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Strategic Communications: Leveraging this Line of Operation in the GWOT

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AUTHOR: Major Roderick M. Hynes, USA

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Mentor: Dr. Gordon Rudd
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*"Tim, the American people need to brace themselves for a long war in the Middle East and Central Asia, and they need to brace themselves for a long war in the Middle East and Central Asia because **the battle is being waged out here between extremists and moderates**. It's not a war that ultimately needs to entail large number of American forces, but it's a war where intelligence, where economics, where political and diplomatic power need to come together with military power **to defeat this ideology of al-Qaeda, Zarqawi, Ansar al-Islam, the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan, etc**.*"[1] *General John Abazaid, CENTCOM Commander, on Meet the Press, 26 September 2004*

Introduction

The Global War on Terror (GWOT) is fought along different fronts and use different weapons to achieve success. As General Abazaid points out, a key aspect in the GWOT is the battle or ability of Arab extremists to influence the moderate populace. This is a war of ideals and persuasion fought mainly, but not exclusively, in the Arab streets. The American led Coalition must recognize this and appreciate the importance communications has in this fight. When leveraged properly, Strategic Communications (STRATCOMS) is an essential and formidable weapon that can achieve decisive effects.

Strategic Communications must harness all functions associated with information management. Public Affairs and Information Operations (IO) often have a partial overlap of aims and objectives that are often unsynchronized. For instance, Information Operations are focused on the adversary while public affairs focus on the public perception of the unit. They often overlook the decisive audience: the average Arab on the street. The battle is to insure the moderate Arab understands what the American led Coalition is trying to accomplish. The decisive element of STRATCOMS is the ability to influence and inform the Arab population. The Arab piece would insure success with the western media. It is difficult for CNN or FOX to

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run negative stories on Iraq if the moderate Arab media outlets run positive stories. Credibility is a huge challenge when dealing with Arab media outlets and a thorough understanding of these outlets is essential. Al Jezeera and Al-Arabiya differ as greatly as CNN and FOX News by appealing to different audiences. A thorough Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) of all Arab media outlets is an essential element of creating a STRATCOMS campaign plan.

Current Public Affairs Operations are heavily weighted toward western media and specifically toward American media outlets. Since, Vietnam, the U.S. military has worked hard to gain and maintain public support for the Soldiers and mission. Both the U.S. Army and Joint Public Affairs Mission statements confirm this:

> "Public Affairs fulfills the Army's obligation to keep the American people and the Army informed, and helps to establish the conditions that lead to confidence in America's Army and its readiness to conduct operations in peacetime, conflict and war."[2] FM 46-1

> "The mission of joint public affairs (PA) is to expedite the flow of accurate and timely information about the activities of U.S. joint forces to the public and internal audiences."[3] JP 3-61

This effort has made the Arab media a secondary operation and which is treated as the adversary by the U.S. Military. This is understandable considering the reputation of outlets such as Al-Jezeera which often portray coalition operations in a negative light. However, moderate Arab media outlets, such as Al-Arabiya or Abu Dhabi are mistakenly lumped into the same category.

For Strategic Communications to achieve decisive results, a new intellectual paradigm is required. Current doctrine needs reevaluation in order to identify which traditional barriers can be torn down. The emerging concept of Strategic Communications as a Line of Operation should be fully explored and aligned with organizational and planning constructs. These efforts will aid in creating a future model that is relevant and decisive.

