



KEEPING FRIENDS and GAINING ALLIES

The Indivisible Challenge of Military Public Relations

Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege,
U.S. Army Retired

Brigadier General Huba Wass de Czege, U.S. Army, Retired, was one of the principal developers of the Army's AirLand Battle concept and the founder and first director of the School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS. He holds a B.S. from the United States Military Academy and an M.A. from Harvard University. He also attended the Army War College and the Capstone Course at the National Defense University. He commanded an Airborne Infantry Company and a Vietnamese Ranger Battalion advisory team in combat. His most recent publications, on subjects from tactics to strategy and military "transformation," have appeared in *Armed Forces Journal*, *Army Magazine*, *Military Review*, *Artillery Journal*, *Strategic Studies Institute Papers*, and *AUSA Land Power Papers*.

PHOTO: Greek Hoplites, symbols of Hellenic democracy. Upper tier, side B of the so-called Eurytios Krater from Cerveteri. Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* makes clear that democratic Athens went to great lengths to foster confidence at home and to gain and keep allies. (Marie-Lan Nguyen, Wikimedia Commons)

IF THE ARMY is going to take public relations seriously, it needs a "Military Public Relations" branch that is fully aligned with its purposes, a doctrine that clearly articulates the causal logic of its function, and organizations that properly reflect requirements. In "Re-Thinking IO: Complex Operations in the Information Age" (*Military Review*, November/December 2008), I argued: "Keeping the trust and confidence of home and allied publics while gaining the confidence and support of local publics [is] crucial to success for . . . modern free societies conducting any kind of military operation anywhere today." History teaches that gaining and keeping allies is essential for long-term strategic success. Both sides in the Greek Peloponnesian War, for example, knew two truths:

- Keeping the trust and confidence of one's own and allied publics will ensure availability of resources for any mission.
- Winning the respect and support of publics in the battle space is the key to quickly finishing the mission successfully.

America's recent history has not communicated these lessons sufficiently well. Desert Storm could not teach them. That startling event in the desert was mostly devoid of destitute people and the complications of social turmoil and broken governance, and it was brief enough to maintain consensus for support at home and among allies. Other involvements, from El Salvador onward, could have taught these truths, but they were lost because we chose not to draw those lessons while our focus was on major combat operations. The United States can no longer afford to be obtuse about public relations: involved populations will increasingly be the arbiters of success or failure in all military operations, whatever the scale or duration and whoever the enemy. *Maintaining* and *building* positive relations with all the relevant publics must become a more integral part of U.S. military operations.

Truth, Perception, and Operations

When publics at home and in allied countries develop the impression that their forces are ineffective and illegitimate, which is just what adversaries want them to believe, they will withdraw support. When local populations believe our operations are illegitimate and against their interests, they will oppose us. If the enemy is winning, they will oppose us all the more. In such a milieu, whether a mission succeeds or fails first depends on the efficacy

The United States can no longer afford to be obtuse about public relations...

of what the command actually does. Success then hinges on the image the command projects and on the words a command spokesperson utters in support of that image. A military spokesperson has only a limited capacity to mitigate ineffective or counterproductive acts and images. In the best case, a spokesperson can build on effective acts and images and thus multiply their effects, speeding mission success. This economy possesses today a critical immediacy for a fully committed force.

Conditions today have changed dramatically from those that American forces had grown used to after World War II. Populations that today make decisions to support our operations bear a steep price. Realistically, military forces have to *prove* worthy of the great risks these people are asked to accept. Because of this great risk, lessons from commercial advertising and journalism are not applicable. Soldiers and Marines deal not only with “accredited media” but also with the novel and ubiquitous voracity of modern, informal information dissemination. They are not selling soap to locals; they have to communicate their credibility and professionalism and the necessity of their mission.

