

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND ITS EFFECT ON ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND ITS EFFECT ON ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper focuses on the Army's need to gain and maintain the will of the nation's stakeholders in support of its strategic objective to train, equip and field forces to execute military operations and war. To gain the support of stakeholders the Army must adjust its strategic communication plan, policies and operations to become more proactive and open with the media and the citizenry of the United States. To support this position, the paper will focus on strategic communication as it relates to the Army's second strategic objective – equipping the force. In the era of the all volunteer force, the Army must communicate its efforts not only to service members but to their immediate and extended families. Within this context, it will examine the Army's current strategic communication plan and how it relates to the acquisition of equipment and weapons systems. As the past is prologue, the paper examines two recent cases where strategic communication played a role in affecting the people's confidence in the Army's ability to properly equip soldiers. The paper concludes with four recommendations linking strategic communications with specific programs contained in future Army Posture and Vision Statements.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND ITS EFFECT ON ACQUISITION PROGRAMS

Strategic Objectives

The Army's 2006 Posture Statement reflects four overarching and interrelated strategies:¹ Provide Relevant and Ready Land power; Train and Equip Soldiers and Produce Adaptive Leaders; Sustain an All-Volunteer-Force; Provide Infrastructure and Support. Each of these strategies requires some level of strategic communication to gain support and necessary resources to succeed.

However, equipping soldiers is one of the most critical to the Army and public at large, as evidenced by General Schoomaker's statement, "Protecting our soldiers continues to be our highest priority."² Our failure to meet this objective can affect public confidence in our ability to protect soldiers on the battlefield. Any perception of failure or delay in properly equipping soldiers often translates to a media focus on casualty counts and injuries that may have been prevented by the uses of alternative technologies or weapons. As additional evidence to support the importance of equipping soldiers, the posture statement focuses on the implementation of the Rapid Equipping Force (REF). The REF program takes off-the-shelf products and developing technologies, tests and quickly fields these items to soldiers with the goal of enhanced force protection and lethality on the battlefield.³

Why are the Stakeholders Interested?

Equipping soldiers to support the Army's Strategic Objectives is of specific interest to Congress, as they have both responsibility and authority over defense authorizations and appropriations, as a constitutional check within our government. Equipping an entire army with new systems, products and capabilities is a high-cost endeavor. The amount of resources or funds necessary to complete the research, development, testing, evaluation (RDT&E) and fielding of a new system are substantial. For example, an independent estimate forecasts the total cost of the Future Combat Systems (FCS) will equal \$300 billion over 20 years, and this figure does not include life cycle, upgrade or recapitalization costs. Surprisingly, research, development and acquisition (RDA) is not the Army's greatest resource requirement and only accounts for about 18-20% of the Army's total FY 2006 budget.⁴ Ultimately, Congressional concern for acquisition programs is a combination of financial and media issues, with focus on which vendors will produce the systems. The competition for the opportunity to develop and build systems equates to jobs and positive economic impacts in specific regions in the United States. Given this incentive, major defense contractors also play an active role in lobbying Congress on how systems are marketed and resourced. This Congressional concern is

implicitly supported by the numerous letters the Army receives from members of Congress related to payment of vendors, award of contracts to specific vendors and concerns related to cost of vendors. Given their involvement with Congress, vendors may shape strategic communication about specific acquisition programs, outside the Army's influence.

The amount of funding is only one of the primary reasons acquisition programs receive a significant amount of interest. Acting as a watchdog for the taxpayer, media routinely request information on program development and investigate the process of contractor selection, system evaluation and award of major weapons systems contracts. These news organizations, web blogs and special interest groups are interested in funding levels, why systems are developed and which vendors may receive long-term contracts to develop and build the complex weapons of the future. One of the primary areas of interest for the media is the process of awarding large contracts to defense companies. Possibilities of corruption, vendor influence and unethical behavior are often the focus of media news stories related to high dollar value acquisitions. The media's effectiveness in checking contractor influence and unethical behavior is evidenced by recent articles about awarding a contract for personal gain, involving Boeing and Ms. Darleen Druyan, the former Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Air Force Acquisition and Management.⁵ The media interest in acquisition programs appears to be equivalent to an internal affairs division of a police department. Has the Army done the right thing? Was the competition fair? Is there corruption in the system? Was the expenditure of our federal "treasure" worth the new capability? The information above provides insight into the reasons why Congress and the media have great interest in acquisition programs. The metaphor "blood and treasure" is often used to describe the reasons for the interests of these organizations.

