

## Annex A

# **Marine Corps Functional Concept for STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION (SC)**

### **Purpose**

*"To remain the Nation's force in readiness, the Marine Corps must continuously innovate. This requires that we look across the entire institution and identify areas that need improvement and effect positive change."<sup>62</sup>*

**T**he purpose of this functional concept is to inspire thought and stimulate experimentation, wargaming and debate about the nature of strategic communication and its utility to the Marine Corps as an institution and, specifically, to the Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). This concept also will be used to inform the Expeditionary Force Development System (EFDS) process and provide the conceptual underpinnings necessary to address SC gaps in doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities (DOTMLPF) and policy. It provides practical considerations for Component and MAGTF planners, commanders and staffs.

### **Overview and Scope**

The Marine Corps Functional Concept for Strategic Communication (SC) covers the timeframe from 2017 to 2025. This timeframe addresses SC during the period beyond the current Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP) out to the guidance provided in the Marine Corps Vision & Strategy 2025. This concept applies primarily to all elements and command echelons of the MAGTF with conceptual application also at the HQMC and institutional level.

Strategic Communication (SC) is currently defined at the joint level as focused United States Government (USG) efforts to understand and

---

62. Marine Corps V&S 2025

### Marine Corps Operating Concepts - Third Edition

engage key audiences in order to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG 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.<sup>63</sup> Another definition is that SC is simply a way to affect perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of key publics in support of objectives.<sup>64</sup>

Guidance in the 2010 QDR, the Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (CCJO), and the Strategic Communication Joint Integrating Concept (JIC), coupled with the projected future in JFCOM's Joint Operational Environment (JOE), make clear that the U.S. military must enhance its ability to operate in the cognitive domain. By cognitive domain, we mean the intellectual and emotional arenas in which individuals, families, tribes and governing bodies reason and make decisions based on their respective historical, cultural, social, religious and educational backgrounds. It is the domain of mind, will and emotion. It is a domain in which perceptions affect attitudes.<sup>65</sup>

SC concepts, definitions and boundaries at the U.S. Government and the Joint levels continue to evolve. In order to adhere to and take advantage of current guidance and conceptual thought at all levels, this Marine Corps functional concept expands on the following basic framework from existing joint publications:

- The importance of information as an operational enabler will continue to rise.
- Military concepts, definitions and doctrine with respect to the information environment are evolving, partially in response to an

---

63. Joint Pub 5-0

64. Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL) Issue Paper; "The Trouble with Strategic Communication"; Dennis Murphy, Jan 2008; Vol 2-08

65. Strategic Communication conference in October 2009; In a briefing on "Future Marketing and Advertising," Dr Julie Edell Britton indicated that more than 70 percent of attitudinal change is based on feelings. Dr Britton is an associate professor at Duke University.

### Marine Corps Operating Concepts - Third Edition

increase in diverse populations who are accessing advancing technology and influencing a rapidly evolving information environment.

- SC is a process of understanding and engaging key publics to advance U.S. national (strategic) interests and objectives.
- SC is affected significantly more by actions than by words or images.
- SC is relevant to the Marine Corps as an institution at the service level and to the MAGTF at the tactical and operational levels.
- SC is a broad, overarching concept that, in the operational realm, includes all operational actions, defense support to public diplomacy (DSPD), IO, and Public Affairs (PA), as well as Civil-Military Operations (CMO) and Combat Camera (COMCAM).<sup>66</sup>
- SC for the MAGTF is the process of integrating issues of audience and stakeholder perception into planning and operations at every level.
- MAGTF SC plans and objectives will nest with and support those of higher headquarters.
- Relevant training, education, and exercises will improve MAGTF SC.
- Existing planning processes and the MAGTF Operational Planning Team (OPT) are sufficient to affect the integration necessary in SC planning.
- Constant feedback, analysis and assessment are necessary to ensure that efforts support desired outcomes.

---

66. JP 5-0, pg II-2.

## Background

*“DoD is viewing strategic communication as an adaptive, decentralized process of trying to understand selected audiences thoroughly, hypothesizing physical or informational signals that will have the desired cognitive effect on those audiences, testing those hypotheses through action, monitoring the actual result through feedback, and disseminating the best solutions quickly through the Department and the joint force.”<sup>67</sup>*

SC has many definitions above and beyond the JP 5-0 definition above. In many respects, it is a new term for an old concept. That is, success in any endeavor is directly related to our level of understanding of the environment we are in; the history, culture, social structures and intentions of all the participants (e.g., allies, neutral parties, and adversaries) with whom we are engaged; and all of our respective purposes, strengths, weaknesses and preferences. Recent conflicts that illustrate an ongoing battle of ideas have demonstrated the value of this broader understanding, and a new term – strategic communication - gives it modern expression. Some consider SC to be synonymous with other terms such as “influence” or “persuade.” Others take the term literally to mean that it can only be done at the strategic level. Regardless, MAGTF actions, words, and images at the tactical level clearly can support or hinder joint force and national level objectives.

