



CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



ANNEX 3-61 PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS

STRATEGIC EFFECTS

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Public affairs (PA) operations can achieve effects at the strategic level of war. One crucial PA operation is the execution of informational flexible deterrent options (IFDOs) listed in the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan. Along with diplomatic, military, and economic means, the JCS recognizes information as an instrument of national power. IFDOs are options available to commanders as alternative, non-kinetic courses of action to accomplish operational missions other than “bombs on target.” IFDOs heighten public awareness; promote national and coalition policies, aims, and objectives for an operation; seek to build public support for operations; and counter adversary propaganda and disinformation in the public information environment.

Air Force PA operations are among the commander’s IFDO options that enable a commander to address issues surrounding a crisis or conflict through the use of public information. These options include:

- ✦ Maintaining an open dialog through the media with domestic and international audiences.
- ✦ Articulating US (and/or coalition) policies, aims, and objectives.
- ✦ Gaining and maintaining public support for the operation.
- ✦ Heightening adversary awareness of the potential for conflict.
- ✦ Combating adversary deception efforts.
- ✦ Countering adversary propaganda efforts.

The news media and other information networks in the public information environment have a significant impact on military operations, national will, political direction, and national security objectives. **PA contributes to global influence and deterrence by making foreign leaders and populations aware of US capabilities and resolve.** PA operations comprise a powerful capability that can be used to achieve far-reaching effects on an adversary, while defending friendly forces from an adversary’s efforts to manipulate the public information environment. **PA serves as the Air Force lead for the counterpropaganda mission in the public information environment by**

countering adversary propaganda and maintaining public support and trust for US military operations.

Maintaining an open dialogue with the news media communicates the leadership's concern with the issues and allows the correct information to be placed in the public information environment and helps to satisfy the media's near-constant desire for current information. PA operations provide truthful, timely, and accurate information, helping to stem media speculation and prevent the possibility of the media presenting only one side of the story—the adversary's. This flow of information heightens public awareness and helps gain and maintain public support. The increased media attention may also place enormous pressures on foreign leaders and governments, affecting their decision-making processes.

Heightening adversary awareness of the potential for conflict by maintaining issue prominence in the public information environment helps focus national and international pressure on our opponents or would-be adversaries. Consistent interest is sometimes difficult to achieve because news media outlets must use their resources to gather stories of interest to readers and viewers. A lull in operations may result in disinterested media. To lessen the likelihood of disinterested media, PA operations should include news media in unit deployment preparations, expand the number of regional and hometown media involved, offer high-level spokespersons, provide strong visuals and offer opportunities to do and see things they otherwise would not—like embedding reporters with operational units. These efforts take careful planning and a clear understanding of the effect desired by keeping issues in the news.

PA operations also deliver a virtual force projection IFDO. While a common approach is to withhold information to prevent any possible degradation of planned or actual military operations, commanders should consider the possible advantages of releasing certain information—time-critical and truthful information—after proper security review to demonstrate US resolve, intent, or preparations. Rather than providing an advantage to an adversary, the carefully coordinated release of operational information in some situations can intimidate a rival government or adversary, deter conflict, and counter adversary propaganda while also maintaining or building support for military operations.

As tensions grew in the days before the US launched Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003, the US publicly highlighted the devastating capabilities of its newest weapon—the Massive Ordnance Air Blast, or MOAB. International media used the video images and information provided to tell the story of one of the tools now in the US arsenal for use against Iraq and other possible adversaries. The media called the weapon the “monster bomb” and the “Mother of All Bombs,” sending a clear message of extraordinary capability to the US population—and a strong, visual warning to would-be aggressors. The images and information did not result in a peaceful solution to the problems in Iraq but are an important piece of information thousands of Iraqi soldiers may have used in their decisions to surrender.

—Multiple Sources

[Operations security](#) protects friendly forces by denying an adversary critical information about US or coalition operations. A critical information list of sensitive information and indicators is developed prior to a contingency to help ensure that deploying military personnel and embedded media are aware of information considered non-releasable. While dealing openly with the media and providing accurate information, Air Force personnel must ensure the release of information does not adversely affect national security or threaten the safety of US and coalition forces. Commanders should emphasize this approach, which protects sensitive information and enables PA operations to deliver their full potential. Embedded media may encounter classified information and should sign a nondisclosure agreement as part of their ground rules for being embedded. This method allows the reporter to truly become part of the unit, building understanding and knowledge which improves their work. Nondisclosure agreements also help to ensure the reporter does not deliberately disclose classified information.
