

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS: A COMMUNITY WHOSE MILITARY
VIABILITY HINGES ON CULTURAL CHANGE:**

**Surviving the Transition of our
Nation's War-Winning Capabilities**

by

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“We have to do a much better job in terms of perception management. Some people, my PA (Public Affairs) friends, get all excited when I say that. I am not talking about deception, lying, cheating, or nefarious operations. I am talking about using the truth as a weapon. We have to do that.”¹

Using “truth as a weapon” ... an edgy concept from a combat-tested general officer who has been an attack planner, Joint Task Force commander, director of an Air Operations Center, and twice a Joint Force Air Component Commander. As such, U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General David Deptula clearly understands the challenges of modern warfare and clearly enunciates through his comment the need for change in the way the Department of Defense views Public Affairs (PA). In fact, a few short years ago, it was inconceivable for PA practitioners, much less warfighting commanders, to consider PA an instrument of power. Today, senior combatant commanders understand that war-winning hinges on the success of an operationally integrated and synchronized strategic communication process, one that recognizes the complementary and galvanizing effects PA, IO, Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, and Civil Affairs have if properly integrated. This synergistic concept will require serious collaboration among practices that have traditionally walked on different sides of the street and avoided contact at all costs.

What caused this shift in the way our nation’s senior leaders think about Public Affairs? It could have been the recognition of the gradual atrophy of relevant or effective Public Affairs skills stymied by parochial, change-adverse leadership. It could have been a reaction to the

President's embarrassing declaration of the collective strategic communication failure, over which senior leaders have responsibility. Or it could have been an awakening by warfighters directly facing the challenges of conducting and combating irregular warfare. Whatever the reason, the Public Affairs community, albeit the entire Department of Defense, currently has the momentum and opportunity to move beyond the baggage accumulated from years of stove-piped development and initiate significant change in its war-winning capabilities. It is now time for PA, IO, Public Diplomacy and Civil Affairs to coalesce as a national instrument of power, capable of directly influencing behavior via engagements in the non-kinetic information battlespace applying the same logic and context of the historically kinetic principles of joint operations.

Support for a flattened, more integrated construct that incorporates all competencies found in Strategic Communication can be found in the answer to the following question. "What does the nation need to win the kinetic war that is now, more than ever, directly dependent upon winning the non-kinetic information war?" In this paper I will discuss strategic communication requirements as they relate to irregular warfare and the future of Air Force Public Affairs, and then offer recommendations for a way ahead. Before any recommendations for change can be developed however, defining the "what, who, and how" of strategic communication is necessary. What expertise and/or skill sets define strategic communicators? What makes strategic communication different from Public Affairs – or is it? What are the operational expectations for this competency? Who do our leaders envision as the practitioners of strategic communication? Who is responsible for organizing, training and equipping a strategic communication force? And finally, how does our nation expect to implement strategic

¹ Lt Gen David Deptula, USAF, Maj Gen Chuck Link, USAF (Ret), "Modern Warfare: Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom," Air Power History, Winter 2007.

communication? These are just some of the questions that when answered, illuminate a way ahead for the collective capability called Strategic Communication.

This research paper is one of four papers focused on answering the question, “How should the Department (DoD) institutionalize strategic communication as an integral component of war-winning?” This paper concentrates on the Public Affairs component of SC. It is my intent to articulate the need to dissolve Public Affairs and its stove-piped development process in order to capitalize on the more synergistic Strategic Communication approach. Coordinating the elements of our force responsible for influence operations enables planners and practitioners alike to determine desired effects and subsequently create a coherent U.S. government message. This requisite collaboration will ensure combatant commanders have the necessary guidance to effectively plan and execute SC activities. Only then can the SC effort be fully integrated into military operations as an instrument of power—a viable, relevant, non-kinetic option for war-winning.

Chapter 2 provides an historical review of a previous, but missed opportunity for significant change within Public Affairs. It also highlights some of the engrained beliefs of senior PA officers that led to Public Affairs’ gradual decline in operational value as the National Security Strategy transitioned from a stable, Cold War construct to “fighting and winning the war on terror.”² Chapter 3 proffers an apparent parallel effort for SC components to embrace their role in influence ops and ultimately merge the four competencies into one, unified specialty. A shift this significant could be described as nothing less than a cultural change. Chapter 4 summarizes the research and anecdotal references necessary to support my recommendations.

Chapter 2

At the Crossroads of Change

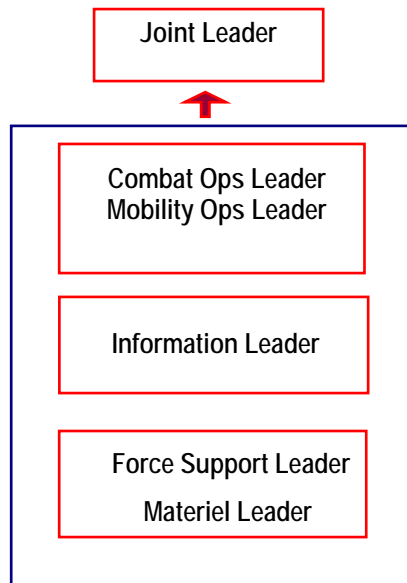
Developing Aerospace Leaders

With the establishment of the office of Strategic Communication, this is the second time within a decade Public Affairs stands at the crossroads of change. The first opportunity came in July 2000, when then Air Force Chief of Staff, General Michael F. Ryan, established the Developing Aerospace Leaders initiative. The project's charter was to "examine and recommend actions necessary to prepare the USAF Total Force for leadership into the 21st century...to develop officers who understand the full spectrum of Air Expeditionary Forces and aerospace operations, officers who can be articulate in staff assignments, in joint assignments, in operational assignments—regardless of their core specialty..."³ In essence, DAL was an effort to identify the required competencies or skill sets to meet the future leadership needs of the Air Force by logically associating like skill sets to create efficiencies, eliminate redundancies, increase effectiveness, and then purposefully organize, train, educate and equip to the desired outcome.