Recent publications at the Secretary and the Joint levels have added clarification but have stopped short of spelling out exactly how, when, and by whom SC is performed. In the operational world of deployed forces, the lines between strategic, operational and tactical levels are now blurred, often beyond distinction. Also unclear are the distinctions between friends, enemies and innocent third parties. This blurring adds a layer of complexity to planning and has important ramifications across the range of military operations. This functional concept acknowledges this adjustment in the MAGTF mission set and proposes an approach for developing needed capability.

The SC JIC lays out the general philosophies, definitions, and high-level themes of SC within the Joint Force. As DoD’s view of SC has evolved,

---

67. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

the Department has reduced its emphasis on strictly “informational” activities.<sup>68</sup> The SC JIC highlights “the challenge of [persuading] others to think and act in ways compatible with our objectives, whether this means causing them to adapt a specific course of action or to simply understand us better and accept us more.” At the national level, “effective SC requires the orchestration of multiple lines of operation. Chief among these is policy implementation, force employment, information operations, public affairs, civil affairs, and public diplomacy and engagement.”<sup>69</sup> Across the levels of war, SC is the synchronization of the those “multiple lines of operation” down to the tactical level to affect perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of key audiences and create favorable conditions in support of MAGTF objectives and ultimately our national strategy. SC is an overarching process and a way of thinking rather than a new functional area. So what does this mean for the Corps as an institution; and for the MAGTF?

## **Description of the Military Problem**

### ***Internal MAGTF Problem***

The primary military problem for the MAGTF in the SC arena is that we are not yet adept at maneuvering quickly and effectively in the cognitive domain. Marines traditionally excel in operational plans that are “kinetically” oriented. While we have made significant strides in emphasizing considerations such as cultural learning and key leader engagement, we do not yet excel in meeting myriad challenges in complex cultural and informational campaigns. Kinetic campaigns often are defined by physical goals that permit easy measurement and management. At the most abstract level, these campaigns have a simple goal: we win, the enemy loses. During execution, the supporting staff functions that comprise the totality of an effective operation are largely independent support actions, with their details contained in annexes of the main plan and their actions performed by specialists. In the more information dense environments that we predict in the future, military missions are more complex as the number of affected parties increases.

---

68. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

69. QDR; Feb 2010

### Marine Corps Operating Concepts - Third Edition

What constitutes “victory” is different in CENTCOM these days from what it was in WWII or even Desert Storm.

Instead of a traditional “win-lose” situation, future engagements likely will consist of “win, win, win – lose” environments in which every involved or affected party in the battlespace, except the enemy, expects a positive outcome that fosters a sense of security, growth and hope. These kinds of missions place a premium on the execution of an effectively nested SC plan from the national to the MAGTF level and the integration of actions and messages developed specifically within the MAGTF’s base plan. If we lack the ability to integrate these messages into our base plans or fail to develop the capability to react quickly to fleeting opportunities, we risk losing credibility gained by Marines on the battlefield. Thus, the major challenge: the Marine Corps, largely through training and education, must expand the planning culture of the MAGTF so that non-kinetic tools and the cognitive domain are consistently and completely addressed in every planning problem and throughout each phase of execution.

To help meet this challenge, each staff section and element of the MAGTF must develop supporting plans under an umbrella of cultural understanding consistent with higher headquarters’ intent and guidance. Our plans often do not seek first to understand and address the root causes of the conflict or instability. In some respects, we are treating symptoms but neglecting the disease. By including the expertise and influence of those persons and organizations knowledgeable of cultural considerations and the information environment, we will take a key step to a comprehensive approach to complex security environments.

Another challenge, especially for MAGTF planners, will be mentally switching, when appropriate, from “kinetics supported by all else” to a “kinetics in support of all else” mindset. The ability to balance these two operational mindsets throughout a campaign is a key attribute for any military organization operating outside the traditional “force against force” military scenario. At present, the ability to conduct maneuver warfare in the cognitive and the physical domains, especially as the lead of a coalition and/or interagency task force is personality-dependent. It must be institutionalized throughout the Marine Corps via enhanced PME, training and exercises.

