

## PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

BY

COLONEL F. SCOTT MAIN  
United States Army Reserve

### DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A:

Approved for Public Release.  
Distribution is Unlimited.

USAWC CLASS OF 2009

This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.



U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle State Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 24-03-2009		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Strategy Research Project		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b>	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> Psychological Operations Support to Strategic Communications in Afghanistan				<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Colonel Francis Scott Main				<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>	
				<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>	
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Colonel R. Christion Brewer Department of Distance Education				<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>	
				<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>	
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Distribution A: Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> This paper examines the current issues and shortfalls of psychological operations (PSYOP) support to Strategic Communications in Afghanistan. The United States Government Strategic Communications message is not reaching the center of gravity, the Afghan people, and there is no coherent plan to provide a comprehensive message. Viable options are suggested to improve PSYOP dissemination of Strategic Communications. Properly resourced, and provided with expanded authorities based on policy changes, PSYOP can fill the current Strategic Communication gaps in Afghanistan.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Global War on Terror, Information Operations, PSYOP, Lines of Persuasion					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>  UNLIMITED	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>  24	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> UNCLASSIFIED	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> UNCLASSIFIED			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>



USAWC STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

**PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS  
IN AFGHANISTAN**

by

Colonel F. Scott Main  
United States Army Reserve

Colonel R. Christion Brewer  
Research Project Adviser

This strategy research project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013



## **ABSTRACT**

AUTHOR: Colonel Francis Scott Main

TITLE: Psychological Operations Support to Strategic Communications in Afghanistan

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 24 MARCH 2009    WORD COUNT: 5,000    PAGES: 24

KEY TERMS: Global War on Terror, Information Operations, PSYOP, Lines of Persuasion

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This paper examines the current issues and shortfalls of psychological operations (PSYOP) support to Strategic Communications in Afghanistan. The United States Government Strategic Communications message is not reaching the center of gravity, the Afghan people, and there is no coherent plan to provide a comprehensive message. Viable options are suggested to improve PSYOP dissemination of Strategic Communications. Properly resourced, and provided with expanded authorities based on policy changes, PSYOP can fill the current Strategic Communication gaps in Afghanistan.



## PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN AFGHANISTAN

The US military is not sufficiently organized, trained, or equipped to analyze, plan, coordinate and integrate the full spectrum of capabilities available to promote America's interests. Changes in the global information environment require the Department of Defense (DOD), in conjunction with other US Government (USG) agencies, to implement more deliberate and well-developed Strategic communication processes. Strategic communication is a vital component of U.S. national security.<sup>1</sup>

This paper examines the current issues and shortfalls of psychological operations (PSYOP) support to strategic communications in Afghanistan. PSYOP is a primary tool in the battle to inform audiences not reached by other information disciplines that support the Strategic Communications plan in Afghanistan. Since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the capability of the US PSYOP Operations Task Force (POTF) in Afghanistan to disseminate strategic communications through regional media has steadily decreased. PSYOP personnel and resources in Afghanistan were reduced in order to meet requirements for PSYOP operations in Iraq. Despite this purposeful reduction in PSYOP capacity, General Petraeus stated in early February of 2009, that the battlefield (center of gravity) in Afghanistan is not the country, but the Afghan population.<sup>2</sup> The ability of US forces to react to a nimble adversary who does not follow the same rules as the US is inadequate in Afghanistan. By 2007, the POTF's ability to react to a nimble opponent did not significantly improve. The POTF's capabilities and capacity had suffered a steady decline of key personnel and PSYOP units assigned in Afghanistan from 2003 through 2007. Translators assigned to the POTF were reduced not only commensurate with the US force reduction, but the POTF received a lower priority for translators further reducing the number of translators assigned to the product development section. Translators, who had worked with the POTF for several years,

