

**Planning to Influence:
A Commander's Guide to the PA/IO Relationship**

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“Ideas are more important than [artillery] rounds.”¹
—Lt. Gen. James N. Mattis

More than a decade of innovation in the global information environment has radically changed the way the world communicates, and our enemies have gained new advantage in building support for their causes and inciting hostility against us. While Marine Corps leaders have long understood the importance of information in the form of command, control, communications, and intelligence, it is only relatively recently that influence and perception have become widely recognized as critical factors in all aspects of military operations. Dealing with perception in operational design, however, is complex, and integrating influence into the Marine Corps Planning Process proves difficult. Complicating factors include a lack of naval doctrine on the conduct of information operations (IO) and policies that restrict collaboration between the primary activities dealing in the cognitive dimension of the information environment—that is, public affairs (PA) and psychological operations (PSYOP).

This study addresses how best to approach the issues of perception and influence in operational planning by considering statutory restraints, analyzing relevant policy, and examining the functional role PA and IO play in the planning process. More importantly, it presents Marine commanders a framework for understanding the roles and limitations of PA and IO. We should note here that while IO includes five core capabilities—electronic warfare, computer network operations, operational security, military deception, and psychological operations²—discussion of IO in the context of this study remains focused on PSYOP, as this capability is aimed at affecting the mind directly and therefore presents the greatest potential for functional overlap with PA.

In order to discuss the PA/PSYOP relationship, it is first necessary to understand the laws governing their activities. Principal among these is the 1948 Smith-Mundt act, which restricts

information activities of the U.S. Department of State (DOS) and prohibits the domestic distribution of U.S. public diplomacy material—that is, diplomatic communications directed at citizens in other countries.³ This body of law has also been held to prohibit the domestic distribution of any material designed to influence foreign audiences and, as a consequence, forbids military PSYOP from undertaking action directed at the U.S. public.⁴

Executive agencies in general are further constrained by Title 5 U.S. Code Sec. 3107, passed in 1913 to prevent the use of federal funds for partisan “puffery” of individual agencies.⁵ Annual executive appropriations bills continue in the spirit of this statute by including language that prohibits the use of funds “for publicity and propaganda purposes within the United States.”⁶ The difficulty faced in applying these laws, however, lies in interpreting what constitutes *publicity* and *propaganda*.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has generally interpreted *publicity* as involving self-aggrandizement of an agency or its activities, which it views as “quite different from disseminating information to the citizenry about the agency.”⁷ Unfortunately for commanders, the line drawn here is not a clear one. The GAO definition is based on the idea that disseminating information is separate and distinct from communications intended to influence an audience. Communicating select information, however, is inherently influential, and even the most benign conveyance of fact has a persuasive effect. Thus, while the intent to influence may be a key characteristic of publicity, it is not a practical definition for commanders and military planners.

The traditional definition of *propaganda* is similarly useless for a commander attempting to identify what constitutes prohibited activity. Most sources agree that a “systematic distribution of information issued with the intent to persuade” constitutes propaganda.⁸ The

label, however, has a negative connotation synonymous with *misinformation* and *half-truth*,⁹ and is most often used to discredit an opposing argument. Psychological operations expert Maj. Gen. Paul Vallely, USA (Ret.), describes propaganda purely in terms of perspective, going so far as to compare the activity to journalism: “I’m trying to get a story out, so it’s propaganda if you don’t agree with me.” While journalist Paul Peters acknowledges that the reporter and propagandist both select the information their audience receives, he argues that the two differ in methodology. In journalism, Peters writes, “the idea is to present information judged most important and/or useful to an audience. Propaganda turns reporting on its head, presenting information based on its importance to the propagandist.”¹⁰ What is important to note is that both journalist and “propagandist” agree conveying select information is not what defines propaganda. Rather, it is the audience’s judgment of the information relative to its source that results in a perception of propaganda.

Clearly, an appreciation for the importance of source credibility and audience perception is essential to understanding influence operations. However, while current policy discusses both perception and credibility, it does so in a way that does not assist a commander seeking to integrate influence into operational design.