## **MAGTF Nesting Within Higher SC Problem**

*“I would argue that most strategic communication problems are not communication problems at all. They are policy and execution problems.”<sup>70</sup>*

Other military challenges are apparent across the waterfront of SC, some not exclusively in the military lane. For example, we often see a lack of effective synchronization or staffing of SC goals, objectives, themes, and messages outside of the DoD across the rest of the USG. Regionally focused, deployed commands often tailor SC themes and messages to the local cultures with whom they are creating dialogue and relationships. Depending on the message and the local culture, this can become highly complex and appropriately nuanced. Contrast this with our partners in other USG agencies who sometimes fail to ensure appropriate coordination or staffing of proposed themes and messages to lower levels before going “global.” This execution shortfall often creates a national-to-tactical “say-do” gap when the USG promotes a national or regional message that differs from on-the-ground wisdom, practice and realities. The poppy growth-local economy-corruption topic in Helmand Province provides a good case study. This message alignment challenge is further exacerbated if the MAGTF is employed under a coalition environment in which USG SC efforts are in conflict with that particular alliance’s SC efforts.

*“Our messages lack credibility because we haven’t invested enough in building trust and relationships, and we haven’t always delivered on promises.... We hurt ourselves more when our words don’t align with our actions.”<sup>71</sup>*

Given an increase in the number and the nature of coalition commands, local forces, non-governmental organizations, and interagency groups in a typical MAGTF operating area, we face cultural hurdles as well as technical impediments to unity of effort and mission completion. This is an ongoing reality that we must deal with. With more than a dozen

---

70. Admiral Mullen; JFQ Issue 55, 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2009; “Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics”

71. Admiral Mullen; JFQ Issue 55, 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2009; “Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics”

different intelligence and communication systems in use throughout the Marine Expeditionary Brigade's assigned operating area in Afghanistan, we strive to ensure that key players are getting the right information at the right time. Amid these challenges, our actions often speak louder than our words, so the goal is to synchronize the actions of all these distinct and often widely dispersed players. One of the more practical ways proposed to help improve this synchronization is through the addition of a clearly stated information end-state, or an aspirational narrative, to the commander's intent.<sup>72</sup>

## Central Idea

*"The essence of good communication: having the right intent up front and letting our actions speak for themselves. We shouldn't care if people don't like us; that isn't the goal. The goal is credibility. And we earn that over time."<sup>73</sup>*

In the future security environment, we no longer can concentrate solely on defeating a hostile adversary solely by fire and maneuver. The battlespace of the future will be among people, often with unclear distinction between friend, neutral and foe. Almost every activity performed by Marine units will place them in direct contact with the people indigenous to the area of operations and who will become the primary focus of the battle of the narrative. As the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review notes, "Strategic communication is essential in COIN, CT and stability operations, where population and stakeholder beliefs and perceptions are crucial to our success, and where adversaries often enjoy the advantage of greater local knowledge and calibrate their activities to achieve sophisticated information objectives." Not only in these operations, but across the full range of military operations, all individual and small-unit actions in a complex environment must be guided by SC principles (outlined below) and incorporated as an integral element of the overall campaign design.

---

72. Parameters, Winter 2009-2010; "In Search of the Art and Science of Strategic Communication"; Dennis M. Murphy

73. Admiral Mullen; JFQ Issue 55, 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2009; "Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics"

By their nature, MAGTFs are exceptionally capable units, “tailor-made” for a broad range of missions. The qualities that make the MAGTF an exceptional fighting organization are its agility and versatility. This is especially so in complex operations in which every Marine must possess the mindset of a fighter, a diplomat, a public servant, a builder, a medic, and a good Samaritan. These operations often demonstrate that building relationships is often as important as building bridges or hospitals. Of all the character traits necessary to operate in these environments simultaneously, arguably some of the most important are the ability to listen, to correctly interpret, to effectively communicate, and to constantly assess feedback. These qualities are so important that consideration of them must be made an integral part of any operations plan. The central idea of this concept is to inspire commanders and planners to make the principles of strategic communication outlined below a baseline consideration of any campaign design, all planning processes, and every operation. The question: How do we do that?

