

## UNIT 01-004: Roles and Responsibilities of the Public Affairs Officer

### Required Readings:

Joint Publication 3-61, Executive Summary and Chapters 1-3

### Supplemental Reference Material:

Effective Public Relations Ch 15, pp 487-511

### Note Taker

[Click here for Note Taker](#)

### Method of Evaluation:

Material presented during this unit of instruction is testable on FPA Exam One and will be applied during practical application throughout the course.

### Assignments:

Guided Discussion

## Unit Introduction

Our military is accountable and responsible to the public for performing its mission of national defense. By providing accurate information and clear explanations of its activities, the Armed Forces of the United States fulfill their responsibility to the nation, contributing to understanding of DOD programs and military operations. The media are the principal means of communicating information about the military to the public.

Commanders must recognize their responsibility to communicate to the American people via the media. The Internet also provides new options and challenges for unfiltered communications with important audiences. Increasingly, internal or command information and external communications are more closely linked as military personnel, civilian employees, family members, and the media draw from the same sources of information. Commanders should view military journalists and PAOs as effective means of reaching these audiences and keys to mission success.

Accurate and timely information is essential to the public's understanding, morale and resolve in times of crisis. Similarly, that same information, when conveyed to the military's internal audience, helps military personnel more clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in accomplishing their missions. Establishing the command information connection with joint forces, and especially their families, is increasingly important. In all internal and external communications, PA must train and exercise the way we intend to operate.

## **Unit Introduction**

Successful relationships between the military and the media are primarily based upon credibility and trust. Such relationships are normally built over time, not during a crisis or combat situation when the commander has a multitude of important issues vying for attention.

What does this mean for you? As a PAO you fulfill a critical and very important role on the commander's staff – that of principal spokesperson and senior advisor on public affairs matters. How well you carry out your duties and how successful you are in this position could depend on what you take away from this unit of instruction. So, let's get started on making you successful.

## **Learning Objectives**

- Explain the roles and responsibilities of a public affairs officer
- Explain the three fundamental areas of military public affairs

## **Overview**

- Three primary PA functions
- Two primary PA responsibilities
- Five PA fundamentals
- Four PA capabilities
- Four target audiences

## Three Primary Public Functions

Public Affairs has three basic functions: public information (aka media relations), command information (aka internal information) and community relations.

### Public Information (Media Relations)



"While the Internet continues to provide new public information opportunities, military public information is still largely a matter of coordinating media relations. Media relations activities are designed to provide information through the media to the external national and international public." (JP 3-61, Chapter III, para. 2.b.(1).

Commanders and their PA staffs should be prepared to respond to media inquiries, issue statements, schedule interviews, conduct briefings, arrange for access to operational units, and provide appropriate equipment, transportation and communications support to the media.

After all, a well-informed public will be better able to make knowledgeable decisions regarding defense issues and will be more likely to understand military operations.

**Three Primary Public Affairs Functions Command/Internal Information.**

A critical joint force PA mission involves informing the various internal audiences about the participation of military forces in a joint operation. Full coverage is particularly important for the participating forces, those military personnel and civilian employees who remain behind, and all family members.

## Command Information (Internal Information)

One of the most critical PA missions involves keeping our various internal audiences informed on issues of importance and interest to them and the command. The internal audience typically comprises active duty and reserve military forces, their family members, civilian employees, contractors and retirees.

Internal communication efforts are designed to:

- Create an awareness of the organization's mission and goals
- Inform the internal audience of significant developments affecting them and the organization
- Inform the internal audience about what is going on in the organization.



## Community Relations

During joint operations, joint PA operations will support the Joint Forces Commander's (JFC's) civil-military operations as required. However, the community relations function in communities around or near home stations that are affected by force deployments remains a unit or installation PA responsibility during joint operations.

A commander's community relations program should be designed to foster and maintain positive relations between the military and the surrounding community. Such programs are usually associated with the interaction between U.S. military installations and their nearby civilian communities.

Typically community relations programs deal with:

- The relationship between the military and civilian communities
- Those public affairs programs that address issues of interest to the general public, business, academia, veterans and service organizations, military-related organizations, and other non-news media entities
- Community relations programs are most effective with direct, face-to-face contact between military members and the local community.



*Typical Air Force base open house.*

## **Primary Public Affairs Responsibilities**

Public Affairs officers have two major responsibilities; to use public affairs to support command strategy, and to use public information to attack an adversary's strategy.

Public affairs counters adversary propaganda and disinformation by providing a continuous flow of credible, reliable, timely and accurate information to military members, their families, the media and the public. This capability allows PA to help defeat adversary efforts to diminish national will, degrade morale and turn world opinion against friendly operations. PA must be engaged in operational planning, have visibility into domestic and international media reports, as well as relevant intelligence, understand common adversary propaganda techniques, and be very aggressive by anticipating and countering adversary propaganda — putting accurate, complete information out first so that friendly forces gain the initiative and remain the preferred source of information. Gaining and maintaining the information initiative in a conflict can help discredit and undermine adversary propaganda. The first side that presents the information sets the context and frames the public debate. It is extremely important to get factual, complete, truthful information out first — even information about DOD mistakes. This helps disarm the adversary's propaganda and defeats attempts by the adversary to use these mistakes against friendly forces. Absolute credibility must always be maintained.