For the public, the focus is the protection of our sons and daughters' "blood" on the battlefield in hope they will return safely. Parents of soldiers are less concerned about the cost of equipment. Their concern focuses on their son's or daughter's safety and perception that Army leaders are competent and making the right decisions to return their loved ones home safely. Should the Army lose the trust of soldiers' families or the public, not only would high-value acquisition programs receive more scrutiny, it could place future recruiting and reenlistment in jeopardy. As parents and family members often influence the decisions of young men and women, a loss of public confidence might seriously hamper the all-volunteer force.

Strategic Communications

In the arena in which the senior leader of the United States Military exists, you've got to be persuasive with a variety of audiences. You've got to be persuasive to

the internal audience of military people whom you serve. You've got to be persuasive with both major and minor bureaucrats and the Department of Defense and the Secretariat of your own service You've got to be persuasive in house. Then you've got to be persuasive with the Congress and with the general public.⁶

Strategic Communication is defined as focused efforts by the United States Government to understand and engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable to the advancement of our interests, policies and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages and products synchronized with all elements of national power.⁷ Essentially, the goal of Strategic Communication is to understand and engage your audience, persuading them to endorse, or not oppose, specific policies or actions taken in support of the nation. Conversely, Strategic Communication may involve addressing audiences who have already taken a position against a policy or action, making it incumbent upon the leader or spokesman to persuade the audience to change their view and support the current actions. These situations are common to public affairs professionals and to Army senior leaders as they appear before Congress, the media and the internal audience of their own soldiers. Each of these audiences must be understood and their concerns addressed as part of our communication strategy.

Given the concerns of Congress, the public and media, the Army must effectively communicate intent, progress, success and failure in equipping the force. We must engage and persuade those who have differing views that we are doing the right things in equipping soldiers. Issues like the safety of soldiers, proper expenditure of tax dollars, economic impacts to regions of the country, and vendor interests, make it clear that the Army must be able to successfully conduct strategic communication. Failure to communicate our intentions to these three groups could result in the loss of resources, delays in equipment fielding and the loss of public confidence in the Army's ability to protect the nation and its soldiers.

Why is this Important to Army Acquisition?

In today's complex environment, strategic leaders must possess a myriad of competencies to be effective and successful. The Strategic Leadership Primer defines competencies as, "...knowledge, skill, attributes and capacities that enable a leader to perform his required tasks."⁸ Further, the primer categorizes these competencies into three major categories: conceptual, technical and interpersonal.⁹ This paper will focus on interpersonal competencies as most relevant to strategic communication. As defined by the primer, the interpersonal competencies are consensus building, negotiation and communication.¹⁰ It is the

aspect of strategic communication, specifically the ability to effectively communicate with organizations outside the Army to include political leaders, their constituents and the media at large,¹¹ that will impact the future of the military profession.

This paper will focus on the Army's ability to effectively communicate with Congress, their constituents and the media regarding acquisition programs. In doing so, it will also examine the problems that ineffective communication creates in meeting one of the Army's strategic objectives – Equipping the Force. To support this focus, the paper will address the strategic objectives in the current Army Posture Statement related to acquisition. Moreover, it will review the objectives of the Army's Strategic Communications Plan and how it may apply to acquisition programs. As past is prologue, the paper will compare and contrast how strategic communications affected the procurement of Interceptor Body Armor (IBA) and the new Stryker Armored Vehicle. Taking lessons learned from each case study, it will recommend ways to improve future procurements and programs.

The Army procures its goods and services through the programs and activities of Army Acquisition. A primary objective of the Army Acquisition Corps is to “acquire quality products that satisfy user needs with measurable improvements to mission capability in a timely manner, at a fair and reasonable price.”¹² This complex process is governed by the Department of Defense (DoD) 5000 Series documents which establish the regulations and policies for the acquisition of goods and services. A simplified acquisition process is described in a six steps: Idea, Research and Development, Testing, Production, Fielding and Use, and Disposal.¹³ The process starts with an idea about how to improve an existing capability or develop a needed capability the Army needs to meet mission requirements. Once the idea is reviewed by the associated decision authority, research and development is authorized to begin investigating possible material solutions to provide the capability and fulfill the idea. As material solutions are developed, testing begins to determine which solution will best meet the capability need and support the original idea. When testing is complete a single material solution is chosen for production. As production proceeds the Army begins the process of fielding the item to soldiers for their use in tactical situations and missions. Over a period of years the solution or product is used by soldiers to meet mission requirements. However, as technology improves the product will become obsolete and requires decommissioning and disposal. Graph 1 offers a visual representation.¹⁴

