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The Joint/Combined Information Bureau:
Is It Credible and Properly Resourced?

A Monograph
by
Major Patrick J. Beer
Infantry



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School of Advanced Military Studies
United States Army Command and General Staff College
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

Second Term AY 91-92

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
<small>Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1.5 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.</small>				
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE 13 MAY 1992	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE JOINT/COMBINED INFORMATION BUREAU: IS IT CREDIBLE AND PROPERLY RESOURCED?			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJOR PATRICK J. BEER				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES ATTN: ATZL-SWV FORT LEAVENWORTH, KS 66027-6900 Comm: (913) 684-3437 AV 552-3437			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION UNLIMITED			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE	
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) <i>VIETNAM</i>				
14. SUBJECT TERMS MEDIA INFORMATION BUREAU			VIETNAM PROVIDE COMFORT DESERT STORM	MEDIA CENTER MPAD PAO
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED			18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	15. NUMBER OF PAGES
			19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	16. PRICE CODE
			20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	

SCHOOL OF ADVANCED MILITARY STUDIES

MONOGRAPH APPROVAL

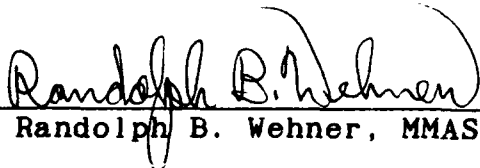
Major Patrick J. Beer

Title of Monograph: The Joint/Combined Information


Bureau: Is It Credible and

Properly Resourced?


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Accepted this 22nd day of May 1992

ABSTRACT

THE JOINT/COMBINED INFORMATION BUREAU: IS IT CREDIBLE AND PROPERLY RESOURCED? by MAJ Patrick J. Beer, USA, 53 pages.

This monograph analyzes whether the joint/combined information bureau is credible and properly resourced. First, Vietnam is analyzed as an historical example to examine the public information policies that were followed to enhance credibility and to determine the resource constraints under which the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV)'s information bureau operated. Next, a doctrinal analysis identifies how to enhance successes and correct shortcomings. The analyses covers Desert Storm and Provide Comfort which are contemporary examples that are likely indicative of the future use of the information bureau. Finally, a synthesis of applicable lessons identify what changes are needed to make the information bureau better able to perform its mission.

The monograph concludes that current joint/combined information bureaus follow policies and procedures which foster credibility with the media and the American people. However, to be fully credible, the information bureau must also be adequately resourced, which was not true for any of the three historical examples. This conclusion implies a need to fill equipment and organizational shortfalls. In equipment, a "JIB [Joint Information Bureau] in a box" should be authorized and funded by DOD for unified commands. Additionally, recent contingencies indicate an increased need for dedicated air and ground transportation. The information bureau should be augmented with an aviation liaison officer. Some of the Reserve Component mobile public affairs detachments (MPAD) either should be realigned to specialize in public information, while others remain specialized in command information or the MPAD should backfill active component public affairs officers who deploy forward.

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INTRODUCTION

Carl von Clausewitz's concept of war describes a paradoxical trinity composed of violence and hatred, represented by the people; chance and probability, represented by the army; and policy and reason, represented by the government.¹ This relationship of the parties in war has been enhanced by the media which is a conduit for information between the military, the government, and the people. The military public affairs mission deals directly with the media in the belief that operations are won, in part, because soldiers and the people understand and support the need for sacrifice.²

Public affairs has three primary and three secondary missions to meet the information needs of the soldiers and the American people. Command information is the most important public affairs mission. It is internal command information between the commander and the members of his command which includes families and civilian personnel. Public information is directed at audiences external to the armed forces in order to inform the American public. Community relations informs local civilian leaders and people about military activities near their community whether in the Continental United States (CONUS) or overseas. The three secondary public affairs missions include support to psychological operations, civil affairs, and combat camera/visual information units.³ The focus of this monograph is primarily on the public information mission.

With modern communications, any information directed at the

American public also gets to current and potential enemies. Public information therefore serves the dual role of informing the U.S. public and potentially deterring aggression. Public information's goal is to tell the military story accurately and timely to the largest audience by providing information to the civilian media, without compromising operational security. Public information provides information which fosters the people's support. The United States Constitution provides for the American public to have access to information because it is an informed people that ultimately control, through the legislative process, the raising, equipping and employing of armed forces.⁴ The people need accurate and timely information to be fully informed and act as a check to executive authority.

Military commanders need to be concerned with the ability of the media to influence public opinion, particularly since the tremendous growth in communications technology. This is likely to gain importance in future wars because potential adversaries may be adept at media manipulation to shape domestic and world opinion. Some writers believe that television news could potentially be a greater operational weapon than an armored division.⁵ In fact, "wars of information" are expected to precede actual conflict and continue concurrently with military operations. Accordingly, a major PA effort is devoted to winning this "information war." As the Vietnam analysis will show, wars of information may be more decisive than actual battles.

Deterrence, the second aspect of public information, is

achieved when commanders and public affairs officers (PAOs) contribute to the direct public affairs mission and deterrent value by showing the Army in a high state of training and readiness. This information about the Army can ensure that adversaries understand the readiness of the Army to deter or defeat aggression.⁶ For deterrence to be successful, information must convince potential enemies that the United States' armed forces are trained, ready, and equipped to defend the nation's interests. Should deterrence fail, public information continues to inform the public about military operations to ensure that the citizenry understands the need for sacrifice and that efforts are taken to minimize that cost.⁷

The media center is an instrument that the commander and PAO use to win the information war. The unified or specified command's media center is normally called a joint information bureau. Combined command's media centers are normally called either an Allied press information center or a combined information bureau. The joint or combined information bureaus are essentially a command post for the theater command public information effort and have two functions. First, the information bureau identifies, registers, and accredits authorized media correspondents. Second, it provides these correspondents access to accurate, unclassified information and, if possible, access to commanders and soldiers in the theater of operations. The information bureau serves as a center for news representatives to work and also as a production/coordination center for PAOs and

journalists. The terms "joint" and "combined" information bureau are interchangeable because the roles, functions, and missions are essentially the same except that combined information bureaus have allied staff members and therefore must be more conscious of host-nation sensitivities.

