

Chapter 3

Policies and Principles

*“Our policy is clear: honesty, openness, and accessibility to the maximum extent possible consistent with the demands of national security.”*⁵

—General C. C. Krulak, USMC,
31st Commandant, *The Commandant’s
Planning Guidance*

Marine Corps public affairs is a discipline of communication that informs and educates the American people about the performance, capabilities, needs, and activities of the institution during peacetime and during times of conflict. Ideally, public affairs accomplishes this mission by—

- 1 Maximizing disclosure of accurate information with minimum delay so that the public may assess the facts, regardless of the context or whether it helps us in any way, thus ensuring our continued credibility.
- 1 Taking public affairs into account throughout all phases of peacetime and wartime planning and execution to ensure appropriate access to accurate, unclassified, and releasable information.
- 1 Ensuring and maintaining operational security (OPSEC).
- 1 Initiating and supporting activities that foster public awareness of the Marine Corps.
- 1 Supporting and conducting aggressive public affairs programs to inform internal and external audiences.
- 1 Issuing and implementing public affairs guidance (PAG) on Marine Corps plans, policies, and objectives in the form of directives, letters, and messages from the Director of the Division of Public Affairs.

- 1 Supporting DOD and/or joint public affairs operations and organizations. (This may include the Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense [OASD] for Public Affairs, Joint Information Bureaus [JIBs], *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, *Navy-Marine Corps Times*, the Fleet Home Town News Center, and the AFRTS.)
- 1 Providing public affairs and news media relations training for Marines and civilian employees.

THE FORMAL BASIS FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States prohibits unlawfully restricting the free flow of information. It reads, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”⁶ Thomas Jefferson believed that this free flow of information was imperative to the democratic process and that such governments derived their power from the consent of the governed. Few circumstances warrant withholding or delaying information. Three such circumstances are national security, the physical protection of people, and the legally established privacy of individuals.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), passed in 1966, guarantees the public’s right to obtain information from the Government that is not classified or otherwise exempted from release. In most cases, FOIA makes disclosure the general rule, not the exception; affords all individuals equal rights of access; places the burden to justify the withholding of a document on the Government, not on the person who requests it; and affords individuals improperly

denied access to documents the legal right to pursue the matter in the courts. However, the Privacy Act limits the Government's ability to publicly release personal information.

IMPLEMENTATION POLICY

Marine Corps Public Affairs actions are guided by DOD guidelines, Joint Doctrine, and the Secretary of the Navy Instruction (SECNAVINST) 5720.44A, *Public Affairs Policy and Regulations*, which emphasize a free flow of information, via appropriate forums and within national security constraints and statutory mandates, to provide information to the Marine Corps community. Joint Publication 3-61, *Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations*, provides overarching guidance for operational PA. The Smith-Mundt Act authorizes the U.S. Government to conduct programs designed to influence foreign publics, although laws such as 18 *United States Code* section 1913 sharply limit any agency of the U.S. Government from conducting programs designed to influence domestic publics.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE PUBLIC AFFAIRS GUIDANCE

A commander's familiarity with the principles of information will add perspective to the news media environment in which public affairs operates. The commander's responsibility is to ensure that all planning for military activities and operations efficiently and effectively addresses the goals set by these principles.

DOD Directive 5122.5, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs*, directs the following:

- 1 Information will be made available so that the public may assess and understand the facts about national security, defense strategy, and ongoing joint and multinational operations.
- 1 Requests for information from media organizations and private citizens will be answered in a timely manner.
- 1 Information will be made fully available, consistent with statutory requirements, unless its release is precluded by current and valid security classification. The provisions of the FOIA and the Privacy Act will be complied with in both letter and spirit.
- 1 Information will be made available, without censorship or propaganda, to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their family members.
- 1 Information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the Government from criticism or embarrassment.
- 1 Information will be withheld only when disclosure would adversely affect national and operations security or threaten the safety or privacy of the men and women of the Armed Forces.

The DOD's obligation to provide the public with information on its major programs and operations may require detailed public affairs planning and coordination within DOD and with other Government agencies. The sole purpose of such activity is to expedite the flow of information to the public: Propaganda or

publicity designed to sway or direct public opinion will *not* be included in DOD public affairs programs.

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS PUBLIC AFFAIRS GUIDANCE

The 31st Commandant's Planning Guidance provided definitive public affairs policy guidance:

As with our legislative initiatives, our best spokesmen and women are, and will continue to be, individual Marines demonstrating their capabilities and speaking for and about their Corps. Our goal is to provide an informed perspective concerning Marine Corps capabilities, programs, and intentions to develop a foundation of public understanding and support for our requirements.⁷

The Commandant then issued the following four tasks to Marine Corps public affairs that set the tone for the future:

- 1 Public affairs will expand existing programs throughout the country by using the recruiting and Marine Corps Reserve infrastructure to reinvigorate grass roots support for the Marine Corps.
- 1 HQMC and every subordinate command will have a campaign plan that ensures coordination between public affairs, the Officer of Legislative Affairs (OLA), and all general officers to consistently reiterate and reinforce our capabilities and objectives.
- 1 Commands must plan to permit and support news media coverage and must be prepared to meet, brief, escort, transport,

and host news media personnel to ensure coverage opportunities and accurate content.

- 1 Public information about the Marine Corps (using print and electronic media) will be coordinated by the Director of Public Affairs.

Three-Part Discipline

Public affairs has evolved into a three-part discipline: external relations, community relations, and internal information. An integrated public affairs effort embodies all three in garrison and during operations.

External relations (sometimes called news media relations) provides an indirect method of communication with the public through the news media. Dealing directly with the media requires the highest level of professional competence and sophistication. The public information responsibility is focused primarily on the accurate and timely dissemination of information to local area and national news media about the people, actions, and activities of the Marine Corps. This function involves daily contact with representatives of the civilian print and electronic news media. Although timely reporting is vital to a successful relationship with the civilian news media, credibility is equally essential to a professional and enduring relationship. Requests for information in response to news media queries must be responded to quickly, accurately, and candidly. Although the Marine Corps cannot dictate which stories will receive coverage in the civilian news media, efforts to tell the story from a Marine Corps perspective must be pursued.