Transparency in the global operating environment and the speed and diverse ways with which publics inform themselves bring novel and overwhelming immediacy. The sensitivity of politicians to sudden public mood swings can make strategic authorities impatient for results. They are thus prone to over-reaction. That same transparency, speed of information flow, and multiplicity of means, combined with the many ways entrepreneurial adversaries can misinform and distort events, makes gaining the confidence and support of local populations far more difficult than before.

Not long ago, it was possible to think of keeping the trust and confidence of the public and gaining the confidence and support of the population in conflict as two separate problems. Today, no command can separate dealing with the media from dealing face-to-face with the mission-relevant public. It is impossible to separate what is said to people at

home, and in allied homelands, from what is heard by people in the command’s area of operations.

This challenge of media communication is different from, but parallel to, that of gaining the respect, compliance, and support of the people in the area of operations. Our approach to the former is overly centralized, slow, inflexible, and outmoded. It would benefit from a “mission command” approach to control. Gaining respect, support, and cooperation, on the other hand, is grass roots, bottom-up work, not susceptible to economies of scale. Absolute unity of effort is required for success in military public relations because these two related but separate challenges are so entwined today.

The Military’s Public Relations

Military public relations is the term that best describes the increasingly important and indivisible art of gaining and maintaining favorable relations with the public at home, abroad with allies, and in the area of operations. While the two halves of military public relations *are* indivisible, the logic, purpose, and art of each remain different. Both halves must contend with people who, as science tells us, find it impossible to maintain strict neutrality. Switching between positive and negative attitudes based on changing perceptions is natural. The first object of military public relations is to keep the trust and confidence of the people who foot the bill and bear the burden of the operation, those who are already favorably disposed. The second object is likely far more complex, and striving for that goal entails commensurate difficulty. It may, for instance, entail causing a still-hostile indigenous polity to accept new and unpleasant facts without active resistance. When the mission is to depose one government and facilitate the establishment of a new one more to our liking, a radical and much more challenging shift in indigenous attitudes is necessary. The majority of people need to become *real allies*.

Today, no command can separate dealing with the media from dealing face-to-face with the mission-relevant public.

Maintaining support at home. Nothing is as popular as success, and early success followed by steady competent progress is the simple and timeless formula that satisfied the democratic citizens of ancient Athens and every other free society in history. Citizens of 20th-century democracies, like the United States, Great Britain, and France, might have debated long over whether to go to war, but once elected authorities took that step, all but a few citizens united behind the effort. Today's interconnected and interdependent world complicates the use of force by such free societies in several ways:

- It makes it difficult to achieve strategic surprise using large conventional forces.
- It obligates political and senior military leaders to be more conscious of the “disproportionate” use of force.
- It magnifies the impact of collateral damage.
- It affects the decision-making of higher levels of command and involves them in tactical details.
- It makes “covert” operations more difficult to conceal.

These factors combine to add layers of complexity to all types of operations, and not only to counterinsurgencies. Harsh counterinsurgency techniques of the Cold War era and throughout history—including forced population movements, coercion of locals into security forces, stringent curfews, and even lethal pressure on civilians to take the government side—are outdated. The combination of an insurgent's skillful international propaganda and all-pervading media coverage ends the use of such tactics that worked in the obscure jungles of the Philippines, West Java, Malaya, Vietnam, and elsewhere. Using such tactics today would prompt loss of allies and international condemnation, damaging the pursuit of vital national objectives elsewhere.

Nevertheless, isolating the population from the insurgent remains a long-standing tenet of counterinsurgency operations. Because the old tactic of uprooting entire villages and moving them

to easily controlled sites is no longer an option, the task becomes much more troop- and police-intensive. New counterinsurgency doctrine based on extensive historical studies states that population control and protection during troubled times, such as during an active insurgency, requires 20 reliable security troops for every 1,000 persons in a population.¹ Troops have to be able to recognize strangers, live among the people, be present at night, and be respected at least as much as the insurgent. The resources required to do this seem unreasonable to a Western public accustomed to policing levels of about 3 per 1,000 on a normal day.

