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JOINT PUBLIC AFFAIRS DOCTRINE: ITS TIME HAS COME

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The enduring theme of Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, is that “joint warfare is team warfare.” And just as the concept of team warfare applies across the continuum of conflict in terms of operational, logistical, intelligence, and Service-unique capabilities and perspectives, the same is true of public affairs. This paper examines the issue of joint public affairs doctrine—what it is, what the responsibilities of the major “actors” within the Defense Department are, and how such doctrine must fit into the joint warfare arena. It argues that joint public affairs doctrine needs to be promulgated throughout the Armed Forces immediately, to guide Joint Force Commanders toward solid, results-oriented public affairs programs which disseminate their “message” to internal and external publics. Further, the paper cites recent joint operational experiences wherein the author’s main points are best illustrated by how the senior military leadership involved dealt with the external media: the national and international press corps.
**Introduction.**

Joint Publication 1 states that "the nature of modern warfare demands that we fight as a team." And just as that joint "team" fight has operational, logistical, and politico-military dimensions to it, there is also another important aspect to be considered—public affairs. Given those statements, and the various major joint operations conducted in recent years—Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti come to mind—it is imperative that there be an overarching joint public affairs (PA) doctrine. Put another way, the functional area known as "public affairs" must take its rightful place alongside operations, logistics, and intelligence in the joint doctrine framework.

Currently, however, such doctrine is not published. The purpose of this paper is to examine why such doctrine is necessary and what it should do, and the author's view of how a typical joint task force operation can benefit from well-stated, universally-understood joint public affairs doctrinal principles.

**The Mission.**

The mission of joint public affairs operations is no different from that of the Services' public affairs offices: to ensure timely, accurate and complete information about U.S. military forces in action—before, during, and after deployments, training, actual combat, or military operations other than war (MOOTW). What are different, however, are the structure and system in which public affairs operations take place. For example, personnel trained at the Defense Information School (DINFOS) as public affairs officers (PAO) and PA specialists focus on Service-specific, parochial issues and installation/unit PA activities. However, when the United States commits its military forces in support of national security objectives, often in concert with regional
friends and allies, there is international interest at once, and sometimes the public
affairs community is found wanting, in terms of how best to respond to the inevitable
media queries. Somehow, the routine manner in which a Service installation or unit
PAO deals with issues, crises, or operations involving his organization must be
applicable at the higher, more complicated, level—as with a Joint Task Force (JTF).
Doctrine makes that possible—joint public affairs doctrine. What follows is a
presentation of who should be responsible for what, and how the public affairs
operation can function smoothly in a joint environment if all the actors understand
their respective roles.

The Defense Department’s Role.

The Department of Defense (DOD) is ultimately responsible to the American
people for keeping them informed of how their tax dollars are being spent on the military
Services and for programs within the Department. The commercial news media form the
main conduit through which such information passes, to publics both internal and external
to the military. That said, it is critical that the two institutions—the military and the
media—develop and maintain a solid working relationship based on trust, credibility, and
a mutual understanding of each other’s concerns. The Department’s efforts in that regard
are guided by the “Principles for News Coverage of DOD Operations” contained in the
DOD Directive 5122.5. As stated in Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), Doctrine for Public Affairs
in Joint Operations, those principles “chart the course for all DOD public affairs activities,
and apply to the full continuum of day-to-day activities and operations.” The time-
honored phrase “maximum disclosure with minimum delay” has long been the standard for
commanders and PAO’s in this regard. Commanders must ensure that their operational
planning includes public affairs considerations and input, the better to achieve the goals set forth by the DOD “Principles.” Timely, accurate information must be provided to the public (through the press) and the Congress on everything Defense-related, from strategy and operations through equipment procurement and training. What’s more, queries of the Department from private citizens, organizations, and especially the Congress must be handled in an expeditious manner. Unless the information requested is classified or protected under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or the Privacy Act, it must be provided to the requester promptly, without any sort of “spin” or propagandistic bias—just the facts. Understanding the aforementioned is key to being able to work in the public affairs milieu of joint operations.