Community relations extends beyond issuing information. It involves fostering positive relations with the neighboring

community, including Marine Corps Reserve components, in a direct community and military interface. Well-conducted community relations enhance readiness by fostering hometown support. A good-neighbor policy is established through involvement with the communities and extends support to families of deployed Marines. It also helps reinforce the idea that the Marine Corps is a meaningful and rewarding career choice for America's youth. Close, positive relations with neighboring communities inspire patriotism, and that patriotism translates into recruitment and retention opportunities. Every reasonable effort will be made to develop and maintain sound community activities.

During deployments and operations, community relations efforts take many forms and can be organized by units, chaplains, public affairs personnel, or concerned individuals. From a unit venturing out in town to paint an orphanage in Pattaya, Thailand, to visits to schools and community centers by Marines and sailors throughout the world, the best picture we paint of the Marine Corps is through community involvement. Navy chaplains function as a tremendous organizational resource during these events. Civil affairs, when deployed, will coordinate community interaction in an operation and or exercise. Although public affairs will release information to the news media, CA will be responsible for the direct release of information to the local population. Civil affairs and public affairs will need to coordinate actions within the information operations cell to ensure that common themes and messages are maintained. The objective of an internal information program is to ensure that all segments of the Marine Corps community (Marines, their family members, civilian employees, and retirees) are fully and continually informed regarding Marine Corps programs, policies, and events. Internal information is a key enabler for commanders, whose decisions affect cohesion,

morale, quality of life, and retention. The unrestricted flow of unclassified information applies to internal information programs in that Marine Corps personnel are entitled to the same access to news as the public.

Aspects of this three-part discipline often overlap. The distinction between the external and internal audience is becoming blurred because of the impact of technology, such as the Internet, and that more married Marines live in the local community. Although PAOs still specifically target the Marine family through internal information channels, they do so with an understanding that every form of communication intended for an internal audience will be received, assessed, and evaluated by people outside of the Marine Corps. Providing pertinent information to Marines, families and dependents, and civilian employees boosts morale; relieves family and dependent anxiety; and reduces uncertainty, rumor, and misinformation. Such information enhances the mission capability of involved Marines.

Principles

Since all Marines are potential spokespersons, they should all be aware of the fundamental tenets that support public affairs strategies and guide planning and execution of public affairs operations—in peacetime and in conflict or war. Knowledge of these principles can assist anyone who may be in a position to represent the Marine Corps to news media outlets. Basic public affairs principles form the foundation for conducting operations in the global information environment.

Honesty builds credibility. Trust and confidence in the Marine Corps results when external and internal audiences understand the Marine Corps and the reasons for its actions, decisions, and

policies. Providing knowledge of the Marine Corps' culture, units, and individual Marines, ethics, values, policies, and procedures creates credibility in the eyes of the public. Because every active and Reserve component Marine, civilian, and family member is perceived as a credible spokesperson, telling the *factual* Marine Corps story is a total Marine Corps responsibility. Once lost, credibility cannot be easily regained. The quickest way to destroy believability is to misrepresent the truth. Communicating different messages to different audiences is also a sure way to destroy the source's credibility. When credibility is undermined, communication becomes ineffective and achieving information objectives is impaired.

Bad news doesn't get better with age. In the global information environment, information flow about the Marine Corps and its operations will be both pervasive and quick. Marines cannot control news media coverage, nor should they try to do so. DOD policy is that information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the Government from criticism or embarrassment. Information can be withheld only when its disclosure would adversely affect security, threaten safety, or invade the privacy of members of the military community. The Marine Corps will practice the principle of maximum disclosure with minimum delay, regardless of the nature, adverse or favorable, of the news. Marine Corps spokespeople must avoid speculation and confirm the accuracy of their information. Withholding or appearing to withhold negative information creates the perception of coverups, leads to speculation, and damages the credibility of the Marine Corps.

If news is out, it's out. The global information environment makes information accessible to larger audiences and makes it easier to disseminate. As the value of information increases, the ability to limit or restrict its flow decreases. Leaders must

recognize this; consider the impact that information availability will have on missions; and prepare to address issues openly, honestly, and in a timely manner. Waiting for others to shape the battlefield is inconsistent with our warfighting doctrine—by addressing questions as rapidly as possible, we can retain our credibility and initiative. Denying information about, or refusing to comment on, policies, operations, activities, positions, or procedures that are clearly in the public domain undermines confidence in the Marine Corps. Additionally, waiting for all of the facts can often prevent the message from being considered by the news media due to their deadlines.

Telling our story is good for the Marine Corps. Providing accurate and timely information about the force and its operation will contribute to mission accomplishment during stability and support operations in particular, but also during war. Such information can communicate restraint, indicate perseverance, and serve as a deterrent. It can clarify the nature of the operational mandate and the Marine Corps' efforts to operate within stated guidelines. The active release of complete and accurate information influences the perception of events, clarifies public understanding, and frames the public debate. It preempts attempts to misrepresent situations through intentional misinformation or disinformation efforts by adversaries and is the most effective tool for countering the effect of enemy information operations.

The Marine Corps family is important. Internal audiences include Marines, civilian employees, retirees, and all affiliated family members throughout the Marine Corps' active and Reserve components. This audience must be well informed to ensure maximum effectiveness and the highest sustainable morale. Because this group constitutes potential spokespeople, effectively managed internal information programs contribute to their ability to accurately represent the Marine Corps.

The news media is not the enemy. The vast majority of journalists and the organizations they represent are committed to the ideals of providing responsible, accurate, and balanced coverage. Good reporters will thoroughly investigate issues and ask tough, challenging questions. They will seek information, interpretation, and perspective. However, many reporters today have not served in the military, and their inexperience and uncertainty may create communication gaps. Marines may need to educate them on military operations and help them understand the significance of the events on which they are reporting. The best way to give reporters a chance to know Marines, understand the operation, and experience the Marine Corps is to incorporate, or embed, them into units. This provides journalists with a unique perspective and usually results in the best coverage.