The dichotomy between the military and the media comes from the military's requirement for secrecy and an image of skill, courage, and strength counterpoised with the media's obligation to report events accurately and candidly identifying mistakes and weaknesses.⁸ The information bureau can balance conflicting needs by helping operational security and troop safety by preventing reporters from inadvertently exposing troop positions, movements, or filing stories that will be helpful to the enemy.⁹

The information bureau's credibility and resourcing are important because of the required information flow between Clausewitz's trinity of the people, the government, and the military. The press provides the medium for conveying information while the military provides access. Failure to properly resource the information bureau could constitute censorship. Censorship is the official suppression of information which some military exigencies may require. However, censorship of any kind hinders the interaction between the members of the trinity and lessens the information bureau's ability to win the information war.

If commanders hope to win the information war, these information bureaus must be effective. Effectiveness requires both credibility and adequate resourcing. Although analyzed

separately, credibility and resourcing are so interrelated that one impacts on the other.¹⁰ The purpose of this monograph is to determine if the information bureau is credible and whether it is properly resourced for its mission. Credibility is hard to measure objectively; therefore, it is subjectively gauged based on the opinions of members of the media and how well they believed what the information bureau released. Proper resourcing is determined by the operational resource requirements compared to resources actually on hand. Resources for the purpose of this monograph include communications, transportation, and personnel.

The methodology used to answer the research question first analyzes Vietnam as an historical example to examine the public information policies that were followed to enhance credibility and to determine the resource constraints under which the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV)'s information bureau operated. Second, an analysis of doctrine, which is derived from theory, identifies how to enhance successes and correct shortcomings. The doctrine analysis follows the Vietnam study because of the tremendous influence Vietnam had on current doctrine. Third, the analysis will conclude with Desert Storm and Provide Comfort which are contemporary examples that are likely indicative of the future use of the information bureau. A synthesis of applicable lessons will identify what changes, if any, are needed to make the information bureau better able to perform its mission.

Vietnam Combined Information Bureau

By late 1967, the war in Vietnam was in full swing. United States troop strength in country was increased one hundred thousand during the year to a total of nearly a half million. Over nine thousand American soldiers were killed in 1967 despite more than a million and a half tons of bombs dropped against the enemy.¹¹

President Johnson mounted an impressive public relations campaign to gain support for the war, coopt adversary congressmen and dampen street protests at home. The president personally participated in the public relations effort by touring naval installations and military bases across the United States to enhance confidence and optimism. The White House also formed a committee which released favorable reports on the war to the media. A complementary public relations effort, conducted in Saigon, provided reporters with statistics and captured enemy documents to show that the war was being won.¹²

The instrument in Saigon used to win this information war was the combined information bureau. The combined information bureau, which was essentially a joint information bureau with a combined U.S. and Vietnamese staff, had to be particularly attuned to the Vietnamese sensitivities. Therefore, the combined information bureau often pursued policies which were deemed to be in the best interests of the Vietnamese government and American political guidelines, but did little to foster credibility. Sometimes the information officers briefed American newsmen

privately, especially when South Vietnamese press releases were less than truthful. However, when the South Vietnamese government ordered a story suppressed, the PAOs' reply to correspondent's queries had to be: "I have been ordered by the Vietnamese Joint General Staff not to talk to you about this subject."¹³ This policy obviously left the reporters questioning the combined information bureau's credibility.

A conference of PAOs, who met to determine ways to improve credibility, recommended leaving justification of the war to the administration. However, in support of the President and the Secretary of Defense, the Chief of Public Affairs disregarded this advice which resulted in further deterioration of the combined information bureau's credibility. Consequently, the PAOs were increasingly drawn into politics.¹⁴

By late 1967, the military was as involved in "selling" the war as the politicians in Washington. When civilian reporters dutifully reported on the war's inconsistencies, the military increasingly blamed the media, particularly television, for the military's poor credibility and for turning American public opinion against the war.¹⁵ Accordingly, although many military staff members of the combined information bureau believed that complete candor was the best policy when dealing with the press, they were forced to issue conflicting, erroneous reports because of the administration's policies.

The combined information bureau had to acquiesce to South Vietnamese restrictions as well, which further alienated the press.

An example of this acquiescence and subsequent alienation was that correspondents' activities were severely restricted at Da Nang air base by the South Vietnamese government. The restrictions at the base placed the military in the contradictory position of trusting base security to the Vietnamese locals more than American citizens, albeit media correspondents.¹⁶ As a result of these inconsistencies, the military-media relationship became increasingly antagonistic. The consequences of such antagonism and poor credibility were graphically demonstrated by the public's perception of the Tet Offensive.

The severity of the January 1968 Tet Offensive completely discredited the MACV military command's credibility. Only two months prior in November 1967, General Westmoreland, MACV commander, had said that the enemy was near defeat and the end was in sight. However, the Viet Cong simultaneously attacked multiple locations in South Vietnam. Additionally, one nineteen-man sapper team breached the American Embassy compound in Saigon which was less than one half mile from the correspondents in the information bureau. The correspondents' proximity as well as the political symbology of the embassy itself being under attack caused them to exaggerate the story "beyond its military significance."¹⁷ The reporters who heard gunfire from the compound questioned officers who were nearby and subsequently filed erroneous reports stating that the Viet Cong occupied the bottom floors of the embassy. The State Department, which was in constant contact with the embassy, tried to correct the mistake by

pointing out that the actual building had not been penetrated. General Westmoreland confirmed the State Department's assertion at a press conference soon after the embassy grounds had been retaken. However, the news correspondents believed the military police at the scene more than the Commander, MACV. Subsequently, NBC News reported that evening that, "enemy snipers located both in the embassy and on nearby rooftops had fired down upon American rescuers in the courtyard--the exact opposite of what had happened."¹⁸

Actually the Tet Offensive was a military disaster for the enemy. The Viet Cong lost about ten thousand men compared to seven hundred and forty-nine American and South Vietnamese casualties. The only real damage, which proved irreparable, was psychological. Civilian pacification workers grew more defensive and the people grew more fearful of the Viet Cong. This psychological victory for the Viet Cong was largely due to the American news media. Particularly disturbing was the fact that when NBC News realized that the media coverage had been misleading, it made no attempt to correct the misperceptions of the American public by producing a follow-up. NBC felt that Tet had been established as a defeat in the public's mind and therefore it was a military defeat.¹⁹

