



Military Public Diplomacy

How the Military Influences Foreign Audiences



American Security Project



White Paper

Matthew Wallin
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IN BRIEF

Structural Elements

- The Department of Defense brings significant resources to bear which can be used to conduct public diplomacy activities.
- Though the Department of Defense claims it does not conduct “public diplomacy,” the reality of actions on the ground and in cyberspace indicates that it does.
- The structure of Information Operations, strategic communication, and other activities is confusing and overlapping.
- DoD resources augment U.S. public diplomacy, but debates over responsibilities and definitions hinder oversight, cost-savings, and message effectiveness.
- Interagency efforts can help ensure message and resource coordination, ultimately improving mission effectiveness.

Lessons Learned

- A full and thorough understanding of the target audience is required in order to generate messages that are strategically, and not just tactically effective.
- Credibility is dependent on truthfulness and is gained through building and maintaining trust relationships.
- Fully understanding the target audience allows for crafting more effective messages.
- Proper training and resources are a primary factor in mission effectiveness.
- Output does not equate effect, and success must be measured by the action of the target audience, not the activities of the messenger.

About the Author

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Introduction

For more than a decade, the U.S. Military has been at the forefront of America's interaction with overseas populations. In countries like Iraq and Afghanistan, members of the U.S. Armed Forces have often been the first Americans that the populations of those countries meet. The numbers alone tell the story: at the end of 2012, the Department of Defense had over 352,000 active duty troops deployed in foreign countries, of which at least 177,000 were deployed in support overseas contingencies operations in countries like Afghanistan or Iraq.¹ But that number just scratches the surface—the number multiplies considerably when factoring the total number of troops rotating in and out of various theaters of operation.



U.S. Army Photo

As the State Department has been adjusting to its newfound responsibilities after the demise of the U.S. Information Agency, the Department of Defense has been confronted with its own challenges defining its role in public diplomacy (PD). This attempt to define the roles of various DoD resources appears to have become consuming, mirroring the Department's ability to conduct effective communication campaigns, and clouding the overall strategic objectives that these campaigns should be geared to supporting.

Reporting in recent years has also brought to light extensive funding spent on a number of ill-conceived strategic communication campaigns, sometimes featuring extensive use of contractors without the appropriate knowledge or experience to conduct effective campaigns.

This paper is intended to explore issues of military “public diplomacy,” including “Information Operations,” Military Information Support Operations (Psyops/MISO), exchange, and other issues as they pertain to how the military interacts with foreign publics. It essentially tells the story of what military PD is, how it's organized, what's being done, how it should be done, and how what's being done relates to how it should be done.

The report contains an overview of definitional issues, perceived reasoning, case studies, and best practices aimed to give a better understanding of how military public diplomacy has been used over the past decade. It attempts to cover many of the key issues, while recognizing that a comprehensive discussion of military public diplomacy cannot fit within the restraints of a single report.

It is strongly recommended that this paper be read in conjunction with The [New Public Diplomacy Imperative](#), which features a broad perspective of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in general since the beginning of the 21st century.



U.S. Navy musicians in Thailand. U.S. Navy photo

Defining and Denying Military PD

Officially, the U.S. Military does not “do” public diplomacy, which by law is under the purview of the Department of State.² Considering this, not every case study explored in this paper is specifically designed to communicate with foreign publics. Instead, some cases emulate the types programs traditionally attributed to public diplomacy and adapt them for foreign military audiences.

In its research into these issues, the Stimson Center categorized the DoD’s efforts in this field as “public diplomacy-like activities.”³ Although the use of this label is understandable, this type of terminology is often used to create semantic deniability for the conduct of activities which in reality *are* public diplomacy. That is, it is a “safe” way to say that DoD does not do actual public diplomacy—only things that are “like” or support public diplomacy, therefore allowing DoD to defend or augment the budget for programs designed to “communicate strategically.”⁴



A Civil Affairs soldier with schoolchildren in Djibouti. U.S. Army photo

This type of terminology is not without precedent, and its use is understandable, especially considering the audience isn’t always exactly a foreign public. Thus, DoD has officially supported a “we don’t do public diplomacy” narrative. Reporting on Strategic Communication in 2009, the Defense Department stated:

DoD does not engage directly in public diplomacy, which is the purview of the State Department, but numerous DoD activities are designed specifically to support the State Department’s public diplomacy efforts and objectives, which in turn support national objectives. DoD refers to these activities as “Defense Support to Public Diplomacy” (DSPD).⁵

In order to understand how the military communicates with foreign audiences without getting caught up in the debate about who does what, it is worthwhile to discard the official definitions and terminology and look at the facts on the ground. The reality is, the military conducts operations and activities that are both directly and indirectly intended to influence the attitudes and actions of foreign publics and military audiences to support foreign policy objectives.



U.S. Army photo

For lack of a better term, this paper will therefore define military public diplomacy as:

Military communication and relationship building with foreign publics and military audiences for the purpose of achieving a foreign policy objective.

Why Military PD?

The military has long played a role in the strength of America's soft power, particularly when analyzed against the backdrop of the First and Second World Wars. While foreign perceptions of the military's soft power role evolved over the course of the Cold War, its relevance saw increasing importance in the years following the September 11 attacks.

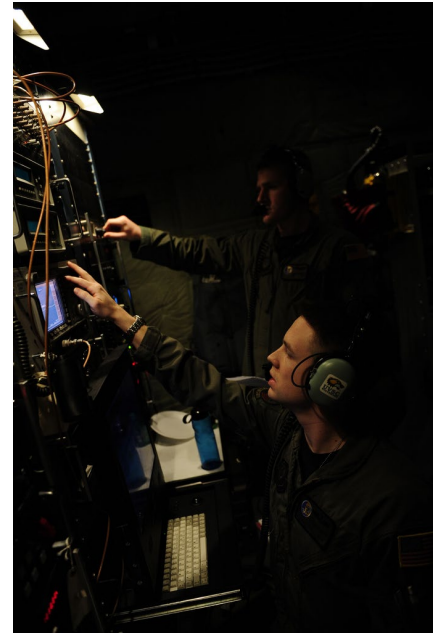
In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the military would establish the initial contemporary American presence in those countries. This placed the Department of Defense in a de facto position to carry out actual public diplomacy activities or those which had PD implications. Particularly in Iraq, the large American military presence would make immediate impressions across the country, as large numbers U.S. troops made person-to-person contact with the Iraqi population.

Faced with this reality, and the dangers of operating in a hostile environment, the military often found itself in situations where it was either required by reality or simply in a better position than the State Department to conduct public diplomacy. Additionally, one must consider the manpower resources at hand, comparing the Department of Defense's 3.2 million total personnel⁶ in comparison to the Department of State's 69,000.⁷

In some cases, DoD and State Department roles and responsibilities can overlap. For instance, some DoD informational activities and key leader engagements closely resemble State Department public diplomacy efforts. At times, this overlap is useful and does not lead to problems; at other times, it is appropriate for one agency to have a lead or exclusive role. Thus, during combat operations or in other hostile environments, DoD often takes the lead out of perceived necessity, as civilian actors may be unable to perform their usual activities.⁸

Perhaps the overall argument for why the modern military conducts public diplomacy is best exemplified in these words by former Defense Secretary Robert Gates:

In the long-term effort against terrorist networks and other extremists, we know that direct military force will continue to have a role. But we also understand that over the long term, we cannot kill or capture our way to victory. Where possible, kinetic operations should be subordinate to measures to promote better governance, economic programs to spur development, and efforts to address the grievances among the discontented from which the terrorists recruit.



An EC-130J crew operating broadcasting equipment. USAF Photo

The Structure of Military PD

Much as the State Department has struggled at times with the integration of the former U.S. Information Agency's responsibilities into its portfolio, DoD has been rife with definitional and organizational disagreements and changes over the past 15 years. The resulting debate over responsibility and definitions is both confusing and detrimental to the conduct of effective communication and influence techniques. For this reason, this report will not focus on the definitional and structural debate, but rather the reality of military communication as it occurs "on the ground."

However, it is useful to have a basic understanding of some of the concepts as DoD defines them.

The Department of Defense's own definitions help paint a picture as to why these issues are clouded with overlap, confusion, and name changes. It is difficult to categorize DoD's overseas communication activities under one "public diplomacy" umbrella—and several overlapping terms, or substitution of terms, has added to the confusion of just who is supposed to do what. On top of that, the use of different terms, depending on the branch of service, further complicates the story.



U.S. Army photo

Though some of these definitions and organizations may not be traditionally purposed towards public diplomacy efforts, it is difficult to deny their influence or consequences on public diplomacy issues.

Inform and Influence Activities

Inform and Influence Activities (IIA) is a very new term used by the U.S. Army and replaces the Army's earlier manual on Information Operations. It appears to be an integrating/coordinating mechanism between various "information related capabilities." It is defined as:

..the integration of designated information-related capabilities in order to synchronize themes, messages, and actions with operations to inform United States and global audiences, influence foreign audiences, and affect adversary and enemy decisionmaking.⁹

The "information-related capabilities" included under IIA are:

- Public affairs
- Military information support operations (MISO)
- Combat camera
- Soldier and leader engagement
- Civil affairs operations
- Civil and cultural considerations
- Operations security
- Military deception

The term Information Operations is still preferred by other branches of the military, and is explained in the following section.