Practice and provide security at the source. The characteristics of the military and global information environments essentially render field censorship in its traditional sense impractical as well as nearly impossible. All individuals must be responsible for protecting sensitive information. Whether being interviewed by a reporter or sharing news with a spouse or a friend, communicators must be aware of operational security. Any information disclosed may become public. The standard must be to practice security at the source by not sharing information that is inappropriate for release.

Release of Information

Although we have a legal and moral responsibility to provide the public with as much unclassified information as possible, we have an equal responsibility to withhold classified information, thus protecting secrecy and surprise. The fact that we have a dual responsibility to release some information while withholding

other information may require public affairs practitioners to release information *selectively*. The selective release of information may lead to a variety of unintended but often predictable effects. News media personnel may not understand why some information is releasable and other information is not—especially once it becomes evident that the military withheld that information. On occasion, it may be wise to quietly explain to reporters the reasons behind selective release. American and allied news media personnel have a very good record of maintaining the confidentiality of such information. Throughout the history of the Marine Corps, we have found it expedient to take numerous civilian reporters into our confidence on the battlefield. Although such boldness must be tempered with judgment lest it border on recklessness, not once has that confidence been broken.

A Lesson Learned

One of the lessons learned over the past decade is that *public affairs personnel must be deployed early*. News media interest will be intense at the outset of operations, especially during the initial deployment of forces. A Marine Corps commander's first contact during a peacetime or wartime operation will often be with a news reporter. Journalists will be present in the area of operations (AO) before Marine Corps forces arrive, will often be well established, and will sometimes know and understand the AO.

The news media will closely cover the deployment of American forces, their arrival in the theater, and their initial operations. Because national and international news media will be present from the moment forces arrive, public affairs personnel need to be deployed in the first hours of an operation to support the commander and the force in their interactions with the news media.

The PAO can significantly reduce the distractions created by the demands of the news media, thereby allowing the commander to focus on his mission and his Marines' welfare. Once operations have been initiated and equilibrium begins to return, news media attention will diminish until a significant event occurs or there is a notable change in the situation. Typically, news media interest will resurface as the force completes its mission and begins to redeploy.

RANGE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

The operational aim for public affairs is to disseminate information deemed releasable to the public more quickly and with more credibility than any adversary. As with combat operations, relative speed and concentration of effort matter most to prevent enemy disinformation.

We have a responsibility to take public affairs considerations into account as we conduct actions across the range of military operations. Although our legal and moral responsibility to keep the public informed remains constant, the impact of public information on our operational objectives throughout the range of military operations does not.

At all levels, public affairs operations are critical to the ability of the Marine Corps to accomplish the mission. This is especially true because the global information environment spans the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war.

At the strategic level, public affairs helps establish the foundation and framework for conducting Marine Corps operations in support of national security. Strategic public affairs efforts inform internal and external audiences about our organization, training,

and capabilities. They help demonstrate our readiness to react promptly, decisively, and appropriately. They are planned to clarify the linkage between national strategic goals and how the Marine Corps will contribute to the overall success of the strategy.

At the operational level, public affairs supports the commander by providing an assessment of a critical aspect of the information environment in which his force will conduct operations. It identifies public affairs issues for his consideration; assists him in evaluating the public affairs implications of current and future campaigns, operations, and plans; and ensures that the higher headquarters and commander's public affairs guidance is integrated into the planning process. At the operational level, public affairs also plays a critical role in facilitating news media efforts to cover the operation and/or exercise and in supporting the commander's requirement to meet the internal information needs and expectations of the force.

At the tactical level, public affairs is conducted to achieve a balanced flow of accurate and timely information that communicates the Marine Corps' perspective but does not violate OPSEC. It assists commanders in implementing a program that fulfills the internal information needs and expectations of the force. It provides an interface between Marines at the tactical level and news media representatives in the AO.

News media coverage can instantly span the three levels, and incidents at the tactical level may have immediate consequences at the strategic level. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-2, *Campaigning*, points out: "The news media, because of its global reach and ability to influence popular opinion, can have operational effects—that is, it can often elevate even minor tactical acts to political importance."⁸ The actions of

a single Marine at the tactical level can be elevated by instantaneous news media coverage of those actions.

Opportunities to tell the Marine Corps' story can affect the morale of Marines and sailors. If their story—good or bad—is reported, morale is often enhanced. If the news media go home, morale is also affected. As an AO becomes more stable, the news media's interest wanes. Although this may seem on the surface to be advantageous to the commander, it may lead to a loss of interest in the deployed forces by the public at home, and this can affect morale. In the latter part of Operation Restore Hope, one of the news media representatives confided to the operation's commander, "This operation is boring, general, you're a success." The news media lights were turned off, and Marine personnel on the ground felt forgotten.

In addition to the domestic or international impact of news coverage, it also effects our adversaries. For example, news media coverage of enemy troops surrendering on the battlefield could quickly affect the enemy's level of public support around the world. Similarly, international news reports of the capture of an enemy's capital, heard by enemy units in the field, may adversely affect enemy troop leadership and morale down to the lowest levels. This may be reason enough to consider embedding news media into maneuver and frontline units.

We can often predict when news media coverage may have a greater or lesser impact on our operational objectives across the range of military operations. However, PA operations do not encourage news media coverage of certain operations to achieve operational objectives. We cannot control news media coverage, nor should we attempt to. Rather, we make available timely, unclassified information regarding all of our operations, and we provide as much access to those operations as is feasible based on

both logistical and security constraints. Any influence certain information may have in the minds of our adversaries or anyone else is merely a secondary result of our consistently providing timely, unclassified information. It is *not a design or intent of our public affairs program.*

Chapter 4

Command Responsibility

“I’ve never had that [a promise made by a member of the media to keep a conversation off-the-record] violated—ever. It’s unprofessional and stupid . . . to hate the media. They are not going to go away.”⁹

—General Walter E. Boomer,
USMC (Ret.) Commanding General,
I Marine Expeditionary Force
Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM

The impact that emerging technologies and the evolving global news media environment will have on all aspects of future military operations is difficult to fully anticipate or grasp. One thing is certain: the pressures and influences of the mass media on the commander's battlespace will be profound regardless of the type of operation. The commander will be forced to consider the implications of news media at every turn. We will see more and more real-time reporting, which means the commander must prepare for the reporter who lands in the middle of an operation and is capable of sending live reports back to an awaiting audience. The unavoidable effect of the evolving communication environment is that an event will be occurring at the same time that the commander is being asked by the news media to respond—and this response will be broadcast in near-real time. This dynamic environment will challenge commanders and their public affairs personnel to plan accordingly.

