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About 2,700 words

#### THE INFORMATION ENGAGEMENT BAND-AID

*Sticking PSYOP and public affairs together in a bulletized list  
won't fix what ails the US military's media efforts.*

by

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As of the writing of this article, the current FM 3-0, *Operations*, dated June 2001, predates the Global War on Terrorism. Obviously, the US Army has learned many hard lessons since then. These lessons are reflected in a yet-to-be-published, draft version of FM 3-0. Among its changes is a realignment of information operations' "core elements" into "tasks and capabilities." Among the new tasks in this redesigned construct is "information engagement." The capabilities classified under information engagement are PSYOP, public affairs, combat camera, and defense support to public diplomacy.<sup>1</sup>

This new vision of information operations (shown in Figure 1) is the culmination of a long debate about how to improve the US military's ability to confront the enemy in the media.

While the sentiment is laudable, the solution is suspect. Putting public affairs and PSYOP together on a chart or explicitly calling public affairs an information operations (IO) capability does not address the underlying problem. Public affairs is the only discipline designed to communicate in the media and it seeks only to inform, not influence, while PSYOP seeks to influence but cannot effectively use the media. This new Army IO construct, even if applied to the entire US military, cannot cure the US military's fundamental inability to fight effectively in the media battlespace.

#### INFORMATION OPERATIONS: A BRIEF HISTORY

As the US military became increasingly digitized, in the wake of the telecommunications revolution, 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. The US Army's FM 100-6, *Information Operations*, was among the first official publications to express this concept. Figure 2

shows this information environment and what the US military sought to do with it in 1996.

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 "disseminate information to national and international audiences" (including the media) and was largely "outside the control of the military."<sup>2</sup>

The military force sought to achieve "information dominance" in the military information environment through "information operations." This manual stated that there were three components to information operations: command and control warfare (C2W), civil affairs, and public affairs. C2W was further segmented into five "elements": operations security (OPSEC), military deception (MILDEC), psychological operations (PSYOP), electronic warfare (EW), and physical destruction.<sup>3</sup> From its inception the focus of information operations was on keeping the US military's information safe and disrupting or exploiting the enemy's information.

Over time, the idea of information operations became joint doctrine. The concept of the information environment as a

component of the battlefield remained, but doctrine no longer made a distinction between a global and military information environment. Eventually, there was only one information environment, seen in Figure 3. The information environment expressed in this new joint doctrine contained "the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information."<sup>4</sup> This new doctrine no longer acknowledged that portions of the information environment "are outside the control of the military or National Command Authorities."<sup>5</sup> In light of this omission, it is not surprising that, when the US military was challenged by a new form of warfare occurring in the media, it forgot the basic assumption that some areas of the information environment were beyond the reach of IO.

While the scope of the information environment expanded, the rest of information operations doctrine became more focused on protecting friendly information and disrupting or exploiting enemy information. The five "elements" from C2W of 1996 were elevated to the five "core elements" of information operations in joint doctrine: computer network operations (CNO), operational security (OPSEC), military deception (MILDEC), psychological operations (PSYOP), and electronic warfare (EW). Civil affairs (called civil military operations or CMO in joint doctrine) and public affairs were relegated to "related

activities,"<sup>6</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 it needed to reliably achieve information dominance in conventional warfare. Being networked, computerized, and able to "acquire, use, manage, protect, exploit, and deny" information in the information environment<sup>7</sup> gave the US military an asymmetric advantage on any conventional battlefield.

#### THE COMMUNICATIONS GAP

Enter the Global War on Terrorism. Within two years, the US military was embroiled in wars on two battlefields that were decidedly *not* conventional. The civilian and uniformed leadership of the US military began to struggle with how to prosecute a war being fought largely in the media. In an op-ed he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times*, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld summarized the problem well:

Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but for the most part we--our government, the media or our society in general--have not.

Consider that violent extremists have established "media relations committees" and have proved to be highly successful at manipulating opinion elites. They plan and design their headline-grabbing attacks using every means of communication to break the collective will of free people.<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to describe the US government's efforts to win the war of public opinion as "a five-and-dime store in an EBay world."<sup>9</sup>

The uniformed leadership of the military immediately realized that the media battlespace was a critical front in the Global War on Terrorism. As Rear Admiral Robert Moeller, special aide to General John Abizaid, put it, "One of the attributes of [this] warfare is that the media [are] the terrain."<sup>10</sup> For the United States to win the Global War on Terrorism, it needs the ability to influence the populace in each operational area, the ability to change perceptions in the Muslim world, and the ability to "defend" American and Coalition public opinion from enemy influence. This struggle is occurring primarily in the media. The US military has naturally looked to IO, its primary influence tool, and the "related activity" of public affairs (PA), its media communication tool, to wage this war.

