

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR TACTICAL LEADERS

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by

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## ABSTRACT

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION FOR TACTICAL LEADERS, by Major Lee E. Bokma, 89 pages.

Strategic communication is a relatively new and currently evolving concept in the U.S. military, and it is currently not widely understood what role, if any, leaders at the tactical level have in it. In order to determine what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication this thesis examines the problem in three sections. First, it examines the concept of strategic communication, hoping to determine potential roles for tactical leaders through defining the concept itself. Next, it examines the characteristics of the information environment in which strategic communication is conducted, potentially enabling or limiting roles for tactical leaders based on those characteristics. Finally, it examines what resources, such as training or specialized assets, leaders at the tactical level have available to incorporate strategic communication into their operations. The thesis concludes with what role tactical leaders have in strategic communication and recommendations to make that role more widely understood.

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## ACRONYMS

DA	Department of the Army
DARPA	Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
DoD	Department of Defense
DSPD	Defense Support to Public Diplomacy
FM	Field Manual
IO	Information Operations
JFCOM	Joint Forces Command
JP	Joint Publication
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
OPSEC	Operations Security
PA	Public Affairs
U.S.	United States

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

If we've learned nothing else these past eight years, it should be that the lines between strategic, operational, and tactical are blurred beyond distinction. This is particularly true in the world of communication, where videos and images plastered on the Web--or even the idea of their being so posted--can and often do drive national security decision making.

—Admiral Mike Mullen,  
*Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics*

#### Defining the Problem

Understanding what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication is the topic of this thesis. It is currently not clear within the United States (U.S.) Army, both in doctrine and in practice, what this relatively new concept called strategic communication fully entails, or what part leaders at the tactical level have in its execution, if any.

The problems potentially caused by the ambiguity surrounding strategic communication at the tactical level can perhaps be exemplified in the case of Master Sergeant C.J. Grisham during the latter part of 2009. Master Sergeant Grisham is one of the most prolific bloggers in the U.S. Army. His blog, *A Soldier's Perspective*, has had nearly one million hits to date, is followed in more than 120 countries, and garners an average of 1,500 visitors a day (Anderson 2009, 4). If that were not enough, he also maintains three other blogs, a web radio show, and a Twitter following. Master Sergeant Grisham's efforts, along with the size of his expansive audience, have captured the attention of those at the strategic level. Numerous general officers, including four-star-level flag officers, have volunteered to be guests on his blogs and web radio show. Two

different presidents have invited him to the White House (Anderson 2009, 4). Without doubt, his messages possess a potential for strategic impact, but does that them part of strategic communication? If not, can his messages be coordinated into strategic communication? The fact that several flag officers have volunteered as guests on Master Sergeant Grisham's show seems to indicate that upper echelon military leaders seem to think it may be a part of strategic communication.

However, the issue is far more complicated than stated above. Master Sergeant Grisham's blogging led to issues with his chain of command in the 309th Military Intelligence Battalion in 2009. He was investigated by the Inspector General, and at the time of this study possibly faces formal charges and a letter of reprimand (Anderson 2009, 4). All of this trouble began when he openly criticized government officials, from the local to the national level, to include the Commander-in-Chief on his blogs. Master Sergeant Grisham's opinions, communicated to thousands via his online efforts, have caused his chain of command to wrestle with their role in managing his personal communications, as they may have impacts of a strategic nature. The case of Master Sergeant Grisham is complicated. To many tactical-level leaders it is unclear if this scenario is considered under the concept of strategic communication, or if it is just a case of a soldier saying inappropriate things--albeit a soldier who just happens to have an audience large enough to possess potential strategic impacts.

Another example that demonstrates confusion concerning strategic communication deals with disjointed key leader engagements across an area of operations during stability operations. Often different tactical units, normally from battalion to division in size, will conduct key leader engagements with the populace in their areas of

operations. During these engagements various incentives, offers, deals, and rewards will be offered by the tactical leaders to the populace. The friction arises when different incentives, offers, deals, and rewards are offered in neighboring areas which communicate with each other. Distrust or spite can develop within the populace toward U.S. forces because of these discrepancies, and it may grow to have effects beyond the tactical level. To many tactical leaders it is unclear if the issues in this scenario fall under strategic communication, or if other organizations or processes are designed to address it.

What is clear, however, is that whatever strategic communication may be, it is very important. The U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) has stated that “victory in the long war ultimately depends on strategic communication by the U.S. and its international partners” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, I-1). Information is the new key terrain, and the decisive command of it is essential to fighting and winning the nation’s conflicts of today and tomorrow (Eder 2007, 61). In fact, U.S. Southern Command has designated strategic communication as their main effort (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, III-1). The center of gravity for America’s strategic objectives is often the will of the people, including American, coalition, and host nation populations. The ability to communicate information to strengthen that will, and to weaken the will of the enemy is essential to victory. The intent of strategic communication, whatever strategic communication may be, is to provide the ways to achieve this critical end. To highlight its importance, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff designated strategic communication as an area of special emphasis for joint education in 2007-2008 (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-4).

The significance of this study contributes to understanding strategic communication and discovering what role leaders at the tactical level have in its execution.

The concept of strategic communication is a relatively new construct undergoing continuous change and development. It has gained mainstream professional awareness in just the past few years and is perhaps one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted concepts in the U.S. Army today (Murphy 2008, 24). Currently strategic communication is in the infantile stages of being incorporated into doctrine, and leaders across the Army do not have a shared idea of what it is, or what role they have in it. It is not uncommon to hear Army leaders use the term strategic communication interchangeably with the terms of Public Affairs (PA), Information Operations (IO), strategic effects, strategic engagement, “telling the Army story,” and even propaganda, as if all these were one and the same, or at least so interconnected as to be reasonably considered one and the same. The term strategic communication, or sometimes called strategic communications with an “s” added, has also been used loosely to encapsulate any communication a soldier has with any group outside of the military. In some Army leaders’ vernacular every media interview, every Rotary Club presentation, and every blog posting has now become a strategic communication. Having a clear definition of strategic communication, and what it fully entails as a concept, is the first step toward discovering what role tactical-level leaders have in its execution.

Another issue that complicates what role tactical-level leaders might have in strategic communication is the ongoing revolution in the global information environment. The ever growing progress in communication technology has broadened the scope of participants in global communication and turned the paradigm of top-fed information

flow upside down. Due to the rapidly evolving information environment, with pervasive media coverage and the democratization of instantaneous global communication technology, messages generated at the tactical level can quickly reach mass audiences and have potential strategic implications. More so than ever before, individual actions and messages at the tactical level can now carry a strategic context. The mediums in which tactical-level actions and messages reach strategic audiences are ubiquitous, ever changing, and for the most part unregulated. This presents a colossal challenge to tactical-level leaders. How can they manage messages at their level to support a cohesive strategic communication effort in such an expansive and constantly changing information environment?

A brief examination of the news media, and how much its capability has grown in the past decade, provides context to this challenge. Due to advancements in technology the news media can now travel lighter and faster than ever before. It is able to imbed itself deeper into combat zones, report in real time from anywhere on the planet, and broadcast to global audiences via 24-hour news outlets and the Internet. This translates into a more pervasive media presence on the battlefield and puts a greater number of leaders at the tactical level in front of an ever watching global audience.

The expanding, agile media presence is the primary medium for messages generated at the tactical level to reach strategic audiences but may perhaps be only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. Advances in modern communication technology are currently democratizing the way the world shares information. Technology today has the ability to inexpensively provide every soldier on the battlefield an unfiltered outlet to a global audience in near-real time. Social media is the vehicle providing the majority of this

outlet, and it is growing in popularity at a meteoric rate. Blogs and websites like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter form the core of the social media phenomenon. They provide a forum for a shared communication and information experience, putting the ear of the world to the lips of anyone who wishes to speak. In conjunction with social media, the rapid advancement of technology in the fields of wireless networks, portable computers, cell phones, and digital cameras further democratizes the capability to communicate globally. The technology in these areas is getting exponentially smaller, faster, and cheaper. Today for an initial purchase price of around \$300 and a monthly payment for service of approximately \$90, a soldier can get a pocket-sized cell phone complete with internal digital video camera and broadband wireless internet connectivity (Sprint 2009). With this technology and a few clicks of the finger, that soldier can take a video, add a commentary, and have it distributed via social media to a global audience within minutes from nearly anywhere on the planet.

An extraordinary example of how the evolving information environment has connected the world and changed the way it shares information can be seen in the results of a 2009 Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) study. The DARPA Network Challenge offered a cash prize to the first group to locate ten red weather balloons hidden in secret locations across nine states by using only the Internet and social media. DARPA gave participants nine days to locate the balloons, but was astounded when a group completed the challenge in a mere nine hours (Johnson 2009). The ability of the general populace to share information, in real time across thousands of miles, and use it in a coordinated manner went far deeper than the researchers had imagined. In the context of strategic communication, the power and interconnectivity demonstrated in the

modern information environment presents a challenge to tactical-level leaders trying to understand what role they might play.

Keeping the challenges presented by the information environment in mind, leaders at the tactical level have to know what resources they have at their disposal in order to understand what role they have in strategic communication. The resources available will dictate the scope of the role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication and are divided into three broad categories by this study. First, tactical-level leaders will only be able to participate in the strategic communication effort within the limits of their training and education. What knowledge leaders possess through training and education will establish the basis for their role in strategic communication. Second, organizational assets at the disposal of tactical-level leaders, such as communication equipment and specially trained personnel, will further define what role they have in the strategic communication effort. Finally, any current and developing policies and command guidance regarding the topic will provide a resource for leaders at the tactical level in understanding what role they have in strategic communication.

Understanding the concept of strategic communication, the characteristics of the information environment, and what resources tactical-level leaders have in incorporating strategic communication into their operations, could explain what role tactical-level leaders have in the strategic communication effort. To put this study into the terms of a traditional military operation, an area most tactical-level leaders feel comfortable with, understanding the concept of strategic communication is much like understanding the mission statement of a particular operation: You cannot be successful unless you understand what you are trying to accomplish and why. Once the mission is understood,

the leader must then understand the characteristics of the battlefield environment, or in the case of strategic communication, the information environment. Finally, the leader must know what assets are available to accomplish the mission, be it an offensive operation with combined arms forces or strategic communication with simply the spoken or written word.

#### Primary Research Question

What role do tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication?

#### Secondary Research Questions

There are three secondary questions. First, what is this relatively new and continuously developing concept known as strategic communication? Second, what are the characteristics of the information environment tactical-level leaders must operate within to conduct strategic communication? Finally, what resources do tactical-level leaders have toward incorporating strategic communication into their operations?

#### Key Terms

The term ‘tactical level’ must be defined in order to understand what level of leadership the thesis is addressing. Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* states that the three levels of war--strategic, operational, and tactical--“have no finite limits or boundaries” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 6-1). This makes defining a tactical-level leader challenging. However, FM 3-0 eventually gives some further resolution and states that tactics “are typically conducted at brigade level and below” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 6-3). For the purpose of this thesis, the tactical level is defined in

agreement with the second statement and encompasses the leaders at brigade level and below.

The term “social media” will be used throughout the thesis, and its definition will be important when determining the characteristics of the information environment in which tactical-level leaders can conduct strategic communication. The Army has defined social media as “dialogue-based web platforms, to include such sites as Facebook, Myspace, Flickr, YouTube, and Twitter” (U.S. Army Online and Social Media Division 2009, 19). In this thesis the term social media will go beyond the Army definition to include other web-based content that allow for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. For the purposes of this study, social media content can be broken down into the categories of blogs, social networking, collaboration, and media sharing. These four categories are defined below.