Challenges and Shortcomings of Current Doctrine

Strategic Communications Defined

The U.S. Army defines Strategic Communications as "the method by which the Army delivers its messages to those in and out of uniform."[4] Army Chief of Staff, General Peter Schoomaker has made Strategic Communications one of seventeen focus areas designed to strengthen efforts to win the Global War on Terrorism. The Strategic Communications plan of the U.S. Army is managed by three separate offices: Office of Chief of Public Affairs (OCPA), Office of Chief of Strategic Communications (OCSA) and the Office of Congressional Legislative Liaison. OCPA focuses on getting internal (i.e. Army News Service) and external media (CNN) to support the Army by getting the Army story out. OCLL deals with the Congress because, "The Army wants Congress to know what's going on so they can do something about it during the congressional cycle."[5] OCSA targets senior Army leaders (active and retired). The STRATCOMS director, Patti Benner, states that:

> "In the Office of Strategic Communications, the mission to deliver the Army story is similar to OCPA. Whereas OCPA focuses informing Soldiers, family members and the public at large through the media, STRATCOM's audience is expanded to target senior Army leaders- active and retired- business and social executives, and academic and think tank representatives."[6]

Clearly, the U.S. Army treats Strategic Communications as a Public Affairs operation focused mainly on American media and is of limited direct utility to the operational commander.

GIE in the Operational Commander's Battlespace

An additional challenge operational commanders face is the current and evolving Global Information Environment (GIE). Commanders must recognize the GIE as part of his Battlespace. Simply, the GIE encompasses any individuals, systems, organizations involved in gathering, processing and disseminating information.[7] They include International Organizations (Red

Cross, World Health Organization), other Governments, other U.S. Government Organizations (DOS, CIA) and the media. The media not only includes radio and television but the emerging use of nontraditional forms such as the Internet. Arab audiences are becoming as sophisticated as their western counterparts in the use of the Internet. Within the commander's battlespace a proper IPB should be created.

An IPB of Arab media limited only to Al Jazeera is insufficient. In fact, one must not combine Middle East/ Arab media as having the same impact within the same battlespace. For example, many have recognized the impact Al Jazeera has in the Arab world. However, that impact varies in the Middle East and within Iraq. This comparison of western media is in complete context of western media that includes, arguably, liberal/ anti-government outlets like the BBC. CNN may be viewed as liberal within the United States but is main stream when compared to many European outlets. Greater Arab reaction does not always equal Iraqi reaction. While beheadings and car bombings are a rating hit in many parts of the Middle East, moderate Iraqis do not want to see their country viewed as barbaric.[8]

Other IPB factors include only 2-3 percent of the population gets their information from the 190 newspapers in Iraq. Radio is about the same, which leaves television and the internet as the largest media outlets of information. Al Jazeera, based in Qatar, has been compared to FOX News among Arab experts. Suggesting, they are poorly produced, simplistic, heavily ideological, and intellectually low.[9] Al Arabiya, based in Dubai United Arab Emirates, is considered by Arab media experts as moderate and a polished well-produced news channel. CNN is the American equivalent. The operational challenge starts with recognizing the GIE within the battlespace but includes leveraging all assets within the GIE for operational goals.

Far too often operational commanders are not responsive enough in this environment. The same military that can deliver precision weaponry at a time and location of their choosing react to events in the GIE slowly. Here is an example of a possible scenario. A story breaks that a wedding party was gunned down by an AC-130 gunship. Arab and American media outlets aired apparent footage of the massacre. The Coalition Force Command takes 3 days to mount a proper and credible response to the allegation. This story should be rapidly neutralized within hours not days. Much of the problem deals with resource and personnel shortfalls within the public affairs community.

Public Affairs Shortfalls

During the initial stages of OIF, the public affairs team for the theatre consisted of a reserve unit out of Chicago. The team was undermanned from the beginning and lacked a clear Strategic Communications Plan. Prior to the invasion, they spent a great deal of time training American and European reporters in preparation for their embedding into various units. Once in Baghdad they supported two main headquarters with often-conflicting priorities. They ran PA for the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and Combined Forces Land Component Command/ Combined Joint Task Force (CFLCC/ CJTF-7). Undermanned, they were required to augment the G3 Current Operations with two battle captains[10]. It didn't take long for this small team to be overcome by events.

