
Strategic Communications: An Expanded IO Role?

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Editorial Abstract: Colonel Perkins assesses the preeminence of Strategic Communications in light of the recent Quadrennial Defense Review, and describes the complexities of implementing this concept within DoD.

“America’s negative image in world opinion and diminished ability to persuade are consequences of factors other than failure to implement communications strategies. Interests collide. Leadership counts. Policies matter. Mistakes dismay our friends and provide enemies with unintentional assistance. Strategic communication is not the problem, but it is a problem.”

- Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication

Over the last year, there have been numerous philosophical debates and subsequent establishment of a new communication activity formulated in the policy circles of the Pentagon. Of course, the new concept is called Strategic Communication (SC), and it is having an increasing impact on and interaction with the military information operations (IO) arena. As the SC field of endeavor continues to mature, what effects will the current Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) hold for the future of SC and military IO? What challenges will military IO likely face during the implementation of SC as an institutional process for communicating integrated, synchronized, and effective messages to our targeted audiences? The challenges focus on three areas: QDR; IO Education and Training; and implementation of the new SC construct.

Quadrennial Defense Review

The QDR is a congressionally mandated, comprehensive strategy review process that the Department of Defense (DoD) must undertake every four years. The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff lead the QDR with involvement by the combatant commands and the respective Services. The 2005 QDR focuses on four core problem areas, two of which are most applicable to SC and military IO activities.² The irregular and catastrophic threats have particular relevance to SC and military IO in the 21st Century:

- Irregular threats are forms of unconventional warfare, such as terrorism and insurgency
- Catastrophic threats are the use of WMD by terrorists and other non-state actors

In these areas the military–Services and Joint IO communities, as non-kinetic force multipliers—can help mitigate

or possibly resolve emerging challenges in the geopolitical environment by influencing and shaping the desired responses from our targeted audiences – possibly before the need arises for more traditional uses of military force. Given the current dynamics of the international arena, SC and IO will play an increasingly larger role in resolving many trans-regional issues facing our Coalition and Allied partners around the globe. As the IO community takes on these challenges, DoD must ensure that its IO warriors are trained with enhanced IO education and training opportunities, and properly equipped with the right tools and resources for the job.

IO Education and Training

One key challenge facing the IO community today remains education of DoD and Services’ senior leaders on IO’s validity as an effective non-kinetic tool for use in their day-to-day operations. For IO to work effectively at the combatant commands, senior leaders must take an active role in helping explain and push the role of IO. One only needs to look back a few years to see how effectively this process can work. Army General Tommy Franks, then-commander of U.S. Central Command, repeatedly stressed the importance of IO during all phases of an operation, to include the vital influencing and shaping aspects during the peacetime environment as was the case before Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.³ The education of and support from senior leaders—Service and Combatant Command—is paramount to the success of IO activities.

Educating our senior leaders is only one aspect of the equation. The proper training of our IO planners is probably the central tenet in DoD’s IO Roadmap. The formal IO Planner Courses taught by the Joint Forces Staff College

and Joint Information Operations Center (JIOC) certainly provide the “science” portion of the training curriculum, but the value-added “art” aspect is typically attained through a robust continuing and experimental training program, to include theater and regional training courses. As the new SC construct continues to unfold, it begs several questions: What level of training is appropriate to prepare our IO warriors for the expanded responsibilities of working with Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy representatives in providing integrated, synchronized, and effective messages? Should IO professionals become SC planners? How can we integrate SC into the Defense and State Department’s education and training, selection and promotion processes? The JIOC is currently examining that question as it conducts an internal mission analysis of its own organization to help posture ourselves for the future. The JIOC must remain oriented on providing the best support possible to its primary customers—the combatant commands and their theater components.

Implementing Strategic Communication

While DoD and the Joint Staff continue to codify the new SC process, some procedural and coordination issues will still need further examination. For instance, what function is best equipped to handle the area of Defense Support to Public Diplomacy as it relates to influencing foreign audiences? The combatant commands probably have different positions on this subject – Public Affairs or military IO? Who supports whom, and to what extent? Should the combatant commands have their own SC organizations or deter that integrator process to U.S. Strategic Command, based on its Unified Command Plan responsibilities?⁴

Likewise, we must consider the formal training process for those involved with and ultimately responsible for the overall integration of SC across DoD. How do we best train our personnel to engage in the new construct of SC, especially relating to the interagency arena? Mandate attendance to the DoS’s Introduction to Public Diplomacy course, along with training in the fundamentals of Public Affairs? These training opportunities definitely provide a good orientation and basic understanding of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, but does this suffice for being truly “trained” in SC duties? Furthermore, does the addition of SC to our portfolio of responsibilities mean we will require additional resources to accomplish the mission, or perhaps this is just another “tool” to put in our current IO kit-bag? The implementation of an SC construct will not be easy, and it will require some further in-depth deliberations and flexibility as this new field of endeavor matures.

In the meantime, ongoing events in the Middle East dictate a need for the IO community to meet the challenge and vigorously support the SC effort to effect change and prevent a further erosion of the geopolitical environment. The situation in that region will require much more than just a military IO effort to resolve the myriad regional issues. Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs activities are an integral part of the solution. The SC process will require a concerted effort by DoD’s IO

warriors to integrate and synchronize our actions with the other disparate U.S. government organizations to present viable, effective messages to our foreign audiences.

Conclusion

The Defense Science Board was right when they highlighted the importance of America’s strategic communication efforts and stressed strength of purpose that “matches our commitment to diplomacy, defense, intelligence, law enforcement, and homeland security.”⁵ Leadership and unity of effort counts ... whether it is a National Security Council advisor or Ambassador Karen Hughes, as the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, we need to put self-interests aside and develop policies that allow SC to assist the government’s effort to effectively project American strategy. U.S. Strategic Command’s JIOC remains committed to the integration of military IO into the SC equation – Strategic Communication is an expanded role for IO to embrace.

Endnotes

¹ Office of the Under Secretary of Defense For Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, Washington, DC, September 2004, p. 1-2.

² Jack Spencer and Kathy Gudge, “The 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review: Strategy and Threats, 20 Apr 2005, WebMemo #725, The Heritage Foundation, <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm728.cfm>>.

³ GEN Tommy Franks with Malcolm McConnell, *American Soldier*, New York: ReganBooks, 2004, p. 338-340, 377. General Franks, U.S. Army, identified IO as one of his critical lines of operation for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.

⁴ The Honorable George W. Bush, *Unified Command Plan 2004*, Washington, DC: The White House, 1 March 2005, p. 16. U.S. Strategic Command is responsible for integrating and coordinating DoD IO that cross geographic AORs or across the core IO capabilities. The JIOC has the IO integration mission and works with U.S. Strategic Command J5 on SC issues.

⁵ *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, p. 2. 