Wartime roles and missions

Regardless of whether we deploy with our unit or stay behind at the home command, public affairs practitioners need to understand the relationship of the military and the media, and the information needs of the internal and external audiences so we can meet the needs of all our customers.
Department of Defense’s principles for media coverage

Open and independent reporting is the principle means for media coverage.

After Desert Storm, the news media representatives expressed dissatisfaction with their treatment by the military. The media organizations offered up 10 principles for news coverage of combat operations. DOD and the media agreed on all but one, which remains a point of contention.


1. Open and independent reporting shall be the principal means of coverage of U.S. military operations.

2. Media pools (limited number of news media who represent a larger number of news media organizations for news gatherings and sharing of material during a specified activity) are not to serve as the standard means of covering U.S. military operations. However, they sometimes may provide the only means of early access to a military operation. In this case, media pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity (in 24 to 36 hours, when possible). The arrival of early-access media pools shall not cancel the principle of independent coverage for journalists already in the area.

3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be applicable for specific events, such as those at extremely remote locations or where space is limited.

4. Journalists in a combat zone shall be credentialed by the U.S. military and shall be required to abide by a clear set of military security ground rules that protect U.S. Armed Forces and their operations. Violation of the ground rules may result in suspension of credentials and expulsion from the combat zone of the journalist involved. News organizations shall make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations and to make them familiar with U.S. military operations.
5

Journalists shall be provided access to all major military units. Special operations restrictions may limit access in some cases.

6

Military PA officers should act as liaisons but should not interfere with the reporting process.

7

Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders should be instructed to permit journalists to ride on military vehicles and aircraft when possible. The military shall be responsible for the transportation of pools.

8

Consistent with its capabilities, the military shall supply PA officers with facilities to enable timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and shall make those facilities available, when possible, for filing independent coverage. If Government facilities are unavailable, journalists, as always, shall file by any other means available. The military shall not ban communications systems operated by news organizations, but electromagnetic operational security in battlefield situations may require limited restrictions on the use of such systems.

9

Those principles in paragraph 8 shall apply as well to the operations of the standing DOD National Media Pool system.

10

The 10th principle was NOT agreed upon:

The U.S. military will retain the option to review news material when operational security is a consideration.

Media did NOT agree to this principle, however, if you ever believe media may have recorded sensitive material or have recorded anything that may breech operational security, do not hesitate to speak to the reporter about this issue. Calmer heads need to prevail in this situation and a phone call to your service headquarters and/or the media outlet’s news chief should take care of this.

Photo courtesy of Defense Imagery
Guidelines for arranging media pools and embedded media

**Media pools** are selected by and from a larger group of media in a location to share, or pool their print, photo and video resources for the group. This method is used by public affairs specialists due to limited space restrictions.

These restrictions usually occur due to a lack of space on government vehicles or when there are more media than a court room will allow during a high-profile military trial. The media select the pool. The senior media person at the scene will help run the selection process. Public affairs specialists do not and will not select or get involved with the selection process to determine the media pool.

Public affairs guidance includes your service regulations and input from your PA chiefs.

1. Public affairs chiefs may have information from higher headquarters to pass and information about a particular media in your area of operation.
2. Service PA regulations also give additional guidance for setting up a media pool.

Media pooling must be fair. Public affairs staff must assist in setting up the pool, but the PA staff does not pick the individuals who cover the story.

1. The media members decide on pool membership; we just provide transportation.
2. For media pools, membership is not limited to U.S. media members.

Pools will not be standard for news coverage. However, media pools may be used when everyone cannot be handled at the same time, and all the media parties agree to the pool.

**Embedded media** are media who are attached to a particular squad, platoon, company or battalion to cover the progress during wartime or peacetime operations. These media are screened, accredited and have met specific criteria set forth by the U.S. command in charge of that area of operation. For example, the Central Command is in charge of setting the criteria needed for media to cover missions in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Embedded media is the preferred method of DOD in combat operations. Current media technology has made this coverage timelier and mirrors the cornerstone of DOD’s Principles of Information – maximum disclosure, minimum delay.

1. For embedded media, this type of coverage often includes “media boot camp.” This orientation introduces the media to the military way of life. However, there are advantages and disadvantage to embedded media coverage.

   a. **Advantages:**
      - Increased coverage
      - Perceived as unbiased, uncensored
      - Shared hardships, creating shared perspectives
      - View from the front line and service member’s perspective
   b. **Disadvantages:**
      - Public affairs must train units embedding the media
      - Greater risks of SAPP violations
Internal information objectives in theater of operations

Internal information plans must be developed for both the theater of operations or war and at the home base. Without an effective internal information plan, rumors will be everywhere.

Internal information needs in theater and at home:

- Deployed forces will be too busy settling in at first, then the demand for information will rise and stay high as time goes on.
- Non-deployed forces, family members and friends will want a great deal of information at first, and that desire will stay high for the length of the deployment.

In theater, those who are most isolated or farthest from the line of departure need news the most because they are also the most cut off from outside news sources and inundated with rumors.

To get out that information to your internal audience, use all your resources including:

**Print**

- Use newsletters/fact sheets/clips from external newspapers
- Publish often to counteract rumors
- Post on bulletin boards in high traffic areas

**Electronic**

- Use computer networks and Armed Forces Radio and Television Service
- Navy maintains the shelters for equipping these joint-service detachments
- Mobile detachments broadcast local internal information and programming from the broadcast center

**Oral**

- Through formations/musters.
- Internal information needs at home and base.
- Service members, family members and civilians at home and base have high demand for information throughout the mission.
- The public affairs office needs to continue publishing, posting and broadcasting normal internal information, including stories from the operations theater.
- Provide briefings to family support groups by the rear area commanders.
Public affairs interaction with civil affairs

**In theater** - The role of public affairs community relations stops and becomes the primary mission of civil affairs, J-5. However, public affairs specialists still provide media support when possible.

**At base/home** - The role of public affairs community relations continues because the military cannot operate without the support of the American people. Community relations efforts remain constant or increase during a unit’s deployment for two main reasons.

1. Community members will be curious about what we do, and requests for speakers and tours may increase.

2. Many local businesses depend on service members as customers and will need to understand why their customers are gone.

Photos courtesy of Defense Imagery
Public affairs’ role in information operations

Public affairs and information operations are critical to accomplish the commander’s intent. Successful PA operations, fulfilling the public’s right to know, require institutional credibility to maintain public trust and confidence.

PA’s role in information operations is to continue credible PA operations to help complete the commander’s mission. PA does this by keeping the American public and international audiences informed!

IO serves, in part, to influence foreign adversary audiences using psychological operations capabilities.

Although both PA and IO require planning, message development and media analysis, the efforts differ with respect to audience, scope and intent, and must remain separate.

Effective coordination and collaboration with IO is necessary for PA to maintain its institutional credibility.

Commanders should structure their organizations to ensure PA and IO functions are separate.
Conclusion

In order to be an effective public affairs specialist, you must follow the principles of information and guidelines of embedded and media pools, and realize the importance of internal information and community relations on the battlefield and at home. You are going to be on those front lines with the media and handling media queries at your home base.
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