## **SC Principles and Challenges**

### ***Principles***

With respect to Marine Corps forces, the MAGTF will be largely responsible for executing or supporting elements of higher headquarters’ SC plans. The MAGTF’s tactical actions and the “face” it presents should support higher headquarters and national SC objectives, themes and messages. The actions of the MAGTF must fit within the words of civilian leaders. The MAGTF’s communication strategy must be commander-driven, proactive, and synchronized with respect to all its actions, themes, messages, and images. As deployed Marine units plan and execute, they should be guided by the following SC principles.

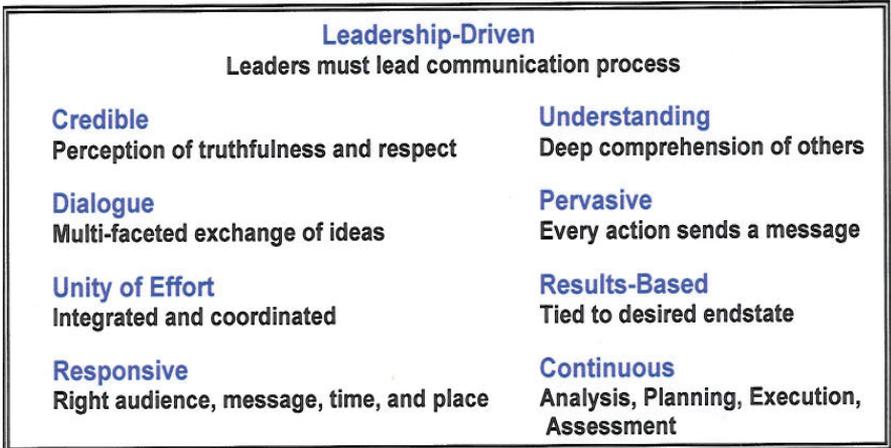


Figure 1. Nine Principles of Strategic Communication

## **Challenges**

### **Preserving Influence in Environments of Competing Narratives**

*“More than half this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media...we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our ummah.”<sup>74</sup>*

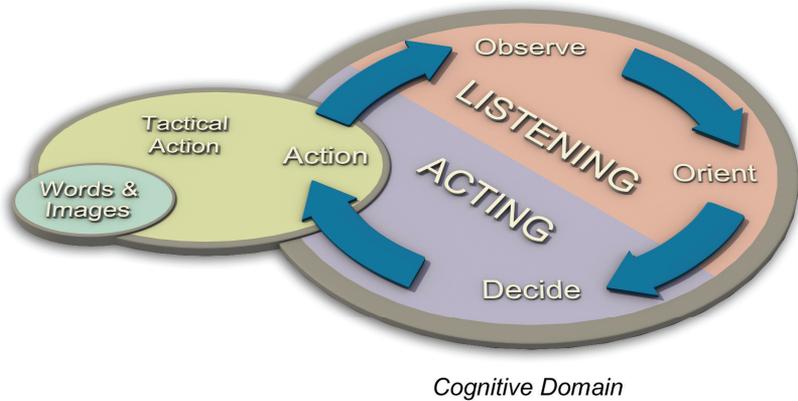
Rapid technological change makes the information environment accessible, at the institutional and the operational level, to almost anyone. Individuals and small groups can now rapidly disseminate their version of reality, shape global perceptions, or counter other messages across boundaries and borders. Individual and small unit actions are amplified in an environment in which everything that can be witnessed or heard can also be easily recorded, manipulated and widely distributed.<sup>75</sup> In this new information environment, Marines must have processes sufficiently agile enough to enable them to anticipate, plan for, and operate successfully. The observe-orient-decide-act (OODA) loop is just as applicable in the information domain as in the physical domain, and relative tempo is critical in both.

---

74. Ayman al-Zawahiri

75. QDR; Feb 2010

## Strategic Communication



### Gaining Cognitive Agility and Staying Ahead of the Situation

With respect to this MAGTF challenge, the SC process aims to synchronize and thus maximize the impact of efforts to achieve one or more of the following, depending on the circumstances:

- Improve MAGTF and U.S. credibility and legitimacy;
- Weaken an adversary's credibility and legitimacy;
- Persuade selected audiences to take specific actions that support the MAGTF, the United States or international objectives;
- Cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions.<sup>76</sup>

### The Importance of Listening

One of the challenges is the need to foster a better understanding of the relationship between “listening” and “communicating.” “Strategic listening” is imperative if we are to understand SC as an overarching philosophy intended to guide the way Marines think, organize, and

