



Strategic Communication

So far in your PAQC course, you've learned about core national policy documents that help define and explain U.S. national values and interests. You've learned about the four instruments of national power (DIME: Diplomacy, Information, Military & Economic) the nation can employ to advance and to defend its national security objectives.

In operational planning classes, you learned how regional combatant commands support national security objectives through security cooperation activities and defense support to public diplomacy.

So, now, we'll focus on how PA fits into this complex security environment. It is very important for PAOs to understand how the U.S. narrative is synchronized at various command levels and among a host of intergovernmental agencies. It is only with "nested messaging" expressed across echelons that the United States can successfully speak with one voice.

This class will introduce you to the tools you need to help commanders at every level to speak with one voice. Themes and messages, nested in national policy guidance, must be synchronized. This process is called strategic communication.

First, we'll define the strategic communication process for synchronizing communication plans and products. We'll see how all the instruments of national power come together to advance U.S. security objectives. Then we'll look at your critical role in strategic communication and how good interagency coordination and staff work can make you an indispensable part of a planning staff. Finally, we'll see how effective SC can inform operational planners, support commander's intent, and engender the support of other countries and coalition partners in advancing common interests.

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The Strategic Communication Process Defined

Although there is significant interagency debate over a formal definition and operational application of strategic communication, the Department of Defense defines strategic communication as follows:

“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” (*2010 Commander’s Handbook for SC & Communication Strategy, Version 3.0*).

Who’s responsible for strategic communication oversight in the US government?

- Department of State: Within the Department of State, the Office of the Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs has the lead for strategic communication.
- Department of Defense: In January 2011, the Secretary of Defense designated co-leads for strategic communication within the DOD to better integrate policy-making and communications planning.
- Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (also oversees and manages Information Operations)
- Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs

Because ongoing efforts to “institutionalize” a process for strategic communication have lacked traction, sometimes creating confusion among various government agencies, Adm. Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, weighed in on the operational application of strategic communication in an August 2009 article in *Joint Forces Quarterly*. Mullen called for the military to take a harder look at strategic communication, cautioning that the U.S. government has allowed strategic communication to become a “thing” instead of a “process.” He said strategic communication should be an enabling function that guides and informs decision makers and not an organization unto itself.

There’s a wealth of guidance on strategic communication out there, but arguably the most succinct treatise to date is Mullen’s JFQ article. As you will read, in your assigned reading, Mullen said good communication is “having the right intent up front and letting our actions speak for themselves. We shouldn’t care if the people don’t like us; that isn’t the goal. The goal is credibility, and we earn that over time.”

Key takeaways from ADM Mullen’s JFQ article:

- “We need to worry a lot less about how to communicate our actions and much more about what our actions communicate.”
- “Our adversaries monitor the news to discern coalition and U.S. intent as weighed against the efforts of our forces. When they find a say-do gap...they drive a truck right through it.
- We must be vigilant about holding ourselves accountable to higher standards of conduct and closing any gaps, real or perceived, between what we say about ourselves and what we do to back it up.”
- Our messages lack credibility when we haven’t invested enough in building trust and relationships and when we don’t deliver on promises.
- Our adversaries intimidate, control and communicate from within. They aren’t just out there shooting videos; they deliver. Each beheading, each bombing, and each beating sends a powerful message or, rather, is a powerful message.
- Most strategic communication problems are not communication problems at all. They are policy and execution problems. Each time we fail to live up to our values or don’t follow up on a promise, we look more and more like the “arrogant Americans” the enemy claims we are.
- Messages are not something we can launch downrange like a rocket, something we can fire for effect. Good communication runs both ways. It’s not about telling our story. We must also be better listeners.
- We need to better appreciate cultural differences and people’s needs, and hopes for the future to supplant the extremist narrative. We cannot capture hearts and

The Strategic Communication (SC) Process Defined (continued)

minds; we must engage them; we must listen to them, one heart and one mind at a time—over time." —"We need to worry less about how to communicate our actions and more about what our actions communicate."