were abruptly reassigned to higher priority US units. Newly assigned translators required training as their duties required the translation of US PSYOP products in the desired languages of Afghanistan. In April of 2006 the reassignment of all PSYOP Regional Battalion assets from Afghanistan, left the POTF with only a tactical PSYOP product development capacity. Further reducing the number of US soldiers developing PSYOP products from twenty-five to eight PSYOP personnel. In addition to these personnel reductions, the PSYOP commercial contracts with a new Afghanistan public relations firm which was contracted to propose, write, and translate, stories to partially address the reduction was declared legally insufficient and the contract terminated for the good of the US Government. Due to existing US funding processes these contracts for PSYOP products were not reestablished. In July of 2006, Regional Command (RC) South PSYOP forces lead by a British PSYOP unit, were reassigned from the US control to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). During this transition to NATO, the RC South PSYOP unit also suffered a reduction of personnel and forces including US personnel who were part of PSYOP product development. The NATO led PSYOP effort had an entirely different focus than the US PSYOP effort, and no longer supported the US Strategic Communications plan. All of these factors contributed to the decline of US capacity and capability in Afghanistan to react to a nimble, unconstrained, opponent in the information and influence realm.

As the US continues to face non-state actors in ideological struggles, garnering influence external to the US and denying support to an enemy are critical to influencing the center of gravity and determining the end-state of the conflict. Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF), including PSYOP, is increasingly important in the

execution of the Global War on Terror (GWOT). PSYOP traditionally shapes and influences minds on the battlefield, and is a key component of Strategic Communications.

Psychological operations is defined in Joint Publication 1-02 as the planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives.<sup>3</sup>

Successful PSYOP effectively delivers on-time and on-target messages. The ability to quickly craft appropriate lines of persuasion (LOP), themes, and messages that resonate effectively with the target audience is the challenge. Timeliness is lost in protracted assessments and staff decision processes from the strategic through tactical levels. The message often lost or diluted because operators and decision makers decide that products are unacceptable based on their perceived expertise, or western viewpoint. Hasty, or battlefield expedient qualitative and quantitative measures of effectiveness (MOEs), attempt to ensure timely and appropriately targeted messages. However, operational truth and perception are merely a snapshot, or picture, in the minds of the target audience(s). Those who speak fastest, or first, are often perceived as purveyors of truth, especially if the so-called 'truth' fits preconceived notions created by centuries of historical precedent. Due to the speed of the process, PSYOP works at an often significant disadvantage against our enemies. In traditional kinetic warfare, the United States normally achieves tactical and operational advantage by quickly overwhelming its adversaries. Communications efforts must, likewise, quickly reach out and resonate on target for maximum effectiveness. The challenge of producing a coherent, understandable message, before the enemy does, is critical. J.B. Jones (a

former commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> PSYOP Group, and Senior Director of Strategic Communications and Information for the National Security Council), and P. Taylor (Professor of International Communications at the University of Leeds) both emphasize the critical importance of producing a fast and effective message:

....The information on the War on Terror is going so badly that something must be done. Already longer than World War Two, Western Strategic Communication directed towards the Arab and Muslim World has failed because the military, while quite good at tactical operation propaganda, is not by itself equipped to work at the strategic or political level. This is because Western militaries regard information as a support tool. For the Al Qaida and the Taliban it is the main weapon.<sup>4</sup>

PSYOP encompasses both art and science in addressing the Strategic Communications problems of speed, accuracy and the physical limits of the battle space. It supports the Strategic Communications plan which, in turn, is part of Military Support to Public Diplomacy. However PSYOP does not adequately support Strategic Communications.

The United States and its allies are engaged in a battle of ideas and concepts in Afghanistan. As a tool in that battle, PSYOP creates messages, provides information to non-US media, and enables the media to reach selected populations not normally accessed by Strategic Communications or US Army Public Affairs. The United States and allied nations often operate reactively in what they refer to as a “response to query” (RTQ). The mission of the Public Affairs Officer (PAO) is to publish stories related to a commander’s talking points regarding immediate, daily, or weekly events. Commanders incur increased risk with excessive press releases, or allowing the media’s unrestricted access to available relevant facts, or greater media access to the commander. This perception of increased risk often results in a restriction of information and messages to the media. Lacking access to accurate information or messages on any military related