The Secretary of Defense, Clark Clifford, believed that if the administration attempted to play down the effects of Tet and the Viet Cong attacked again, the repercussion of American public opinion would make the credibility gap virtually unbridgeable.²⁰

Subsequently, Mr Clifford directed the MACV combined information bureau to establish guidelines for all future press dealings. He disallowed any predictions of friendly or enemy war plans or predictions of victory. PAOs were not to predict future difficult fighting or to identify uncommitted enemy forces. He believed that a moderate approach would foster favorable public opinion, lessen the shock of reversals, and allow modest claim to any successes.²¹

Vietnam provides a good example of the combined information bureau's credibility being questioned when it supported the administration's contradictory policy of making limited war acceptable, while alienating as little of the public as possible.²² However, the bureau had little choice because of the military's constitutional subordination to policy. In Vietnam, PAOs increasingly found themselves compromised by the President's attempts to gain support for the war and the PAOs' belief that the military should not be involved in politics. This situation illustrates the dilemma of the combined information bureau's responsibility to support policy, even at the expense of credibility.

In Vietnam the combined information bureau's credibility was sacrificed in support of the administration's policies of duplicity. Although future information bureaus could be subject to the same conditions, following the guidelines that Mr. Clifford directed would tend to foster greater credibility between the information bureau and the press. Those same guidelines were later incorporated into both doctrine and subsequent information bureau policies. However, in addition to following policies which foster credibility, the

information bureau had to be properly resourced to accomplish its mission.

Communications, transportation, and personnel in Vietnam were constrained in both quantity and quality. The lack of communications facilities for news media and PAOs topped the list of problems that the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs wanted solved. The local telephone system was so backward and overloaded that calls outside the city took hours. Consequently, field reporters had problems relaying information to their bureaus in Saigon and PAOs in the combined information bureau were unable to quickly verify rumors from the field.²³

Air transportation was inadequate for both newsmen and PAOs. The combined information bureau had only one helicopter, which was based in Saigon. If the media wanted to cover a story outside of Saigon, they had to hitch a ride with whatever transportation was available. Outside the city, reporters made their own travel arrangements with individual pilots. The lack of regular transportation and frequently missed connections was a constant irritant. Even the chief of MACV Public Affairs was constantly having to hitch a ride. He was never able to ensure that he could get the press to a news event of national interest.²⁴

The third Vietnam public affairs resource issue, personnel, was mainly one of quality. A public affairs conference in Honolulu, convened to investigate ways to improve public affairs operations, concluded that the military services needed to place a higher priority on improving the quality of PAOs they sent to South

Vietnam. Many officers who were perhaps the best qualified, considered PAO duty in Saigon a stigma on their career. Moreover, some of the better qualified officers resigned their commissions instead of working in Saigon. Consequently, the majority of the public affairs officers either lacked the experience, interest, or competence to do the job.²⁵

In summary, the Tet Offensive was an American military victory but a psychological defeat. The media portrayed it as a moral defeat and, in the eyes of the American public, Tet was translated into a physical defeat as well. Concerning resources, both communications and transportation were insufficient for the mission and detracted from the combined information bureau's credibility. The personnel quality issue was not resolved until after Vietnam when the perceived stigma of public affairs duty was overcome by command emphasis and a greater infusion of combat arms officers.²⁶

Both the Tet Offensive and the whole Vietnam War brought into question the credibility of the government and, by association, the military. The Secretary of Defense's public affairs guidelines and other public affairs lessons learned from Vietnam had a tremendous effect on subsequent doctrine. This most recent PA doctrine—whose intent is to win the information war—focuses on building and maintaining credibility and on the proper resourcing needed for an effective public affairs effort.

CURRENT DOCTRINE

Like all doctrine, public affairs doctrine is derived from theory and experience and in this case incorporates many of the lessons from Vietnam. The Army capstone manual for public affairs operations, Field Manual 46-1 Public Affairs Operations, provides commanders guidance on the employment of public affairs assets.²⁷ Although there is no joint public affairs doctrine, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ASD-PA) establishes public affairs policy guidance for joint and combined commands. The resultant support channel, which parallels the chain of command, ensures that everyone—from the Pentagon to the battlefield—is synchronized and speaks "with one voice."²⁸ Other services are limited to information bureau augmentation because they are not organized or equipped to staff the information bureau.²⁹ Only the Army has the organization and equipment to staff the information bureau. Consequently, Army doctrine addresses the joint information bureau in general and the Army element of the information bureau in particular. An analysis of current doctrine should identify the methods to ensure credibility and identify how the information bureau should be resourced.

Doctrinally, information bureaus build credibility based on truthfulness, accuracy, security, and timeliness. Even if it is bad news, doctrine stresses the importance of telling the truth. As Vietnam amply demonstrated, misleading or half-truthful statements by commanders or PAOs can destroy credibility which could have disastrous results. Accuracy is achieved when the PAO

makes sure that he provides verified information to the media. Otherwise, the media would soon ignore a PAO whose information was not dependable.

Concerning security, the PAO must not only ensure that he does not release any classified information, but that the media are not exposed to situations where security compromises would likely result. However, news that would embarrass the command, but is not classified, is releasable. A security review is one measure the military takes to ensure that sensitive security issues are not accidentally released by the press. However, the more strict the security review, the more likely that some information will be improperly censored.