- What we are after in the end—or should be after—are actions that speak for themselves, that speak for us. What we need more than anything is credibility. And we can't get that in a talking point.

Moreover, Mullen is strongly suggesting, between the lines, that PAOs, like their operational counterparts, should be lifelong students of operational design/art. They should study how all the instruments of national power (Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic, or DIME) come together to advance U.S. security objectives, and, in turn, consider the interplay of politics, national policy, international relations, and military strategy in reaching audiences—intended and unintended.

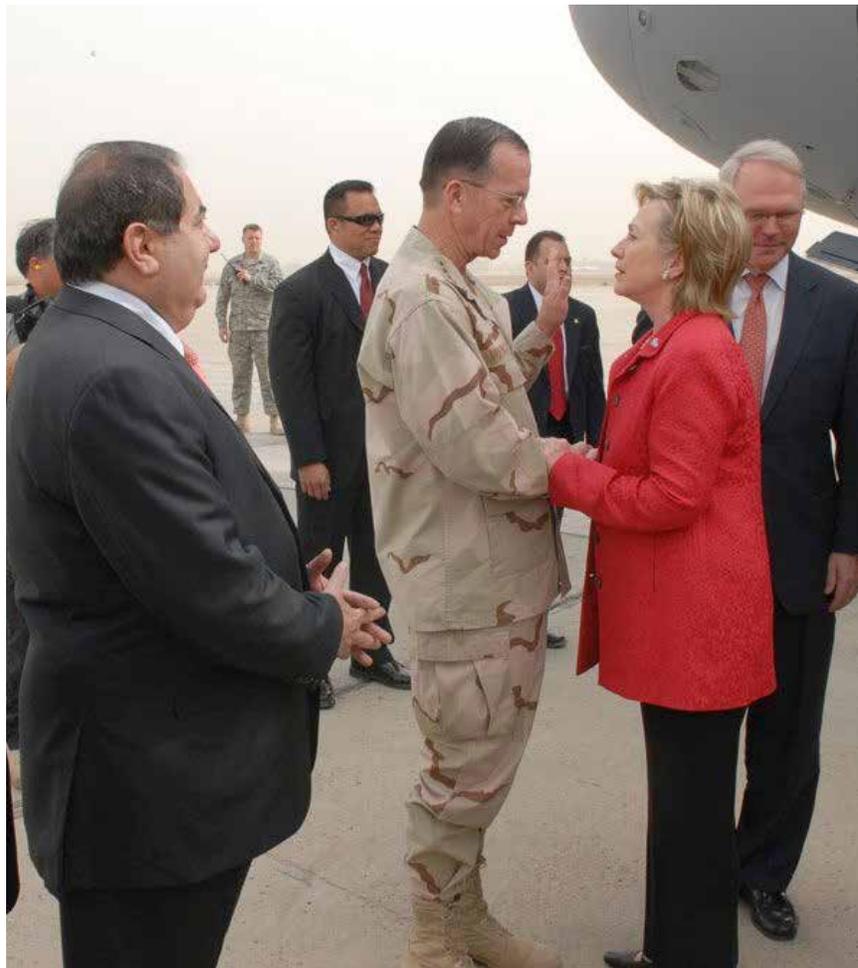


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Aligning operational themes and messages with USG strategic objectives/narrative

Speaking with “One Voice”

This concept might seem simple, but think about our involvement in Afghanistan for a moment. We have been in Afghanistan for more than a decade and many of you might even have served in the theater and expended blood and sweat in the fight; but how well do “we” understand the “why” of the mission. If a civilian neighbor of yours asked you, “*What is the strategic goal of the United States in Afghanistan?*” would you be able to reply with an answer your friend would understand?

ISAF GOAL: “To disrupt, dismantle and eventually defeat al Qaeda, and to prevent its return to either Afghanistan or Pakistan.”