The marriage of these two disparate disciplines has been troubled from the start. Lieutenant General Metz commanded MNC-I (Multi-National Corps-Iraq) from May 2004 to May 2005. He articulated this problem by saying, "We are not consistently achieving synergy and mass in our strategic communications (consisting of IO, public affairs, public diplomacy, and military diplomacy) from the strategic to the tactical level." As a solution, he feels that "commanders at all echelons must, at present, serve as the bridge across the doctrinal gap between IO and PA in order to synchronize efforts in the information domain." The problem, as he sees it, is a doctrinal "firewall" between IO and PA.<sup>11</sup>

#### SEPARATED AT BIRTH

This firewall is completely intentional. A deep cultural aversion exists in America to the government influencing the people. American government censorship and propaganda in World War II inspired a body of laws that codified this aversion. In 1948, Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act, which established the US Information Agency (USIA) and the concept of public diplomacy (promoting the US and its ideals abroad). This act included provisions which explicitly prohibited public diplomacy products from being disseminated in the United States. These prohibitions were strengthened in the Foreign Relations Act of 1972. The

Zorinsky Amendment to this act also prohibited any federal funding of government efforts to influence the American people.<sup>12</sup> It is this body of laws that created the deep doctrinal separation between PSYOP and public affairs.

Despite these prohibitions, the US military has looked to IO to change world opinion. 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>13</sup>

IO was never intended to influence foreign or domestic civilian populations (which lie inside the global information environment but outside of the military information environment, according to FM 100-6).<sup>14</sup> 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 military decision-makers, not civilian populations. CNO has components that could be used to conduct "influence operations" on the Internet. However, because of First Amendment concerns and the worldwide 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 an Internet-savvy insurgency. PSYOP was originally conceived to

influence enemy militaries. It is the only core element in the IO arsenal that has the capability to influence populations.

But, because it was originally intended to target enemy militaries, PSYOP was not designed to use the media as a mode of communication. The military tool for speaking to American and international audiences through the media is the "related activity" of public affairs.<sup>15</sup> The PA community doesn't want to be in the influence business. Joint public affairs doctrine, JP 3-61, *Public Affairs*, states this sentiment as plainly as it can be said: "propaganda has no place in DOD public affairs programs."<sup>16</sup> Consider this selection from the same manual: "PA capabilities are related to IO, but PA is not an IO discipline or psychological operations (PSYOP) tool.... PA must be aware of the practice of PSYOP, but should have no role in planning or executing these operations." The manual goes on to describe all of the other ways in which public affairs should be kept separate from the other "IO disciplines."<sup>17</sup> PA sees itself as separate from IO.

The doctrinal separation between PA and IO has developed into a deep cultural and philosophical division. The declassified portions of the *Information Operations Roadmap* provide a window into the thinking of the IO community on this topic: "The likelihood that PSYOP messages will be replayed to a much broader audience, including the American public, requires

that specific boundaries be established for PSYOP."<sup>18</sup> The document then goes on to list a number of institutional separations that should be imposed on information operations to prevent PSYOP products from seeping into domestic discourse in an illegal fashion.

The PA community is just as reluctant to integrate. Linda Robinson, a correspondent for *US News & World Report*, had an interesting observation on this topic, based on her investigation of the Department of Defense's efforts to create an integrated media-response system.

Another conflict arises in the effort to integrate or coordinate all the information activities under strategic communications directors in the field. This makes public-affairs officials uneasy. Their preferred solution is to do all the integrating at senior levels in the Pentagon, where tricky policy decisions can be made.<sup>19</sup>

In her view, public affairs does not want to intermingle PA and IO activities at the operational level because it will desynchronize messages from civilian and military leaders at the strategic level.

PA sees itself as separate from IO. IO sees itself as separate from PA. And, from the very top echelons of the US military, there is reluctance to synchronize the two at the

operational level. It is not surprising that the US military is having so much trouble fighting in the media battlespace.

#### THE INFORMATION ENGAGEMENT BAND-AID

Cramming PA and PSYOP together under "information engagement" is not going to fix the US military's inability to defeat the enemy in the media. The US military, by its very nature as a military in service of a democracy, is fundamentally handicapped in its ability to use the media as a means to influence civilian populations, foreign or domestic.

