

# PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND COMBATING DISINFORMATION

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fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Information Advantage Scholars

by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND COMBATING DISINFORMATION, by Daniel Mathews, 102 pages.

Commanders understand that informing the American public directly correlates to the national will and support for military obligations. America believes that democracies are stronger and more resilient because they honestly inform their citizens. While informing the public is a command responsibility, commanders delegate this mission to U.S. Public Affairs Officers (PAOs). Public Affairs training focuses on informing key audiences and executing commanders' communication plans. Technology constantly forces Public Affairs training to adapt, but adaptation outside of its core mission has never occurred. With the emerging regulatory requirements of correcting misinformation and countering disinformation, public affairs' capability and readiness must be assessed. This study evaluates the readiness of public affairs to counter disinformation and examines the training PAOs receive to execute this obligation through scholarly review, military regulations, and industry research. The study concludes that not only are PAOs untrained to execute this task but that no strategy currently exists for combating disinformation effectively while upholding the American democratic ideals. This thesis recommends three changes that the Army must implement to raise the readiness of public affairs to compete in the disinformation space. These recommendations will provide a future model for countering disinformation and modernizing public affairs' role in information advantage.

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## ACRONYMS

ACOM	Army Command
AP	Associated Press
APAC	Army Public Affairs Center
AR	Army Regulation
CONUS	Continental United States
CPA	Chief of Public Affairs
CSA	Chief of Staff of the Army
DA	Department of the Army
DCS	Deputy Chief of Staff
DoD	Department of Defense
DOTMLPF	Doctrine, Organization, Training, Materiel, Leadership and Education, Personnel, and Facilities
FM	Field Manual
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act
HQDA	Headquarters, Department of the Army
IE	Information Environment
IG	Inspector General
JP	Joint Publication
OCONUS	Outside the Continental United States
OCPA	Office of the Chief of Public Affairs
OE	Operational Environment
PA	Public Affairs
PAO	Public Affairs Officer



SECARMY	Secretary of the Army
UPAR	Unit Public Affairs Representative
USC	United States Code
VI	Visual Information

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) are expected to serve as the external communication branch of the Army to the American public.<sup>1</sup> PAOs present communicated information and actions to the United States public and international audiences.<sup>2</sup> Informing the American public about operations and activities is a federal responsibility of the U. S. Army.<sup>3</sup> The intent is to provide only factual information, allowing the public to make their conclusions and decisions.<sup>4</sup> This is done to cultivate and maintain public trust in the Army organization.

The PA functional area emphasizes informing rather than influencing, although there remains debate on if it is possible to only inform rather than influence.<sup>5</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-61, *Public Affairs* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), I-4.

<sup>2</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Regulation (AR) 360-1, *The Army Public Affairs Program* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2020), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Deputy Chief of Management Officer of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 5122.5, *Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ATSD(PA))* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), 4-7.

<sup>4</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-61, *Communications Strategy and Public Affairs Operations* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2021), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Jeff A. Davis, “Lessons from the Information Battlefield,” *LinkedIn*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/lessons-from-information-battlefield-jeff-a-davis>.

Field Manual 3-13 states that Public Affairs (PA) help the commanders “shape the information environment and acknowledges cognitive biases, selective information, method of distribution, and timeliness all impact the information disseminated.”<sup>6</sup> Army PA is not an impartial party but representative of the U.S. government. The recipients of information carry their own biases, perspectives, knowledge, and beliefs, causing them to interpret data uniquely. While there is debate on the effectiveness of informing without influencing, the mission of public affairs remains steadfast.<sup>7</sup>

Previous publications have highlighted the limited public affairs training and credentialing its officers receive as part of their initial training. Certification through DINFOS credentials a PAO to operate within the military.<sup>8</sup> As of 2021, PAOs will receive nine weeks of branch-specific training in a joint environment.<sup>9</sup> This training is the only requirement for PAOs to attend for the remainder of their careers as Army communication professionals. AR 360-1, The Army Public Affairs Program, tasks PAOs

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<sup>6</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-13, *Inform and Influence Activities* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2013), 3-1.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the Deputy Chief of Management Officer of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 5400.13, *Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ATSD(PA))* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2008), 4-7.

<sup>8</sup> Charles M. Spears, “Evaluating the Professional Status of the U.S. Army’s Public Affairs Program,” (Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2019), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Department of the Army Pamphlet (DA PAM) 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management: FA 46 Public Affairs* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2017), 3-4.

to “Mitigate misinformation and disinformation” in accordance with DODI 5400.13.<sup>10</sup> This task formalizes additional roles in the Public Affairs functional area. As the task to mitigate misinformation and disinformation was added, no additional training was added. Therefore, an examination is needed of the training and readiness of Public Affairs to effectively operate within the information advantage arena.

### The Rise of Misinformation and Disinformation

This paper analyzes PA’s role in countering disinformation in the information environment. It presents research gathered from various publications on the strategic use of PA in the increasingly socially and politically polarized climate.<sup>11</sup> This thesis focuses on the emergent technologic advances in media that have exponentially increased the capability and reach of information warfare. Social media platforms could tweak their algorithms to curb the spread of misinformation but are not required to do so.<sup>12</sup> PA must train its soldiers to respond appropriately to misinformation and disinformation. Human Resource Command requires Army PAO candidates to be selected and trained before being validated as PAOs.<sup>13</sup> Commanders ensure PAOs have the personnel and equipment

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<sup>10</sup> DoD, DoDD 5400.13, 8-1.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Baum, Tim Groeling, *New Media and the Polarization of American Political Discourse* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2008), 345-350.

<sup>12</sup> Adedayo Akala, “Don’t Censor! Stop the Hoaxes! Facebook, Twitter Face A Catch-22,” *NPR*, October 16, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/10/16/924625825/dont-censor-stop-the-hoaxes-facebook-twitter-face-a-catch-22>.

<sup>13</sup> HQDA, DA PAM 600-3, 2-3.

necessary to operate in the politicized IE.<sup>14</sup> Military publications and federal regulations provide frameworks and limitations for PAOs operations.<sup>15</sup>

The rise of misinformation and disinformation makes political polarization more damaging to public trust.<sup>16</sup> AR 360-1 tasks PA to provide timely and accurate information to counter the mis/disinformation campaigns by adversaries in the social media domain.<sup>17</sup> No industry is revolutionizing faster today than information.<sup>18</sup> News is spreading quicker today than at any other time in human history. However, studies show that much or a vast amount of the data is false. The amount of information available, combined with the high percentage of incorrect information, impacts the ability of individuals to know what to believe.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> HQDA, AR360-1, 5-7.