The DAL initiative proposed to develop five senior, "transformational" leaders within the Air Force, ultimately creating general officers fully capable and qualified to lead in the growing Joint environment.

² The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, March 2006, 3.

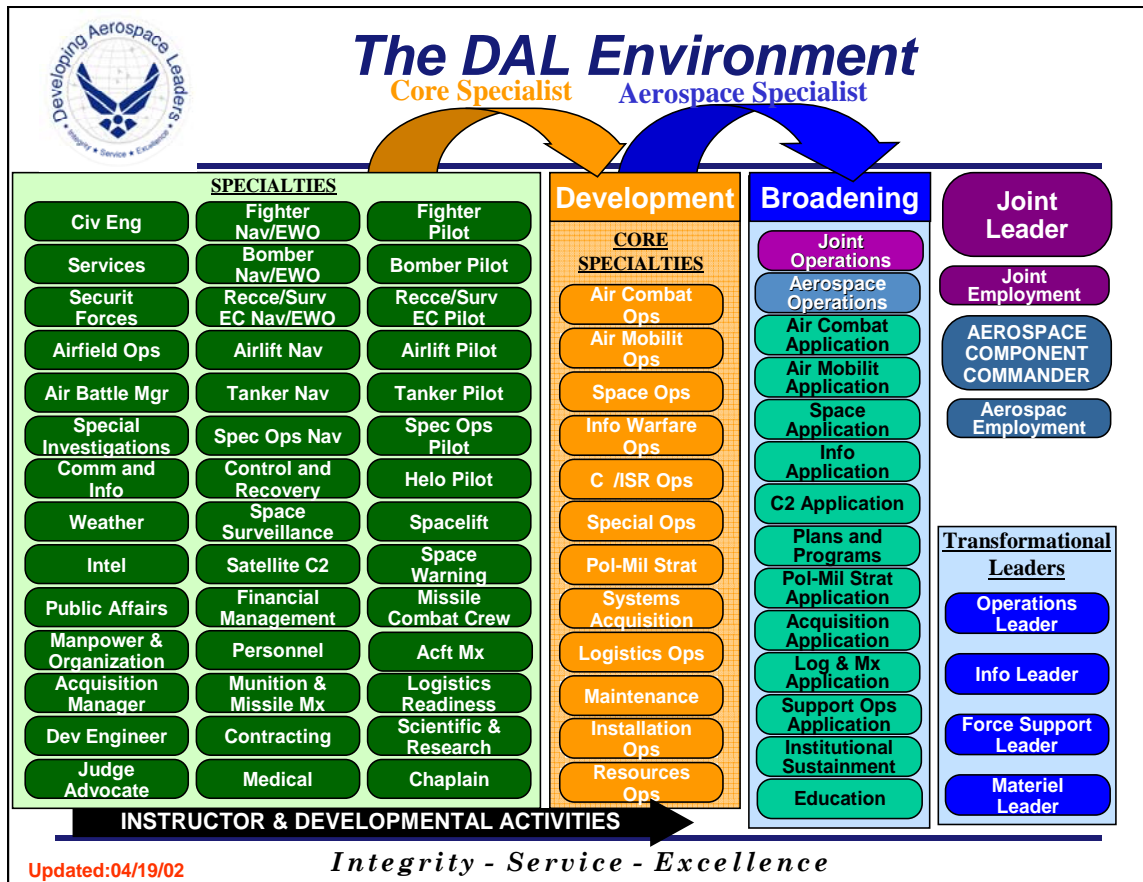
Figure 1. Transformational Leaders



The next chart, affectionately called the “bubble chart,” was created to capture the skill sets inherent in Air Force specialties. The initial proposed path for a PA Officer was to move into the “Information Warfare/Ops” bubble, eventually leading to their development as an Information Leader or Force Support Leader. Rigorous daily reviews of these skill sets and their pairings led to nearly hourly updates to a chart that could have only been accurately translated by its creator. This power point challenge unfortunately led to skepticism of the entire project’s intent.

³ Developing Aerospace Leaders Talking Paper, July 2000.