They marginally handled western media and all but excluded Arab media as their focused audience. There was Arab media representation (local newspaper reporters) [11] but the message, if any, remained focused on maintaining support at home. The top PA priority during the summer of 2003 was dealing with American casualties.[12] Casualties overshadowed rebuilding stories but of greater significance was the lack of Arab media involvement when rebuilding stories did

occur. If a Black Hawk helicopter flew four reporters to a school opening, it was common that only one of them would be Arab. This is a significant lost opportunity in influencing/ informing the moderate Arab target audience.

In addition, the current execution of Strategic Communications is flawed. The "Baghdad Plan" focuses on compiling CD Roms and PowerPoint slides. It is important to keep the high level visitors (Congress, DOS, DOD) informed on operations but misses the larger picture. Little emphasis is shown on keeping the local populace informed at the same level as western leaders. Once again, the critical audience is shortchanged and it is not surprising that most Iraqis do not know what the political process is about.[13]

One of the biggest challenges in Strategic Communications is the lack of Arabists who contribute to the process. Many confuse Arabists with individuals who have a working knowledge of the language. Arabists have regional studies background vs. international political studies. In addition, they bring a cultural and political knowledge of the region, but few Arabists are universal experts. One who is knowledgeable about Jordan may not have a working understanding of the tribal issues associated with Iraq. These individuals are an invaluable resource when it comes to drafting and executing a Strategic Communications plan.

Strategic Communications and Information Operations

At the operational level, there is a tendency to interchange Strategic Communications and Information Operations. While both share some of the same desired effects Information Operations (IO) have a specific lane that is not as encompassing as Strategic Communications. The objective of IO is to achieve information dominance.

> "Information operations are actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems, while defending one's own information and information systems. IO require the close, continuous integration of offensive and defensive capabilities and

activities, as well as effective design, integration, and interaction of C2 with intelligence support. IO is conducted through the integration of many capabilities and related activities. Major capabilities to conduct IO include, but are not limited to, OPSEC, PSYOP, military deception, EW, and physical attack/destruction, and could include CNA. IO-related activities include, but are not limited to, public affairs (PA) and civil affairs (CA) activities (See Figure I-3). There are two major subdivisions within IO: offensive IO and defensive IO." JP 3-13 Joint Doctrine for Information Operations.[14]

This is done by enabling, enhancing, and protecting the use of information while influencing (degrading, controlling) an adversary's decisions and actions through manipulation of his information and information systems. IO will directly support the commander's intent and will be conducted throughout the full range of military operations and at all levels of command. IO will be developed and executed to provide commanders with knowledge-based military superiority over an adversary. IO uses both kinetic and non-kinetic force to achieve results. IO is a key enabler in Strategic Communications but it lacks emphasis on the neutral population (results focused on advisory). However, organizationally the IO effects board/ cell is a model that has potential benefits for Strategic Communications.

Future Strategic Communications Model

One must recognize that operational commanders in the future (2014) will face a Global Information Environment that will be far more complex than at present. First, the target audience will be more sophisticated in terms of information sources and interpretations. Globalization will evolve and the Internet and television will reach a larger Arab audience. The internet has the advantage of exposing an audience to diverse ideas and positions. Exposure to other views should allow moderates to question the validity of extremist ideas. The opportunity to leverage information to moderate Arabs will increase and validate Strategic Communications as a vital Line of Operation for the future commander.