One of the most important missions of the DOD, under the aegis of the Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (OATSD-PA), is to “review, coordinate, approve and disseminate public affairs guidance, public affairs plans, and public affairs annexes written under the provisions of Joint Pub 5-03.2, “Joint Operations Planning and Execution System (JOPES).”¹ Three For the PAO in the field, especially in a unified command or in any joint environment, the public affairs guidance promulgated at the seat of government forms the foundation upon which he can build his PA plans and execute his PA missions. It is that interagency-approved public affairs guidance which ensures that he and everyone in his chain of command are truly “speaking with one voice.” Once such guidance is provided to the combatant commander-in-chief (CINC) or the Joint Force Commander (JFC), all press releases and public statements which pertain to an ongoing operation should reflect, and address issues related to, current U.S. policies.

In addition to its public affairs guidance and interagency coordination roles on all
PA matters, the Department also manages, activates, and directs the DOD National Media Pool (NMP). Born in the aftermath of Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada in 1983, wherein the international media were kept out of the combat area for the first two days of the operation, the NMP is comprised of representatives from all the major U.S. television and radio networks, print wire services, news magazines, large daily newspapers, and photo agencies. What the NMP does is provide the American public (and Congress) with on-scene reporting of operations—both combat and MOOTW—in areas where there initially is no U.S. media presence. Through ten years of trial-and-error with the concept, the DOD and the members of this standing pool have reached the point where there is a greater understanding and appreciation of each other’s mission, needs, and considerations. Because of the increased on-the-ground presence, mobility assets, and news transmission capabilities typical of today’s mainstream national and international media, there will realistically be fewer occasions to activate the NMP, other than in training scenarios. The reason: the media will virtually always “be there” when things happen. Nonetheless, commanders at all levels (and especially CINCs and JFCs) must be prepared to receive, brief, escort (and facilitate media coverage by) the NMP. Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Colin L. Powell made that clear to all commanders in his now-famous 18 May 90 message which was sent to the field in the aftermath of the NMP’s Operation Just Cause deployment to Panama the previous December. In that notorious public affairs fiasco, the press pool members were taken to Panama too late to cover the operation, and were prevented from covering the action once they arrived in-country. Such was the resulting outcry from the media that then-Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney launched an investigation into what went wrong. Because of the findings of that investigation—known as the Hoffman Report—changes in media relations
procedures were initiated within the Department's PA apparatus. Nearly six years later, the guidance from both General Powell and Mr. Hoffman needs, and gets, periodic reinforcement.

The OATSD-PA must also provide public affairs plans officers to the DOD Crisis Coordination Center prior to and during major operations. Said planners work on interagency issues (in conjunction with the Joint Staff's PA representatives), ensure accurate information is provided by the Department, and evaluate the overall PA support of the operational mission through media product analysis and feedback. Two major portions of that PA support are regularly scheduled news briefings and the multi-media products from the American Forces Information Service, especially the *Stars and Stripes* newspapers and programming from the Armed Forces Radio & Television Service. The latter are aimed at the Services' internal audiences, to keep them informed to a greater extent than the external media can accomplish. And finally, the DOD must ensure that all public affairs training, for military and civilian personnel in the PA career field, is *joint* in nature, with a clear focus on the operational PA requirements of joint warfare. 6

**The Services' Role.**

The Services, as part of their Title 10, U.S. Code responsibilities to "organize, train and equip" the force, should "coordinate closely with the combatant commanders to determine the resources (personnel and equipment) necessary to conduct successful public affairs activities in joint or single-Service environments, ensure the immediate availability of necessary active and reserve component public affairs resources to support any assigned mission, and ensure that all required capabilities for public affairs support of short-notice deployments exist in the active force." 7 That is a crucial paragraph of Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), for it gets to the heart of just how and how quickly the Service public affairs
organizations can (and must) support the CINCs in planning and conducting PA support of their joint (and combined) operations. Because of the relatively small size of the public affairs staffs assigned to CINCs and JFCs—less than 20 people—Service support through personnel augmentation is mission-essential. Later, we will examine a proposed new way of maximizing such Service support to a joint or combined operation early on—indeed, the Service public affairs establishments are the key to that, as will be shown.

