

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS:
TRAINING TODAY FOR THE FUTURE

by

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Preface

I became interested in the topic of public affairs officer training relatively recently while assigned to the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, and working with the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Strategic Communication, where I saw first-hand the difficulty PA leaders have in coming to grips with new and changing mission sets, and trying to do more with less. It has also become clear that PA officers can no longer remain relevant using 20th century PA techniques in a 21st century information world. Much has been written on this, and combining an idea for a new model of training with the necessary overlaps between PA and IO were the defining precepts for this paper.

I must thank LtCol Ron Watrous for his patience with me, and for his willingness to spend time talking about these ideas with me – not just while I was working on this paper, but beginning when I was a captain at the wing level, working with him at Headquarters Air Combat Command PA office.

I also take this opportunity to thank the U.S. Air Force Public Affairs Center of Excellence staff and Mr. Robert Potter for all the hard work they did over the past few years on this very topic, creating the Public Affairs Continuum of Education product, which highlights some of the very issues at the crux of PA training. Their assistance in granting me access to their products was invaluable. And finally, I would be remiss if I failed to thank Major Tadd Sholtis for the advice and recommendations he gave me, which so often were worth much more than he knows. His off-the-cuff equaled my deep thoughts. Thanks much, Quatto.

Abstract

Public Affairs and Strategic Communication are becoming increasingly more important in today's information-centric world. Air Force officials have given lip-service to the primacy of these skill sets, but have not reinforced those words with significant action toward training or equipping today's public affairs officers to be strategic communicators.

Using the problem-solution research methodology, I begin this paper by examining the current state of Air Force Public Affairs, including the doctrine and training. One of the primary areas considered is the lack of consistent formal training for public affairs officers beyond their initial career field training. I also delve into the realm of the emerging strategic communications field, and how the Air Force and Department of Defense (DoD) officials are struggling to define and meet this mission area. Next, I analyze the necessary ties in strategic communication between public affairs and information operations, the doctrinal overlaps and similarities, and some of the challenges therein.

The conclusion of the paper is a recommended roadmap for enhanced, standardized training for Air Force public affairs officers throughout their careers. The application of an operations-type initial qualification training (IQT) and mission qualification training (MQT) system is prescribed, to ensure the necessary training objectives are met. These steps will shape tomorrow's public affairs professionals into well-trained and well-rounded advisers best able to support combatant commanders and DoD strategic communication goals.

Chapter 1

Introduction

He who molds the public sentiment...makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to make.

—Abraham Lincoln

In this paper I will address the problem of not having proper training for public affairs officers across the span of their Air Force career. This problem has plagued Air Force Public Affairs professionals for years. Currently, the only standing, established training for PAOs is the initial training at the Defense Information School (DINFOS), usually accomplished within the first year of active duty or assignment to the PA career field. All other training is ad hoc, selective and variable.

The topic of correct training for Public Affairs officers (PAOs) came to the forefront recently when I was assigned to the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs (SAF/PA) and saw first-hand the difficulty PA and the Secretary of the Air Force Office of Strategic Communication (SAF/CM) officials were having in coming to grips with new and changing mission sets, and trying to do more with less. It has also become clear that PAOs can no longer remain relevant using 20th century PA techniques in a 21st century information world. Added to this are the Presidential Budget Decision 720 reductions; an increasing number of PA deployment requirements – both rotational and 365-day billets; Base Closure and Realignment

joint basing decisions; the merger of public affairs and visual information career fields; and other AF restructuring impacts on the public affairs career field manning and organization.¹

This need for a consistent, mature training program has been further highlighted by the emergence of Strategic Communication as a separate Air Staff two-letter agency. SAF/CM still has an emphasis on PA operations, but with a different mission set and with a more encompassing field of view. The working definition of Air Force strategic communication includes “appropriately influencing key audiences by synchronizing and integrating communication efforts to deliver truthful, credible, accurate and timely information.”² SAF/CM is meant to incorporate communication efforts of public affairs, legislative liaison, military support to public diplomacy, information operations, and other elements the Air Staff – with trickle-down effects and actions at all AF levels. The solution will be to discover and recommend an evolutionary approach to initial and follow-on training requirements for public affairs officers, in light of both current and new requirements and ties to strategic communication and information operations (IO).

Right now, the level of training for public affairs officers is inadequately preparing them to perform the mission. With fewer standing PA professionals than ever, there is a dearth of experienced public affairs officers available not only to fill steady-state and the increasing number of deployed requirements, but also to provide counsel and mentoring to the next generation.³ Adequate training across the span of the PA career can no longer be an idealized solution, but one that must now be put into practice. One of the recommendations from the 2004 Defense Science Board report on Strategic Communication (SC) was specifically to ensure the coordination of “all components of strategic communication including public diplomacy, public affairs, international broadcasting, and military information operations.”⁴ This is something we

are neither proficient in nor consistently training to achieve. PA leaders need to address how, as a career field and as an important part of SC and IO missions, to train our professionals on their mission and how to do the job that is now expected of them.

As stated in the DSB report, effective strategic communication requires the “need to move beyond outdated concepts, stale structural models, and institutionally based labels. Public diplomacy, public affairs, psychological operations and open military information operations must be coordinated and energized.”⁵ In this paper I focus on PA operations and the role supporting strategic communication, including the doctrinal ties between PA and IO. I will also address some of the common pitfalls and myths the services confront when talking about cooperation between PA and IO.⁶ Finally, I will consider the training necessary to ensure current and future PAOs are equipped and prepared to provide the proper support to the joint force commander across the spectrum of operations, ending with a recommended roadmap for the career field for the way ahead.

Notes

¹ Sherry Medders, “Air Force Public Affairs: The Way Ahead” (address, Public Affairs Center of Excellence, Maxwell AFB, AL, 27 Aug 2007).