Blogs, or weblogs, are online publications of chronologically ordered thoughts and opinions, which are regularly updated and can be linked to other sources. Blogs can be published by both institutions and individuals, and are generally open forums available to anyone who cares to register with the blog (U.S. Army Online and Social Media Division 2009, 20). The term blogosphere means the complete collection of all existing blogs. Micro-blogs are blogs that contain 140 characters or less and are messages sent to individuals who are registered to ‘follow’ the micro-blogger. Twitter.com is one of the leading micro-blogs, providing real-time short messaging service over multiple networks and devices, such as cell phones (Twitter 2009).

Social networking sites are online platforms that provide registered users with the capability to interact with other users for social or professional purposes (U.S. Army

Online and Social Media Division 2009, 20). Social network sites generally allow users to share text, photo, and video content to an open forum or to selected users. Popular social networking sites include Facebook.com and Myspace.com.

Collaboration sites are online publishing platforms that allow multiple users to create and maintain documents, often with version control available. Wikipedia.org is perhaps the most commonly known and widely used collaboration site.

Media sharing sites are online platforms that allow users to share photo, video, and audio content, often with the capability to comment on the content with text. Media sharing sites can be open forum or available only to registered users. Flickr.com is a widely known photo-sharing site. YouTube.com and Vimeo.com are leading video sharing sites.

### Assumptions

For the purpose of this study it is assumed that the general trends in social media use for the U.S. Army are reflective of the trends of social media use for the U.S. general population. This assumption was necessary as social media trends were not tracked for the Army, but rather for the nation as a whole.

### Scope of Study

In order to limit the scope of the study, this thesis will only address what role tactical-level leaders in the Army have in strategic communication. It does not address leaders in the other branches of military service and what different role they might have, or what role leaders at the operational and strategic level possess.

The focus will also be refined to only include officers, and not non-commissioned officers, at the tactical level. This refinement was done solely to limit the scope of the study to a manageable field. In no way was this limitation meant to imply that non-commissioned officers are not leaders at the tactical level, or that they have any less important role in strategic communication than their office counterparts.

Officers specializing in an information-related field, such as PA, IO, or Psychological Operations, to name a few, are not the focus of this study. These officers specialize in communication, and have a more defined and explicit role in strategic communication than officers in non-information-related fields. This thesis is focused to determine what role leaders at the tactical level in non-information-related fields have in strategic communication.

The final factor limiting the scope of study concerns operations security (OPSEC). Whenever any member of the military communicates, be it to either a military audience or a non-military one, OPSEC must always be considered. Regardless of how challenging the ever-changing information environment makes OPSEC, the protection of sensitive and classified information is, and always will be, of paramount importance to the Army. Without doubt, tactical-level leaders must always consider OPSEC when conducting any role in strategic communication. However, in order to limit the scope of this thesis, the OPSEC considerations tactical-level leaders must address in the strategic communication effort are not being studied. This is being done for two reasons. First, the topic of OPSEC and strategic communication is a study worthy in breadth and depth of its own complete thesis. Second, the maintenance of OPSEC is an inherent task that all leaders and soldiers possess and is not a unique role that tactical-level leaders have in

conducting strategic communication. In conclusion, the omission of OPSEC from this thesis is not a reflection of its importance or complexity, but rather a matter of limiting the scope of study.

### Summary

Despite strategic communication developing into an identified function of successful warfighting in the information age, it is a concept which is often misunderstood in the U.S. Army. To date, a clear understanding of what role leaders at the tactical level have in strategic communication does not exist. Several issues make determining this role a challenge. The information environment tactical-level leaders must operate in to conduct strategic communication is rapidly growing, ever changing, and utterly pervasive. Also, tactical-level leaders have finite resources that limit what role they can have.

In order to determine the role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication, the concept itself must first be clearly defined. With that concept established, an exploration of the information environment tactical-level leaders must operate within to conduct strategic communication must then be conducted. This exploration of the information environment must determine the characteristics of the environment and derive how those characteristics can or cannot be utilized by tactical-level leaders. Finally, the resources available to tactical-level leaders must be identified to determine the capabilities and limitation they have in executing strategic communication.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of strategic communication has only recently been recognized within the DoD, and therefore relevant policy and doctrine are still evolving. Doctrine does exist for each of the major military capabilities that contribute to strategic communication (public affairs, defense support to public diplomacy, and information operations), however, there is minimal doctrine that expands upon and describes the integration and synchronization of these capabilities and its potential impact on joint operations.

—U.S. Joint Forces Command,  
*Multi-National Force-Iraq Strategic Communication Study Paper*

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to determining what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication. The important works of literature pertaining to the concept of strategic communication, and what role tactical-level leaders might have in its execution, are examined. The connections and inconsistencies between these works are discussed toward answering the research questions. The chapter concludes by identifying any gaps in the existing field of literature.

#### Important Works

Strategic communication is a relatively new concept within the U.S. Government and the Department of Defense (DoD). The earliest bodies of literature addressing strategic communication within the military are written in the opening years of the twenty-first century, and the concept does not attain a sizable and consistent base of literature until 2006, when it is addressed in the DoD's *Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap*. Within this document the DoD formally

defined strategic communication for the first time. Despite this effort by the DoD, the U.S. Government as a whole has yet to publish a formal definition for strategic communication (Murphy 2008, 1). The definition posited in the *Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap* will be further examined in chapter four of this study, along with other definitions of strategic communication formulated by sources outside of the DoD.

As a relatively new construct in the military establishment, strategic communication is in the rudimentary stages of incorporation into doctrine, both at the joint and Army levels. The definition of strategic communication, along with its associated and related concepts, can be found at the joint level in Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* and at the Army level in FM 3-0, *Operations*. Both doctrinal sources agree on the definition of strategic communication, as put forward in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap*, but they differ widely on explaining the scope of strategic communication and how it is related to other operations in the information related fields. The inconsistencies portion of this chapter will further examine these differences. Additionally, both the joint and Army doctrine fail to clearly prescribe what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication, despite both sources outlining some general ideas that may be applicable to leaders at all levels.

In addition to its fledgling presence in doctrine, strategic communication is currently addressed in a growing number of DoD non-doctrinal publications and studies which possess a great deal of influence in the field. Besides the aforementioned 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap*, perhaps the

most important non-doctrinal publication is the 2009's JFCOM *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, or for the sake of brevity, the *Handbook*. The preface of the *Handbook* states that it is a "pre-doctrinal document on strategic communication" that "provides the fundamental principles, techniques, and procedures that are evolving...and moving toward incorporation into joint publications" (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, i). This bridge document between evolving field practice and developing doctrine establishes the nine principles of strategic communication concept, imitating the familiar nine principles of war concept, albeit with a focus solely on strategic communication. The nine principles of strategic communication put forth in the *Handbook* are likely to become the foundation for future doctrine on strategic communication and might prescribe a more explicit role for tactical-level leaders in its execution.

Another DoD non-doctrinal publication that holds influence within the field of strategic communication is JFCOM's *Multi-National Force-Iraq Strategic Communication Study Paper* published in 2008. This study was conducted to capture the best practices of Multi-National Force-Iraq's (MNF-I) highly successful strategic communication effort in 2007-2008. Many of the findings of the study will likely be incorporated into future strategic communication doctrine and procedures and may provide insight into what role tactical-level leaders have in the field.

Beyond DoD publications, both doctrinal and non-doctrinal, many influential articles from independent defense-related journals have been published on the topic of strategic communication. These articles capture many of the emerging thoughts, practices, and challenges that relate to strategic communication. The authors of these

works come from a wide range of backgrounds, including career information officers, faculty from the DoD's educational establishment, and flag officers serving at the strategic level. Many of these articles propose potential roles for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication.

An analysis of these important works of literature in the field of strategic communication led to the identification of several connections and inconsistencies.

### Connections

In reviewing the literature regarding what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication several concepts shared connections across the breadth of work. The first identified connection is that strategic communication is not just words and messages alone, but also actions. This concept is clearly presented in doctrine when FM 3-0 *Operations* states "Soldiers' actions are the most powerful component of information engagement. Visible actions coordinated with carefully chosen, truthful words influence audiences more than either does alone" (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-4). Non-doctrinal publications and independent articles echo this idea consistently across the scope of literature. Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, drives this connection home when he stated that strategic communication fails "when our words don't align with our actions" (Mullen 2009, 3).

A second connection within the applicable literature is the concept that strategic communication can be conducted at all levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. Army doctrine, namely FM 3-0, *Operations*, states numerous times that Soldiers and leaders, implying from the tactical level and up, are participants in strategic communication and related operations like Information Engagement (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-

3). Several of the independent articles published outside of the DoD concur with this belief. Dennis Murphy, a professor at the U.S. Army War College who has contributed multiple pieces to the field of strategic communication, states “it should be clear that both strategic communication and IO can be employed at all levels of warfare (tactical, operational, theater strategic and national strategic)” (Murphy 2009, 3).

Perhaps the most prevalent connection within the review of literature is the commonly held belief that a ubiquitous, rapidly-evolving information environment presents new challenges and opportunities for the strategic communication effort. Once again, doctrine links into the connection. FM 3-0, *Operations* states “Information systems are everywhere, exposure to news and opinion media is pervasive, the pace of change is increasing, and individual actions can have immediate strategic implications” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-1). Non-doctrinal DoD publications agree, as highlighted by the *Handbook*: “The continuous, rapid communications flow in the information environment, facilitated by modern technological advances and media distribution methods, requires responsive, agile processes and capabilities” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, I-1). Within the collected literature, the sheer scope of this concept is perhaps best captured in a paper by two faculty members at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Bill McCollum and Steven Kerrick, when they wrote,

World-wide news distribution capabilities have exploded. Today’s information-sharing technologies allow the transfer of news information to hundreds of millions of people at near real-time over multiple transport means. No longer must the American and world populations have to wait for the traditional daily television broadcasts or daily printed newspapers as occurred during Viet Nam to obtain news of military action. News consumers now have access from multiple and ever-increasing sources: some credible and some not. These sources include

everything from traditional major television and radio networks, to twenty-four hour news channels, to broadband Internet blogs, to mobile phone messaging and video, and the list goes on and on. These technologies will continue to grow and advance. Suffice to say these advancements will continue to place unique and rapidly changing demands upon military leaders. (McCollum 2006, 6)

The rapidly changing information environment, along with the other connections identified within the review of literature, begins to develop common ground for what role tactical-level leaders might have in executing strategic communication. Yet perhaps as equally important as identifying the connections, discovering what inconsistencies exist in the literature also assists in defining this role.

### Inconsistencies

Despite a limited number of connections, the body of influential literature regarding strategic communication is nowhere near unity or cohesion. In some cases the opposing literature merely presents a misunderstanding or shortcoming, while in others it is irreconcilably conflicting. As a relatively new initiative in the military establishment this is not completely surprising, especially considering the speed at which the information environment is expanding and changing. Several inconsistencies were identified in the literature regarding what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication.