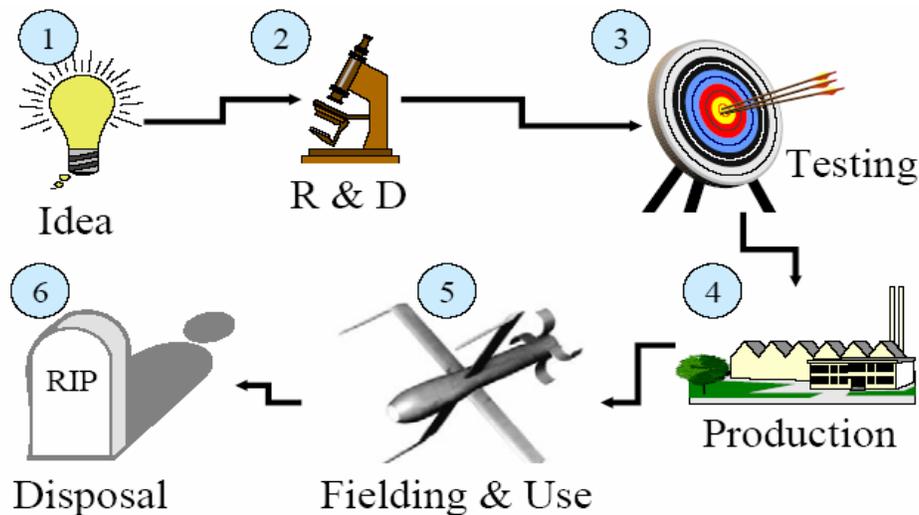


Figure1. Simplified Acquisition Process

According to the definition of Army Acquisition, one of its goals is to provide the user measurable improvements in a timely manner -- providing equipment before it's needed in combat, rather than after the start of a mission.

This process is important because the purpose of Army Acquisition programs is to safeguard and protect soldiers on the battlefield. The best procurement systems anticipate the needs of its customers and responds to fill that need. For example, it would be extremely beneficial to produce a new weapons system making soldiers more lethal and survivable on the battlefield that they could use in a current or future conflict. This weapons system or protective device could save lives and prevent casualties today rather than in some future conflict. However, if that same weapons system was developed at the end of a current conflict, is it as valuable to the force as a whole? Are the lives it could have saved, if it had been fielded sooner, the cost of a funding or schedule delay? Conversely, what if a system is fielded quickly to support a current conflict but does not work once it's in the hands of soldiers? What if soldiers' lives are lost because we issued the system without the necessary testing? Answers to each of these questions must be communicated to stakeholders via senior leaders. Subsequently, it is successful strategic communication in addition to proper planning and management that play a key role in keeping Acquisition programs funded, and on schedule to provide soldiers needed capabilities.

It is a function of strategic communication to allow stakeholders to understand the important capabilities we provide to soldiers. A primary thesis of this paper is that without the necessary communication to our stakeholders the normal acquisition process is often delayed.

The delay is created by lacking or reduced resources, congressional inquiries, competing vendors, exaggerated media reports and other events. Whereas, when senior leaders communicate with stakeholders about the status of programs they have a greater propensity to remain resourced, on schedule and meet the Army's strategic objectives.

Acquisition programs that recently received media and stakeholder attention offer insights about the roles of critical audiences in the acquisition process, and the influence of strategic communication. The first case of body armor procurement reflected the Army's effort to speed fielding of more effective body armor; one vendor's communications undermined the Army's credibility despite the program's ability to provide necessary capabilities to soldiers. The second case of Stryker vehicles received much negative attention, and some delay, but the Army's case for the Stryker was more effectively communicated. In each case, program managers executed strategic communications plans, and engaged the media, Congress and the general public. Both programs provided the necessary capabilities to soldiers. Soldiers did receive the necessary body armor in time to meet mission requirements and the Stryker program continues to meet schedule and budget milestones.

Body Armor – A Case in Strategic Communication

In the late 1990s, the Army commissioned research into new lighter body armor technology. By 1999, the Army's research yielded a new lightweight ceramic composite body armor consisting of an Outer Tactical Vest (OTV) and two Small Arms Protective Insert (SAPI) plates covering the front and rear torso. After type classification and testing, the Army issued a five-year contract for production of what it now called Interceptor Body Armor (IBA).¹⁵ From 2000 through 2001, minor changes were made to the Outer Tactical Vest based on soldier feedback and improved technologies. In January of 2001, the Army issued a Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) Contract to Pinnacle Armor to explore advances in body armor technology and develop more flexible body armor system. This new system was required to meet the same standards and specifications as IBA.¹⁶ By January of 2003, Interceptor Body Armor had been fielded to approximately 10% of the Army as a whole. Funding for IBA was limited, to \$39.4M in FY 01 and \$36.6M in FY 02.¹⁷ By late 2002, concern about a war with Iraq was looming and the IBA program received an increase in funding with a mandate to accelerate production and find other sources to minimize any delays. Body armor shortages were a major concern to senior leaders and supplies were reallocated to deploying units, but the Army was still unable to fully equip every soldier going to war.