### **Primary Public Affairs Responsibilities**

DOD's Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan tasks each combatant commander to consider public information options to deter conflict — before using force. PA assists combatant commanders in planning these efforts. PA uses truthful information to put the international public spotlight on an issue. PA clearly communicates US goals and objectives, what we expect the adversary to do to satisfy international concerns, why the US concern is important and what the US intends to do if the adversary refuses to comply. PA activities may involve highlighting the military's deployment preparations, activities and force projection to show domestic, allied, coalition and adversary publics what the commander is actually doing to prepare for conflict.

## **Interim Review**

**Q.** The three primary functions of Defense PA are?

**Q.** The two primary responsibilities of a public affairs officer are?

## Interim Review

**Q.** The three primary functions of Defense PA are?

**A.** *Public information, command information and community relations.*

**Q.** The two primary responsibilities of a public affairs officer are?

**A.** *To use PA to support command strategy and to use public information to attack an adversary's strategy.*

## **Five PA Fundamentals of Information**

Joint Forces Commanders, as the most visible and credible spokespersons for an organization, play a crucial role in successful PA operations. The PAO is a member of the commander's personal staff. Official communication with internal and external audiences has a significant effect on the Global Information Environment (GIE). Good planning and message development can have a positive impact on operations. Poor planning and message development is just as certain to have a negative effect. Credible PA operations support the commander's mission and maintain essential public liaisons throughout the spectrum of conflict. There are several fundamentals of information that guide commanders for effective employment of PA operations and for an appropriate relationship with the media. These basics complement the DOD Principles of Information and describe the best practices to follow when fighting in the GIE.

## **Fundamental 1**

**Tell the Truth.** JFC PA personnel will only release truthful information. The long-term success of PA operations depends on maintaining the integrity and credibility of officially released information. Deceiving the public undermines trust in and support for the Armed Forces and PA activities. Accurate, balanced, credible presentation of information leads to confidence in the Armed Forces and the legitimacy of operations.

## Fundamental 2

**Provide Timely Information.** Commanders should be prepared to release timely, factual, coordinated and approved information about military operations. Information introduced into the public realm has a powerful effect on each side's decision-making cycle during a crisis. The adversary that releases more timely and accurate information enjoys the benefit of becoming the media's preferred source of information. Timely release of truthful information enables warfighters to stay aware of the latest developments in a crisis, frame the public debate, and make well-informed decisions. Timely release of truthful information also applies to difficult issues and events that are potentially unfavorable to DOD. Attempting to deny unfavorable information or failing to acknowledge its existence leads to media speculation, the perception of cover-up and lost public trust. These issues, too, should be openly and honestly addressed as soon as possible.

## Fundamental 3

**Practice Security at the Source.** All DOD personnel are responsible for safeguarding sensitive information. As sources of information, each DOD member should be aware of OPSEC issues, whether being interviewed by the media or sharing information with family or friends. Therefore, it is critically important that information be approved for public dissemination before it is released.

## Fundamental 4

**Provide Consistent Information at All Levels.** One effect of the GIE is that the public simultaneously receives information about military operations from all levels of command. For example, media coverage routinely combines reports from the theater of operations with information released at higher levels of DOD. Commanders should ensure that DOD PA operations put forth a consistent message through its many voices. Information should be appropriately coordinated and in compliance with official DOD and supported command guidance before it is released to the public.

## Fundamental 5

**Tell the DOD Story.** Every military and civilian member of DOD should help provide accurate information about the Armed Forces and national defense operations to the public. Although commanders must designate only military personnel or DOD civilian employees as official spokespersons, they should educate and encourage all their military and civilian employees to tell the DOD story by providing them with timely information that is appropriate for public release. By projecting confidence and commitment during interviews or in talking to family and friends, DOD personnel can help promote public support for military operations. PA can contribute to mission accomplishment, communicate restraint, indicate perseverance, demonstrate resolve, and serve as a deterrent.

These fundamentals, and the previously described DOD Principles of Information, apply across the full range of military operations. They are the fundamental principles by which military PA activities are conducted and provide the basis for our actions in support of national objectives. It is the commander's responsibility to ensure that they are efficiently and effectively addressed in all stages of planning and execution. The joint force PA staff enables the commander to fulfill this important responsibility.

## Four Public Affairs Capabilities

PAOs provide four basic capabilities to Joint Force Commanders: They provide trusted counsel to leaders; they enhance morale and readiness; they foster public trust and support; and they use global influence and deterrence.