The first major inconsistency resides in doctrine. Strategic communication has been defined and described in joint doctrine by JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, and in Army doctrine by FM 3-0, *Operations*. Both manuals agree on the definition of strategic communication as dictated in the DoD's *Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap* but beyond that share little common ground. JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* expands upon strategic communication in a mere eleven sentences, five

of which are duplicates, resulting in a net of six total sentences. In those few sentences, joint doctrine states that strategic communication is supported by the existing activities of IO, PA, and Defense Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD) (U.S. Department of Defense February 2008, I-2). Looking now at the Army doctrine, FM 3-0, *Operations* allocates about the same amount of verbiage toward strategic communication as JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* does, but that is where the similarity ends. FM 3-0, *Operations* does not place IO, PA, or DSPD as activities which support strategic communication but instead lists only DSPD as a supporting activity of strategic communication. It then lists strategic communication, DSPD, and PA, along with other activities such as psychological operations and combat camera, as capabilities in support of a task called information engagement (U.S. Department of the Army February 2008, 7-3). Nowhere in JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* is the task of information engagement defined or described. Nowhere in FM 3-0, *Operations* is IO related to strategic communication or information engagement. The roles between strategic communication, IO, PA, DSPD, and information engagement have no unity between joint and Army doctrine. This confusing inconsistency within doctrine contributes to the lack of clear understanding of what strategic communication is, and what role anybody, to include tactical-level leaders, have in its execution.

This doctrinal disorder has contributed to another inconsistency within the literature regarding strategic communication. A debate rages across both DoD non-doctrinal publications and independent works as to what the exact nature of strategic communication is. The established definition aside, it is not clear within the literature whether strategic communication is an entity with organization and funding or simply a way of thinking that connects other entities into a unified effort. For example, U.S.

JFCOM's *Multi-National Force-Iraq Strategic Communication Study Paper* concludes that one of the strategic communication best practices is to institute a dedicated and manned element specifically to execute strategic communication (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center December 2008, 7). Complimenting this concept, one independent work questioned how to integrate strategic communication into the DoD's selection and promotion process, which undoubtedly gives it some sort of organization (Perkins 2006, 6). On the other hand, Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argues that strategic communication should be a way of thinking and not an organization unto itself. He states that it defeats the intent of strategic communication to give it a structure, and turns it into "something of a cottage industry" (Mullen 2009, 2). Dennis Murphy agrees with Admiral Mullen. He translates strategic communication into the strategists' model of ends, ways, and means. This model states that strategy describes how (the ways) objectives (the ends) are achieved by capabilities, such as things with organizations (the means). Murphy argues that "strategic communication is a 'way' to achieve an information effect" and that it does so by employing "multiple 'means'" and not by acting as a means on its own accord (Murphy 2008, 3). Describing strategic communication as a way that employs means translates it into a way of thinking that employs other capabilities and organizations to accomplish its desired objective, rather than being an organization unto itself.

The disagreement about whether strategic communication is an entity with organization or a way of thinking, in addition to the other inconsistencies identified by the literature review, may further establish what role leaders at the tactical level have in the strategic communication effort.

## Summary

The relatively new concept of strategic communication possesses a growing body of literature from a wide variety of sources. The important works within this body that relate to discovering what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication include emerging doctrine at the joint and Army level, non-doctrinal publications from the DoD and its subordinate organizations, and several independent articles in defense-related publications.

Several connections can be found throughout the diverse literature regarding this subject. First, actions are as important as words in regards to strategic communication. Second, strategic communication occurs to some degree at all levels, including the tactical level. Finally, the information environment within which strategic communication must be conducted is complex, ubiquitous, and rapidly changing.

Several inconsistencies can also be found between the important works regarding the subject of strategic communication and what role leaders at the tactical level might have in its execution. Most apparent is the massive divide between joint and Army doctrine on establishing exactly what relationship strategic communication has with established information activities, such as IO and DSPD, and how it is generally executed. Another important inconsistency exists over whether strategic communication is an entity with organization or a way of thinking.

What role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication remains unanswered in any direct fashion by the review of literature and continues to be a gap in the existing field. This thesis intends to aid in filling that gap. The next chapter addresses

the methodology executed to research the gap within the field and provide some resolution as to what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Despite the interest and attention, strategic communication is still a developing concept. Contributing to the challenge is the lack of approved policy and doctrine.

—Robert Hastings,  
Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense of Public Affairs

#### Introduction

The research methodology being utilized to determine what role leaders at the tactical level have in the execution of strategic communication is discussed within this chapter. The discussion of the methodology is organized into four sections. The first three sections discuss the research methodology being used to analyze and answer the three secondary research questions identified in chapter one. The final section discusses the research methodology being utilized to determine an answer to the primary research question and topic of this thesis. Each section will identify the type or types of research conducted, the criteria applied toward evaluating the data accumulated by the research, and the method of analysis for determining answers and conclusions.

#### Methodology for Defining Strategic Communication

Determining what the relatively new and continuously developing concept known as strategic communication entails is the first secondary question being studied. The research methodology being utilized to answer this question is an analysis of applicable literature. Doctrine, both at the joint and Army level, is being analyzed first and as a criterion of analysis will have precedence over non-doctrinal literature. If disagreements are present between joint and Army doctrine, joint doctrine will be given precedence over

Army doctrine as another criterion. Joint doctrine is being given precedence because it was clear in the earliest stages of research that strategic communication is an effort being conducted by all components of the DoD, and not just the Army. Additionally, if it is determined that gaps or shortfalls exist within joint and Army doctrine concerning strategic communication, as the initial review of literature suggests, then an analysis of non-doctrinal literature will be conducted in an attempt to bridge the gaps and shortfalls. In the field of non-doctrinal literature, resources published by the DoD or Department of the Army (DA) will be given precedence over independently published literature. This criterion was selected because officially published literature by the DoD or DA should contain established concepts free of the bias or speculation possibly present within independent literature. In addition, in order to maintain credibility within the body of independent literature, only works from reputable defense-related journals or established academic institutions will be utilized by this study.

The research methodology used to analyze non-doctrinal literature is primarily an identification and comparison of trends. During the research, any concepts, theories, and ideas concerning the nature of strategic communication that are common across multiple sources will be identified. Those identified common areas of thought will then be compared to any related doctrinal concepts, or in the lack thereof, analyzed as a possible bridge to that particular doctrinal gap. Should trends exist which are in disagreement with one another, the criterion for establishing precedence is the trend supported by the preponderance of literature. If the literature does not clearly establish one trend over an opposing trend, then both trends will be disregarded toward determining a conclusion for the question. However, if such a situation should occur, the equally opposing trends will

be discussed within this study's conclusions as a topic requiring further study to be resolved.

Another criterion concerning precedence within the body of non-doctrinal literature, regardless of being published by the DoD, DA, or an independent source, is date of publication. As strategic communication is a relatively new concept which is rapidly evolving, an assumption is being made that more recently published literature is likely to be more relevant. Therefore, this study will give more weight to evidence from resources with a more recent publication date.

One final criterion affects what doctrinal literature this study uses as a resource. This criterion is derived from the scope of this study pertaining only to tactical-level leaders in non-information specialty fields. Therefore, doctrine specifically focused toward information specialists, such as PA and psychological operations officers, is not included in the research, as its applicability is too specialized to be relevant to leaders in non-information-related fields. Doctrine included in the research is general in nature and applicable to leaders across the spectrum of the Army, such as FM 3-0, *Operations*.

#### Methodology for Determining the Characteristics of the Information Environment

Determining the characteristics of the information environment within which tactical-level leaders must operate to conduct strategic communication is the second of three secondary questions being studied. In order to understand what this study means by a characteristic of the information environment, and how it is important to the execution of strategic communication, a comparison as to how a tactical-level leader analyzes terrain for conventional operations may be helpful. When conducting conventional

military operations, a tactical-level leader will analyze the terrain within which he must operate, looking for those characteristics of the terrain which will afford him advantages, disadvantages, options, and limitations. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of the information environment toward executing strategic communication in the same way as a leader would analyze the terrain toward executing a conventional military operation. What are the aspects of the information environment which provide advantages, disadvantages, options, and limitations to a tactical-level leader in conducting strategic communication? Much like the first secondary question, the research methodology being utilized to answer this question is an analysis of applicable literature. However, unlike the previous question, much of the literature for this question will be from online sources, as much of today's information environment exists online.

The analysis of literature, both from traditional and online sources, is aimed to identify trends of ideas and concepts that define the characteristics of the information environment. An idea or concept that is commonly held across the greater portion of resources and develops a clear trend will be identified as an established characteristic of the information environment by the study. Established characteristics will be used as conclusions to answer this particular secondary research question.

Should opposing trends be identified during the analysis, the issue will be resolved in a fashion similar to the process outlined in the previous section of this chapter. The trend supported by the greater preponderance of sources will be selected as the established characteristic. If the literature does not determine one opposing trend over the other by preponderance, then neither trend will be selected as an established

characteristic, and the issue will be discussed in the conclusions as a topic requiring further research for resolution.

Although the research regarding this question is not as doctrinally focused as the previous question, doctrine at the joint and Army level will still be analyzed for possible conclusions. Any characteristics of the information environment identified within doctrine will be considered as an established characteristic, regardless if it was identified as a trend among non-doctrinal resources. Much like the first secondary question, this criterion grants doctrine precedence over non-doctrinal sources.

Another criterion that will be utilized for this portion of the study is publication date. It was evident early in the research that the information environment is rapidly changing and progressing, a point that may become an established characteristic upon analysis. Because of this, sources that are older are more likely to be irrelevant. Accordingly, evidence with a more recent publication date will be given precedence over older evidence by this study.

A final criterion concerns the selection of online resources. As the Internet is largely unregulated and free of publishing standards, only well-established and mainstream websites will be used as resources by this study. In determining if a website is well-established and mainstream, the length of its existence and the number of its visitors will be compared against other websites of its genre. For example, to determine if Metacafe.com is a well-established and mainstream video sharing website, its length of existence and number of visitors would be compared against Youtube.com, Vimeo.com, and other prominent websites within the video-sharing genre.

## Methodology for Determining Resources Available to Tactical-Level Leaders

Determining what resources tactical-level leaders have toward incorporating strategic communication into their operations is the final secondary question being studied. The research methodology to answer this question dissects it into three distinct sections. First, what education and training are tactical-level leaders provided concerning strategic communication? Second, what physical assets, such as special equipment and personnel, are at the disposal of tactical-level leaders? Finally, what policies and programs exist to support tactical-level leaders with strategic communication?

In order to determine what education and training tactical-level leaders receive on strategic communication, the programs of instruction of all applicable courses within the U.S. Army Officer Education System will be reviewed. This review includes pre-commissioning courses, Officer Basic Courses, Captain's Career Courses, Intermediate Level Education, Pre-command Courses, and the U.S. Army War College. Instruction on strategic communication, or related topics such as interacting with the media, will be identified. The amount and nature of the instruction will then be analyzed against the conclusions of the first two secondary questions to determine if the instruction is not only sufficient to meet the requirements needed by tactical-level leaders, but applicable considering the rapidly evolving nature of both strategic communication and the information environment.

In order to determine what physical assets are available to tactical-level leaders for executing strategic communication, a review of doctrinal and non-doctrinal military publications will be conducted. First, the assets themselves must be identified. This will be primarily completed by searching units' Modified Tables of Organization and

Equipment (MTOE) or Tables of Distribution and Allowance (TDA) for the assets themselves. As literally hundreds of unit MTOEs and TDAs exist, a sampling of a select number of modular units will be conducted and the assumption will be made that those units are representative of the majority of similar units. For the purpose of this study, the MTOEs from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division and the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division will represent maneuver brigades who commonly own battle space. The MTOEs from the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade and 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade will represent functional brigades that commonly do not own battle space. Finally, the TDAs of the 78th Training Brigade and 1st Recruiting Brigade will represent non-deployable organizations of roughly brigade size. In addition, a review of assets not normally assigned to units, and therefore not listed on their MTOE or TDA, will also be conducted through research of military literature. After identifying the assets themselves from all sources, the capabilities of those identified assets must be established. This will be completed by an analysis of literature applicable to the particular asset. For example, if human terrain teams are determined to be assets available to tactical-level leaders for conducting strategic communication, literature applicable to the capabilities of the human terrain team will then be analyzed to determine what resource they provide to the tactical-level leader.