Information Operations

Many who have experience or are familiar with military communication techniques may be more accustomed to the term Information Operations (IO), which is defined by the Joint Staff as:

The integrated employment, during military operations, of information related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own.¹⁰

Formerly under the control of Strategic Command, Joint Force IO was transferred to the Joint Staff in 2012.¹¹ IO capabilities include five categories, some of which appear completely unrelated to traditional concepts of public diplomacy:

- Military information support operations (MISO)
- Operations Security (OPSEC)
- Electronic Warfare
- Computer Network Operations
- Military Deception (MILDEC)

Of these categories, only MISO (and to a lesser extent military deception) holds true relevance to the conduct of public diplomacy. MISO, formerly known as Psychological Operations (PSYOP), is defined as:

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 in a manner favorable to the originator's objectives.¹²

Public Affairs

Historically, Public Affairs (PA) has been institutionally completely separate from the employment of Information Operations. In 2004, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Richard Meyers issued a memo explaining the primary difference between PA and IO:

PA's principal focus is to inform the American public and international audiences in support of combatant commander public information needs at all operational levels. IO, on the other hand, serves, in part, to influence foreign adversary audiences using psychological operations capabilities.¹³

The memo continued to outline why PA was separate from IO:

Inherent in effective coordination and collaboration with IO is the necessity for PA to

maintain its institutional credibility. While organizations may be inclined to create physically integrated PA/IO offices, such organizational constructs have the potential to compromise the commander's credibility with the media and the public. It is important that we not let the organization's relationship diminish the command's PA capability or effectiveness.¹⁴

In reality, with the expansion of social and global media, the effects of these practices tend to cross the institutional artificial boundaries. As the global media environment continues to evolve, boundaries normally established by the borders of nation states have also become less of an information inhibitor.

In 2004, the Defense Science Board Task Force report on Strategic Communication stated that though public affairs focuses on domestic media, its "advocacy activities reach allies and adversaries around the world."¹⁵ This essentially recognizes that despite PA's focus on domestic audiences, that messages produced have public diplomacy consequences.

With the adoption of the Inform and Influence Activities manual as explored above, the reality of today's information landscape has caused Public Affairs to now be considered an "information related capability" by the Army.



Department of Defense photo

Civil Affairs

Civil Affairs is a military practice conducted since the American Revolution, but with renewed seriousness since the Second World War.

Army Field Manual 3-57 defines the Civil Affairs Operations core tasks as: populace and resources control, foreign humanitarian assistance, civil information management, nation assistance, and support to civil administration.¹⁶ It defines civil military operations as:

...the activities of a commander that establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations between military forces, governmental and nongovernmental civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace in a friendly, neutral, or hostile operational area in order to facilitate military operations, to consolidate and achieve operational U.S. objectives. Civil-military operations may include performance by military forces of activities and functions normally the responsibility of the local, regional, or national government. These activities may occur prior to, during, or subsequent to other military actions. They may also occur, if directed, in the absence of other military operations.¹⁷

Thus, by this definition, Civil Affairs incorporates certain elements of public diplomacy as part of its core mission.

Civil Affairs has been criticized for being undermanned, underequipped, unprepared and undertrained for the

missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁸ Possibly contributing to this, upwards of 96% of Civil Affairs manpower is comprised of reservists specifically valued for their civilian skillsets.¹⁹ Though this does not criticize the principle of the military reserve system, nor question the value of the Reserve, it does bring into question the effectiveness of the system as used for this purpose.

Strategic Communication

Army Field Manual FM3-13 describes strategic communication as:

...focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.²⁰

This definition sounds a lot like public diplomacy. Adding to the confusion, a memo issued by Pentagon Spokesman George Little indicated a desire to eliminate the term and replace it with “communication synchronization.”²¹ In a *Foreign Policy* article, Rosa Brooks retorted that the memo itself “is just another shot fired in the ongoing skirmish” over internal definitional debates and not a reflection of institutional change at the Pentagon.²²

Tying it all together

As can be seen, public diplomacy conducted by the military incorporates or is related to a number of different practices within the Defense Department. Though some of these practices appear lumped together almost arbitrarily, it is more evident that despite efforts to compartmentalize, many of the activities undertaken by the military have public diplomacy effects that bleed across institutional divisions.

Though strategic communication has been an often-used term to describe the military’s efforts, internal and external confusion over the term has made it very difficult to determine what exactly it is, and how it truly relates to other government public diplomacy efforts. The wide variety of activities, definitions, and DoD institutions make it difficult, as especially as an outside observer, to accurately assign responsibility for how the U.S. military communicates with foreign audiences. Illustrating this, the following case studies demonstrate a wide variety of communications practices that can sometimes be difficult to categorize within the structural framework.



U.S. and Russian naval personnel during a port visit to Vladivostok in 2010. U.S. Navy photo

Case Studies

As institutionally confusing as the various elements of military public diplomacy may seem, it is more useful to understand its conduct as it occurs on the ground.

The purpose of these case studies is to observe the practice of military public diplomacy in order to better understand some of the challenges it faces.

Rather than focusing entirely on small projects by individual units, these studies analyze some of the broader programs designed to influence target audiences in foreign countries. These studies cover a wide variety of the types of activities conducted by the military around the world. While they are not all necessarily programs intended as public diplomacy efforts, they all incorporate issues that have public diplomacy consequences.

Leaflets in Afghanistan

Leaflets have long been perceived by the military as a valued tool of psychological warfare. Those touting their success routinely point to the surrender-instruction leaflets dropped during Operation Desert Storm in 1991.²³ The U.S. Air Force contends it had considerable success with print and broadcast messaging to Iraq in 2003, explaining that the heavy assistance of Iraqi exiles over the previous decade helped assure linguistic and cultural consistency with the target audiences.²⁴ However, for several reasons, the use of leaflets in Afghanistan presents a case of dubious results.

Firstly, the premise of using printed material like leaflets in a country with low literacy rates presents an immediate challenge. For a leaflet to be effective in Afghanistan, it has to convey a simple message without assuming that the viewer can read, and convince that viewer to take a specific course of action. Beyond just the fundamental issue of low literacy, the target audience must have familiarity and understanding of the images used—and images that are familiar to American producers of these materials might not be familiar to an Afghan audience.

As Afghanistan also has little television or print media, images that may seem commonplace to westerners may cause the target audience to draw a blank. For instance, images of Osama bin Laden or Taliban leaders in leaflet materials resonated little with rural Afghans who had no knowledge of what these figures looked like.²⁵ Subsequently, leaflets of these individuals depicted with crosshairs superimposed over their faces may not have conveyed the same message to Afghans as it did to Westerners. The RAND Corporation's Arturo Munoz explains:



Leaflets courtesy psywarrior.org

To the illiterate eyes of most of the target audience, the images of Taliban and al-Qai'da leaders in this leaflet might have been seen as just ordinary Afghans wearing turbans. This would have

been reinforced by the inclusion of the unknown Taliban at the far right. When the images of these ordinary Afghans are then turned into skulls in the leaflet, the impression could well have been that the U.S. military was threatening death to all Afghans, as opposed to the specific leaders pictured on the leaflet, unrecognizable as leaders to the target audience.²⁶

In another example, efforts to explain the international military presence in Afghanistan via leaflets depicting the 9/11 attacks also ran into trouble. Research performed by the International Council on Security and Development in 2010 indicated that 90% of men in Helmand and Kandahar did not see a link between the 9/11 attacks and the international military presence in Afghanistan.²⁷ While roughly 2/3 of interviewees could “recognize” photos of the World Trade center being struck by aircraft, they could not connect it to the 9/11 attacks or the justification for the military entry into Afghanistan.²⁸ This disconnect may demonstrate that while leaflets dropped in Afghanistan created familiarity with the image, that the lack of literacy resulted in an inability to understand what the images were about.

Much of the problem with regards to the leaflet campaigns revolves around fundamental misunderstandings of the target audience. From cultural misunderstandings, to language, to inability to collect appropriate metrics, these issues render many of these efforts ineffective at best and harmful at worst.

Further compounding the communications challenges leaflets posed, there has been criticism over what they actually accomplish. While some may be confounded at the premise of a “good intentioned” leaflet being harmful, Doctors Without Borders reported in 2004 that leaflets circulated by coalition troops in Afghanistan put aid workers at risk:

One leaflet pictures an Afghan girl carrying a bag of wheat and reads: “In order to continue the humanitarian aid, pass on any information related to the Taliban, El [sic] Qaeda and Gulbaddin.” Another leaflet reads: “Any attacks on coalition forces hinder humanitarian aid from reaching your areas.”

Threatening to withhold food, water and medical care unless Afghans gather military intelligence for the US military is far from humanitarian. Making assistance a tool of its military goals, the US contributes to suspicion and violence against aid workers, and puts all humanitarian aid workers in southern Afghanistan at risk. As a result, Afghans don’t get the help they badly need, and those providing aid are further targeted for attack.²⁹

Overall, the effectiveness of leaflets tends to be dependent on a number of factors, mostly surrounding a full understanding of the target audience. Though leaflet drops on the Iraqi military in both Gulf Wars proved effective in encouraging desertion or surrender and instructing troops on the proper ways to do so, their use on irregular forces or civilians in Afghanistan cannot be qualified as successful.

Take-aways

- Images familiar to originator may not resonate with target audience.
- Target audience literacy is important to maximize effectiveness.

- A full understanding of the target audience is necessary in order to craft a message that will resonate.
- Messages intended to invoke a certain course of action may be interpreted as hostile.