² Air Force Portal, “Strategic Communication SAF/CM Home Page,” <https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/afp40/USAF/ep/globalTab.do?pageId=681743&channelPageId=-738647> (accessed Nov 14, 2007).

³ Medders, “Air Force Public Affairs: The Way Ahead.”

⁴ Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force On Strategic Communication* (Washington, DC: Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, 2004), 6.

⁵ Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force On Strategic Communication*, 3.

⁶ Tadd Sholtis, “Public Affairs and Information Operations--a Strategy for Success,” *Air & Space Power Journal*, 19:97-106 Fall 2005, 98.

Chapter 2

Current Public Affairs Mission and Training

Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed.

— Abraham Lincoln

As a career field, Air Force Public Affairs provides initial training to incoming officers at a joint school. From that starting point, this chapter addresses the nature of that training and the state of follow-on training. As another issue facing public affairs professionals today, it also discusses how external factors such as manpower cuts and institutionalized pressure to continue status quo operations both affect the conduct of PA operations and training.

Air Force Public Affairs Today

The training and equipping of today's Air Force public affairs officer begins with a two-month joint course at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) at Ft. Meade, Maryland, which is the *only* established, required training for them. PAOs usually accomplish it within the first year of active duty or assignment to the PA career field. All other training is accomplished on an ad-hoc basis, completely dependent on each PAO's situation. The senior leader's willingness to fund the training and part with their PAO for the duration of the course, and even the general knowledge of the PAO or their PA chain of command about what courses are available, end up

creating and perpetuating large training gaps from PAO to PAO. With no equivalent of initial qualification training and mission qualification training as exists in the operational world, there is no prescribed standard of professional PA education across the board.

The traditional DINFOS curriculum is centered on training to the three mainstays of PA, namely: internal information, community relations, and media relations. In the past, officer training included how to lay out newspaper pages; how to take and arrange photos for a base paper or press release; how to write an article for a newspaper following Associated Press style guidelines; and how to conduct and prepare someone for a media interview. While necessary skills for a PA officer, these are certainly insufficient training for today's information environment. Training also did not typically include any information on how to work within an air operations center (AOC) environment, how to coordinate with IO, or bigger picture AF-level and DoD-level integration and strategy – all important since DINFOS is not just service but a joint training venue.

There has been some work on implementing changes at DINFOS, according to Lt Col Ron Watrous, the DINFOS deputy commandant. The 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap required the school to develop intermediate and advanced courses for public affairs practitioners.⁷ Three additional courses have either been implemented or are on short approach. The first is a two-week Joint Intermediate PA Course (JIPAC). JIPAC will be offered for the first time in FY08, and targets mid-level PA officers at the O-3/O-4 level. The second is a 10-day Joint Expeditionary PA Course offered to PAs at the E-5 to O-5 levels. This course focuses on expeditionary PA planning – PA activities at the operational level in support of the joint force commander. It includes exposure to the military planning process for humanitarian operations through to major combat operations at the DINFOS

FTX site. The final course is the three-week Joint Senior PA Course, designed for senior O-4s and up. This senior PA course has been held twice, with most attendees at the O-5/O-6 level. It emphasizes interagency operations, including interaction with senior interagency representatives, and issues affecting the strategic level of Public Affairs.⁸

Other developments are also underway. The Governing Council for DINFOS had a meeting with its shareholders – the PA directors from each service. DINFOS officials analyzed the initial entry training for enlisted public affairs professionals, and found that there was significant overlap in the more than 30 courses developed in response to meet the requirements of each service to achieve the Air Force specialty code. After the analysis, a recommendation was made to reorganize and consolidate as much as possible to create the most streamlined base course possible, addressing for all joint students, the required training and recommendation was accepted immediately.⁹ While it is still in the process of being created and implemented, the upshot is that the innovative desire to update the training was recognized and acted upon. While these changes represent a step in the right direction, there are still many challenges facing the public affairs career field.

Manpower Challenges

“The QDR identified capability gaps in each of the primary supporting capabilities of Public Affairs, Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, Military Diplomacy and Information Operations, including Psychological Operations. *To close those gaps, the Department will focus on properly organizing, training, equipping and resourcing the key communication capabilities* [emphasis added]. ... These primary supporting communication capabilities will be developed with the goal of achieving a seamless communication across the U.S. Government.”¹⁰

The lack of a consistent, dedicated follow-on public affairs training is not surprising when examined in the context of overall superficial senior Air Force leader support to the PA career field. Not only do PA leaders have to deal with fluctuations in training level of its officer corps, but the very pool of officers itself is shrinking. In spite of repeated rhetoric at the highest levels of the importance of PA and SC, AF PA continues to be given short shrift, as evidenced by the 2006 -2007 AF-wide cuts to the career field enacted by Presidential Budget Decision 720.¹¹ PBD 720 called for some 40,000 active-duty manpower cuts across the service, and Air Force Public Affairs, an already small career field challenged to meet its home base, steady-state deployment and contingency deployment requirements, took more than its fair share of those cuts. (See Figures 1 and 2)

