

Influencing Friends & Allies: The Role of the Combatant Commander

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Editorial Abstract: *Combatant Commanders have a clear mandate to carry out Department of Defense regional influence activities, but joint doctrine limits exactly whom COCOMs may influence. The author recommends doctrinal changes to enable a new concept of Information Operations-Friends & Allies, to better serve US Government strategic messaging roles.*

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MOGADISHU, SOMALIA (CNN)—*May 12th, 2010—A resurgent Islamic Courts Union (ICU) conducted a series of attacks in both Mogadishu and Kismayo in an attempt to disrupt the Somali Transitional Government. However the ICU attacks were largely unsuccessful due to the ability of Somali government forces to effectively respond. Most importantly, the citizens of Mogadishu and Kismayo have reacted very strongly in opposition to the ICU, instead supporting the Somali government in its efforts to bring lasting peace to the troubled state. It seems Somalia is no longer the fertile ground for Radical Islamist support that it used to be.*

Reading this news report, the Commander of US African Command (AFRICOM) knew that his combatant command's efforts in influencing the hearts and minds of the Somali people were having a positive effect—in the geographic region as well as in the greater Long War. Somalia has been through quite a journey since the ICU forces were defeated over three years ago in the Battle of Ras Kamboni. The UN supported Transition Government has worked to stabilize the state and has steadily progressed toward the country's first general election in a generation. Of key interest to the combatant command was the willingness of the Somali people to support the government over the ICU. The ICU's inability to garner popular support in its fight against



*What lies ahead for the leaders of the newest US Command?
General Kip Ward, US Army, Ambassador Mary Ward, US Africa Command.
(Defense Link)*

the Transitional Government was the successful outgrowth of a concerted Information Operations campaign conducted by his J39 team.

AFRICOM responded to the crisis brought on by torrential rains and flooding, by establishing a humanitarian assistance coordination center (HACC) in the port of Kismayo and coordinating an interagency and international effort to deliver foreign humanitarian assistance, providing water, food, and temporary shelter to the Somalis affected by the floods. The after-action report from the humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operation revealed that the port of Kismayo was woefully inadequate to support such an operation. Fifteen years of conflict and neglect had rendered this important Somali port ineffective. In 2008 AFRICOM initiated a civil-military operation that helped Somalia rebuild the port facilities. Following this, the IO team recognized that the good news story about the port needed to be told to all Somalis as evidence of the growing stability and strength of the Transitional Government. AFRICOM began an

information effort to provide the Somali people accurate news on how the Transitional Government was providing for their security (thanks to military training with US forces), building the economy to address their needs, and establishing the central government in preparation for a general election. By 2009, when the ICU attempted to regain the initiative, they were unable to enlist (or co-opt) the people in support of their efforts. The commander of AFRICOM smiled, saying "looks like the Somalis are supporting their government over the Islamists." Maybe they would be willing to support the United States over radical Islamists in the Long War?

The above story is fiction—but it reveals a dichotomy between the potential application of information operations by the combatant commander and current IO joint doctrine. Joint Publication (JP) 3-13 states information operations are described as the integrated employment of [core capabilities], in concert with specified supporting and related capabilities, to influence, disrupt,

corrupt, or usurp *adversarial* [emphasis added] human and automated decision making while protecting our own. While this definition addresses the full measure of joint efforts in effecting the mind of the enemy decision maker, it cordons off other potential recipients of IO—friends and allies of the United States. The term *adversarial* in the JP 3-13 definition of IO is limiting; IO has beneficial application in US efforts to influence states and peoples friendly or allied with the United States. Certainly, some aspects of IO are best reserved for unfriendly target audience—namely actions to disrupt, corrupt, and usurp. But if IO represents a panoply of capabilities that can be used to affect the enemy, it also includes capabilities that can be used to influence friends. Therefore joint IO doctrine should be changed to include friends and allies of the United States as targeted audiences. Furthermore the geographic COCOM has a role to play in IO focused on decision makers friendly to the United States. Indeed, the Somalia vignette provides an outline for exploring the COCOM's role in conducting Information Operations-Friends & Allies (IO-F/A). Yet before delving into an examination of these roles, an analysis of current joint doctrine regarding IO (and its supporting and related capabilities) is useful.