In order to determine what policies and programs exist to support tactical-level leaders with strategic communication a comprehensive search for those items will be conducted. If the research determines a single office or organization responsible for strategic communication within the U.S. Army, that office will be queried for existing policies and programs specifically for leaders at the tactical level. If no such office exists,

the study will query offices or organizations that have some role in strategic communication for applicable policies or programs that they may possess. A search for policies and programs will also be conducted using various Army knowledge management resources available online. The policies and programs will then be analyzed against the conclusions of the first two secondary questions to determine if first, they are sufficient to meet the requirements needed by tactical-level leaders to conduct strategic communication, and second, applicable considering the rapidly evolving nature of both strategic communication and the information environment.

#### Methodology for Answering the Primary Research Question

The primary research question is what role do tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication? The research methodology selected to answer this question is a combination of two methods. The first method is an analysis of literature that directly establishes what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication. The second method is a synthesis of conclusions from the three secondary research questions.

The initial review of literature failed to find a source that directly establishes a role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. However, further research may find a source that does. If so, that source will be analyzed to determine the validity of its concepts. If the source is doctrinal, its concepts will be accepted as an established role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. If the source is a DoD or DA non-doctrinal publication, its concepts will be accepted as an established role unless contradicted by another DoD or DA non-doctrinal source. If such a conflict occurs, an analysis of the disagreement will be conducted in order to provide resolution. If the

source is published outside of the DoD or DA, other sources will be sought in an attempt to establish a trend. A trend will be considered an established role.

The other method to be used in combination with any direct literature findings will be a synthesis of conclusions from the three secondary research questions. Analyzing the conclusions of what strategic communication is, what kind of information environment it must be conducted in, and what resources tactical-level leaders have available should provide some resolution as to what role leaders at the tactical level have in strategic communication.

### Summary

The study organized the research methodology into four sections in order to resolve the primary research question. The first section's methodology primarily utilizes an analysis of literature, along with criteria to establish precedence within the body of works, to determine what strategic communication is. The second section's methodology uses an analysis of literature similar to the first section, although with less emphasis on doctrine and more upon online resources, to determine the characteristics of the information environment. The third section's methodology uses a variety of predominantly military sources to determine what resources tactical-level leaders have toward conducting strategic communication. The final section's methodology uses a combination of analyzing applicable literature and synthesizing conclusions from the three secondary research questions to determine resolution for the primary research question of what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication.

The next chapter executes the research methodology outlined above and details the analysis toward determining conclusions for the thesis.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

Clausewitz may not have listed information as a principle of war, but today it is, whether we like it or not. There will be trouble if we ignore the need to inform our people and to deal with the commercial media in the planning, practice and execution of war.

—Major General Patrick H. Brady,  
*Telling the Army Story: 'As It Is, Not As It Should Be'*

#### Introduction

The analysis to determine what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication is detailed within this chapter. As outlined in the previous chapter, the analysis is conducted in four separate sections, one addressing each of the three secondary research questions, and the last addressing the primary research question. The first section executes the previously described research methodology to analyze what strategic communication is. The next section focuses upon analyzing the characteristics of the information environment within which tactical-level leaders must operate to conduct strategic communication. The third section analyzes what resources are available to leaders at the tactical level toward executing strategic communication. Finally, the last section of the chapter analyzes any explicit roles discovered in the literature toward answering the primary research question of what role do tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication.

#### Defining Strategic Communication

Currently the U.S. Army does not have a cohesive understanding of the concept of strategic communication. It is a relatively new and currently evolving construct within

the military lexicon, and is not clearly understood across the breadth of the force. Strategic communication was formally defined for the first time by the DoD in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap*. According to that document, strategic communication is “focused U.S. Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of U.S. Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power” (U.S. Department of Defense 2006, 3). This definition is tremendously broad and open to a wide range of interpretations. Also, despite strategic communication being defined as a “U.S. Government effort” that is “synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power,” no overarching published definition for strategic communication by the U.S. Government as a whole exists, only the DoD definition (Paul 2010, 10). This broad and vague definition, coupled with the fact that this whole-of-government concept has no definition published by the U.S. Government as a whole, leaves the concept open to a wide range of interpretations about what strategic communication really is, who conducts it, and how it is to be accomplished.

In order to determine a more complete understanding of strategic communication this study first analyzes doctrine. An initial analysis determines that little information concerning strategic communication currently exists in joint or Army doctrine. As stated in chapter two, both JP 3-0 and FM 3-0 address strategic communication with less than a dozen sentences each. This is most likely due to how new the concept of strategic communication is and how rapidly it has been evolving since its inception. A more

thorough analysis of what little doctrine does say about strategic communication results in consistency regarding some aspects, but inconsistencies in others. The first consistency is the formal definition. Both JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* and FM 3-0, *Operations* share the DoD definition of strategic communication as stated earlier in the chapter. However, despite this common ground neither source expands upon the definition much, and both fail to narrow down the vagueness within its broad nature. Both doctrinal sources emphasize that the U.S. Government as a whole conducts strategic communication, and that its planning should be incorporated into military planning, but that is where any expansion or further description ends.

The next and only other consistency between joint and Army doctrine lies with strategic communication's relationship with DSPD. Both JP 3-0 and FM 3-0 state that DSPD compliments and contributes to strategic communication. DSPD is defined as those activities and measures taken by the DoD components to support and facilitate public diplomacy efforts of the U.S. Government (U.S. Department of Defense 2008, GL-12). At the tactical level, Army units often contribute to DSPD when they conduct peacetime military engagement activities in support of theater cooperation plans (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-5). Beyond that, leaders at the tactical level normally do not play a significant role in DSPD.

Despite the two consistencies mentioned above, joint and Army doctrine unfortunately possesses a major inconsistency regarding strategic communication. Neither source can agree on what relationship strategic communication has in respect to previously established or traditional communication operations. Joint doctrine states that strategic communication is not subordinate to any other communication activity and is

primarily supported by IO, PA, and DSPD (U.S. Department of Defense 2008, I-2). Army doctrine establishes strategic communication, in conjunction with DSPD as a combined single entity, as a capability that supports a task called information engagement (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-3). Army doctrine goes on to list PA, psychological operations, combat camera, and leader and soldier engagement as other capabilities separate from strategic communication that support information engagement (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-3). Nowhere in FM 3-0 is IO addressed as a supporting element of strategic communication as it is in JP 3-0. Nowhere in JP 3-0 is information engagement addressed as a concept, despite its overarching application in FM 3-0.

A deeper analysis of FM 3-0 locates a definition for information engagement, a term that is neither mentioned nor defined in JP 3-0 or other joint manuals. According to FM 3-0, information engagement is “the integrated employment of PA to inform U.S. and friendly audiences; psychological operations, combat camera, U.S. Government strategic communication and DSPD, and other means necessary to influence foreign audiences; and leader and soldier engagements to support both efforts” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-3). This definition is in conflict with the DoD definition of strategic communication. It relegates strategic communication as a means to “influence foreign audiences” only, and not to “understand and engage key audiences,” which would include both foreign and national venues, as stated in the DoD definition. FM 3-0 also goes on to state that the purpose of information engagement is “to communicate information, build trust and confidence, promote support for Army operations, and influence perceptions and behavior” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-3). If information engagement is to

be considered a concept overarching strategic communication, as it is listed in FM 3-0, then the purpose of the two contain some dissonance. As per their definitions, the purpose of strategic communication is to advance U.S. Government interests at the strategic level, while the purpose of information engagement is to promote support for Army operations, which may or may not be at the strategic level. By placing strategic communication subordinate to information engagement, FM 3-0 creates several confusing inconsistencies as to how the Army conducts and supports strategic communication. Inconsistencies aside, neither joint nor Army doctrine specify a role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication.

In the search to determine what strategic communication is beyond the definition, an analysis of doctrine determines little and further complicates the issue with inconsistencies. Outside of presenting the recognized DoD definition, doctrine provides little information about strategic communication, or how it is to be accomplished as part of military operations. In order to fill this gap left by doctrine, an analysis of non-doctrinal literature will be conducted.

The most in-depth and descriptive non-doctrinal source concerning strategic communication is U.S. JFCOM's *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, henceforth referred to as the *Handbook*. According to the *Handbook*, it is a pre-doctrinal document meant to provide "fundamental principles, techniques, and procedures that are evolving" within the field of strategic communication (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, i). Like the doctrinal sources discussed above, the *Handbook* shares the recognized DoD definition of strategic communication. As a document produced by U.S. JFCOM, the *Handbook* supports joint

doctrine as opposed to Army doctrine concerning the relationship strategic communication shares with existing information fields such as PA, IO, and DSPD (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, ix). It also does not mention the concept of information engagement that is found solely in Army doctrine. More importantly, the *Handbook* goes into far greater detail than what is currently published in both joint and Army doctrine concerning what strategic communication is, how it is to be conducted, and other related concepts.

In describing strategic communication, the *Handbook* uses an analogy that helps put the somewhat ambiguous and lengthy definition into a more easily comprehensible context. The *Handbook* states “due to the myriad strategic communication-related capabilities, organizations, missions, and audiences, some have likened strategic communication to an orchestra” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, II-4). Within the analogy, strategic communication is the integrating elements of an orchestra that transforms the noise made by many different instruments into a single, harmonious work of music. The conductor of the orchestra represents senior strategic communication leaders within the military. The score the orchestra is playing represents the strategic communication guidance and plans. The conductor, with the use of the score, then integrates and synchronizes the different instruments within the orchestra, which represent the various information efforts that support strategic communication such as IO, PA, and DSPD, into concert through selection, timing, tempo, volume, and emphasis. The result is music, which represents the messages communicated to achieve desired effects upon the audience. The audience within the orchestra analogy represents the intended key audiences selected by strategic communication and may contain the U.S.

public, U.S. media, international media, allies, adversaries, supporters, and neutral parties as applicable. The analogy also depicts feedback from the audience that the conductor must assess to adapt the score and orchestra in order to refine the effectiveness of the music. Finally, the analogy recognizes that unintended audiences exist which also hear the orchestra playing, which represents the open nature of the information environment where messages meant for one audience are heard by others. More detail on this potential characteristic of the information environment will be analyzed in the next section of this chapter.

The orchestra analogy presented by the *Handbook* interestingly lists efforts other than the doctrinally established IO, PA, and DSPD as members of the orchestra playing in support of strategic communication. Theater Security Cooperation, Visual Information, and Operations are also identified as elements within the orchestra playing to help make the music of strategic communication (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, II-4). These areas, especially Operations, open roles that involve leaders at the tactical level in strategic communication. However, the *Handbook* does not expound on any of these additional areas or how they contribute, other than during this brief analogy.

In addition to the orchestra analogy, the *Handbook* provides a second concept toward understanding strategic communication beyond the DoD definition with the nine principles of strategic communication. According to the *Handbook*, the nine principles of strategic communication, modeled after the nine principles of war concept, are provided “to assist dialogue and instruction, promoting understanding of strategic communication” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-1). The nine principles, listed in no particular order of precedence, are: leadership-driven, credible, understanding,

dialogue, unity of effort, results-based, responsive, continuous, and pervasive (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-1). Eight of the principles express goals or desired states that those conducting strategic communication must achieve to be successful. The ninth principle, pervasive, is different in that it provides insight into the nature of the information environment rather than a goal to be achieved.