That is one side of the coin. Working through the traditional media to maintain the support of the public is also becoming ever more complicated. Public officials, including military leaders, must expend much more time and competence on their press relations. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair noted (in a June 2007 speech) that media is becoming more fragmented, more diverse, and above all, transformed by technology.

The competition among an increased number of news media organizations has transformed reporters into analysts in order to gain attention and audience share. The product of uninformed analytical commentary is more troublesome than the reporting of incorrect facts. Facts can be set straight by evidence. Poor analysis is more difficult to set straight, requiring the time and energy of authoritative figures rather than spokespersons.² There are roughly 150 million blogs in existence, with over 150,000 being created daily.³ Forms of communication are merging and interchanging. The print media cannot keep up, and, to stay in business, they have to break stories and give commentary to remain relevant. Blair remarked that, for politicians, “not to have a proper press operation nowadays is like asking a batsman [in cricket] to face bodyline bowling without pads or headgear.”⁴

Having a proper press operation is also critical to military commands at lower levels than ever



Corinthian helmet from the tomb of Denda. From a Greek workshop in South Italy, 500–490 BC.

Being first with the truth is paramount.

before, and competence in this field is relatively rare. Unprepared stand-ins can do more harm than good. Soldiers and Marines in the field must realize the stresses within which their political and senior military leaders are functioning, but they must stay above politics and above reproach in the performance of their duty. (The problem of hiring mercenaries not connected with the Department of Defense, and who possess different rules of engagement, is an additional complication.) Furthermore, the competencies associated with the media will be necessities ever further down the chain of command, and antiquated methods of message control will have to give way to new methods that can keep pace with demand. We will not be able to predict the future, but we won't be able to cancel it either. Therefore, appreciating tendencies in this mission dimension is vitally important. The issues Mr. Blair raises are challenging enough, but the transfer of the function of informing publics from traditional newspapers and radio and television media to the internet adds additional layers to the problem. And this trend demands new competencies.

When people had only a few sources of news, the media decided what was newsworthy. The internet encourages people to pursue their own niche interests. Thus, informing the public so that responsible voters and representatives can make informed decisions has become more difficult because the public first has to be drawn to the information. How will military organizations trigger interest in the information they think the public needs to know? Command "outreach" or "strategic communication" efforts are already recognized to be important, but the means and methods will increasingly have to rely on the internet.

This shift has important implications for military doctrine, organization, methods, and means. It demands increasing attention and careful forethought now. *Being first with the truth is paramount.* Minutes and hours matter whether that "truth" is a notable mission success, a failed enemy initiative, or bad news. Just as "mission command" relies on the judgment of commanders to decide how to implement the intent of higher authorities, the judgment of commanders should be relied on to decide what should and could be said in public within the mission area of responsibility. This latitude speeds clearance decisions, keeps spokespersons in their

lane, and is *the only* control mechanism that has a chance of meeting the deadlines for success. It implies taking and maintaining the initiative to aggressively "push-to-inform" all media within the area, and all information networks that serve *all* publics relevant to the mission. This effort will consume more of the commander's time, and it means that military public relations must support him to make that time pay dividends. Commanders must be educated to this effect.

Winning trust, confidence, and support. Overcoming the prejudices and biases of strangers is always difficult. As aforementioned, legitimacy and the perception of on-going success are critical to winning support. Advertising for mission allies is not good enough, and economies of scale likewise will not work. Only alliance building with specific communities of people and their leaders can succeed. Social dynamics and cultural knowledge are critical.

Modern insurgents have a marked advantage over their Cold War era counterparts. They can plug into a global media network that will instantly amplify their message. Email, satellite phone, and text messaging are all independent and more easily exploited by insurgents than by the Afghan or Iraqi governments. This dynamic of rapidly increasing sources of information and lessening government control of content is still accelerating. Information acceleration means that we have to re-think our approaches to the challenge.