Lines of Operation and Strategic Communications

The concept of Line of Operations (LOO) to a mission is not new. However, what

constitutes a Line of Operation has evolved to include non-traditional elements like Strategic

Communication. First, what is a Line of Operation? Joint Pub 3-0 states:

> "In modern war, lines of operation attain a three-dimensional aspect. JFCs use them to
> focus combat power toward a desired end. JFCs apply combat power throughout the three
> dimensions of space and over time in a logical design that integrates the capabilities of
> the joint force to converge on and defeat adversary COGs."[15]

This is the traditional understanding of LOOs that focus on kinetic capabilities against the

enemy. The GWOT requires focusing on the battle of ideals between moderates and extremists

and a better construct on the traditional LOO exists. In this context, positional reference to an

adversary is less relevant. Commanders visualize the operation along logical lines, which link

multiple objectives and actions with the logic of purpose: cause and effect. For example, an

operation could have the desired effect of achieving a secure, stable Republic of XX. A

commander would establish three LOOs to achieve this desired effect: restore basic services,

create a professional army for XX, destroy or disarm existing paramilitary forces. With in the

LOO: restore basic services, the commander could have decisive points that lead to the
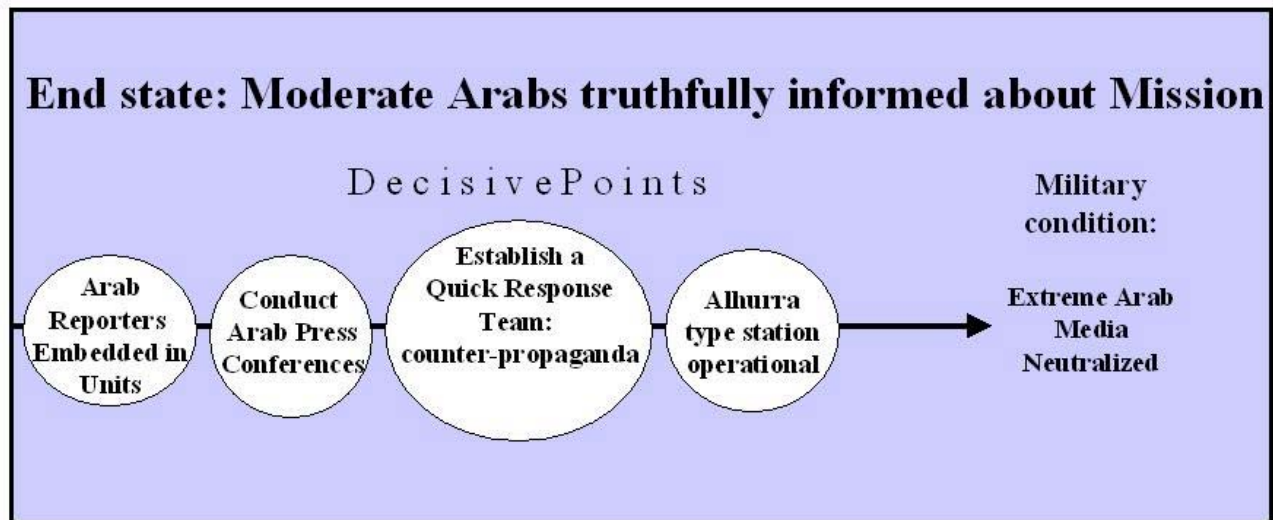
achievement of desired endstate.
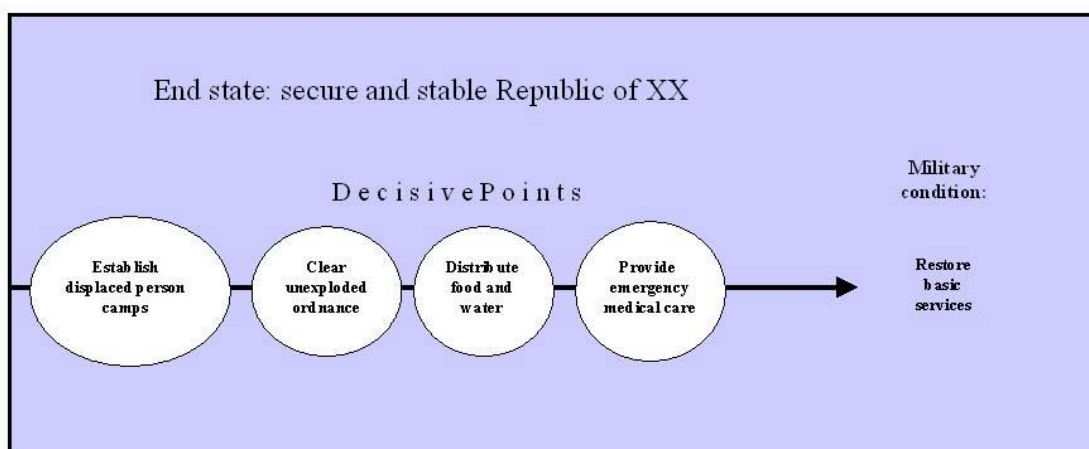
Strategic Communications could act as a supporting LOO that aids in achieving each desired endstate. In the example of restoring basic services, STRATCOMS would inform the local population through various media outlets to avoid areas of towns that are being cleared of unexploded ordinances. The same public announcements would apply to food distribution and where to get medical care. In addition, embedding Arab and western media in units conducting these operations would help achieve support amongst neutrals.