Timeliness is achieved when the information bureau follows the Department of Defense (DOD) public affairs policy of maximum disclosure with minimum delay within the bounds of operational security (OPSEC). Unnecessary delays in responding to news reporters or releasing information often induces speculation and subsequent stories based on rumors or inaccurate information.³⁰

Doctrine also provides a basis for the resources needed for an information bureau to perform its mission. Although the media are expected to provide their own equipment and other support, a proliferation of civilian vehicles and mobile satellite dishes could inhibit the military's ability to perform its mission. Therefore, the Army provides essential services when such services are not available from commercial sources. The unified command then issues guidelines to the information bureau about services that are

available on a reimbursable basis. Regardless of the situation, the information bureau will require communications, transportation, and personnel assets to be effective and therefore credible.³¹

Required communications systems include both commercial and tactical capabilities. Commercial assets include satellite capability and sufficient Class A telephone lines to ensure communications internal and external to the theater. Dedicated secure and unsecured lines are needed for facsimile machines, modems for computers, and digital photographic transceiver/controllers. Facsimile machines are a distinct advantage to an information bureau because of the need to coordinate security reviews, policy changes, and media visits.³²

Tactical communications systems are needed to coordinate between units in the field and with visiting media. Additionally, if such use does not interfere with military operations and is not otherwise commercially available, tactical communications can be used by the media to file their stories. In fact, the DOD National Media Pool—which was instituted after the media blackout in Grenada and is composed of select members of major news organizations—is guaranteed the use of military communications. News reporters who are not members of the DOD National Media Pool are also allowed the use of military global communications, on a reimbursable basis, if commercial systems are not available and when it does not interfere with military operations.³³

Doctrine acknowledges the fact that the lack of adequate transportation assets limits media access to the battlefield more

than any other factor.³⁴ It requires information bureaus to ensure adequate air and ground transportation is available within the theater. Additionally, military transportation into the theater is authorized when commercial transportation is not available. And finally, military transportation is always provided for the DOD National Media Pool.³⁵

Although the information bureau is doctrinally responsible for ensuring transportation for the media and their products, analysis shows that the information bureau's best efforts will not be sufficient without the commander's tacit approval and his awareness of the importance of media relations. More than any other resource, transportation helps the information bureau build and maintain its credibility which is accomplished by ensuring access. Transportation shortfalls, which would subsequently limit access, would deny the media the opportunity for independent verification. Verification is limited to the reporter either being an eyewitness to the event or private interviews with participants. Both of these verification alternatives require dedicated transportation assets to move the media and their products around the battlefield.³⁶

If large numbers of media representatives are expected to overwhelm available transportation means, a pool system should be considered.³⁷ Media pools provide a fair mixture of print journalists, photojournalists, and broadcasters access to military operations.³⁸ As Pete Williams, the ASD-PA, has stated, the media pool does three things:

It gets reporters out to see the action, it guarantees that Americans at home get reports from the scene of action, and it allows the military to accommodate a reasonable number of journalists without overwhelming the units that are fighting the enemy.³⁹

An example of a necessary use of a media pool can be demonstrated by what takes place when an aircraft carrier comes into the area of operations. Because of space and transportation limitations, the Navy states that it can take only a limited number of reporters to the carrier. Therefore a pool is established and reporters' stories are posted for everyone's use. However, use of pools should be avoided if possible and, if used, disbanded as soon as possible.⁴⁰ Although pools provide equal access by various news media, the reporters give up their exclusive stories and share their information with others in the pool. This procedure provides access to the truth, but as the reporters see it, it is not good for news "business." Therefore, the military must be aware that reporters will balk at media pools unless absolutely necessary.

The staffing of the information bureau, which involves the resource issue of personnel, is determined by the unified command's PAO. The information bureau staff should be proportionate to the various services in the theater of operations to include host nation personnel. Normally some augmentation will be required. The press camp headquarters and mobile public affairs detachments, both of which are in the Army Reserve, are designed and equipped to support news media center missions.

The press camp headquarters is particularly organized to be the Army component of a large media center, while other services

provide augmentation commensurate with the population of the service in the theater.⁴¹ The press camp headquarters is normally found above the division level and is authorized twenty-eight personnel who provide administration, operations, supply, and briefing/escort teams. For a major operation, the mobile public affairs detachments may be needed to augment the press camp headquarters.⁴²

The public affairs detachment is the second major public affairs asset which provides support. Like the press camp headquarters, the detachment is normally assigned above the division level. Although the detachment provides a full range of support to deployed military commands, it usually specializes in the command information aspect of public affairs instead of public information. Detachments are the most likely unit to augment any other operation. They can deploy autonomously in support of joint or Army operations to include humanitarian aid, disaster relief, counterdrug, peacekeeping, or other contingency operations.⁴³ The public affairs detachments may either be incorporated into the information bureau's operation or it can operate a subordinate information bureau at a distant location which would report to the main information bureau.⁴⁴

Doctrine emphasizes the importance of the information bureau's credibility and resourcing. Doctrine also states that military operations cannot be considered a complete success without the support of the American people. To be credible, the information bureau needs to be properly resourced with adequate

commercial and tactical communications systems, dedicated transportation, and personnel augmentation from press camp headquarters and public affairs detachments. Contingency operations and campaign plans must ensure that public information operations are credible and properly resourced to meet the information needs of the American people.⁴⁵

Desert Storm Joint Information Bureaus

Desert Storm had three joint information bureaus, Riyadh and Dhahran in Saudi Arabia and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Although the press briefings and individual interviews were conducted by Central Command (CENTCOM), in Riyadh, only 200-400 journalists stayed there. Dubai had only about 12 reporters. Dhahran had over 1000 journalists because this was where the troops had initially deployed and where the logistic operations were centered. Consequently, the news media established their base of operations in Dhahran because, until late December, it was where reporters went to see the troops in the field.⁴⁶

The Dhahran information bureau managed an overwhelming number of correspondents and did its utmost to ensure access for the media. This access was enhanced by the collocation of the Dhahran information bureau, the media, and the majority of the troops in Saudi Arabia. As Molly Moore, a reporter for *The Washington Post* noted:

My experience indicated that the greater the contact between reporters and commanders, the better the access and information. It was extraordinarily beneficial that Marine

pools were out in the field weeks before hostilities began. It made for much smoother operations and far greater accessibility once the war started. It also gave reporters a far better understanding of what was happening around them.⁴⁷

Despite the access advantages provided by proximity, the Dhahran information bureau had to initiate a media pool system. Although doctrine states that the use of pools should be a last resort, the Dhahran information bureau had little choice when there were over 1,000 reporters and the commanders on the battlefield were willing to take only 200.⁴⁸ Consequently, the reporters realized that they would have to give up both their independence and the exclusiveness of their story by participating in a media pool. Particularly during the initial stages of the conflict, the media were thankful for the pool system because it was the only way they could get into the country because of Saudi Arabian restrictions.⁴⁹