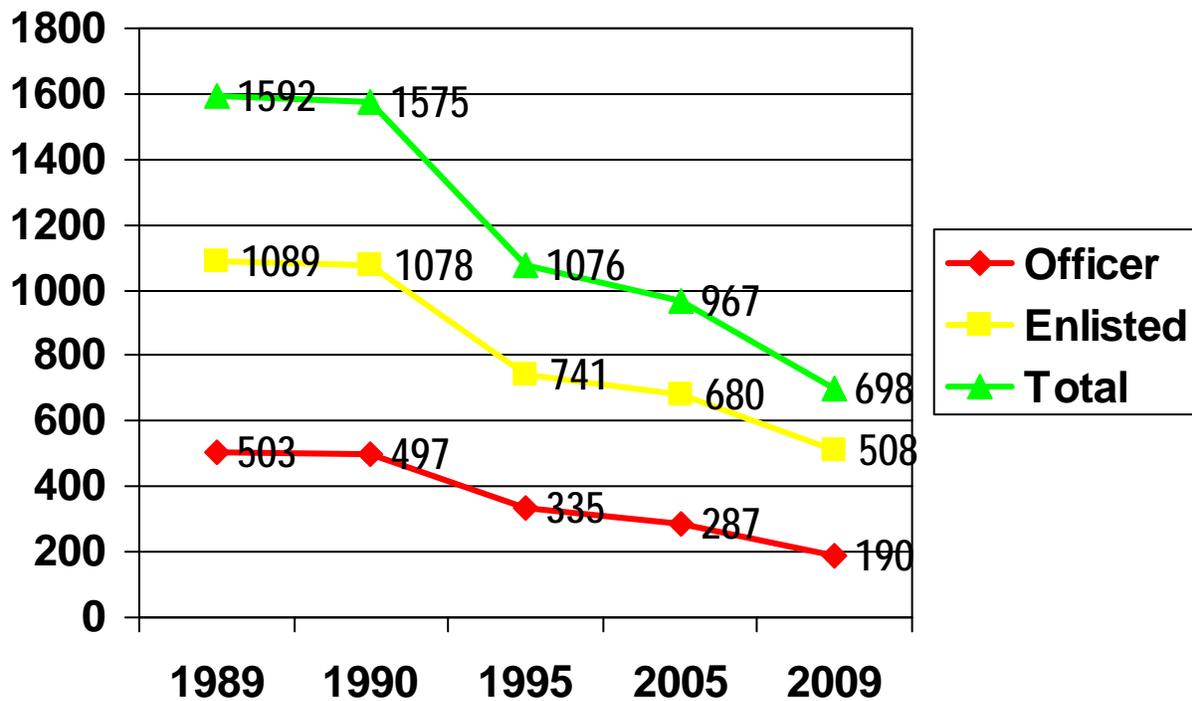


Figure 1 Chart depicting decrease in PA manning over past 20 years. The PBD 720 cuts equated to 30% of PA officers and 30% of PA enlisted personnel.¹²



5 July 07: SAF/PA to AF/A1 Post-PBD 720 35P Manning

	Lt	Capt	Maj	Lt Col	Col	Total
Auths	19	50	58	48	16	191
Joint	0	6	24	18	4	52 (25%)
Outside 35P	0	27	23	8	0	58 (30%)
Available to deploy	19	17	11	22	12	81
Deployment rqmts	1	24	15	5	2	47
AF 35P not deployed	18	-7	-4	17	10	34

Integrity - Service - Excellence

Figure 2. Post-PBD 720 Public Affairs Officer Manning Chart

PA support to warfighting commanders, senior leaders, and to the DoD strategic communication mission is severely impacted by the numbers of PA experts available. While there has since been a reevaluation of the cuts to the PA career field, the damage has been done, and it will require considerable time to reconstitute the necessary level of skilled, experienced public affairs officers.

Cold War-Era Practices

Completely separate from the personnel issues affecting the career field is the need to overcome the institutionally interred practices and training methods that have traditionally made up public affairs activities. The need for change and improvement in the overall training and

organization of public affairs has been identified several times in the past few years. Necessary changes for PA and SC are spelled out in the QDR and in the 2004 DSB report it is reflected that “United States strategic communication lacks ... direction, effective interagency coordination, optimal private sector partnerships, and adequate resources. Tactical message coordination does not equate with strategic planning and evaluation. Personal commitment by top leaders has not been matched by needed changes in the organizations they lead or in a dysfunctional interagency process.”¹³

This was reiterated by then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who said, “The standard U.S. government public affairs operation was designed primarily to respond to individual requests for information. It tends to be reactive, rather than proactive -- and it still operates for the most part on an eight hour, five-days-a-week basis, while world events, and our enemies, are operating 24-7, across every time zone. That is an unacceptably dangerous deficiency.”¹⁴

In the AF Public Affairs arena, the idea of strategic messaging is dumbed down to the point where even within the service, messaging becomes all about the sheer number and stylistic presentation of products coming out of the MAJCOM and the Pentagon. Thoughts of consistent, clear messaging are lost in the rush to produce more products with more brilliant graphics. In 2006 alone, the Air Force put out an AF Posture Statement, an AF Roadmap, an AF Handbook, a new AF Vision Statement, the Air Force Story, the Air Force Strategic Plan 2006-2008, and the Air Force Priorities document – along with a monthly ‘AF Talking Points’ which lists two to three pages (67 bullets) of our ‘most important’ messages. From document to document, there were inconsistent messages on programs, scores of sound bites on every weapon system, many attractive pictures of combat-ready Airmen, and a lot of polysyllabic words describing the

absolute critical importance of just about *everything*. In that context, any single overarching message of strategic importance to the AF or to DOD is impossible to pinpoint.

Another example of this problem was spelled out, again in the 2004 DSB report, discussing the White House Office of Global Communications (OGC) established in 2002. The OGC was tasked to “coordinate strategic communications with global audiences” and “advise on the strategic direction and themes that United States government agencies use to reach foreign audiences.”¹⁵ In spite of those lofty goals, however, the OGC evolved into an organization focused primarily on tactical public affairs coordination – and not engaged in strategic direction, coordination, and evaluation.¹⁶

This is the same unfortunate effect that is seen in DoD’s strategic communications efforts [more of which will be discussed in chapter 3], especially in PA at operational and strategic levels. Current SC and PA operations boil down to standard PA messaging, with tactical metrics and quantitative measures of effectiveness (MOE) and measures of performance (MOP) based on the number of press releases sent out, number of interviews conducted, number of phone calls from media answered – and not on the effects generated or desired.