<sup>15</sup> DoD, DoDD 5122.5, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Ognyanova, David Lazer, Ronald Robertson, and Christo Wilson, “Misinformation in Action: Fake News Exposure is Linked to Lower Trust in Media, Higher Trust in Government When Your Side is in Power,” *Misinformation Review* 1, no. 4 (May 2020): 4-14, <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/misinformation-in-action-fake-news-exposure-is-linked-to-lower-trust-in-media-higher-trust-in-government-when-your-side-is-in-power/>.

<sup>17</sup> HQDA, AR360-1, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Brad Plumer, Ezra Klein, David Roberts, Dylan Matthews, Matthew Yglesias, and Timothy Lee, “Technology is Changing How We Live, but It Needs to Change How We Work,” *Vox*, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://www.vox.com/a/new-economy-future/technology-productivity>.

<sup>19</sup> P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 223-248.

The phrase “my truth” has become popular among the American public. This phrase refers to an individual’s unique perception and beliefs of an incident.<sup>20</sup> The definition of truth counters this notion. Merriam-Webster defines truth as the body of real things, events, and facts.<sup>21</sup> Truth is not customized to an individual. Truth and perception are different. If the U.S. Army seeks to gain decision dominance over its adversaries, commanders must first understand the reality of the situation. As technology advanced in the information domain, adversaries of the United States identified opportunities to spread misinformation and disinformation.<sup>22</sup> American adversaries have chosen to bypass hacking American systems, instead choosing to hack the cognitive domain of the public.<sup>23</sup> Manipulation of a technological system can be identified and corrected, but manipulation of the human mind is much more difficult to detect and repair.<sup>24</sup>

As the Army recognizes the increased importance of the information domain, there must be an equal analysis done to examine if the information-related capabilities are

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<sup>20</sup> Conor Friedersdorf, “The Difference Between Speaking ‘Your Truth’ and ‘The Truth’,” *The Atlantic*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/01/the-power-and-perils-of-speaking-your-truth/549968/>.

<sup>21</sup> Merriam-Webster, Inc., “Truth,” Merriam-Webster, accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/truth>.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Stengel, *Information Wars: How We Lost the Global Battle against Disinformation & What We Can Do About It* (New York: Grove Press, 2020), 287-293.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Dressler, Anders Sandberg, and Christoph Bublitz, “Hacking the Brain: Dimensions of Cognitive Enhancement,” *American Chemical Society* 10, no. 3 (2019): 33-41.

<sup>24</sup> Jutta Joormann and Catherine D’Avanzato, “Emotion Regulation in Depression: Examining the Role of Cognitive Processes,” *Cognition and Emotion* 24, no. 6 (2010): 913-939.



appropriately equipped to compete at every level of warfare. With the changing operating environment of information and the revolution of news and media, Army PA must ensure PAO training is appropriately aligned to execute PA core tasks and maintain its regulatory duty to inform the American Public and mitigate misinformation and disinformation.<sup>25</sup>

### Problem Statement

As PA doctrine continues to modernize to operate in the emerging information environment, there is minimal guidance on how PAOs should operate, specifically mitigating misinformation and disinformation. Currently, minimal formal training is provided in military Public Affairs courses to combat disinformation or the impacts of actions on the profession of arms. PA Officers are required to conduct nine weeks of PA training throughout their military career.<sup>26</sup> The current Public Affairs and Strategic Communication Qualification (PASC-Q) course sets aside two hours of training for social media. There is no curriculum to address misinformation, disinformation, or cognitive bias that allows it to operate successfully.<sup>27</sup> Historically, disinformation has taken advantage of many mediums, but technological advancements in social media have

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<sup>25</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 87.

<sup>26</sup> Office of the Deputy Chief of Management Officer of the Department of Defense (DoD). Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 5160.48, *Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ATSD(PA))* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Defense Information School (DINFOS), “Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction,” (PASC-Q POI) (Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 3-11.

increased the speed by which disinformation is created and spread. Thomas Rid states in *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*, “The internet didn’t just make active measures [disinformation] cheaper, quicker, more reactive, and less risky; it also, to put it simply, made active measures [disinformation] more active and less measured.”<sup>28</sup>

Is Army Public Affairs training aligned to adequately fulfill its role in combating disinformation in an increasingly politically and socially polarized world? Technology constantly requires public Affairs training to adapt, and the inclusion of mitigating misinformation and disinformation as a core public affairs task requires significant adaptation to PA training. Does adding a core task necessitate assessing PA’s capability and readiness to correct misinformation and counter disinformation? What is the readiness of public affairs to counter disinformation, and does the training PAOs receive prepare them to accomplish this task? Answering this question required an understanding of both the training in public affairs and the role of disinformation. The analysis then evaluated whether the selection of PAO candidates and if the training PAOs receive is synchronized adequately to counter disinformation. It also required an analysis of disinformation’s cognitive effects and role. Finally, this study considered the current training within the PA career field both in and outside of the Army to better elucidate future training opportunities to operate more effectively.

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Rid, *Active Measures: The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare* (New York: Picador, 2021), 12.

### Purpose of Study

The US Army exists to “fight and win the nation’s wars.”<sup>29</sup> This paper identifies a gap in the training/education/experiences of PAOs and provides recommendations on the way ahead. Commanders understand that informing the American public directly correlates to the national will and support for military obligations.<sup>30</sup> America believes that democracies are stronger and more resilient because they honestly inform their citizens.<sup>31</sup> While informing the public is a command responsibility, commanders delegate this mission to their Public Affairs Officers (PAOs).<sup>32</sup> Public Affairs training focuses on informing key audiences and executing commanders’ communication plans. Understanding and strengthening the ability of PA practitioners to better combat and operate in the information domain increases operational objectives.

By understanding PA’s role in gaining Information Advantage, this paper analyzes the readiness of Public Affairs to combat disinformation and highlight the best options for future operations while maintaining its regulatory obligation to inform external, internal, and international audiences.<sup>33</sup> The study focuses on evaluating the readiness of public affairs to mitigate misinformation and disinformation according to the

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<sup>29</sup> Chief of the Staff of the Army, and Secretary of the Army, “The Army Vision,” (Department of the Army, 2021), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020), IV-33.

<sup>31</sup> George C. Marshall, quoted in Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory, 1943-45* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 95.

<sup>32</sup> HQDA, AR360-1, 1-4.

<sup>33</sup> DoD, DoDD 5122.5, 11.

training currently provided. The study assesses the effectiveness of PA counter disinformation tactics and training. It recommends future training and tactics for PA professionals if necessary. Finally, this research highlights the negative impact and cost of not changing.