Reconnaissance of the "human terrain" and focused military public relations efforts must precede the first physical encounter with the indigenous population. Such reconnaissance is critical to identifying and assessing potential allies and to condition first impressions. As facts unfold, the aim of military public relations among the local population is to relate a coherent and credible narrative of success, progress, and positive consequences that extends beyond the reach of the command's actual physical presence. Given the nature of military operations, this extension presents difficult work, but doing so is increasingly essential for success. This way of thinking has to overcome lingering 20th-century military attitudes.

While successful 20th-century insurgents and counterinsurgents achieved sociopolitical effects, operations could succeed without the “hearts and minds” of the people in the enemy country ostensibly being liberated. Once people were mobilized for war against an enemy country, there was little differentiation between the enemy regime and its citizens. For most citizens, the enemy was a distant, de-humanized abstraction (e.g., the Japanese). The popular conception was that citizens were considered complicit in whatever wrongs their governments committed. This was particularly true of the two World Wars. The Geneva Convention and the Law of Land Warfare were the only constraints on the military’s treatment of non-combatants. Some national armies were more scrupulous than others, but many millions of non-combatants were killed, injured, or maimed as a normal consequence of industrial-age war machines, especially in Europe and Asia. Rules of engagement were rarely stricter than these conventions required.

For several significant reasons, the enemy is now a far less distant abstraction. It is more commonplace to differentiate between the enemy regime and its citizens, and the contest for the citizenry has become a crucial, many-sided, and complex contest. These trends will continue. Distant people are no longer de-humanized abstractions. The world recognizes suffering for what it is. The Internet provides a way for people of similar interests to form virtual communities regardless of geography or kinship. All sides have rapid access to the ability to capture the attention of billions of people, and the politically savvy can rapidly and favorably spin their messages. The resulting global transparency and new technical capabilities that facilitate it have radically intertwined peoples’ lives.

The full political implications of this transformed global environment are far from clear, but this much is discernible: communities of interest cross national boundaries much more extensively with every passing day. During the war between NATO countries and the Serbian Milosevic regime over genocide in Kosovo, many of the most educated Serbs were more interested in economic development, and eventual political and economic integration with the regime’s enemies, than in supporting their national leader. The precise destruction by NATO aircraft of their property, the economic

...the contest for the citizenry has become a crucial, many-sided, and complex contest.

infrastructure their livelihood depended on, and the threats to their safety caused many of them to rally to their natural internal enemy, the nationalist tyrant. Current historical, political, and economic trends favor the developed democracies in such transnational political transactions.

At a minimum, one should not antagonize potential allies needlessly, and military planners have increasingly come to recognize this vital point. Rules of engagement have become more specific, limiting, and strategically important. Population densities are increasing everywhere, especially in underdeveloped and failing states. Military operations cannot avoid populated areas until stability operations kick in. Knowledge of social dynamics and the cultural mosaic are thus increasingly critical. What people think, the decisions they make, and the actions and mass movements that flow from them will matter more. Success in war will hinge on the ability to influence the decisions of varied audiences to support or impede one side or the other. Similarly, success in stability operations



AP Photo, Srdjan Ilic

Serb Lazar Antic wipes his tears while standing in front of his house which was hit in a NATO airstrike in the town of Aleksinac, some 200 kilometers (124 miles) south of Belgrade, Yugoslavia, April 1999.

will depend greatly on influencing varied groups to trust their security and future to legitimate governments (we support) rather than to extended families, clans, or tribes that make separate accommodations with violent political movements and organized crime.

In the future, it will be increasingly important to restrict the *public* communication emanating from psychological operations (PSYOP) agents at every level to avoid damaging the military public relations effort. The problem for commanders in the field today is that without the PSYOP capabilities now available to them, they would be short-handed in their public relations efforts. U.S. public law permits the use of PSYOP organizations to conduct military public relations, as long as it takes place abroad, even when it aims to influence allied publics in their homelands. But directing PSYOP against audiences you intend to win over is problematic. Information operations doctrine was originally not intended to venture into winning the trust, confidence, and support of people abroad. It was meant to demoralize the public of an enemy state, induce war weariness, and convince them to petition their governments for peace. This was an important aspect of 20th-century warfare; hence, orienting PSYOP against hostile foreign audiences made perfect sense. In layman's terms this is propaganda, not the logic that applied to regime change campaigns in Panama, Afghanistan, and Iraq or to other campaigns in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, Haiti, Kosovo, and others.