The commander can prepare the public information environment most directly through a credible relationship with the news media. Basically, news media relations comes down to building and maintaining professional standards, mutual trust, and credibility. The commander can provide the story—and access to it—or risk having reporters finding their own stories. History shows that reporting is more accurate, balanced, and factual when commanders are proactive rather than reactive. The simple fact is that military operations will always be news, and the news media will be there to cover the action. The demands brought to bear by the news media will undeniably affect the ability of the commander and the organization to function at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, regardless of the mission. The commander has little room to maneuver and ever-diminishing time in which to respond to the news media. The commander must understand how news media considerations affect the planning process,

preoperation strikes, the actual operation, and post-operation activities. Although working with the news media inherently introduces challenges, public affairs can be a force multiplier for the commander by informing internal and external audiences.

Public affairs operations are a fundamental tool of competent leadership, a critical element of effective battlefield command, and an essential element of mission accomplishment. Effective leaders employ a coordinated public affairs strategy to help reduce distractions, rumors, misinformation, boredom, uncertainty, fear, loneliness, confusion, and other factors that cause stress and undermine efficient operations. They integrate the public affairs program into their effort to build unit cohesion and enhance confidence. They conduct public affairs operations to increase understanding, dedication, discipline, and the will to win. Goals in this arena should include—

- 1 Creating an informed public.
- 1 Maximizing opportunities for interaction between Marines and their surrounding community through innovative and aggressive community relations efforts.
- 1 Supporting a program of internal information that keeps Marines, civilian employees, and their families well-informed.

The commander sets the tone for public affairs operations. Either directly or indirectly, the commander is the unit spokesperson.

CONSIDERATIONS

The public affairs considerations described in the following paragraphs will assist commanders in performing the public affairs mission.

Most issues, plans, and events contain elements of interest to the general public, the news media, and the committed forces and their families. This is particularly true of military operations, which often draw public attention as personnel and equipment prepare for upcoming assignments. Unit alerts, increased aircraft activity, and rail or ship loading are highly visible and will almost inevitably lead to news media inquiries. Such activities may also cause concern among unit personnel and family members. Commanders and staffs at all levels should anticipate such interest as part of the normal planning process and be prepared to respond through internal and external information outlets.

Complete integration of public affairs personnel in all staff planning is essential to ensure an effective public affairs operation. By being fully involved, the PAO will be in a better position to advise the commander about the public affairs environment, current news media interests, public-opinion concerns, command information matters, and the public affairs implications of evolving operation plans. The PAO will also be better prepared to anticipate and respond to the news media while safeguarding security and sensitivity requirements. To adequately accomplish the mission, public affairs personnel must have appropriate security clearances.

External information, internal information, and community relations are complementary functions and should be addressed simultaneously when developing the public affairs program. External information operations that accommodate local and military reporters as well as national and international news media will help ensure that the commander communicates with all of the important audiences. Initial plans should consider the inclusion of local news media on deploying aircraft (established guidelines and appropriate waivers for requesting news media

transportation should be used). This ensures early access for journalists who are conveniently available and familiar with the unit. These journalists are then able to serve a dual role of reporting to the American people while helping the commander communicate with the unit's family members through local news media outlets in addition to the unit's command information program.

Effective public affairs operations should be consistent with security concerns. Commanders and their public affairs, security, and operations officers must balance the need for news media access to forces with the imperative to ensure security. This includes both protecting classified information and controlling the essential elements of friendly information associated with all operations. Achieving the necessary balance requires a coordinated effort to identify what degree of access will be provided to news media personnel and what activities they will be allowed to observe. The guiding principle is security at the source.

Unity of effort is achieved by developing, approving, distributing, and using of DOD-approved PAG. The PAG is an information package containing such items as public affairs policy, news statements regarding the current operation, answers to news media questions, and community relations guidance. It is used to support the public discussion of defense issues and operations. Armed with a coordinated, DOD-approved PAG, talking points, and answers to anticipated questions, commanders and their PAOs are able to provide the most accurate information to their own forces and to the American people. Speaking with one voice involves close coordination among all those involved, including agencies outside the DOD.

Accuracy, balance, fairness, and timeliness are the standards for successful dealings with the news media. Success does not necessarily guarantee that all news media stories will be positive or

supportive. From the earliest planning stages of an operation, accuracy and timeliness of the information made available to the public are essential in establishing and maintaining credibility with the news media, Congress, the general public, our allies, and the operating forces. Commanders must realize that the information they control at the tactical level is the most perishable and, therefore, must be released while still newsworthy and capable of telling the story.

A well-planned, proactive public affairs program provides the best opportunity for public understanding of operations. DOD policy mandates open access consistent with OPSEC and the safety and individual privacy of the operating forces. Planning for news media participation in any operation should be tailored to anticipate technologically sophisticated news media personnel. The successful public affairs operations will be those that have dedicated the necessary personnel, equipment, transportation, and communications resources to meet the prevailing demands for information.

CREDIBILITY

The cornerstone of an effective public affairs program is credibility—the PAO’s credibility with the commander, the staff, and the news media. *Credibility and good working relations with the news media begins with the PAO and news media interacting on a regular basis.* The PAO’s credibility is predicated on the trust, confidence, and access that staff commanders provide them. To conduct an effective public affairs effort, the PAO must have virtually unlimited access to all levels of staff, be included in all levels of staff planning, and have a close working relationship with a

knowledgeable staff. This requires the commander's active support. The news media are unlikely to deal openly with the PAO unless it senses that he has the commander's confidence and the support of the staff. This is especially true in times of contingency operations, incidents, or volatile issues because of the ever-narrowing window of opportunity in which to respond. If the PA staff is slow to respond to news media requests or queries due to poor staff coordination or support, the news media will look elsewhere for the information they need, and we will have lost the initiative. The PAO must be able to articulate complex policy decisions and the commander's intent to a civilian audience in a manner that stands up to news media scrutiny.