### Research Questions

1. What is the readiness of public affairs to counter disinformation, and does the training PAOs receive prepare them to accomplish this task?
2. Is Public Affairs training adequately aligned with the roles and responsibilities of PAOs?

This analysis may raise secondary research questions to address. These questions clarify the roles and responsibilities for information-related capabilities to operate within the information domain. Critical aspects of these questions could shape how the Army targets the cognitive part of audiences both within the United States and abroad.

1. How should public affairs be task-organized to achieve its regulatory obligations?
2. What level of misinformation and disinformation mitigation should be the responsibility of the U.S. Army?

This research analyzed the role and functionality of public affairs as the primary information instrument for the United States Army. This analysis attempts to provide a framework for the proper alignment of PA core tasks and training.

### Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the identification of assumptions is necessary to complete the study. This thesis operates from four fundamental premises:

1. The information space will continue to transform dramatically with increased technology.
2. Operations below the level of armed conflict will continually happen in the information and cognitive domain.
3. Training provided to Public Affairs Officer is adequately aligned with the training documents provided by the Defense Information School.
4. Adversaries will continue to use disinformation to justify their actions and decrease the national will of the American people.

For the purposes of this study, a critical assumption is that the information space will continue its current transformation trajectory and that adversaries will continue to attempt to use disinformation. This assumption enables the recommended operational changes and research conclusions to not merely address the current environment but become a framework for future operations regardless of the technology involved.

Operations below the armed level of conflict occur daily and in numerous nuanced ways. Actions in the information and cognitive domains influence the strategic and political atmospheres.<sup>34</sup> This thesis assumes that these actions will continue to occur. This is a necessary assumption because it provides a constant movement in an otherwise constantly changing environment.

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<sup>34</sup> Ryan Holiday, *Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator* (London: Profile Books Ltd., 2018), 230-235.

This thesis relies on analyzing the training the PAOs receive from DINFOS; it is essential to assume that training materials are accurate and thorough. There remains a possibility that instructors within DINFOS provide additional training not outlined by the training materials. Still, this study assumed that instructors teach in accordance with the Training Program of Instruction (POI) unless the research finds overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

This study analyzes actions public affairs must take in competing in the information domain. Crucial steps will likely occur within social media or through technological means of communication.<sup>35</sup> This thesis assumed that future conflict will not happen in a technologically denied space. This does not include electronic warfare or other means to degrade the means of transmitting the information.

### Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the terms used focus on how best to communicate with the American public. Social media definitions are often misconstrued or obfuscated the story or message.<sup>36</sup> This thesis attempted to be exact to further drive conversations throughout the PA career field and the Army.

Audience. In public affairs, a broadly defined group that contains stakeholders and/or publics relevant to military operations.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Singer and Brooking, *Like War* 258-268.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Jakaza, "Identity Construction or Obfuscation on Social Media: A Case of Facebook and WhatsApp," *African Identities* 20, no. 1 August (2020): 15-23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

Disinformation. The intentional dissemination of false or inaccurate information to deceive, delay, degrade trust or coerce a misinformed decision.<sup>38</sup> This definition differs from the AR 360-1 and FM 3-61 definitions due to the inclusion of methodological distribution or intentional dissemination.<sup>39</sup> This study focused on disinformation on a strategic scale with the intent to weaken the national government of the United States. While satire and parody can be considered a type of disinformation, they do not apply to the scope of this study.

Influence. The power to change or affect someone or something.<sup>40</sup>

Inform. The provision of factual information to domestic, international, and internal audiences to accurately describe military operations and activities.<sup>41</sup>

Information. Information is not defined in army regulations nor the Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. For the purposes of this study, information is defined as the communication or reception of knowledge or intelligence.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 10-12.

<sup>39</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 157.

<sup>40</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), *Joint Concept for Operating in the Information Environment (JCOIE)* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 42.

<sup>41</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61, 15-16.

<sup>42</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014).

Misinformation. Information that is inaccurate and is shared unknowingly by an individual.<sup>43</sup> This study uses this definition rather than the definition listed in AR 360-1 and FM 3-61 due to the inclusion of the term unknowingly shared.<sup>44</sup> FM 3-61 defines misinformation as “a subset of information that includes all incorrect information.”<sup>45</sup>

Public Affairs. Communication activities with external and internal audiences.<sup>46</sup>

Public Trust. While the Army did not define public trust in its doctrine, it does define external trust. “The confidence and faith that the American people have in the Army to serve the Nation ethically, effectively, and efficiently.”<sup>47</sup> In addition to the Army’s definition of external trust, public trust should include the belief that the military is honestly and accurately informing the American taxpayer on how their money is being used. For this thesis, public trust is defined as the confidence and faith that the military is acting ethically, efficiently, and effectively while informing the American public of all information that is classified in a way it can be released that the Army provides timely and accurate information without the intent to deceive or withhold negative information.

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<sup>43</sup> Meira Gebel, “Misinformation vs. Disinformation,” *Business Insider*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/misinformation-vs-disinformation>.

<sup>44</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 158.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61, 137.

<sup>47</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Reference Publication (ARP) 1, *The Army Profession* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2015), 27.



Social Media. Websites and applications that allow communication and dissemination of information on the internet.<sup>48</sup>

### Scope

While there is an overwhelming amount of research and opinions on media, social media, and influence activities, there remains a gap in information regarding military information in combating disinformation. The methods for combatting disinformation, in general, have garnered very little success.<sup>49</sup> Due to cognitive bias, individuals are more likely to believe the first information they read significantly if it reinforces their beliefs.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, even when people are faced with data that proves their position false, this tends to make people more entrenched in their ideas rather than change them.<sup>51</sup>

The amount of data is increasing exponentially every day. It is projected that the amount of all human information doubles every two years, and with the increase in data, there is also more misinformation than ever before.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, military communication constantly occurs in numerous languages and at multiple echelons every day.<sup>53</sup> Without

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<sup>48</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1, 79.

<sup>49</sup> Tim Hwang, *Dealing with Disinformation: Evaluating the Case for CDA 230 Amendment* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2017), 10-12.

<sup>50</sup> Emma Norman and Rafael Delfin, “Wizards Under Uncertainty: Cognitive Biases, Threat Assessment, and Misjudgments in Policy Making,” *Politics & Policy* 40, no. 3 (2012): 371–378.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: Pearson, 2008), 143-169.

<sup>52</sup> Stengel, *Information Wars*, xi.