ISAF MISSION: “ISAF, in partnership with the international community, supports the Afghan government in the conduct of comprehensive, population-centric counterinsurgency operations—to protect the Afghan people, neutralize insurgent networks, develop an Afghan National Security Force that assumes lead responsibility for security, and support development of Afghan government institutions for legitimate, credible, and enduring governance, security and sustainable socio-economic growth—in order to deny terrorists safe havens and ensure the Afghan government’s stability and sovereignty not later than 31 December 2014.”

As a PAO, and official spokesperson, you want to always be prepared as an to deliver an “elevator speech,” informed directly by the national strategic guidance or narrative. Remember lower-level commanders need to echo messages from higher commands in a complementary way and you can help your commander with this “nesting” by knowing the strategic direction of our country and the respective services. The boss will have a lot more confidence in his or her messages if you can show how the messages are connected and complement one another.

Let’s review the four instruments of national power. Understanding this lexicon may help you link messages for your command by the lines of

operation that are important at your level.

Sources of Strategic Guidance—Achieving national strategic objectives requires effective unified action resulting in unity of effort. Speaking in “one voice” is accomplished through collaboration, synchronization, and coordination in the use of four instruments of national power, commonly known by the acronym “DIME.”

- **Diplomacy:** “Diplomacy is the principal instrument for engaging with other states and foreign groups to advance U.S. values, interests, and objectives.”
- **Information:** “The U.S. government uses strategic communication to provide top-down guidance relative to using the informational instrument of national power in specific situations.”
- **Military:** As the military instrument of national power, the Armed Forces must ensure their adherence to U.S. values, constitutional principles, and standards for the profession of arms.
- **Economic:** A strong U.S. economy with free access to global markets and resources is a fundamental engine of the general welfare, the enabler of a strong national defense, and an influence for economic expansion by U.S. trade partners worldwide.

Keep in mind that military power is used in conjunction with the other instruments of national power to advance and defend U.S. values, interests, and objectives.

The National Military Strategy is nested in the Quadrennial Defense Review and National Defense Strategy, which are informed by and support the President’s National Security Strategy objectives. PAOs must understand the ways in which military and civilian capabilities best complement one other. When military and civilian organizations share information, cooperate and strive together to accomplish a common goal....unity of effort possible.

Synchronization—PAOs can help ensure mutual understanding of the capabilities, limitations and consequences of military and nonmilitary actions as well as the understanding of end state and termination requirements. Consensus building is the key element to

Aligning operational themes and messages with USG strategic objectives/narrative (continued)

unity of effort.

The Public Affairs Joint Pub explains that: "The mission of joint PA is to plan, coordinate and synchronize U.S. military public information activities and resources in order to support the commander's intent and concept of operations."

As a PA professional you must understand how all operations should be designed to support the commander's vision and express a desired message to a target audience.

At the unified combatant command level, the PAO should gain a full understanding of the unified combatant commander's plan for theater-level operations and engagement to learn how the command will integrate military activities with diplomatic activities. Theater and global campaign plans are the centerpiece of DOD's planning construct, linking steady-state shaping activities to current operations and contingency plans.

Each geographic combatant commander is responsible for integrating military activities with diplomatic activities in their respective areas of responsibility, executed through:

- Theater Strategies: The bridge between national strategic guidance and the joint operation planning required to achieve national and regional objectives and end states, executed through...
- Theater Campaign Plans: The primary vehicle for designing, organizing, integrating and executing security cooperation activities.

Theater strategies typically employ military and regional engagement, close cooperation with the Department of State, embassies and other federal departments and agencies as ways to achieve theater objectives.

