



PUBLIC AFFAIRS TENETS

Last Updated: 10 Sep 2020

Public affairs (PA) advances Service priorities and achieves mission objectives through integrated planning, execution, and assessment of communication capabilities. PA personnel enhance their ability to meet commanders' information requirements by adhering to the following tenets of PA:

TENETS

- ✦ Tell the truth.
- ✦ Provide timely information.
- ✦ Practice security at the source.
- ✦ Provide consistent information at all levels.
- ✦ Tell the Department of the Air Force story.
- ✦ Engage the media.
- ✦ Be survivable, sustainable, and deployable.

Tell the truth

Truth is the foundation of all PA operations. Truth enables credibility; credibility can provide US military personnel with an information advantage relative to adversary or competing messages that are not grounded in truth.

Commanders use PA to provide accurate information to key publics in a timely manner. The effectiveness of that communication in supporting the commander's overall objectives depends on maintaining the integrity and credibility of officially released information. Lying, attempting to deceive, or providing inaccurate information harms unit morale, destroys public trust and support, and risks ceding the information advantage to the adversary.

Provide timely information

Commanders are charged with releasing timely, coordinated, and approved information about military operations and are responsible for understanding and adhering to the guidance for media and public engagement. Establishing that guidance in advance of

operations requires thorough coordination through the [chain of command](#), but enables effective employment of PA. Difficult issues and events that are potentially unfavorable to the Air Force should be addressed openly, honestly, and as soon as possible; maximum disclosure permissible with minimum delay.

The maxim of “maximum disclosure, minimum delay” is especially relevant to the release of adverse information. Attempting to deny unfavorable information or failing to acknowledge its existence leads to media speculation, creates the perception of a cover-up, and results in lost public trust in the Service while degrading the overall effectiveness of PA capabilities. The delay in addressing unfavorable issues also provides adversaries with an uncontested opportunity to dominate the [information environment](#) (IE), twisting the facts to support their narrative.

Practice security at the source

All Service personnel—military and civilian—are responsible for safeguarding sensitive information. As a conduit for the dissemination of information, every Service member should be familiar with [operations security](#) (OPSEC) considerations and abide by them, whether being interviewed by a reporter or sharing information on social media. The speed at which information passes through the IE makes attempts to censor military operations impractical, if not impossible. As a result, Service members should understand what information is approved or not approved for release. Commanders and PA personnel should actively engage personnel, making them aware of the necessity to safeguard information and communicate responsibly.

PA personnel should work closely with OPSEC program managers to ensure PA products are as thorough as possible without endangering OPSEC. Commanders should ensure security reviews are performed and release authority is granted at the lowest possible level to ensure the effectiveness of their PA operations. Unnecessarily lengthy security reviews of operational information may degrade operational effectiveness. The information advantage is often achieved by the first to enter the IE. As such, delays limit the effectiveness of PA capabilities and increase the opportunity for adversaries to get their message out first and seize the advantage.

Provide consistent information at all levels

Commanders should strive for the release of coordinated and consistent information at all levels of command. The IE provides the public with information about military operations from a variety of military units. Sources in theater and at the Pentagon are often quoted in the same media reports. Conflicting statements or inconsistent information can cause skepticism, undermine public trust and support, damage morale, and degrade the strength of global influence and [deterrence](#) efforts. Commanders should ensure the Service puts forth a consistent message through diverse “voices.” Information should be appropriately coordinated and in compliance with official Department of Defense (DOD), supported command, Service, and major command guidance before it is released to the public. Commanders should ensure PA operations

are coordinated, integrated, and deconflicted with air, space, cyberspace, and information operations. It is important to coordinate and distinguish between PA operations and Information Operations, including [Military Information Support Operations](#)¹, to ensure that messages provided to different audiences are not contradictory.

Tell the Service story

Although commanders designate specific military personnel or civilian employees as official spokespersons, they should educate and encourage all military and civilian employees to tell the Air Force or Space Force story by providing them with information that is appropriate to share and/or help them to share their perspectives related to their part of their overall Service mission. By projecting competence, confidence, and commitment during interviews or in discussions with family and friends, Service members can help promote public understanding and support of military operations and activities. Social media has become a popular means for personnel to tell their story, which can be an essential means of validating and increasing the reach of official releases of information. Social media use should conform to all relevant DOD and Service guidance and take into account OPSEC, operational risk, and privacy. All members must be aware that their social media activities reflect on themselves, their units, and their Service. Commanders should also consider the use of social media as an essential means to conduct communication efforts with various audiences.

All Department of the Air Force (DAF) personnel should be trained to have a basic ability to engage members of the news media with general Service and individual professional information. They may become spokespersons for the Service and, in some cases, could be considered by the media to be more credible sources than commanders or senior officials. By projecting confidence and commitment during interviews or in discussions with family and friends, command personnel can help promote public support for military operations, enhance morale, and strengthen global influence and deterrence efforts. Telling the Service's story contributes to mission accomplishment, can communicate restraint, indicates resolve, and can serve as a deterrent to adversaries.

Engage the media

Reporters covering operations should be given access to units and personnel and, whenever feasible, be integrated into unit-level activities. Integrating journalists into units informs more accurate reporting of the Service by building relationships with members who can articulate their part of the mission. Ultimately this integration strengthens our global influence and deterrence, builds public trust and support, and enhances morale.

Differences in philosophies, values, and perspectives may lead to misunderstandings between military professionals and the media. However, the gulf between these differences is best bridged through proactive engagement and the establishment and

sustainment of constructive working relationships. The media will be a constant factor in any military operation. Rather than considering the media an adversary, commanders and planners need to actively engage them whenever practicable, leading to potential positive impacts supporting the commander's communication objectives.

Providing accurate and timely information to the media educates them about military operations, creates a bond of trust between the media and the military, and results in more accurate reporting. DOD Directive (DODD) 5122.05, [Assistant To The Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs \(ATSD\(PA\)\)](#), includes DOD principles for news media coverage of DOD operations and provides guidance to commanders and PA to facilitate media engagement.

Commanders and planners can promote more accurate reporting by educating the media on military activities to help overcome communication difficulties and improve the media's understanding of the military. Similar efforts should be directed towards civic leaders as well as domestic and international audiences to enhance their understanding of military operations, help generate public understanding and support at home and abroad for military operations, and help shape the IE.

Be survivable, sustainable, and deployable

PA resources and personnel must be survivable to ensure their capabilities are available when needed. Essential components of survivability include redundancy of critical information and protection against adversary information warfare and influence. In addition to survivability, PA systems and equipment should be deployable. The vital characteristics of deployability include: easy to transport and set up and capable of immediate connectivity into the host-unit communications architecture. Finally, these resources should be easily sustainable by host-unit communications personnel. These characteristics ensure they can operate regardless of whether it is at an austere location with minimum support or an established location with robust support availability.