Other public affairs missions for the Services include programs (installation newspapers, closed-circuit television programming, family member briefings, etc.) designed for internal audiences, and perhaps most importantly, PA training at each of the Service schools. Such training includes, but is not limited to, a media “intelligence preparation of the battlefield” program, as was used so effectively by JTF 180 prior to Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti in late 1995. That program—conducted by the XVIII Airborne Corps PAO—provided “a realistic, practical assessment of the media to commanders and key staff officers so they would know what to expect once U.S. forces arrived.”8 Another step the Army has taken in the interest of improving the military-media relationship is the incorporation of press play into exercise scenarios at its combat training centers. Not only must commanders deal with an “enemy” at the training center, they must also learn to work with the media covering their operations. The results brought about by injecting reporters into exercise scenarios have been encouraging and enlightening, thus adding to the overall training value of the exercise.

The Chairman’s Role.

Any discussion of high-level responsibility for joint public affairs doctrine would have to include the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Joint Staff. In his Goldwater-Nichols role as the principal military advisor to the President, the Secretary of Defense,
and the National Security Council, the Chairman (assisted by the Joint Staff) ensures that joint public affairs doctrine gets disseminated and that all alert, warning, and deployment orders—as well as existing plans—are published in accordance with said doctrine. Under his guidance, a Public Affairs Response Cell (PARC) is established within the National Military Command Center (NMCC) during times of crisis. That cell works closely with the aforementioned OATSD-PA plans officers and the CINC’s’ PAOs to ensure field compliance with established public affairs guidance as coordinated through the interagency process. Finally, and most importantly, the Chairman should maintain an appropriate PA profile—with internal and external audiences—through interviews, talk show appearances, editorial boards, press conferences, Congressional testimony, and on-the-record sessions with the media during his official travel. What’s more, he should ensure that the appropriate directors of the Joint Staff (especially those involved in intelligence, operations, and long-range strategic planning, i.e., the J-2, J-3, and J-5, respectively) make themselves available to the media as circumstances warrant. Such appearances by these senior flag/general officers complement the public information initiatives of the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

The Role of the Combatant Commanders.

And what of the CINC’s? What are their public affairs responsibilities? First and foremost, they must ensure that their long-range operational and contingency plans are developed in accordance with joint public affairs doctrine and that the proper resources—people, equipment, facilities, communications gear, and transportation assets—are allocated to their PA staffs. Next, they must see their PAO as a key partner in the planning process. Whenever they don’t, the result too often is after-the-fact damage control, instead of positive, proactive messages being provided to the public via the media.
on the CINC's own terms and time schedules. Having the PAO in the planning loop at
the outset offers the greatest chance of operational success in terms of: 1) getting
proposed public affairs guidance staffed and cleared through the interagency process; 2)
preparing all commanders to host national and international media representatives, to
include the NMP; 3) identifying public affairs assets and requirements in support of JTF
commanders; 4) establishing a productive Joint Information Bureau (JIB) on the ground,
with a real-time data link to the operations center; and 5) developing a solid working
relationship based on mutual trust and respect with in-country media. Once the above
tasks are accomplished, a routine series of press briefings and periodic updates will serve
to keep all publics informed. Joint PA doctrine that is both authoritative and directive
will enable CINC's and JFC's to reach this point sooner than ever.

The Doctrine Itself.

Now that we have discussed the public affairs responsibilities of the major players,
let us look at what joint PA doctrine should say about how to ensure success, especially in
dealing with the external media. First of all, military leaders must understand the
dynamics of today's joint operational environment not only from their perspective, but
from that of the external media as well. Few people realize that less than 30 reporters
accompanied the entire D-Day invasion force in 1944, and that those reporters were
subjected to a strenuous field press censorship regimen. There was no "live" coverage of
battlefield events. Those days are gone forever, though, largely because of advances in
communications technology and the way in which news reporting is presently conducted,
with everything done in virtually real time. And as Army Lieutenant General Hugh
Shelton, who commanded JTF 180 in Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti said in a
recent article in Military Review, "commanders and staff officers must come to grips with
one undeniable fact in military operations: Great numbers of media will cover U.S. troop deployments anywhere in the world and in great detail. The images and words the media project are powerful, moving, and immediate and can influence national policy."