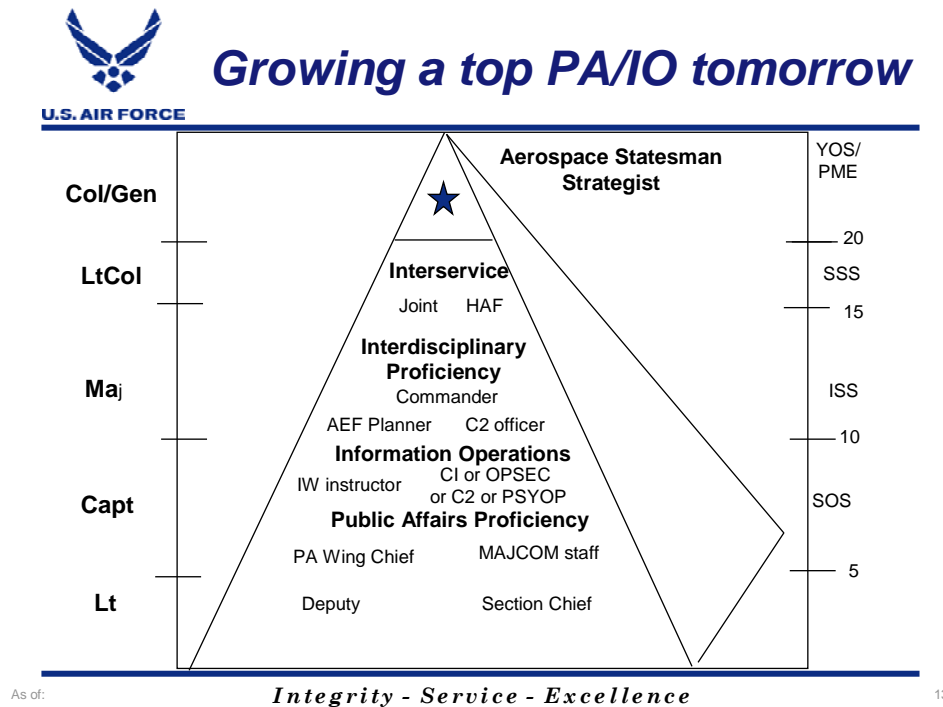
Figure 2. The DAL Environment



When the bubble chart and the below draft PA/IO development pyramid were presented to the senior PA leaders in Sep 2000, the idea was vehemently rejected. As the briefer for this presentation, it was clear to me the functional leadership at the time felt threatened, that somehow their status as the Air Force’s “honest broker” would be tarnished with the linkage to Information Operations and/or Psychological Operations. They were not ready to engage the warfighters. In fact, not only did the PA community dismiss the integration into IO, it

aggressively sought to become what DAL called, “specialists” (i.e. lawyers, doctors, and chaplains), wishing to remove themselves entirely from any broad development path.

Figure 3. PA/IO Development Path



Admittedly, the DAL project met with skepticism across a variety of functional communities, not just PA. Criticism that it was simply an exercise to promote more rated officers to positions of leadership often appeared in feedback comments. Passionate opinions such as, “You can’t get there from here, it costs too much,” “We’re creating a Team A and a Team B construct, the haves and have-nots,” and “Competency-based development doesn’t reward out-of-the-box success, but rather in-the-box risk aversion,” all saw the light of day. But no matter what one felt about the overall DAL effort, I believe they had it right by identifying and assessing basic core competencies. Understanding Air Force skill sets at their purest and

aligning them with their natural match made sense as the nation transitioned in its warfighting capabilities ... and I would argue had Public Affairs recognized the future value of understanding and possessing the capability to exercise information and psychological operations tactics, techniques, and procedures, we might have been eight years into a more effective and relevant Strategic Communication process with skill sets purposefully developed to meet the needs of a nation now battling irregular warfare.

Constrained by Culture

Unfortunately, generations of leaders with experiences matured by the contained and predictive Cold War enemy had strong views on the great divide between PA and IO/PSYOPs competencies. Prior to the DAL effort, the standing guidance within the Joint Publication for Public Affairs 3-61 read, “The mission of joint public affairs is to *expedite the flow of accurate and timely information* about the activities of US joint forces to the public and internal audiences.”⁴ Additionally, the publication offered guidance regarding the association between PA and Civil Affairs relations. According to JP 3-61, “PA and CMO personnel *disseminate information* to local populations.”⁵ In fact, according to JP 3-61, “the successful joint PA operation will be those which have dedicated the necessary personnel, equipment, transportation, and communications resources *to meet the prevailing demands for information.*”⁶ If simply meeting the demands for information was all our nation asked of our PA practitioners in 1997, then operationally integrating and synchronizing strategic communication processes, and recognizing the complementary and galvanizing effects PA, IO, Defense Support to Public

⁴ Joint Publication 3-61, Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations, 14 May 1997, v.

⁵ Ibid, vii.

⁶ Ibid, III-5.

Diplomacy, and Civil Affairs could render would most certainly have been a bridge too far for leadership at that time.

I had the opportunity to talk with a number of senior PA officers over DAL's two year charter, many whose reticence to evolve appeared to center on the argument that any association, actual or perceived, with IO or PSYOPs would jeopardize their integrity with the media. Their assumption was that information and psychological operations were founded in untruths and applied through manipulation and propaganda. They argued it would have been professional suicide to consider merging into an IO "bubble"—PAOs would be guilty by association and thus become ineffective communicators.

Further removing Public Affairs from value as an instrument of power, the 1997 revised Joint Publication for Public Affairs (3-61), continued to outline for the Joint Force Commanders the "Public Affairs Program," highlighting "three main functions - public information, command/internal information, and community relations."

Public Information. While the Internet continues to provide new public information opportunities, military public information is still largely a matter of coordinating media relations.

Command/Internal Information. A critical joint force PA mission involves informing the various internal audiences about the participation of military forces in a joint operation.

Community Relations. During joint operations, joint PA operations will support the JFC's civil-military operations as required.

Herein lies another cultural roadblock to effective strategic communication—support to the warfighter based on stove-piped PA skills constrained by a Cold War-style, three-function *program*. How could Strategic Communication ever be an instrument of power for the Joint Force Commander if it comes to the fight with self-imposed limitations? An effective

communication strategy, capable of winning wars, has to be more than the sum of traditional PA media, internal, and community relations *programs*.

As operational war-winning capabilities began to transform, not only did the PA community cling to their tribal roots, the greater AF institution neglected the “specialist” capabilities of PA. For example, warfighters “failed to plan for component SC by: 1) not reversing business rules that prevented more than one token PA in the warfighting headquarters, 2) not qualifying PAs for AOC and IO training slots, 3) trying to “do” SC with inexperienced personnel in an influence ops branch of information warfare, 4) not incorporating SC into exercises and training, 5) not granting TS/SCI to existing PA authorizations, and 6) thinking that SC is not a warfighter’s business.”⁷ I would argue however, PA failed to engage the warfighter’s in any effort to convince them otherwise.

