

Information Operations

The Imperative of Doctrine Harmonization and Measures of Effectiveness

By Arturo Muñoz and Erin Dick

In 2012, RAND published a report titled *U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan: Effectiveness of Psychological Operations 2001–2010*,¹ which concluded that there was a disconnect between the doctrine and practice of information operations (IO) in the field that was counterproductive to effective and efficient operations. The report made several recommendations for improving the effectiveness of IO in Afghanistan, including the need for a cohesive strategy better integrating IO with psychological operations (PSYOP) and public affairs (PA), as well as having a set of clearly defined measures of effectiveness (MOE). Today, as the United States looks to further reduce its military footprint in Afghanistan, the need for harmonized IO doctrine that supports effective operations in the field, as well as the measures with which to gauge their effectiveness, is even greater.

Facing continual force draw down in Afghanistan, and given the implications of an ongoing mismatch between the need for harmonized IO doctrine and its availability, as well as the need to measure IO effectiveness, RAND recently took another look at the subject. RAND's principal finding is that, while there have been some tactical IO successes in Afghanistan, such as the Radio in a Box Program,² little progress has been made in the area of doctrine integration and harmonization and the establishment of MOE in the five years since the previous study period ended (2010). This deficiency will have an even greater negative impact as the United States continues to reduce the number of troops in theater and as resources to combat the enemy's propaganda offense remain limited. This paper briefly describes these continuing challenges and reiterates the importance of implementing the recommendations made in the previous RAND study on how to improve IO.

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Lack of Clarity and Continuity in IO Doctrine Creates Confusion and Reduces Effectiveness

Since the period covered by RAND's initial report, the Secretary of Defense, the Department of the Army, and other elements of the Defense Department have separately issued conflicting IO doctrines and conflicting definitions of IO roles and responsibilities. While the intentions were at times consistent with the goal of harmonization, the effect has been to complicate its achievement and extend confusion.

Specifically, on January 25, 2011, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates instructed that IO oversight and management be transferred from the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. According to Gates' memo, the "realignment of responsibility provides a single entry point for all components of the Department and our interagency partners. This realignment also assigns a single point of fiscal and program accountability; [and] establishes a clear linkage among policies, capabilities and programs."³

The following year, in November 2012, the Joint Chiefs of Staff published a revised *Information Operations* manual that implemented Gates' guidance to avoid "too much emphasis" on the five traditional core capabilities—PSYOP (now military information support operations [MISO]), operations security (OPSEC), military deception (MILDEC), computer network operations (CNO), and electronic warfare (EW)—and instead defined IO as an "integrating staff function" identifying "information-related capabilities most likely to achieve desired effects."⁴

However, just a few months later, the Department of the Army published its own IO definition in its January 2013 update to Field

Manual (FM) 3-13, *Inform and Influence Activities*. The Army's new definition not only stressed increased coordination with PA, in keeping with RAND's previous recommendation, but also further expanded the scope of coordination: "Designated information-related capabilities that support Inform and Influence Activities (IIA) and its lines of effort typically include, but are not limited to, public affairs operations, military information support operations (MISO), combat camera, soldier and leader engagements, civil affairs operations, civil and cultural considerations, operational security (OPSEC) and military deception."⁵

Conflicting doctrine and definitions illustrate that the Department of Defense has yet to create a unifying theory to guide the harmonization of IO doctrine and practice, and it has not yet been successful at implementing greater integration with PSYOP and PA. Even though joint doctrine supersedes service doctrine, various subject-matter experts suggest that a state of confusion exists. This assessment is corroborated in Michael Williams and Marc Romanych's 2014 article, "The Future of IO: Integrated into the Fabric of Warfighting." The authors state that, "Given the intellectual confusion about the nature of IO in service and joint doctrine, it is not then surprising to hear complaints from our senior leaders. Their criticism generally centers on the perceived simplicity of the enemy's message, the ease with which it is disseminated, and our corresponding inability to do anything about it."⁶ In an attempt to once again remedy this situation, new guidance is being drafted.⁷ Taking as its point of departure the October 2003 *Information Operations Roadmap* authorized by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld,⁸ this new guidance document will serve as both a report to Congress and guidance to the services. Therefore, at this time,

the 2012 RAND recommendation that IO doctrine be harmonized across the services remains a work in progress.

Measures of Effectiveness Are Necessary to Validate the Impact of IO

In response to the continuing media and congressional criticism of the IO/MISO community for being ineffective propagandists, a MISO officer expressed widespread sentiment among his colleagues when he wrote on his blog that “we have done a terrible job helping Congress and other elected officials understand what we do. For a craft that prides itself on communication, this is a sad state of affairs.” The MISO officer concluded by reiterating the long-standing call for better ways to measure the effectiveness of IO/MISO operations: “[W]e need to be developing metrics of effectiveness that can help document our successes and convince our customers and funders that we know what the heck we are doing.”⁹ The question remains; can the IO/MISO community create accurate and timely MOE to guide the use of IO and to help inform Congress and senior policymakers on the efficacy of IO programs?