The First Issue – Not Enough

In March 2003, the Army initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom. Body armor shortages were of critical interest to both Congress and the media. Parents were purchasing body armor wherever possible and sending it to soldiers based on media reports¹⁸. Web blogs and mainstream media alike were scaring families into believing that soldiers would be forced into combat without the necessary equipment. Reacting to these reports, the Army issued statements and provided interviews advising families that no soldier would leave a safe area without the necessary body armor.¹⁹ This meant that units would “trade off” armor from soldiers returning from patrols or combat actions with those preparing to depart for patrols.

To make up for shortages, Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier had awarded contracts to several vendors to add production capacity for the SAPI Plates and awarded a modification to Point Blank Armor to increase production of the OTV²⁰. In July of 2003, PEO Soldier awarded the second phase of the Small Business Innovative Research Program to Pinnacle Armor to continue its research into flexible, lightweight body armor.²¹ As the war in Iraq continued, IBA became one of the most critical items of equipment managed by the Army. Total funding for IBA in FY 03 increased to \$221.3M to meet the cost of accelerated production.

The Second Issue – A Recall

Through the remainder of 2003 and 2004, the Army focused on reacting to multiple accusations that soldiers were not properly equipped to go to war. Body armor shortages were used by the press and Congress as the primary evidence that the Army was not prepared. Letters from senators and congressmen began to flood the Pentagon, demanding answers as to why it was taking so long to get body armor to soldiers.²² The Army responded to these concerns by citing the arduous production and testing requirements to ensure the body armor met program standards before fielding.²³

In addition to meeting production demand, PEO Soldier had retained H.P. White Laboratories and the Defense Contract Management Agency to conduct product testing and production oversight at vendor locations. The purpose of the testing and oversight was to ensure that the pace of production did not affect the quality of the armor. Samples from each lot of SAPI plates and OTV's were “shot” in live fire testing to verify repeatable production and quality. By the summer of 2004, production had increased and sets of IBA were shipped directly to theater upon the completion of lot testing. The Marine Corps was also purchasing body armor from the same vendors as the Army. In July of 2004, the first production problem occurred and both DCMA and H.P. White Labs notified the Marine Corps that specific production lots of the

OTV from Point Blank were not meeting performance standards.²⁴ Surprisingly, the Marine Corps Systems Command waived the requirements as the vests were not the primary protection for soldiers.²⁵ The OTV was only designed to stop 9mm rounds, but when combined with the SAPI Plates the IBA ensemble could overmatch any known small arms threat.

The process to waive the requirement took some time, and the vests were fielded to Marines in theater. Ironically, in May of 2005 the Marine Corps Times published an article titled, "*The Marines' Flawed Body Armor.*"²⁶ Once again, the Army and now the Marine Corps were reacting to accusations of not being prepared. Prior to the article's appearance, the vests were recalled with a Marine Corps Admin Message, dated 4 May 2005. In response to the allegations, MG William D. Catto, Commander USMC Systems Command, responded to the Times in a written statement; "I concurred with the program manager's decision to waive the 11 lots in order to rapidly replace the PASGT flak vests with a superior, advanced body-armor system. Due to the massive deployment this was considered to be an urgent need, and was deemed to be in the best interest of deployed Marines at that time."²⁷ As a result of the Marine recall Army officials were queried by both Congress and the media as the Army purchased the OTV from the same vendor, Point Blank Armor.

By January of 2005, the Army had successfully equipped all soldiers and Department of Defense civilians deployed to Operation Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.²⁸ But senior leaders in Army Acquisition spent significant time explaining to the press that no vests issued to Army soldiers needed to be recalled.