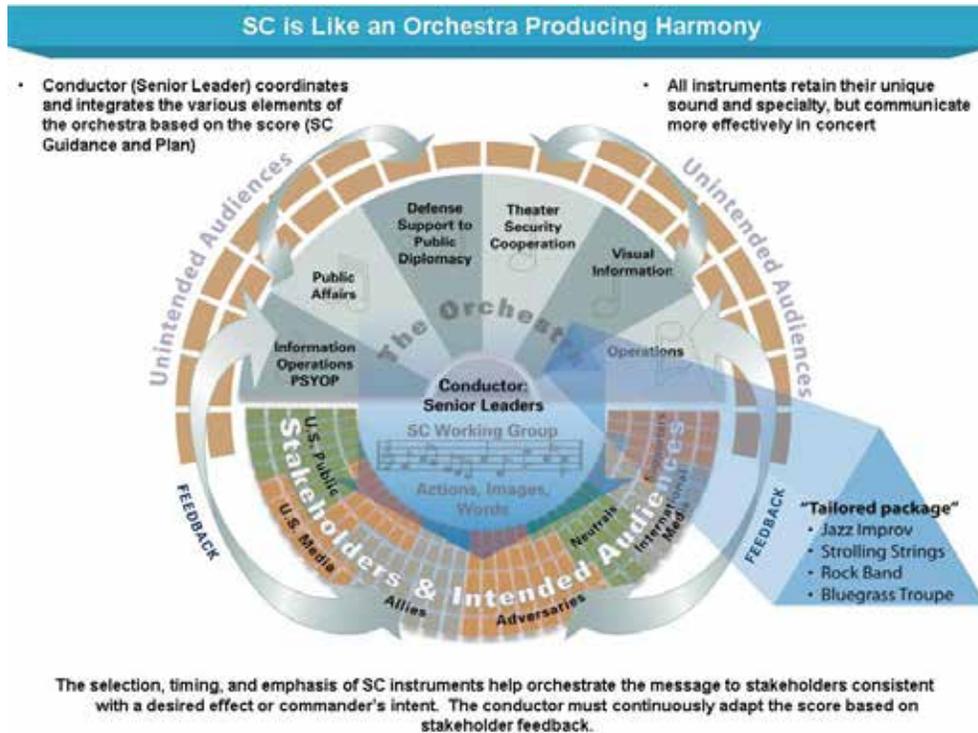
The State Department, that is the U.S. ambassador and the corresponding country team, take the lead in diplomatic-military activities in countries

abroad. They are charged with integrating strategic communication planning (themes and messages) into military planning and operations. As you now know strategic communication planning must be integrated into military planning and operations and this is done by documenting the plan for strategic communication in operation plans and coordinating and synchronizing with other government agencies – also known as OGAs – and multinational partners. Themes at all levels should support strategic and national objectives. This ensures consistent communications to global audiences.

Now that we've reviewed how unified combatant commands plan for theater-level operations, let's look at the PAO's operational counterparts in the strategic communication process. At a fundamental level, effective strategic communications is linked to good staff coordination. Good staff work and the ability to reach out effectively to OGAs and NGOs – non government organizations – in both peacetime and during contingencies defines the strategic communication process.

An excellent illustration for how the strategic communication process can work may be found in the "Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication."

Aligning operational themes and messages with USG strategic objectives/narrative (continued)



The Strategic Communication Orchestra—The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report states that strategic communication "requires close collaboration across interagency lines" and notes that DOD supports the State Department's "core role in communicating with foreign governments and international publics." Because of the need to synchronize the myriad strategic communications-related capabilities, organizations and missions, the QDR suggests we look at strategic communication as an "orchestration of multiple lines of operation" to support national objectives.

To create the desired effect, or outcome, different sections of the orchestra play at different times, tempos and volumes.

- Theater Security Cooperation
- Defense Support to Public Diplomacy
- Public Affairs

- Information Operations, including Military Information Along with Support Operations
- Operations
- Visual Information

The Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy depicts the Orchestra as including:

The Military's Contribution to Strategic Communication Planning—The U.S. military plays an important supporting role in strategic communications, primarily through information operations, public affairs and defense support to public diplomacy. Strategic communication considerations should be included in all joint operational planning for military operations from routine, to recurring military activities in peacetime, through major operations.