Because the exigencies of war mandate greater security controls, the reporters' products were reviewed for security violations such as identifying tactical unit locations. Per doctrinal guidance, pool escorts performed a security review at the source while the media were reporting their news. The stated military policy was for the escort to identify possible security infractions at the source. If the reporter balked, the story was sent to the reporter's bureau chief in Dhahran where it was reviewed for security violations by the military director of the joint information bureau, in this case Colonel William Mulvey. If the director believed that the story constituted a security breach, but the media

bureau chief did not, the story was forwarded to the Pentagon. At the Pentagon, Pete Williams reviewed the story with the journalist's editor but left the final decision to the editor.⁵⁰

As may be expected, some escorts did not fully understand the security review guidelines. Both the Air Force and the Marines were guilty of unintentional censorship because of this misunderstanding. When Air Force public affairs personnel were not sure about ground rule violations, they tended to raise their concern to wing commanders instead of the joint information bureau.⁵¹ There was one infamous incident in which a Marine escort changed the word "giddy" to "proud" in a reporter's story—a clear violation of the security review intent.⁵² As a result of examples like this in particular and the security review process in general, some reporters believed that they were being improperly censored.⁵³

An analysis of the security review process reveals that the reporter's assertions about censorship are generally without merit. The process was not really censorship because the media, not the government, made the final determination about releasing a story. Actually, the process worked exceptionally well. Of almost one thousand print pool reports written during Desert Storm, only five were appealed to the Pentagon. Of those five, four were quickly cleared for publication and only one was changed to protect sensitive intelligence procedures. It is noteworthy that the reporter's editor-in-chief decided to change the story, not the Pentagon.⁵⁴

In addition to the security review issue, some reporters felt that censorship was de facto practiced by delaying reports from the reporters in the field to their offices in Dhahran and the United States.⁵⁵ Albeit there were delays throughout the process, the delays were not deliberate but more a chance of bad weather, extended distances, and sometimes poor land navigation. However, the reporters' charge does seem to have weight at the command level which will be addressed later.⁵⁶

In summation of the credibility issue, the joint information bureau, for the most part, maintained credibility despite managing an overwhelming number of media correspondents within severe resource constraints. The joint information bureau accomplished the public affairs mission of accurately and truthfully telling the military story to the American public. Noted print, radio, and television reporters thought the information bureau released accurate information.⁵⁷

Although the joint information bureau accomplished its goal of being credible, it could have been even more so if it had been better resourced. Total credibility requires the media to be able to independently verify information.⁵⁸ However, independent verification problems caused by resource constraints--which limited access and gave merit to charges of censorship by delay--resulted in the information bureau never being totally credible with the media.⁵⁹

At first glance from reading the Desert Storm operations order, it appears that CENTCOM supported the public information

effort with adequate resources. The order stated that CINCCENT public affairs will:

. . . support or task components to support the needs of JIB [Joint Information Bureau] Dhahran in providing equipment, weapons, transportation, physical security, and communications to the pool and pool escorts. Prepare to establish additional JIB(s) forward as the operational situation dictates.⁶⁰

Published order or not, without command emphasis, the annex was little more than lip-service. To determine how well the command truly supported the public information effort, resourcing issues of communications, transportation, and personnel merit attention.

The information bureau's shortage of communications equipment hampered media coordination because the information bureau had little contact with CENTCOM or the units in the field. Not only were the PAOs unable to speak "with one voice," they had difficulty speaking to each other at all. Sufficient communications assets such as cellular and field telephones and facsimile machines either came too late or not all. Information officers at the Dhahran information bureau noted that, "communications became the bane of PAOs, especially after pools were activated."⁶¹ Although Colonel Mulvey, the Director of the Dhahran information bureau, requested tactical communications equipment or tactical vehicles with communications gear, none of this mission essential equipment was ever provided.⁶² Consequently, the Dhahran information bureau was quickly out of the tactical information flow and was not able to keep up with the tactical situation, which thwarted effective PAO operations.⁶³

Certainly the reporters were quick to pick up on the

communications shortfalls because these shortfalls significantly affected their ability to do their job. Their major complaint was the transmission of pool products. *The Washington Post's* Molly Moore probably summarized it best by saying: "No matter how cooperative the commander or the PAO, it is all for naught if the story cannot get out to the readers and viewers."⁶⁴

An easy fix to communications shortfalls would have been to have a satellite telephone which could support facsimile, data, and voice capability similar to systems used by the British.⁶⁵ The British had a better solution which used a portable satellite phone at King Khalid Military City. The British were then able to send media products directly to London which curtailed the need for having ground lines of communication back to Dhahran.⁶⁶

As with communications, command emphasis on transportation can vary from what is stated to what actually happens. The Desert Storm Operations Order stated that:

USCINCCENT has authorized media travel via military transportation. Media pools are totally reliant upon military transportation and will be provided dedicated air and ground transportation. Those assets may be utilized for other purposes when not in use by the pool; however, when needed, they are to be provided to the pool on an expedited, dedicated basis.⁶⁷

Despite CINCCENT's stated support for the information bureau, command support varied from the national to the theater level. At the national level, the PA effort seemed to be fully supported. For example, the last aircraft that landed in the theater on 17 January 1991, just prior to hostilities beginning, had 127 news media members on board. During the largest airlift since

the Berlin blockade, it is noteworthy that the military dedicated one of its cargo planes to carry additional journalists to Saudi Arabia. This shows the senior military leadership's commitment to get the public information story to the American people.⁶⁸

However, at the theater level support was less than adequate. Although CENTCOM "officially" supported the media, inadequate organizational structure and lack of command emphasis by subordinate commanders, particularly the Army, caused problems--as evidenced by the after action review comments of the Director of the Dhahran information bureau.⁶⁹ The information bureau's organization did not include aviation assets. Furthermore, Reserve or National Guard flight detachment assets were not considered. Additionally, the Army did not supplement the information bureau with an aviation liaison from each corps. Despite CENTCOM's operation's order, not only were aviation assets or priority for aviation support not expedited or dedicated, but also requests for support were usually denied. In addition to air transportation shortcomings, there were problems on the ground too. Although a fleet of vehicles was contracted, maintenance support for the fleet was not.⁷⁰

