

DEFINING THE MEDIA BATTLESPACE

by

MAJ Pat Proctor

Pat Proctor  
Major, US Army  
554 Hithergreen Dr.  
Lansing, Kansas 66043  
(913)250-5572  
[patrick.proctor@us.army.mil](mailto:patrick.proctor@us.army.mil)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Pat Proctor spent a year researching the media, the enemy in Iraq, and public affairs-information operations integration while participating in the Graduate Degree Program at the United States Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He then spent a half-year assigned to the Center for Army Lessons Learned, attached on special assignment to the Information Operations Cell, Strategic Effects, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) in Baghdad. While serving as the information operations plans officer for MNF-I, his concurrent mission was to continue his research in this field. Major Proctor is currently attending the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he is continuing his study of this topic.

The past half century of warfare has seen a military revolution, the telecommunications revolution, which has fundamentally reshaped warfare and society in dramatic ways. The US military embraced this revolution and successfully reshaped itself by embarking on a revolution in military affairs, becoming networked and computerized. By doing so, it temporarily gained an asymmetric advantage over every other military in the world. However, it has been caught completely unprepared for a second revolution in military affairs (RMA), the media-enabled insurgency, and now finds itself at an asymmetric disadvantage to its enemy in Iraq.

While the US military created its RMA primarily by developing new technology, the enemy in Iraq has created a revolution by using existing technology and crafting new tactics and doctrine for exploiting it. The US military has tried in vain to combat this new revolution with a tool designed for the last--information operations. To succeed in Iraq, the US military must develop new tools, designed to neutralize the enemy's ability use the media to attack the will of the American people. The first step in developing these tools is visualizing warfare in a different way.

## THE RESPONSE TO REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

The telecommunications revolution is a military revolution. It has "recast society and state as well as military organizations."<sup>1</sup> Information technology has had a huge economic impact, steadily increasing the productivity of the industrialized world for the past quarter century. This revolution has also increased interconnectivity. The world is a smaller place. Since World War II, the world has gone from FM radio and the telephone to global multi-media corporations and the Internet. Telecommunications has created a

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<sup>1</sup> MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *Dynamics of Military Revolution: 1300-2050* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

“world community” and given a global voice to those in the most remote regions of the world. Totalitarian regimes struggle to keep information out, while media outlets try to spread their products to every corner of the globe.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the US military employed telecommunications technology to become ever more networked and computerized. This RMA culminated in the initial invasion of Iraq in Operation Iraqi Freedom. A coalition of around 150,000 subdued an Army at least three times its size in only twenty-one days with only three percent of its opponent’s casualties.<sup>2</sup> Small, agile, lethal forces, interconnected and synchronized over vast distances, wreak havoc on more conventional, Soviet-style formations that lack telecommunications capability.

While this RMA began primarily as a technological revolution, it also developed a strong, doctrinal component. As the US military became increasingly digitized, it began to realize the growing importance of information in maintaining an asymmetric advantage in situational awareness and agility. Militarizing the emerging concept of “cyberspace” in the mid-1990s, the military began to describe the battlefield as two “environments,” the physical and the information environment. As this concept emerged, doctrine-writers acknowledged that the whole information environment was not within the capability of the military to influence. There was a “military information environment” consisting of friendly and enemy information systems. However, it existed inside a larger “global information environment,” which contained all means that

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Center for Army Lessons Learned, *On Point: The US Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2004), 8-12.

“disseminate information to national and international audiences” (including the media) and was largely “outside the control of the military.”<sup>3</sup>