U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan highlighted the need for MOE, as reiterated by the media: “A 2012 report by RAND for the Marines said efforts in Afghanistan were not working and the military had not mastered how to determine the effectiveness of the programs. An April 2013 Government Accountability Office report found the same thing.”¹⁰ Aware of the need to improve MOE, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) established a Global Assessment Program in 2012 to provide “global assessments and prove measures of effectiveness” by having civilian contractors conduct baseline survey research on a range of attitudes in several countries of interest. The USSOCOM

2014 Global Research Assessment Program intended to expand on that research.¹¹ The program’s February 2014 request for proposals asked potential contractors to detail the criteria that they would use to determine target audiences for propaganda programs and how they would conduct the research needed to determine message effectiveness. Long-standing congressional concern over potential U.S. military involvement in propaganda, as manifested in the 2002 closure of the short-lived Office of Strategic Influence, produced objections to the proposed Global Research Assessment, and the request for proposals has been suspended while questions are answered.¹² Absent accurate and timely MOE to inform the debate in a holistic fashion, it is difficult to judge success and accurately capture and convey the real results of IO operations.

Conclusion

Based on this analysis of IO doctrinal effectiveness in the Department of Defense since 2010, it is evident that there is still a great deal of work that must be done to integrate and harmonize doctrine to achieve the greatest results, as well as to accurately measure the effectiveness of operations. The recommendations offered in RAND’s previous study on this subject remain the same today, and they must be addressed with a greater sense of urgency to put the U.S. IO community on a trajectory of improvement. Given the increasing importance of IO activities in Afghanistan, coupled with the ongoing reduction in troop levels, it is imperative that every task, operation, and deployed service member are able to exact the greatest positive impact.

Notes

¹ Arturo Muñoz, U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan: Effectiveness of Psychological Operations 2001–2010, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-1060-MCIA, 2012. As of March 23, 2015: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1060.html>

² “Radio in a Box (RIAB),” *Afghan War News* web page, undated. As of September 17, 2014: <http://www.afghanwarnews.info/IO/RIAB.htm>. For more on how RIAB supports IO, see Frank Lazzara, *Information Operations, Finding Success as Afghanistan Draws to a Close*, Newport, R.I.: Naval War College, May 4, 2012, pp. 9–11. As of September 17, 2014: <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA563888>; also see Kevin Sieff, “In Afghan Fight, U.S. Takes to the Airwaves,” *Washington Post*, August 25, 2011.

³ Robert Gates, U.S. Secretary of Defense, “Strategic Communication and Information Operations in the DoD,” memorandum, Washington, D.C., January 25, 2011.

⁴ Gates, 2011; see also Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations*, Washington, D.C., November 27, 2012. As of September 17, 2014: http://www.defenseinnovationmarketplace.mil/resources/12102012_io1.pdf

⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 3-13, *Inform and Influence Activities*, Washington, D.C., January 2013. As of September 17, 2014: http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/DR_pubs/dr_a/pdf/fm3_13.pdf

⁶ Michael Williams and Marc Romanych, “The Future of IO: Integrated into the Fabric of Warfighting,” *IO Sphere: The Professional Journal of Joint Information Operations*, Spring 2014, pp. 3–8.

⁷ Interview with Joint IO officer, Washington, D.C., June 24, 2014.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap*, Washington, D.C., October 30, 2003. As of September 17, 2014: http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB177/info_ops_roadmap.pdf

⁹ Lawrence Dietz, “MISO in the Hot Seat,” *PSYOP Regimental Blog*, posted May 18, 2012. As of September 17, 2014: <http://psyopregiment.blogspot.com/2012/05/miso-in-hot-seat.html>

¹⁰ Ray Locker, “Congressional Scrutiny Puts Propaganda Plan on Hold,” *USA Today*, April 30, 2014.

¹¹ See Federal Business Opportunities, “Global Research Assessment Program,” Solicitation Number H92222-14-R-0009, January 6, 2014. As of March 17, 2015: https://www.fbo.gov/?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=b44edbcf1d2cb6d3fdf3045fccad4aef&tab=core&_cview=0

¹² Eric Schmitt, “Rumsfeld Formally Disbands Office of Strategic Influence,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2002.

About This Perspective

In an update to a 2012 RAND report on information operations (IO) in Afghanistan, this Perspective describes the continuing challenges of IO doctrine integration and harmonization and the establishment of measures of effectiveness for IO within the Department of Defense. Despite recommendations made in the 2012 report, little progress has been made in these areas, which will have an even greater negative impact as the United States reduces the number of troops in theater and as resources to combat the enemy’s propaganda offense remain limited.

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