Nowhere was that more evident than in the aftermath of the 3-4 October 1993 fire fight in Mogadishu, Somalia involving U.S. Army Rangers and Somalis loyal to the warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. What began as a tactical operation ultimately had a strategic impact on U.S. policy once the media broadcast pictures of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu after the battle. That the Rangers won that battle, inflicting terrible casualties on their enemy in the process, was lost in press reports of the action. The resulting outrage voiced by the American public and the Congress forced the Clinton Administration to announce a "withdrawal-from-Somalia" timetable. That vignette illustrates the current "real-time" environment in which the military and the media must operate, with virtually the whole world watching. Joint public affairs doctrine that is universally understood will help facilitate the requisite planning necessary to deal with that phenomenon.

As stated earlier, a combatant CINC's organic public affairs staff is not large enough to form a standing Joint Information Bureau (JIB). As a result, in the recent past it has become standard practice to create an ad hoc organization to handle that responsibility. Unfortunately, that approach leads to command and control problems involving an organization which lacks sufficient manpower and equipment capable of providing top-notch public affairs support to either a deployed CINC or a JTF commander. As was the case in Operation Desert Shield, where the U.S. Central Command stood up a JIB with a handful of joint Service PAO's on temporary duty—and lacking organic equipment—mission-essential public affairs support is often less than satisfactory in the early, most critical, stages of an
operation. What is needed is a new, joint public affairs organization—one resourced with sufficient manpower, equipped to deploy rapidly, given a training budget, and most important of all, given top-down command support. This is where the Services’ public affairs organizations can make a great contribution, as they would have to give up the requisite personnel spaces to DOD in order to create this new entity. OATSD-PA is exploring such a possibility, calling the new proposed detachment a Joint Media Operations Center (JMOC). I support the creation of such an organization, for the reasons discussed below.

**The Joint Media Operations Center.**

A standing JMOC would be integrated into the supported CINC’s planning process, would provide the CINC and his staff with a media analysis and evaluation capability, would be self-contained in terms of state-of-the-art communications equipment, transportation assets and all-weather gear, and would remain as the core element of the Joint Information Bureau until the theater matures, or until it is augmented with public affairs personnel from the Services’ active and reserve component PA assets as necessary. Once replaced in theater, the JMOC would then re-deploy to home station, perhaps at Andrews Air Force Base, MD, or at Fort Meade, MD. This organization would have to be modular, so that one “team” can be deployed, another could be getting ready to deploy on either an operation or an exercise for training purposes, and a third sub-element would remain at home station as a “second major regional contingency (MRC)” asset. The JMOC would also have to be expandable, to accommodate additional public affairs assets from allied military forces, or perhaps non-governmental organizations or private volunteer organizations, as the situation would dictate. And finally, it would have to “be capable of conducting split-based operations, so that organizational integrity, command and control is maintained, even when teams are operating from different locations or in support of different operations.”12
Because media interest in, and coverage of, U.S. joint operations will tend to be highest at the outset, and because media representatives will most likely be in the operational area already, time is of the essence. The CINC or the JFC must have a fully functional public affairs infrastructure capable of landing with the initial elements of the joint force and commencing operations at once. Only an organization like the JMOC has that capability. While under the command and control of OATSD-PA during peacetime, the JMOC would come under the operational control of the supported CINC or JFC during a deployment, and would have the capability to fly its advance party personnel and their custom-palletized equipment within 24 hours’ notice, with the rest of the unit closing within 72 hours.¹³

Once on the ground, the JMOC would immediately establish a news media center (the Joint Information Bureau in its infancy), leasing the appropriate facilities as necessary, and begin to facilitate news media deployment, in-theater entry, accreditation, and operations. (This was done—eventually—in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in August 1990, during Operation Desert Shield, in conjunction with the Saudi Ministry of Information, but only after a delay of several days. Such a delay in press operations by today’s standards would be disastrous.) Because of his collocation with the JFC’s operations center, a JMOC liaison officer would be able to keep the news media center abreast of breaking developments, which should in turn lead to timely, accurate press releases about JTF operations. In addition, the JMOC would be able to respond to media queries more expeditiously and facilitate interviews with senior commanders and staff officers on an as-requested, as-required, not-to-interfere basis. Such competent media relations can only enhance the overall public affairs plan of the CINC/JFC. The JMOC concept is one of the most important elements in the new joint public affairs doctrine I support and wish to see published.
The Next Step.