The Need for a New Concept for Training

The information environment our military forces work in has changed and we need to change with it. According to Rumsfeld in a 2006 address, “Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today’s media age, but for the most part we – our country – has not...”¹⁷ He went on to describe a perfect example showing how the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense PA (OASD/PA) officials must learn to respond to the new information environment. “The growing number of media outlets in many parts of the world still have relatively immature standards and practices that too often serve to inflame and distort – rather than to explain and

inform. And while extremist movements have used this to their advantage for years, the U.S. have barely even begun to compete in reaching their audiences.”¹⁸ Rumsfeld provided a concrete example in the false allegations of desecration of a Koran in 2005. He explained how the story rapidly proliferated to websites, blogs, satellite news and radio, and sparked anti-American riots in Pakistan and elsewhere, where lives were lost. Public affairs officials took the time needed to ensure that it had the facts before responding to the false reports, as PAOs have always been taught to do, and finally determined that the charge was false. But in the meantime, he said, lives had been lost and great damage had been done.¹⁹

“What complicates the ability to respond quickly is that, unlike our enemies, which propagate lies with impunity – with no penalty whatsoever – our government does not have the luxury of relying on other sources for information – anonymous or otherwise. Our government has to be *the* source. And we tell the truth.”²⁰

LtCol Watrous is aware of this changing environment, and in spite of forward movement at DINFOS, in the big picture there remains significant work to do. In his view, the career field is well overdue for two major actions. The first is a serious legal and policy review within DOD of communication laws and policies applying to communication at home and abroad. This would include a survey of the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 as it’s been updated through the years and the Department of State and Defense policies that have been derived from this law.²¹

The second action is, as he calls it, a “serious knock-down drag-out bloodletting” discussion of the roles and missions among PA, psychological operations (PSYOP), international affairs (IA), and civil affairs (CA) – which has yet to happen in spite of the blurring of the boundaries between information operations and public affairs. Watrous is calling for a communication-centric version of the ops community’s Joint Warfighter Talks where operators

from each service talk and compare notes on aviation technology, and what it means for their own mission. That capability, says Watrous, just does not exist yet for communication capabilities in DoD.²²

What does exist now, although only very recently, is a document outlining the joint capabilities offered by public affairs. The Joint Public Affairs Support Element, run out of Joint Forces Command, spearheaded creation and staffing of a Joint Initial Capabilities Document (ICD) for Public Affairs. The Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) approved and signed this joint ICD in early 2008. According to Watrous, that is tantamount to categorizing Public Affairs as an operational capability, and represents a significant step forward for the joint PA field – first to define the mission, then to define the tasks needed to accomplish the mission, and then figure out how to train to it.²³ Today, that process now includes establishing the PA role in strategic communication.

Notes

⁷ Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap*, 25 September 2006,9.

⁸ LtCol Ron Watrous, (deputy commandant, Defense Information School), interview by the author, 3 April 2008.

⁹ Watrous, interview.

¹⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, 6 February 2006, 92.

¹¹ Sherry Medders, “Air Force Public Affairs: The Way Ahead” (address, Public Affairs Center of Excellence, Maxwell AFB, AL, 27 August 2007).

¹² “Public Affairs: The Way Ahead” SAF/PAR briefing, 27 August 07

¹³ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, 23.

¹⁴ Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense (address, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 17 February 2006).

¹⁵ The White House Office of Global Communications was formally established by Executive Order 13283, with an accompanying news release, on January 21, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ogc/>.

¹⁶ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, 25.

¹⁷ Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense (address, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 17 February 2006).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Notes

²¹ Smith-Mundt Act, U.S. Code, Title 22, Chapter 18, Subchapter 5, Paragraph 1461 (1948); excerpt available from http://assembler.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode22/usc_sec_22_00001461----000-.html. Accessed 3 April 2008.

²² Watrous, interview.

²³ Watrous, interview.

Chapter 3

The Mission of Strategic Communication in DoD

One cannot wage war under present conditions without the support of public opinion, which is tremendously molded by the press and other forms of propaganda.

— Douglas MacArthur

Strategic communication has been one of the newest buzz words in DoD for the past few years. The DoD and the individual Services have each addressed – or begun to – how to accomplish the strategic communication mission. In the absence of SC doctrine or definitive direction, this has been a struggle. This chapter looks at that struggle to understand what strategic communication really is within DoD, and how the Air Force is trying to approach it.

A New National Priority

Strategic communication itself is not a new idea, but as Karen Hughes, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, remarked in 2007, the communication environment the U.S. is facing has changed. “In order to be successful, it’s important for our messages to be coordinated – quick and credible. They must speak to the conscience of people around the world. And our actions must demonstrate the courage, conviction and compassion of the American character.”²⁴ Thus, the idea of strategic communication has gone through a renaissance as military operations themselves have changed and the world in which they are conducted has

become a more information-dominant environment. As such, ‘strategic communication’ at the national and Department of Defense level gained some traction as a key buzzword for winning the information war. Unfortunately, this renaissance did not go so far as to establish a consistent definition of what strategic communication is, or how DoD should accomplish that mission.

The QDR SC Roadmap defines strategic communication as: “Focused United States Government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs, and actions synchronized with other elements of national power.”²⁵

It is clear, then, that at the highest levels strategic communication is not a service-specific or even simply a DoD function, but should involve all national instruments of policy and communication. While this paper addresses only the DoD and specifically AF functionality of strategic communication, it remains important to note that strategic communication is a *national* priority – not simply a service priority. This serves to highlight the importance that should be – and is not – being placed on developing strategic communications experts within the military services.