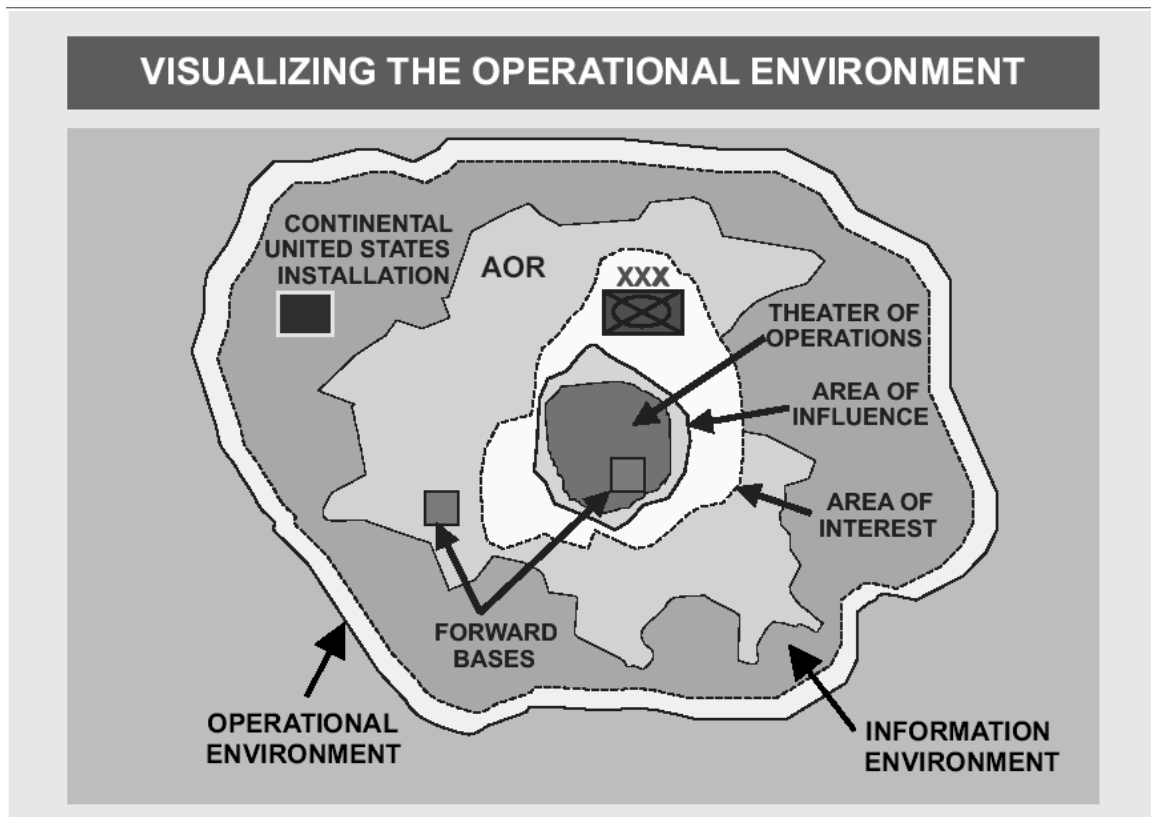


Figure 1: The information environment in joint doctrine

Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC, 17 September 2006), II-23.

Information operations, as it was originally conceived, was operations in the military information environment and happened through and across information systems. Its aim was to achieve “information dominance” in the information environment--to keep the US military’s information safe and disrupt or exploit the enemy’s information.<sup>4</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters Department of the Army, FM 100-6, *Information Operations* (Washington DC, 27 August 1996), 1-2-4.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC, 17 September 2006), GL-18.

five “core elements” of IO, computer network operations (CNO), operational security (OPSEC), military deception (MILDEC), psychological operations (PSYOP), and electronic warfare (EW), were the tools the US military used to fight “information warfare.” Civil affairs (called civil military operations or CMO in joint doctrine) and public affairs were relegated to “related activities,”<sup>5</sup> since they did not occur in the military information environment, but in the physical theater of operations and in the media, respectively.

Information operations gave the US military the tools to reliably achieve information dominance on the conventional battlefield. Being networked, computerized, and able to “acquire, use, manage, protect, exploit, and deny” information in the military information environment<sup>6</sup> gave the US military an asymmetric advantage over any conventional military force in the world.

#### THE LIMITS OF A REVOLUTION

Enter the Global War on Terror. Within two short years, the US military was fighting two wars on two different battlefields, with not a conventional opponent to be found. Both Afghanistan and Iraq had quickly transitioned from high-intensity conflict to grueling counterinsurgency. The same IO doctrine that had facilitated lightning victories in two Persian Gulf wars now seemed insufficient to fight a war occurring largely in the media.

From the beginning, in the Summer of 2003, the insurgency in Iraq had no hope of defeating the US military on the battlefield. The casualties the enemy inflicts on the US military in Iraq, while tragic, are tactically insignificant. But the enemy’s objective is

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<sup>5</sup> Army, FM 100-6, 2-21

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2-9.

not to defeat the US military by attrition. The enemy's objective is to use small, tactical attacks, amplified through the megaphone of the media, to erode US public support for the war--media-enabled insurgency. Henry Kissinger famously observed, at the height of the Vietnam War, that "the guerrilla wins if he doesn't lose."<sup>7</sup> This is only half of the story in Iraq. It is true that the enemy must avoid obliteration by the US military. But, to win (to force the withdrawal of the US military from Iraq) the enemy must also maintain the steady drumbeat of casualties and car bombs in the press that erode the American public's support for the war.