Trans-Regional Web Initiative

The Trans-Regional Web Initiative (TRWI) is an umbrella term for a series of DoD funded news websites that operate in regions where countering violent extremism (CVE) is a priority.³⁰ Though headed by Special Operations Command, each website in the program was operated by the corresponding combatant command for the targeted region. The program was defunded in the FY2014 NDAA.³¹

The genesis for TWRI came in 1999, in the form of Southeast European Times, a website originally aimed at countering messaging by Slobodan Milosevic.³²

For descriptive purposes, websites under the TRWI could be considered elements of a series of encompassing “voice operations.”³³ One example of a voice operation is Operation Objective Voice, which General William Ward described to the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2010:

OOV [Operation Objective Voice] is U.S. Africa Command’s information operations effort to counter violent extremism by leveraging media capabilities in ways that encourage the public to repudiate extremist ideologies. OOV is closely coordinated with U.S. embassies, DOS, and USAID, and employs a variety of messaging platforms, such as the African Web Initiative, to challenge the views of terrorist groups and provide a forum for the expression of alternative points of view. OOV also supports local outreach efforts to foster peace, tolerance, and understanding. Examples included a ‘youth peace games’ in Mali and a film project in northern Nigeria.³⁴

Those contributing written content to OOV (which may include TRWI sites) were people from the regions in which it operates.³⁵ But the type of content disseminated within voice operations may not always be innocuous. Operation Earnest Voice, under the purview of CENTCOM, included the use of software to create false personas online (known as “sock puppets”), complete with convincing histories, to post information on non-English websites favorable to U.S. positions.³⁶ This has the potential to harm credibility—and as *The Guardian* points out, General David Petraeus’ Counterinsurgency Guidance emphasized the need to “be first with the truth.”³⁷ Deliberately misleading foreign publics about the source of information is *not* truthful, and holds the potential to discredit the messenger no matter the validity of the information.



Fortunately, the TWRI websites upheld a standard of honest disclosure, as they contained an “about page”

which included a brief message disclosing U.S. DoD sponsorship. Considering this, and that TWRI program websites were components of a wider effort, they should not be confused for the Voice Operations themselves, nor the other programs alongside which they are encompassed.

Since 2009,³⁸ TWRI websites were coordinated by Special Operations Command through a contract awarded to defense contractor General Dynamics.³⁹ The TWRI websites themselves were operated through the geographic combatant commands. Identified websites included:⁴⁰

www.infosurhoy.com	SOUTHCOM	www.magharebia.com	AFRICOM
www.centralasiaonline.com	CENTCOM	www.khabarsouthasia.com	PACOM
www.al-shorfa.com	CENTCOM	www.khabarsoutheastasia.com	PACOM
mawtani.al-shorfa.com/	CENTCOM	www.agorarevista.com	NORTHCOM
www.setimes.com	EUCOMM	www.sabahonline.com	AFRICOM

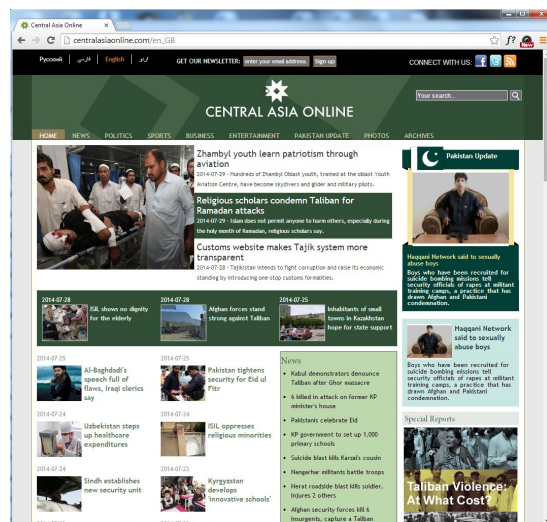
ISSUES

One major criticism of TWRI was that it duplicated capabilities which already existed in Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.⁴¹ Another is that TWRI blurred the lines between State Department and Department of Defense roles, ultimately damaging credibility and undermining the State Department's public diplomacy efforts.⁴² When asked for comments on the TWRI program, a BBG spokesperson informed ASP that though the BBG is aware of TWRI, the Board had “no official position to share at this point.”⁴³

Another issue raised with TWRI has been the lack of objective news produced by some of the sites. As these sites do not operate with the level of independence seen in the BBG's media companies, they could be seen as less-likely to report on information seen as critical of the United States. In other cases, reporting did not always reflect on-the-ground reality. In Foreign Policy, David Trilling criticized Central Asia Online for its lack of critical coverage on the Uzbek government.⁴⁴ Citing various reports from several of the U.S. agencies which criticize the human rights record of the Uzbek government, Trilling identifies several articles posted on Central Asia Online which praise or otherwise “whitewash” the Uzbek government's actions.⁴⁵

METRICS

Ultimately, the major dilemma with TRWI was measurement of whether it actually accomplished what it was intended to do, and there are a great deal of questions that must be answered to make this determination. These questions are not unique to the TRWI program. Did it reach the target audience? Was the target audience the right audience? How many visitors did it have? How long did they spend on the website? How



does this compare to the competition for the audience's attention? What percentage of traffic originated from the target region? Assuming the target audience was reached, what did they do with that information? This type of measurement is critical to gauging the success of a website, especially as websites must fight for audience attention often stolen from the myriad of alternatives out there.⁴⁶ Like television, radio, and print media, users must choose to open that website, unless those users are forcefully driven to that website through redirects or pop-up/under advertising methods.

Unfortunately, publically available metrics are difficult to come by. According to information revealed in the Tampa Tribune about TRWI's performance:⁴⁷

- 400-500 articles a month were reposted by viewers on other websites.
- Readers provided roughly 500,000 words per month in comments.
- Information presented on the sites sparked debate.
- The average article cost per read was 51 cents.

But none of these metrics mattered if the right people weren't being reached, nor did they provide comparative insight into the vast amount of competition providing alternatives to the websites.

After ASP inquired about the performance metrics used to evaluate the TRWI program, Special Operations Command stated that as the program is due to be terminated, they would not support the request for information.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, this deprives current and future practitioners of potentially valuable lessons learned.

Take-aways

- TWRI duplicated some capabilities already existing in the Broadcasting Board of Governors.
- Content must be monitored, not for censorship purposes, but to ensure coverage is accurate and reflective of on-the-ground reality.
- Performance metrics are vital for budget justification.
- Information posted online is not guaranteed to be read, especially given the number of competing sources.

Port Visits

Port visits (or port calls) are often routine stops made by various U.S. Navy ships to numerous ports around the world. During a port call, the crew often has the ability to disembark from the vessel and interact with the local population, and sometimes offers opportunities for civilians, foreign military, and government officials to go aboard the ship. The Department of Defense recognizes the effect this can have on an audience's perceptions, stating:

A Navy ship stopping in a foreign port—and the interactions of U.S. sailors with local populations, for instance—can have a significant impact on how Americans and U.S. policy are perceived by the host population, as can kinetic actions.⁴⁹

Understanding this, port visits can also be used as an instrument in the process of reestablishing relations between the U.S. and foreign countries. For instance, in 2003, *USS Vandegrift* became the first U.S. warship in 30 years to visit Vietnam.⁵⁰ The visit included hosting “hundreds of Vietnamese military, political and foreign business leaders, as well as international diplomatic corps officials for tours and an evening reception.”⁵¹ Other activities included a volleyball tournament with the Vietnamese Navy Technical school, and several community relations projects such as toy and supply donations,⁵² school building⁵³ and school improvements.



Crew members from USS Vandegrift digging a foundation in Vietnam. U.S. Navy photo

In 2007, the *USS Gary* became the first U.S. warship in 30 years to dock in Cambodia, representing a warming of relations, and providing opportunities for the crew to work on projects ashore.⁵⁴ The Navy uses these types of activities for building two-way relations. For example, Cmdr. Michael Misiewicz (a Cambodian ex-pat), in command of the *USS Mustin* during a Cambodian port visit in 2010, “made sure the Sailors aboard *Mustin* engaged with the Cambodian community through a wide variety of events that would help both sides learn more about one another and gain knowledge from their encounters.”⁵⁵

This included training with Cambodian sailors aboard the *Mustin*, as well as volunteer projects deep in-country.

In spite of their potential benefits, port visits do not necessarily guarantee improved relationships, and in some cases may cause issues of their own. For instance, the behavior of officers and crew visiting from ships at sea is crucial to the success of said visits. In 2012 the Navy disciplined officers from the *U.S.S. Vandegrift* (the same vessel previously mentioned) for their drunken and “rowdy” behavior during a visit to Vladivostok, Russia.⁵⁶ In another example of good intentions gone-awry, *USS Guardian* ran aground on a protected coral reef after a port visit to the Philippines in 2013, resulting in protests outside the U.S. Embassy in Manila.

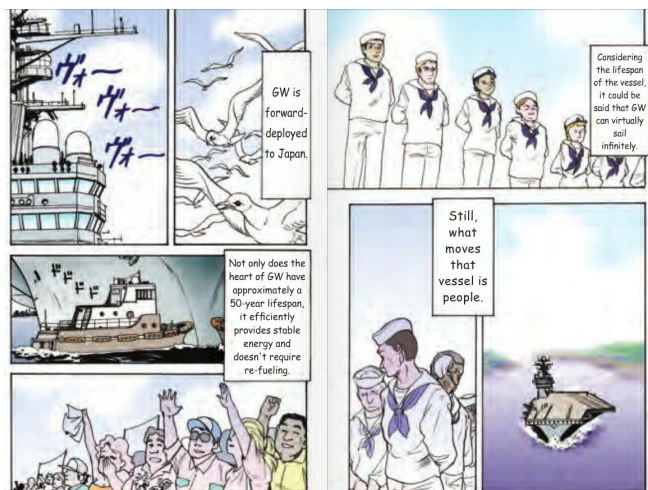
Further complicating the perspective of military port visits, a sometimes sensitive issue is the matter of naval vessels with nuclear propulsion—in some countries, populations express greater concerns about the presence of these vessels.