DoD and Air Force Strategic Communication

Two years before the QDR was released, in that 2004 DSB report, specific recommendations were spelled out, emphasizing the importance of SC. “The Task Force met with representatives from the National Security Council, White House Office of Global Communications, Department of State, Department of Defense, Broadcast Board of Governors, academic and private sector communicators. US strategic communication must be transformed. Strategic communication is vital to US national security and foreign policy. ... The new

recommendations emphasize the scope of change required across US Government departments and agencies in order for strategic communication to be effective.”²⁶

The DSB report went on to recommend that “all military plans and operations have appropriate strategic communication components, ensure collaboration with the Department of State’s diplomatic missions and with theater security cooperation plans... The Department should ... reallocate Information Operations funding within U.S. STRATCOM for expanded support for strategic communication programs.”²⁷

The Mission?

In spite of strong wording for the past few years about the need to develop SC capabilities, there exists no SC doctrine. Other extant doctrine documents and instructions have yet to fully address the strategic communication mission areas to be supported by public affairs, even those updated or created since the emphasis by DoD on SC. For instance, around the same time the Air Force merged the public affairs and visual information career fields in 2006 and 2007, DoD Directive 5160.48, Public Affairs and Visual Information (PA&VI) Education and Training, originally created in 2004, was updated as of October 2007. The chance to highlight the emerging SC mission and new importance of PA and VI in supporting that critical national capability was squandered, and only the same traditional PA roles were emphasized: “All joint-Service PA&VI E&T supporting the mission areas of community relations, media relations, internal information, VI, and combat camera. Specific career fields in PA&VI include broadcasting (radio and television), journalism (photo, broadcast, electronic and print), still photography, videography, electronic imaging, lithography, graphic arts, and related maintenance specialties.”²⁸ Granted, these continue to be important mission and skill sets for

PA, but do not represent any departure from standard public affairs operations and training that would be expected from the DoD and national push for SC.

Disciplines under Strategic Communication

It is stated in the Air Staff Directorate of Communication (SAF/CM), that Strategic Communication is “the process of informing and appropriately influencing key audiences by synchronizing and integrating communication efforts to deliver truthful, credible, accurate and timely information.”²⁹ What is interesting to note here is the use of the words ‘appropriately influencing,’ as for some time there has been the desire in DoD, especially among some of the services, to avoid the use of the word ‘influence’ in relation to public affairs activities, which are undeniably a key capability of SC.

Based on the DSB recommendation, DoD’s role in Strategic Communication specifically involves the cooperative involvement of all the elements of IO, psychological operations (PSYOP), intelligence, civil affairs and public affairs.³⁰ Further, it recognizes the seemingly inherent Cold War operations bias, and went on to say that “We need to move beyond outdated concepts, stale structural models, and institutionally based labels. Public diplomacy, public affairs, PSYOP and open military information operations must be coordinated and energized.”³¹ Any further work on organizing, training and equipping future PA professionals has to take into account these new synergies, and make them work.

Notes

²⁴ Karen Hughes, Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, “Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy: Interagency Coordination” (address, Department of Defense Conference on Strategic Communication, Washington, DC, 11 July 2007).

²⁵ Statement of Captain Hal Pittman, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Joint Communication), “Strategic Communication and Countering Ideological Support for Terrorism” in House, U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, 15 Nov 2007.

Notes

²⁶ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, letter from Task Force Chairman to the Chairman of the DSB.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 9.

²⁸ Department of Defense Directive 5160.48, *Public Affairs and Visual Information (PA & VI) Education and Training*, 4 October 2007, 7.

²⁹ Air Force Portal, "Strategic Communication SAF/CM Home Page," <https://www.my.af.mil/gcss-af/afp40/USAF/ep/globalTab.do?pageId=681743&channelPageId=-738647> (accessed Nov 14, 2007).

³⁰ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, September 2004, 78 – 83.

³¹ *Ibid*, 3.

Chapter 4

Information Operations and Public Affairs

An ongoing discussion amongst PA professionals for many years has revolved around the appropriate linkages between PA and IO. This chapter examines the nature of public affairs and information operations. It considers the legal and doctrinal restraints and constraints for each field and how each fits under the umbrella of strategic communications. It also discusses possibilities and ramifications of increased PA-IO cooperation.

A Bright Line

The most problematic of the interactions under the new model for SC involves public affairs and information operations. Ties between PA and IO, regardless of semantic arguments over terminology and lexicon (such as age-old fight about whether or not public affairs communication can or should 'influence' the audience), are only getting stronger. Each service responds differently to these ideas, making the issue even more complex. AF and Navy officials have typically been somewhat forward-thinking with regard to this issue, while Army officials have painted a more strict bright line between PA and IO operations. DoD officials faced a similar problem of 'perception as policy' over the creation of the Office Of Strategic Influence, which suffered from the Shakespearean flaw of merely having the wrong name.

Rumsfeld gave his view on the unfortunate sequence of events in his CFR speech. The U.S. military, he explained, working with the Iraqi government and the U.S. Embassy, tried to find non-traditional means to provide accurate information to the Iraqi people to counter the active anti-U.S. propaganda that was so prevalent. Out of ignorance, this innovation was portrayed as inappropriate, and led to allegations of “buying news” in Iraq. The resulting negative press stories then caused all initiative to stop. Even worse, he said, was how it led to a “chilling effect” for military public affairs.³² “The conclusion is drawn that there is no tolerance for innovation, much less any human error that could conceivably be seized upon by *a press that seems to demand perfection from the government, but does not apply the same standard to the enemy or even sometimes to themselves.*[emphasis added]”³³

The OSI was in short order completely decommissioned simply because the media, public and Services themselves could not or would not understand the intent. Credibility of course is always an issue, but that issue simply highlights again the overriding need to not allow lack of education to stifle innovative ways to get these communities to work together – in every service and joint arena – in such a way as to ensure messages are coordinated and in sync. This is the only way to conduct effective strategic communication.