There is reason to believe that STRATCOMS as a separate LOO would achieve

How Strategic Communications works as a Supporting LOO

Decisive Points

Establish displaced person camps

Clear unexploded ordnance

Distribute food and water

Provide emergency medical care

Arab/Western Reporters Embedded with Units conducting Humanitarian MSNs

Radio and TV Public Service Spots Informing Locals of Operations

Press Conferences Informing Media and target audiances of Operations

Military condition:

Restore basic services

Keep Public Informed

significant results. A campaign plan could have the desired endstate of secure moderate Arab support. In this example two (could be many more) conditions are established: extremist Arab media outlets neutralized, and the target Arab audience truthfully informed. The first condition is clearly difficult but there are some decisive points that could be achieved. For instance, a Quick Response Team would be created to focus solely on dealing with misinformation or inaccurate reporting by extremist Arab media. The key is speed and accuracy. The condition of informing

the targeted audience would encompass all media outlets to include radio and television stations established, and the ability to leverage the Internet.

End state: Moderate Arabs truthfully informed about Mission

DecisivePoints

Military condition:

Arab Reporters Embedded in Units → Conduct Arab Press Conferences → Establish a Quick Response Team: counter-propaganda → Alhurra type station operational → Extreme Arab Media Neutralized

While Strategic Communications as a Line of Operation may be a valid concept it does fix a fundamental problem of unity of effort and planning. As previously stated, STRATCOMS is essentially an IO theme that heavily leverages public affairs toward multiple audiences to include moderate Arabs. However, IO possesses an effects based construct that should be applied to Strategic Communications. Much like a Fire Effects Coordination Cell (FECC) IO utilizes the same principles using kinetic and non-kinetic means to achieve their goals against adversaries. Public affairs doctrine does an excellent job in laying out their contribution to the IO campaign. They include analysis of GIE, print and electronic products, news releases, press conferences and media facilitation. [16] PA doctrine clearly points out that PA support must be proactive within IO. Unfortunately, the IO battlestaff has only one PA officer who deconflicts operations rather than synchronizes efforts. PA is rarely recognized as the Main Effort in any IO campaign. Therefore a construct must be established that balances and leverages

PA and IO capabilities toward a Strategic Communications goal. A proposed construct is the Strategic Communications Effects Cell (SCEC).

Strategic Communications Effects Cell

The Strategic Communications Effects Cell (SCEC) is an organization whose mission is to leverage and synchronize all assets available to the Operational Commander to achieve the communication effects required for the mission. The SCEC size and scope would be tailored for the mission but would compose of some basic elements. First it would fall under the purview of the J/ G-3 and would be chaired by the PA officer in charge. The PAO would have representation from all applicable PA elements and include IO and primary staff representatives. In order to fully maximize the SCEC certain enablers would be added. Included representation from Department of State (Embassy Rep), JAG, and Land Information Warfare Activity (LIWA). In addition, a regional expert (Arabist), and a regional media expert would be crucial to any Strategic Communications activity. The Operational Analysis Team representative would aid in assessing the effects of implementation. Where should one find a SCEC?