---

76. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

operate, and not simply as an operational option or a staff activity. “Strategic listening” is not an updated euphemism for knowing the enemy, nor does it suggest a new kind of intelligence gathering. If MAGTFs, or individual Marines, are going to operate in complex environments, they must develop a “sixth sense” that permits them to instinctively understand that environment so that they can operate effectively within it. This can only come through increased education and training. At the tactical level, this occurs only after immersive contact with the local population, and typically only after a level of trust is achieved. Active listening is more than paying attention to words or actions of the actors in the operating environment. It is about observing and properly reacting to one’s “body language.” It is about recognizing potential actions or outcomes before they occur and creating circumstances more favorable to a successful outcome. Correctly assessing the situation adds to overall situational awareness.

“Understanding the effect of operations as seen through the lens of the local culture and psyche is the foremost planning consideration for every operation.”<sup>77</sup> Maneuver Warfare, no matter how expertly executed, can be equated to a game of two-dimensional chess in which one competitor tries to defeat another. Operations in complex environments (those in which SC figures prominently) can be thought of as multi-dimensional chess in which one player tries not just to defeat an opponent but to create conditions favorable for all other players and for observers as well. Success hinges upon the MAGTF’s ability to listen, interpret, and act at a higher level of awareness than before. The key to this heightened level of performance at the operational and the tactical levels rests primarily with a better understanding of SC and how its nine principles can be applied within the MAGTF’s battle rhythm.

### **Designing Appropriate MAGTF Actions**

Since MAGTFs operate mainly at the tactical level, most SC objectives, guidance and directives will be determined at levels above the MAGTF. The MAGTF will be responsible for executing its assigned mission in such a way as to support the higher level SC objectives, themes, and

---

77. Army Combined Arms Center Handbook on Human Terrain Teams; 2008; LTG Peter Chiarelli quote

### Marine Corps Operating Concepts - Third Edition

messages and preventing any “say-do” gap from emerging. MAGTF actions can communicate strategically to friends, adversaries and others alike. However, MAGTF commanders must be enabled to better plan and execute specific MAGTF actions that result in positive effects on the actions or behavior of selected populations, governments or other decision-making groups, including the enemy, within an area of operations. Achieving this in socially complex cultures and a globally interconnected information environment often transcends current capabilities in the MAGTF. An SC imperative requires us to better understand how our actions will be received and responded to. We hurt ourselves and the messages we attempt to convey when our actions are inconsistent with what we say.

The following list is representative of some of the progressive and continuous actions that should form the basis of any operations plan for MAGTFs operating in the cognitive environment:

- Conduct a continuous engagement program within the MAGTF operations area with respect to selected key leaders and populations, as the foundation for all other communication efforts.
- Conceive every action based on its potential cognitive impact, consequences and effects on various audiences in the MAGTF operations area and beyond.
- Actively engage in the debate over MAGTF actions and their effects. Seek and encourage bottom-up refinement from battlespace owners.
- Anticipate, monitor, understand and quickly counter or exploit the influence efforts of adversaries and competitors.
- Develop in-depth knowledge of selected publics and their networks and be aware of personal biases.
- Formulate and produce tailored, resonant and culturally attuned signals that reach intended audiences through the surrounding noise of competing messages.
- Adapt continuously and iteratively based on feedback on the effects of MAGTF signals.
- Understand how the information environment affects both the physical and cognitive domains.

## Blending SC into Operational Design

Military planning and decision-making are historically studied in both the realm of art and science. It is important that the planning and execution of SC is considered from both perspectives as well. The SC process involves horizontal coordination (across the MAGTF and the joint force as international partners as appropriate) and vertical coordination (up and down the chain of command to include DoD and the U.S. Government). In all cases, such coordination aims to ensure that:

- Cultural, informational, and communication considerations are part of strategy, planning, and policy development from the very beginning (rather than as afterthoughts);
- The potential communication impact of kinetic and non-kinetic actions – their likely "perception effects" -- are assessed and planned for before actions are taken;
- Words and actions are consistent and mutually reinforcing (closing "say-do" gap); and
- "Soft power" options and capabilities are given equal priority and considered in coordination with hard power alternatives.<sup>78</sup>

The revised MCWP 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*, explains design as a fundamental responsibility of command inherent not only in planning but in all phases of execution. The critical first phase of planning is re-titled *Problem Framing* to better convey its purpose and importance. This *Problem Framing* stage is where the MAGTF commander and staff seek to fully understand SC issues and competing narratives at play in a theater and area of operations. A key lesson from previous DoD SC efforts is that processes to develop separate and distinct SC priorities, plans or organizations are ineffective when divorced from existing planning processes.<sup>79</sup> Since planning is, in essence, envisioning a desired future and laying out effective ways of bringing it about, design as an element of planning is at the heart of effective SC. As the MAGTF OPT is the principal tool to plan and

---

78. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

79. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

integrate combined arms actions, it should plan and implement SC initiatives.