According to a treatise on successful PA-IO operations, Major Tadd Sholtis, PAO attending the School of Advanced Air and Space Studies, points out there are a few main reasons why so many fail to adequately understand the relationship between PA and IO. “Many people who have spoken in favor of a PA-IO firewall do so because they are convinced that the two functions serve entirely different moral ends. PA officers must tell the truth. Information operators, many believe, are paid to lie. In reality the small, highly compartmentalized specialty of military deception is the only branch of IO that knowingly provides false information – often

accomplished merely by allowing the enemy to reach his own wrong conclusions about observed facts. Psychological operations (PSYOP), the larger segment of IO's influence capabilities, provide factual information – including rebroadcasts of straight news stories...”³⁴

Col. William Darley, a U.S. Army public affairs officer, wrote an article in 2005 for Army Magazine, which points out why PA and IO should have only limited interaction. “To accomplish its mission, the *only arrows in the public affairs quiver are exercising the simple virtues of telling the truth and facilitating access by outside observers* [emphasis added] to confirm the truth of what is elsewhere officially asserted³⁵ ... One must therefore observe that forcing public affairs into the IO operational template – the purpose of which is messaging, control and manipulation – strips it of its distinctive character and consequent benefit to the military, the war effort and ultimately strategic support for operators in the field.”³⁶

Darley falls prey to the dogmatic precept that PA and IO are separated by their audiences – that PA activities are targeted toward domestic audiences, and IO are targeted at foreign audiences. As Sholtis recently wrote, the “naïve solution currently offered by joint doctrine and the PRSA Board of Ethics and Professional Standards, among others, seems to call for theorizing separate information 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 the enemy. Can such a distinction really exist when the enemy, even if easily segregated from larger populations, gets his information from the same satellite news channels or Internet sites potentially used by millions?”³⁷ In today's world, such distinctions are more and more irrelevant – with satellite television, pervasive blogs, web sites and the almost universal reach of most information, the idea of separation based on *who* gets to receive information is simply not feasible.

Watrous also points out that the Smith-Mundt Act and how it is interpreted have had a lasting impact on the conduct of Public Affairs. The Smith-Mundt Act essentially says responsibility for communicating with foreign audiences with the intent of influencing them to support U.S. interest belongs with DOS, and under the auspices of this law, those foreign communication programs will not be aimed at domestic U.S. audience or Congress with any intent to propagandize U.S. audiences.³⁸

However, Watrous explains, the Smith-Mundt Act was introduced following WW II – in a very different information environment – and has never been adequately updated to reflect the impact of pervasive communications technologies. The law as it stood in the 1940s worked, because by and large what was said in a foreign country didn't come back to the US – the state of technology just did not allow for that. The information age changes all that, but there has yet to be any sufficient impetus to review the Smith-Mundt Act in light of those changes. Such a review, argues Watrous, will greatly assist in breaking down the barriers between IO and PA that have been artificially constructed around different 'audiences' for information.³⁹

Doctrinal Linkages

There exists public affairs doctrine and instructions, both joint and service, addressing how to accomplish public affairs operations as they are traditionally understood (internal information, media relations, etc). Like many publications, this is actually more of a TTP document – a how-to guide for PA officers at all levels on the daily conduct of typical PA activities. The most recently updated Air Force PA publication, AFI 35-101 *Public Affairs Policies And Procedures*, dated 29 Nov 2005, includes reference to the conjunction of PA and IO operations. There exist strict differences, though, in Air Force service doctrine and joint doctrine

on the lines between the two disciplines.⁴⁰ The following excerpts illustrate these differences.

From AFI 35-101:

In Air Force doctrine, Public Affairs is considered a core capability of IO. It is essential that PA practitioners know how to integrate, coordinate, and deconflict PA activities with other IO capabilities and understand what PA does and does not bring to the fight. ... The availability of information via the Internet in real and near-real time has blurred the traditional separation of information intended for foreign audiences and information available to the American public. As psychological operations (PSYOP) and military deception planners formulate courses of action, PA must maintain an equal voice with operational commanders. The only sure way to guarantee PA core competencies are properly employed is for PA operators to be directly involved in IO planning.⁴¹

Public Affairs tactics reside in the influence operations sphere of IO and provide the commander with effective means to maintain legitimacy and counter adversary propaganda through the timely release of accurate information through public communication channels.⁴²

PA planners will integrate with IO organizations at the appropriate levels. PA coordination with IO organizations does not cede control of PA operations to the IO community, but provides opportunities for PA to support the commander's operational objectives through centralized control and decentralized execution of all information operations. Public Affairs and IO planners for PSYOPS, Military Deception and Civil Affairs (when in use) should coordinate their actions/information products to prevent counteracting each other or compromising operational security.⁴³

Joint doctrine, however, while acknowledging a relationship between IO and PA, goes further toward creating strict lines between them, and stresses the traditional roles of PA. From

JP 3-13, *Information Operations*:

There are three military functions, PA, CMO, and DSPD, specified as related capabilities for IO. These capabilities make significant contributions to IO and must always be coordinated and integrated with the core and supporting IO capabilities. **However, their primary purpose and rules under which they operate must not be compromised by IO.**⁴⁴

PA as a **Related** Capability to IO. PA and IO must be coordinated and synchronized to ensure consistent themes and messages are communicated to avoid credibility losses. As with other Core, Supporting, and Related Information Operations Capabilities related IO capabilities, PA has a role in all aspects of

DOD's missions and functions. Communication of operational matters to internal and external audiences is just one part of PA's function. In performing duties as one of the primary spokesmen, the public affairs officer's interaction with the IO staff enables PA activities to be integrated, coordinated, and deconflicted with IO. While intents differ, PA and IO ultimately support the dissemination of information, themes, and messages adapted to their audiences.... The embedding of media in combat units offers new opportunities, as well as risks, for the media and the military; the PA staff has a key role in establishing embedding ground rules.⁴⁵

While any meaningful discourse on the future of Air Force public affairs needs to include the joint perspective, the Air Force career field needs to move forward and continue to push the agenda of PA-IO cooperation.