incidents or policy, the media often seek alternative sources. That alternative information is frequently unfavorable to the US government and military. An illustration of this problem is the recent (2008-2009) US air strikes in Afghanistan. The Taliban conducted an effective information campaign, alleging excessive non-combatant casualties from coalition airstrikes in Afghanistan. US forces were unable to convince the local and international media that they did not kill innocent civilians in these airstrikes. That negative message cost the President of Afghanistan popular support. This misperception was reinforced by the local and international media, communicating to the Afghan people, asserting that the US was bombing compounds and killing large numbers of Afghan civilians, without an acceptable reason. The President of Afghanistan losing popular support attempted to limit the coalition use of airpower in Afghanistan. The insurgency, realizing they could not compete with the coalition airpower, had changed their focus to creating events (the killing of innocent civilians) in order to restrict bombing runs. A quick analysis would suggest some of the insurgency operations were designed specifically to create the appearance of the excessive use of airpower by coalition forces. This perceived excessive use of coalition airpower, combined with the culture of Afghan tribal politics has created political instability for a weak Afghanistan Government. Airpower in support of small units has allowed coalition forces to greatly expand the areas in support of the Afghanistan Government. The inability of PSYOP or Strategic Communications to address this perception of excessive casualties has restricted one of the most effective kinetic tools available to the coalition.

The problem of an insufficiently focused Strategic Communications plan is traced to a lack of clearly definable authorities. One complicating factor in obtaining the required focus is that there are several strategic communication definitions. The most current definitions are found in the: 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), Strategic Communication Execution Roadmap; Joint Publication (JP) 5-0; and, the Army Field Manual 3.0 (which lays out the responsibilities for Strategic Communication).

The QDR defines Strategic Communication as: "Focused United States Government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen or preserve conditions favorable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs, and actions synchronized with other elements of national power."<sup>5</sup> This definition implies that US Strategic Communication processes are laid out with a responsible governmental agency in the lead for Military Strategic Communications efforts. It implies a clear flow of information regarding Strategic Communication information, from the executive agency to the military user. The joint definition of Strategic Communication matches the QDR definition, except for replacing the words "national interests" with "US Government interests."<sup>6</sup> In December, 2008, the Army redefined strategic communications in a far more detailed manner. For the first time, it laid out the importance of the Strategic Communications process, including the need to shape the environment. Now, providing access and information to the media is critical to the process of strategic communications, a tool of US policy<sup>7</sup> The PAO now has a responsibility to be proactive in the Strategic Communications process, and not return to a passive role, utilizing RTQ. It was always the job of the PAO to arrange access for local and

international media (as operational requirements dictate), but now the PAO message should be tied to the Strategic Communications plan.<sup>8</sup> One of the gaps in Strategic Communications is that access to the local and international media is not the primary duty of the Army PAO. One of the issues with having a PAO involved with strategic communications is the potential compromise of credibility for both the PAO and the commander. “This [concern for credibility] requires care and consideration when synchronizing public affairs with other information engagement activities. Public affairs and other information engagement tasks must be synchronized to ensure consistency, command credibility, and operations security.”<sup>9</sup>

The Army Strategic Communication program is nested in Defense Support to Public Diplomacy, one part of the Department of State’s Strategic Communications program. Defense Support to Public Diplomacy is critical to peacetime theater security cooperation plans (TSCP), a key component of peacetime support and the authority to execute Strategic Communications when not engaged in a conflict.<sup>10</sup> In order to engage key audiences, the Army “implements Strategic Communication and defense support to Public Diplomacy while applying focused efforts to understand and engage key audiences.”<sup>11</sup> Colonel Nelson McChouch, head of the Strategic Communications Division in the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs, stated: “Strategic Communications is about communicating to our audience what’s going on in the Army, and explaining it in terms or concepts people can understand, so that they can be a part of achieving the goal.”<sup>12</sup> Three shortfalls identified by Colonel McChouch are: identifying the target key audiences; obtaining the resources to reach them; and knowing who consistently targets them. The challenge in Afghanistan is in identifying an agency and entity with