Military leaders who are realists understand why, even if PSYOP is truth-based, using its capability in this role is myopic. Realistically, *PSYOP should only be directed at parties the commander sees as adversaries and not as potential allies*. Thus PSYOP requires even stricter controls than public law allows, but they should be controls the employing commander exercises based on his own judgment (i.e., mission command).

Crude and broad appeals like those of the past are more inclined to backfire because today people are much more informed and politically savvy. The message has to be far more subtle, and the messenger more clever. Actions will still speak louder than words and in a voice amplified by the omnipresent media megaphone. Clumsy "kinetics" will drown out our messages. Even necessary security measures

that inflict short-term pain for long-term gain may be impossible to implement because they send the wrong message.

Understanding the Psychology of the Tipping Point

Two books by Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink* and *The Tipping Point*, make modern psychology accessible for military officers inclined to think in terms of mechanistic causality. These two books provide some of the latest understanding of social dynamics, and how and why messages move people to action in some cases and not in others. The logic made clear in these books shows how centralized and homogenized "hearts and minds" campaigns and approaches aimed at the population in general simply miss the target.

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell shows us why epidemics are useful metaphors for shaping our thinking about winning the trust, confidence, and support of strangers. His logic can help empower every thinking military professional who has a message to peddle (support my mission) or a campaign to promote (support a new democratically elected government). In fact, his ideas should shape the way we all look at every military operation in the 21st century.

To summarize Gladwell, an idea passes a certain point in currency or acceptance, and then it tips. What was a gradual progress, or stasis, before, suddenly changes at a dramatic, geometric rate. Anyone who has ever been in a combat unit that has panicked, or observed it in the enemy force, has witnessed a virtual epidemic of fear seize the previously brave. It can happen to whole states, and it can occur rapidly and unexpectedly. For instance, historians have highlighted the dramatic collapse of France in May 1940. An example we all witnessed was the inexplicably quick collapse of the former Soviet Union. Gladwell concludes that "Ideas, products, messages, and behaviors spread just like viruses do."⁵ Pandemic disease is a function of three things: the people who transmit infectious agents, the agent itself, and the environment in which the agent is operating. When a system is jolted out of equilibrium, it tips. Some, potentially very small, change happens, in one or more areas, and it has dramatic consequences. There is reason to conclude that winning support for our missions would follow the same pattern.



AP Photo, Boris Yurchenko

A crowd gathers around a personnel carrier as some people climb aboard the vehicle and try to block its advance near Red Square in downtown Moscow, 19 August 1991, in a coup attempt by hard-line Communists.

Mavens, Connectors, and Salesmen

Gladwell also argues convincingly that a social movement, such as winning support for our mission within a community, spreads primarily by word of mouth, and, paradoxically, that word of mouth epidemics are becoming more, not less, important. The flood of information coming at people overwhelms their ability to make judgments. So they rely more and more on very primitive social contacts, traditional forms of communications, and the people in their lives whom they respect, admire, and trust. Among these are three kinds of people who play key, and very specialized roles—opinion leaders called “mavens,” people who are well connected called “connectors,” and people who can become passionate about an idea and sell it to others, “salesmen.”

Research and experience tell us that people adopt new ideas at widely different rates on a bell curve. A small handful of innovators or visionaries are followed by a slightly larger group of early-adapting opinion leaders and a big bulge comprising the early majority and the late majority. At the other end of the curve are the laggards. Understanding the differ-

ent motivations of each group and the fact that they do not communicate well with one another is critical. Visionaries want revolutionary change and are willing to take huge risks to achieve it. The early majority are pragmatists. Change must fit into the world of complex arrangements they inhabit, and they must see a pragmatic improvement. The late majority are conservative conformists who don't want to be left behind. The laggards are the archconservatives. The problem is the usual chasm between the visionaries who “get it” quickly and easily with little translation, and the majority who may have trouble even making sense of the new idea. Mavens, connectors, and salesmen together form a bridge between visionaries and pragmatists. The key lies in finding them and getting their help.

