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FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



ANNEX 3-61 PUBLIC AFFAIRS OPERATIONS

PA PRINCIPLES

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The purpose of Air Force [public affairs](#) (PA) operations is to communicate timely, accurate, and useful information about Air Force activities to Department of Defense (DOD), Air Force, domestic, and international audiences. PA operators enhance their ability to meet commanders' information requirements by adhering to the following principles of public information:

- ★ Tell the truth.
- ★ Deliver time-critical information in time.
- ★ Engage the media.
- ★ Practice security at the source.
- ★ Coordinate and be consistent.
- ★ Strive for accuracy.
- ★ Be relevant.
- ★ Integrate with other operations.
- ★ Seek fusion of information.
- ★ Ensure [unity of effort](#).
- ★ Be survivable, sustainable, and deployable.

Tell the truth

Truth is the foundation of all public affairs operations. Truth enables credibility; credibility allows US military personnel to be believed or heard over an adversary or competing message.

Commanders should use PA operations to provide accurate and useful information to the public in a timely manner. The long-term success of Air Force operations depends

on maintaining the integrity and credibility of officially released information. Lying or attempting to deceive the public will destroy trust and support for the Air Force and PA operations.

Deliver time-critical information in time

Commanders should be prepared to release timely, coordinated, and approved information about military operations. Commanders should know the guidance for media engagement prior to initiating operations. Establishing media guidance requires aggressive coordination through the [chain of command](#), and establishing the guidance prior to initiating operations will enable the commander to provide time-critical information. Difficult issues and events that are potentially unfavorable to the Air Force should be addressed openly, honestly, and as soon as possible; maximum disclosure permissible with minimum delay.

A B-1 Lancer flying an Operation ENDURING FREEDOM mission crashed into the Indian Ocean the night of December 12, 2001. Shortly afterward, Defense Department spokeswoman Victoria Clark addressed reporters at a Pentagon press conference explaining the situation and that all four crewmembers had been rescued. Media access to the crew was granted very quickly, including video of the Airmen aboard the Navy ship involved in the rescue. The very next day, because the military was proactively addressing the press with information, it became a non-story. When Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Richard Myers held their regularly scheduled press conference, only one question was asked about the cause of the B-1 crash.

—Pentagon News Service Report, 2002

Information should be released quickly, even though it may be uncomplimentary for the Air Force. Attempting to deny unfavorable information or failing to acknowledge its existence leads to media speculation, creates the perception of a cover-up, and results in lost public trust in the Air Force while degrading the effects of other capabilities of PA operations. The delay in addressing unfavorable issues also provides adversaries with an uncontested opportunity to dominate the public [information environment](#), twisting the facts to support their claims.

Engage the media

Reporters covering operations should be given access to units and [Airmen](#) and, whenever feasible, be included in the operation at the unit level. Integrating journalists into units gives the media a unique perspective, a chance to know the Airmen, and an opportunity to understand and experience the Air Force. The increased access and insight allow a reporter to more thoroughly and accurately tell the Air Force story, strengthening our global influence and deterrence, building public trust and support, and enhancing Airman morale.

Differences in philosophies, values, and perspectives may lead to misunderstandings between military professionals and the media. The media will be a constant factor in any military operation, and rather than considering the media as an adversary, commanders and planners need to actively engage them whenever practicable.

Providing accurate and timely information to the media educates the media about military operations, creates a bond of trust between the media and the military, and results in more accurate reporting. DODD 5122.05, Enclosure 3, [Statement of DOD Principles for News Media Coverage of DOD Operations](#), provides guidance for commanders and PA to facilitate media engagement. Refer to [Appendix B](#) for additional information.

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

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

Practice security at the source

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

PA personnel should work closely with OPSEC program managers to ensure PA products are as thorough as possible without endangering OPSEC. Commanders should ensure security reviews are performed and release authority is granted at the lowest possible level to ensure the effectiveness of their PA operations. Unnecessarily lengthy security reviews of operational information may degrade operational effectiveness. The tone and message will be set by the first to enter the public information environment. The timely release of information is a force multiplier, while delays limit the effectiveness of PA operations and increase the opportunity for adversaries to get their story out first.