enough resources to provide a consistent flow of information to support Strategic Communications to the targeted population. US Public Diplomacy focuses on modern electronic audio visual media, but the majority of that information never reaches the Afghan local populace, or the insurgents. The Defense Science Board (a government 'think tank') illustrated this disconnect between ways and means in the current insurgencies, stating: "winning the global struggle for ideas requires waging a much more effective Strategic Communication effort here and abroad."<sup>13</sup> "To do this, however, we must give up the assumed advantages of the 'incumbent' and trade them for the real edge of the 'insurgent' in the information age. Building an insurgent global Strategic Communication culture that borrows the most effective private sector marketing and political campaign techniques will be at the core of rebuilding and reinventing the way the U.S. listens, engages, and communicates with the world."<sup>14</sup>

US Government Strategic Communications lacks a consistent effort to provide a culturally focused Strategic Communications message that not only transmits the appropriate message, and also takes into account the complete historical and ethnic influences of the target audience. There have been several organizational attempts to meet this need. The United States Information Agency (USIA) was disbanded in November of 1999, after successfully supporting this mission for nearly forty-six years. Its Strategic Communications mission was to provide messages in the gaps left by mainstream electronic audio-visual media. For example, news provided to Eastern Europe through Radio Free Europe. USIA was responsible for providing long-term US Government policy-relevant messages for selected foreign audiences. After the disbandment of USIA, two organizations tried (and failed) to fill the Strategic

Communications void: the Office of Strategic Influence (OSI); and, the Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.<sup>15</sup>

The OSI, disbanded in February, 2002. It was a military organization, located in the Pentagon, and was controversial due to perception problems with the American media. OSI Director, Air Force Brigadier General Simon P. Worden, stated in mid-February of 2002 that in support of the military mission, OSI would lie, if necessary, to the American media and the world.<sup>16</sup> This public statement created such a controversy and public outcry that the OSI was disbanded.<sup>17</sup>

Public Diplomacy, currently defined as inherent in all State Department Operations, did not in create a dedicated, responsible organization with appropriate resources to execute a Strategic Communications mission. Public Diplomacy remains and the Strategic Communication mission is an additional duty for State Department personnel. No additional funding, personnel, or access to media resources were provided to the Department of State when it assumed the additional mission of Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported, on three occasions, that Department of State (DOS) failed to effectively integrate and coordinate its own efforts to marginalize extremists, promote shared values, and that it lacked a coherent strategy.<sup>18</sup>

David Hitchcock, in his article "Making Public Diplomacy Work," summarized the reasons why Public Diplomacy is failing. He described how an organizational chart would show that Public Diplomacy functions are entwined through a myriad of dotted lines, stuck in different DOS bureaus. These bureaus missions are primarily political and economic specifically to one country often to the exclusion of other issues. Work

on synchronized Public Diplomacy is often an afterthought of the bureaus located within DOS. The once-integrated, now dispersed, tools of public diplomacy are not used effectively to achieve a maximum impact on attitudes of overseas leaders and audiences. “The ingredients (tools) are cooking away, on different Washington stoves, even in different kitchens – and with no experienced, responsible chef. The result: a cold, unattractive menu, far less than the sum of a square meal.”<sup>19</sup>

Just as public diplomacy is failing to provide a Strategic Communications message, operational level PSYOP support to Strategic communication suffers a similar shortfall. The US military needs to change the paradigm of the information battlefield in order to allow PSYOP to fill information gaps that result from the lack of a coherent Strategic Communication program. Although it should, Strategic Communication does not reliably inform and modify the behavior of the selected populations, or provide access to those groups who have not received the Strategic Communications message.