Once joint PA doctrine is promulgated in the final edition of Joint Pub 1-07 (scheduled for release later this year) and unit commanders subordinate to the JFC understand both how the high-level public affairs issues are addressed “inside the Beltway,” and what public affairs activities are being conducted at the JTF-and-higher levels, they can then focus on the following, time-tested, Service-oriented public affairs fundamentals, which apply in the joint arena, as well:

1) anticipate the public’s interest in what’s going on, and be prepared to respond to press and private citizens’ queries;¹⁴

2) as indicated before, incorporate the PAO’s into the planning process early on. Doing so will make them better equipped to deal with queries and to conduct media “intelligence preparation of the battlefield,” as was done in Operation Uphold Democracy;

3) the three legs of the public affairs “triad”—public information, command (internal) information, and community relations—are all part of joint public affairs operations, and Service unit PAO’s should plan accordingly. For example, including local news media representatives on deploying aircraft ensures informed media coverage, as those reporters tend to know the units and commanders and thus need less training. The positive coverage which nearly always results from such arrangements not only reaches the public at large, it reaches the service members’ families, as well;

4) operations security (OPSEC): the guiding principle is “security at the source,” meaning that each person talking to the press has to be cognizant of what is classified and therefore not releasable, or if it is, that it be time-sensitive, so that no advantage or intelligence value could accrue to the enemy.¹⁵ Recent operations in Haiti showed that fully-briefed and well-informed media representatives posed no threat to the troops they were accompanying into the operational area. That can be the rule, and not the exception, with the help of enlightened commanders, informed troops, and experienced, media-savvy PAO’s;

5) unity of effort, one of the key fundamentals of joint warfare, applies to media relations, as well. As Charles W. Ricks stated so succinctly in his Strategic Studies Institute report titled The Military-News Media Relationship: Thinking Forward, “unity in the media relations effort is achieved through the development of public affairs guidance which assists the entire chain of command in communicating consistent and credible information. Although the resulting public affairs plans are approved by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, commanders at each level have a role in formulating the policy, news statements, information packages, and media support arrangements which make up the plan. This effort ensures that those most knowledgeable about the operation play a major role in developing the messages to be communicated.”¹⁶
6) As stated in the draft version of Joint Pub 1-07, “credibility is the standard for success. “Success” does not mean that all news media stories will be positive or supportive. Accuracy, balance, fairness, and credibility are more appropriate indicators of “success” in dealing with the media.”17 Credibility is the “coin of the realm” in the world of media relations. Public affairs officers know that—their commanders must, as well.

These fundamentals, if understood and followed, will stand any member of the military, at whatever level, in good stead.

The military establishment has learned a great deal from its most recent dealings with the press, both in combat operations and in operations other than war. One of the lessons learned from the Somalia operation referred to earlier was ably stated by then-Major General Thomas Montgomery, USA, the commander of U.S. forces in UNOSOM II: “U.S. forces in UNOSOM II had no public affairs organization. And one of the major lessons learned is that any U.S. force which is a part of a UN operation must have a first-class public affairs section in the future. After 3 October (in the wake of the aforementioned ill-fated battle), I was sent a 30-man Joint Information Bureau—and quality of coverage improved enormously thereafter.”18 The other painful lesson of Somalia for the public affairs community was that “planning for their (public affairs) employment in peace operations should not be left to chance. In fact, a good rule may be to have the public affairs team on the first plane in country.”19 That doctrinal lesson has not been forgotten. In fact, the Joint Task Force Commander’s Handbook for Peace Operations, dated 28 February 1995, says that “the JTF should deploy with public affairs assets as part of the command group.”20 The handbook goes on to say that it “would be better to initially deploy additional personnel and equipment and scale back rather than lose control of the media impact on operations.”21 Such observations are at the heart of what I believe needs to be codified in joint PA doctrine: how the information and public affairs guidance flow, who does what, with whom and with how much, and how soon? The Joint Media Operations Center concept provides many of the
answers, in my view.