In the 2004 memorandum, “Policy on Public Affairs Relationship to Information Operations,” then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Gen. Richard Meyers declared that, in order to preserve public affairs’ institutional credibility, the “physical integration” of PA and IO activities was expressly forbidden.¹¹ Meyers’ intent was apparently to protect PA, based upon the premise that direct collaboration with IO would result in a loss of PA credibility with the news media and the greater public. The effect of the policy, however, has been to institutionalize the segregation of PA and IO. The Department of the Navy (DON) has

exacerbated this effect, using the CJCS memo as the foundation for its long-overdue 2005 *PA Policy and Regulations*. This DON policy includes all four paragraphs of the CJCS admonition, verbatim, yet fails to add any prescriptive guidance that might offer commanders an organizational construct that naval policy-makers do consider acceptable.¹² Commanders are told what not to do, but left to develop their own, ad hoc functional concepts for information planning.

Notably, the Navy and Marine Corps are not the only institutions impacted by the 2004 memo. Confusion over the policy has led to disagreement among all the services as to its true intent, causing a delay the release of the recently-updated JP 3-13, *Information Operations*. This 2006 publication places a great deal of focus on the concept of PA and IO interaction: “The public affairs officer’s interaction with the IO staff enables PA activities to be integrated, coordinated, and deconflicted with IO.”¹³ The Air Force, however, objected to this language, citing policy prohibiting such integration. The Army countered that the wording was consistent with that of the memo, which merely warns against “physically integrated PA/IO offices.”¹⁴

This apparent gap between the Chairman’s intent and effect is certainly an indication of poor policy, but perhaps of even greater concern is the memo’s unsubstantiated assertion that the mere association of the public affairs officer (PAO) with the IO staff is “damaging to the credibility of the PAO.”¹⁵ Indeed, PA credibility is essential to preserving the public’s trust and confidence, but Meyers’ policy leans too heavily on this concept in shaping its logic: “Credible PA operations are necessary to . . . maintain essential public liaisons throughout the spectrum of conflict.” As such, “organizational rigor” (segregation) is required to protect institutional credibility.¹⁶ Notably, the policy does not place any such emphasis on the concept of credibility in the conduct of IO. On the contrary, it implies that IO inherently lacks credibility. The 2003

Information Operations Roadmap, on the other hand, indicates quite the opposite is true, calling credibility “critical” for successful PSYOP.¹⁷ The CJCS conclusion that collaboration with IO risks PA credibility and jeopardizes the public trust is therefore a false proof. This flawed logic, however, has resulted in the policy’s implicit message of PA credibility above all else; an assertion now apparently accepted as conventional wisdom.

Yet another flaw in the policy is the concept that PA and IO intent and objective audiences differ: “PA’s principal focus is to inform the American public and international audiences in support of combatant commander needs at all operational (sic) levels.” PSYOP, in contrast, serves “to influence foreign adversary audiences.”¹⁸ Again, the attempt to distinguish between an intent to inform and an intent to influence is used as a means of differentiating the functions. However, as in the case of publicity, these definitions are not useful for commanders actually engaged in directing information activity. Furthermore, this approach fails to consider the information environment. As strategic communications expert Col. Jeffery Jones, USA (Ret.) explains:

Traditional dividing lines between public affairs, public diplomacy, and military information operations are blurred because of immediate access to information. Domestic press announcements are broadcast and monitored globally. Reports and examples of focused, tactical U.S. psychological operations—all truthful but designed expressly to influence foreign attitudes and behavior—are also available in this country on the Internet. Each is important and designed for specific audiences. None is preeminent. Synergy is impossible without coordination.¹⁹

It is precisely the coordination Jones endorses, however, that current policy effectively limits. “PA and IO entities must be aware of each other’s activities for maximum effect,” the memo declares, warning that, “Absent this awareness, conflicting efforts could impede

operational success.”²⁰ Unfortunately, the concept of operational “awareness” is undefined and falls far short of an implemental construct.