### **Employing SC as an Integrating Process**

The MAGTF commander and his staff are already well prepared to integrate combined arms through the existing Marine Corps Planning Process (MCPP). MEF and MEB OPTs are well trained to integrate lethal and non-lethal fires in their assigned battlespace. From an SC point of view, most of the right functional “players” participate in most current OPTs. What is often missing is the appropriate emphasis on “seeing” and developing appropriate courses of action that take SC considerations into account. The education and training of commanders and their lead planners can help to quickly change this. For example, all courses of action should more explicitly attempt to integrate actions on the ground with explicit delivery and support of national/host country and higher HQ “key themes and messages” to specific audiences. The Marine Corps can ensure its ability to maneuver better in the cognitive domain by requiring the right players in initial OPT activities, approaching the problem from the right conceptual start point, and taking advantage of existing strategic communication primary supporting capabilities and representative organizations, such as the Marine Corps Information Operations Center.

One key is ensuring the commander includes detailed SC objectives within his guidance. Developing quality guidance requires that those in the influence spectrum advise and inform the Problem Framing (cultural IPB<sup>80</sup>, etc) process. In other words, contributing to and shaping the commander’s view of the battlespace is critical, and every iteration of the planning cycle must include considerations relating to the effect of potential, or planned, actions on tactical, operational, and strategic objectives. Considerations must include intended and potential unintended consequences about perceptions in the commander’s AO, Area of Interest, and Area of Influence, the latter of which can go from local to global in an instant. In short, SC priorities must be included in the main plan itself (Commander’s Intent and Concept of Ops) and not

---

80. IPB as Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace is being considered for change to IPOE as Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment.

merely as an Annex Y or another functional annex. SC functional area experts must become part of the commander's key advisor group.

### **Understanding the Totality of SC Participation and the Creation of Legitimacy**

Because the actions of any Marine or sailor in a MAGTF could have repercussions (i.e., a “CNN moment”), we all acknowledge the increasing importance of culturally sensitive and well-informed Marines. At the basic level, SC begins with the individual Marine. NCOs and unit commanders at all levels are responsible for seeking out, understanding and helping to communicate the full context of why their units are taking or not taking certain actions. Individual Marines and small units are key participants in the SC plan because their actions contribute directly to the perceived legitimacy, character and reputation of the MAGTF as a whole. This truth argues for the inclusion of an information end-state as an important step in proactively managing the information environment in support of military objectives.<sup>81</sup> Internal and external legitimacy is fundamental to SC. Legitimacy is fostered only if the message transmitted is reinforced by the actions of the Marines who interact directly with the population. In almost every situation, actions are more important than words.

At the staff level, functional area expertise enters the equation and raises questions as to how the MAGTF should best organize for success. Because MAGTF tactical units are the most important participants in any action or event, the way they are supported by functional areas of IO, PA, CMO and COMCAM should be viewed as the “supporting arms” of the cognitive environment.

In most situations, representatives of those functional areas must be key participants in the initial and iterative IPB alongside intelligence officers. *Most commanders understand this intuitively, but it is not necessarily happening as a matter of prioritized design.* One goal of this concept is to provide the conceptual start-point for the examination and

---

81. Parameters, Winter 2009-2010; “In Search of the Art and Science of Strategic Communication”; Dennis M. Murphy

development of critical solutions to this shortfall across the DOTMLPF solution spectrum.

### **Blending Fires, Maneuver, and SC into a Cohesive Whole**

*“Marines must approach counterinsurgency prepared to combat armed adversaries as well as influencing the environment through the use of information, humanitarian aid, economic advice, and a boost toward good governance.... With this mix of skills and abilities, the Marine Corps will have the means to more effectively apply its maneuver warfare-based warfighting philosophy to irregular threats and to attack our enemies from many angles at once, wearing them down and drawing away their public support.”<sup>82</sup>*

The draft SC Joint Integrating Concept (JIC) describes communication as a mechanism of influence and presents an “influence spectrum” that ranges from “inform” as the most “indirect” form of influence, to “coerce” as the most “direct” form of influence. This spectrum often creates confusion among commanders who attempt to draw communication coordination boundaries within the spectrum as they would with lethal fires. Absent a clear concept describing roles, responsibilities, authorities and limitations of various influence functions across the spectrum, MAGTF commanders will have only a broad framework for engagement. Blending fires, maneuver and SC actions into a cohesive whole should be the conceptual point of origin for a MAGTF dealing with the complexities of the cognitive environment.