The principle of “leadership-driven” states that “leaders should place communication at the core of everything they do” and treat it with the same emphasis as they would other areas of importance such as logistics and intelligence (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-1). The principle of “credible” states that the communicator should strive to establish trust and credibility with the intended audience; otherwise, the messages will not be given any attention. “Understanding,” the next principle, emphasizes that in order to communicate effectively the communicator must understand how the intended audience interprets ideas based on cultural and societal contexts. The fourth principle, “dialogue,” posits that communication is a two-way enterprise, and to be effective the communicator must actively listen to the audience and strive to develop a relationship of positive engagement. The “unity of effort” principle states that in order to be effective the strategic communication effort must be a collaborative process that is nested vertically from tactical to strategic level, and horizontally across all participants. The “results-based” principle emphasizes that strategic communication should focus on achieving a clearly defined end state, and that it should not be “just another tool in the leader’s toolbox,” but rather an encompassing guide to all an organization says and does (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-3). The principle of “responsive” strives to match the right audience

with the right message at the right time and the right place. The eighth principle, “continuous,” declares that in order to be effective strategic communication must be an ongoing process of constant research, planning, execution, and assessment. The final principle of “pervasive” establishes a characteristic of the information environment rather than a desired state or goal the communicator should strive for, as the previous eight principles did. It states that “communication no longer has boundaries . . . all players are communicators, wittingly or not . . . every action, word, and image sends a message, and every team member is a messenger . . . all communication can have strategic impact, and unintended audiences are unavoidable” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-2). Although the principle of pervasive does not provide a goal for strategic communicators to strive for, it is useful toward understanding the complexity of conducting strategic communication in the current information environment, which will be analyzed further in the next section of this chapter.

Beyond the *Handbook*, an analysis of other non-doctrinal literature aimed at determining what strategic communication is uncovers two major trends, both of which possess some measure of internal disagreement and debate. The first trend addresses whether strategic communication encompasses just messages, or both messages and the actions related to those messages. The second trend debates whether strategic communication is a process executed by existing organizations, or a process that requires its own organization to be executed.

The first trend identified in the non-doctrinal literature debates whether strategic communication encompasses planning and executing just messages, or if it also encompasses some aspect of the actions which relate to those messages. The *Handbook*

implies that in order to effectively synchronize messages and actions, strategic communication must encompass some planning or coordination of those actions. In fact, it goes so far as to state that commanders must provide guidance on how actions support strategic communication messages and themes, rather than how strategic communication messages and themes support actions (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, III-18). However, other than this statement the *Handbook* fails to provide details on to how strategic communication is to encompass actions in support of messages. Other than the *Handbook*, six of the non-doctrinal resources selected for this study contributed to this trend for one side or the other. Two of the resources disagreed with the *Handbook* and maintained that strategic communication is solely concerned with the planning and execution of messages without any responsibility for related actions. These two resources were U.S. JFCOM's *Multi-National Force-Iraq Strategic Communication Study Paper* and Brigadier General Eder's article "Toward Strategic Communication." The remaining four resources agreed with the *Handbook* that strategic communication has some planning and execution responsibility for the actions which relate to messages. The following are a few examples. In his article "The Trouble with Strategic Communication(s)," Dennis Murphy states that "how military operations are conducted affects the information environment," and that military leaders must integrate strategic communication means with established planning processes to fully exploit this concept (Murphy 2008, 24). In "Strategic Communication is Vague" Christopher Paul states that "all of the actions and utterances of representatives of the U.S Government contribute potential information and influence, and those activities can be harnessed and synchronized in support of national or theater strategic objectives" by strategic

communication (Paul 2010, 10). Yet perhaps the most vocal proponent of strategic communication being more about actions than messages is Admiral Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. He stated in his article “Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics”:

In fact, I would argue that most strategic communication problems are not communication problems at all. They are policy and execution problems. Each time we fail to live up to our values or don't follow up on a promise, we look more and more like the arrogant Americans they claim we are. And make no mistake—there has been a certain arrogance to our “strat comm” efforts. We've come to believe that messages are something we can launch downrange like a rocket, something we can fire for effect. They are not. (Mullen 2009, 4)

Overall, an analysis of the literature debating whether strategic communication is concerned solely with messages or with both messages and actions, finds that Admiral Mullen is in agreement with the preponderance of the resources, and that strategic communication has some responsibility for both messages and related actions.

The second trend identified in the non-doctrinal literature debates whether strategic communication is solely a process executed by existing organizations, or a process which requires its own organization. Nine of the resources selected for the study contributed to the trend, debating for one side or the other. Four of the nine resources argued that strategic communication is a process to be executed by existing organizations, while another four stated that strategic communication requires its own, specialized organization. The ninth and final resource argued for both concepts based on the needs of the situation.

Three of the four resources favoring strategic communication as a process executed by existing organizations use the strategist's model of ends, ways, and means to explain their stance. The three resources argue that strategic communication is a way, or a

process, that utilizes other means, or other organizations, to accomplish the ends. Dennis Murphy and Kristin Lord were the authors of these three resources. The fourth and final resource that argued in favor of strategic communication as a process without organization was Admiral Mullen's "Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics." In it he states "strategic communication should be an enabling function that guides and informs our decisions and not an organization unto itself" (Mullen 2009, 4).

On the other side of the debate, four resources selected by this study argue that strategic communication is a process which requires its own organization. The foremost resource for this position was the U.S. JFCOM's *Multi-National Force-Iraq Strategic Communication Study Paper* which concluded as a best practice the establishment of an independent staff organization responsible for strategic communication (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center December 2008, 7). In support, Brigadier General Eder concludes that "we need to consider the possibility of new organizations" toward executing strategic communication (Eder 2007, 63). Also, Christopher Paul adds that "strategic communication planning, integration, and synchronization processes constitute a discrete set of activities that require distinct organization, procedures, and personnel" (Paul 2010, 11).

One final resource, the *Handbook*, straddled the debate and argued that the situation dictated whether strategic communication is to be considered an organization-less process or a process with its own organization. It offered five options for the commander toward executing strategic communication within a command. The first two options treated strategic communication as a process without a dedicated organization, and included either increasing command emphasis on the process of strategic

communication or tasking an existing staff leader to coordinate the strategic communication process. The final three options included the development of some type of organization to conduct strategic communication and included integrating information specialists into a direct planning team, establishing a separate strategic communication directorate, or establishing a strategic communication director with subordinate staff and working group (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, III-4).

Overall, an analysis of whether strategic communication is a stand-alone process or a process with a distinct organization finds that neither school of thought can establish a clear preponderance of support in the field of related literature. The *Handbook's* situational-dependant structuring is most likely the best option to resolve this disagreement until strategic communication can be further developed.

With the definition of strategic communication identified and some supporting concepts providing refinement of that definition examined, an analysis of the information environment in which strategic communication must be conducted will be executed next toward further determining a role for tactical-level leaders.

#### Characteristics of the Information Environment

In order for leaders to effectively contribute to the strategic communication effort at any level, whether strategic, operational, or tactical, they must understand the basic characteristics of the information environment in which it is conducted. Much like a battalion commander who must understand the characteristics of the physical environment to conduct successful tactical missions, leaders wishing to conduct successful strategic communication must understand the characteristics of the information environment.

An overarching analysis of the literature selected by this study identifies numerous trends which may be characteristics of the information environment. These trends can be categorized into four major concentrations and will be further analyzed to determine if they can substantiate established characteristics of the information environment. The four trends being analyzed as potential characteristics of the information environment are: (1) the information environment is ubiquitous and interconnected, (2) the information environment is becoming faster and less durable, (3) the information environment is constantly changing, and (4) the information environment is unregulated and empowering. After analyzing each potential characteristic, an examination will be conducted to determine how that characteristic may be important to tactical leaders executing a role in strategic communication.

The first trend being considered as a potential characteristic of the information environment examines the extent to which it is ubiquitous and interconnected. Doctrine supports this trend, stating “information systems are everywhere, exposure to news and opinion media is pervasive” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-1). The preeminent non-doctrinal source, the *Handbook*, also concurs, stating “the information environment is typically complex, has many competing signals, and is globally interconnected” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, I-4). One of the *Handbook’s* nine principles of strategic communication, specifically “pervasive,” which was discussed in the previous section of this chapter, also supports this characteristic. Eight additional resources selected by this study directly contribute to this trend, and the majority of others imply concurrence in one way or another without directly stating words to the effect.

Several factors contribute to the ubiquitous, interconnected nature of the modern information environment, but the literature was nearly unanimous in its determination that technology is the greatest of those factors. Advancements in technology are currently making it easier and cheaper to communicate anywhere in the world, at any time, and with a previously unimagined capability to convey massive amounts of information. Technological advancements in the fields of broadcasting equipment, satellite communications, cell phones, cable television, and most spectacularly the Internet have democratized information, allowing access to nearly anyone. Audiences that were previously disconnected are now being plugged in and plugged together.

The ubiquitous nature of the information environment can be analyzed by examining the sheer quantitative statistics of its presence, in all its facets from traditional news media to social media. Examining the traditional news media first, in 1980 the world received its news primarily through newspapers and scheduled television and radio broadcasts such as the evening news. A constantly updated, internationally available, twenty-four hour source of news did not exist. Thirty years later in 2010, within the U.S. alone three national networks and forty two local and regional networks broadcast the news non-stop twenty-four hours a day (Pew's Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2007). The second most popular of the national news networks, Cable News Network or CNN, as it is commonly known, was watched by 93 million American households in 2008, and through its affiliates is available to a global audience of 212 countries and territories (Cable News Network 2010). This increase in news broadcasting has resulted in a more pervasive media presence on the battlefield. During Operation

Iraqi Freedom in 2003 over 700 members of the media, approximately two battalions worth, were imbedded with combat units (Caldwell 2009, 11).

Much like the news media, the quantitative statistics concerning social media also demonstrate growing ubiquity. Between 2002 and 2008 over 133 million blog sites were created, which as a combined group contributed an average of 1.5 million blog posts every seven days (Winn 2009). Facebook, the most popular social media platform, boasts of over four hundred million members world-wide (Facebook 2010). This is roughly equivalent to the population of the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom combined (Central Intelligence Agency 2010). The numbers do not stop there. Myspace is number two behind Facebook in the social media world and boasts of over one hundred million members in addition to those active on Facebook (Myspace 2010).

In addition to demonstrating ubiquity, the information environment also demonstrates an interconnected nature. The information environment is comprised of several distinct mediums, most predominantly television, print, radio, and the Internet, which often blend together into a complex web with very indistinct boundaries. For example, newspapers and magazines are now no longer just print media. Most have online versions which are more rapidly updated than their paper and ink editions. The traditional television media is no different, with most networks broadcasting over both television and the Internet twenty-four hours a day. It is not uncommon to see what NBC television network has designated as a “digital correspondent,” a journalist who reports in near simultaneity over multiple information platforms (Kumar 2009). Another example which demonstrates the interconnectedness of the information environment played out in the 2009 Iranian elections. The Iranian regime effectively shut out the bulk of traditional

media, but stories of protests and harsh crackdowns found their way to the international media and then the global audience largely due to bloggers and social media users (Caldwell 2009, 11). This interconnected nature makes it commonplace for a piece of information deemed news-worthy to be rapidly disseminated across all mediums, reaching vast and disparate audiences.