At the Joint Task Force (JTF) level, a commander engages audiences only within his Area of Responsibility (AOR). PSYOP is unable to target audiences outside of the commander’s AOR, or before the AOR is established. In Afghanistan, the roots of the current conflict span a significant portion of history and transcend the boundaries of the state. The battle for influencing the minds of the insurgents and the population is shaped by events, ideas and messages outside of the AOR. Prior to a conflict, only the US Ambassador (to a state that later is a source of foreign fighters) has the authority to conduct Strategic Communications to address the target audience likely to produce those future foreign fighters. However, US Ambassadors lack the resources and access to communicate a coherent Strategic Communications message to counter the

growth of foreign fighters. In Afghanistan, the US JTF Commander's AOR, designated as RC East, borders Pakistan and the other four RC commands in Afghanistan. The country of Afghanistan itself shares common borders with four other countries, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and a very small portion of India. Those adjacent areas are unreached by the US message. Foreign fighters, from the Middle East and the Far East, as well as Afghans entering RC East from other AOs, bring support to the insurgency in RC East. This support includes material and financial aid, as well as external messages. While the typical insurgent's age is between 13 to 18 years of age (a young male with little or no economic prospects at home), they often receive the insurgent's message before the age of nine years. The inability to counter growth of foreign fighters and their messages is a significant gap in the effectiveness of the JTF Commander's strategic communications plan.

Currently, in Afghanistan daily PSYOP messages are produced by less than ten PSYOP soldiers and eight translators, responsible for product research, development, production, and printing. The printing process is either contracted out, or done on a limited scale by a separate group of military personnel. Several attempts were made to commercially outsource PSYOP research and production requirements, but produced unsatisfactory results. PSYOP audio products are limited to four hours of radio, every two weeks, and limited leaflets and handbills supporting ongoing operations.<sup>20</sup> These leaflets and handbills are often requested three to four weeks in advance to support military operations. Rapidly produced printed material is limited to single color leaflets in amounts under 200,000 for immediate operations. Production requires up to twenty-four hours, plus delivery time to the dissemination area. With an Afghan literacy rate of

twenty-eight percent, the use of images, pictures, and audio broadcasts are far more effective in Strategic Communications.<sup>21</sup> Radio is the fastest and most effective media in Afghanistan, especially when working with a predominately illiterate populace. Department of State Public Diplomacy has little to no capacity to broadcast their Strategic Communications message in Afghanistan. The RC East Psychological Operations Task Force (POTF) focus is on pre-recorded radio broadcasts and leaflets. Both messages are limited in distribution. Very few radio stations have internet capability (to receive digitally recorded messages from the POTF), requiring messages sent via convoy, slowing delivery and increasing risk to the US soldier. Audio programming distribution to local radio stations requires seventeen days, from conception to delivery. The capacity of the JTF Commander to quickly communicate an account of events to the general Afghan public in a timely manner is hampered by this process.

The Strategic Communications message of the Afghan and US governments to the people and the regional audiences are only partly disseminated due to the restricted information flow. The remote unconnected newspapers and radio stations, to include those which exist in the periphery of the border regions, continually sway their populaces, which are critical in the US military's battle for the center of gravity of the Afghan populace. The insurgents know where the media outlets are, the numbers and ways to get their message to them, and they are using them to effectively influence the population. In 2006, the Taliban was able to claim credit for the downing of an Apache helicopter on the local radio and the internet in less than thirty minutes. It took twenty-four hours for the JTF to communicate that the helicopter crashed due to mechanical

failure.<sup>22</sup> This lag in Strategic Communications severely harms the credibility of the JTF commander. Simply watching the current campaign by the Taliban against the use of US aircraft inflicting extreme casualties on insurgent forces and their ability to redirect the perception of indiscriminate killing of the Afghan populace is causing the Afghan people to lose faith in the Afghanistan government's ability to protect them. This perception of indiscriminate killing also portrays a brutal image of coalition military forces to the international media. It does not matter if the air strikes are causing the damage or not, or if the dead are truly combatants, or if the number of Afghan dead is factual. Many of the Afghan people think the reports are credible and President of Afghanistan must deal with that perception. Insurgent forces are not similarly constrained. Mshari Al-Zaydi, a Middle East journalist and expert on Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, stated that the Middle Eastern Media "have transformed the media into a creator events and their impact, because of the emotions it generated from such coverage."<sup>23</sup> The insurgents place great importance on manipulating this type of coverage, and Al-Qaida continues as a significant part of that insurgency. David Killcullen, a counterinsurgency expert, noted that the "information side of Al-Qaida's operation is primary; the physical is merely the tool to achieve a propaganda result". The information part of every operation is planned as well as the actual attack.<sup>24</sup>