For the US military to win in Iraq, it needs both the ability to influence the populace in the operational area and the ability to "defend" American public opinion from enemy influence. The US military has looked to IO and the "related activity" of public affairs, to provide these capabilities. According to the US Army's newly minted FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, "information operations must be aggressively employed," among other things, to "obtain local, regional, and international support for [counterinsurgency] operations."<sup>8</sup>

IO, from its inception, was designed to protect the US military's information and attack that of an enemy military. This new doctrine now asks it to adapt to influence "local, regional, and international" populations. OPSEC and EW have no influence component at all. They are focused on protecting information and attacking or monitoring communications systems, respectively. MILDEC is designed to influence enemy leaders, not civilian populations. CNO has components that could be used to

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<sup>7</sup> Tony Karon, "Israel and Hizballah: A Fight to the Finish?" [On-Line] Available from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1215417,00.html>; Internet: accessed 18 February 2007.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC, December 2006), 5-1-2.

conduct “influence operations” on the Internet. However, because of First Amendment concerns and the world-wide nature of the Internet, gaining permissions to use CNO in this way requires approval at the highest levels of government. This renders CNO largely ineffective and much less agile than the average Internet-savvy insurgent. PSYOP is the only capability in the IO arsenal that has the capability to influence populations.

However, there is a significant body of laws in the United States that prevent PSYOP from being conducted on the populace of the United States.<sup>9</sup> That creates problems for integrating IO with the “related activity” of public affairs, the traditional military tool for speaking to the American public.<sup>10</sup> The current generation of joint public affairs doctrine, JP 3-61, *Public Affairs*, states the problem as plainly as it can be said: “propaganda has no place in DOD public affairs programs.”<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, what LTG Metz (former commander of Multi-National Corp-Iraq) described as a doctrinal “firewall” has been erected between IO and PA.<sup>12</sup> The US military has no way to influence the American populace.

This is a healthy and positive aspect of any military in service of a democratic nation. But it is not surprising that, as a result, the US military has been utterly powerless to prevent the enemy from eroding the will of the American public to fight the war. In a Pew Poll conducted the day after the statue of Saddam Hussein fell (10 April 2003), 74 percent of those polled felt it was the “right decision” to use military force in Iraq, while only 19 percent said it was the “wrong decision.” Nearly four years later, in February of

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap* (Washington, DC, 3 October 2003), 26.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Joint Forces Command. JP 3-61, *Public Affairs*. (Washington, DC, May 2005), I-7-8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I-3.

<sup>12</sup> LTG Thomas F. Metz, LTC Mark W. Garrett, LTC James E. Hutton, and LTC Timothy W. Bush, “Massing Effects in the Information Domain,” *Military Review* 85, no. 3 (May-June 2006): 9.

2007, only 40 percent said it was the “right decision” while 54 percent, said it was the “wrong decision.”<sup>13</sup>

Why? After all, the US military hasn’t lost any battles and its casualties, while tragic, pale when compared to losses in other wars. American public opinion has plummeted because the enemy is able to attack it with impunity. Media-enabled insurgency has left the US military at an asymmetric disadvantage to the enemy in Iraq in the battle to maintain the will of the American people to prosecute the war (a battle in which the military has not yet decided it should even be fighting).

#### INTERCONNECTED BATTLESPACES

Until World War I, battles were fought in two dimensions. Combat happened on the surface of the earth and the surface of the ocean. World War I brought the RMA of unrestricted submarine warfare, which opened a third dimension in naval operations. The war also introduced indirect fire and aerial observation, which opened a third dimension in ground warfare. During the interwar period and through World War II, the scope of combat in this third dimension expanded to include strategic bombing and aerial combat over land and carrier-based aviation over sea.<sup>14</sup>

In the wake of the telecommunications revolution, information operations introduced yet another dimension to warfare, the information environment. Now, with this new enemy RMA, media-enabled insurgency, a fifth dimension, a media dimension has emerged. The US military tries in vain to use its old tools, meant for the information environment, to fight in this new dimension. Currently, the enemy has complete freedom of action in the media--“media superiority.”