Understanding the ubiquitous and interconnected nature of the information environment is important to those conducting strategic communication in order to avoid, or at least mitigate, message spillover. Message spillover occurs when a message designed for a specific audience reaches unintended audiences due to the ubiquitous and interconnected nature of the information environment. Tactical leaders must understand that all communications, from Facebook posts intended for friends to statements to local Iraqi media intended for local audiences, have the potential to find their way to U.S. and even global audiences.

The second trend being considered as a potential characteristic of the information environment examines the extent to which it is fast and nondurable. Doctrine supports this trend, stating that “conflicts in the 21st century occur in an operational environment of instant communications” and that “individual actions can have immediate strategic implications” (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-1). As for non-doctrinal publications, the *Handbook* agrees, stating that “frequently there will be a limited window of opportunity for specific messages to achieve a desired result” due to the rapid nature of the information environment (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, A-3). The preponderance of other non-doctrinal literature either directly or indirectly substantiates the rapid nature of the information environment. One example is a

1992 quote from Brigadier General William Nash, at that time Commanding General of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, in a Center for Army Lessons Learned Newsletter:

the media will be present on any future battlefields. . . . In World War II, Korea and even Vietnam, news did not normally reach the public or the soldiers until it was at least twenty-four hours old...today's technology allows the media a high degree of mobility and the ability to transmit their stories and images instantly. (Nash 1992, Foreward)

Brigadier General Nash's statement about the speed of the traditional media in the twenty-first century was certainly prophetic, but his vision only addresses a portion of today's information environment. He did not foresee how the Internet and other communication technology would work in conjunction with traditional media to increase the speed to an exponential degree.

The near instantaneous speed of the information environment has resulted in a by-product: non-durability. In order to be competitive in today's media environment where information is rapidly consumed, communicators must constantly seek fresh stories and new information. This insatiable production and consumption of information has given it a nondurable effect on the audience to some degree. Unless the story is super sensational to the point of changing the culture, such as the 9/11 attacks in 2001, yesterday's headlines are more often than not today's forgotten trivialities. In essence, due to the constant flood of available information the audience has lessened the length of its attention span. For example, during one week in 2008 the Russian invasion of Georgia garnered twenty-six percent of the news coverage. The following week it barely garnered a third of that. Earlier that same year, the scandal surrounding New York Governor Eliot

Spitzer received twenty-three percent of the news coverage. The following week it received two percent (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism 2009).

Understanding the fast and nondurable nature of the information environment is important to those conducting strategic communication in order to keep pace and stay relevant. Tactical leaders must understand that if they desire to have an effect in the current information environment, they must be quick, responsive, and focused on the most recent of events. They must also realize that any effects they do have, both positive and negative, will not be long lived for the most part.

The third trend being considered as a potential characteristic of the information environment examines the extent to which it is constantly changing. Doctrine supports this trend, stating that “the pace of change is increasing” in the information environment (U.S. Department of the Army 2008, 7-1). The *Handbook* concurs, stating that “the communication capabilities of today greatly amplify and impact the speed of change” (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, I-1). The bulk of the literature selected for this study also supports this trend without dissent. The ways that people receive and transmit information is constantly changing at an ever faster and faster pace. New mediums arise as old mediums die. More so than ever before people are relying on the Internet for their information, and the medium affected most from this shift has been the newspaper industry. In 2008 alone Internet news sites recorded a 27 percent increase in visitors, while in the same period newspaper advertising revenue fell twenty-three percent (Caldwell 2009, 12). But this trend began well before 2008. From 1990 to 2000 newspaper readership dropped from fifty-two percent to 37 percent of U.S. adults (Posner 2005). With the ever increasing expansion of the Internet, it is safe to assume that this

steep decline in newspaper readership continued into the twenty-first century and will continue for the foreseeable future.

Beyond just trading paper and ink for electrons, the changing information environment is also revolutionizing the way the world defines the media. With the rise of the blogging community and other shared online media applications, the corporate media is no longer the sole provider of news coverage and commentary. Blogging has grown in power to the point where it now has the capability to influence U.S. presidential elections and challenge the most respected of media icons. For example, during the 2004 presidential election, Dan Rather, anchor of *CBS Evening News* and household media name, challenged the validity of President George W. Bush's military service based on military records he and his team of professional journalists had acquired. Bloggers researched the military records Rather was using as evidence, and discovered them to be falsified. The evidence the bloggers had discovered discredited the professional journalists and ultimately resulted in Dan Rather being removed as the anchor of *CBS Evening News* (Power 2005). When a new media source like blogging can challenge and ultimately defeat Dan Rather, a professional media icon with the longest anchor tenure in U.S. history, change is most definitely in the air.

The U.S. Army has recognized the changing nature of the information environment, establishing new policies and organizations, such as the Online and Social Media Division, to meet the opportunities and challenges such change presents. Tactical leaders must also understand the ever-changing nature of the information environment to be effective in any strategic communication role. In order to have effects in the changing

information environment, leaders must be adaptive and versatile with communication plans and processes.

The fourth and final trend being considered as a potential characteristic of the information environment examines the extent to which it is unregulated and empowering. Doctrine does not directly support this trend, but the *Handbook* does with a focus on the enemy rather than the population at large. It states that the U.S.'s "adversaries are often unconstrained in this environment, unencumbered by traditional processes, and unconcerned about the necessary ethical, moral, or legal constraints" (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, I-1). Although its focus is enemy centric, the *Handbook's* statement implies that this tactic is only available because of the unregulated and empowering nature of the information environment.

The bulk of the non-doctrinal literature supports the trend of an unregulated and empowering information environment. Central to their claim is the concept that prior to the Internet the world largely received its information from corporate media sources, regulated to varying degrees by law, professional code, or both. However, in today's information environment, where a rapidly increasing percentage of the population is connected to the Internet, to include all its sources of information from blogging to social media, few regulations or professional codes exist. In addition to a lack of regulation, a revolution in technology has democratized the information environment. Relatively inexpensive and readily available communication technology now allows nearly anyone to not only connect, but also contribute to, the information environment. Social media by its nature is a shared experience, where the contributions of users are the content. This democratization and shared connectivity is empowering. Lieutenant General Caldwell,

former commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, agrees, stating that now “virtually anyone with access to the Internet and a cell phone can make an impact on the news cycle” (Caldwell 2009, 12). Echoing that thought is Kristin Lord, Vice President of the Center for a New American Security, stating that the “widespread availability of cheap and instantaneous information and communication technologies...devolve power to individuals” (Lord 2010, 7). One final supporting quote from Micah Sifry of *The Nation* posits that “new tools and practices born on the Internet have reached critical mass, enabling ordinary people to participate in processes that used to be closed to them” (Sifry 2004).

Tactical leaders must understand the unregulated and empowering nature of the information environment in order to be effective in any potential strategic communication role. In fact, without the empowering nature of the information environment, leaders at the tactical level would not have any role in strategic communication at all. The empowering nature in itself allows for the possibility of a role down to the tactical level. An understanding of the unregulated nature will also help prepare tactical leaders to overcome the expected misinformation floating about, and reinforce honesty as the only way to attain credibility in the information environment.

Overall, the four trends identified within the literature that contribute to establishing characteristics of the information environment were nearly unanimous and unopposed. Both doctrinal and non-doctrinal sources supported the four trends without incongruities or counter-trends.

### Communication Resources at the Tactical Level

An analysis of the resources available to tactical-level leaders for the conduct of strategic communication is embodied in three areas. The three areas are training and education, physical assets, and policies and programs. These resources are being analyzed to determine how they may potentially enable or limit roles for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication.

Current doctrine did little to illuminate what resources are available to leaders at the tactical level toward conducting strategic communication. This was not surprising considering the underdeveloped content addressing strategic communication within current doctrine. However, the non-doctrinal *Handbook* did provide some information on resources focused on strategic communication. Most of its focus was set at the operational level and above, as opposed to tactical, and even there its information on resources was overarching in nature and lacking specific detail. It also acknowledged that “resourcing remains an ongoing challenge” in the strategic communication effort (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, xiii).

Acknowledging these expected shortfalls, the first resource area to be analyzed is the field of training and education. The programs of instruction for officer education courses were examined for strategic communication instruction, along with material related to strategic communication, such as media relations. Starting with pre-commissioning training, cadets currently do not receive any strategic communication instruction but do however receive a two-hour class on media interaction followed up by practical exercises and application during various situational training exercises (U.S. Army Cadet Command 2009). At the Officer Basic Course level, newly commissioned

officers still do not receive any explicit strategic communication instruction. The curriculum varied from branch to branch, but common throughout were one to two hours allocated for media interaction and one to two hours for cultural awareness (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command 2006). The Captain's Career Course level had no training specifically allotted to strategic communication, but had two hours for media interaction (Eder 2007, 68). The first level of officer education which currently addresses strategic communication specifically is the Intermediate Level Education course for Majors. During this course strategic communication is given a one-hour block of instruction. Additionally, students also receive four hours of formal media interaction instruction, along with informal media and strategic communication education embedded throughout numerous practical exercises, various electives, and guest media panels (U.S. Army Command and General Staff School 2010). The final course available for officers at the tactical level is at the Army War College. The Army War College has identified strategic communication as one of their "special themes" derived from important contemporary issues (U.S. Army War College 2010). The Army War College integrates their special themes across the breadth of the curriculum, including it in seminar discussions and numerous blocks of instruction.

An overall analysis of strategic communication instruction throughout the officer education system demonstrates room for development. Strategic communication is not addressed until the field-grade level, and even there quite sparingly until the Army War College. Media interaction is taught from pre-commissioning forward, which supports the strategic communication overall effort to some degree. However, media interaction training usually does not address incorporating communication planning into operations,

communicating via other mediums outside of the media, or applying any of the coordinating efforts of strategic communication (Eder 2007, 68).

In addition to education and training, leaders at the tactical level may also have physical resources, such as specialized personnel and equipment, available to them for conducting strategic communication. The nature and extent of these assets will help determine the limits of what role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication.

Analyzing the MTOEs and TDAs of selected brigade-sized elements, as outlined in the research methodology, determines that specialized personnel are available at the tactical level to assist in strategic communication, but those assets are not evenly distributed. The Infantry Brigade Combat Teams selected by this study possess identical assets. Each possesses an IO officer in the rank of Major, a psychological operations non-commissioned officer in the rank of Sergeant First Class, a PA non-commissioned officer in the rank of Staff Sergeant, and two PA soldiers in the rank of Specialist (U.S. Army Force Management Support Agency 2010). An examination of the functional brigades selected displayed a wide imbalance of assets available to assist in strategic communication. The 12th Combat Aviation Brigade has an IO officer in the rank of Captain and two PA non-commissioned officers in the ranks of Sergeant First Class and Sergeant. Disproportionably, the 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade did not possess a single soldier specialized toward strategic communication, either in PA, IO, or psychological operations (U.S. Army Force Management Support Agency 2010). Finally, an analysis of the non-deployable TDA units reveals that they have assets available for strategic communication that are surprisingly as robust as the MTOE deployable units. The 1st Recruiting Brigade has three PA specialists in the DA civilian pay grades of GS

9, 11, and 12, and the 78th Training Brigade has two PA officers in the rank of Captain and three PA non-commissioned officers in the ranks of Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, and Sergeant First Class respectively (U.S. Army Force Management Support Agency 2010).

Although most of the brigades do possess some specialized personnel for the conduct of strategic communication, the *Handbook* recognizes that they are currently insufficient. It addresses this problem by stating that because the techniques and procedures for how forces should coordinate communication efforts in support of strategic communication have yet to be decided, it is currently premature to make organizational changes (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, V-4).