Aligning operational themes and messages with USG strategic objectives/narrative (continued)

- **Information Operations (IO):** Military actions that attack an adversary's information and related systems while defending our own.
- **Public Affairs (PA):** Public information, command information and community engagement activities directed toward both the external and internal publics with interest in the DOD.
- **Defense Support to Public Diplomacy (DSPD):** Activities and measures taken by DOD components to support and to facilitate USG public diplomacy efforts.

Joint Force Commander's Role—The JFC, as part of the strategic communication effort, should ensure planning for PA, IO and DSPD is coordinated to make certain consistent themes and messages are communicated that support the overall strategic communication objectives of the U.S. government.

Every JFC has the responsibility to develop a coordinated and synchronized communications strategy that links to, and supports, planning and execution of coherent national and strategic communication effort. In addition to synchronizing the communications activities within the joint force, an effective communications strategy is developed in concert with other U.S. government organizations, partner nations and NGOs as appropriate.

Combatant commanders should develop staff procedures for implementing strategic communication guidance into all operational planning and targeting processes as well as collaborative processes for integrating strategic communication activities with nonmilitary partners and subject matter experts.

PA's Joint Staff Role—The PAO serves as the joint force commander's:

- Principal spokesperson
- Senior public affairs advisor
- Member of personal staff

PAO's and the PA staff should be involved in planning, decision-making, training, equipping, and

executing operations as well as integrating PA activities into all levels of the command.



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PA Elements of the Annex Y (Strategic Communication) to an Operation Plan

An Operation Plan or Operation Order (OPORD) is a directive issued by a commander to subordinate commanders for the purpose of effecting the coordinated execution of an operation. OPORD annexes include C (operations), F (public affairs), P (host-nation support), Y (strategic communication), and others.

In the Doctrinal Foundations of PA lesson, you learned that the mission of joint PA is to plan, coordinate, and synchronize U.S. military public information activities and resources in order to support:

- The **commander's intent** – A clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.
- The commander's **concept of operations** – The commander's concept of operations, commonly referred to as CONOPs, is a verbal or graphic statement that clearly and concisely expresses what the joint force commander intends to accomplish and how it will be done using available resources.

Given this mission, PA is charged with developing and implementing Annex F to an OPORD, along with being involved in its planning and development along with other staff annexes.

Annex Y

Since every JFC has the responsibility to develop a coordinated and synchronized communications strategy that links to, and supports, planning and execution of a coherent national and strategic communication effort, PA has a key role in helping develop Annex Y. Let's review the components.

An Annex Y is divided into five parts:

1. Situation
2. Mission
3. Execution, which includes three parts: concept of

- operations, tasks and coordinating logistics
4. Administration & logistics
5. Command and control.

PAOs may be asked to contribute to any or all of these sections but, PA has a specific subparagraph under "Tasks," where it will provide a "concise statement encompassing all key actions that it will perform" as a subordinate and supporting element.

PAOs must:

- Assign responsibilities based on capabilities to reach the intended audience or audiences
- Ensure that tasks clearly assign responsibilities
- Consider Defense Support to Public Diplomacy and visual information
- Address interagency coordination
Provide for guidance on measures of effectiveness (MOE) and measures of performance (MOP)



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Conclusion

The SC process depends upon the nexus between those seeking to shape perceptions and the front-line communicators, whether strategic corporals, public affairs officers or theater commanders, who deliver the message.

You, as your commander's trusted PA advisor, need to be thoroughly familiar with the SC process and your unique role in helping your commander's staff synchronize themes and messages, nested in national policy documents. To be successful, you have to be lifelong students of both the operational and information environments and understand how

all the instruments of national power: Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economics or DIME come together to advance U.S. values, interests, and objectives.

PAOs are the focal point for ensuring that the message is delivered in one voice and play an integral role in helping commanders integrate SC in all joint operational planning, from routine military activities in peacetime through major operations. Stay on top of this process, and you will always remain invaluable to your commander.

References and Additional Resources

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