The Final Issue - Pinnacle Armor

In the spring of 2005 Pinnacle Armor was nearing the end of its innovative research contract. Throughout the development process, Pinnacle touted its new flexible armor known as "Dragon Skin," to be superior to anything currently on the market. To this point, limited "coupon" testing was completed with marginal results. Coupon testing is the first developmental test process where a 15 by 15 inch square of material undergoes ballistic testing to ensure it meets required standards of protection prior to operational testing or mass production. As the contract deadline approached Pinnacle requested and received a three-month contract extension from April 2005 to July 2005, citing raw material shortages. By late fall of 2005 the debate about new body armor was beginning to gain momentum. The primary concern was a perceived lack of protection on a soldier's side torso, specifically from underneath the armpit to the belt line. Combatant commanders had addressed this issue in early July of 2005 and the Army had

already begun to develop additional protection in the form of side plates to provide extra protection. However, the Army did not publicize the improvement to the body armor suite.

Pinnacle began to publicly market its product as the only one with side protection that exceeded the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) Level III standard. By December 2005, the associated Program Managers from PEO Soldier had contacted Pinnacle to purchase full vests for testing purposes. Unfortunately, Pinnacle was unable to provide full vests but offered coupons as a substitute. The Program Manager declined, as coupons were already tested as part of the SBIR contract. The dichotomy in Pinnacle's strategy of marketing to the public, and refusing to sell production representative samples to the Army, raised significant concern.

In early January 2006, the New York Times published, "Pentagon Study Links Fatalities to Body Armor," alleging that a secret Pentagon study revealed that 80% of Marines killed in Iraq were from bullet wounds to the side torso, specifically an area not protected by body armor. This single article caused the body armor debate to quickly gain wide visibility with the media, Congress and the families of soldiers. The Army's response to the allegations was minimal and took the form of prepared press releases. Additionally, inquiries from the public began to flood congressional offices. Consequently, congressional interest was also increasing.

Over the next two months the Army formally responded to a number of letters, inquiries and requests for interview. By March 2006 the Army was aware that soldiers' parents were purchasing commercial body armor. It was assumed that this was a direct result of the media exposure from the New York Times, other media outlets and web logs. As most commercial body armor had not been tested by Army labs, there was no assurance that the products purchased by family members could protect soldiers as well as Interceptor Body Armor. In an effort to prevent fatalities from this untested equipment, a Safety of Use Message (SOU) was issued on 17 March 2003. The SOU directed soldiers to use only approved body armor, and that the only Army-approved product was IBA. The SOU also stated, "Media releases and related advertising imply that Dragon Skin is superior in performance to IBA. The Army has been unable to determine the veracity of these claims."²⁹

Media exposure increased significantly after the SOU was issued. Pinnacle Armor began to accuse the Army of providing substandard body armor and recommended the Army buy its product instead. Many of the major network and cable news outlets ran stories about Body Armor and the Army did participate in several interviews for CNN, ABC and FOX news channels. In a few news reports, Interceptor Body Armor was compared to Pinnacle's Dragon Skin³⁰. However, in each case the Army was responding to incorrect, exaggerated or out-of-context information. Army representatives highlighted the superiority of IBA, but because

Pinnacle Armor would not provide production Dragon Skin vests for testing, Army spokesmen were cautioned against one-to-one comparisons during interviews.

By the end of March 2006 it appeared that Pinnacle Armor was on a media campaign to discredit the Army's current body armor in favor of its own product. The web site, "Soldiers for the Truth," became the advocate for Pinnacle product. Over the next several months Soldiers for the Truth and Defense Watch continued to make remarkable claims and print inaccurate articles like, "U.S. Army Officials Continue to Trap themselves in Web of Deceit,"³¹ "Army Orders Soldiers to Shed Dragon Skin or Lose SGLI Death Benefits,"³² and "Army Acquisition General's Mission -- Damn the Lies, Kill Dragon Skin at All Costs."³³ Again the Army only responded to the claims, failing to take the initiative in the information campaign for body armor.

By July of 2006 Pinnacle Armor was finally able to provide full Dragon Skin vests for testing. In an effort to be more transparent to the public, the Army invited several media organizations, members of congress and members of the Pentagon press corps to attend and witness the testing. Surprisingly, no media attended the testing. This was unfortunate as the first round of testing clearly demonstrated that Pinnacle Armor's Dragon skin armor, in its current configuration, did not meet Army specifications.

Throughout the Pinnacle Armor episode the Army tried to take the high moral ground. In other words, Army spokesmen would only respond to questions or try to correct mistaken information, never attacking or speaking negatively about Pinnacle. Senior leaders did engage the press in interviews and press conferences but only to clarify issues, dispel rumors and provide data on existing programs. Other courses of action, in responding to Pinnacle's claims were considered. However, Army Senior Leaders had hoped Pinnacle could produce lightweight body armor in the future and did not want to adversely affect the company.