Despite acknowledging that the conditions have yet to be set to institute organizational change on a large scale, the *Handbook* states that assets such as machine translators and linguists are currently important for the conduct of strategic communication by deployed units at the tactical level. However, it did not address if these assets were being provided in adequate quantity to affect success (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, V-6).

One final group of assets potentially available to leaders at the tactical level are specialized strategic communication elements pushed from the joint, Service, and combatant command levels down to the tactical level. This is rare but has happened on occasion. One example consists of the Human Terrain Teams attached to brigades in Afghanistan. These specialized teams can assist with planning communication efforts, providing expertise on the nuances of the local culture and information environment (Murphy 2008, 26).

The final area of resources being analyzed consists of policies and programs focused on facilitating strategic communication, especially those that may have an effect at the tactical level. Analysis determines that similar to current doctrine, policies and programs addressing strategic communication are underdeveloped or non-existent. The *Handbook* discusses one policy--DoDD 3050.00 *Strategic Communication* in draft form at the time of its publication (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, V-1). As of the writing of this study, the DoD does not list a DoDD 3050.00 in its official list of issuances, and it is therefore concluded that it must still be in draft form, or cancelled altogether. Despite the lack of this potentially key policy, the Department of State has initiated a program to provide a one-source strategic communication website to assist in strategic communication planning by all government agencies. This website, known as INFOCENTRAL, is meant to act as a central repository for vetted senior leader statements, research analysis, and other products for use by strategic communication programs at all levels (U.S. Department of State 2010). Access to INFOCENTRAL is available to anyone with a U.S. Government or military email address. Membership not only allows access to the site, but also provides members with email notification of key strategic communication efforts.

Additional policies or programs geared specifically toward strategic communication could not be located; however, research did discover some related policies and programs that may assist tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. The first of these policies is actually an Army regulation. Army Regulation 530-1 currently mandates that all soldiers who blog or participate in Internet discussion forums to notify their chain of command (U.S. Department of the Army April 2007, 4). This was

done primarily for OPSEC reasons, but it also provides an asset to tactical-level leaders in the strategic communication effort. Armed with the knowledge of which soldiers are blogging, a leader can achieve better situational awareness of how the unit is communicating with external audiences and potentially facilitate those communications to support strategic communication, keeping in mind the boundaries of unlawful command influence. Another policy which potentially assists tactical-level leaders in strategic communication was the DA's decision to allow soldiers to access certain social media platforms over the Unclassified but Sensitive Internet Protocol Router Network. The policy states that "the intent of senior Army leaders is to leverage social media as a medium to allow soldiers to 'tell the Army story' and to facilitate the dissemination of strategic, unclassified material" (Kash 2009). This policy can help tactical-level leaders and their soldiers in the strategic communication effort by allowing access to the information environment from Army provided computers and servers.

One final program was discovered that may be an asset to leaders at the tactical level in conducting strategic communication. The DoD has recently launched a social media hub website, located at [socialmedia.defense.gov](http://socialmedia.defense.gov), to help soldiers and leaders at the tactical level understand the guidelines regarding social media use. The hub also encourages members of the military to tell their story while reminding them of the importance of OPSEC and professional discretion (Anderson 2009, 6).

Overall, resources available to tactical-level leaders, including training and education, physical assets, and policies and programs, are emerging and developing as strategic communication continues to grow.

## Potential Role of Tactical Leaders in Strategic Communication

In addition to researching the secondary research questions, analysis was also conducted toward directly answering the primary research question. Two explicit roles for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication were discovered during the direct analysis, both of which were found in the *Handbook*.

The first role explicitly directed to leaders at the tactical level in support of strategic communication is key leader engagements. The *Handbook* states that key leader engagements that focus on building relationships with local leaders are a key part of strategic communication, and that they are executed in a decentralized fashion by leaders at all levels, to include tactical (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, III-8). This explicit role is also supported by Dennis Murphy, director of the Information in Warfare Group, in his article “The Trouble with Strategic Communication(s).” In it he states that “tactical commanders routinely employ strategic communication in Iraq today based on their interactions with key audiences in their area of responsibility to a potential strategic end” (Murphy 2008, 25).

The second role explicitly directed to tactical leaders in support of strategic communication is assessment. The *Handbook* provides an example of a successful strategic communication effort conducted in Afghanistan in 2007. In that example, soldiers from the tactical units within the area of operations were tasked to gather evidence and meet with the local populace to assess the effectiveness of particular strategic communication efforts (U.S. JFCOM Joint Warfighting Center October 2009, IV-18). The use of tactical units to provide feedback, or information battle-damage

assessment so to speak, to strategic communication planners at the operational and strategic levels is a clear role for leaders at the tactical level in strategic communication.

### Summary

This chapter detailed the analysis of the primary and secondary research questions toward determining what roles tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication.

The first section examined what strategic communication is in hopes of using that definition to determine potential roles for tactical-level leaders. It discovered that a single, formal DoD definition exists, but beyond that several disparate schools of thought exist concerning the nature of strategic communication. The second section explored the characteristics of the information environment. Four major trends were identified and then examined toward determining additional roles for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. The third section took stock of the resources available to tactical-level leaders for conducting strategic communication, namely in the areas of training and education, physical assets, and policies and programs. The final section examined two roles for tactical leaders that were found directly in the literature and not derived from the secondary research questions.

Based on the analysis presented in this chapter, conclusions will now be made on what role leaders at the tactical level have in strategic communication. Additionally, any recommendations to improve the effectiveness of those roles will also be presented.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

You're going to have to convince people, not kill them. Since 9/11, I have watched as America tried to first put out this fire with a hammer, and it doesn't work.

—General Stanley McChrystal  
*Commander Maps New Course in Afghan War*

#### Introduction

The current lack of understanding concerning what role U.S. Army leaders at the tactical level have in strategic communication is the problem this thesis examines. In order to address this problem, the primary research question asked what role do tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication. Three secondary research questions were also asked, their answers each having the potential to determine additional roles for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. The secondary research questions asked what strategic communication is, what the characteristics of the information environment are, and what resources leaders at the tactical level have in its execution.

Conclusions to the primary and secondary research questions are discussed below, with the secondary questions being addressed first to determine if they elaborate on any roles and thus contribute to answering the primary research question. Following the conclusions, recommendations will be made toward increasing the efficacy of any roles determined by the analysis.

#### Conclusions towards Defining Strategic Communication

The approved DoD definition of strategic communication lays the foundation for answering the first secondary research question that asked what is strategic

communication. The DoD definition states that strategic communication is “focused U.S. Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of U.S. Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power” (U.S. Department of Defense 2006, 3). Although providing a foundation, this definition is enormously broad and vague, and in order to determine more detail about the nature of strategic communication further conclusions are required.

Analysis of joint and Army doctrine discovered several incongruities between the two. As joint doctrine better aligns with the DoD definition of strategic communication, as opposed to Army doctrine’s contradictory placement of strategic communication under its all-encompassing information engagement concept, this study will utilize joint doctrine toward determining what strategic communication is. Joint doctrine states that strategic communication is primarily supported by IO, PA, and DSPD (U.S. Department of Defense 2008, I-2). The relationship between strategic communication and these previously established information capabilities will be used by this study, as opposed to Army doctrine’s separation of them from strategic communication.

Beyond doctrine, this study found the orchestra analogy and the nine principles of strategic communication presented in the pre-doctrinal *Handbook* to be helpful in understanding strategic communication. They provided tools to better visualize this complex concept, and although they are not formally part of the definition of strategic communication, they were important toward developing understanding of it.

Analysis of literature outside of doctrine and the *Handbook* revealed two incongruities concerning strategic communication that require resolution. The first incongruity is concerned with whether strategic communication encompasses just messages or also some aspect of the actions which relate to those messages. This study concludes in agreement with the bulk of the literature that strategic communication is not just about messages, but that it encompasses the effective synchronization of related actions with messages. As a result, strategic communication has some responsibility and authority in planning and executing operations that relate to desired messages. The second incongruity is concerned with whether strategic communication is just a process conducted by traditional organizations or rather an organization unto itself. The literature was split almost evenly within this incongruity, and based on the research methodology a clear conclusion could not be drawn from non-doctrinal literature alone. However, the *Handbook* explicitly detailed five possible methods for conducting strategic communication, ranging from pure process to specialized organization depending on the situation and requirements. Based on the lack of clear trend in the literature, along with the flexible options outlined in the *Handbook*, this study concludes that at this time strategic communication must be considered both a process and an organization.

To review the conclusions made toward determining what strategic communication is, it is defined by the DoD definition and expanded based on joint doctrine. It can be visualized by the orchestra analogy and understood in more detail using the nine principles of strategic communication. It encompasses both messages and related actions. Finally, depending on requirements it is both a process and an

organization. Based on these conclusions, two possible roles for tactical-level leaders can be inferred.

First, due to the all-encompassing, whole-of-government nature of strategic communication as stated in the DoD definition, all representatives of the U.S. Government to include leaders at the tactical level are implicitly participants in the process to some degree. In order to be a participant in strategic communication--a member of the orchestra to further that analogy--leaders at the tactical level must be engaged in communicating the themes and messages of strategic communication. The themes and messages can be modified to be more relevant at the tactical level if necessary, as long as the desired effects and goals of the overarching strategic communication effort are still achieved. If not provided to them, leaders at the tactical level should seek out these themes and messages from their higher headquarters, along with an explanation of their desired effects, in order to possess the required information to be effective instruments in the strategic communication effort. Therefore, the first role tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication is to be an actively engaged communicator in strategic communication themes and messages.

Second, because strategic communication encompasses both actions and messages, leaders at the tactical level must incorporate it into the planning process for operations in order to have any effect. Actions at the tactical level must be aligned and synchronized, as reasonably as possible considering all other implications, to support the larger strategic communication effort. Just as the mission of the company should nest within the battalion mission, and the battalion mission should nest within the brigade mission, and so on up the chain, so should actions at the tactical level eventually nest

within the themes and messages of strategic communication. Commanders at every level should coordinate their unit's actions toward strategic communication objectives. Therefore, the second role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication is to include strategic communication considerations into tactical mission planning.

### Conclusions towards the Characteristic of the Information Environment

Research identified a host of trends concerning the characteristics of the information environment, and analysis of those trends led to the development of four overarching characteristics into which all the various trends could be categorized. The four overarching characteristics of the information environment identified by this study are (1) the information environment is ubiquitous and interconnected, (2) fast and nondurable, (3) constantly changing, and (4) unregulated and empowering. The vast majority of literature researched by this study supported these four characteristics with very little, if any, noteworthy inconsistency.

The ubiquitous and interconnected nature of the information environment, the first of the four characteristics determined by this study, does not spell out an additional role for tactical-level leaders, but it does provide insight into how to conduct oneself within the information environment while conducting a role in strategic communication. Tactical-level leaders must understand that any action or message they make has the potential to ultimately be consumed by any audience in the world. For example, statements made during a key leader engagement meant for a local audience in a deployed theater could be recorded by a cell phone's video camera, posted via social media to the Internet, and then picked up as a story by the international media, thus

reaching various unintended audiences. Therefore, leaders at the tactical level must keep the ubiquitous and interconnected nature of the information environment in mind, aware that their actions and statements may spill over to any number of audiences and have potential strategic impact. Such awareness aids tactical-level leaders in their decision-making process, and allows them to be better equipped to support the strategic communication effort. An action or statement made by leaders at the tactical level that finds its way to an international audience does not inherently mean that that leader is conducting strategic communication. However, if that tactical-level leader, cognizant of the ubiquitous and interconnected nature of the information environment, uses that knowledge to shape actions and statements toward effecting strategic communication objectives, then that leader is a more effective instrument in the strategic communication effort.