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<sup>13</sup> PollingReport.com, “Iraq,” [On-line] Available from <http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm>; Internet: Accessed 18 February 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Knox., 136-145.

The modern battlefield has become so complex that the dimensional construct is no longer adequate to describe it. The human mind, after all, is designed to perceive in only three dimensions. The concept of interconnected battlespaces offers a better construct to understand these new degrees of freedom.

Figure 2 shows three interconnected battlespaces: the physical, information, and media battlespace.

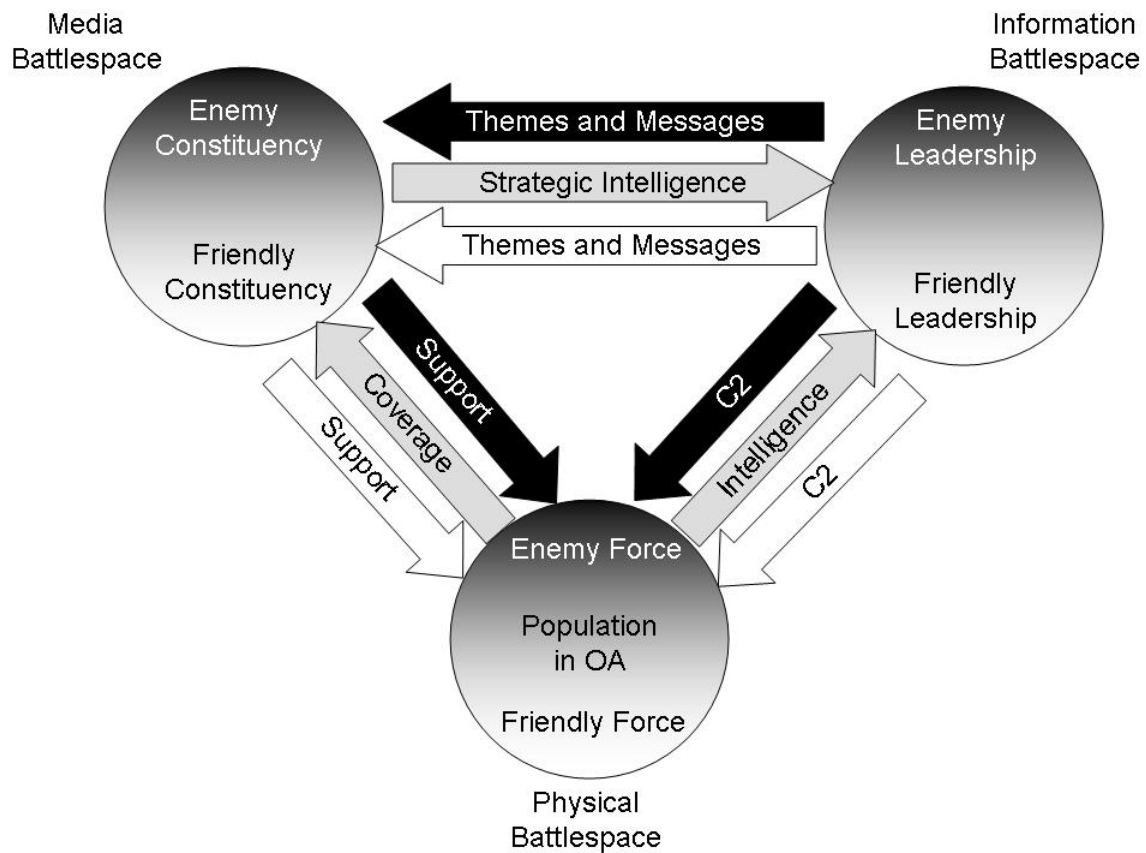


Figure 2: The interconnected battlespaces

### The Physical Battlespace

The physical battlespace starts at the boundaries of the area of responsibility and converges inward on the operational area. It is the “real world,” where opposing forces

engage in combat. It is also the battlespace in which the populace in the operational area lives. Regional bureaus and reporters are the physical projection of “the media” in the physical battlespace. Their products (“coverage” in Figure 2) leave the physical battlespace and enter the media battlespace. Network and communications architecture, radio equipment, tactical operation centers (TOCs), organizational leaders, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets are the physical manifestation of information systems in the physical battlespace. Collectively, they carry data about the physical battlespace (“intelligence” in Figure 2) into the information battlespace.

