

Information Operations and Public Affairs: A working relationship defined

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A working relationship defined
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"To fight and conquer in all your battles is not the supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting. In the practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact; to shatter and destroy it is not so good."

-Sun Tzu

Introduction

"The worst outcome would be to lose this war [Iraq] by default. If the smart folks in the psy-op and civil affairs tents can cast a truthful, persuasive message that resonates with the average Iraqi, why not use the public affairs vehicles to transmit it?"¹ This proposal throws those familiar with both organizations into a mental tizzy. Military deception (MILDEC) as an element of information operations (IO) is an integral part of maneuver warfare, as is psychological operations (PSYOP). Because MILDEC and PSYOP have negative connotations, it is blindly assumed that both create a false perspective for an opposing force, therefore causing the media and public to become rightfully suspicious when public affairs (PA) and information operations collaborate. Truth is necessary for public affairs to build credibility for success. The question is how can the military use information operations and public affairs as an effective team when their missions appear to be contradictory. The war necessitates a well-defined relationship between IO and PA; built on integrity, they must be able to constructively join forces.

¹Mark Mazzetti, "PR Meets Psy-Ops In War On Terror," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 2004, page 1.

Definitions

Marine Corps information operations support maneuver warfare that, "involve actions taken to affect an adversary's information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems in order to achieve specific objectives. . . . The focus of IO is on the individual decision makers and their decision making process."² Within IO there are five core capabilities: electronic warfare (EW), computer network operations (CNO), operations security (OPSEC), PSYOP and MILDEC. Of these five, the two that cause the most concern are psychological operations and military deception.

"Military deception operations are actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary military decisionmakers as to friendly military capabilities, intentions and operations..."³ For example, a deception plan was employed during the battle of Normandy to mislead the Germans. Allied forces lead the German high command to believe they would strike north rather than south. It is, therefore, deception, vice the overarching function of IO that must remain separate from PA activities.

PSYOP, on the other hand, has to rely on the truth. "The purpose of PSYOP is to induce or reinforce attitudes and

² Joint Publication 3-13, Joint Doctrine for Information Operations (Oct., 1998), I-9

³ U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-40.4, Marine Air-Ground Task Force Information Operations, 2003 (Washington D.C.: Department of the Navy, 2003), 3-2.

behavior favorable to U.S. national goals in selected foreign target audiences.”⁴ As Sun Tzu so aptly suggests, “Just integrate yourself with the people while causing inward rifts among the military, and the city will conquer itself.”⁵ Tactical PSYOP teams have to use the truth as their weapon. Major Hezekiah Barge, Jr., I Marine Expeditionary Force G-3, deputy, IO officer states that, “Tactical PSYOP forces have to be as credible, if not more [credible] than PAO because of their daily interactions with the local civilians in their area of operation. Truth projection goes [sic] a lot farther than lies. Furthermore, it is easier to backup the truth and address the truth of a situation years later.”⁶ If PSYOP does not abide by the truth, the United States may lose undecided host country nationals who question American intentions.

Unlike deception, but similar to PSYOP, PA is dependent on the truth. Truth and credibility are the backbone of public affairs; disseminating truthful information is PA’s primary function. “The mission of public affairs is to provide timely, accurate information to Marines and the general public and to initiate and support activities contributing to good relations

⁴ U.S. Marine Corps Filed Manual 33-1, *Psychological Operations*, 1987 (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army), 1987, 1-1.

⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*; Translated by Thomas Cleary, (Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1998), 72

⁶ Major Hezekiah Barge, Jr., interview by Captain Teresa Ovalle, December 12, 2004.

between the Marine Corps and the public.”⁷ To suggest that PA be used as a vehicle to transmit deception is not acceptable, but to suggest that PA be used to as a vehicle to transmit the truth is practical and pro-active.

Current Relationship

“Words are more important than 10,000 men with guns.”⁸ The force that harnesses information on the battlefield and uses it to influence its enemy has the best chance of winning a modern day conflict. Today America is involved in a war of information; media, signals and the internet. Battlefield tactics are no longer accomplished solely by kinetic effects. Battlefield tactics now include and focus on non-kinetic effects and the ability to influence the enemy using IO. Imagine a strategic level IO plan that begins to shape the battle environment months out, working on conditions rather than time. When certain conditions are met the next phase is incorporated and so on. As the conditions draw near to enter the targeted country the strategic plan funnels down to the operational and tactical levels; thus creating a possible environment of capitulation rather than that of physical destruction.

Traditionally IO and PA lacked integrated planning fearing “guilt by association.” The American media can be suspicious of

⁷ U.S. Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.3, *Public Affairs*, 1997, 1-4.