Why PA-IO Cooperation is the Answer

If we look to one of Sholtis's recommendations, the answer is as simple as getting the joint community to accept the fact that PA and IO can and should cooperate in influence operations. "Globalization's smoothing of the seams between formerly segmented audiences makes it imperative that PA and IO integrate strategies and tactics to present consistent messages."⁴⁶ According to Sholtis, it also boils down to a question of efficiencies and that pesky issue of manpower. "The military has too few resources or trained communicators of any stripe – PA or IO – to deal adequately with the overwhelming information demands of major conflicts, much less protracted counterinsurgency campaigns, nation-building efforts, or steady-state security-cooperation initiatives. Fully capable PA and IO forces inevitably would see overlaps in areas such as skills training, planning products, or assessment tools."⁴⁷

Notes

³² Information throughout this paragraph taken from Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense (address, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 17 February 2006).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sholtis, "Public Affairs and Information Operations," 98.

³⁵ Col. William M. Darley, "Why Public Affairs Is Not Information Operations," Army Magazine 55, no. 1 (January 2005), <http://www.ansa.org/armymagazine>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Sholtis, "Public Affairs and Information Operations," 98.

³⁸ Smith-Mundt Act, U.S. Code, Title 22, Chapter 18, Subchapter 5, Paragraph 1461 (1948); excerpt available from http://assembler.law.cornell.edu/uscode/html/uscode22/usc_sec_22_00001461----000-.html. Accessed 3 April 2008.

³⁹ Watrous, interview.

⁴⁰ References taken from Air Force Instruction (AFI) 35-101, *Public Affairs Policies and Procedures*, 29 November 2005; Air Force Doctrine Document, 2-5.3, *Public Affairs Operations*, 24 June 2005; Joint Publication (JP) 3-61, *Public Affairs*, 9 May 2005; and JP 3-13, *Information Operations*, 13 February 2006.

⁴¹ AFI 35-101, 27.

⁴² Ibid, 278.

⁴³ Ibid, 279.

⁴⁴ JP 3-13, II-8, II-9

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Sholtis, "Public Affairs and Information Operations," 98.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 5

Recommendations and Conclusion

But it's critically important that each of you have the ability to communicate, to deal with the press.... The problem is that we've not yet adapted to all of these new realities that exist and we're going to have to do a much better job of it.⁴⁸

— Donald Rumsfeld

Public Affairs Qualification Training

The overriding problems addressed in this paper is a failure to recognize and train public affairs officers to the 'new' PA mission, the changes in store from strategic communication, and the changing role of PA and IO. One example is the previously described reliance on outdated MOEs such as number of press releases generated – regardless of their effect. Only since 2006 has SAF/PA introduced an assessment branch, which still has yet to significantly influence the day-to-day media operations of SAF/PA, simply because there is no limited practical PA knowledge of how to do this. Institutional inertia has continued to thread the path for PA along same time-worn seams of focusing on internal information, media relations, and community relations. While still relevant, these basic missions on their own do not address the way communications need to occur in this day and age. Cold War-era close-hold information and long lead times to counter incorrect information and inject our own messages into the public

realm are insufficient to address modern enemies and their skillful and blatant use of propaganda and disinformation to influence global audiences.

This argument for change is further supported by the QDR. “Responsibility for strategic communication must be government-wide and the QDR supports efforts led by the Department of State to improve integration of this vital element of national power into strategies across the Federal Government. The Department must instill communication assessments and processes into its culture, developing programs, plans, policy, information and themes to support Combatant Commanders that reflect the U.S. Government’s overall strategic objectives. To this end, the Department will work to integrate communications efforts ... across the enterprise to link information and communication issues with broader policies, plans and actions.”⁴⁹

The operations world in the Air Force has long established its training through its IQT, MQT and continuation training (CT) levels, where IQT is to qualify the personnel in basic duties without specific regard to an operational mission, MQT is training required to achieve a basic level of competence in the unit’s primary tasked missions, and CT is follow-on training. The PA career field would benefit greatly from creating its own version of standardized, required training at the entry, mid, and senior levels.

Initial Qualification Training

The initial qualification training should consist of finishing the PA Qualification Course at DINFOS. This exists now as the basic course for all PAOs, and upon completion, practitioners receive their PA occupational AFSC. DINFOS should continue to grow to meet the changing SC and PA mission sets, and should ensure that students receive at least an overview of Information Operations, IO ties to PA, and AOC operations. Most of that is already happening. IQT should happen as an O-1 or in the first year of a cross-trainee’s assignment to PA.

Mission Qualification Training

Mission qualification training for PA should include the JIPAC under development, but to reach that 'MQT' level, PA officers should also be required to complete the Information Operations Fundamentals Applications Course (IOFAC), the Contingency Wartime Planning Course (CWPC), and the Joint Public Affairs Officer Workshop. Mid-level PAOs should be exposed to working with a Joint Interagency Task Force, be familiar with the Universal Joint Task List, have a more thorough understanding of AOC operations and the ATO cycle, and have a basic understanding of a combatant commander's objectives and how to link PA tasks to supporting those objectives. PAOs should take the AOC Familiarization Course and the Joint Air Operations Planning Course through distance learning, or perhaps it should be worked into the JIPAC curriculum. All PA captains and majors should be recommended, but not required, to attend the Joint Public Affairs Supervisors Course.