<sup>53</sup> Office of the Deputy Chief of Management Officer of the Department of Defense (DoD), Department of Defense Directive (DoDD) 5160.70, *Assistant to the*

Artificial Intelligence (AI), it would be challenging to gather all the content that the Army or any organization creates daily and analyze its effect on the American audience. This thesis does not attempt to cover the breadth of disinformation or military communication. Instead, this research focused its efforts on evaluating the readiness of public affairs to mitigate misinformation and disinformation effectively and the training provided to do so.

This thesis focuses its examination on countering disinformation and fulfilling the regulatory obligations outlined in accordance with DODI 5400.13.<sup>54</sup> It evaluates the training received and educational requirements necessary for PAOs. This thesis examines the use of PAOs and the effectiveness of professional communicators in combatting disinformation. Considerable time is being spent exploring the use of disinformation and the ability to conduct counter-disinformation in an impactful way. This thesis provides an overview of the history of public affairs, the standard practices, and the framework it operates. By briefly highlighting the history of Army Public Affairs and its original purpose, this study can better understand the current environment's context.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Due to the limited time frame required to complete this thesis while at Command and General Staff Officer Course, this study relies on pre-existing materials. While a vast amount of study has recently been done on emergent communication technology tactics,

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*Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (ATSD(PA))* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2007)

<sup>54</sup> DoD, DoDD 5400.13, 8-1.

minimal research has focused on Army PA's new role within the information domain. This study attempted to provide professional research focused on government communication and tactics and apply those findings to Army PA. There is a risk that these findings do not directly correlate or do not support the objectives of this paper. The limited period in which this thesis is produced is necessary because of its inclusion in the Command General Staff Officer's College program of study. These limitations are essential to provide an examination of the effectiveness of the training received

The research was limited to the training material provided. The lesson objectives of the Defense Information School (DINFOS) may not fully capture the conversations or lectures given by the DINFOS cadre. The research did not consider experience learned on the job and may miss personal research done by individuals. Examination of the readiness of PA to operate effectively in the information environment focused on an average; the school-trained PAO rather than the potential outlier PAO who has conducted practical self-study.

This study does not provide a comprehensive list of all adversarial actors, actions, or the vast breadth of media. This study generalized the use and effects of disinformation to focus on Army communication on potential strategies for combating malign information. Examination of the emerging environment explains the current and emergent information-related strategies. The paper provides a framework for understanding the media and political landscape and produces the context required for recommending additional training and equipment specific to the increased roles assigned to Army PA. Due to the emerging nature of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, along with

the relative inability to verify the data in the information space, this paper does not include tactics used to counter Russian disinformation in Ukraine.

This qualitative study does not represent the whole of Army PA actions because it is limited in scope and cannot be generalized for the entirety of Army PA messaging. The qualitative analysis of PA training tasks analyzes the training and education received by PAOs. This study attempts to analyze the data into information relative to the average PA professional. The average PA professional is defined as an individual who graduates from the PASC-Q course and has met the standard graduation requirements. No assumptions were made about the previous education or experience that may exist for PASC-Q graduates. The research examines previous actions to combat disinformation and their relative success or failures.

A study of the joint DINFOS education facilitates understanding PA's role in the information domain and knowledge of the schooling requirements. As the increased regulatory requirements emerge, the focus of PAO training has not yet shifted to incorporate the new responsibilities. Examining PA training in this manner provides an understanding of current training and readiness goals. It serves to provide a measuring stick to explore the readiness state of the PA functional area.

### Significance of Study

Military operations are currently undergoing a shift to Large Scale Combat Operations. Included in this shift is the focus on information advantage and the role of public affairs.<sup>55</sup> Although the context and utilization of PA in information advantage is

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<sup>55</sup> Mark Pomerleau, "US Army Works Through What Information Advantage Is and How to Achieve It," *C4ISRNet*, September 9, 2021, <https://www.c4isrnet.com/smr/>

not yet fully understood, the implementation of PA in this role necessitates a study of their current functionality. Publication of the Draft ADP 3-13 will further define the role of PA in Information Advantage. By exploring the intent and effectiveness of PA, the Army can better craft themes and messaging strategies to achieve their end state.

Current PA training does not include discussions concerning the political nature of information, nor does it address misinformation or disinformation.<sup>56</sup> This gap in the knowledge of its PA professionals is a concern but was not significant enough in and of itself to warrant a research study until the inclusion of the increased regulatory obligations. Technological advances in the speed and ease of human interactions allow U.S. adversaries to expand past physical battlefields and combat in the cognitive environment using disinformation and narrative warfare.<sup>57</sup>

The modern United States military has not withdrawn from combat due to insufficient power, technical or tactical ability, or availability of troops and resources. The Army has withdrawn forces on multiple occasions due to a lack of public support.<sup>58</sup> Withdrawing troops is done for many purposes; however, previous engagements where the U.S. removed troops partly due to the loss of national will highlight PA's importance in the cognitive dimension. Understanding the need to inform the American public of the

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[technet-augusta/2021/09/09/us-army-works-through-what-information-advantage-is-and-how-to-achieve it/](https://technet-augusta/2021/09/09/us-army-works-through-what-information-advantage-is-and-how-to-achieve-it/).

<sup>56</sup> DINFOS, PASC-Q POI.

<sup>57</sup> CJCS, JCOIE, 7.

<sup>58</sup> William Lunch and Peter Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *The Western Political Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1979): 21-44.

intent and end state of operations has taken a back seat to achieve mission objectives. While referencing Operation Just Cause, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell stated he knew public affairs ranged at the very bottom of the priority list for many commanders.<sup>59</sup> Some historians claim the military failed to equip its PA operators with the framework, training, or equipment to operate effectively in the information environment.<sup>60</sup> This research is necessary for providing the framework for future military communication.

### Summary

Military operations continue to draw international attention. Is Army Public Affairs training aligned to adequately fulfill its role in combating disinformation in an increasingly politically and socially polarized world? It analyzes the impact of technology and the role of mis/disinformation in the modern world. It addresses how the Army equips PA professionals to combat disinformation in an increasingly politically and socially polarized world.

This study identifies usable strategies and tools available today by examining current PA training. The paper highlights the state of PA and recommends additional training, if required, to ensure that PA is ready to support future IA military endeavors. The conclusion suggests three changes that the Army must implement to raise the readiness of public affairs to compete in the disinformation space. These

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 76.