The PAO is more than a mere collector and conduit of command information. PAOs are special staff officers trained to advise commanders on public affairs. Marine Corps PAOs know their profession. They know the news media, appreciate its distinct appetites, and understand that it is a dynamic, constantly evolving business. Most PAOs have attended the Defense Information School, many have majored in journalism or related studies in college, and some have advanced degrees in this career field.

To be effective in this role, in either peacetime or wartime, the PAO must also be able to actively participate in the commander's decisionmaking process—in effect, to provide public affairs situational awareness. PAOs must provide commanders with a continuous assessment of the nature of the communication environment and the likely effects of public information both on command operations and various relevant audiences. PAOs are most effective if they have direct access to commanders or to the executive officer or chief of staff as directed. They should not be subordinated under any staff section. Direct and timely access to the commander greatly enhances the PAO's credibility with the

rest of the staff, subordinate commanders, and especially the news media.

An effective PAO gets to know the reporters and other members of the news media with whom he deals. This requires spending some time together, perhaps even in a purely social setting. This helps to build credibility and trust, and it can also serve as an early warning system. A good relationship with the news media can present the opportunity to turn around an inaccurate story before it is too late.

The PAO must always be accessible. When he is away from his desk or in the field, the PAO should wear a pager and carry a cellular phone. The PAO is of no use to either the news media or the chain of command if he cannot be reached. His pager, cellular phone, and home phone numbers should be readily available. Availability is part of the job.

THE COMMANDER, OPERATIONS, AND PLANNING

Commanders should ensure that public affairs activities are tailored to support missions across the entire range of military operations from full-scale war to the many types of operations categorized as MOOTW. Commanders and their public affairs personnel should be prepared to discuss, among other topics, organizational structure, strategy, objectives, tactics, training, logistics, intelligence, and troop support issues.

Experience shows that news media interest in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, peacekeeping, and similar MOOTW peaks early then diminishes gradually as the operation becomes routine. Planning for news media operations should reflect that curve.

Public affairs personnel, logistic, and other news media support might be front-loaded during the early stages of an operation with the expectation that they could be drawn down as the operation loses its news media appeal.

The following specific missions involve unique issues that should be addressed as part of the public affairs planning and communication processes.

Foreign Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. These missions involve a delicate balance of political and military objectives. They include operational and information coordination with nongovernmental relief organizations and often the representatives of other nations contributing to the effort. Commanders and their public affairs staffs must exercise care so that, in their attempts to demonstrate their responsiveness, concern, and assistance, they do not preempt the authority of the political leadership or appear to be taking credit for success at the expense of other contributing parties.

Counterdrug Operations. A number of factors are unique to counterdrug operations, such as a high degree of interagency and international coordination. Most significantly, the legal and law enforcement aspects of counterdrug operations are extremely sensitive and generate additional concerns about the release of information to the public. The inappropriate release of information could threaten the personal safety of military personnel, civilian law enforcement officials, and other participants, as well as the success of follow-on operations, pending judicial cases, and the security of intelligence systems and sources.

Combatting Terrorism. Because terrorists generally seek maximum publicity, preventing coverage that could reveal tactics,

techniques, and procedures used in combatting terrorism organizations may be impossible. Public affairs planners should anticipate and make accommodations for the probability of live and near-live direct news media coverage activity and strive to provide as much information as possible to the public about DOD activities, consistent with the operational, technological, and information security. In making information available to the news media, commanders must delicately balance the legitimate information requirements of their DOD and civilian audiences against the revelation of useful information to terrorists.

Peace Operations. Although similar in their objectives to ensure stability in a particular region or country, peacekeeping and peace enforcement involve different public affairs challenges. A primary concern during peace operations is that the peacekeeping forces are not and must not be perceived as taking sides in the conflict.

Crisis Management. In times of crisis, public and news media interest in developing situations will be heightened and pervasive during the decision process and political, economic, and military responses to the situation. Public affairs planning will require considerable interagency coordination to ensure that information plans are accurate and consistent in communicating the military aspects of the crisis. Military public affairs personnel must understand and respect the different responsibilities of the military and political leadership and focus on the military aspects of the situation.

Planning Considerations

Commanders need to consider many issues when planning for public affairs. The following paragraphs cover the major issues.

News Media Access. Commanders must understand that reporters will desire to move as close to the action as possible to gain a complete understanding of the operation and to expand on background information. Commanders who have laid the proper news media training foundation will be able to incorporate news media representatives within their units with minimal disruption. Within OPSEC constraints, this close-in reporting will provide the American public with insight that captures the preparation, professionalism, and capabilities of the Marine Corps. This should be a consideration when preparing surface and helicopter load plans.

Security. Security issues are fundamental to all public affairs planning. Inclusion of the PAO in the planning process will help to ensure that information is properly categorized by its sensitivity. Although security review of news media products may occasionally be necessary, the practice of security at the source is the primary protector of security and always governs discussions with news media representatives.

News Media Pools. Contingency planning should include provision of equipment, transportation, and communications assets necessary to help the news media gather information and file stories about the Marine Corps. Commanders should realize that the formation of a pool places additional news media support requirements on the organization. Planning must include detailed provisions for accommodating and supporting the news media, including providing access to communications. Plans must address measures for handling those reporters who are not members of the pool, but who appear in the joint operations area. Event-specific (e.g., a raid or patrol) and contingency news media pools, usually of short duration, may occasionally be necessary. These should be kept to a minimum and disbanded as soon as

open reporting is practical. See appendix A, *DOD National News Media Pool Support*, for guidelines.

Combat Camera. The deployment of joint combat camera teams provides the commander with a sophisticated capability to enhance both operational and public affairs missions. Joint combat camera teams are operationally controlled by the J-3 and support the entire spectrum of an operation. Organizationally, Marine combat camera assets fall under the G-3/S-3 but are often assigned operationally to the PAO. Public affairs imagery requirements for this resource must be identified and prioritized throughout the planning cycle.