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, freedom of movement for embedded media, along with the volume of their reports and access to regional media, combined to effectively disseminate Strategic Communications. Worldwide audiences were able to cross-check information through multiple sources and multiple networks, most with twenty-four hour news coverage.<sup>25</sup> Afghan reporters that are willing to travel to combat

areas or to or other newsworthy events have been (and remain) unable to do so because of limited transportation capability of the Afghan Government and US Military. One effect of this limited ability to travel is that the Afghan press often produces reports based on questionable sources, with little factual or verifiable information. The insurgents provide primary sources to the regional media, unconstrained by concerns for accuracy. Few reporters have the resources to validate this insurgent-provided information, typically portraying a stereotypical view of coalition forces, so it often receives a great deal of play in the regional press.

There are four recommended solutions to the problems of effective PSYOP support to Strategic Communications in Afghanistan. First, to produce a credible message that will be listened to by the Afghan population. With its largely illiterate populace and spotty radio reception or lack of local radio broadcasts addressing local issues, small, local radio stations are the means to address the media gap that exists in Afghanistan. Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan established a free-flowing information conduit that reached out, by radio, to a population of approximately four million Afghans. Special Forces units, often paired with a PSYOP team, ran an aggressive Commanders' Information Program. This information program focused on two key principals: always the truth; and, broadly lay out the facts of the story and why it happened (even when it was not complimentary to the Special Forces teams). The words, deeds and actions of those units were part of coherent strategy to get the facts out to the local population. Small radio stations were established with locally hired and trained news directors and producers who wrote and produced their own stories and newscasts. These radio stations became important to their local communities and were

accepted as a source of alternative viewpoints and educational information. The stations were provided with four hours of news stories distributed by the POTF in Baghram. In locations with existing radio stations, the same news stories were provided to the station to supplement their existing programming with national and international news events. These new, small radio stations provided provincial government officials with a means to quickly address the populace and hear feedback of local Afghan concerns, increasing the amount of interaction between the people and the local government, and developing a better relationship. In some areas the radio stations began broadcasting weather reports and flash flood warnings, saving large number of lives in Eastern Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the reason that many small stations were so successful was much of the programming and news was done in the dominant local language or dialect.<sup>27</sup>

Second, reestablishment of a US Government Strategic Communications entity, similar to USIA (disbanded in 1999). To direct a coherent Strategic Communication program to selected audiences in a time frame well before the conflict begins. Reestablishment of such a program would be a first step to a credible Strategic Communications message and help in closing the Strategic Communications gap. Proactive, long-term Strategic Communications will not fix the problem overnight, but take several years to develop and maintain. Responsibility and control of this Strategic Communications program should rest with the Department of State. This requires no change of existing authorities since Department of State retains responsibility. Establishment of this capability requires additional funding, and additional personnel with the primary duty of communicating the US government's

strategic communications message to a worldwide audience, in multiple native languages.

Third, redefining the boundaries of the Strategic Communications battle space to allow for communications beyond the AOR will require a US government policy change, allowing for a 'whole-of-government' response, involving primarily Department of State and Department of Defense cooperation and planning. The current geography of a PSYOP Commander's battle space does not allow for mission success. The PSYOP target audience, under the authority of this new policy, must be expanded to reach populations outside of the AOR. Increased support to the Regional Combatant Commanders' TSCP under this new authority will degrade or eliminate the insurgent's ability to obtain support from outside the JTF Commander's AOR.