A common notion is that SC can be effected solely through use of a matrix, template or a well-written annex. Such tools are important for detailed planning and coordination, as well as assessment and decision support, but effective SC will require much more than good tools. An Annex Y or a “communication strategy” does not meet the scope of operational need if relegated to the “back page.” The Annex Y should retain its place and role, but SC should be integrated into all operations processes at the outset and throughout planning, preparation, execution, and assessment to ensure the greatest effect in the information environment. Just as targeting boards are used to synchronize MAGTF kinetic fires, synchronizing words and actions across the MAGTF

---

82. Gen Mattis; Concept for Countering Irregular Threats

operational environment can help the commander close the “say-do gap” and increase the potential to influence intended audiences.<sup>83</sup> All Marines and every staff member should understand the overarching strategic purpose and considerations for any MAGTF operation. The MAGTF’s base plan should be written in such a way that it is also the MAGTF SC plan, i.e., MAGTF actions and images will speak volumes more than its words, so everything the MAGTF does should be viewed as an important element of the SC plan.

### **Assessing Operational Progress through an SC Lens**

In the future, the MAGTF would track and assess operations in the same way it does now but with a more informed staff sensitive to the effect MAGTF actions and messages have in the information environment. Both physical and psychological effects have to be measured in order to track how actions, words and images are being perceived within the local culture. Given that culture is, by definition, locally defined, the amount of time and resources required to develop necessary feedback and assessment systems can be daunting. While kinetic or lethal effects in the physical domain can normally be quickly and easily observed, non-kinetic or non-lethal effects in the cognitive domain require much more time and effort to discern – especially with nuanced cultural differences abounding even within a given operational environment. Patience and “time” are not normally on the U.S. force inventory list as being in sufficient quantity.

The MAGTF must develop and maintain a proactive stance with respect to SC planning in order to look for operations, actions and events that can reinforce prioritized themes or messages or to counter existing false perceptions. In similar fashion, the MAGTF needs to build an assessment plan that discerns how actions, words, and images are either supporting or hindering larger objectives. Otherwise, positive actions at the individual and the small unit level might go unrecognized, the effects of ill-considered actions might receive undue attention, and, worse, we could cede the operational advantage to the enemy. One need only recall the vivid images of dead American aviators being dragged through the

---

83. JFCOM Jt Warfighting Center; “Cdr’s Handbook for Strategic Communication”; 1 Sep 2008

streets of Mogadishu and contemplate the effects those images had on U.S. policymakers. That single example serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of operations at the cognitive level. An important part of the cultural shift in MAGTF staff planning and execution is a more athletic stance that enables the MAGTF to create advantage through actions and operations that have been intentionally integrated and resourced within a top-down communication plan. *“More important than any particular tool, we must know the context within which our actions will be received and understood.”*<sup>84</sup>

## **Functional Staff Activities in Support of SC**

The traditional functional staff sections falling under the doctrinal umbrella of SC will continue to support the MAGTF. These staff members will perform routine day-to-day tasks developed within the Annex Y, man watch sections, and develop the plans, branches, sequels, and immediate responses necessary to take advantage of, or mitigate the effects of, actions that occur within the purview of the MAGTF commander. However, the composition, organization, and location of these staff sections remains a matter of discussion, experiment and, in practice, application of recent lessons learned. Traditional staff sections, SC “cells,” and other kinds of teams all need to be examined closely to determine the optimal way to organize. Who should have staff cognizance over these elements and whether they are best organized for their many tasks is another matter for discussion, experimentation, and continued development.

In addition to the organization of permanent MAGTF SC staff sections, some deployed MAGTFs have had success employing various functionally focused, mission-oriented teams. The Human Terrain Team is one example and has been employed in Afghanistan with positive results. These teams typically include a sociologist or an anthropologist with cultural expertise. In some case, the MAGTF could use similar support teams to great advantage. Key Leader Engagement teams are another possible direct support capability.