Internal Information. The DOD command information program helps commanders in their leadership communications functions. It provides timely and accurate information about environment, pay, housing, personnel policies, and other issues that affect the morale, welfare, health, and safety of DOD personnel and their families. Various resources are available through the Armed Forces Information Service to include deployed information services.

Armed Forces Radio and Television Service. The AFRTS supports the DOD command information program by providing a broad range of broadcast information and entertainment programming.

Every phase of public affairs planning should remain in sync with preparation of the operation plan (OPLAN) that it supports and should include coordination with the host nation and country team. Therefore, the public affairs portion of the OPLAN should be developed with the OPLAN so that the transportation, communications, billeting, equipment, and personnel resources required

to support the public affairs plan can be built into the total operational resource requirements.

Guidance

Unity of effort is central to the public affairs mission. The development and timely dissemination of DOD-approved PAG ensures that all information and policies are in consonance when responding to the information demands of joint operations. See appendix B, Public Affairs Guidance.

The first step in achieving public understanding is translating the mission and unclassified objectives of the operation into a form that can be easily understood by the general public. This information is further developed, coordinated, and disseminated in the form of PAG. PAG conforms to OPSEC and the privacy requirements of the members of the force. The continuous flow of updated PAG among all participating organizations is critical for remaining abreast of current developments.

Commanders and their public affairs personnel at the tactical and operational levels are most likely to find themselves confronting detailed questions about the forces involved, their capabilities, and their immediate objectives. Officials and spokespeople at the strategic level will most often concern themselves with matters of general policy and political considerations. The approved PAG serves as a source document for responding to news media representatives and military journalists at all levels.

Ideally, the development of PAG begins with the commander's public affairs staff. However, if the situation does not allow, PAG development will be assumed by the next higher headquarters. The operational staff and the PAO, working together, are in the

best position to recommend public affairs policy, draft appropriate statements, and identify the issues and responses most likely to be of interest to both external and internal audiences. PAG is approved by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. Public affairs offices should coordinate all proposed PAG with their legal advisors.

Public affairs, CA, and PSYOP messages must be coordinated during the planning process and throughout an operation as the situation develops. A continual exchange of information must exist during execution. Although public affairs, CA, and PSYOP messages may be in different formats and delivered via different news media, they must not contradict one another or the credibility of all three will be lost. Although each has specific audiences, information will often overlap audiences. This overlap makes message deconfliction crucial. Under no circumstances will public affairs personnel engage in PSYOP activities, or vice versa. The joint task force (JTF) commander will establish separate agencies and facilities for public affairs and PSYOP activities. At no time will PSYOP personnel address the news media, unless such an address is related to coverage of the PSYOP function.

Marine Corps Planning Process

The Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPPE) establishes procedures for analyzing a mission, developing and wargaming course(s) of action (COAs) against the threat, comparing friendly COAs against the commander's criteria and each other, selecting a COA, and preparing an operation order (OPORD) for execution. The MCPPE organizes the planning process into six manageable, logical steps. It provides the commander and staff with a means to organize their planning activities and transmit the plan to subordinates and subordinate commands. Interactions among

various planning steps allow a concurrent, coordinated effort that maintains flexibility, makes efficient use of the time available, and facilitates continuous information sharing. Through this process, all levels of command can begin their planning effort with a common understanding of the mission and commander's guidance. The six integrated steps of this process are mission analysis, COA development, COA wargaming, COA comparison and decision, orders development, and transition.

Public affairs must participate in the MCPP to ensure that it is fully considered in the COA process and then integrated into the OPORD that is the product of the process. The planner uses the PA estimate, the guidance provided in the PAG (if developed already), and other considerations to assist him in this endeavor. An overview of public affairs in the MCPP includes—

- 1 **Mission Analysis**—the first step in planning. The purpose of mission analysis is to review and analyze orders, guidance, and other information provided by higher headquarters and produce a unit mission statement. Mission analysis supplies public affairs planners with insights into the raw inputs and the subsequent analysis that ultimately shapes the mission statement. This information assists the planner in determining how public affairs might aid the commander in accomplishing his mission while, at the same time, effectively dealing with the news media. This phase also provides an opportunity for the public affairs planner to inject issues into the analysis and the specified and mission-essential tasks. A public affairs estimate is the result of mission analysis (see appendix D, Public Affairs Estimate).
- 1 **COA Development**—the planners use the mission statement (which includes tasking and intent from higher headquarters),

the commander's intent, and the commander's planning guidance to develop several COAs. Public affairs planners assist in the process by identifying issues that should be included in each COA. Each prospective COA is examined to ensure that it is suitable, feasible, different, acceptable, and complete with respect to the current and anticipated situation, the mission, and the commander's intent. In accordance with the commander's guidance, approved COAs are further developed in greater detail. The public affairs planner gains insights into the concerns of all other staff sections as well as possible actions the commander may choose.

- 1 **COA Wargaming**—each friendly COA is examined against selected threat COAs. COA wargaming involves a detailed assessment of each COA as it pertains to the threat and the environment. Public affairs planners lend their expertise to this process. COA wargaming assists all of the planners in identifying strengths and weaknesses, associated risks, and asset shortfalls for each friendly COA. It will also identify branches and potential sequels that may require additional planning. Short of executing the COA, COA wargaming provides the most reliable basis for understanding and improving each COA. It gives the public affairs planner valuable information that can be used to prepare Annex F, Public Affairs, to the OPORD. (See appendix E, Preparation of Annex F.)
- 1 **COA Comparison and Decision**—the commander evaluates all friendly COAs—against established criteria, then against each other—and selects the COA that he deems most likely to accomplish the mission. Here the PAO will learn the relative strengths and weaknesses of the selected COA and will be better able to plan news media operations.
- 1 **Orders Development**—the staff takes the commander's COA decision, intent, and guidance, and develops orders to direct

the actions of the unit. Orders serve as the principal means by which the commander expresses his decision, intent, and guidance. Public affairs planners finalize Annex F during this phase. (See appendix F, Annex F, Public Affairs.)