Coordinate and be consistent

Commanders should strive for the release of coordinated and consistent information at all levels of command. The IE provides the public with information about military operations from a variety of military units. Sources in theater and at the Pentagon are often quoted in the same media reports. Conflicting statements or inconsistent information can cause skepticism, undermine public trust and support, damage Airmen's morale, and degrade the strength of global influence and [deterrence](#) efforts. Commanders should ensure the Air Force puts forth a consistent message through its many Airman "voices." Information should be appropriately coordinated and in compliance with official DOD, supported command, Service, and major command guidance before it is released to the public. Commanders should ensure PA operations are coordinated, integrated, and deconflicted with air, space, cyberspace, and information operations. [Military information support operations](#) (MISO) information and the information prepared for public release should be coordinated and deconflicted to ensure the messages to the respective audiences are not contradictory.

Strive for accuracy

In April 1999 Operation ALLIED FORCE F-16s mistakenly struck two civilian convoys in Kosovo. For almost a week, conflicting information came from NATO, EUCOM, and Washington. Images of the scene led evening newscasts. After a week of conflicting stories and negative media headlines, NATO approved the Aviano AB commander to brief the "ground truth" to the international media. His highly detailed explanation set the issue to rest that day. However, some officials came to believe that NATO's slow response to the incident could have cost NATO its credibility. Had NATO been given accurate information to immediately release – putting the incident into the proper context for the world audience – the Serbs would have been denied the enormous propaganda value the incident and its initial handling gave them.

**—Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War against Serbia
Aerospace Power Journal, Summer 2000**

One of the most demanding tasks for PA professionals during operations is the need to balance expediency with requirements for accuracy. At times it may be necessary to release as much accurate information as is available and provide updates as more information is obtained. Accuracy of all the information must always be the higher priority, but it should not unnecessarily delay release of accurate information available at the time.

Every member of the Air Force can help provide accurate information to the public about the Air Force and its operations. Commanders should educate and encourage

their military and civilian personnel to tell the Air Force story by providing them with timely, accurate information appropriate for public release.

Be relevant

PA operations must be well-planned, executed, and assessed. This is necessary to ensure PA operations are relevant to commanders, the operations are fully integrated, and the operations meet desired objectives. PA products and resources must be developed and focused to achieve and complement the commander's intent and operational objectives. Likewise, these products and resources must be continually assessed to ensure they adequately address public interest.

Integrate with other operations

PA operations are most effective when their capabilities are integrated into strategic, operational, and tactical plans and employed by commanders at all levels to achieve desired effects. Failure to integrate PA operations in the [strategy development](#) and [planning phases](#) can result in a reduced ability to affect the public information environment and increased likelihood of conflicting with other objectives.

It is vital to overall operational success that PA is a part of the strategy development and planning phases. Similarly, as an essential element of operations, PA must be fully aware of operations goals and objectives and be fully integrated at all levels.

Seek fusion of information

Information from many sources is combined, evaluated, and analyzed to produce predictive awareness of the public information environment and identify PA opportunities. This process is called fusion. Fusion helps defeat adversary [propaganda](#) and misinformation efforts by providing PA operators with information from multiple sources, building a more complete picture of the public and IE. Care must be taken not to promote fusion at the expense of timeliness: significant information that accurately tells a part of the story should be released as soon as possible to help gain information dominance for the Air Force.

Ensure unity of effort

PA organizations at all levels should have clearly defined relationships that minimize duplication, enhance sharing of information throughout the public affairs structure, and are mutually supportive. PA at all levels must speak with one voice to address common issues. As part of unity of effort, PA operators must maintain a close relationship within the operations and support communities and other government agencies engaging in the public information environment.

Be survivable, sustainable, and deployable

PA resources and operations must be survivable to ensure their capabilities are available when needed. Important components of survivability include redundancy of critical information and protection against adversarial information operations and misinformation attempts. PA systems and equipment must be built to be easily deployable. Deployable resources should be easy to transport and set up, and be

capable of immediate connectivity into the host-unit communications architecture. Finally they must be easily sustainable by the host-unit communications personnel. This entails ensuring they can operate regardless of whether it is at an austere location with minimum support or an established location with robust support availability.