Fourth, expansion of the PSYOP product development capacity begins with resourcing the Afghanistan PSYOP Product Development Cell (PDC) to produce more than just four hours of programming every two weeks. Currently, the US effort in Afghanistan operates at about ten hours per day, and only five and half days per week. Increasing the amount of Afghanistan PSYOP product development personnel and translators each to thirty would allow the PDC to provide twenty-four hour support to the JTF Commander. This expanded capability would give the PDC the ability to surge production to meet un-forecasted events and provide support in a more timely manner. In addition to increased hours, the PDC must expand its message languages. As of 2008, the US only published messages in two of the official languages of Afghanistan, Dari (fifty percent of the population), or Pashto (thirty five percent of the population). Messages did not address any of the lesser known languages such as Uzbek or

Turkmen (eleven percent), or an additional thirty minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai), representing four percent of the target population.<sup>28</sup> Broadcasts in Persian or Urdu, or any number of dialects that exist in the border regions of Afghanistan, were not allowed under current policy in order to avoid problems with neighboring countries. In these border regions large population groups move back and forth claiming primarily tribal status, not state or national identity status. Populations that receive their news primarily in these lesser known languages or adjoining countries do not receive an effective PSYOP message. These same groups are often either passive or active supporters of the insurgents for any number of reasons. Limited language dissemination hinders the PSYOP commanders' ability to effect audiences who exist on the periphery of the battle space of the JTF Commander whose primary language is other than Pashto or Dari. This limited language dissemination has been a consistent shortfall in most previous PSYOP task forces.<sup>29</sup> Changing this policy requires a diplomatic effort with neighboring countries, or a decision to ignore the concerns of those states, such as was made in the use of Radio Free Europe.

In conclusion, our Strategic Communications message is not reaching the center of gravity: the Afghan people. Currently, there is no coherent strategy to provide a comprehensive US government Strategic Communications message to that center of gravity the Afghan people. The most viable strategies to improve PSYOP dissemination of the Strategic Communications message in Afghanistan are to: establish a proactive and free-flowing information conduit to the Afghan people; reestablish a US government Strategic Communications entity (similar to USIA); redefine the boundaries of the strategic communications battle space to allow for communications beyond the RC East

AOR; and, expansion of the PSYOP product development capability and capacity. The lack of a robust communications infrastructure in Afghanistan is one problem that has no viable solution. Physical infrastructure, such as internet, fax machines, and non-cellular telephone networks is required in order to facilitate the transmittal of facts and stories to existing media outlets and to the Afghanistan populace the center of gravity. The US military does not currently have the internal resources to overcome this infrastructure shortfall in Afghanistan. In order to support the JTF Commander's strategic communications plan, the PAO must remain proactive, and work in partnership with PSYOP in order to prevent message fratricide. Increasing PSYOP support to the peacetime TSCP allows Strategic Communications engagement well before hostilities commence, significantly reducing the flow of new insurgent forces into Afghanistan. Properly resourced and provided with expanded authorities based on policy changes, PSYOP can fill the aforementioned current Strategic Communication gaps in Afghanistan. In an era of persistent conflict, nimble and unconstrained enemies will continue to exploit the gaps in the Strategic Communications of US forces, unless recommended changes are enacted.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> US Department of Defense, *2006 QDR Execution Roadmap for Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: US Department of Defense September 25, 2006), 2. [www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/other/2006QDRStratCommRoadmap.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/other/2006QDRStratCommRoadmap.pdf) (accessed February 1, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> GEN David H. Petraeus speech, "Commander's remarks at 45th Munich Security Conference" ( 8 February 2009) <http://www.centcom.mil/en/from-the-commander/commanders-remarks-at-45th-munich-security-conference.html> (accessed March 20)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint publication 1-02 (Washington DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff April 12, 2001), 441. [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf) (accessed February 01, 2009)

<sup>4</sup> J.B. Jones, P. Taylor, "Becoming the Enemy... and How Not to: Strategic Communications and the Challenges of the War on Terror," *Journal of Information Warfare* Volume 7, issue 3(2008): 1.