<sup>60</sup> William Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1988).

recommendations provided a future model for countering disinformation and modernizing public affairs' role in information advantage. The literature review examined the existing literature directly related to secondary research questions and described the analysis framework.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

PAOs are the commanders' premier communicators and are often referred to as among the world's most talented communication professionals.<sup>61</sup> The data for these claims is unsubstantiated. Few studies have been done evaluating the professionalism of PAs, and the studies conducted often conclude that military PAOs are far less educated than their civilian counterparts.<sup>62</sup> Education does not always directly correlate to talent, and the question of the readiness of Army PA remains debatable.<sup>63</sup> There is a distinction between education and training. Education refers to the knowledge required to do a skill; training focuses on the ability to accomplish the task. PA readiness must be a balance between education and training. With the increase of misinformation and disinformation by U.S. adversaries, PA is tasked to counter disinformation and correct misinformation.<sup>64</sup> This study examines the training and readiness to counter disinformation provided to public affairs practitioners. Is Army Public Affairs training aligned to adequately fulfill

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<sup>61</sup> Lloyd Eldon Bedford, "Social Media: Enhancing the U.S. Military's Communication with its Target Audience," (Master's thesis, Syracuse University, 2016), 54.

<sup>62</sup> Spears, "Evaluating the Professional Status of the US Army Public Affairs Program," 27.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 61-71.

<sup>64</sup> DoD, DoDD 5400.13, 8-1.



its role in combating disinformation in an increasingly politically and socially polarized world?

The literature provides the historical context of adversarial tactics, describes the current political and social context, and examines public affairs in nationally focused case studies. Additional resources provide an overview of the primary public affairs officer's operational tactics, training, and capabilities. The media environment in 2022 presents literature that shapes the discussion of political and adversarial disinformation, but minimal data annotates the Army's role in this discussion. Few works of literature provide a framework for countering disinformation effectively. Additionally, many scholarly reviews on adversarial disinformation tactics and operations are accused of being counterfactual, frequently by those charged with disinformation.<sup>65</sup>

The subject of misinformation and disinformation continues to be newsworthy and has cemented itself in the political discourse of the twenty-first century.<sup>66</sup> Attempts to lessen the spread of misinformation and disinformation have been met with backlash and claims that it violates the American ideals of freedom of speech.<sup>67</sup> All of this affects how the Army messages through PA to maintain public trust in an increasingly politically and socially polarized world and improves the effectiveness and impact of Army Strategic messaging. Countering disinformation remains a task of PAOs but must occur within America's democratic norms.

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<sup>65</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 10-14.

<sup>66</sup> Rand Corporation, "About Truth Decay," accessed November 15, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/research/projects/truth-decay/about-truth-decay.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Akala, "Don't Censor! Stop The Hoaxes!"

To effectively review the amount of data within the public space, this chapter is organized to review the following topics: 1. Historical Analysis of Public Affairs, 2. Regulatory Requirements, 3. Public Affairs Training, 4. The Role and Function of Misinformation and Disinformation. These topics were selected for examination to understand and illustrate the problem facing PA. Historical analysis frames how the Army uses PA based on the regulatory requirements. Regulations drive the training and education provided to a PAO. With the inclusion of mitigating disinformation as a critical task, understanding how disinformation functions is vital. The study focuses on the theoretical analysis of what misinformation and disinformation are and how they work while at the same time analyzing the readiness of Public Affairs training to counter disinformation.

#### Importance of Public Affairs

“Images of war and peace—either real or contrived—can decisively influence national will or public opinion before authorities confirm or repudiate their authenticity.”<sup>68</sup> The Army serves at the order of the American people, and PA is chartered to keep the American people informed. “People want instant, credible, relevant access to information, and if you don’t provide it, they will go elsewhere to obtain it.”<sup>69</sup> Communication with the American public about military use is an essential PA task. FM

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<sup>68</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria, II, “Inter-Dimensionality: A Revolution in Military Theory,” *Joint Force Quarterly* (Spring 1997): 30.

<sup>69</sup> Gleason, Carla, “Public Affairs, the Self-Directed Information Environment and Strategic Integration,” (Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2016), 62.

3-61 states directly that “The Army must keep its public informed thoroughly and timely.”<sup>70</sup> Open and transparent communication with the American public builds trust in the Army organization.<sup>71</sup> Attempts to mislead or deceive the public have occurred within the Army and PA. Chapter 3 contains examples of previous military attempts to control information and deceive the public. These attempts are often investigated and reported on by the media and hurt the professionalism and confidence of the American people in the military.<sup>72</sup> The media has a role in holding the government accountable for its actions. At the same time, PA focuses on telling the Army story and doing so in a way to explain military activities to the ordinary person.

#### Historical Analysis of Public Affairs

To present an influential study on the role of public affairs, it is crucial to understand the current operational environment and the historical use of public affairs. *Trust Me, I’m Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator* by Ryan Holiday, *Information Wars: How We Lost the Global Battle against Disinformation & What We Can Do About It* by Richard Stengel, and *Like War; The Weaponization of Social Media* by P. W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, are referenced to provide the historical context of the civil sectors of public information distribution.<sup>73</sup> Understanding the use of information in the civilian sector creates the foundational building blocks for understanding the industry

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<sup>70</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>72</sup> Holiday, *Trust Me, I’m Lying*, 230-235.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

norms, jargon, and communication intent. It also identifies the relationship between media and its audiences.

### Army Communication before Public Affairs

Army Public Affairs often exists in tension with operational security. In 1775 George Washington complained about operational security.<sup>74</sup> “It is much to be wished that our printers were more discreet in many of their publications.”<sup>75</sup> The tension between open communication with the American public and operational security led to the formalization of Army Public Affairs. Army PA began providing formalized training to its officers in 1946 at the Army Information school.<sup>76</sup> Before the formalized training of Army Public Affairs Officers, reporting of military actions and wartime events was managed solely by the civilian press. While there are numerous examples of commanders like Washington, Lincoln, Grant, and Jackson succeeding or failing due to their attitudes and use of PA; these were instances of personality.<sup>77</sup> No formalized policy regarding PA occurred until 1917.

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<sup>74</sup> Mickel Woodburn, “Public Affairs Responsibility in Unified Command,” (Research paper, U.S. Army War College, 1972), 24.

<sup>75</sup> George Washington, quoted in William Greider, “The Press as Adversary,” *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1971, B-1.

<sup>76</sup> Defense Information School (DINFOS), “DINFOS History,” accessed January 23, 2022, <https://www.dinfos.dma.mil/About/DINFOS-History/>.

<sup>77</sup> William Hammond, “The Army and Public Affairs: Enduring Principles, 1962-1968,” (Strategic Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 1989), 67.