The most important point for Soldiers and Marines engaged in our current struggles for support and allegiance is that all contenders will vie for the same few connectors, mavens, and salesmen in every rural village and urban community. The importance of knowing the people among whom these struggles are waged boils down to finding and converting these few.

Memorable Messages

The message of the few also has to be one that sticks. Not only do epidemics tip because of the extraordinary efforts of a few select carriers, but also because something happens to transform the virus itself, making it durable. An idea becomes more appealing, and thus more durable, to a target audience. Research indicates that there are specific ways of making a message memorable, and thus durable, such as relatively simple changes in presentation and how the information is structured.

Gladwell argues that for messages to have the maximum impact on all their intended audiences, they require inordinate efforts to ensure that busy practical people remember them and find them attractive enough to take certain risks to act on them.

We cannot assume that this level of persuasion will be easy, or self-evident, because a message's contagiousness is often an unexpected property. Conventional advertisers believe in speaking loudly and often enough—the rule of six hearings—to make a message memorable. But such advertising gimmicks are often impractical in a combat zone, and worse, such tactics can also alienate or invite ridicule. Some of those who are clamoring for attention will have hostile intent, and this is the first hurdle to overcome before any community will even listen. To stir “hearts and minds,” the message must have five essential qualities:

- It must be *credible*. Americans and Pushtun villagers or Sadr City residents will not find the same truths equally credible. An incredible message may be true, but it will not be entertained seriously. And as much as we would like to “spin” a purse out of a sow's ear, such attempts generally backfire.

- It has to be *verifiable* locally and by the *intended audience*. It is essential to think through how local people can verify it.

- It must be understood *in the way it was intended*. Local testing for this quality is vital.

- It must apply to people *personally, and concretely*, not abstractly. For instance, how will supporting *this* election process at *this* time affect their lives?

- It must unambiguously communicate how *they* can act on it in their local community. Localized and clearly conveyed instructions are essential.

Cross-cultural communications and communicating with several different cultural communities at once takes patience, persistence, and some trial and error. Every small and seemingly trivial thing will make a message either effective or counterproductive. A message, like an epidemic, is sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which it occurs. People are extremely sensitive to context; they respond to signals in their physical surroundings and take cues from their social environment.

Features of our environment provide a strong impetus to act a certain way. A troubled person may be tipped toward crime by something as simple and trivial as every day signs of disorder like trash in the streets, graffiti, and rampant petty crime. These send a strong signal that says, “No one cares, and no one is in charge.”

Often it is within our power to change the signals that invite crime or dysfunctional behavior. The principle is to begin somewhere and show steady, inexorable progress. A clear and unambiguous message of unremitting progress, one with no prospect of retreat, has been used in Iraq, and elsewhere, by various commanders. But for such approaches to really work, commanders require enough resources, strong support from above, and a sustained effort over time. They must first meet the people's fundamental expectations of any government—keeping them safe, securing their property, and facilitating their livelihood (not just now and then, but, to a reasonable extent, *always*). When people fear the consequences of acting on a message, it will not matter how memorable it is. No tipping point will follow.

The Rule of 150

People who have an idea to sell have long realized the value of creating a community around new converts where those new beliefs can be practiced, expressed, and nurtured. This is one effective way to make a fundamental change in people's beliefs and behavior. One successful strategy for rapidly propagating a contagious message has been to collect the most enthusiastic followers in a particular area into close-knit societies. In this way, one super connector/maven/salesman can tie many groups together through occasional visits, and while they are away, daily group dynamics reinforce basic tenets of the movement.