For instance, *USS George Washington* became the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to be stationed in Japan, replacing the non-nuclear *USS Kitty Hawk*. As portions of the Japanese population are decidedly and vocally “anti-nuclear anything,” the Navy anticipated the potential for protest. Adding to the potential for objection by the Japanese public, a fire onboard the *George Washington*, which delayed the originally intended deployment⁵⁷ date, raised fears about the overall safety of the nuclear-powered carrier.⁵⁸

In preparation for possible protests, the Navy produced 27,000 copies⁵⁹ of a 200-page Manga (Japanese comic)

titled “CVN-73”, depicting the life of a fictional American sailor of Japanese descent aboard the carrier.⁶⁰

The metrics for success conducted for this particular project are interesting, but also raise some questions. Initial distribution of the comic in front of Yokosuka Naval Base saw 800 copies handed out in 3 hours to a long line of people.⁶¹ However, it’s not quite clear if the *actual* audience reflected the *target* audience of ages 10-30, as initial distribution saw a sizeable portion of senior citizens.⁶² In addition to the physical copies, which were also given out at various events and distributed to several regional Japanese government bodies, the manga was also made available online.⁶³ Unfortunately, there do not appear to be metrics available for online



Pages from “CVN-73.”

distribution. Despite being requested by the manga project managers, the Navy website responsible for e-distribution neglected to implement a download counter,⁶⁴ making accurate assessment of audience reach impossible.

On the other hand, Navy personnel who worked on the project suggested that feedback from the Mayor of Yokosuka, the regional governor, and other Japanese government offices was very positive, and that rhetoric from the media decreased.⁶⁵ But ultimately, it is difficult to determine whether this particular effort had an effect on the view of the Japanese public, or eased the potential level of protest.

While home-porting as depicted in the case of the *George Washington* has a multitude of differences from typical port visits, especially in terms of longevity and logistics, there is a great deal of strategic weight associated with both types of activities.

Yet overall, though the PR benefits of port visits may seem apparent, more research should be put into a cost-benefit analysis of these efforts. Certainly, the benefits to sailors in need of liberty and the experience of “seeing the world” are immeasurable, but there should be more effort to track the long-term impact of such visits on the host population.

Take-aways

- Port visits are a primary point of people-to-people interaction and relationship building.
- A visit or home-porting carries with it a significant strategic message.
- Potential problems resulting from environmental conditions or incidents involving individual undisciplined crewmembers carry risk.
- Navy should consistently work with host government and private actors to prepare for arrival of vessels and establish preliminary and follow-up metrics for effects of visits.

The Commander's Emergency Response Program

The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) is essentially money available for use by troops on the ground to address emergency conditions encountered in their areas of operations. CERP is based on the military's principle of Money as a Weapon System (MAAWS), which conceptualizes the distribution of money and aid as a key counter-insurgency weapon. It is a rather unique practice, which doesn't have a direct parallel in civilian public diplomacy. It is a non-kinetic method by which soldiers on the ground attempt to address the population's perceived needs in order to influence their perceptions and actions.

The principle behind CERP has had a great deal of support within DoD. In Congressional testimony in February 2007, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained:



*CERP-provided farming equipment for Kirkuk.
U.S. Army photo*

Commander's Emergency Response Program or (CERP) funds are a relatively small piece of the war-related budgets...But because they can be dispensed quickly and applied directly to local needs, they have had a tremendous impact – far beyond the dollar value – on the ability of our troops to succeed in Iraq and Afghanistan. By building trust and confidence in coalition forces, these CERP projects increase the flow of intelligence to commanders in the field and help turn local Iraqis and Afghans against insurgents and terrorists.⁶⁶


As CERP is essentially a counterinsurgency program, the key measure of its effectiveness should relate to levels of violence, insurgency and stability. However, though this seems easy to measure, in reality it is rather difficult to ascertain. Logically, more money is spent in regions with higher levels of violence and destruction, making it difficult to identify causality trends between spending and the level of violence. At its most basic levels, the key question about CERP is whether or not CERP spending contributes to overall reductions in levels of violence. Analyzing the correlation between CERP spending and violence levels in Iraq, a 2011 study concluded:

Though regional spending on local public goods is unconditionally correlated with greater violence, once we condition on community characteristics, we find that this spending is violence-reducing. This violence-reducing effect of service provision became substantially stronger from January 2007 onward when operational changes meant that Coalition forces nationwide had a better understanding of their communities' needs. In that period every additional dollar per capita of CERP spending predicted 1.59 fewer violent incidents per 100,000 population per half year.⁶⁷

Keeping in mind the same study rated the average levels of violence at 58.6 incidents per 100,000, the authors also commented that CERP was most effective in the post-2007 era when government forces used methods that gave them a better understanding of community needs.⁶⁸ The study also concluded that "The vast majority of reconstruction spending (the non-CERP spending that constituted about 90 percent) had no violence-reducing effect."⁶⁹ This implies that CERP may be one of the most effective forms of aid in reducing violence,

but does not tell the whole story.

Though commanders on the ground generally have great leeway in determining how to use CERP funding, the CERP handbook issued by the Center for Army Lessons Learned outlines the permitted uses and restrictions:⁷⁰

Authorized Uses	Restrictions
Water and sanitation	Direct/indirect Benefit to US/Coalition/ Military personnel
Food production and distribution	Goods, services, Funds to national security forces
Agriculture	Weapons buy-back programs, firearms/ ammunition
Electricity	Entertainment
Healthcare	Reward Programs
Education projects that repair or develop educational facilities	Removal of unexploded ordnance
Telecommunications systems/infrastructure	Services available through municipal governments
Economic/Financial/Management improvement	Salaries, bonuses, pensions of Afghan or Iraqi military/civilian government personnel
Transportation	Training/Equipping/Operating cost of Afghan or Iraqi military/civilian personnel
Rule of law/governance	Psyops, IO, other security force operations
Irrigation	Support to individuals/private businesses with exceptions of condolence payments, battle damage payments, micro-grants
Civic Cleanup that removes trash and cleans up communities	
Civic support projects that purchase or lease vehicles	
Civic and cultural facilities	
Repair of damage caused by U.S./Coalition not compensable under the Foreign Claims Act	
Condolence Payments	
Payments to individuals upon release from detention	
Protective measures for critical infrastructure	
Humanitarian relief/reconstruction	

*Bales of U.S. Currency for CERP in Iraq. Image
courtesy airbornehodan-Flickr*

While the idea of having funding available to address immediate concerns of the local population may seem sound in principle, the effectiveness of the program is less clear when analyzed with more scrutiny.

One major criticism of the CERP program has been the ability for the Iraqi and Afghan governments to maintain the projects after they have been completed,⁷¹ a problem which undermines any long-term benefit brought by spending large amounts of money. Though there may be immediate or short-term benefits to expensive projects, those benefits made be quickly lost if those projects fall into disrepair due to lack of funding or lack of expertise when turned over to the host governments—and that is wasteful.

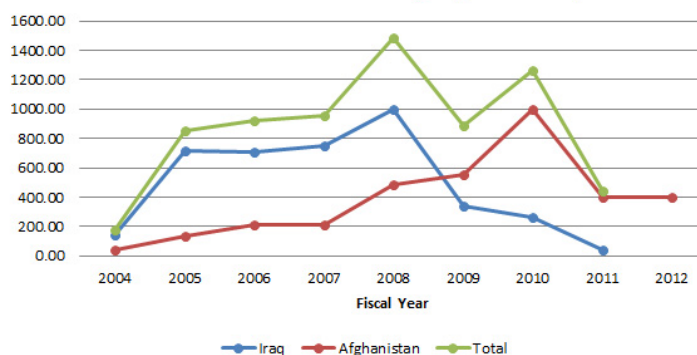
Another major criticism has revolved around paperwork for CERP projects, which the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) has routinely cited as inadequate or incomplete.⁷² The nature of paperwork omissions makes tracking the effectiveness of projects incredibly difficult. Given the amount of money spent, more than \$3.5 billion between FY2004-2010,⁷³ accurate paperwork is incredibly important for assuring accountability and protecting from corruption. SIGIR also determined that for the same period, 21% of all CERP spending was uncategorized—a percentage that was larger than any other single category of CERP spending.⁷⁴

In conclusion, the effectiveness of CERP spending is conditionally linked to other factors at play. Do the troops using CERP funds have proper information? Will this project influence the local population? How secure is the environment? Is the project likely to be destroyed in the conflict? Can the project be maintained by the host government? The answers to these questions all contribute to whether or not CERP spending is ultimately worth the cost.

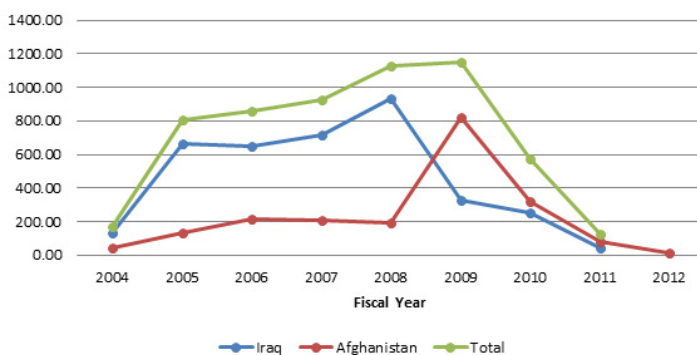
Take-aways

- Though in specific circumstances, money may have violence-reducing capabilities, its overall value for reducing insurgency is unclear. It is also a huge factor in corruption.
- Distribution of money must be effectively tracked and metrics must be established for effectiveness.
- Money should not be spent on projects beyond the capability of host governments to maintain or operate.
- Effectiveness is conditional on other factors contributing to the circumstances of the project.