Army Transformation – Enter Stryker

We will develop the capability to put combat force anywhere in the world and 96 hours after liftoff—in brigade combat teams for both stability and support operations and for war fighting. We will build that capability into a momentum that generates a war fighting division on the ground in 120 hours and five divisions in 30 days.³⁴

On October 12, 1999 General Eric Shinseki delivered the keynote address at the Association of The United States Army's Eisenhower Luncheon. In this speech he outlined his vision for transforming the Army. The goal was to make the Army's forces..."light enough to deploy, lethal enough to win and survivable enough to return home."³⁵ The speech also marked the beginning of what he called Army Transformation, a complex interweaving of advanced

equipment, revamped doctrine and sophisticated training³⁶. The concept itself generated a shower of positive and negative reactions. The speech seemed to be a challenge to any detractors to either support the change or just get out of the way and let it happen. Regardless of the views of others, the Army's most senior leader had made his intention and goals clear.

From his vision emerged the concepts of the Legacy Force, Interim Force and the Objective force. The current heavy armor of the M1 Abrams Tank and M2 Bradley Fighting vehicle would continue to support the majority of Army engagements.

In late 1999 the concept of the interim force was defined by General Shinseki. The challenge to the Acquisition Corps was to make it happen in 18-22 months. The goal was to use existing technology, essentially off-the-shelf vehicles, to equip a force that could be deployed in a brigade size formation, by C-130 aircraft in 96 hours, and ready for combat the minute it rolled off ramp. This was a radical change in philosophy, both for the Acquisition Corps and the Army at large. Not only was the development time of 18 months unheard of, but to acquire, test and field a weapons system in that time frame had never been done before. This essentially required that all testing, block changes and upgrades be completed in under a year so that the first production vehicle would come off the line by July 2001. The decision to acquire a system so quickly became a political dispute that resulted in program delays.³⁷ Members of the Armor community felt that a wheeled vehicle would not be as mobile, effective or survivable as current tracked vehicles like the M113 or Abrams Main Battle Tank.

In January of 2000 the Interim Armored Vehicle Project Office began the process of examining the defense industrial base to determine who might bid on such an effort and whether they had the necessary production capacity to meet the Army's timeline.³⁸ By February 22, 2000 the Operational Requirements Document was completed³⁹ and shortly thereafter, a solicitation was issued for vendors to bid on the contract. By November 2000 a contract was awarded to a joint venture company consisting of General Dynamics Corporation and General Motors Defense. However, the debates continued as many in the Army community and the press continued to shudder at the idea of wheels over tracks. Many think tanks like the Lexington Institute, Rand Corporation and Adelphia continued to analyze and compare the capabilities of heavy tanks versus light wheels.

Regardless of the debate, the Interim Armored Vehicle Office continued to receive the necessary funding to further the acquisition process. As the political debate raged, the IAV program, as it was named at the time, was not funded at the initial levels requested. However, once the budgets were finalized the Army used its legal authority to cancel and decrement other programs to fund the development of the IAV. With the stalwart support of the Chief of Staff and

Secretary of the Army the IAV program established and maintained the necessary funding levels, focusing on the 18 month procurement timeframe.

In addition to the funding issues, many detractors were focusing on the cost of the IAV compared to the M113 family of vehicles. Opponents of the program would cite the high initial cost of the IAV compared to the mature M113. This debate became so intense that Congress required a side by side comparison of the two vehicles. The test requirement was codified in the FY 2001 Defense Authorization Act.⁴⁰ This testing requirement created a significant delay in meeting General Shinseki's goal of 18-22 months for the first system to roll off line.

The first Stryker rolled off the production line in Anniston, Alabama in April 2002. As a result of the congressionally mandated testing, the vehicles were shipped directly to Fort Lewis in August of 2002 to begin testing as a company level unit.⁴¹ This decision was extremely risky as the unit had just completed new equipment fielding and was relatively green on its new equipment. However, the risk paid great dividend; Stryker demonstrated greater protection, speed, deployability and battlefield agility.⁴² The GAO report concluded that Stryker provided greater advantages in force protection, support of the dismounted assault and close fight and was more survivable against ballistic and nonballistic threats.⁴³ Further, GAO found that Stryker, although more expensive than the M113 initially was less costly to operate over its life cycle.⁴⁴ Secretary of Defense certified, as required by the Defense Authorization Act of 2001, that the Stryker met requirements and did diminish Army combat power. This certification also triggered the release of funds to purchase the 3rd planned Stryker Brigade.