1. **Transition**—an orderly handover of a plan or order as it is passed to those tasked with execution of the operation. It provides those who will execute the plan or order with the situational awareness and rationale for key decisions necessary to ensure that there is a coherent shift from planning to execution. Because a public affairs planner was involved in the entire process, the commander can be confident that public affairs issues will be fully integrated into the execution phase.

MAKE NEWS MEDIA RELATIONS A UNIT CONCERN

The commander is not always the best person with whom the news media should talk. For example, the best spokesperson about a light armored vehicle or a tank is the Marine who drives one. The news media is not the message. The news media is the messenger. *Marines are the message.*

When appropriate, commanders should encourage their Marines to talk to the news media, especially when reporters ask questions about a Marine's job or mission. To ensure that Marines understand the role of the news media, commanders should include realistic news media training in all exercises, at every level possible. To the extent possible, all the Marines in the command should be aware of differences among and within the various news media organizations and be familiar with possible lines of questioning during interviews. All Marines need to be briefed on

the various formats for coverage. (See appendix C, Meeting the News Media.)

When Marines of any rank meet the news media, they do not have to be glib or have a rapid-fire delivery—they do have to be right. It is wise to take a moment or two to form answers. Former Defense Secretary William Perry used to bow his head in thought before replying to a question. Sometimes 10 or 15 seconds would go by, a seemingly interminable time when the interview was live, before Secretary Perry would speak. He was sometimes criticized for being slow or ponderous, but during his tenure he was never guilty of misspeaking or putting his foot in his mouth. Marines in the command must be briefed on the mission and what information (if any) may not be divulged. Answers should be short (less than 20 seconds), and Marines should use words that are readily understandable to the general public. This means using few acronyms and keeping military jargon to a minimum. Avoid the reply, “no comment.” That statement often comes across as indication of guilt or a coverup.

Commanders must consider the effect of news media coverage on unit morale. What Marines are told by their friends and family at home about the mission may be good for morale or it may be detrimental. A commander has some control over the information the public receives. He should actively encourage the public affairs team to continually provide coverage to hometown news media through internal communication channels and assets. This requires the commander to ensure that the public affairs team is equipped to effectively communicate with such news media outlets and to distribute their journalistic products. The commander can also facilitate hometown coverage by inviting and embedding local newspaper, TV, and radio personnel into the unit. During joint operations, the joint force commander must approve embedding news media into units.

Operations Security

The inevitable presence of the news media during military operations complicates OPSEC. All commanders and their Marines are concerned that the accurate and speedy release of information does not aid and abet the enemy. As part of the global information infrastructure, the news media portray and offer commentary on military activities in the battlespace—both preparatory to and during the battle. No doubt our opponents will be watching and listening to news media coverage of operations. News media portrayal of military activities before hostilities can help to deter actual hostilities and/or build public support for inevitable hostilities. However, the presence of the news media in the operational area, with the capability to transmit information on a real-time basis to a worldwide audience, has the potential to be a source of information for adversaries.

OPSEC planners must keep these considerations in mind when determining which aspects of a military operation must be denied to the adversary. OPSEC planners must work closely with military public affairs personnel to develop guidelines that can be used by both military and news media personnel to avoid inadvertent disclosure of critical information that could, ultimately, increase the risk to the lives of U.S. and/or multinational military personnel.

Public affairs must walk a fine line between the public's right to know and friendly forces' security requirements. The public does not necessarily need to know everything that military commanders know, when they know it. We release information freely as long as it does not compromise national security, OPSEC, the physical welfare of our people, and the right to privacy as defined by law. Consequently, one of the paramount requirements for public affairs operations is to make certain that all officers and

enlisted personnel know what they can talk about and what is sensitive—and why. In joint operations, the PAO should make sure that all Services are working under the same ground rules. The release of information has to be coordinated just like any other combat activity.

THE COMMANDER AND THE NEWS MEDIA

Although the military often accuses the news media of not reporting in context, the military has been guilty of not giving the news media the context they need. Marine leaders are the obvious experts on the missions and capabilities of naval forces. The American people have come to expect access to the person in charge—the one making the decisions, not a spokesperson. The news media, particularly television, provide that public access to Marine leaders. Commanders must seek every opportunity to use the news media to reach a greater audience to explain their mission, its importance, and the risks involved. The commander who chooses not to speak cedes the information battlefield to critics and analysts who are uninformed about the true situation on the ground, how the mission relates to the situation, and the capabilities of the Marine units involved.

Commanders should, with the assistance of the PAO, seek to understand the news media presence in detail. The commander must be thoroughly briefed before meeting the press. This briefing may include a practice interview. It should also include a list of possible questions and answers. Commanders should know who is coming and who is already there. This means which news organizations and, ideally, which reporters. *The Washington Post* may be after a completely different story than *USA Today*. Television news organizations will ask different types of questions

than the entertainment news media or the print press. Will there be a news conference or selected interviews on location? If the former, who will host it? For the overall mission, the commander will be in demand, but if he is not available to conduct the news conference, an operations officer or planner should do it. Although the PAO should know how to do these briefings, the officer closest to the operation should conduct it to provide more thorough and credible answers. Other formats also exist, ranging from an open-ended interview to a brief telephone interview. Commanders and their staffs need to know the format in advance and determine how to respond.

The PAO should establish a news media center where news media representatives can have ready access to, but not interfere with, ongoing operations. This center need not be elaborate, but it must be an easily identifiable physical location—even if it is merely the back of a particular high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV). On joint operations, a joint news media center will be part of, or at least connected to, the JIB. Depending on Marine responsibilities within the JTF, the Marine PAO may have the responsibility of setting up and/or running this joint bureau. Similarly, if the operation involves allies or coalition partners, a combined or multinational information bureau will be established.

Logistical support of these news media centers is a PAO responsibility. Specific equipment requirements will depend on geography and the mission. If the mission is in the continental United States (CONUS), the bare minimum requirements will include a serviceable laptop computer and a cellular phone. In overseas deployments, add a compact satellite phone.