## PA Capability 1

**Providing Trusted Counsel to Leaders.** This capability includes analyzing and interpreting the Global Information Environment (GIE), monitoring domestic and foreign public understanding, providing lessons learned from the past, forecasting the possible impact of military operations within the public information realm and preparing JFCs to communicate with audiences through the media and other methods of communication.

## PA Capability 2

**Enhancing Morale and Readiness.** PA operations enable military personnel to understand their roles in the mission by explaining how policies, programs, and operations affect them and their families. Media interest in military operations can be high, especially during the initial phases. Any military and family members may be interviewed. In order to clearly communicate the mission, all military members need to understand their role in the operation. PA operations keep military members and their families informed about operations, events, and issues to counter adversary propaganda efforts, and reduce stress and uncertainty, and other factors that may undermine mission accomplishment.

### **PA Capability 3**

**Fostering Public Trust and Support.** With backing from the public and Congress, military leaders are able to effectively recruit, equip and train forces to perform across the full range of military operations. Effective PA supports a strong national defense by building public trust and understanding for the military's contribution to national security. During national crisis, PA gives the American public the information needed to understand military roles and missions. This understanding is critical to sustaining American public support for military operations.

## PA Capability 4

**Using Global Influence and Deterrence.** JFCs should employ PA to develop and implement communication strategies that inform national and international audiences and adversaries about the impact of the US military during operations and exercises. Making these audiences aware of US military capabilities and US resolve to employ them can enhance support from allies and friendly countries, and deter potential adversaries. When adversaries are not deterred from conflict, information about US capabilities and resolve may still shape the adversary's planning and actions in a manner beneficial to the US.

## **Target Audiences**

Public Affairs concentrates on four target audiences: The American public; the international audience; the internal audience; and adversary forces.

## Target Audience 1

**American Public.** Commanders have an obligation to inform the American public about their nation's military. This communication enhances morale and readiness and increases public trust and support. Through active engagement, the military demonstrates it is a community partner and a responsible steward of national resources. The goals for communicating with the American public are to disseminate information concerning US military power and capabilities, preparations and results to enhance servicemembers' morale and readiness to accomplish the mission, gain and maintain public support for military operations, communicate US resolve in a manner that enhances global influence and deterrence, and increase public awareness and understanding of the Armed Forces as a respected professional organization charged with the responsibility for national security.

## Target Audience 2

**International.** Information flow in today's GIE is faster, farther-reaching and has greater impact than previous information technology. While DOD has an obligation to keep the US public informed about its activities, the same principles of information should be applied to international audiences. Current information technology ensures information in the public domain is available worldwide. Therefore, information provided to international publics is also provided to the US public. Modern military operations are often conducted as part of a coalition force. DOD should keep host nations (HNs) informed about US military operations and activities on their soil and in conjunction with HN armed forces within the constraints of OPSEC. In addition, international media interest in military operations may be just as high, and sometimes higher, than US media interest, especially in military operations conducted overseas.

## Target Audience 3

**Internal.** Internal information programs are the primary means commanders use to communicate with military members and their families. As used in this document, military members include active-duty and retired, officer and enlisted, Guard and Reserve personnel. The main purpose of conducting internal information programs, or command information, is to link military members and their commanders. PA professionals must have the knowledge and skills to conduct internal information programs at home, while deployed, and in a joint operations setting.

## Target Audience 4

**Adversary Forces.** Credible information regarding US intentions and conduct can undermine adversary propaganda, potentially causing dissent within adversary ranks.

## **Review**

**Q.** What are the five fundamentals of information?

**Q.** The four PA capabilities are?

**Q.** The four PA target audiences are?

## Review

**Q.** What are the five fundamentals of information?

**A.** *Tell the truth; provide timely information; practice security at the source; provide consistent information at all levels; tell the DoD story.*

**Q.** The four PA capabilities are?

**A.** *Providing trusted counsel to leaders; enhancing morale and readiness; fostering public trust and support; using global influence and deterrence.*

**Q.** The four PA target audiences are?

**A.** *The American public; the international audience; the internal audience; and adversary forces.*

## **Conclusion**

Accurate and timely information is essential to the public's understanding, morale, and resolve in times of crisis. Similarly, that same information, when conveyed to the military's internal audience, helps military personnel more clearly understand their roles and responsibilities in accomplishing their missions. Establishing the command information connection with joint forces, and especially their families, is increasingly important. In all internal and external communications, PA must train and exercise the way we intend to operate.

Successful relationships between the military and the media are primarily based upon credibility and trust. Such relationships are normally built over time, not during a crisis or combat situation when the commander has a multitude of important issues vying for attention.

You should now have the necessary tools to serve on the commander's staff. How well you perform in this position depends on your ability to develop credible PA operations that support the commander's mission and maintain essential public liaisons throughout the spectrum of conflict. You can't demand a seat at the table, but you can certainly earn it.