Current Joint Doctrine: A Rose by Any Other Name...

Two questions are at the forefront of our analysis of joint doctrine regarding Information Operations: Is current IO doctrine useful vis-à-vis friends and allies and if so how? Interestingly enough, JP 3-13 possesses the concepts and capabilities that support IO efforts focused on friends and allies of the United States.

JP 3-13 provides the joint force commander (and staff) the guidance needed to plan and execute information operations with the goal of achieving and maintaining information superiority. The desired dominance is over the information environment—the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or

act on information. JP 3-13 identifies three dimensions of the information environment—physical, informational, and cognitive. Further, JP 3-13 states the cognitive dimension is the most important of the three, for in it resides the mind of the decision maker. Finally, JP 3-13 recognizes IO can produce effects and achieve objectives across the range of military operations, with the ultimate objective of securing US national interests in the information environment. The publication identifies specific capabilities—core, supporting, and related—to be used in the three dimensions of the information environment. Adversaries merit application of all these capabilities, but friends and allies are not enemies and thus should not be the recipient of IO capabilities that destroy, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp their information environment. This eliminates the physical and informational dimensions for IO-F/A application, but the cognitive dimension provides a working space for IO efforts to influence friendly decision makers.

Thus current joint doctrine is useful in conducting IO-F/A and it identifies the tools for doing so. Yet throughout JP 3-13 the motif is a focus on IO planning and execution against adversaries of the United States. But, as we have seen throughout the Global War on Terror (GWOT) the decisions and actions of our friends and allies have not always been supportive of US national interests—whether those decisions have been regionally focused (such as Turkey's decision not to allow US ground forces to invade Iraq from inside her territory) or globally focused (such as France and Germany's resistance to US initiatives regarding Iraq on the UN Security Council). Turkey, France, and Germany are all long time US friends and allies, but the decisions of their leaders impacted the means with which the United States pursued major operations in the GWOT. Granted, the above examples are more relevant to the national-strategic level, and would involve the US Department of State more than the affected COCOM. But CENTCOM was certainly affected

(at the operational level) by the decisions of these friends and allies. Thus if the ultimate objective of IO according to joint doctrine is to secure US national interests (in the information environment... or simply in the mind of the decision maker), then shouldn't the executor of joint IO—the geographic COCOM—be able to apply IO (at the operational level) towards affecting the minds of those decision makers who can impact US national interests? By examining the geographic combatant commander's role in conducting IO-F/A—through Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR), the Theater Security Cooperation Plan (TSCP), and Strategic Communications (SC)—we can answer this question.

The Geographic Combatant Commander's Role in IO-F/A

The COCOM's role in IO-F/A depends on the integration and coordination of the core, supporting, and related IO capabilities identified above—specifically psychological operations, combat camera, public affairs, civil-military operations, and defense support to public diplomacy. PSYOP pervades IO-F/A because at its heart are actions designed to influence the behavior of the targeted audience. Combat Camera provides COCOMs with the capability to record and document, via visual media, information valuable to the operational commander and pertinent to national objectives—information that can then be transmitted to the desired targeted audience. The COCOM utilizes public affairs activities to maintain the trust and confidence of the US friends and allies as well as to counter adversary propaganda. By providing truthful, pertinent, and timely information to the targeted audience, public affairs contributes to effective IO-F/A.