Not only did PA fail to engage the warfighter, as a community, it failed to, “1) dedicate scarce field grade and senior NCO resources to the warfighter, 2) adequately engage in the warfighter development process, and 3) grow ops-centric communicators.”⁸

A Rebel Among Them

Around the time DAL was chartered, there were a few PA practitioners who identified the neglect and potential competency atrophy and believed in the advantages of broadening the communications skill set. There was one Public Affairs officer in particular who aggressively pushed the community toward a more operational focus. Col Jack Ivy, Director of the Air Force’s Public Affairs Center for Excellence at Maxwell AFB, and subsequently Deputy

⁷ Maj Tadd Sholtis, *Strategic Communication and Information Operations*, PowerPoint briefing, 28 Sep 06.

⁸ Ibid.

Director, Air Combat Command/PA, was the community’s leading advocate for change, authoring multiple briefings and point papers on information as an instrument of national power.

In an undated power point briefing entitled, “Public Affairs in Information Operations,” Ivy spoke of creating an “effective synergy of PA ops *within* IO.” He understood and could articulate PA capabilities as an instrument of power—a force that was crucial in developing public support for military operations and consequently, the formulation of national will. In his briefing, he also discussed “informational flexible deterrent options,” defined as options other than “bombs on target.”

“Everyone—commanders, IO specialists, and public affairs officers—needs to understand public information is a battlespace that must be contested and controlled like any other.”⁹ Ivy’s efforts then, although limited to PA and IO competencies, were in line with the intent of this paper today—to advocate for a strategic communication effort fully integrated into military operations as an instrument of power—a viable, relevant, non-kinetic option for war-winning.

“Attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy’s army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence.” – Sun Tzu, The Art of War

Up to this point, I have used the terms “Public Affairs” and “Strategic Communication” interchangeably. This is not an inconsistency in thought. It goes directly to my thesis that war-winning hinges on the success of an operationally integrated and synchronized strategic communication process, one that recognizes the complementary and galvanizing effects PA, IO, Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, and Civil Affairs have if properly integrated.

⁹ Col Jack Ivy, *Public Affairs in Information Operations*, PowerPoint briefing, undated.

In today's aggressive, interconnected Global Information Environment, it is critical the SC expert be able to work behind the 'green door' on an IO campaign that may have SC elements and then confidently walk back through that door and effectively deal with the media. Information today is available simultaneously from strategic to tactical levels of operations, creating pressure on our political decision makers. As such, counsel to our leaders must come from SC practitioners experienced in the full spectrum of information capabilities.

While technology rapidly advanced and operational doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures evolved, the PA craft remained committed to a specialist's view of its role in the Department of Defense. It was this functional perspective that I believe led to the degradation in value and effectiveness of Public Affairs in the minds of the warfighters.

“Either we engage the warfighters now, or they will find someone else to do our work.” DAL Talking Paper, 2000

Having missed the opportunity for change in 2000 DAL initiative, one has to ask, “Did Public Affairs get left behind in the transition of our nation's war-winning capabilities and therefore our nation's leadership had to create the office of “Strategic Communication” as an alternative to meet the needs of the evolving defense strategy?” I would argue our leadership has indeed found someone else to do PA's work.

Chapter 2

Strategic Communication

“I’ve taken strategic communication out of the hands of my Public Affairs folks and created a separate Strategic Communication cell. Why? Because PA doesn’t know the operational issues, they aren’t familiar with the commander’s intent. They know how to create a message and determine the best audience, but they don’t know the larger strategic operation.” Combatant Commander comments in non-attribution briefing to AWC, Dec 2007

According to the 2005 Air Force Doctrine Document 2-5.3, Public Affairs is defined as, “Those public information (read: **media**), command information (read: **internal**), and **community relations** activities directed toward both the external and internal publics with interest in the Department of Defense.”¹⁰ Years into Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror, this definition is not much different than the restrictive 1997 Joint Pub discussion and PA still “doesn’t know the larger strategic operation.”¹¹

Joint Pub 3-61 had been revised by May 2005 however, it ,too, still placed constraints on the synergistic possibilities of influence ops. “Although both PA and IO require planning, message development and media analysis, the efforts differ with respect to audience, scope and intent, and must remain separate. PA capabilities are related to IO, but PA is not an IO discipline or psychological operations (PSYOP) tool.”¹² This continued reluctance to change may be why we now have a new competency, Strategic Communication, which begins to link PA, IO, Public Diplomacy, and Civil Affairs through the subtle introduction of key operational mission sets

¹⁰ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-5.3, *Public Affairs Operations*, 24 June 2005.

¹¹ Combatant Commander comments from a non-attribution briefing, Jones Auditorium, Air War College, Dec 2007.

¹² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-61, 9 May 2005, xi.

capable of ‘influencing, synchronizing and integrating’ communications operations for a desired effect.

The SAF/CM website defines Strategic Communication as “the process of informing and appropriately influencing key audiences by synchronizing and integrating communication efforts to deliver truthful, credible, accurate and timely information.”

“Public Affairs has become irrelevant as a military duty. SC or IO is what senior leaders want and need to win today’s war of ideas.”

Lt Gen David W. Barno, USA (Ret); Commander, Combined Forces – Afghanistan, 2003-2005.

By now it should be clear senior leaders, both military and political, are desperately looking for ways to create unity of effort in order to win the war of ideas. .