<sup>5</sup> US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *2006 QDR Execution Roadmap for Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: US Department of Defense September 25, 2006), 2. [www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/other/2006QDRStratCommRoadmap.pdf](http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/other/2006QDRStratCommRoadmap.pdf) (accessed February 1, 2009)

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Operation Planning*, Joint Publication 5-0 (Washington DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff 26, 2006), II-2 [www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new\\_pubs/jp5\\_0.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp5_0.pdf) (February 1, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, *Operations*, Army Field Manual FM 3-0 (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Army, February 27, 2008), 7-4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 7-5

<sup>12</sup> Lorie Jewell, "Focus: Strategic Communications Leverage the Army Story" *Army News Service*, April 14, 2004. [http://www.samhouston.army.mil/pao/2004pdf/04\\_29\\_04.pdf](http://www.samhouston.army.mil/pao/2004pdf/04_29_04.pdf) (accessed, February 1, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Defense Science Board, *Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication*, (Washington DC: Defense Science Board September 23, 2004). [http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic\\_Communication.pdf](http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/2004-09-Strategic_Communication.pdf) (accessed January 20, 2009), 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin C. Dewitt "Strategic Communications, Psychological Operations and Propaganda: Is a Unified Strategic Message Possible?" *Information As Power* 3, (January 2009):30 [http://cbnet/orgs/usacsl/publications/InfoAsPower3/Information%20as%20Power%203%20\(complete%20book\).pdf](http://cbnet/orgs/usacsl/publications/InfoAsPower3/Information%20as%20Power%203%20(complete%20book).pdf) (accessed February 1, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "Pentagon readies Efforts to Sway Sentiment Abroad," *New York Times*, February 19, 2002. <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/19/world/nation-challenged-hearts-minds-pentagon-readies-efforts-sway-sentiment-abroad.html> (accessed March 01, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> James Dao and Eric Schmitt, "A NATION CHALLENGED: HEARTS AND MINDS; A 'Damaged' Information Office Is Declared Closed by Rumsfeld" <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/27/world/nation-challenged-hearts-minds-damaged-information-office-declared-closed.html?scp=1&sq=%22Office+of+Strategic+Influence%22&st=nyt> (accessed March 01, 2009)

<sup>18</sup> Calvin C. Dewitt “Strategic Communications, Psychological Operations and Propaganda: Is a Unified Strategic Message Possible?” *Information As Power* 3, (January 2009): 31. [http://cbnet/orgs/usacsl/publications/InfoAsPower3/Information%20as%20Power%203%20\(complete%20book\).pdf](http://cbnet/orgs/usacsl/publications/InfoAsPower3/Information%20as%20Power%203%20(complete%20book).pdf) (accessed February 1, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> David Hitchcock, “Making US Public Diplomacy Work” Public Diplomacy Alumni Association, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/104.htm> ( February 1, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Authors’ personal experience; As Commander of the Psychological Task Force, Afghanistan from March 2006 to February 2007 (Author set the requirements for required hours to support the CJTF Commanders Intent).

<sup>21</sup> CIA Fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> Afghanistan (accessed March 01, 2009)

<sup>22</sup> Authors’ personal experience; As Commander of the Psychological Task Force, Afghanistan from March 2006 to February 2007. (Author was tasked by Future Effects Coordinator to correct story of AH64, which crashed, not shutdown outside of Kabul).

<sup>23</sup> Mshari Al Zaydi, “all is fair in love and war; but not everything is acceptable in war.” February 12, 2009, <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=15708> (accessed February 13, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Cori E. Dauber, “The Truth is out there: Responding to Insurgent Disinformation and Deception Operations” *Military Review* (January-February 2009), 15.

<sup>25</sup> Glenn, T. Starnes, *Leveraging the Media: the Embedded Media Program in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Strategy Research Paper(Carlisle Barracks, PA: Center for Strategic Leadership July 2004), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Authors’ personal experience; As Commander of the Psychological Task Force, Afghanistan from March 2006 to February 2007. (Author was tasked by CJTF-76 commander to assist in notification of local populace of impending floods due to weather forecasts. Floods did occur in the area many lives were saved due to early notification).

<sup>27</sup> Authors’ personal experience; As Commander of the Psychological Task Force, Afghanistan from March 2006 to February 2007. (Author oversaw coordinated effort to assist in the development of funding for local hiring of radio staffing).

<sup>28</sup> CIA Fact book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> Afghanistan (accessed March 01, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Authors’ personal experience; As Commander of the Psychological Task Force, Afghanistan from March 2006 to February 2007. (Authors experience with US forces inability to hire translators of languages other Dari and Pashto to develop PSYOP programs in other languages).