CERP Allocated Funds (in \$ millions)



CERP Obligated Funds (in \$ millions)



Data from SIGIR/SIGAR

Military Exchange Programs

Military exchange programs are the basis for creating mutual, operational, and tactical understanding between the militaries of participating nations. Participation in exchange programs increases interoperability between militaries, helps allay concerns, and can be crucial in times of joint operations.

According to the U.S. Army, “Military-to-military exchanges build trust, improve understanding and communication, and pave the way toward greater cooperation.”⁷⁵ According to the State Department’s FY13 Budget Justification, military exchange and training programs are important because, “More professional militaries are less likely to block necessary political reform efforts.”⁷⁶

There are a large number of different exchange programs. One such program is the Military Personnel Exchange Program, which can be considered a “traditional” form of military exchange. Army Regulation 614-10 states the objectives for MPEP:⁷⁷

- Support priorities of AR 11–31, the Army Security Cooperation Strategy, DOD guidance, combatant command and/or commander campaign plans, and the Army Campaign Support Plan.
- Strengthen alliances and coalition partners by building partner capacity and maintaining or enhancing relationships in support of a global strategy.
- Increase defense cooperation by integrating U.S. and PN [partner nation] military personnel working in valid positions at the unit level.
- Provide a framework through bilateral exchanges of military personnel that prepare officers and NCOs for future assignments in support of multinational operations.

Further, the same regulation stipulates that military exchanges are to operate on a one-to-one basis, and that those participating should be of equal or equivalent rank.⁷⁸ Exchange participants essentially integrate into the partner nation’s military, and vary in duty assignments of 1 to 3 years.⁷⁹ However, U.S. personnel on exchange assignments do not participate in combat unless “expressly authorized” by the U.S. Government.⁸⁰ As an example of program size, the Navy, which operates its own MPEP program, averaged 200 assignments with 20 countries for the past three years.⁸¹



U.S. and Chinese officers discussing disaster relief. U.S. Army Photo

Another type of military exchange is foreign military training, which incorporates a variety of programs under the purview of the Departments of Defense and State. In FY2011, these training programs involved roughly 61,200 students from 158 countries at a total cost of approximately \$589.5 million.⁸²

There is also IMET (International Military Education and Training)—a type of military exchange/training

program, which the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) describes as “a key component of U.S. security assistance that provides U.S. training on a grant basis to students from allied and friendly nations.”⁸³ In 2013, DSCA contended that IMET:

...exposes students to the U.S. professional military establishment and the American way of life, including amongst other things, U.S. regard for democratic values, respect for individual and human rights and belief in the rule of law. Students are also exposed to U.S. military procedures and the manner in which our military functions under civilian control.⁸⁴

Exchanges are also intended to demonstrate transparency and openness. General Eugene Habiger, a retired four-star general was one of the first U.S. officers to tour Russia’s nuclear facilities. Responding to why he took Russian General Vladimir Yakaoulev on a tour of a U.S. Ohio class submarine, Habiger explained:

I wanted to show him that we were totally and completely open; that we had nothing that we wanted to keep from them. The primary purpose in taking him to Bangor, Washington, to the sub base area, in addition to taking him in the submarine and show [sic] him the quality of people and the condition of our equipment, but also to take him to the nuclear weapon storage site there, to show him how the United States Marines guard that facility. And again, there was a [sic] alternative method in my madness, [that] is that they would reciprocate. And they did, in less than 90 days. I went back over, and they took me to a submarine base. And again, it’s to build that confidence.⁸⁵

Yet despite the concept of “exchange” being two-way, there are instances where those exchanges tend to be more one-sided. In the case of the exchange program with Pakistan, few American officers participate for a variety of reasons, including security concerns.⁸⁶ Ideally, American participation in exchange programs should provide a wealth of experience and personal knowledge about foreign operations, providing key insight when the situation becomes necessary.

But aside from the information America can gain through military exchange, a key question is whether or not it influences the thought process or actions of foreign militaries in a way that helps secure U.S. strategic interests.

In Congressional testimony in 2010, Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman expressed the opinion that military to military engagement over the years resulted in specific action taken by the Egyptian military in wake of the Arab spring. He explained:

The statements that the military has made about understanding Egypt’s international obligations, upholding Egypt’s international obligations, are encouraging. We think that there is a basic understanding of the importance to Egypt of its international obligations, including the peace treaty with Israel.⁸⁷



The Wyoming National Guard maintains a state partnership program with Tunisia. USAF photo

Since the removal of President Morsi after mass public protests, many questions have been raised about the role of the military in the country. The key question for the U.S. revolves around how the relationships built with the military can be best utilized to support American strategic goals and assist Egypt's transition to democracy. Between 2000-2009, more than 11,500 Egyptian military officers studied or trained in the U.S., including President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and Defense Minister Sedki Sobhi.⁸⁸ It is vital that these relationships, particularly in this critical time, are not forsaken.

The case of Tunisia, a country in which the military refused to fire on civilians during protests, is also interesting. Tunisia was ranked in the top twenty recipients of IMET funding since 1994, and in the top 10 since 2003.⁸⁹ Since Tunisia's independence in 1956, the country has seen 4,600 military personnel receive training in American institutions.⁹⁰ Though causality cannot be proven, the military's decision to disobey President Ben Ali's orders to fire on protestors was instrumental to the course of the Arab Spring in that country. Did U.S. military exchange influence the thought process in this instance?

But it should also be noted that programs like IMET are not necessarily a guarantor of influence on participants' thought processes. In a small number of cases, forces trained under IMET programs have been accused of human rights abuses, resulting in modifications to courses to ensure a higher emphasis on respect for such rights.⁹¹

Another question involving exchange revolves around the rank-level at which they are most effective. Quoting Colin Powell, Joseph Nye contends that military exchanges are particularly useful at the mid-level, stating, "...if you get two generals together for a visit, you gain a few years of dividends, but if you get two majors together you reap the benefits for a few decades."⁹² This is mostly a consideration of time, not only reflecting the amount of time it may take for advancement in rank or political stature, but also the amount of time that individuals remain in positions of influence.

Attempting to empirically determine the impact of military exchanges, Carol Atkinson's research on the matter came to several conclusions. First, the overall trend is that states which send military officers to study at military institutes in the U.S. are more likely to see improvements in human rights than those states which do not.⁹³ Second, this is particularly significant when human rights are considered to include rights like freedom of speech, religion, political participation. Third, this is less-significant when considering rights such as physical or personal security.⁹⁴

In the end, perhaps the best explanation as to whether military exchange supports U.S. foreign policy goals is that it depends on which goal one is referring to, and whether or not the exchange is specifically geared towards addressing that issue. As such, the results may differ then the primary strategic goal may be regional stability vs. interoperability vs. relationship building within an alliance.

Take-aways

- Military exchange offers an opportunity to establish and maintain relationships of influence with the militaries of other countries.
- Military exchange programs provide a means of easing fears and misconceptions; they stand to provide

the means to less-adversarial relationships.

- Educational and training programs involving military exchange members must include respect for human rights and civilian government authority.
- The effects of military exchange may become apparent over a long term period, but are not guaranteed.

Female Engagement Teams

Originally formed in 2004 as “cordon and search teams,”⁹⁵ Female engagement teams (FETs) are essentially groups of female soldiers tasked with interacting and engaging the female populations in areas of operation where non-familial male interaction with women is not culturally acceptable. In these types of societies, female engagement teams gave the U.S. military access to the 50% of the population that would otherwise be unapproachable, and could serve as a listening tool.



USMC photo

Female engagement teams evolved from two programs in Iraq: the Lioness Program and the Iraqi Women’s Engagement Program (IWE).⁹⁶ The Lioness Program held the specific purpose of using women to search women. On the other hand, the IWE was created with more broad goals, pursuing techniques perceived by the military as being more appropriate for relationship building, such as medical help.⁹⁷

While from a tactical level, female engagement teams make perfect sense, their effect on the overall strategic objective may be less certain. Strategic effect in public diplomacy requires building trust-relationships with the target audience, and the real-world use of these teams was not conducive to doing so.

One issue with relationship building in conflict zones is that the tour-of-duty for military personnel is very short overall. It is difficult to build valuable, deep, personal relationships in a matter of months with only a few hours of interaction. This lack of long-term relationship planning can have short term ramifications as well, causing breakdowns in continuity for individual projects. As Lt. Col. Janet Holliday notes in the case of business projects in Afghanistan:

Anecdotal evidence, storyboards, and after action reports indicate the teams are making a difference with business projects, but empirical evidence and personal interviews show that when the relief in place/transfer of authority occurs, the successful projects are sometimes lost in transition and may take several months to start again.⁹⁸

In Afghanistan, FETs served only a short period from 2009-2012, after which they were replaced by Afghan men performing the “same role.”⁹⁹ How exactly these Afghan units perform the same role is unclear, as the very use of FETs is intended to provide interaction that men cannot.

Interestingly a Marine Corps document examining the best uses of FETs makes the point that FETs were *not* intended to be a copy of the Lioness Program for Iraq, stating: “the primary goal is not to conduct female searches.”¹⁰⁰ Essentially contending that FETs serve a strategic purpose, the document explains:

FETs primarily work in a civil affairs capacity, assisting with community development projects that can include women, engaging with key leaders and shopkeepers alike, helping with reconstruction efforts, and supporting civil society development. It is precisely because Marines provide tangible services in a civil affairs capacity that locals come to trust and appreciate their efforts. For this reason, the primary goals of female engagement should not be motivated by collection or security requirements. FETs serve in such a capacity only inasmuch as civil affairs teams do.¹⁰¹

However, the same document also encourages FET members to lie in ways that are perceived to increase trust by the population. While this may be done for safety reasons, this tactic could have negative consequences especially in cases where long-term engagement is desired. Nevertheless, the document states:

No matter what your marital status is, it is best to tell locals you are married and have children. It is also helpful to tell locals that one of the male Marines is a brother or cousin. Women traveling unaccompanied by male family members is very unusual (especially in large groups), and may inadvertently cause locals to have negative perceptions toward females trying to engage. More importantly, talking about married life and children is a great way to bridge a cultural gap and open conversation.¹⁰²

Furthermore, this type of recommendation goes beyond issues of cultural sensitivity, and paints an inaccurate picture of American culture. As public diplomacy is partially intended to create mutual understanding, being dishonest about these differences in culture is self-defeating, and represents diminished value on building true relationships. Of course, this premise of cultural understanding should not be used as justification for imposing American culture abroad.