### The Information Battlespace

The information battlespace is the “information environment” described earlier, in the review of IO doctrine. It is the “ether” in which data about the physical battlespace gathers and is analyzed. Organizational leaders operate in the information battlespace, consuming data about the physical battlespace, making decisions, and generating directions communicated to their forces (“C2” in Figure 2). Senior leaders in the information battlespace communicate to friendly and enemy constituent populations by generating themes and messages communicated in press conferences and press releases to the media (“themes and messages” in Figure 2). Opposing leaders compete for information dominance via IO (as it was originally conceived) in this battlespace.

### The Media Battlespace

The media battlespace is the global, interconnected, telecommunications architecture of the modern world. It is the collective result of the Internet, satellite television, and all of the other means that provide world-wide news, entertainment, and communication. It is Fox News. It is Al-Jazeera. It is the Associated Press. It is John

Stewart's *The Daily Show*. It is the Website, *The Onion*. It is every way that human beings are informed about events in their world in the information age. The media battlespace is occupied, virtually, by everyone that is "plugged in" to it. Individual members of the friendly and enemy force are in the media battlespace. The population in the physical battlespace also exists in the media battlespace. And the constituent populations of each force (people outside the physical battlespace who provide physical and moral support to each force) are also present in the media battlespace.

Friendly and enemy forces and their constituent populations contend in a battle of ideas in the media battlespace. This conflict is called "media warfare." The level of support each force receives from its constituency is directly proportional to the opinion of each constituency about the activities of its representative force. This is the purpose of media warfare--to reduce the support a force receives from its constituency by attacking the constituency's opinion about a force or its actions.

The mechanism by which this loss of support damages a force is very much dependent on the nature of the force. For an insurgent force like the enemy in Iraq, reduced support means reduced money to spend conducting attacks, reduced numbers of foreign fighters (*jihadis*) joining their cause, and less support in weaponry from foreign governments. If support for the insurgency drops low enough and support is low enough among the population in the physical battlespace, the insurgency will be defeated because it lacks the means to continue the war and the means to hide in the populace ("like a fish in water," as Mao Tse-Tung put it<sup>15</sup>). To defeat an insurgency, one must influence both the insurgent's constituency in the media battlespace and the populace in the physical battlespace.

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<sup>15</sup> Mao Tse-tung. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977) vol. v, 468.

Western militaries like the US military are more vulnerable to media warfare. The insurgent need only influence the force's constituent population in order to be successful. Lowered support means reduced numbers of soldiers in combat, less money to reconstruct and support the host nation, and, if support becomes low enough, removal from the physical battlespace. The American public, with its voracious appetite for media products, is particularly vulnerable to influence through media warfare.

#### A "COUNTERREVOLUTION" IN MILITARY AFFAIRS

Unless a person is on the battlefield, all he knows about the war is what he sees in the media. People form opinions about policy matters based on their perceptions. The only way most Americans can form an opinion on the war in Iraq is to consume media products, analyze the information, and decide. Collectively these decisions form public opinion about the war in Iraq and impact how much support the US military receives to prosecute the war. If public support collapses completely, the US military will be forced to withdraw from Iraq.

Isn't this a matter of national strategy? Why is this an operational-level problem? Since the US government rightly has no means to "counter-influence" the American people (fight "defensively" in the media battlespace), it must rely solely on its military's overwhelming, asymmetric advantage in the physical battlespace to neutralize the enemy's advantage in the media battlespace. The enemy is conducting media warfare from the physical battlespace, in the operational area. This makes it the purview of the US military, which is also in the operational area, to defeat media-enabled insurgency. This makes it an operational-level problem.

The US military must understand the system that brings coverage out of the physical battlespace into the media battlespace, challenge the enemy for control of this system, and achieve superiority. Collectors (such as stringers), reporters, and regional bureaus are the manifestation of the media in the physical battlespace. They are also the conduit by which coverage of events leaves the physical battlespace and enters the media battlespace. This is the “media system” that the US military must protect from enemy influence in order to achieve media superiority.

Media-enabled insurgency, has created a new battlespace, the media battlespace. Yet the US military tries in vain to use its old tools, meant for the information battlespace, to fight in this new arena. The US military must engage in a “counterrevolution” in military affairs that leverages its dominance in the physical battlespace in order to defeat this new enemy capability. If the US military doesn’t defeat this enemy RMA in Iraq, it will face it again and again, on every future battlefield on which it fights. Finally, the US military will be relegated to employment in only the most finite, limited of circumstances, permanently crippled in its inability to fight and win its nation’s wars.