By encompassing all joint force commanders' activities to establish, maintain, and influence positive relations between their own forces, civil authorities (and the general population in friendly or neutral areas), civil-military operations represent a robust tool kit for conducting IO-F/A. CMO

activities such as foreign humanitarian assistance (FHA), military civic action, and domestic support operations provide the COCOM with effective means for shaping the battlespace—which in the context of IO-F/A equates to the minds of friendly decision makers. Furthermore, CMO provides a conduit for interagency coordination as well as connection with non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations—professional relationships that positively contribute to the COCOM’s ability to influence friends and allies. The most important linkage to connect in IO-F/A is between the COCOM’s activities and United States Government (USG) public diplomacy efforts. DOD support for public diplomacy represents the alignment of the COCOM’s efforts and the national-strategic goals of the USG—an alignment that at its core matches strategy to policy.

Armed with a deeper understanding of the specific core, supporting, and related capabilities that energize IO-F/A, let’s examine the COCOM’s role in conducting IO-F/A through HA/DR actions, TSCP endeavors, and USSTRATCOM.

The Influence of Good Deeds

The deadly December 2004 tsunami that ravaged Southeast Asia resulted in the largest international humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operation in history. At the forefront of this massive HA/DR effort was US Pacific Command (PACOM)—the combatant command responsible for the affected region. PACOM’s efforts have been thoroughly documented and our purpose here is not to recount them, but rather to examine this HA/DR effort (and others) through the perspective of IO-F/A.

Operation Unified Assistance (OUA) provided PACOM with the opportunity to use its vast resources of “hard power” to create “soft power” effects. PACOM ordered USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier

Strike Group and USS Bonhomme Richard Expeditionary Strike Group to the area of operations (AOR) the day after the tsunamis hit, and they were on station shortly thereafter delivering much needed water, food, and medical supplies. Soon afterward, the hospital ship USNS MERCY arrived to continue urgent medical care. Conducting HA/DR in support of a USG lead agency is not new to the COCOMs, nor to the US military in general. The CMO tools used by PACOM—FHA, HACC, and civil-military operations center (CMOC)—are already detailed in joint doctrine. But in the context of information operations, OUA enabled PACOM to use its forces to influence our friends in the region. In his study of the US Navy’s efforts in OUA,



“The Influence of Good Deeds.” US Navy doctors help provide AFRICOM AOR Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. (Defense Link)

Bruce Elleman noted that the operation, “dramatically improved US-Indonesian government-to-government and military-to-military relations, and so furthered the goals of the global war on terror and of regional cooperation.” The last point from Elleman is key: the impact on future operations in the GWOT. PACOM’s humanitarian assistance efforts in Operation Unified Assistance positively influenced the opinions of regional governments and people vis-à-vis the United States, thereby paving the way for better cooperation in the future. Commenting on the impact of OUA, Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter stated “We have seen significantly positive impacts in Indonesia, Pakistan

and the Horn of Africa as a direct result of our and other nations’ humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.”

SECNAV Winters’ comments also reflected the HA/DR experience of US Central Command (CENTCOM) in the devastating October 2005 earthquake that struck Pakistan. Much as PACOM responded to the Southeast Asian Tsunami, so did CENTCOM quickly respond to this natural disaster. As part of Operation Lifeline, CENTCOM utilized forces in-theater forces supporting Operation Enduring Freedom to conduct HA/DR missions. Medical supplies, water, foodstuffs, and building materials were all delivered to the hard hit areas via CENTCOM’s logistical support. Again, details of the relief effort have been documented elsewhere—what is important is this HA/DR effort in the IO-F/A context. If IO-F/A is about influencing friends and allies, then the HA/DR effort should be part of a relationship with the targeted audience—in this case our ally, Pakistan. And indeed that is what CENTCOM did: build on the success of Operation Lifeline with Operation Promise Keeping—a follow up mission to deliver aid to the Pakistani people still recovering from the earthquake one year later. Operation Promise Keeping again utilized CENTCOM assets to provide building materials and construction teams to areas in northern Pakistan still in need. Commenting on their mission to provide relief and to show the Pakistani people that America is their ally and friend, a CH-46 pilot stated that “Pakistan is one of the most important partners in the global war on terrorism, especially in Operation Enduring Freedom. [The] Taliban and other fighters are all over the mountains on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. When the Pakistanis see that America is an ally and we help them when they’re in need, then the Taliban has no place to go. You sure don’t see the Taliban helping people in northern Pakistan.”