Success is still possible, however, for the commander seeking to integrate perception and influence into operational design. The current operational planning process and staff construct are more than adequate, provided commanders know the boundaries of information capabilities. “Integration [of IO and PA] is only a problem when you lie,” says Lieut. Gen. James N. Mattis, USMC.²¹ Commanders too often forget, Mattis explains, that IO differs from statecraft—an aspect of strategic communication that takes place far above the operational level of war. “When Churchill spoke of ‘a bodyguard of lies,’ he was describing something [commanders] don’t have the latitude to do.” But commanders do deal with perception, Mattis says, and to that end must understand how to integrate information planning.²²

Incorporating perception into operational design begins with shaping the information battlespace. This requires the commander to engage the PAO early in the conceptual stage of planning in order to evaluate the strategic and operational communication themes identified by the higher headquarters. This also offers the commander the opportunity to focus the public affairs mission-specific analysis that can assist in the commander’s battlespace area evaluation (CBAE). Much as an intelligence staff provides the intelligence preparation of the battlespace (IPB), so must the PA staff begin an “informational” preparation of the battlespace. The public affairs estimate, which involves analysis of the information environment, can serve as the backbone of this process.²³ This estimate informs the commander’s guidance in the transition to functional planning, and should be updated throughout planning in much the same way as the IPB. It is essential the commander ensure this analysis is conducted in close coordination with

all members of the IO staff. This broadens the view of the information battlefield by tapping into intelligence and PSYOP resources not otherwise immediately available to the PAO.

Like the Public Affairs estimate, the principal tools necessary to integrate information activities successfully into detailed planning also exist within current techniques and procedures. The IO cell—essentially a cross-functional working group for IO’s core, related and supporting activities—is an established element of operational planning, and the best venue for synchronization of information functions. Successful planning requires a coordinated effort that PA and IO staffs can only achieve through direct collaboration. Commanders must require the participation of all IO core and related activities during information planning sessions to ensure parallel themes and messages across functions, and guarantee the activities of one function do not conflict with or otherwise complicate the work of another. This type of collaboration produces a synergistic relationship, where PA is able to offer strategic impact to tactical actions and IO is able to use strategic issues to tactical advantage.²⁴

This is not to say that PA collaboration makes the activity itself subordinate to IO, or that it otherwise combines the functions. While there is significant overlap, message delivery methods are distinctly different and remain separate. These distinctions are best illustrated when considering military deception, which by its very nature involves misleading a particular audience. Under these circumstances, IO cannot involve PA spokespersons or other PA products to disseminate a message designed to reinforce deception. This does not mean, however, that PA should be excluded from deception planning. On the contrary, deception requires close coordination of all information activities. This includes functions under the direct control of PA, such as reporting ground rules for embedded news media, or the practice of operational security

by unit spokespersons. In this way, PA supports deception operations without crossing a line that would risk the trust of its audiences.

Integrated planning across information functions therefore does not require a construct that realigns information activities, or otherwise forces the segregation of any particular capability. Synergy is possible in dealing with influence at the tactical level, and without risking institutional credibility. When PA and IO are staked to coordinated planning and intellectual collaboration, commanders will find themselves better able to articulate a vision that effectively integrates perception and influence into operational design.

Col. Jones, for example, describes effective communication as assuring adversaries of our resolve, reassuring friends and allies of our legitimacy, persuading neutrals and potential adversaries to support our actions, and educating all audiences about our capabilities.²⁵ Commanders should pursue this same logic. Jones' description is effective and precise because *assure*, *reassure*, *persuade*, and *educate* are all terms that express purpose, and stand in stark contrast to the words *influence* and *inform*, which merely express the vague presence of purpose or the intentional lack thereof. Information activities are best differentiated by the purpose and methods associated with each function, and not by indistinct notions.

Commanders should therefore consider that the ultimate purpose of all information activities in the cognitive dimension is to influence the human decision-making process. For its part, public affairs is bound only by the truth and the restraint that its actions and products never be designed to deceive. Commanders should also dispense with the notion that there is any single objective audience for PA. While public affairs officers will often prioritize messages differently based on a particular audience and purpose, every human on Earth is an acceptable target for PA activity. Further, commanders must accept the fact that that while psychological

operations are restricted from designing material for domestic audiences, the information environment will frequently permit unintended audiences to observe PSYOP products. This does not mean PSYOP themes and messages cannot parallel those of PA. On the contrary, IO must root its activities in the truth and remain congruent with those of PA.

Ultimately, all Marine leaders must understand that the segregation of PA and IO is an unfortunate effect of current policy, but not an operational requirement. The practice of isolating PA activities for the sake of reputation and purity—preserving PA’s “informational chastity”—is not useful or effective. Rather, true institutional credibility ensues as a result of truth and consistency across the information functions, and is not threatened by a functional working relationship between public affairs and information operations.

Notes

1. Lieut. Gen. James N. Mattis, U.S. Marines. Interview, 27 October 2005. The general's precise quote was, "Ideas are more important than one-five-five rounds," in reference to the 155mm Howitzer artillery piece.