In an attempt to solve the transportation shortfall with available ground assets, the information bureau instituted a system of couriers to carry the media's copy from the front lines to the Dhahran information bureau. The tremendous distances and shortage of equipment made the system inflexible and unresponsive and ultimately resulted in untimely pool reports which eroded PA

credibility, further irritated the media, and encouraged pool violators.⁷¹

All of the military services had problems returning reporters' pool products to the information bureau. The Army placed unrealistic demands on the couriers by having them operate alone and without communications equipment across the desert. The Marines attempted to use opportune aircraft to move products directly to Dhahran, but they still had from 6 to 24 hour delays. The Navy failed to start or coordinate a means to guarantee timely return of media products while the reporters were on a ship. Even civilian reporters realized that a relatively simple fix was to have helicopters at the disposal of the courier system which would have eliminated most of the problems with returning pool products to Dhahran.⁷²

Personnel was the third area in which the information bureau in Desert Storm could have been improved. Mobilization of reserve component PAOs was efficient but could have been more effective. Like Vietnam, the issue of personnel quality was again a concern. However, in Desert Storm there were qualified personnel who placed their names on a mobilization list for voluntary callup. Unfortunately, some of the names of qualified, experienced personnel were either misplaced or ignored; meanwhile, other less qualified personnel were called up. Finally, some public affairs personnel and units were malutilized.⁷³ For example, a press camp headquarters deployed late to Saudi Arabia because the Army Reserve unit required more mobilization time. Upon arrival, its

component elements were distributed to various staff agencies. Consequently, it was ineffective as a unit and therefore, sent home before Christmas.⁷⁴ Less experienced PAOs marred the public affairs effort by being poor escorts for the media and by their inability to plan for future operations.⁷⁵ In addition to the public affairs experience factor, the information bureau also lacked liaison officers who could track operations and intelligence information. Consequently, the Dhahran information bureau had no access to the tactical situation.⁷⁶

USA Today's reporter and editor Laurence Jolidon observed that the information bureau did not have adequate resources to get his stories out of the field. He further believed that the system was fatally flawed because adequate resources were not given to PAOs.⁷⁷ As Colonel William Mulvey, Director of the Dhahran information bureau said: "a helicopter here, a tactical telephone there, a tactical fax machine here, a cellular phone there, and we could have easily won the information war."⁷⁸

In summary, Desert Storm offers several lessons learned which may apply to future information bureau operations. Clearly, the Dhahran information bureau successfully managed an unprecedented number of media correspondents. Given the overwhelming numbers of media representatives in theater, media pools were a proper solution. The joint information bureau did its best to follow doctrinal policies and guidelines learned in Vietnam and written in doctrine to accomplish its mission of informing the American public by establishing and maintaining its credibility with the media.

However, without command emphasis--not only in writing, but in fact--to adequately resource the information bureau, access and censorship-by-delay issues prevented the joint information bureau from having even greater success.

Provide Comfort Combined Information Bureau

Immediately following Desert Storm was Provide Comfort, the emergency humanitarian relief effort in northern Iraq to help the Kurds. Although there was not sufficient time to formally incorporate all the lessons learned from Desert Storm, Provide Comfort PAOs had been in contact with Desert Storm PAOs and tried to improve relations with the media.

Provide Comfort has been praised as the way future information bureaus should be operated in an operation short of war. The information bureau was recognized for its work during the humanitarian operation by the Commander of the Combined Task Force (CTF), by Commander of United States European Command, and by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. The information bureau was also praised by the media because, in contrast to Desert Storm, news reporters had total access to all aspects of Provide Comfort. This full access was possible because an operation short of war inherently has fewer security considerations than a war. Consequently, the reporters noted their satisfaction with being able to tell the story as they saw it without the perceived military bureaucracy's filter or hidden agenda.⁷⁹

The public information effort was organized with a primary information bureau at Incirlik Air Force Base, Turkey collocated with the CTF Headquarters. Subordinate information bureaus were located in more remote areas and reported to the primary information bureau at Incirlik. The information bureau stayed at Incirlik because of the availability of communications and transportation facilities.⁸⁰

The majority of media personnel registered at the subordinate information bureau at Diyarbakir, Turkey. Even though it was a four hour drive or one hour flight from Silopi and the mountain camps in Iraq, it still offered an appealing combination of communications and helicopter support. For better communications, satellite functions were initiated at forward locations to ensure that PAOs were able to assist the news media with information, access to the CTF leadership, and transportation to witness the military's life-saving efforts in the mountain camps along the Turkey-Iraq border. Both of the subordinate information bureaus at Silopi and Zahko, Iraq also developed into transportation centers as well.⁸¹

The British and Canadians were members of the combined information bureau. Other countries handled their own national media in support of individual country agendas. However, all countries coordinated with the information bureau at Incirlik for air base access needs and for media escort/transportation.⁸²

The Incirlik information bureau enjoyed two distinct advantages over the Dhahran information bureau. First, as an

operation short of war, Provide Comfort inherently had fewer security constraints and therefore less risk to American servicemen due to media compromised plans. Second, Provide Comfort had greater command support because media relations are inherently a key aspect of humanitarian operations. An additional incentive to fully cooperate with the media was that favorable media coverage of lifesaving efforts would help offset media focus on post-Desert Storm Kurdish civilian deaths. Consequently, the media were granted full, open access and were dutifully kept informed of developments. As a result, the Combined Task Force and the media developed a mutual trust. However, one disadvantage of this open access was that independently operating news reporters developed sources from soldiers whose views did not always match that of the command. Despite this problem, everyone, including the CTF commander, believed that open access was the better policy for reasons mentioned above.⁶³

Although Desert Storm was a war, and Provide Comfort was an operation short of war, the information bureau's procedures which fostered such good credibility and rapport merit examination. Provide Comfort's combined information bureau was better resourced than Desert Storm's information bureau, which enabled it to keep up with operations. Unlike Desert Storm, the Provide Comfort CTF was able to form a joint operations center with representatives from all staff agencies to include public affairs.⁶⁴ Because of the security risks of war and in accordance with doctrine, Desert Storm did not collocate the information bureau

with the tactical operations center.⁸⁵

Although Provide Comfort's operations order directed similar support as that of Desert Storm, the Incirlik information bureau enjoyed greater actual command support. In addition to such statements as, "Public Affairs is not a side show,"⁸⁶ the CTF Commander, General Shalikashvili, demonstrated command support by actually resourcing the Incirlik information bureau better in personnel and equipment. As a result of these differences, Provide Comfort's public affairs operations stayed in the tactical information flow and conducted better coordination.