Operation Unified Assistance and Operation Lifeline represent successful COCOM HA/DR actions—with IO-F/A benefits. But a COCOM does not require a natural disaster in order to use CMO and FHA activities. In June 2007, the hospital ship USNS COMFORT deployed on a goodwill mission to Latin America and the Caribbean—a mission planned and coordinated by US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). By providing medical care to the people of Nicaragua, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Columbia, and eight other countries, the USNS COMFORT humanitarian assistance mission spread the benevolence of the United States into the region—signaling as did PACOM’s tsunami relief and CENTCOM’s earthquake assistance, that the United States is their friend and ally.

The purpose of looking at the HA/DR efforts of PACOM, CENTCOM, and SOUTHCOM is not simply to present examples of COCOM success in delivering FHA. Look at these operations from the perspective of the COCOM’s respective IO Cells. In the context of IO-F/A, these HA/DR actions provide excellent opportunities to positively influence the minds of US friends and allies (government and peoples alike). Moreover, with IO-F/A as a stated part of joint IO doctrine, the COCOM J39 shop would incorporate the appropriate core, supporting, and related IO capabilities in its planning for these HA/DR missions in order to achieve the best IO-F/A effects. An accompanying PSYOP effort to get the word out about American HA/DR actions; the COCOM PA team countering any negative press; effective COMCAM footage to back the PA piece up; and IO-F/A DSPD planning would work to ensure that the COCOM’s actions were aligned with USG national policy and strategic objectives.

Building the Neighborhood

One of the primary means COCOMs support USG policy and objectives is via their Theater Security Cooperation Plans. These activities encompass FHA missions such as those noted above, military-to-military training programs, and regional

military exercises. SOUTHCOM again provides rich examples of how COCOM TSCPs can be utilized in the context of IO-F/A.

The aforementioned USNS COMFORT deployment could stand alone on the merits of its FHA mission, but it is synchronized with other regional missions as part of SOUTHCOM’s TSCP. Shortly before Comfort deployed this summer, SOUTHCOM sent a specially configured ship on a seven-month deployment to engage regional allies with training and maintenance events designed to help our partner states in Latin America better secure their ports and coastal waters. USS Swift’s deployment to the SOUTHCOM AOR is part of the Navy’s Global Fleet Station initiative in which a single US Navy ship is sent to an area of interest to act as a base of operations for security patrols, construction assistance, and other outreach missions. Indeed, military-to-military activities such as this have enabled SOUTHCOM to build and maintain positive relationships throughout the region.

In addition to the activities of USNS Comfort and USS Swift, SOUTHCOM further engages through sequencing of their annual New Horizons exercises. New Horizons 2007 had US engineer, medical, and combat service support units conducting humanitarian and civic assistance missions, to provide much needed services and infrastructure to rural, underprivileged areas in South and Central America. Such joint and combined exercises enable US forces to work with regional military and civilian organizations—and equally important, to interact with local people as they build schools and clinics, and fix roads.

Fixing roads may seem bland in comparison to building schools or clinics, but it actually presents a different approach to what COCOM civil affairs (CA) teams have generally done in the past. While schools and clinics have their purpose (and are attractive endeavors for FHA), building and repairing infrastructure holds the possibility of gaining greater influence vis-à-vis a targeted audience. As commander of