The Junction of SC Components

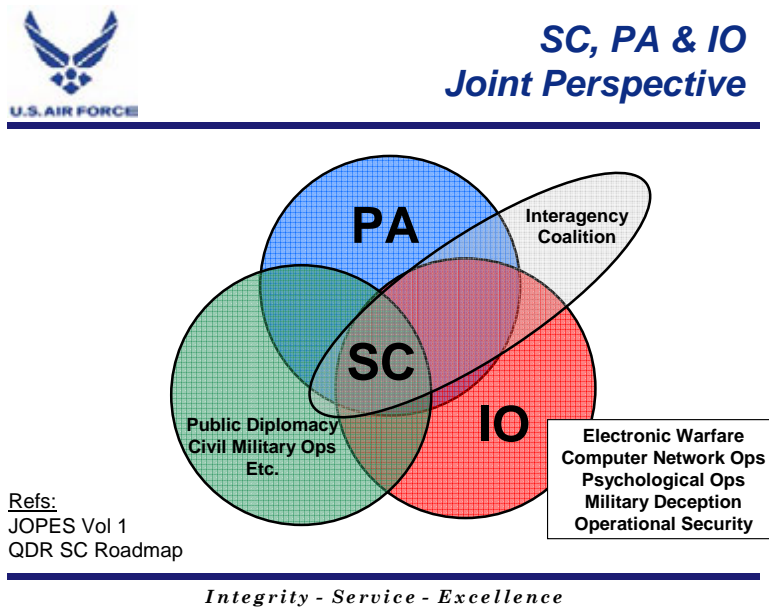
“It is possible to increase the likelihood of success without defeating the enemy’s forces. I refer to operations that have direct political repercussions that are designed in the first place to disrupt the opposing alliance, or to paralyze it, that gain us new allies, favorably affect the political scene, etc. If such operations are possible it is obvious that they can greatly improve our prospects and that they can form a much shorter route to the goal than the destruction of the opposing armies.”¹³ (Clausewitz)

Only by synchronizing and integrating all of the components of Strategic Communication can we begin to think about influence as Clausewitz proposed over a century ago. We must get beyond the stove-piped mentality of separate information areas of responsibility. Only when you consolidate all the moving parts, does Strategic Communication become the instrument of power the nation desires—a viable, relevant, non-kinetic option for war-winning.

¹³ Carl Von Clausewitz, “On War,” Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 1984, 92.

In a 2006 briefing prepared by Maj Tadd Sholtis, SAF/PAR, entitled, “Strategic Communication and Information Operations”, Sholtis effectively illustrates a perspective of the junction of SC, PA, and IO congruent with the thesis of this paper.

Figure 4. SC, PA & IO Joint Perspective



In an Air Power Journal article, same topic, Sholtis warns of the dangers of creating and/or maintaining current information stovepipes, or as he calls them, spheres; “one in which PA engages global news media and builds support among US, coalition, or neutral populations, and one in which IO employs its capabilities to influence [our adversaries and the indigenous populations in which our adversaries are embedded.] Can such a distinction really exist when the [adversary,] even if easily segregated from [the larger indigenous] population, gets his information from the same satellite news channels or Internet sites potentially used by millions?”¹⁴

¹⁴ Maj Tadd Sholtis, “Public Affairs and Information Operations: A Strategy for Success,” Air Power Journal, <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj05/fal05/sholtis.html> , Fall, 2005.

Sholtis goes on to say, “Any attempt to simplify the PA and IO “job jars” strictly by intended audiences will lead to a situation whereby PA “owns” communication to friendly audiences through inter-national media, while IO owns communication to presumably hostile audiences through smaller local information sources. Such an approach would result in the production of uncoordinated information products that inevitably affect all audiences in unpredictable and indiscriminate ways.”¹⁵

“Influence ops are a vital part of military options today and integrating PA into IO is critical to the success of the operation based on the way we think about insurgencies today.” Barno

During a non-attribution lecture at the Air War College in Jan, 2008, a senior Air Force official discussed Strategic Communication in a similar, “job jar” manner by stating he looked upon SC and PA as having an ‘offensive’ and ‘defensive’ type of relationship. “I put them in a room and said, now go to it.”¹⁶ While great strides have been made over the last decade chipping away at functional walls, a mental construct of SC and PA as offense and defense, us against them, win versus lose, and potentially even more detrimental, effective and ineffective (essentially why we saw the creation of SC, filling the void in PA skills), jeopardizes the transition to a unified SC specialty.

Overlapping Core Competencies

It’s worth taking a step back to review the earlier definition of Strategic Communication as it appears on the SAF/CM website referenced at the beginning of Chapter 2. It states SC is,

¹⁵ Ibid.

“The *process of informing and appropriately influencing* key audiences by *synchronizing and integrating communication efforts* to deliver truthful, credible, accurate and timely information.”¹⁷ Now let’s compare that to the Joint Publication 3-13 (IO): “Focused USG efforts to *understand and engage key audiences* in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives through the use of *coordinated* programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the *actions of all elements of national power.*”¹⁸ Using the DAL “bubble chart” as a point of reference, the above definitions, combined with Public Diplomacy and Civil Affairs competencies, would justify an SC core “bubble” through which future leaders should be purposefully developed today.

By late 2006, documents and briefings produced by the Public Affairs community began to appear in “joint military operational” language. The community was finally engaging the warfighter in terms that resonated with the war-winning capabilities enunciated in the Principles of Joint Operations. Public Affairs rallied behind the SC guidon. Thankfully, PA was in a full-court press to transition from the outdated construct of media, internal, and community relations programs, which had atrophied to limited impact at the wing and Major Command level with little to no war-winning value to the combatant commander in irregular warfare.

If the argument wasn’t ringing loud enough in the Air Force community, there were others shouting for change. U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Derrick W. Crotts, a career Army Public Affairs officer, wrote an extremely persuasive article for the *IO Sphere*, a Joint Information Operations Center publication, in which he advocated for ‘operationalizing’ PA.