While any operational level unit would benefit from having a SCEC it would best serve at the highest level commander in theater. For example, MNF Iraq, a 4 star Operational HQs, would be in the best position to leverage the capability of the SCEC. The SCEC is resource intense, therefore it should be consolidated at the highest workable level. Theaters vary and it is possible a 2 or 3 star headquarters could find it forming a SCEC. While CENTCOM could utilize a SCEC the best bang for your buck would occur at the 4 star operational command level. While a SCEC construct seeks to help better organize and shape the STRATCOM operation, it still requires some imagination and unorthodox employment methods.

Strategic Communications Effects Cell
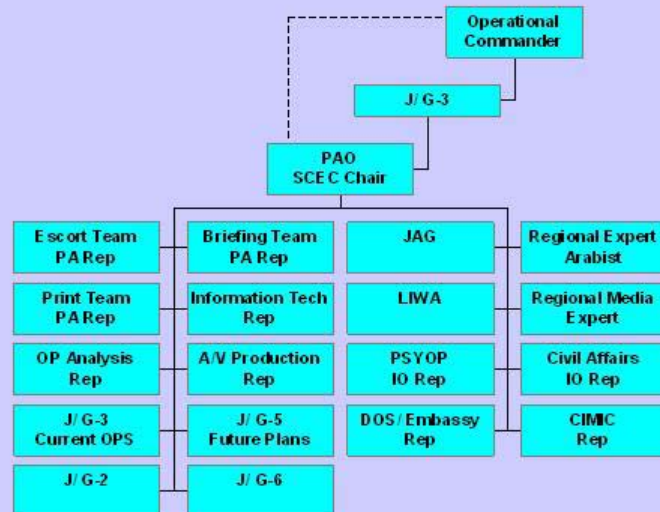
STRAT COM Enablers: Traditional and Non-traditional

Doctrine and systems are an important element of Strategic Communications. However, innovative applications within the doctrine is also required. Many concepts will fail and that is expected. But from the ruble, a jewel could emerge and form the backbone of a successful STRATCOM plan. Enablers such as Alhurra, the Internet, and reach back sources must be properly exploited.

One of the most fascinating endeavors taken in the Middle East was the formation of Alhurra television. Alhurra, "the free one" in Arabic, is a U.S. Department of State funded project that mirrors the long established Voice of America. Located in Springfield, Virginia a staff of 150 reporters broadcast, via satellite, pro-American news to a Middle Eastern audience.

The network first aired in February 2004. The first year costs are projected at $64 million. However, the network is off to a bumpy start.[17]

Many Arabs view the network as an American propaganda machine. Government officials in some Arab countries protested its existence. President Bush conducted an interview with Alhurra, regarding the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, and ended the interview by telling the reporter, "Good job."[18] Unfortunately, many viewed this incident as evidence of Alhurra's bias. The lack of viewers is a greater problem. Simply, Alhurra competes in a large market of 120 stations that is saturated by news channels. Alhurra receives approximately 2.3 percent of all news viewers.

Top Six International News Channels Watched by Arab Viewers*
1. Al-Jazeera, Qatar (51.7 percent)
2. Al-Arabiya, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (8.4 percent)
3. Abu Dhabi TV, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (7.6 percent)
4. CNN, Atlanta (6.4 percent)**
5. MBC, London (5.3 percent)
6. Lebanese Broadcasting Corp., Beirut (4.6 percent)
*Surveys conflict on the popularity of each channel, although al-Jazeera generally ranks atop any list. These are the results of a May 2004 survey of 3,400 people in the Middle East, conducted by Zogby International, a Utica, N.Y., polling company, and commissioned by the University of Maryland, asking viewers what channel was their primary source of news. It is frequently cited because it did not use statistics provided by the channels.
**All except CNN are Arabic-language stations.[19]

Clearly, moderate Arab media outlets, like Alhurra, need an edge or a corner of the market to exploit.