U.S. Army photo

Beyond just engagement with women, on-the-ground experience in Afghanistan has also indicated that female soldiers have been effective at interacting with Afghan men. According to Pottinger, Jilani and Russo:

Many Pashtun men, far from shunning American women, show a preference for interacting with them over U.S. men. Pashtun men tend to view foreign women troops as a kind of “third gender.” As a result, female servicewomen are accorded the advantages, rather than the disadvantages, of both genders: they are extended the respect shown to men, but are granted the access to home and family normally reserved to women.¹⁰³

As indicated by these types of advantages, FETs can serve as an effective tactical tool in certain cultural environments. While this tool offers a great deal to battlefield commanders, the abilities it grants cannot make

up for deficiencies in policy.

In the end, the conceptual premise behind female engagement teams appears sound and effective as a public diplomacy technique. However, in practice, these techniques appeared most effective on a tactical level. The Lioness Program served a tactical purpose: conducting searches of local women, and answered a very basic combat need. The Female Engagement Teams' purpose appears to have been more strategically minded in that it provided a solution for an enormous communications problem, but ultimately did not address the political factors leading to instability.

Though research has revealed some anecdotal evidence of initial success, it appears that this success is limited by relatively short deployments and the relatively small number of teams. But more revealing, there is neither statistical nor quantitative evidence that the efforts of FETs have led to a strategic impact on the course of the war in Afghanistan, and most studies of the subject appear to point towards measures of output, rather than results.

Take-aways

- Women in the military can be an asset as a means of in-person communication with the local population.
- Women may provide tactical on-the-ground benefit for battlefield commanders, but have not been used in a way that has strategically affected the political basis for military conflict.
- The opening of combat positions for women in the military requires thinking about the expanded role these women will play in on-the-ground communications efforts with local populations.
- Tour of duty periods do not permit for significant or honest relationship building.

Human Terrain System

Human Terrain System is a military program created in 2006 to gather social and cultural knowledge in military areas of operation.¹⁰⁴

HTS is essentially an effort to listen¹⁰⁵ and better understand the populations affected by U.S. military operations. HTS employs the use of small Human Terrain Teams (HTT), on which civilian anthropologists serve to map out the “human terrain” in areas of operation. “Human terrain” is essentially about knowing your audience. Gathering historical, cultural, social, economic, ethnographic and gender data allows a communicator to understand better how actions and messages may be perceived, in addition to gaining greater knowledge of the needs of that audience.

The reasons for creating HTS were numerous. For instance, the tactical challenge provided by IEDs during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan prompted some in the military to call for a “non-technological” human component to a system for countering their placement.¹⁰⁶ Montgomery McFate and Steve Fondacaro, Senior Social Scientist and Program Manager respectively of the HTS program for its first four years, argue that it filled a gap left open by the goals of conventional intelligence gathering.¹⁰⁷ They contend that whereas

conventional intelligence seeks targets for “kinetic resolution,” (destruction, death, capture) HTS is more about gathering intelligence about the sociocultural environment.¹⁰⁸ Thus, HTS provides information on the human operating environment to the warfighter, rather than a targeting list.

Further solidifying support for HTS, the performance of the first field-tested HTT was praised by the fielding brigade commander and his staff, contending that the HTT’s work “helped reduce kinetic activity and therefore lowered brigade casualties.”¹⁰⁹



*Members of a human terrain team conducting research.
US Army photo*

As the program has evolved, human terrain teams are now comprised of “of 5 or 6 military and civilian personnel, and include 1 team leader, 1 or 2 social scientists, 1 research manager, and 1 or 2 analysts with specific local knowledge.”¹¹⁰ In a nod to the usefulness of Female Engagement Teams, “When possible, teams deploy with at least 1 female to facilitate access to the often inaccessible female population.”¹¹¹

While the principles behind HTS seem sound in concept, in-practice HTS has encountered a great deal of trouble and opposition. Some have criticized the program as being rife with payroll padding and ineffective research.¹¹² Another criticism is that the quality of civilian researchers in the HTS program has been poor. This can be partially attributed to shortfalls in properly trained anthropologists, as the mandated rapid size increase of the program in the years shortly after its creation led to demand outpacing supply.¹¹³

HTS also experienced significant opposition from groups like the American Anthropological Association, which argued that the potential misuse of information gathered as a tool for military targeting purposes violated their code of ethics.¹¹⁴ However, while this particular criticism may have its merits, it appears overblown in that it did not account for the potential of anthropological or social study to ultimately reduce the likelihood of violence visited upon the studied population.

A recent National Defense University study of HTS explored the factors that contributed to the success or failures of various HTTs. Amongst many findings, NDU highlighted the following problems:¹¹⁵

- Interpersonal conflict degraded team effectiveness.
- Training was often not reflective of on-the-ground reality in the field, and feedback from experience was not collected properly.
- Training attrition rate of 30%.
- The relative size of the total HTS force was not significant enough to create strategic effect. HTTs were not numerous enough to serve as a “comprehensive effort to collect and analyze cultural intelligence.”
- Short tours for HTTs and brigade commanders required constant readjustment in terms of interpersonal

relationships. Short tours also reduced expertise on “local conditions” and the lack of overlap between transitioning teams harmed effectiveness.

- Individual placement/replacement of team members meant that teams were not cohesive before and during deployment.
- “The quality of HTT recruits was highly variable,” and members were often not conditioned for the physical or mental requirements of operating in combat zones.
- “Autocratic team leaders” were a “major factor in notable team failures.”

Though the principle behind human terrain system was sound in that it was designed to give the military a better understanding of the populations it operates amongst, the program was extremely flawed in practice. Inherent problems with leadership, the necessary size of the program, and a low supply of properly trained anthropologists doomed the program from the start. As these problems were bound to occur due to the reality of what was available, it could be argued that the program itself was flawed in concept.

Take-aways

- Growing a specialized program too rapidly without proper resources (training, expertise) beyond funding can reduce the overall quality of individuals contributing and ultimately damage program effectiveness.
- Program feasibility should be analyzed thoroughly to verify that resources (supply), capabilities, and leadership exists prior to mandating expansion beyond the experimental stage.
- Despite significant funding, the overall small size of HTS was not significant enough to contribute strategic effect.
- HTS techniques may be more effective as an institutionalized form of (non-kinetic) intelligence gathering.

Military Information Support Teams (MIST)

Military Information Support Teams are groups of 3-8 military personnel funded by U.S. Special Operations command to support, augment, and broaden existing public diplomacy efforts in U.S. embassies.¹¹⁶ MISTs are deployed to U.S. embassies at the request from the relevant U.S. Ambassador.¹¹⁷ In the case of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in 2011, PA staff was comprised of 35 State Department employees and a 9-person MIST.¹¹⁸

In addition to providing traditional PD support, MIST teams are also aimed at augmenting capacity within the host nation. This can include military training with regards to MISO capabilities, such as increasing the host nation’s military’s ability to affect attitudinal change amongst its own populations.¹¹⁹ Though there is debate within the PD community about whether or not the Defense Department should be involved in public diplomacy, the key question surrounding the use of MISTs should be less about *if* they should be used, and more about whether or not they work.

A Senior State Department Official interviewed for this report expressed the personal opinion that MISTs

should be considered “value added” in the form of resources, manpower and expertise, and that their overall contribution should be seen as positive.¹²⁰

The State Department official’s assertion that the MISTs are “value” added comes as no surprise. A 2009 State/BBG OIG report indicated that MIST teams were sometimes substantially better funded than their State Department counterparts. For instance, representing a significant imbalance, the State Department in Somalia held a public diplomacy budget of \$30,000, whereas the MIST held a budget of \$600,000.¹²¹ But it is not just funding and manpower that MISTs bring to bear. Further adding to their value, as military personnel, MIST members might be able to move more freely in conflict zones than their civilian counterparts,¹²² as security considerations often place greater restrictions on civilians. However, it appears that the movement of these teams outside of the embassies occurs at the discretion of the chief of mission.¹²³

Another question surrounding the use of MISTs concerns the effect that the messenger has on the effectiveness of the message. While some may raise the question about message credibility from a military vs. civilian institution, the State Department official interviewed contended that foreign populations generally don’t distinguish the source—regardless of what agency U.S. messengers belong to, they are all labeled as Americans.¹²⁴ Contrasting this notion, depending on the agreement made with the embassy out of which they operate, MIST members are not necessarily required to wear uniforms while on duty.¹²⁵ This could represent recognition that military uniforms do have an effect on audience perceptions.

Further supporting this idea, there is clearly a view within the Pentagon that labels can affect credibility. For example, the decision to change the term Psychological Operations into MISO is a clear reflection of this concern, as “PSYOP” is believed to have a negative effect on message credibility.¹²⁶

Given that MISTs are essentially an interagency operation, it also is important to note that members of the MISTs are subordinate to an embassy’s Public Affairs Office.¹²⁷ Subordination is part of the training for MISTs, and the State Department sometimes sends personnel to assist in their training.¹²⁸

As thinking about America’s role in the world evolves, there may be questions as to the future utility of MISTs. In a recent GAO report, a concern was raised that MISTs typically do not have end goals, making tracking their progress towards success difficult.¹²⁹ However, it is arguably inappropriate to apply “end goals” to certain types of communication efforts. Though goals should be established, public diplomacy is an ongoing process: while certain projects may end, effective public diplomacy requires maintaining a relationship beyond the end of specific programs. The end question is, are MISTs a necessary component of these relationships?