¹⁶ Senior military official during a non-attribution lecture in Jones Auditorium, Air War College, Jan 2008.

¹⁷ Secretary of the Air Force Strategic Communication website, *Strategic Communication*.

¹⁸ Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations*, 13 Feb 2006, I-10.

“Many commanders see (PA) as an integral capability ... they feel synchronization and flexibility of IO occurs only when PA, PSYOP, and civil affairs operations are combined.”¹⁹

“Maintaining public support and will is a critical component, in many cases the critical component, to successful military operations,” said Crotts. “Commanders can claim victory but it is the public who will determine if and when victory is achieved. PA is the only tool in the IO arsenal specifically focused and directed to maintain public support. It links the public with the military and established the conditions that lead to operational success.”²⁰

“By employing asymmetrical warfare techniques, our adversaries no longer require large armies or unlimited resources to be successful. How and when PA is used to impact or influence these factors becomes a decision point for the commander. In today’s operational environment, PA is always required.”²¹

U.S. Marine Corps Colonel (retired) Thomas X. Hammes, author of “*The Sling and The Stone*,” would tell you that the U.S. has entered a fourth generation of warfare (4GW) which also recognizes that constant SC requirement. Success in Fourth-generation warfare he says, demands an investment in “human skills rather than technology.” From a Strategic Communication perspective he notes “4GW campaign audiences are not simple, unified targets. (They are) ... increasingly fragmented into interest groups that shift sides depending on how a campaign affects their issues. (Enemy forces) will have one message for their own supporters, their power base. They will have a second message for the general public of the target nation.

¹⁹ LTC Derrick W. Crotts, IO Sphere, *Operational Implications of Public Affairs—Factors, Functions, and Challenges of the Information Battlefield*, Winter, 2006, 13.

²⁰ Ibid, 11.

²¹ Ibid, 12-13.

Another message will focus on the decision makers of the target nation. ... We must integrate all elements of our national power so we can deal effectively with 4GW enemies.”²²

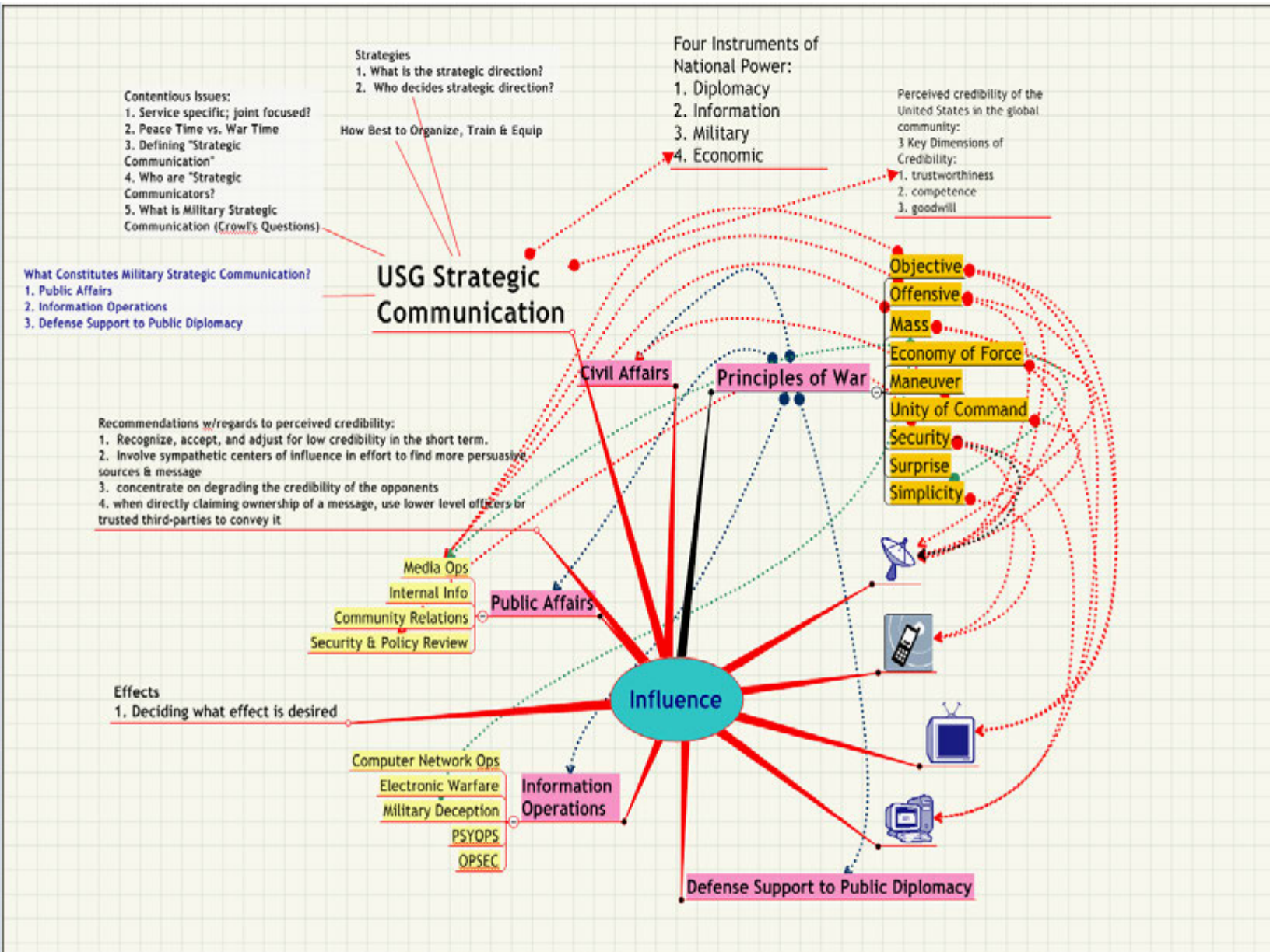
When planning the employment of asymmetrical warfare techniques, SC is now considered an essential and valuable warfighting option for the combatant commander. In essence, SC “seeks to weaken the adversary’s ability or will to engage in conflict, and may achieve strategic objectives without necessarily having to achieve operational objectives as a precondition.”²³ This would appear to be an accurate description of the achievable effects of Strategic Communication, when in reality, this is actually a description of *Strategic Attack* from the Dec 2008 updated AFDD 2-1.2. The point being, the influence capabilities of SC offer the combatant commanders viable, non-kinetic options.