By late 2002 the critics of Stryker were focusing on the number of brigades and General Shinseki's relationships with contractors. Even at the 2002 Association of the United States Army (AUSA) meeting the rumor was that six brigades were too expensive and the three already purchased would be sufficient. However, it was during the Congressional Staff Breakfast as part of the AUSA meeting, that Secretary of the Army Michael White validated the number Stryker Brigades needed by the Army was six.⁴⁵ During his 2002 Eisenhower Luncheon speech, General Shinseki, himself, reminded the audience that the number of Stryker Brigades was six, not three. The criticism began to focus on the general himself, web logs like militarycorruption.com were alleging that the General and some of his staff were "in bed" with contractors, had changed the requirement midstream, and were promised jobs in the defense industry⁴⁶. Each of these allegations were baseless, but made for interesting headlines.

In 2006, four of the six Stryker Brigades had been fielded and the remaining two brigades remain on schedule. The task set by General Shinseki was revolutionary for the Acquisition Corps. Fielding a new weapons system, creating new doctrine, new units and new tactics in less

than three years was thought by many to be impossible. The Army was successful in fielding Stryker, due to the efforts of many. However, without support from senior leadership and their willingness to communicate with the press, congress, and the public when the programs future was in question, Stryker might have been another case study of a failed program.

Comparison/Analysis of Case Studies

To further understand the effect of strategic communication we need to examine three specific elements within the cases: senior leader communications, incorporation of the weapons system in the senior leader's vision for the future and the level of strategic communication to all stakeholders during critical points in the program.

Senior leader communication related to the body armor program did not come to fruition until late 2002, as the possibility of war with Iraq loomed on the horizon. The Interceptor Body Armor suite was not a separate program but part of an ensemble of equipment provided as basic issue items (BII) by Program Manager Soldier Equipment (PM SEQ). Senior leaders had not engaged the press until the initial reports of shortages and rumors that soldiers were purchasing commercial armor. Majority of the strategic communication was reactive in nature, in response to questions, rumors or concerns. During the months prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, PM SEQ was working round the clock to accelerate production and meet demand, but these actions were initially communicated to the press through press releases and statements.

Stryker, or the idea that was Stryker, appeared in the press even before it was established as a program. The Chief of Staff of the Army clearly communicated his intent in the initial speeches to AUSA and other organizations. The Army was moving to a lighter, more mobile and deployable force. How that was to be accomplished was yet to be determined, but the goal and timeline to achieve it were defined. It took another 20 months before a system was actually chosen, tested and named. Throughout the process General Shinseki communicated current progress and reinforced his intentions to the press, Congress and soldiers. More importantly, General Shinseki was proactive in his message, initiating the conversation and focusing the agenda with stakeholders.

In reviewing the vision and posture statements of the Army from 2000 through 2006, it is of interest to note that the term Stryker appears approximately 49 times in reference to Army Transformation and the Interim Force⁴⁷. Conversely, the term Body Armor first appears in the 2004 Army Posture Statement⁴⁸ and is referenced as part of soldier protection only 10 times during the same period. Clearly Army Transformation, specifically the development of the Stryker as the cornerstone of the Interim Force was critical to the Army through both General

Shinseki's and General Schoomaker's terms as Chief of Staff. The recurring theme and mention of the Stryker as a weapon system critical to the Army, communicated both officers' intent and priorities to all stakeholders. It should be noted that in 2004, General Schoomaker, as Chief of Staff, focused his vision to highlight the soldier as our most important asset. Further, he focused the Acquisition Corps to concentrate on force protection programs, with the goal of improving individual soldier survivability. General Schoomaker's first vision statement reflecting this change was published in 2004, less than one year after funding for body armor was increased.

The level of strategic communications for each program must be viewed in one of two categories, proactive and reactive. Proactive communication is defined by the author as strategically driven information focused to a target audience and is easily repeatable. Conversely, reactive communication is defined as tactically driven in response to an organization or individual who questions or doubts previously obtained information and is designed to correct possible misunderstandings.

Looking at both cases and multiple Army Posture Statements it's clear that the Army's desire to develop, test and field Stryker as part of transformation was a priority. The consistent mention of Stryker in vision statements, speeches and in press successful press interviews communicated to stakeholders the importance of this system and need for its continued funding. Even when Stryker encountered production or testing issues the Army leadership remained committed to the program and clearly communicated that intent.