Take-aways

- DoD and State Department interagency cooperation, coordination, expertise and resource sharing can be effective.
- Significant DoD funding can contribute to overall PD apparatus, but raises questions about resource lopsidedness given the intended purpose of these different government agencies.
- Both State Department and DoD should take advantage of opportunities to benefit the overall effectiveness of PD, but seek ways to better define roles, and improve interagency coordination.
- The future of MISTs is dependent on the circumstances of individual missions.

Best Practices

ASP's New Public Diplomacy Imperative established a series of 10 best practices for public diplomacy practitioners. While those practices still hold relevant for the military, there are special considerations that should be given additional credence in military usage. For this reason, the 10 best practices here are recommended to be followed by military practitioners, while keeping the civilian version in mind.

1.) Identify strategic vs tactical goals

Just as weapons have strategic and tactical uses, so too does communication. Battlefield operators must conceptually understand the strategic vs. tactical implications of the communications they choose to employ.

For military public diplomacy practitioners, the policy objectives must be identified before a communications strategy can be formed to provide support. These objectives, whether short term or long term, will help the practitioner identify the methods by which these objectives can best be reached.

A tactical communication, such as a leaflet drop warning residents to leave an area before a military operation, may prove effective in encouraging those residents to evacuate. However, though this may result in fewer civilian casualties in these areas, the overall resentment from being forced to abandon one's home can still cause long-term strategic harm. In another example, signage, signals, or other tactics developed for road blocks and check points in occupied areas may help establish a more manageable system of security checks, but fails to address the underlying needs for these checks in the first place.



A checkpoint in Iraq. Photo courtesy Jayel Aberam, Flickr

On the strategic level, communications have much broader goals. They can be intended to establish or change a narrative. They may be part of an overall plan to affect politics within a country. But these types of communications are much more difficult to implement effectively. Communications that don't address the perceptions of the target audience are unlikely to be successful. Therefore, if a communications strategy is formulated on trying to convince an audience of something contrary to the reality it sees, the chances of success are minimal. This is especially critical to understand in warzones.

2.) Understand your target audience

Crafting an effective message that will resonate with a target audience is dependent on an understanding of that audience. While all messages intended to affect an audience's course of action require a certain level of knowledge about that audience, crafting messages and narratives with strategic objectives often requires a much more nuanced understanding.

The U.S. must also be mindful of the perceptions, desires and culture of the target audience. American ideals of freedom and democracy cannot be assumed to translate or reflect the actual desires of those populations with

which we interact. Audiences with no democratic experience may be weary of the perceived or actual instability brought about by the institution of democratic processes. The 2004 DoD Strategic Communications report mentioned earlier stressed:

Today we reflexively compare Muslim “masses” to those oppressed under Soviet rule. This is a strategic mistake. There is no yearning-to-be-liberated-by-the-U.S. groundswell among Muslim societies — *except to be liberated perhaps from what they see as apostate tyrannies that the U.S. so determinedly promotes and defends.*¹³⁰ [emphasis original]

The same report continues:

What message can generate the desired impact on the targeted audience? We must begin by listening to that audience, because if we do not understand what resonates with them we have only a serendipitous chance of succeeding. Much of the current U.S. effort concentrates on delivering “the message” and omits the essential first step of listening to our targeted audiences.¹³¹

As the report alludes, the message does not exist entirely independently. Rather, while reflecting U.S. foreign policy, the success of the message is also dependent on resonating with the target audience to which it’s tailored. By understanding the target audience, and incorporating that understanding into strategic planning, the U.S. is better able to develop the methods and messaging to better achieve its foreign policy objectives.

3.) Training

Over the past decade, the military has made an effort to better train its military to interact with the cultures its personnel experience abroad. This training is inherently designed to increase mutual understanding between the military and civilians in the areas it operates, and ultimately be considered an effort to maximize the effectiveness of military operations in foreign countries.

One issue in training is that of general vs. region-specific cultural training. As military units have been historically deployed according to military necessity as opposed to geographic preference, it was often difficult to predict what type of cultural training soldiers should receive. There are several efforts underway to address this dilemma. Allison Abbe and Melissa Gouge explain in *Military Review*:

The military services have partly resolved the debate over the merits of each by adopting both. Pre-deployment cultural training tends to be highly tailored to the country and cultures that personnel will encounter on their upcoming deployment, whereas professional military education employs regional or culture-specific elements in addition to more general principles and skills.¹³²

This system essentially aims to provide soldiers with general cultural training so that they can adapt quickly to varying cultural environments while deployed in the field.

One other strategy that addresses this issue has been the very recent institution of regionally aligned forces assigned to the combatant commands.¹³³

But training also needs to go beyond the average grunt, and ensure that the personnel whose job it is to run communications efforts are professionally capable of the tasks they are assigned. As such, Lt. Colonel Rumi Nielson-Green argues that public affairs officers are in need of more training, comparing their 43-day specialized qualification training against the 6-month minimum training many other specialties receive.¹³⁴ As indicated by the troubles exhibited by Human Terrain System, the lack of proper training of civilians can also have a catastrophic effect.

Though cultural training cannot eliminate the chances of a cultural “snafu,” it is vital for reducing the chance of errors and improves the warfighting capability of troops operating in these areas. Therefore, it is vital that MISO be understood and treated as a core competency. Proper training can improve troops’ understanding of the populations they operate amongst, allowing for better predictions of reactions to military and information operations. This understanding needs to be maximized beyond the limits of the relatively small foreign area officer (FAO) programs and ensure the military has sufficient personnel that are always regionally focused. Expanding the FAO or similar programs designed to enhance expertise must not be done in a manner that sacrifices quality of personnel for numbers.



Proper PD training involves teaching more than just technical skills. US Army photo

4.) Craft an appropriate message

Crafting an appropriate message first involves developing a *simple* narrative that both resonates with the target audience and supports the policy objective.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban narrative of law and security while depicting themselves as defenders against an imperialist-infidel invading force may have proved more effective than complicated Western narratives in some areas. American narratives of retribution for 9/11, and support for the Afghan government do not resonate for several reasons. As discussed in the case studies, it is difficult to explain 9/11 to an audience not-immediately affected by the attacks or with no relationship to those events. Furthermore, promoting a government which appears corrupt to the population and is unable to provide security has little appeal in comparison to the law and order alternative offered by the Taliban, however harsh it may be. Though the actual communicative abilities of the Taliban may not be as effective as some insinuate,¹³⁵ the basis of this narrative can be powerful.

It is also crucial that any message or narrative not contradict the actual “on the ground” experiences of the target audience. Creating communications campaigns that are contrary to what people experience tends to erode credibility. Considering this, matching the message with the experience of the target audience also requires that messages match with actions. Following-up words with actions helps to increase credibility and close the “say-do” gap.



An example of a “cash for weapons” billboard in Afghanistan that might not accomplish its intended purpose. Image courtesy psywarrior.com

5.) Be truthful

Many documents produced by the department of defense have stressed the importance of truthfulness in strategic communications. Truthfulness is a primary factor in the credibility of a message, and helps build as basis for a continued level of trust. Untruthful propaganda tends to be harmful and easily discovered in the information age. Being repeatedly truthful, even when that truth does not favor the United States, serves the long term strategic credibility of the American word.



U.S. instructors training Iraqi troops. U.S. Army photo

In a June 2013 article for *Stars and Stripes*, Heath Druzin explored issues of military truthfulness, finding that particularly with regards to Iraq and Afghanistan, the military has made conscious efforts to tell a more “positive” side of the wars.¹³⁶ This has included inaccurate or contradictory statements made regarding levels of violence, the combat effectiveness of indigenous government forces, and a tendency to “steer embedded reporters away from combat zones and try to get them instead to write about ‘feel-good stories.’”¹³⁷

But doesn’t the U.S. have an interest in telling the positive side of its story? Not at the expense of the truth.

Being truthful is really about long term strategy. While certain information may depict the United States in a negative light, it is important to acknowledge these problems for the sake of credibility. This ultimately improves the ability of the military to counter the spread of potentially more damaging misinformation, as it increases the likelihood that the target audience will give America the benefit of the doubt in such situations.

6.) Appropriate Resources

Several military programs which could or should have proven more effective have suffered from a lack of resources, whether those resources come in the form of personnel, equipment, or knowledge. Subsequent attempts to rapidly staff these specialized programs have sometimes had negative results, particularly in the case of Human Terrain System. In this case, the attempts to unrealistically increase the size of HTS resulted in an improperly trained, improperly managed, and improperly qualified force.

On the other side of the coin, the increased resources in terms of manpower, expertise, and funding have contributed to the effectiveness of Military Information Support Teams, in the sense that they have increased the capabilities of State Department public diplomacy efforts.

7.) Public diplomacy is everyone’s job

As discussed earlier, the debate within DoD about roles and responsibilities has clouded the effectiveness of communications efforts. It also contributes to an inability to generate a “whole of government” approach. While the job of designing and implementing communications campaigns may fall under the purview of specific people or commands, the actions of the individual soldier can have unproportionately grave implications

irrespective of rank or position. The Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal serves as a prime example.

This does not imply that every soldier should be doing strategic communication on his or her own, rather that every soldier should be aware of the consequences of their actions on a public diplomacy level. Nor does it imply that duplication of efforts should be allowed run rampant; different agencies need to be aware of how their work factors into a cohesive and coordinated public diplomacy environment.