2. U.S. Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2003), 9. Original classified SECRET/NOFORN. The referenced version is unclassified with secret material redacted, released under the Freedom of Information Act.

3. 22 U.S.C. Sec.1461. (1948) The Smith-Mundt Act prohibited the United States Information Agency (applied to Department of State since 1998) from disseminating information "within the United States, its territories, or possessions." Smith-Mundt was amended by the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1972, which banned domestic dissemination of information prepared for foreign audiences "about the United States, its people, and its policies." The Zorinsky Amendment of 1985 (Sec. 1461-1a) added the prohibition that "no funds be authorized to be appropriated to the United States Information Agency shall be used to influence public opinion in the United States, and no program material prepared by the United States Information Agency shall be distributed within the United States." More information is available on Smith-Mundt and its amendments at <<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-68-dos.htm>>

4. Presidential Decision Directive 68, unclassified summary. "International Public Information." 30 April 1999. Available at <<http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-68.htm>> (18 January 2006). President Clinton issued PDD 68, ordering the creation of an International Public Information (IPI) Group to address policy coordination problems identified during military missions in Kosovo and Haiti. This directive reinforces the interpretation of PSYOP as public diplomacy, stating that military information activities are to address only foreign audiences with the purpose of influencing "foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals." PDD 68 is classified SECRET.

5. Kevin R. Kosar, *Public Relations and Propaganda: Restrictions on Executive Agency Activities* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, 2005), 1-5.

6. Kosar, 5.

7. Kosar, 6.

8. *The American Heritage dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. "propaganda." Available at <<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=propaganda>> (03 January 2006).

9. *Roget's New Millennium Thesaurus*, 1st ed., s.v. "propaganda." Available at <<http://thesaurus.reference.com/search?q=propaganda>> (03 January 2006).

10. Paul Peters, "The Propagandist," *Missoula Independent*. 12 January 2006, 2. Accessed at <<http://www.missoulanews.com/News/News.asp?no=5398>> (16 January 2006). Vallely's notable assignments include commander, 7th Psychological Operations Group and commander, 351st Civil Affairs Command.

11. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Policy on PA Relationship to IO." Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum. 27 September 2004.

12. U.S. Department of the Navy, SECNAVINST 5720.44B, *PA Policy & Regulations*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2005), 6. The current policy is the first revision made to DON PA Policy in more than 17 years.

13. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-13, *Information Operations*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2006), 2.10.

14. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, JP 3-13, *Information Operations (2ND Draft) Joint Working Group Comment Matrix* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2005), 189.

15. "Policy on PA Relationship to IO."

16. Ibid.

17. *Information Operations Roadmap*, 26.

18. "Policy on PA Relationship to IO."

19. Jeffrey B. Jones, "Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States," *Joint Forces Quarterly* Issue 39, 4th Quarter (2005): 109. Col. Jones, USA (Ret.) was Director of Strategic Communications and Information for the National Security Council during the first term of the George W. Bush administration.

20. "Policy on PA Relationship to IO."

21. Mattis Interview.

22. Ibid. Churchill's full quote, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies," was in reference to the strategic deception undertaken during World War II to protect the codeword program "Ultra" which involved Allied intercepts of the German "Enigma" code. Available at <http://www.brainyquote.com/authors/w/winston_churchill.htm> (01 December, 2005).

23. U.S. Marine Corps, *PA Expeditionary Operations Tactics, Techniques and Procedures, MCRP 3-33.3A (Coordinating Draft)* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 2005), 12. The public affairs estimate in part of current PA techniques and procedures, however the updated version of the TTPs offers a standardized basis for the analysis.

24. Joseph F. Paschall, "IO for Joe: Applying Strategic IO at the Tactical Level," *Field Artillery* July-August 2005: 28. Lt. Col. Paschall, USMC, has served as Chief of Psychological Operations in the IO branch of Headquarters Marine Corps-Plans, Policies & Operations, and as IO Officer for 24th MEU(SOC) during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

25. Jones, 111. Jones defines *strategic communication* as "the synchronized coordination of statecraft, public affairs, public diplomacy, military information operations, and other activities, reinforced by political, economic, military, and other actions, to advance U.S. foreign policy objectives." [Emphasis in original, 108].