The body armor case was marked by reactive communications -- responding to press reports on shortages with press conferences and prepared statements. Further, the Army allowed Pinnacle Armor, a competing vendor, to set the communication agenda and Congress demanded answers. This type of reactive communication also caused significant concern among stakeholders. Congress demanded regular updates and questioned why the Army was not responding to the claims of Pinnacle Armor and press reports. The Army continued to believe that taking the "high moral ground" by not getting into debates with competing vendors was the best way to handle the situation. What is most interesting in regard to the body armor case study is that even with reactive communication, additional funding was provided to support increased production. However, we may not be able to ascertain for several years the effect on public confidence in the Army's ability to equip soldiers. A possible measure of effectiveness related to public confidence may be our ability to meet future recruiting and retention goals over the next 2-5 years.

Insights

The Army does not appear to have a Strategic Communications Plan at this time although Public Affairs professionals say that a plan is currently in development. Without an Army level plan, senior leaders will always be reacting to negative messages in the press. A review of the Strategic Communications Guide demonstrates that it is essentially a “how to” manual for Army leadership at various levels. The guide closely mirrors the Army’s 2006 Posture Statement, by discussing each of the strategic objectives, and provides common talking points as a basis to begin communicating a uniform Army message. The guide itself is a compilation of graphically oriented slides that tie strategic objectives and needs to the Army’s desired message. To support this position, we find on page eleven of the guide, a slide designed to instruct the reader on how to interpret and use the remaining slides of the guide, in media and other Public Affairs engagements.⁴⁹ The document goes so far as to provide a matrix, designating which senior leader is responsible as the “lead communicator” on a specific strategic objective to a particular type of event. For example, if the media wants information or to interview someone regarding the strategic objective of equip our soldiers, the lead communicator is the Secretary of the Army.⁵⁰ Conversely, if a veterans group wants information on the same objective, equip our soldiers, the lead communicator is the Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA). Finally, the guide provides information about what is happening today and fails to provide guidance on how to initiate engagements with the media, Congress or the public at large. Most importantly, the guide does not designate who is responsible for strategic communications or the Army’s goals for future communications engagements.

Additionally, guides for press engagements do not outline when or how to approach the media, only providing the Army’s desired message. A strategic communications plan should provide guidance on how to develop relationships with the press corps and when to proactively engage media resources. Finally, actions like the Marine Corps’ waiver of performance standards, exposed by the press, foster the belief that the Department of Defense may be concealing poor vendor performance at the expense of Soldiers and Marines. The case study above demonstrates that every press engagement regarding the development and production of Interceptor Body Armor was reactive. In each case, the Army and Marine Corps were responding to bad press. Moreover, the Army and Marine Corps never engaged the press prior to Operation Enduring Freedom regarding body armor. If the Army had engaged the Congress and the press on the improvements in body armor technology, its current production and continuing research, the case study may have concluded with a more positive result.

Recommendations

Insights from these two cases add to our understanding of how strategic communications effect acquisition programs. An Army level strategic communications plan for Acquisition Programs must be developed and implemented. The plan must provide proactive strategies to introduce and update the progress of new systems, like body armor, to our stakeholders.

Given the number of acquisition programs it is incumbent on Senior Army Leadership to choose those select few programs that fit into their vision of the future. For example, General Shinseki knew that the interim force was critical to his vision and the Army future. He made transformation from the legacy force to the interim force his short term goal. Meanwhile, the general kept stakeholders focused on the long term goal of the Objective Force, which is now known as the Future Combat System program or FCS. Similarly, General Schoomaker focused his vision and posture statements on the soldier as a system and the programs that supported force protection. His involvement in communicating the need for more advanced body armor was instrumental in the ultimate success of the IBA program.

Additionally, proactive media engagements should be tied to key acquisition milestones ensuring Congress, the American public and our Soldiers can gain the most current information possible while monitoring the progress of systems development. These media engagements should only be for those programs listed in the CSA's vision or posture statement, as not to overwhelm or marginalize the importance of the specific program. The media may not always attend these events but they provide the opportunity to clearly and proactively communicate the Army's intent and acquisition priorities

Finally, Program Executive Officers must develop proactive operational Public Affairs Plans to support the Army Strategic Communications Plan. This would require each PEO to develop the necessary relationship with the Pentagon Press Corps, providing a knowledgeable general officer or senior leader to be the spokesperson in gaining and maintaining the confidence of Congress, Soldiers and the American public. These plans must be synchronized with the overall Army plan with the goal of presenting a unified message.

General George S. Patton Jr. said it best, "in the long run it is what we do not say that will destroy us."⁵¹ If we do not change the current strategic communications posture, our stakeholders will lose confidence in our ability to equip and protect soldiers on the battlefield.

Endnotes

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