The Public Affairs Center for Excellence is currently investigating ‘relationships and collaborations’ of the components of SC. The illustration below is a work-in-progress, but represents a roadmap of influence from which a dialogue begins and a potential cultural change follows. The concept under discussion illustrates the idea that we can apply the same Principles of War lexicon to SC that we apply to kinetic operations.²⁴

²² Colonel (Ret) Thomas X. Hammes, USMC, *The Sling and the Stone*, 214, 224.

²³ Air Force Doctrine Document 2-1.2, *Strategic Attack*, Dec 2008.

Figure 5. USG Strategic Communication



Embedded in the USG Strategic Communication think-piece are five “contentious issues.” One of the issues in question is, “Who are Strategic Communicators?” Part of the answer to that question has to be PA, IO, CA and DSPD. Chapter 3 provides suggested options

²⁴ Col (Ret) Bob Potter, Public Affairs Center of Excellence, *USG Strategic Communication* chart, 2008.

to accomplish the development and integration of the PA component into SC, effectively dissolving PA as a specialty in favor of the broader core competency of SC.

Chapter 3

Developing the SC Operational Capability

As you can see over the course of this paper, there is a parallel effort developing with regard to Strategic Communication. Within the Department of Defense, Public Affairs practitioners are embracing their role in influence ops and there is a growing force of deep thinkers dedicated to merging the four competencies together into one, unified specialty.

Senior PA leadership recognizes that to sustain the career field and remain a viable competency in today's defense environment, their responsibilities and capabilities must extend beyond simple information distribution as previously directed in earlier versions of Joint Pub 3-61. A shift this significant requires nothing less than a cultural change. Today, leaders within the IO community echo the need for change. "Strategic Communication, which is both message and action, provides the means to harness the elements of national power in an effective manner. Often networked globally, SC both informs and influences, synchronizing and deconflicting PA and IO themes and messages."²⁵

In a February 2006 speech, then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called for a more aggressive, non-traditional information campaign to counter messages of extremist and terrorist

²⁵ Richard J. Josten, Strategic Communication: Key Enabler for Elements of National Power, Summer 2006, IO Sphere, 16.

groups in the world media. Following the completion of the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, he said, “Victory in the long war ultimately depends on strategic communication. Today’s form of terrorism is essentially strategic communication in the purest definition—message and action—utilizing the global communications network more to influence than inform.”²⁶

“Is SC an instrument of war or not? If so, let’s source it and train it like a combat force, not a PA force.” Senior Department of Defense civilian during AWC non-attribution lecture, Nov 2008

The above quote from a senior DOD civilian illustrates the most significant roadblock to a successful culture change within the Public Affairs community. Until the DOD sources, trains and equips SC with a priority equal to current combat capabilities, full SC integration will fail. To be effective, “(SC) must be executed with shared knowledge and strong, adaptive networks within government and between government and civil society. But to do so, requires a commitment not yet seen, though some steps have been taken to improve the nation’s capability. What is needed is a transformation supported by resources and strength of purpose that matches the nation’s commitment to defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security.”²⁷

As the Public Affairs leadership considers how to develop unified SC operational capabilities, it looks to one of its more intellectual planners. The following five characteristics represent research by Maj Tadd Sholtis, previously mentioned in this paper. His work while assigned to the Pentagon fueled a debate within the AF as to the appropriate future for the PA community. Although defeated in previous rounds of discussion, it’s worth recommending again in this paper. Sholtis argues for a more operational approach to SC, clearly linking SC to the

²⁶ Ann Scott Tyson, *Rumsfeld Urges Media to Fight Terror*, Washington Post, Feb 2006, 17, 19.

²⁷ Vincent Vitto, Chairman, *Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Memorandum to the Chairman, Defense Science Board, December 2007.

needs of the combatant commanders. The following actions translate well to the larger SC effort and assist in the implementation of a cultural shift away from traditional, nearly irrelevant competencies and toward more viable, operational capabilities. Sholtis' work represents necessary adjustments to the training and purposeful development of SC practitioners:

- *“Full integration in the C2 system.* Each of the Air Force’s new war-fighting headquarters needs two types of SC capabilities in each AOC: an SC-plans element (which integrates information collecting, packaging, and disseminating strategies with the work of the Strategy and Combat Plans Divisions) and a SC-operations element (which mines information systems and specialists in combat operations to identify, collect, and coordinate emerging information relevant to the strategy). Both capabilities require SC forces with training and experience different from those supporting traditional media and internal information functions.”

- *“Rigorous training and evaluation.* The Air Force must augment entry-level instruction with training and experience that qualifies SC forces for operational assignments. A tour as an action officer or a commander in an IO or joint strategic-communication organization does not disqualify an Airmen from future roles as public communicators: we can send these Airmen right back to work with media on their next assignment. More robust SC training and career development then must be validated through tougher inspection criteria. SC must deploy more senior advisers and robust “white cells” to major exercises to provide SC mentoring and realistic, responsive media scenarios.”