A distinct advantage for the Provide Comfort information bureau was that it was not required to provide communications support to the media. Additionally, a proliferation of media microwave transmissions and satellite dishes was not a security concern because Provide Comfort was a humanitarian operation in contrast to a war. Therefore, the Dhahran information bureau's most pressing problem of communication resource limitations was not an issue at Incirlik.

Freed from the extensive communications support requirement, the Incirlik information bureau generated a daily update of its own which included fast-breaking news event releases or quotes from the CTF Commander or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. These releases were often quoted word for word by the media which provided an opportunity to give the best CTF perspective on the operation.⁸⁷ This willingness to directly quote the Incirlik information bureau's press releases testified to the bureau's high

credibility.

Although the Incirlik information bureau was better resourced than the Dhahran information bureau, they both lagged behind the British. Just as the British had used satellite telephones from King Khalid Military City to London during Desert Storm to rapidly support its media, they used a mobile information bureau [Land Rover vehicle with satellite telephone] during Provide Comfort. In an area without communications and accommodation facilities, the mobile Land Rover proved invaluable.⁸⁸ To maintain a telecommunications edge in supporting the public information effort, the British PAOs had a mobile information bureau which was air portable, equipped for field operations, capable of supporting a team of six personnel, and provided with facsimile, picture transmission, and satellite communications facilities.⁸⁹

Transportation, the second component of resourcing, was also easier for Provide Comfort than Desert Storm. Although there were occasional pools with dedicated transportation for special events, normally the media commuted on space available aircraft. However, travel was guaranteed only one-way and media personnel were continually cautioned to be ready to stay overnight in the mountain camps. Also, unlike Desert Storm's Dhahran information bureau where aviation requests were routinely denied, airlift requests for Provide Comfort were more often approved by the CTF operations officer after a formal request from the information bureau.⁹⁰

As to the personnel resourcing for Provide Comfort's

information bureau, after about two weeks, the staffing leveled off to about fifteen personnel which is the minimum needed for sustained 7 days a week, 24 hours a day operations.⁹¹ In addition to the normal manning requirements, the combined information bureau was eventually augmented with two public affairs detachments, but they were of little use in media support. Although the detachments helped reduce the overall workload, they specialized in command information programs. Because Provide Comfort was a humanitarian effort that needed personnel to work the public information aspect of media relations, the public affairs detachments were somewhat ineffective.

In summary, the Incirlik information bureau's operating guidelines for public affairs/media relations are considered to be a blueprint for future combined operations in times of tension or contingencies out of the NATO area.⁹² The Incirlik information bureau earned the full approval of the media for two reasons. First, Provide Comfort benefited from lessons learned about the media's concerns and resourcing shortfalls during Desert Storm. Second, because the operation short of war had fewer security constraints and less risk to American soldiers than the Desert Storm war, full and open access was given to the media.

LESSONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The experiences of information bureaus in Vietnam, Desert Storm and Provide Comfort coupled with doctrinal guidance yield numerous lessons learned that lead to two sets of implications. The first set of implications concern the policies and procedures

that the information bureau followed to ensure credibility.

Additional implications concern the proper operational resourcing. These implications help identify what changes are needed to make the information bureau better able to win the information war.

Particularly during the early years in Vietnam, the media was responsive in supporting the military. However, the result of duplicity and consequent poor credibility was a military-media relationship which became more adversarial than in previous wars. The Vietnam public affairs experience provided several lessons. First, the importance of credibility was aptly demonstrated during the Tet Offensive when the media mistrusted MACV's explanation and later refused to correct the misperceptions they helped generate. Second, as a result of the offensive and other unfavorable dealings with the press, policy guidelines--which include a prohibition from predicting war plans and from denigrating the enemy's capabilities--have been incorporated into doctrine to promote credibility. The third lesson applicable from Vietnam is that although supporting an administration's policies can sometimes compromise an information bureau's credibility, it is important to "speak with one voice" from the DOD level down to the individual soldier.

Incorporating the lessons learned in Vietnam, current doctrine supports the above issues and emphasizes the four basic guidelines of truthfulness, accuracy, security, and timeliness. However, Desert Storm demonstrated that the military-media relationship has evolved beyond these basic guidelines. Desert Storm had little choice

but to use media pools and a security review process which restrained the media. If properly resourced, these two procedures may not have caused much friction inherently. However, as a consequence of resource constraints, the media's charges of limited access and censorship by delay have some merit.

The Provide Comfort Incirlik information bureau enjoyed two distinct advantages over the Dhahran information bureau in establishing credibility. First, the operation short of war had fewer security constraints and less risk to American soldiers. Second, Provide Comfort had greater command support because media relations are inherently a key aspect of humanitarian operations. Consequently, the media were granted full, open access and were dutifully kept informed of developments. The established policies of both commands intended to ensure that the information provided by the information bureau was credible with the media. However, reporters viewed Provide Comfort's information bureau as more credible because the command actually provided resources so that reporters could double check and confirm press releases. As a result, the Combined Task Force and the media developed a stronger mutually beneficial trust and better credibility.

Resourcing constraints affected all of the examples and involved communications, transportation, and personnel. A shortage of adequate communications assets was a problem in Vietnam and for both Desert Storm and Provide Comfort. Vietnam lacked tactical communications systems and the Dhahran information bureau was out of the communications flow. Provide Comfort had

fewer communications problems only because the Incirlik information bureau was freed of the requirement to support the media to the level needed during Desert Storm.