In 1917, the Army sought to control information by implementing the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918.<sup>78</sup> The espionage act made obtaining or publicizing any material relating to national defense that may be used to harm the US or support a foreign nation against the law. The following Sedition Act of 1919 made illegal the criticism “of the actions of the United States government or its military forces.”<sup>79</sup> Restrictions were put on what a reporter could publish, there was a lengthy and costly accreditation process, and all material was subject to a security review. The media was controlled entirely, and there was an imbalance between military security and the public’s legitimate right to truthful information about World War I.<sup>80</sup> Control of information surpassed the acceptable operational security and allowed only approved talking points to be published, effectively turning PA into a propaganda arm. While the efforts to control the national will of the people were successful, they painted an inaccurate portrayal of war and combat for the American public.<sup>81</sup> This erroneous portrayal violated the PA charter to keep the American people informed and damaged the government’s credibility. WWI was too extravagantly cast as a war to end all wars and cement democracy worldwide, damaging the credibility of PA in future conflicts.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> U.S. Congress, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 40, 65th Cong., (1919), 553.

<sup>79</sup> U.S. Congress, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 567.

<sup>80</sup> Hammond, “The Army and Public Affairs,” 67.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>82</sup> Defense Information School (DINFOS), “The History of DOD PA,” Adobe Spark, 2019, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/w2ckpX2cdxTqN/?fbclid=war11yUVucKzEA1wiFX5b8vv7GcSlSTCM2pfM-iMG3KXm7uJy60FBGZc6raQ>.

By 1930, the Army press relations section was becoming institutionalized, but no training was provided to its officers.<sup>83</sup> The focus of this section was to promote army goals within the media and civilian sector, with the additional duty of writing speeches for general officers. Shortly before the start of WWII, the Army PA branch (as it was referred to) was removed from the intelligence section and placed under the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army.<sup>84</sup> This formalization brought about a new focus on representing the people's free thought and free expression.

Army leaders sought to cultivate a positive relationship with the press at General Marshall's behest. He believed that while dictators can more easily organize and control forces, democracies are stronger and more resilient because they inform their people.<sup>85</sup> Relationships with media were so strong that reporter Fletcher Pratt once stated, "the war was won without a single mistake, by a command consisting exclusively of geniuses."<sup>86</sup> This perspective served the military leaders at the time; however, it shielded the American people from the ugly realities of war, realities they would face during Korea and Vietnam.

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<sup>83</sup> Addison F. McGhee and Kenneth L. Fox, "A History of the Officer of the Chief of Information to Include Its Missions and Functions," (Unpublished manuscript. Office of the Chief of Information, 1934), 18, Center of Military History Files, Washington, DC.

<sup>84</sup> McGhee and Fox, "A History of the Officer of the Chief of Information to Include Its Missions and Functions," 22-29.

<sup>85</sup> Marshall, quoted in Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, 95.

<sup>86</sup> Fletcher Pratt, "How the Censors Rigged the News," *Harper's Magazine*, February 1946, 99.

## The Army Formalized Public Affairs Training

Lessons learned in WWI and WWII identified a need for standardized public affairs training.<sup>87</sup> The understanding that an honestly well-informed general and fighting force led to the active support of defending the nation permeated through the ranks. In 1946, the Army Information School was established.<sup>88</sup> By 1948, all services were sending personnel to the Army information school. Still, differences in training efforts and the beginning of the Korean War relegated the school to Army personnel only by 1950.<sup>89</sup>

Army public affairs struggled in the Korean War.<sup>90</sup> Poor organization and the lack of guidelines for press personnel led to numerous security violations.<sup>91</sup> Eventually, the Army reverted to the censorship that it had used during WWII, but the censorship organization was poor.<sup>92</sup> Poor security protocols eventually led to Newsweek publishing a map detailing the entire order of battle for the 8th Army. Poor relationships between the press and PAOs led to the censorship of unnecessary items and the skirting of security protocols.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> DINFOS, “A History of DOD PA.”

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> DINFOS, “The History of DOD PA.”

<sup>90</sup> Hammond, “Public Affairs,” 327.

<sup>91</sup> Hammond, “The Army and Public Affairs,” 68-69.

<sup>92</sup> DINFOS, “The History of DOD PA.”

<sup>93</sup> Billy Mossman, “Command and Press Relationships in the Korean Conflict,” (Study, Center of Military History, Washington, DC, undated [1967]), 21-22.

Press and military PAO friction continued throughout the Vietnam war and came to a head when many senior military officials blamed the media coverage for the loss of the war.<sup>94</sup> The press, in return, accused the military of attempting to mislead the American Public, citing the slowness of information flow and several clandestine operations as proof.<sup>95</sup> The media's accusations were supported by the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff's desire for PAOs to inject themselves into politics.<sup>96</sup> Political reporting led to a lack of trust in the media and challenged PAOs to choose between honest and accurate reporting and supporting presidential political activities and policies.<sup>97</sup>

#### Modern Era Public Affairs (1973-Present)

In 1973, Army Training and Doctrine Command assumed control of DINFOS.<sup>98</sup> Before DINFOS, Brigadier General Albert Sneed sought to have the best-informed Army. He developed a systematic war orientation program with six goals—to explain the rationale for conflict, learn enemy information tactics, gain a cultural understanding of the enemy, learn how to utilize the media, and give faith in our country and its future.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Rid, *War and Media Operations*, 1, 60-62.

<sup>95</sup> Hammond, "Public Affairs," 387.

<sup>96</sup> Hammond, "The Army and Public Affairs," 70.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

<sup>98</sup> DINFOS, "A History of DOD PA."

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*



Sneed's orientation program led to the development of Public Affairs, albeit with a different focus.

Today's public affairs trains to provide proactive release of accurate information in context facilitates perceptions about military operations, counters misinformation and disinformation, reinforces public support, and helps achieve national, strategic, operational, and tactical objectives.<sup>100</sup> Technological capability worldwide has increased the reporting opportunities and expectations while also increasing the timeliness and difficulty in controlling information. These technological advances have created unfiltered access to information and led to the dramatic rise of misinformation and disinformation.<sup>101</sup> DINFOS training on PA principles attempts to provide a framework for countering disinformation.

This review of the history of Army PA highlights the repetitive nature of adversarial media and military interactions. A pattern emerges showing the Army's view of the media. Historically Army commanders have seen the necessity of media in maintaining national will but have equally seen the potential negative press and dangers of unrestrained media.<sup>102</sup> The Army seeks to achieve a balance with the media that allows accurate and timely reporting without violating operational security. The media have seen previous military actions of withholding information and distrusting the military.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 13-14.