---

84. Admiral Mullen; JFQ Issue 55, 4<sup>th</sup> Qtr 2009; “Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics”

## **Potential Implications and DOTMLPF Considerations for the Marine Corps**

*"The operational and tactical synergy of the MAGTF is what makes it a flexible, effective and feared force on the battlefield. Improving this synergy requires concrete steps that cut across the MAGTF... namely, developing capabilities to better operate in complex terrain, in a decentralized manner, and in the information environment."*<sup>85</sup>

DoD is conducting an SC Capabilities-Based Assessment to determine the degree to which existing capabilities are sufficient or need to be enhanced and to identify best practices for strategic communication at the Combatant Command level.<sup>86</sup> The Marine Corps has concurrently identified existing gaps in SC related capabilities and capacities needed to improve our ability to excel in the cognitive domain. Several of these gaps are in the doctrine, training and education arenas where it is clear that both Joint and Marine Corps task lists and standards will eventually need to be developed.

With respect to gaps, a consensus is that "effective SC requires an organizational culture attuned to the information environment and a recognition that SC, as a way to achieve information effects, consists of many capabilities (means) that are an integral part of the commander's arsenal. Staff expertise may be available to support these efforts. Still, the trained staff section is less important than a unit culture [in which] the commander both recognizes what strategic communication is (and isn't) and emphasizes SC as important to successful military operations."<sup>87</sup>

From a DOTMLPF perspective, the majority of SC-related improvements appear to fall into the non-material categories of doctrine, training and education. In most cases, only discreet capability increases MIGHT BE needed, but the Corps should consider expanding some of the capacities of high-demand/low-density SC-enabling capabilities such

---

85. Marine Corps V&S 2025; p35, emphasis added

86. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

87. Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL) Issue Paper; "The Trouble with Strategic Communication"; Dennis Murphy, Jan 2008; Vol 2-08

as PA, IO, CMO, and COMCAM in order to support the SC process more effectively. Integrating these improvements, both among themselves and into the other capabilities resident in service-level staffs and throughout MAGTFs, is essential and will largely be a function of education and training.

Additional consideration should be given to working with Joint commands and the U.S. State Department to further refine the Joint Capability Area (JCA) lexicon with respect to SC and other non-lethal fires outside the “Building Partnership Capacity” JCA category. Although MAGTFs are not expressly directed to improve the general understanding of the importance of SC capability within operational units at the Joint Level, such understanding is critical to improving interagency SC capability. From an operational point of view, the implications for the Marine Corps, and the MAGTF, are considerable. The new definitions of warfare associated with complex environments, hybrid threats, transnational actors, dispersed operations, and the influence of tactical actions on strategic decision making could be argued to call for a much more prominent role for SC.

## **Conclusion**

Although DoS and DoD understand the importance of SC, proficiency in SC execution from the national level down to the “man on the ground” is lacking. The Corps clearly has an important supporting role to play, both at the institutional level and through our operational MAGTFs.

Institutional adaptability will play a large role in how we respond, and “balance” will need to remain a guidon. Part of the “balance” guidon is the acknowledgment that the world always will have actors who are not dissuaded or deterred by anything other than a strong physical (military) US presence.<sup>88</sup>

Ensuring that kinetic and non-kinetic actions, words, and images are consistently synchronized and deconflicted is similarly challenging.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, the Corps must meet this challenge and be willing to adapt to today’s realities.

---

88. E-mail discussion with Dakota Wood, CSBA; 31 March 2010

89. December 2009 DoD Report to Congress

**Marine Corps Operating Concepts - Third Edition**

SC should be inherent in all policy making, operational planning, and execution. Details as to how this will best work at the MEF and MEB levels remain to be refined. Joint Forces Command's recently developed *Commander's Handbook on Strategic Communication* contains several examples of how joint forces have experimented with organization to better address SC concerns.

The ideas contained in this functional concept and other related guidance must be critically examined, fleshed out and adopted within our educational institutions, training venues, and exercise critique lists. With our historic predisposition for kinetic action and terrain-oriented objectives, and our focus on a well-defined, well-understood enemy order of battle, the Marine Corps will continue to explore new turf as it moves into this more sophisticated, more cognitively oriented operational domain. The innovation and adaptation being pursued in the SC arena as a matter of operational expediency by exceptional commanders in the field must be institutionalized across the Corps. This concept and emerging TTP will be used over the coming months to develop a pre-doctrinal Marine Corps Interim Publication that will endeavor to further describe Corps "best practice."