The “rule of 150” refers to the maximum number of people who can be in such a close-knit group. Scientists believe that 150 is the maximum number of individuals with whom human beings can have a genuine social relationship. Anthropological literature confirms this number again and again. In one such study, 148.4 was the number of people in the villages of 21 separate hunter-gatherer societies across several continents. The size of companies of soldiers across time and place has remained steady at no more than 150. Beyond this number, people become strangers to each other, and cohesion erodes. Smaller groups are closer knit and share trust.

The “rule of 150” has several important implications for winning trust and support in any community. Below that number, people are more easily affected with a group ethos. Such groups

are powerful incubators for ideas because people can more easily agree and act with one voice. They can also coalesce and successfully counteract antithetical influences. Unity comes from sharing a common relationship.

Groups that adhere to the “rule of 150” also have another powerful property called “transactive memory.” Groups possess more than the sum of ideas and impressions stored in individual brains: such groups also store knowledge about who in the group knows what about what. People create an implicit joint memory. Since mental energy is limited, people in such groups can concentrate on what each knows best. Truly knowing a person means knowing his or her skills, abilities, and passions—what he or she is truly good at doing. This knowledge gives the mavens in a group much more power to influence others and mirrors, at the organizational level, the kind of intimacy that exists in a family.

Keeping Good Ideas Contagious

As Gladwell notes, “One paradox of social epidemics is that in order to create one contagious movement, you often have to create many small movements first—all headed roughly in the same direction or focused on one thing.” The implication for operations is that Soldiers and Marines can employ this wisdom themselves. A national “hearts and minds” campaign is won by clan, by village, and by one community of close-knit people at a time. There is no substitute for winning the confidence and trust of each of these, one by one. In this campaign for trust, one perceived falsehood will undermine everything, and clever words cannot overcome obtuse actions. Before acting, we must know how our actions are likely to be interpreted and plan to accompany our actions with messages and personal engagements with community leaders to amplify our intent. Doing so will preempt our enemy’s information deployment, his negative spin.

***Before acting, we must know
how our actions are likely to
be interpreted...***

However, we are not now well organized and educated for this work. This work is most usefully done at brigade level and below where imaginative commanders have reorganized to perform it with available, but under prepared people. Progress depends on accurate feedback of local perceptions, and specific knowledge about relationships, agendas, and interests that our intelligence services are ill-equipped to provide. Learning mechanisms in this dimension are stunted and need to grow.

Toward a New Paradigm

Psychological operations must be performed separately and by different people from those who perform military public relations.⁶ Commands succeed or fail in their missions based primarily on how well they do the right things, as aforementioned. Their actions can project an image of doing the right things well, and the words of a command spokesperson can only incrementally add or detract from that message. The capacity of a military spokesperson to mitigate ineffective or counterproductive acts and images is limited, but effective public relations can build on effective acts and images, thus extending effects. Such synergy speeds mission success.

When people at home and in allied countries get the impression that their forces are ineffective and illegitimate, they will withdraw support. When people in the battlespace believe our enemy is winning, they will join them just to survive. When they too believe our operations illegitimate (and against their interests), they will oppose us. These related challenges are as essential to the success of any mission as any warfighting function.⁷ As operations unfold, the task of military public relations is to relate a coherent and credible narrative of success, progress, and positive consequences that extends beyond the reach of the command’s actual physical presence.

Military public relations is a *new function* with new demands. Its professionals require substantial expertise relevant to spanning the challenges of this necessarily unified field of competence. Military education needs to adapt to new demands and to expand military capabilities within a broader, more realistic public relations paradigm. Ironically, without the PSYOP capabilities now available to them, commanders would be short-handed. One possibility would be to “re-flag” PSYOP detachments to be military public relations detachments. Another is to

expand and reorient Public Affairs branch detachments to fill the void. If the Army takes this function seriously, it must have a functionally aligned branch of service with deep expertise.