One activity that transcends politics in the Middle East is soccer. Arabs are intense fans who rally around local and national teams. Strategic Communications campaign plan could exploit this phenomena. For instance, an Alhurra type network could buy or create the exclusive rights to broadcast national and local soccer matches. The station could show scrimmages, practices, interviews and previews of the fans favorite team. The idea is to have a medium that

would reach large, broad base parts of the populace. Targeting and gaining young male viewers (18- 30 years old) is even better. After gaining the attention of the audience, the conditions are set to transmit the message. Community service messages could be broadcast between breaks. They could showcase key reconstruction projects or advertise where one can register for elections. Another advertisement can inform young men about job fairs or hiring. While programming is being aired, a clicker at the bottom of the screen could project much of the same messages. Clearly, not all would be happy with the messages but few would boycott the station because of their propensity to watch the games. In fact, controversy could be healthy. It could generate a positive debate among moderates and aid in fledgling Arab democracies.

It is clear such programming would be counter-productive if it had a western or American face to it. Moderate Arabs running the station is the best solution. The support would come from the periphery and include financial and technological support. It is just as important to deny radical Arab media outlets the ability to reach this audience. An Al Jezeera Sports network could be devastating. This model has applications in radio as well.

Globalization has created a world where anyone with a computer and a modem is connected. Perhaps even more than television, the Internet is a medium that needs additional focus. Developing and monitoring Arab blog sites is essential. In addition, one could advertise anti-extremist/ pro-moderate spam on common Arab Internet sites. One must not forget that ten years ago, few envisioned the impact the Internet would play in society today. There is reason to believe that this medium will expand and that alternate mediums could arise. Commanders and SCEC planners must always evaluate what impact these technologies will play.

The need for Arabists is essential to executing a STRATCOMS plan. But where can one find Arabists? The military has Foreign Area Officers (FAOs) who have a working knowledge of

the language and some cultural/ historical training. They have the benefit of living and working abroad. However, FAOs are in short supply and are usually bound to embassy duty. The State Department is another source, but once again, these individuals are few in number.

A reach back capability may be the easiest solution. Drawing from either a DOD or DOS organization, an Arabist could advise the STRATCOMS team on how to conduct certain operations. The timeliness of such an arrangement and the lack of being at the point of impact are some of the disadvantages. Regardless, reach back capability may also be applied to a host of shortfalls to include Arab Media Experts.

Conclusion

The current war the United States is fighting requires leveraging all elements of national power to achieve victory. Recognize that the long-term prospect of victory revolves around gaining and maintaining the moderate Arab's support. Strategic Communications is a tool that aids in this effort. As a Line of Operation, STRATCOMS can leverage conventional and unconventional enablers to achieve victory. Alhurra type broadcasts, the Internet and the integration of Arabists can combine to create a decisive result.

Iraq: A test of STRATCOMS?

Since the fall of Baghdad, the importance of Strategic Communications has emerged as a critical piece to mission success. The ability to successfully communicate to the Iraqi people is central in bringing about democracy to that nation. XVIII Airborne Corps is deploying to the region in the coming months and the corps commander has made STRATCOMS one of his supporting Lines of Operation. The upcoming elections and the shift to a Strategic Overwatch mission will challenge the STRATCOMS plan.

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[9] Gareth Bayley, interview by Dr. Gordon Rudd, tape recording, Baghdad, Iraq., 26 June 2004.

[10] Battle Captains are staff officers who work in a Tactical Operating Center (TOC) to facilitate the monitoring functions of the TOC.

[11] Most of the arab media representation was formed by local Iraqi newspaper and radio reporters.

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