Operation Task Unit Manda Bay Kenya, LCDR Tristan Rizzi worked with the Kenyan government in efforts to improve their maritime security capabilities. While in Kenya, Rizzi observed that the port facilities in Manda Bay needed repair and were unable to meet the needs of the local people (who used it to transport food and water—especially when the dirt roads were washed out during the monsoon season). A new school may be nice for future generations in Manda Bay, but a COCOM supported CMO working alongside the Kenyans to fix the piers would have a more immediate impact on the Kenyan’s ability to use Manda Bay—and on their attitudes toward the United States. Furthermore, CMO that focuses on simple infrastructure provides a greater benefit to the targeted audience as a whole: a school benefits the kids; a clinic helps the sick; a road helps everyone. “We’re using our CA teams for what we think they need,” stated Rizzi, “Instead we need to help them build the stuff they really need.” Moreover, LCDR Rizzi witnessed the potential benefits such infrastructure-focused CMO could produce. The Chinese government built a 60 mile paved road from Mombassa to Nairobi. Rizzi believed that the road went by an oil refinery that the Chinese used, but that was not the important thing to the Kenyans. They just were happy to have the new road—and they talked openly and positively about the Chinese who built it for them.

Strategic Communications at the Operational Level

In *Terrorism as a Psychological Strategy*, Maurice Tugwell argues that in order to successfully conduct a military campaign, the warring state must meet three psychological criteria—convictions the author terms the Mobilizing Trinity:

1. A belief in something good to be promoted or defended.
2. A belief in something evil to be destroyed or resisted.
3. A belief in the ultimate victory of the good cause.

Coupling these convictions in terms

of the Long War and the role of the combatant commander is useful. The COCOM's IO-F/A efforts in conducting HA/DR missions, and in building regional relationships through the TSCP, should contribute to their belief in the good of America—our institutions, our support for human rights, and our fight for freedom. We can address the other two legs of the Mobilizing Trinity via IO-F/A by conducting information operations that illuminate the enemy for what he is... and that tell the good news stories about our successes.

In order for IO-F/A to be effective in this regard, COCOMs' actions must be aligned with an effective national-strategic narrative for fighting the Long War. But in order for this to happen, we must have a US national communications strategy—something that has eluded the USG since the end of the Cold War. This brings up an issue that is beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say the US has demonstrated the ability to have a very effective strategic narrative for confronting the enemy at hand. President Ronald Reagan's strategic communication plan provided an effective national-strategic narrative from which to fight the Cold War against the Soviet Union and communism. Reagan succeeded in demonizing the USSR, calling it the Evil Empire and framing the Soviets as the bad guys. His communication strategy ensured the American people—and our friends and allies across the globe—knew the Soviet Union was the enemy, and that we must oppose communist forces.

Moving forward to the 21st century's Long War against extremism, and down to the operational level of war, strategic communication plays a vital part in the COCOM's role in conducting IO-F/A. If HA/DR and TSCP efforts communicate to regional friends and allies that the United States is the good guy, then STRATCOM—utilizing the capabilities of PSYOP and COMCAM—can communicate that Radical Islamists are the bad guys... and they are worth fighting against. CENTCOM can use its COMCAM teams to document the nihilistic violence of the insurgents.



*“Language is important”—whether doctrinally or locally.
(Defense Link)*

This is already being done by the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior—showing videos of captured insurgents being confronted by grieving and angry mothers whose children died by the insurgent's hands. By providing true information (and images) about the enemy, the COCOM can influence friends and allies by publicizing the enemy's evil nature.

Additionally, COCOMs can utilize those same IO capabilities—PSYOP, COMCAM, and PA—to provide accurate information on our operational and tactical successes. This piece is critical in maintaining the support of friends and allies in the Long War, by providing evidence of progress towards victory. Just as the COCOM can document the evils of al Qaeda, so can the COCOM document our triumphs—and then clearly communicate them to the media (and our friends) via effective public affairs engagement.

So What? Can COCOMs Even do IO-F/A?