<sup>102</sup> Hammond, "The Army and Public Affairs," 72-73.

<sup>103</sup> Rid, *War and Media Operations*, 78.

Military-media relationships continue to impact the method the Army uses to plan operations.<sup>104</sup> The historical relationship between the media, the military, and the American people provides context for adequately framing the effectiveness of disinformation today. It also adds context to the difficulties in countering disinformation by releasing timely and factual information.

### Regulatory Requirements

For this study, the emphasis is on the current operational structure of public affairs and the creation of the public affairs functional area. Doctrine provides an organizational overview of the use of public affairs as a weapon on the informational battlefield. JP 3-61 presents an operational understanding of the military information domain and highlights information's role in the strategic battlespace. Specifically, this doctrine provides operational actions in context, facilitates the development of informed perceptions about military operations, helps undermine adversarial propaganda efforts, and contributes to achieving national, strategic, and operational objectives.<sup>105</sup>

The Chief of Public Affairs is required to ensure a free flow of information to the media, general public, and department of defense, limited only by DoDI 5200.01 security restraints.<sup>106</sup> JP 3-61 further highlights the requirement to communicate items of national

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<sup>104</sup> Damian Carr, "U.S. Army Public Affairs during Operation Uphold Democracy," (Master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1996), 120.

<sup>105</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61, 87.

<sup>106</sup> DoD, DoDD 5122.5, 4-5.

interest with both domestic and international audiences.<sup>107</sup> PA releases timely and accurate information to inform audiences and achieve national objectives.<sup>108</sup> There exists tension within the military to balance the Freedom of the Press requirements with the unit's operational security (OPSEC).<sup>109</sup>

PA is the principal advisor to the commander on all communication activities.<sup>110</sup> A PAO is empowered by the commander and regulation to lead all media interactions and serves as the chief spokesman.<sup>111</sup> Key to the successful execution as a PAO is the tenets of PA: "tell the truth, provide timely information, practice security at the source, provide consistent communication at all levels, and tell the Department of Defense story."<sup>112</sup> These tenets lay the ground rules of the PAO requirements, chief amongst those is to tell the truth. Integrity is an Army principle; telling the truth is a regulatory tenet of public affairs. Integrity is a quality you develop by adhering to moral principles. It requires that you do and say nothing that deceives others.<sup>113</sup> JP 3-61 defines telling the truth as releasing only accurate, fact-based information.<sup>114</sup> JP 3-61 further highlights the need to

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<sup>107</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61, 17.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>109</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 17-19.

<sup>110</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 8-12.

<sup>112</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 1-9.

<sup>113</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-22, *Army Leadership and the Profession* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2019), 42-46.

<sup>114</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61, 23.

avoid any form of deception or denial of negative information that could negatively impact the integrity of the military. “Once an individual or unit loses the public perception of integrity, it is nearly impossible to recover.”<sup>115</sup>

Emerging requirements in countering disinformation further the role of public affairs. According to FM 3-61, disinformation is “the deliberate use of incorrect or false information with the intention to deceive or mislead.”<sup>116</sup> Further discussion analyzes the accuracy and usefulness of this definition. Rid argues that all disinformation must include a methodological distribution or intentional dissemination of the disinformation.<sup>117</sup> AR 360-1 tasks PA to enable decision-making by developing a situational understanding of the media environment to inform the commander.<sup>118</sup> This task and the others establish the goal of gaining an information advantage. Public affairs are the lead military element charged with informing domestic and international audiences.<sup>119</sup>

### Selection Requirements

When assessing the readiness of PAs to meet emerging regulatory requirements, it is essential to understand the current accession requirements and capability of PAO candidates. By understanding the education and experience level required by the Volunteer Transfer Incentive Program (VTIP), PA can align training and education.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>116</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61, 17.

<sup>117</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 10-12.

<sup>118</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1 27-28.

<sup>119</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 12-14.

Understanding these requirements provides a baseline for PAO candidate knowledge. See Appendix 1 for Public Affairs VTIP requirements listed in VTIP MILPER 22-125.<sup>120</sup>

Summarized requirements are listed below.

1. Officers must be between their 4th and 14th year of commissioned service and have completed the captain's career course (CCC).
2. Officers may not already be committed to another program.
3. Officers must be able to complete the PASC-Q course within 18 months.
4. Officers must have a valid secret security clearance.
5. Applicants must submit a two to three-page writing sample in the form of an article or newsletter.
6. Officers should possess a high degree of physical fitness and be immediately worldwide deployable.<sup>121</sup>

There are no public affairs-specific selection requirements as part of the VTIP process. Selection criteria focus on officer development timelines, clearance, and physical fitness. The writing sample required by requirement five does not assess public affairs knowledge or skillset. This level of writing would be expected of any officer between their 4th and 14th year of commissioned service.

### Public Affairs Training

The literature review provides an overview of PAO training requirements. This chapter reviews the training received and the ability of that training to support the increased task of countering disinformation.

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<sup>120</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Military Personnel Message (MILPER) 22-125, Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program (U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Fort Knox, KY, April 14, 2022), Appendix 1, 4-5.

<sup>121</sup> HQDA, MILPER 22-125, Appendix 1, 4-5.

Army PAOs are required to complete the nine-week PASCQ course at DINFOS before being appointed as a PAO.<sup>122</sup> PASCQ is a credentialing requirement before being appointed or qualified to serve as a PAO. However, timelines sometimes necessitate individuals acting as a PAO before their course attendance. As the VTIP assessment does not measure a PAO candidate's knowledge or skill set, individuals serving as a PAO before PASC-Q attendance may have no PA knowledge. The PASC-Q course is designed to "Provide entry-level public affairs training for the Department of Defense, U.S. government agencies, and selected foreign military professionals."<sup>123</sup> The system serves to ensure PAOs can perform PA's essential functions. DINFOS offers optional intermediate and advanced PA courses for field grade officers, but the U.S. Army's public affairs functional area does not require additional training.<sup>124</sup>

#### Public Affairs Communication and Strategy Qualification Course

PAOs are required to attend the PASC-Q course within 18 months of selection into the career field. The course provides "entry-level public affairs and communication strategy training for the Department of Defense, U.S. government agencies, and selected foreign military professionals."<sup>125</sup> The course is 45 days, 360 hours.<sup>126</sup> Prerequisites of

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<sup>122</sup> HQDA, DA PAM 600-3, 3-4.

<sup>123</sup> Defense Information School (DINFOS), Public Affairs & Communication Strategy Qualification Course 030-22 Resident Course Syllabus, (PASC-Q 030-22 Syllabus (Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2022) 2.