The Marine commander has always had to operate in a complex environment. Friction, uncertainty, fluidity, disorder, and danger

are fundamental properties of human conflict. Dealing with the news media engenders an atmosphere with similar characteristics—but the news media is not the enemy unless we make them so. The evolution of the local, national, and international news media has added new dimensions to all levels of military operations. The commander's responsibility is to see that dealings with the news media are more communicative than confrontational.

THE COMMANDER AND THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

Although public affairs is primarily a commander's concern, the commander does not have the time to handle the public affairs duties or to constantly deal with the news media. However, the PAO, who is a key member of the staff and is the commander's public affairs alter ego, can relieve him of much of that burden. To do this effectively, the commander must ensure that the public affairs staff is integrated into the planning and operations process.

General Walter Boomer, a former director of Marine Corps public affairs and later Assistant Commandant, relied on skilled public affairs personnel to handle the on-site news media for the MEF that he commanded during the Persian Gulf war. As a battlefield commander, General Boomer took reporters, TV crews, and photographers with him into battle. He also ordered all of his subordinate commanders to facilitate the efforts of the press. However, the care and feeding of the news media, requests for interviews, and many of the briefings were handled by PAOs. General Boomer knew how important news media coverage was to the Marines and their operation, but he also had a battle to win. He gave good commander's guidance to his public affairs staff

and subordinate commanders. The result was both a successful military operation and good press for the Marine Corps.

The best place to inculcate public affairs planning considerations and public affairs staff work into an organization is during exercises—especially command post exercises (CPXs). All exercises should include full public affairs participation. Failure to include the public affairs staff and infrastructure in all aspects of an exercise could result in serious deficiencies in public affairs support during an actual operation. All aspects of the public affairs process should be exercised while paying particular attention to coordinating with the operational staff, the resourcing of all public affairs functions, and identifying and addressing OPSEC concerns.

Although this publication discusses the importance of the PAO, commanders at echelons of command that do not have a dedicated PAO must still address public affairs issues. Commanders may request public affairs personnel augmentation, whether they have public affairs assets or not, to their unit during a specific crisis or contingency. A thorough mission analysis and situational assessment of the anticipated news media coverage will assist the higher unit commander in deciding how to apportion public affairs assets. If public affairs assets are not available and news media are expected, commanders must use members of their staff to perform these duties. News media training and planning assistance should be available from the higher unit PAO even if a public affairs Marine cannot be attached to the unit.

The Public Affairs Officer

Although Marines and their missions make the news, PAOs help get it reported. The primary roles of the PAO are to facilitate the

release of timely, accurate information to the public and to oversee internal information and community relations programs. When directed by the commanders, the PAO is also the chief command spokesperson. To reach the American public, the most expedient conduit is the mass news media: print, radio, TV, and, increasingly, the Internet. In many cases, the mass media is also the fastest and most efficient way to reach the internal audience: Marines, families and dependents, and civilian employees.

A key function of the PAO is educating internal and external audiences. PAOs have to go to great lengths to educate the news media members about the commands and missions they are covering. PAOs must ensure that news gets out, not only quickly but also accurately. Because PAOs cannot write reporters' stories for them, they must educate members of the news media to the point where they can understand for themselves what they are seeing and hearing. Because all Marines are potential spokespeople, Marines need to know where they are, why they are there, what to expect from news media personnel, and what they can talk about. Before and during deployment, the PAO arranges the necessary public affairs orientation and training.

Despite the requirement to satisfy the news media's needs, the PAO works for his commander and for the Marine Corps. The commander needs to be well briefed to know what the story is, how many reporters and news organizations are covering it, what they are saying, and how their stories are affecting the mission, if at all. As part of his briefing, the PAO may want to supply the commander with a handy and useful tool: a series of definitive, one- or two-sentence statements on the pertinent issues. These statements can be put on 3- by 5-inch file cards for quick reference. If they are written well, the statements will become sound bites on TV and radio news. This kind of preparation can prevent

the commander from sounding uninformed or incapable of forming cogent thoughts.

The Public Affairs Staff

PAOs are supported by professional staffs that vary in size. In addition to combat correspondents, news media escorts, and editors, a public affairs office staff will probably include the following key members.

- 1 The deputy PAO—assists in and assumes the responsibilities of the PAO in his absence. Some of the deputy's functions may include coordinating the release of all information concerning adverse incidents; developing and maintaining a program to keep the internal and external publics informed about Marine activities; and assisting in coordinating operational planning.
- 1 A public affairs chief—advises the PAO concerning personnel matters, organizational issues, and news media coordination as appropriate. Other responsibilities may include serving as fund administrator, maintaining financial and supply records, and preparing the public affairs office budget; managing the logistic considerations for press conferences and/or briefings; and providing technical advice and assistance to the PAO concerning all aspects of public affairs initiatives.
- 1 The news media relations officer—has primary responsibility in directing the interaction with news media. Other functions include preparing and distributing news releases to the military and area news media; interacting with JIBs when deployed as the Marine Forces PA; and preparing and distributing electronic news and feature releases to military and civilian news media outlets.

- 1 The PA plans officer and/or SNCO—has primary responsibility for integrating public affairs considerations into the planning process—whether that be for exercises, contingencies or operation plans. Additionally, since most public affairs assets work out of the same office, the plans section provides the necessary interface between that office and the operational units for operational training and support.
- 1 Community relations—a noncommissioned officer (NCO) is normally assigned to assist the PAO in that function. Some of the duties of the community relations NCO are to direct the operations of the section, participate with community groups and serve as the principal asset of the PAO for all matters pertaining to a civilian-military community relations council, maintain a speakers roster that lists base personnel who are able to participate in public speaking engagements, receive and maintain records of noise complaints, respond to community inquiries, and coordinate unit information officer meetings.

COMMANDER'S APPROACH

Dealing with the news media is a two-way street. An honest, straightforward presentation of the facts is the approach that, over time, will best serve the Marine Corps and the Nation. Commanders benefit by seizing the initiative to get out in front of a story, therefore setting the agenda. A timely, candid approach, especially in the case of a potentially negative story, can set a positive tone for everything that follows. Bad news is unavoidable, and it does not get better with age. The best tactic is to present all the facts to the news media. Commanders make effective use of the news media by continuing to employ an honest, open approach to all issues—especially the difficult ones.

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