The command's credibility hinges on military public relations. Maintaining the coherence of words and deeds becomes paramount because the command's communicators compete in a realm of moral credibility. When the command sends discordant messages through its actions and messengers, or when it fails to cross-reinforce words and deeds, its credibility is shaken. Only when actions and communications resonate in harmony do words and images acquire a multiplier effect. Truthfulness is the best policy *every time*. The only way to guard the fragile credibility of any command on foreign soil is being first with the truth. The need for alacrity has outdated traditional mechanisms of vertical message control, which must be replaced. Trust streamlines clearance decisions, keeps spokespersons circumscribed, and is the only control mechanism that has a chance of meeting the speed required for success.

Trying to deceive one public and not others is not only impractical and difficult to manage, but also likely to backfire. No open communications should disadvantage the important effort to keep friends and gain allies. The principal message of the command is the mission and how it relates to people. We should always act with clearly communicated intentions. How we act in pursuit of our ends is the strongest evidence of what we mean, and this becomes the source for interpretations of the mission—the message. This includes acting forcefully when that is the language best understood. Well-thought-out actions remain the most convincing way to influence human behavior. Well-chosen, well-targeted words and images that build on such foundations can enhance that sphere of influence. Absolute unity of effort is required for success.

Military public relations is a *dialogue* rather than a *transmission*. The art of gaining and maintaining favorable relations with people in the area of operations depends on accurate feedback of local perceptions, and specific knowledge about relationships, agendas, and interests. This art requires understanding local social dynamics and having the cultural knowledge to build interpersonal alliances with specific communities and their leaders. We need new

doctrine that applies specifically and usefully to the logic of this particular challenge. We also need education and training that arms commanders, staffs, and soldiers with pertinent and useful knowledge. New organizations with the right kinds of knowledgeable specialists in adequate numbers need to take shape. Military public relations relies on distinct, understandable logic and identifiable competencies. It needs increased integration with other functions, and more command attention, education, and resources.

Doctrine is not the place for compromises; it should reflect clarity of thought. While the last FM 3.0 revision made relevant improvements, the doctrine requires further revision to address remaining dysfunctions. For instance, some think the new “information task” labeled “information engagement” is the same as military public relations, but it cannot be since it is defined by the collection of old categories and component means that comprise it, including PSYOP. *Tasks and function should be defined in terms of ends, not means.*

If “information engagement” were so redefined, then it would be clear that PSYOP has no place in it. “Engaging” is a term associated with a category of warfare that is smaller than a “battle,” a fire-fight. The notion of engaging with information is also misleading and grossly simpleminded. It suggests that simply engaging with information can change human behavior. Information engagement is a stale and sterile term best left behind. Whatever we call the public relations function, we should define it by its aim: keeping the trust and confidence of home and allied populations while, simultaneously, gaining the confidence and support of local ones. **MR**

NOTES

1. See the new counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.
2. Tony Blair, “Like a Feral Beast” <www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110010235>. Speech delivered 12 June 2007 at Reuters headquarters in London.
3. *Ibid.* This is based on a projection from data roughly a year old taken from Mr. Blair's speech referred to above.
4. *Ibid.*
5. On 12 September 1967, I observed the 39th Vietnamese Ranger Battalion, a unit I had served with for eight months of dogged fighting, suddenly panic when it was attacked unexpectedly from the rear, just as it commenced a cross-country march. It recovered just as quickly when the battalion commander and a few officers pulled their handguns threatening to shoot any rangers who didn't immediately drop down and take up defensive positions on a line to our left and right.
6. My article, “Unifying Physical and Psychological Impact during Operations” (*Military Review*, March-April 2009) addressed the useful employment of PSYOP specialists. Using them for the purposes addressed here may today be a necessity, but there is no doubt that using suspected propagandists to win mission allies is dysfunctional.
7. In other words, while the function of maneuver is to close with the enemy, keeping the trust and confidence of home and allied populations while simultaneously gaining the confidence and support of the local publics and actors must be a function just as integral to full spectrum operations.