Not surprisingly, tentative attempts to mix IO and PA capabilities have ended in disaster. Media outlets and politicians decry any US government interference with any press, anywhere in the world. This even extends to using media to influence the populace inside an operational area. In 2005, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a secret program run by the Lincoln Group for the US military. The contractor reportedly employed Arab linguists to write articles for Iraqi newspapers and paid the newspapers to run them without attributing the source to either Lincoln Group or the US military. Political leaders and the media pounced on the allegations. Massachusetts Senator Edward M. Kennedy said that the program "speaks volumes about the president's credibility gap. If Americans were truly welcomed in Iraq as liberators, we wouldn't have to doctor the

news for the Iraqi people."<sup>20</sup> Lynne Duke's *Washington Post* article on the program had the subheading, "Propaganda? Nah, Here's the Scoop, Say the Guys Who Planted Stories in Iraqi Papers."<sup>21</sup>

The American people reject the interference of their government in the media, any media, even inside a war zone. The design of IO and PA as separate disciplines with minimal interaction is simply a symptom of this fundamental problem, the intentional crippling of US military capability. Americans don't want their government to be good at influencing populations, American or foreign.

#### OVERCOMING A PERMANENT HANDICAP

In the absence of an effective capability to engage the enemy in the media, the US military response resembles aloof indifference. Both IO and PA have defaulted to what they do best. Information operations immerses itself in the tactical, trying to sway Iraqis to support the Coalition and the Government of Iraq. Meanwhile, public affairs serves up a steady diet of Soldiers opening schools and bringing medical supplies to hospitals. When bad things happen, the US military withholds comment while it investigates, ceding precious news cycles to the enemy, cycles he happily fills with lies and deceptive

pictures to erode the legitimacy of the Coalition and the will of the American people.

The US military, by design, has no tools for effectively conducting media warfare. It has turned to IO and PA to provide these tools and found them completely inadequate for this purpose. Even if these tools were effective in influencing foreign or domestic populations, as David Galula warns, the counterinsurgent is always at a disadvantage to the insurgent.

The insurgent, having no responsibility, is free to use every trick; if necessary, he can lie, cheat, exaggerate. He is not obliged to prove; he is judged by what he promises, not by what he does. Consequently, propaganda is a powerful weapon for him.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to say that the US military should cede the media to the enemy. The US military must find new ways to leverage its overwhelming advantage in military might to defeat enemy media efforts. The US military must understand the system that brings coverage out of the operational area into the media battlespace, challenge the enemy for control of this system, and achieve superiority. Stringers, reporters, and regional bureaus are the manifestation of the media in the operational area. They are also the conduit by which coverage of events leaves the operational area and enters the media. This is the "media

system" that the US military must protect from enemy influence in order to achieve dominance.

The truth invariably favors the United States. Reports held hostage in their fortress-like regional bureaus by security concerns are no more informed than pundits in Washington. The US military must expend combat power to secure reporters in and around their bureaus, transport them to the stories they want to cover, and embed them liberally. And they should do it all free of cost to the media; money not spent on logistics is spent sending more reporters to the operational area, which also favors the US military. When bad news breaks, the US military must be ruthless in finding out the facts and getting them to the media as quickly as possible, lest the enemy fill the void with lies.

The US military should stop trying to "out-propaganda" the enemy. America is only going to defeat the enemy's media efforts by putting a priority on the media commensurate with its importance. That means expending a significant portion of its military might to bring the facts to the American people and the world.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Combined Arms Doctrine Directorate, "Army Doctrine Update" (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 24 February 2007), 6.

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<sup>2</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>3</sup> Army, FM 100-6, 3-2.

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

<sup>5</sup> Army, FM 100-6, 1-2-4.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, JP 3-13, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC, November 2003), II-1.

<sup>7</sup> Army, FM 100-6, 2-9.

<sup>8</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, "War in the Information Age," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 February 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ron Martz, "Media New Front in War on Terrorism," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 23 August 2006.

<sup>11</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): 7-9.

<sup>12</sup> Angela Maria Lungu, "War.com: The Internet and Psychological Operations," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 28 (Spring/Summer 2001): 13-17.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC, December 2006), 5-1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Army, FM 100-6, 1-2-4.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Joint Forces Command, JP 3-61, *Public Affairs* (Washington, DC, May 2005), I-7-8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., I-3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., III-20.

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap* (Washington, DC, 3 October 2003), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Linda Robinson, "The Propaganda War," *US News & World Report*, 29 May 2006, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Associated Press, "Pentagon quizzed on Iraq propaganda program," MSNBC, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10272171> (accessed 6 May 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Lynn Duke, "The Word at War," *Washington Post*, 26 March 2006.

<sup>22</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1968), 14.

Captions: The Information Engagement Band-Aid

Figure 1:

New Army doctrine: information operations tasks and capabilities

Source: U.S. Department of the Army, Combined Arms Doctrine

Directorate, "Army Doctrine Update" (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 24

February 2007), 6.

Figure 2:

The information environment of the 1990s

Source: U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters Department of

the Army, FM 100-6, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC, 27

August 1996), 2-9.

Figure 3:

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.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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