- *“Commitment to assessment.* SC must ... research, fund, and field methods and tools that will give trained but geographically dispersed communication staffs the ability to plug into relevant, ongoing public-survey or content-analysis efforts or quickly develop contingency-specific assessment programs.”

- *“Better engagement at a regional level.* In peacetime the SC staffs of the restructured war-fighting headquarters should focus on activities largely ignored today: regional SC planning, climate assessment and monitoring, cultural-communications training, and the steady-state engagement needed to build confidence with regional media and opinion leaders during a contingency.”

- *“Ability to surge quickly to support media response and news generation.* Most steady-state public-communication requirements for Air Force units differ significantly in size and scope from those during a major military operation. Existing air-and-space-expeditionary-force pairs and Air Reserve Component SC authorizations may need reorganizing to create modular capabilities to support surges in traditional media operations and news generation—the production of strategically aligned multimedia information for rapid dissemination through both internal and external media. ... Instead, we should base the requirement on the unit’s projected need in terms of mission supported, public-access restrictions, and the expected information demand of media or community representatives in the region.”²⁸

As the PA community charts a way ahead, the Office of the Secretary of Defense is also engaged in studies looking for recommendations for transforming the nation’s strategic communication capability, emphasizing that ownership of the SC process rests at the highest levels of government—the President and senior government leaders.²⁹ “SC must be driven by policy from the White House, the NSC, DOS, DOD and other interagency organizations. In the

²⁸ Maj Tadd Sholtis, “Public Affairs and Information Operations: A Strategy for Success,” Air Power Journal, <http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj05/fal05/sholtis.html> , Fall, 2005.

²⁹ Vincent Vitto, Chairman, *Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Memorandum to the Chairman, Defense Science Board, December 2007.

world arena this is sometimes accomplished via the third element of SC: Public Diplomacy. Defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD) is presently receiving renewed USG attention.”³⁰

By now, the message should be clear. Throughout the Department of Defense, there is full acceptance that Strategic Communication is no longer just about informing, it’s about influencing, using all facets of our nation’s non-kinetic components to win wars. In the recently released *2008 Report of the Defense Science Board: Task Force on Strategic Communication*, SC is described as an “increasingly powerful, multi-dimensional instrument that is critical to America’s interests and to achieving the nation’s strategic goals.”³¹

Task Force on Strategic Communication

In the 2004 DSB report, the bottom line up front was, “U.S. strategic communication must be transformed. We need to move beyond outdated concepts, stale structural models, and institutionally based labels.”³² The 2008 report states, “Strategic communication is critical to achieving all U.S. strategic objectives. It is an increasingly powerful instrument, essential to the success of persuasive, cooperative, and coercive instruments of national power.”³³ Processes noted as positive changes since the 2004 report included the creation of a Strategic Communication Working Group capable of producing a SC Roadmap; the formation of the Strategic Communication Integration Group which has as its members the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, the Director of the Joint Staff, and representatives from Intelligence and Legislative Affairs

³⁰ Richard J. Josten, *Strategic Communication: Key Enabler for Elements of National Power*, Summer 2006, IO Sphere, 17.

³¹ Vincent Vitto, Chairman, *Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Memorandum to the Chairman, Defense Science Board, December 2007.

³² Defense Science Board Strategic Communication Report, 2004, 113.

³³ *Ibid*, 3.

divisions. Additionally, the office of Support to Public Diplomacy was established specifically to coordinate between the offices of the Secretary of Defense and Joint Staff and develop SC plans to ideological support to terrorism.³⁴ The report goes on to make seven major recommendations for improvements primarily focusing on enterprise organization and budgets. With the ground swell of support for national Strategic Communication efforts, there appears to be an open door for PA, IO, CA and DSPD to make their case for purposefully developing a unified SC competency.

Chapter 4

Summary and Conclusion

Strategic Communication: “the *process of informing and appropriately influencing* key audiences by *synchronizing and integrating communication efforts* to deliver truthful, credible, accurate and timely information.”³⁵ For most Public Affairs practitioners today, that definition is a perfectly acceptable representation of the desired PA skill set. However, generations of leaders who guided PA through the Cold War would have balked at the reference of ‘influence.’ In fact, they did. When presented with their first opportunity for significant culture change, Public Affairs leadership passed, with passion. They failed to engage the warfighters in order to identify the need and subsequently train and source to that need.

Air Force senior leader expectations and published guidance constrained the Public Affairs community to the role of information distribution. Had Public Affairs recognized the future value of understanding and possessing information and psychological operations tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as, Civil Affairs and Public Diplomacy, we might have been

³⁴ Ibid, 8.

eight years into a more effective and relevant Strategic Communication process with skill sets purposefully developed to meet the needs of a nation now battling irregular warfare.

Thankfully, over the last decade, senior combatant commanders have come to understand that war-winning hinges on the success of an operationally integrated and synchronized strategic communication process, one that recognizes the complimentary and galvanizing effects PA, IO, Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, and Civil Affairs have if properly integrated. This awakening by our nation's leaders, both military and civilian, can be attributed to a variety of events, but most significantly, the impact of today's warfighters having to face the challenges of the Global War on Terror. Through great work by key intellectual thinkers and in-depth Defense Science Board reviews, Public Affairs once again stands at the crossroads of change. This time, it has the momentum of our nation's transformation in Strategic Communication to assist in their transition to a war-winning operational capability.

³⁵ Secretary of the Air Force Strategic Communication website, *Strategic Communication*.

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