The recent Haiti operation provided some more “grist” for the joint public affairs PA doctrine “mill,” in that the JTF commander and his PAO co-authored an article for Military Review wherein they made some key points that are worth sharing:

1) Pre-deployment media training is critical, especially for those soldiers most likely to meet the media. The training gave the soldiers the information they needed so they would not be intimidated once in front of the television camera. The intent of the training was to prepare those leaders so they could concentrate on providing accurate, timely information to the American public without feeling intimidated or nervous.22

2) Public affairs operations must be synchronized. Since Operation Uphold Democracy was an interagency operation, it was important that words and deeds be thoroughly coordinated among all agencies......in Haiti the JTF commander met frequently with the ambassador to implement the National Command Authorities’ policy. Correspondingly, the military command’s and ambassador’s spokesmen coordinated their statements before delivering them to the media.23

This goes to the issue discussed earlier, that of “speaking with one voice,” making sure that the public affairs guidance has been thoroughly staffed and coordinated in the interagency process, especially in operations other than war, so that there is little chance of any deviation from agreed-upon talking points related to the established national policy.

3) Another “lesson” that LTG Shelton and LTC Vane, his PAO, mentioned was the importance of countering inaccurate information with statements from previously-identified and prepared subject matter experts. They deemed it “imperative that the military’s subject matter experts respond quickly to media questions or reports. If this does not happen, incorrect perceptions could be the ones that American and other important audiences accept as truth.”24

4) With regard to meeting the press, the authors felt it important to strike a balance between spending too much or too little time with the press, but “the reality is the commander must meet the press on a frequent, but controlled, basis.”25

5) Because of the competitive nature of the media and their insatiable appetite for new story material, LTG Shelton and LTC Vane felt that commanders and PAO’s needed to plan media “events” each day to gain and maintain the initiative. They also cited the value of credibility with the press, and the idea that exposing units, individuals, and events to media coverage can benefit everyone. I have found this to be true over the years, especially in operations other than war. There are numerous good stories to be found, and we owe it to our troops and the Nation to help those energetic professional journalists tell them.
Conclusion.

There is much to feel good about in the area of military-media relations, despite the fact that an overarching joint PA doctrine is not yet published. The military’s uniformed leadership, led by the incumbent Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John M. Shalikashvili, has a greater understanding of how important it is to work press operations and media considerations into every plan that is written, regardless of the size and scope of the mission. In fact, General Shalikashvili’s positive experiences with the reporters covering Operation Provide Comfort in eastern Turkey and northern Iraq just after the Gulf War helped to shape his current views on how to deal with the press in a field environment. Not surprisingly, those views are not only some of the more proactive, but also some of the most informed. He has worked with the McCormick Foundation on their “Military and the Media” initiatives and the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center during its research for America’s Team: The Odd Couple—A Report on the Relationship between the Media and the Military, and as the military’s primary advocate of joint doctrine and its importance, he fully understands the need to get it right, and to get it disseminated.

The public affairs practitioners of each Service are continually working on plans, procedures, and techniques to improve the effectiveness of current PA doctrine. However, what’s even more important is the fact that the more senior “operators” in the military, most of whom have virtually no public affairs background and who tend to be more reticent, and thus reluctant to engage the media, are at last getting more accustomed to doing so. Service doctrine manuals, like the Army’s FM 100-5, Operations, now address public affairs issues in a more enlightened fashion. The newer Joint Pubs, like Joint Pub 3-07, Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War, also have solid guidance on public affairs matters as part of the planning process. The sooner Joint Pub 1-07 is published, the sooner the Services
and the combatant commanders can begin to frame the entire scope of their public affairs activities from a joint perspective, which is truly the only operational perspective which matters.
ENDNOTES

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2 Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations (15 November 1993), II-2.
3 Ibid., II-5.
4 Ibid.
5 Message from CJCS to Unified and Specified Commanders in Chief (18 May 1990), Subject: DOD National Media Pool Planning Requirements.
6 Joint Pub 1-07 (Draft), II-7.
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