanned without their knowledge and found to be either vulnerable to messaging or already changed in

some way by messaging from a suspect source. In such case, they could be targeted for specialized messaging that has been shown through research to be effective in overriding what has occurred in their unknowing noggins.

Each phase is supposed to go for 18 months though there doesn't appear to be any component of the project that calls for publicly publishing results found or describing product deliveries after completion.

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