The ubiquitous and interconnected nature of the information environment presents another challenge for those tactical-level leaders who have both PA and IO assets at their disposal, such as at the brigade level. Due to message spillover IO efforts solely meant to influence targeted foreign audiences have the potential to reach unintended domestic audiences and may be perceived as propaganda on U.S. citizens. When utilizing their PA and IO assets in support of strategic communication, leaders at the tactical level must consider what unintended effects the ubiquitous and interconnected information environment may yield.

The second characteristic of the information environment is that it is fast and nondurable. Like the first characteristic of ubiquity and interconnectedness, analysis of this characteristic does not determine an additional role for tactical-level leaders in

strategic communication, but it does offer insight into how tactical-level leaders must act within the information environment to be more effective instruments in the strategic communication effort. Due to the speed of the current information environment, leaders at the tactical level must be fast with any information they wish to transmit in support of strategic communication. In today's fast information environment there is effectively an expiration date on information. If tactical leaders do not communicate rapidly enough, they risk the enemy transmitting first and gaining influence for their information. For example, if an incident happened within a tactical leader's area of operations and that leader was not responsive in communicating the facts regarding that incident, it is possible the enemy could communicate his interpretation of the incident first, which may be counter to strategic communication goals. Speed is paramount in today's information environment, without losing sight on the importance of accuracy and transparency. The argument that communicating too rapidly risks loss of accuracy and completeness is valid, but fortunately the nondurable nature of the information environment may aid in marginalizing this possibility. Negative effects caused by incomplete or inaccurate communications have the potential to pass in a short time as the attention span of audiences move on. This can be further mitigated by follow-up communications to fill the gaps created by the initial communication; however, these follow-up communications will more than likely have diminishing returns as time goes on. Therefore, leaders at the tactical level must communicate in a rapid and responsive manner, while maintaining as much accuracy and transparency as possible, to be an effective instrument in support of strategic communication.

The third characteristic of the information environment is that it is constantly changing. Like the first two characteristics, the changing nature of the information environment does not provide an additional role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication, but rather provides further insight into how tactical-level leaders need to conduct their efforts in support of strategic communication. In order to meet the challenges presented by an ever-changing information environment, tactical-level leaders must be agile thinkers well informed on strategic communication in the broadest sense. A constantly changing information environment is likely to present new and unplanned for challenges to those involved in strategic communication. Rigid thinkers who fail to understand the big picture are poorly suited to meet these challenges. Therefore, to be an effective instrument in the strategic communication effort, conducted in the constantly changing modern information environment, tactical-level leaders must be agile, adaptable, and understand strategic communication in a broad context.

The fourth and final characteristic of the information environment is its unregulated and empowering nature. This characteristic of the information environment provides an additional role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. The unregulated and empowering nature of the information environment opens the door for every representative of the U.S. Government, to include tactical-level leaders and their subordinates, to potentially participate in the strategic communication effort. Therefore, leaders at the tactical level must not only be engaged in strategic communication, they must also foster a culture of engagement among their subordinates and mentor them to be effective instruments in the strategic communication effort. In addition to opening the door, the empowering and unregulated nature of the information environment also

provides insight into how tactical-level leaders need to conduct themselves within it. The unregulated and empowering nature of the information environment dictates that in order to communicate effectively one must be well informed and engaged. Poorly informed communicators can be quickly disproved and marginalized by the empowered masses who participate in the information environment. Likewise, communicators who do not stay actively engaged will be overrun and made inconsequential by more aggressively engaged communicators. Communicators must be active and accurate to be effective in the unregulated and empowered information environment. Therefore, due to the unregulated and empowering nature of the information environment, leaders at the tactical level must be engaged and well informed to effectively support strategic communication. As it would be impossible to ask tactical-level leaders to be well informed and engaged in every area, it becomes crucial that they stay within their area of expertise when communicating. Staying within the boundaries of expertise adds credibility and prevents false or misleading speculations. Additionally, it is also of utmost importance to be honest and genuine when communicating. Dishonest and misleading information can be quickly discredited by the empowered masses participating in the information environment.

To review, the study determined four major characteristics of the information environment. The information environment is ubiquitous and interconnected, fast and nondurable, unregulated and empowering, and constantly changing. Analysis of the four characteristics determined one additional role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication--be engaged in communicating strategic communication themes and messages, and foster that same sense of engagement in subordinates. Additionally, the

analysis of the information environment also determined some best practices for conducting that engaged role in strategic communication. Due to the characteristics of the information environment, to be effective contributors to strategic communication leaders at the tactical level must be fast and responsive communicators, agile thinkers who understand strategic communication in broad terms, honest, engaged, within their lanes of expertise, and conscious of message spillover.

### Conclusions towards the Resources Available

In addition to the characteristics of the information environment, the resources available potentially determine additional roles for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. The resources available to tactical-level leaders were analyzed in three categories; education, physical assets, and policies and programs.

Analysis of strategic communication education for leaders at the tactical level determined that the topic is currently not addressed below the field-grade level. Company-grade officers receive training and instruction on media interaction, which inherently supports strategic communication to a degree, but fail to get institutionalized education on strategic communication specifically. The lack of specialized education for company-grade officers limits their contribution to strategic communication. Without strategic communication instruction, incorporating their communications into the strategic communication effort is potentially more challenging due to their ignorance of the concept. Therefore, until the officer education system is adjusted to include education below the field-grade level, a true role in strategic communication cannot exist at the company-grade level. This conclusion in no way implies that communications below the field-grade level fail to have potential strategic importance, but rather that without

education on the subject, those company-grade leaders are simply not aware of the overarching effort their communications could be incorporated into.

Much like the educational resources, the physical resources capable of assisting tactical-level leaders in strategic communication are not available at the lowest levels. Analysis determined that the majority of physical assets which can be utilized in support of strategic communication exist at the brigade level and above. Because these assets, namely specially trained personnel, do not exist below the brigade level, it cannot be expected that strategic communication planning be executed at battalion level and lower. However, as communications with potential strategic implications exist below the brigade level, it is important that what strategic communication efforts are conducted at the brigade and above be disseminated to lower echelons. Leaders below brigade level, armed with at least a basic knowledge of the themes, messages, and desired effects of strategic communication, can better align their unit's actions and communications into concert with the overarching effort.

The final resources available to leaders at the tactical level are policies and programs related to strategic communication. Analysis determined that few policies and programs were in place specifically designed to help leaders at the tactical level in strategic communication. However, a growing body of programs is available to tactical-level leaders which encourage a culture of engagement, with the intent of having soldiers tell the Army story in their own words and help keep the strategic domestic audience informed. Although this culture of engagement is not a specified part of the strategic communication concept, it does appear to support the purpose of its definition to "engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement

of U.S. Government interests, policies, and objectives” (U.S. Department of Defense 2006, 3). Accordingly, this movement to foster a culture of engagement in all soldiers reinforces it as a role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication, as previously determined by the analysis of the earlier secondary questions.

To review, analysis of the resources available reinforced engagement, and the fostering of that engagement in subordinates, as a role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. It also determined that due to limited education and physical assets strategic communication cannot be planned below brigade level or by company grade leaders without some level of augmentation. However, the resources available also indicate that it is acknowledged by senior military leadership that the actions and engagements made at all levels and by all leaders have the potential for strategic impact, and that all soldiers be engaged as instruments in the strategic communication effort.

#### The Role of Tactical-Level Leaders in Strategic Communication

The cumulative roles tactical-level leaders have in strategic communication can be determined by both a direct analysis of the primary research question, and from inferring conclusions from the analysis of the three secondary questions.

Analysis of the literature directly toward answering the primary research question discovered two specified roles that leaders at the tactical level have in strategic communication. The first specified role is to conduct key leader engagements within their area of operations in support of strategic communication. The second is to conduct assessments of strategic communication efforts within their area of operations and provide feedback to planners.

Based on the conclusions gathered from defining strategic communication, the first of the secondary research questions, leaders at the tactical level have two additional roles in strategic communication. First, they must incorporate basic strategic communication considerations into tactical mission planning in order to synchronize and coordinate their actions and messages into the overarching strategic communication effort. Second, they must be engaged in the communication of the messages and themes of the overarching strategic communication effort.

The characteristics of the information environment, resolved in the second of the secondary research questions, determined one additional role for tactical-level leaders in strategic communication. Because of the unregulated and empowering nature of the information environment, tactical-level leaders must not only be engaged, they must also foster a culture of engagement in their subordinates towards supporting the strategic communication effort. In addition to determining the role mentioned above, the analysis of the information environment also illuminated some best practices for conducting efforts in support of strategic communication. When engaging in support of strategic communication, leaders at the tactical level must be fast, responsive, agile, and honest. They should also remain within their area of expertise and conscious of message spillover to unintended audiences.

The resources available to leaders at the tactical level, determined in the third secondary research question, did not determine any additional roles in strategic communication but did reinforce the role of engagement and fostering engagement. The resources currently available are concentrated at the field-grade ranks and at the brigade unit level. Strategic communication outside of those areas presents challenges.

In conclusion, tactical-level leaders need to incorporate strategic communication into their planning process in order to coordinate actions with words, be capable of conducting key leader engagements, assist in information assessment, be engaged, and foster a culture of engagement among their subordinates. Tactical-level leaders can foster a culture of engagement through leading by example, mentoring, counseling, establishing policies, and training to name a few methods. Additionally, they can increase the effectiveness of their roles in strategic communication by being fast, responsive, agile, honest, and conscious of potential second-order effects while operating in the information environment.

### Recommendations

The following three recommendations are made in order to make the role of tactical-level leaders in strategic communication more widely understood and effective.

First, as a whole-of-government program a whole-of-government definition for strategic communication needs to be established rather than just a DoD definition. Following the establishment of a whole-of-government definition, doctrine at the joint and Army level needs to be reconciled concerning strategic communication. Currently, the inconsistencies in doctrine at the various levels make strategic communication difficult to understand and execute, to include at the tactical level.

Second, the officer education system needs to incorporate the basics of strategic communication down to the company-grade level. Although the existing media relations education in place at that level is generally supportive of strategic communication, all leaders also need to be aware that an overarching concept exists to coordinate their interactions into a more effective, all-encompassing effort. A rudimentary understanding

of that effort makes the inclusion of their actions and messages into strategic communication more effective. Most importantly, education on strategic communication at the tactical level needs to focus on the coordination of action and words, and the inclusion of strategic communication considerations into mission planning.

Finally, programs currently available to encourage a culture of engagement by soldiers at all levels need to be incorporated into the strategic communication concept. Although more challenging to plan, coordinate, and assess than other instruments executing in support of strategic communication, such as PA and IO, soldier engagement is a powerful tool which can be guided toward achieving effects through active leadership, supportive programs, and a broadening of understanding about strategic communication.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

Previous studies on the topic of strategic communication largely concern defining the concept, determining its importance, and examining how it should be conducted at the strategic and operational level by communication experts and specialists. This study sought to examine strategic communication and its conduct from the Army tactical level by leaders in non-communication-related fields. Several possibilities exist for further research. A study of the doctrine and policies of the other branches of the U.S. military concerning the role of tactical-level leaders in strategic communication could provide further insight into the subject area. An examination of how leaders in other U.S. Government agencies, at positions comparable to the tactical level, participate in strategic communication could also provide further insight. Finally, research into the roles communication specialists such as PA and IO officers have in strategic communication,

especially when working at the tactical level, could provide additional information on the topic.

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