In addition to recurring communications shortfalls, transportation has been a continuing problem. South Vietnam had a severe lack of air and ground transportation assets available for public affairs requirements. Although doctrine now recognizes the transportation shortfalls by emphasizing the need for adequate air and ground support to the media, it appears likely to continue to be a problem unless operational commanders not only resource the information bureau in planning, but also place command emphasis on it during execution. During Desert Storm there were no routine aviation assets designated for media support despite the requirement to do so in the operations order. Although a contract ground fleet was resourced, maintenance for the fleet was not. The information bureau instituted a military ground courier system to get media products from the field; however, the vast desert distances made the system inflexible and slow. Consequently, Desert Storm was charged with limiting access and censorship by delay, but Provide Comfort was not.

Provide Comfort had essentially the same transportation assets designated in the operations order as Desert Storm. However, the Incirlik information bureau had the CTF Commander's full support. Although the Dhahran information bureau had almost all aviation requests denied, the Incirlik information bureau was given helicopters after a formal request. Consequently, the

command emphasis on media support during Provide Comfort reduced delays, enhanced credibility and precluded subsequent charges of censorship by delay.

Concerning personnel, the two major public affairs organizations with which the information bureau could be doctrinally augmented are the press camp headquarters and the mobile public affairs detachment, both of which are in the Reserves. Doctrine identifies these organizations and describes their function in war or contingencies. However, it fails to fully address the capabilities of these organizations for operations short of war. The press camp headquarters seems the ideal organization to handle media issues, but they were not used in either Desert Storm or Provide Comfort because few of them exist and they are in the later deploying reserves.

The public affairs detachments—the workhorses of public affairs efforts—had problems too. The numbers of personnel helped lessen some of the workload, but public affairs detachments are mainly trained for command information and were relatively unprepared for public information and dealing with the media. The same problem happened in Provide Comfort.

In summary, the joint information bureau is credible but not properly resourced for its mission. Profiting from Vietnam's influence on doctrine, both of the contemporary information bureaus, in war and short of war, had policies, guidelines, and intentions to foster credibility with the media and the American people. Although subjectively measured, these efforts resulted in

the media believing what the information bureaus released.

However, to be fully credible, the information bureau must also be adequately resourced, which it was not for either Vietnam, Desert Storm, or Provide Comfort.

Given the conclusion that the information bureau was not adequately resourced, the major implications seem to apply to equipment and organizational needs. The most immediate equipment needs are those identified by Colonel Kirchoffner, Director of the Incirlik information bureau. He identified the ideal fix for the communications problems that Desert Storm and Provide Comfort faced and future information bureaus will likely face. He believes that DOD should authorize and fund unified commands to get public affairs deployment kits, which he called a "JIB [Joint Information Bureau] in a box" with the following equipment:⁹³

- Portable computers/printers
- Portable fax machines
- Portable copiers (with paper and toner)
- Hand-held radios
- Multi-system TV/VCR
- AM/FM radios
- Tape recorders (with batteries)
- Camera
- Transformers
- Portable satellite telephone.

Additionally, the British solution of a mobile information bureau with dedicated satellite communications and facsimile seems to be a relatively inexpensive solution.

New transportation systems do not seem to be necessary. However, recent contingencies indicate an increased need for dedicated air and ground transportation. As the Desert Storm operations order indicated, these assets can be used for other

purposes when not needed by the information bureau, but their priority should be to media support. Particularly when it is the only operation, a contingency operation could ensure that reserve component aviation assets are designated for the joint information bureau.⁹⁴

In addition to the communications and transportation issues, organizational personnel changes are needed as well. Doctrine fails to sufficiently address the optimal information bureau staffing. Based on his experience in ten joint information bureaus, two REFORGER exercises, three hostage releases and one noncombatant evacuation operation, Colonel Kirchoffner, the Director of the Incirlik information bureau, identified fifteen people needed for 7 days a week, 24 hours a day operations as follows:⁹⁵

Director	0-6
Deputy Director	0-5
Operations Officer	0-4
Day Joint Operations Center Representative	0-5
Night Joint Operations Center Representative	0-3
Day Media Desk Officer	0-3
Day Media Desk Officer	0-3
Night Media Desk Officer	0-3
Day Media Support NCO	E-6
Day Media Support NCO	E-5
Night Media Support NCO	E-6
Photojournalist/Staff Photographer	E-5
Day Administrative NCO	E-6
Day Administrative NCO	E-5
Night Administrative NCO	E-4

Additionally, the forward deployed subordinate information bureaus need a minimum of five personnel as follows:⁹⁶

Director	0-5
Deputy Director	0-4
Media Escort NCO	E-7
Media Support NCO	E-5
Administrative NCO	E-5

In addition to Colonel Kirchoffner's list, analysis shows that information bureaus and/or press camp headquarters should be augmented with an aviation liaison officer.⁸⁷ Additionally, the information bureau would keep in the information flow better if it also had someone able to coordinate intelligence and operations issues.

The specialization of public affairs detachments on command information instead of public information was a problem in both Desert Storm and Provide Comfort. The implication is that it will likely be a problem for future information bureaus unless the situation is corrected. Two options could improve the situation. First, some public affairs detachments could be realigned to specialize on public information while others remain specialized on command information. Although command information is the most essential public affairs function on the battlefield and fundamental to command,⁸⁸ operations short of war require a greater public information effort. Second, public affairs detachments could backfill active component PAOs who deploy forward. That way, a public affairs detachment could continue to focus on command information for the soldiers, families and civilians at a unit's home station and deploying active duty PAOs would handle public information responsibilities. Otherwise, if the current training concept continues, Provide Comfort demonstrated that public affairs detachments will not be as effective for humanitarian operations.⁸⁹

Although these implications require time and expense to correct, they are necessary if the information bureau is to be

truly credible and properly resourced to win the information war. However, no policy or amount of resources will fulfill the mission of winning the information war without true command emphasis-- emphasis which not only gives support in writing during the planning, but also with substance in execution. As General Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote to Desert Storm commanders, "The media aspects of military operations are important, will get national attention, and warrant your personal attention."¹⁰⁰

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