Continuation Training

Continuation training should include the DINFOS Joint Senior PA Course. At this level, the education should focus more heavily on the joint interagency processes at the strategic level and should reiterate and expound on those linkages between PA, IO, Civil Affairs, International Affairs (SAF/IA), and Legislative Liaison – that is, with strategic communicators across the board. This course should be focused on PA professionals at the O-5 level and above.

Other than JIPAC, all of these courses already exist – it is just a question of establishing and funding PA billets, and creating the required understanding among the career field and commanders that PAOs require – not desire – this training. Looking at the Public Affairs Center of Excellence-developed PA Continuum of Education spreadsheet, it is also clear that while at the basic and intermediate levels, there are many educational opportunities for PAs to hone their

skills, once officers approach the senior level, few courses readily available to PAOs have strong content related to communication.⁵⁰

Ensure the PA-IO Dialogue Continues

At DINFOS, through the PA qualification course (QC) officers and senior enlisted PA practitioners receive a 3.5 contact hour block on PA and IO. Because DINFOS is a joint school, the curriculum for that block is built based on the joint doctrine and hence presents the joint perspective – including the need for coordination but separation between the disciplines. In the AF-unique time during PAQC, there is additional time built in to address the AF view of PA-IO and the need for greater ties and interaction between the two. According to Watrous, the emergence of the emphasis on SC gives DINFOS and the PA career field an opportunity to do more integration with IO in the training. “SC not only bridges the gap between the IO and PA communities, but also reaches out to interagency; which has even further implications for training.”⁵¹

Currently, IO training itself does not currently include a thorough education in working with PA as a core set of information/influence operations, which is probably due to the fact that PA is considered only a ‘related’ capability to IO per joint doctrine, and a supporting capability in AF doctrine. While it is beyond the purview of the PA career field to make changes to IO training and education, SAF/PA and PACE should ensure that AF PME includes modules that train to the operational linkages between the two fields.

There should also be focus on not just maintaining the two instructor positions at the 39th IOS (where all IO training is conducted) and 505th C2 Warrior School (where joint/combined air operations center training is conducted), but staffing those positions with capable, trained public affairs officers who will be able to educate future generations of IO professionals on how to

effectively work with public affairs. This would mean a departure from the typical lieutenant or captain sent to fill the instructor position – who, at the 39th IOS, ends up being the senior officer in the Influence Operations section, often with no experience at all in that field. Worse yet is that in spite of the opportunities, there are no formal linkages between the IOS, C2WS and DINFOS schoolhouses.⁵²

Educating AF Leaders – and Ourselves – on PA Capabilities

Changing the way to organize, train and equip public affairs officers will have profound effects on how the Air Force contributes to the strategic communication mission in DoD. But changing how PA thinks about PA is not enough – the field must also be able to educate and convince the operational Air Force about what information capabilities PA brings to the fight. Watrous views the issue in part as an issue of roles, mission and funding. To operationalize public affairs, information needs to be designated as a separate domain in which the Air Force fights. However, according to Watrous, the argument is that we cannot designate ‘information’ as a domain in doctrine because there is no current doctrinal basis for that. This forms a handy Catch 22 in favor of the status quo – if the information sphere were designated as a domain, it would have to be at a doctrinal roles and missions cost to another field (e.g., IO). “This is how new, innovative ideas become stifled by entrenched rice bowls and bureaucracy,” says Watrous. “So PAOs encounter intense pushback to innovation, in part because of the roles and mission protectiveness, and in part because as a service, the Air Force is already under intense resource restrictions.”⁵³ So yet another key to moving PA – and SC – forward is fostering an environment, through education at all levels – that PA is an important capability that should work in conjunction with, not in a separate stovepipe from – other operational capabilities, in support of the larger Air Force and DoD missions.

Conclusion

A thorough review of the current status of PA and SC, coupled with doctrinal and operational ties to the IO sphere of activities, readily lends itself to identification of discrete training requirements for public affairs officers. These training requirements will be necessary to operationalizing the public affairs career field and establishing the strategic communication field. The recommendations will fit into and expand current training for public affairs professionals, and complement existing efforts to define and adapt the career field to operating in an increasingly information-centric environment. In order to achieve the new training model it must be fashioned on the operations-based training model, including IQT, MQT and CT levels.

Until the PA, IO and AF operational communities can overcome their institutional inertia, stop focusing on semantics and recognize that public affairs is another tool in the toolbox for influencing public opinion, we'll be stuck in the same Cold War paradigm. We have to move beyond the wall between IO and PA; learn to effectively use PA as an information tool – an *influence* tool; and train to counter the enemy's rapid use of information technology. The first step down that road is establishing the training that today's and tomorrow's Air Force Public Affairs officers need to foster that change and growth.

Notes

⁴⁸ Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense (address, Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., 27 March 2006).

⁴⁹ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, 92.

⁵⁰ Public Affairs Center of Excellence, PA Continuum of Education, staff study, 23 July 2006.

⁵¹ Watrous, interview.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Glossary

AFDD	Air Force Doctrine Document
AFI	Air Force Instruction
CT	Continuation Training
DINFOS	Defense Information School
DOD	Department of Defense
DSB	Defense Science Board
IQT	Initial Qualification Training
IO	Information Operations
JIPAC	Joint Intermediate Public Affairs Course
JP	Joint Publication
MAJCOM	Major Command
MQT	Mission Qualification Training
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
OSD/PA	Office of the Secretary of Defense Public Affairs
PA	Public Affairs
PAO	Public Affairs Officer
SAF/PA	Secretary of the Air Force Office of Public Affairs
SC	Strategic Communication
TTP	Tactics, Techniques and Procedures

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