⁸ Lt. General Mattis, Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, interview by Captain Teresa Ovalle, November 30, 2004.

military PA releases, especially over classified or otherwise controversial issues. For this reason commanders may lack the understanding of the relationship between PA, PSYOP and MILDEC, rendering IO less effective. As Charles A. Krohn, professor at the University of Michigan and former deputy chief of public affairs of the Army points out, "What harm is done, compared to what is gained? For the first year of the war, we did virtually nothing to tell the Iraqis why we invaded their country and ejected their government. It's about time we got our act together."⁹

The quandary is how to coordinate the available information resources and to reconcile their differing missions. Quoting Pentagon spokesman, Lawrence Di Rita, "Pentagon officials said military commanders were concerned about blurring the lines between using misinformation to fool an enemy and providing accurate information to a U.S. and worldwide audience."¹⁰ In fact, commanders are at a loss as to what is expected of IO at the tactical level because there is not a strategic IO plan. "Strategic IO plan? We don't have one and the few false starts we've had have been inept beyond belief."¹¹ The assets are

⁹ Mark Mazzetti, "PR Meets Psy-Ops In War On Terror," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 2004, page 1.

¹⁰ "Pentagon in Debate Over Managing U.S. Global Image," *Washington Post*, December 13, 2004, Reuters, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A61106-2004Dec13.html>>

¹¹ Lt. General Mattis, Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, interview by Captain Teresa Ovalle, November 30, 2004.

available at each level of command to build a team of information warriors, but due to concerns inside- and outside-of the government, the progress is slow. "We have the [information] technology to terminate our opponents and destroy their ability to conduct armed aggression. . . We have the response capability, but not yet the political will or direction."¹²

Solution

IO must be added as the seventh warfighting function, with functional staff representation equal to that of maneuver, fires, intelligence and logistics. In doing so, IO is integrated into the Marine Corps Planning Process. By revealing IO plans during the planning process, staff representatives maintain situational awareness and can better adjust during execution. This situational awareness is extremely critical in deconflicting PA and IO. As Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "Plans are nothing; planning is everything."

Furthermore, incorporating the five core capabilities under a staff function of 'G-X' would increase the efficiency of IO as a whole. G-X should be fully weighted, manned and funded, to include a primary military occupational specialty; thus creating

¹² Winn Schwartau, Information Warfare; Cyberterroris: Protecting Your Personal Security in the Electronic Age (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1996), page 645.

career force potential that could work the full spectrum of IO issues.¹³

The PA roll is to remain hands-on, particularly while in theater, by assisting IO (PSYOP) in getting the message to the local public. "Information is part of the battlefield in a way that it's never been before. . . We'd be foolish not to try to use it to our advantage."¹⁴ The war on terrorism has to be fought with the truth, and it has to be PA who delivers the message. PA has to use all available assets to be "prepared to counter with the truth. PA has to tell the people [nationals] that America is not responsible for the loss of electricity or that the blown-out bridge was not due to American bombing. PA also has to tell the people when there is something wrong, cholera in the water, for instance. They [PA] have to pass the word."¹⁵ It is also up to PA to correct the wrongful reporting in the media, whether American or international.

Due to the many means available to PA - television, radio, internet, newspaper - PA can disseminate information to a variety of sources within a region. "Our job is to put out

¹³ Major Barge stated that standard operating procedures were currently being developed to add an IO section to the G-3 (MEF level). The author thinks that once IO has full spectrum capabilities, G-3 will become overwhelmed with this new capability; thus pushing IO into a G-X capacity.

¹⁴ Mark Mazzetti, "PR Meets Psy-Ops In War On Terror," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 2004, page 1.

¹⁵ Major Hezekiah Barge, Jr., interview by Captain Teresa Ovalle, December 12, 2004.

information to the public that is accurate...and to put it out as quickly as we can."¹⁶ PA, however, must never deceive or lie.

PA must remain vigilant at all times. With respect to the PA mission and the continued importance of credibility, becoming involved with any portion of IO (MILDEC) that may require something other than absolute truth, could jeopardize the public affairs community. PA cannot afford that mistake. "The [PA's] standard is still to tell the truth."¹⁷

As Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, an operational commander and the military's senior spokesman in Iraq in the spring of 2003 and currently the deputy director of plans for the American military command in the Middle East, points out, "Are we trying to inform? Yes. Do we offer perspective? Yes. Do we offer military judgment? Yes. Must we tell the truth to stay credible? Yes. Is there a battlefield value in deceiving the enemy? Yes. Do we intentionally deceive the American people? No."¹⁸ No matter the issue, there is always doubt. By truthfully telling the story and releasing accurate information, according to operational security measures, public affairs will be able to maintain the credibility necessary to achieve their goal; delivering timely and accurate information.

¹⁶ Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Weighs Use of Deception In A Broad Arena," *New York Times*, December 13, 2004, page 1.

¹⁷ Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Weighs Use of Deception In A Broad Arena," *New York Times*, December 13, 2004, page 1.

¹⁸ Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon Weighs Use of Deception In A Broad Arena," *New York Times*, December 13, 2004, page 1.

Conclusion

The reality is that there is an information war going on and information operations and public affairs need to coordinate and work together to accomplish the mission at hand. It is time to define the IO and PA relationship and to build a cohesive team to win the war on terror. "We can defeat the Information Warrior. We can render his anti-social, anti-business, and anti-American endeavors futile, but it will take a serious effort on our part."¹⁹

¹⁹ Winn Schwartau, *Information Warfare; Cyberterroris: Protecting Your Personal Security in the Electronic Age* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1996), page 588.

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