8.) Measure effectiveness—not just output

Establishing proper metrics for evaluation should be a required element of any military public diplomacy effort. A system of metrics should be required whether that effort is conducted by directly the military or by a contractor. This is vital for determining mission and resource effectiveness.

As part of this, it is crucial that tracking systems be implemented and enforced, as the data inputted into these systems is a vital part of examining program effectiveness. For instance, a lack of enforced procedure and paperwork has been an ongoing problem for measuring CERP effectiveness.

The key issue in evaluating military public diplomacy, as with much of public diplomacy, is tracking movement towards achieving specific objectives. This is less about territory seized, or enemy forces destroyed, and more about determining how messaging and relationship building has resulted in tangible action by the target audience favorable to your objective. This also requires baseline data.

It is inherently difficult to measure whether or not public opinion on its own contributes to achieving specific goals. This is especially apparent when public diplomacy efforts are geared more towards listening and understanding the target audience, as these efforts to gain information do not contain an advocacy element.

Perhaps the simplest way of determining the metrics for a particular communications program is to refer back to the original policy goal, and measure whether it has been achieved. If a communicator knows what needs to be strategically accomplished, that goal *can* often be measured. The communicator must then decide how and to what extent public diplomacy can contribute to this goal. That will determine what metrics need to be applied. While sounding exceedingly basic, this understanding is seemingly often left out of the planning process, and inappropriate metrics are then substituted. It is also inappropriate to assume that a communications campaign on its own will directly correlate to desired behavior by the target audience—public diplomacy is merely one component in an integrated strategy to influence behaviors.



*Distribution of the message is not a measure of effectiveness.
USMC photo*

Within military public diplomacy, measures of effectiveness (MOE) are unfortunately often substituted with measures of activity or performance. In a report for the Strategic Studies Institute at the Army War College,

Dr. Steve Tatham explains:

If any thought is given to MOE, then it is regularly in the context of measures of performance (MOP) or measures of activity (MOA). For example, the MOA associated with an airborne leaflet drop is that the necessary aircraft and equipment were serviceable and available to make a certain number of predetermined sorties. The MOP is that a specific number of leaflets or other products were dropped. The MOE, however, is the specific action(s) that the leaflets engendered in the audiences that they targeted.¹³⁸

Thus, the key measurement in military public diplomacy is not of output, or necessarily even of opinion, but rather of tangible action (or perhaps inaction) taken by the target audience.

9.) Build and maintain relationships

A common term used to describe public diplomacy efforts is “winning hearts and minds.” This is an incorrect way to look at the practice. Paraphrasing Dr. Nicholas Cull, “Public diplomacy is not about winning hearts and minds. It is about building relationships, and you can’t win a relationship.”¹³⁹

Building trust relationships is key in establishing credibility and influence, and can help break down stereotypes or misconceptions. Joseph Nye described effective long-term relationships in public diplomacy as creating “an enabling environment for government policies.”¹⁴⁰ Relationships take time to build, and the military deployment system currently in place makes building meaningful long-term relationships difficult.

Building a relationship over time creates a basis from which trust is generated. Once trust and credibility is established, influence may be exerted more effectively. If that relationship is not maintained, all the work that has gone into its construction can be easily lost.



USAF photo

In an effort to resolve this very issue, 2009 saw the creation of the AFGPAK Hands program, intended to “build trust with the military and local populations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan,”¹⁴¹ by implementing intense cultural and language training for soldiers in the program, and significantly extending the time deployed in theater. Subjective assessment of the program has been mixed, with the Defense Department touting its success,¹⁴² and a fair amount of pointed criticism arising from a number of participants in the program.¹⁴³

Yet in order to build a solid relationship, the target audience must see value in such a relationship. This requires listening, and giving that target audience the impression that they are valued and respected. In Afghanistan, Jirgas and Shuras offer primary opportunities to do this. To maximize the potential of these activities, those attending Shuras or Jirgas on behalf of the U.S. military should be fully aware of the complexities of the social interactions and customs occurring at these events.¹⁴⁴

10.) Wield physical power cautiously

While bullets, artillery, missiles and bombs all send a specific and often effective message, they should not be mistaken as the most effective tools of messaging for every situation. Nor should military public diplomacy practitioners (or their critics) assume that a message can be fired downrange to have immediate impact in the way that munitions do. Military planners must keep in mind that the use of physical coercive power may not always be the best use of resources, manpower, or be the most effective means of influencing a target audience.

When interacting with foreign populations, a uniformed soldier, carrying weapons (even holstered), and covered with body armor, sends messages by appearance alone.¹⁴⁵ One is a message of intimidation, another is a message of fear—that that particular soldier does not feel “safe” at that given moment—and a third could be an improved sense of security. These messages can affect human intelligence (HUMINT), affect the way people respond to questions, and create a situation which skews the accuracy of data collected as locals feel intimidated into giving you the answers they think you want.



U.S. Army photo

The use of physical power also has the very real risk of causing civilian casualties, which may serve to increase the support network of a military adversary. Understanding this, ISAF has made a point to encourage restraint in the use of force, highlighting incidents in which troops exercised “courageous restraint” despite life-threatening situations.¹⁴⁶ Despite this, civilian casualties can and do happen, and every incident causes not only a loss of life, but a loss of credibility as well.

In essence, the very concept of strategic communication revolves around the notion that it increases the policy effectiveness of an actor. Effective strategic communication incorporates a fundamental understanding that it is not a replacement for the force of arms, but that it can complement, or sometimes work more effectively than force in particular situations; in some cases, the use of force can actually counteract the effectiveness of an actor’s message.



US Army photo

Applying Best Practices to the Case Studies

Best Practice	Applicable Case Study	Conclusion
Identify Strategic vs Tactical Goals	Female Engagement Teams	Genesis for FETs was a tactical need to interact with and search women. Strategic importance of women was understood, but small size of the program cannot achieve strategic change.
	Human Terrain System	Tactical necessity of overcoming IED threat led to a strategic but ineffective effort to better understand the operating environment.
Understand the Target Audience	Leaflets in Afghanistan	Leaflets made assumptions about the target audience and neglected lack of audience image familiarity.
	Female Engagement Teams	Understanding of culture necessitated the use of women as communicators to reach significant portion of population.
Training	Human Terrain System	Lacked sufficient numbers of properly trained anthropologists.
	MISTs	State Department personnel are integrated into the training process for MIST members.
Craft an Appropriate Message	Military Exchange	Military cooperation demonstrates desire to build relationships, but unclear whether American principles of governance are always accepted.
	Leaflets in Afghanistan	Messages were sometimes counterproductive or did not resonate with the target audience.
Be Truthful	TRWI	Lack of critical coverage on Uzbek government caused loss of credibility.
	Port Visits	CVN-73 manga directly addressed real risk of fire and accidents aboard ships.
Proper Resources	Human Terrain System	Mandated/rapid expansion of the program did not account for the lack of appropriate human capital to successfully carry out the mission.
	MISTs	Well-funded, well-staffed, and increases the overall resources available to PD missions.
Public diplomacy is everyone's job	MISTs	The integration of MISTs into the embassy environment is useful for interagency coordination and maximizing effectiveness of resources across government.
Establish Metrics	CERP	Tracking for CERP spending was insufficient for proper analysis.
	Military Exchange	Greater emphasis should be placed on tracking whether exchange participants are influenced by various programs.
Build Relationships	Military Exchange	Military exchange programs are designed to increase understanding and familiarity between forces, enabling the U.S. to have partners in foreign countries.
	Port Visits	Port visits are often involve direct interaction between the military and the public. They can be incredibly symbolic in establishing new relationships.
Wield Physical Power Cautiously	Female Engagement Teams	Understands how women could be used tactically to interact with local population, but fails to achieve strategic breakthrough.
	CERP	Recognizes that not all problems can be solved with destructive force, but improper records make final impact difficult to gauge.

Conclusions

The primary issue surrounding military public diplomacy is that of effectiveness. How can public diplomacy techniques be utilized to not only increase mission effectiveness, but to decrease the need for kinetic action?

The reality of the combat environments faced by the United States military in the post 9/11 era placed America's servicemen and women into regions where the power of the bullet was not necessarily the deciding factor in the outcome of the war. Rather than being a war of "ideas," as some have contended, the 21st century battlefield is really a war of information, perception, and influence.

In fighting counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military engaged not only in kinetic warfare, but in information warfare as well. On a daily basis, soldiers were committed to a deliberate effort to influence the opinions and actions of the general public.

But military public diplomacy has not, is not, and will not be limited to the perceived requirements of counterinsurgency. Military PD has a long tradition in various types of exchange, and through the visits and stationing of U.S. forces abroad.

What is key for military planners to understand is that output does not equate effect. No matter how many press releases issued, websites built, soldiers trained, or shuras held, greater emphasis needs to be placed on the *results* of these efforts. Are America's exchange efforts actually instilling military professionalism and support for democratic values? Are they increasing America's ability to work with its allies? Is the target audience actually able to consume the information the military disseminates? And is that information actually influencing the actions of foreign audiences? How do we know this?

Certainly, these can be difficult to track metrics for, as some elements may be intangible or occur over generations, but these factors must be considered when engaging in public diplomacy.

Additionally, interagency coordination between DoD, the State Department, and USAID is vital.

This isn't about stepping on anyone's toes, or encroaching on an agency's budget. Rather, it is about coordinating efforts, being on message, and sharing information, knowledge and expertise in a way that better achieves the diplomatic or military mission.

In the end, the practice and analysis of these activities points to a fundamental question: "What is our strategic goal?" Is that goal achievable with the tools, resources and personnel available? And can these elements contribute to an *achievable* goal in a way that justifies their cost?

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