Thus far in this examination, we've used numerous acronyms in building the argument. Here is one for the counter argument: MOTO—Master of the Obvious. Outlining the COCOM's role in IO-F/A has mostly identified actions, plans, and programs that regional combatant commands are already doing—and will continue to do. Changing joint IO doctrine to include friends and allies as targeted audiences will not establish HA/DR as a COCOM mission

or call for the development of a TSCP. Moreover, the core, supporting, and related capabilities used to conduct IO-F/A are already established in current joint doctrine.

Beyond the substantive argument that current IO doctrine is sufficient is the interagency argument that the military—and the regional combatant commands specifically—should not be engaging in IO designed to influence friends and allies. Such has generally been the purview of the Department of State (DOS). The US *Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948* (more commonly called the Smith-Mundt Act) established Cold War activities to direct US global communications and propaganda against the USSR and other communist antagonists. The primary messaging institution was the US Information Agency (USIA), whose mission was to inform and influence foreign audiences in an effort to promote US national interests. In 1999 DOS disestablished USIA, its mission subsumed by the State Department's Public Affairs office. In essence, IO-F/A is still a DOS mission.

Yet recognizing the growing importance of information operations in the 21st century techno-revolution, DOD wrestles with how it should conduct IO. The 2003 *DOD Information Operations Roadmap* calls for the establishment of IO as a core military competency, and acknowledges the legal limitations of PSYOP and the Smith-Mundt Act, but

does not provide any actual limits as long as DOD forces do not target the American public. This last point—in revealing an inherent ambiguity in the IO Roadmap—leaves the door open for the military to conduct IO-F/A.

And if the door is open, who is most able to walk through it? Beyond having a budget that dwarfs the DOS, DOD—specifically the regional COCOM—has the capabilities to effectively conduct IO-F/A. The Somalia vignette is again useful; it succinctly shows the cumulative effects of COCOM actions in HA/DR, TSCP, and STRATCOM. Furthermore, as we have seen, the COCOM has been successful in influencing friends and allies through real world actions in Southeast Asia, and New Horizons engagement in Latin America.

Language is Important

Which brings us back to the question: why should we change current IO doctrine if the COCOM is already able to do IO-F/A? Because *language matters*. Language provides the knowledge, the guidance, and the lexicon necessary for understanding and conducting joint operations. And the specific language

in joint doctrine drives planning and impacts execution. If joint IO doctrine was not limited by the term *adversarial*, then the COCOM J39 would be able to build IO plans focusing on all potential audiences—friends and foes—as part of the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Environment (JIPOE). This would enable joint force commanders to accomplish the mission. Furthermore, with friends and allies as recognized IO audiences, the staff J39 can plan IO-F/A activities that shape the battlefield (in Phase 0, as part of the deliberate planning process) for contingency operations. Therefore, current joint IO doctrine should be changed to include friends and allies as targeted audiences.

This conclusion does not supplant DOS national-strategic efforts to influence the thoughts and behaviors of foreign audiences. To the contrary, this conclusion points to greater interagency coordination, particularly at the operational level, where the COCOM CA and PA teams can partner with embassy country teams (and USAID) to promote US national policy and strategic objectives. Further, IO-F/A is not simply a game of semantics: it

recognizes a real and important audience and the effective means to address it. Thus it acknowledges the combatant commanders' vital role.

Understanding this, JP 3-13 should be changed to include IO-F/A as part of doctrine. If political sensitivities are still at play, then a classified supplement can help mitigate them. Additionally, as the primary agents for conducting IO-F/A, the regional COCOMs should be empowered to do so—particularly with funding lines to support greater TSCP engagement activities that support IO-F/A objectives.

Information Operations-Friends & Allies is not about lying to our friends. Nor is it akin to the propaganda efforts of Joseph Goebbels. IO-F/A is simply a recognition of the important fact that what our friends think about us and our intentions impacts our ability to operate across the full spectrum of the DIME. Through language and leverage, IO-F/A empowers the regional combatant commanders to perform good and truthful deeds. Such actions positively influence the minds of friendly decision makers—those who we must work with in order to win the Long War. 