<sup>124</sup> HQDA, DA PAM 600-3, 3-4.

<sup>125</sup> DINFOS, PASC-Q 030-22 Syllabus, 2.

<sup>126</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q POI, 3-11.

the course are listed in Table 1. PASC-Q course attendees include civilian, enlisted personnel, officers from five military branches, and international and interagency students.

Table 1. Prerequisites for Attending PASC-Q

Service:	Prerequisites:	Notes:
<b>USA</b>		
Officer	O-3 through O-4	Must have completed Officer Basic Course before submitting into ATRRS. Must meet height and weight standard IAW AR 600-9. Must pass a record fitness test prior to graduation.  APAC is Approving Authority for Army Waivers.
Enlisted	E-7 through E-8	Must have completed required PME level; validated by APAC; control branch 46.
NGB	E-8 through E-9	Non-control branch filing valid CMF 46 position; endorsed by NGB, validated by APAC
USAR	E-8 through E-9	Non-control branch 46 filling valid CMF position; endorsed by USAR, validated by APAC  APAC is Approving Authority for Army Waivers.
Civilian	GS-7 and above	Civilian employees assigned on CP22 in the grade of GS-7 and above  CP22 Career Manager for waivers.
<b>USAF</b>		
Officer	O-1 through O-5	Officer must have Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) 35X.
Enlisted	E-7 through E-9	Enlisted must have 3N0XX AFSC, with Secretary of the Air Force/Public Affairs (SAF/PA) concurrence.
Civilian	GS-7/equivalent and above	OPM Occupational series 1035, or with SAF/PA waiver
<b>USN</b>		
Officer	O-1 through O-4	
Enlisted	E-5 through E-9	Enlisted must be a Mass Communication Specialist.
Civilian	GS-7/equivalent and above	Includes interns. All must be in a public affairs field (GS-1035, 1082, 1083, and 1087 or 0301 with CHINFO approval).
<b>USMC</b>		
Officer	WO-1 through O-4	
Enlisted	E-6 select and above	Must have Military Occupational Specialty 45XX
Civilian	N/A	Civilian prerequisites are based on their billet description and authorization from HQMC CD.
<b>USCG</b>		
Officer	O-1 through O-5	Prerequisites are based on their billet description and authorization from CG092.
Enlisted	E5 through E9	Prerequisites are based on their billet description and authorization from CG092.
Civilian	GS-7/equivalent and above	Must be a U.S. Government employee working in Public Affairs (PA) career field (GS-1035).
<b>International</b>		
Students must have a solid understanding of English language usage, grammar and syntax. Students must score an 85 on the English Comprehension Level (ECL) test; have completed Specialized English Training (SET); obtain a score of 2'/2' on the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and have basic keyboard skills.		
<b>Interagency</b>		
Must be a U.S. Government employee working in the Public Affairs (PA) career field (GS-1035).		

Source: Defense Information School, "Public Affairs Communication Strategy

Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction,” (Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 7-9.

NOTE: Table 1 displays the attendance requirements for PASC-Q. Of note, the Army is the only service that does not allow O-1s or O-2s to attend.

The Army is the most restrictive with its attendance requirements. Army Officers must be an O-3 (Captain) or O-4 (Major). The Marine Corps is the least restrictive with Officers, allowing WO-1 (Warrant Officer) through O-4. The Navy allows Officers in the rank of O-1 (Second Lieutenant) through O-4 to attend. The Coast Guard and Air Force allow O-1 through O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel) to attend. Military branches also differ in their enlisted requirement for attendance; the Army remains the most restrictive. While separate studies are required to examine the most beneficial requirements, this does indicate the educational approach. This table displays that the Army values more senior Officers; the other branches see Public Affairs as a skill that can be taught during initial training, much like infantry, armor, supply, etc. This study found no literature explaining why O-1 and O-2 Officers are not authorized to attend PASC-Q.

The course is divided into three academic phases: Foundations, Scenarios, and Integration. The foundation’s course is 28 days. Foundations provides students with the academic knowledge and skills required to operate as a PAO. “Everything that the students experience in this academic phase is intended to prepare them for hands-on, immersive learning in the Scenario phase.”<sup>127</sup> The foundation’s course facilitates tactical task execution, including media capture and accessioning, writing for internal and

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<sup>127</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q 030-22 Syllabus, 4.



external audiences, and news media engagement.<sup>128</sup> It does not include specific training on counter disinformation tasks. This phase includes 184 of the 360 total course hours.<sup>129</sup>

Phase two is the Scenario phase. This phase allows students to display the education learned in phase one and put it into practice. Students are given a fictitious environment and are tasked to conduct steady-state and event-driven communications. This phase evaluates the students' ability to research, plan, build relationships, execute communication, and conduct assessments.<sup>130</sup> This phase includes 120 of the 360 total course hours.<sup>131</sup>

Phase three is the Integration phase. Integration is designed to process and understand the knowledge and training they have received over the course. This phase focuses on students understanding their role in their future work environment and being able to communicate their value to the command.<sup>132</sup> This phase includes 56 of the 360 total course hours.<sup>133</sup>

#### Additional Public Affairs Training Opportunities

Calls for additional public affairs training to counter disinformation have been consistent. In 1999 COL Garrison publicly advocated for making a weapon of public

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<sup>128</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q 030-22 Syllabus, 4.

<sup>129</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q POI, 10.

<sup>130</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q 030-22 Syllabus, 4.

<sup>131</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q POI, 10.

<sup>132</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q 030-22 Syllabus, 4.

<sup>133</sup> DINFOS, PACS-Q POI, 11.

affairs and the need for PAOs to receive training in countering propaganda, specifically regarding the media.<sup>134</sup> In a 2007 study of public affairs, 74 percent of PAOs and 59 percent of senior commanders identified the need for additional training in at least one area.<sup>135</sup> Much of the other activity received by PAOs has been on-the-job training or self-study. The outlier to this is the attendance at Georgetown University through the Army Civil Schooling program.<sup>136</sup>

Roughly one-half of the annual FA-46 (Public Affairs) officers have no undergraduate or graduate degree background in the communication arts.<sup>137</sup> To provide the academic experience for PA theories, principles, and processes, the Army allows roughly three to five PAOs to attend Georgetown University's Master's in Public Relations and Corporate Communication program.<sup>138</sup> The Georgetown program is designed to provide educational opportunities for high-performing officers. However, there remains little documentation to show a correlation between attendance at Georgetown University and an increased ability to counter disinformation. Previous

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<sup>134</sup> W. C. Garrison, "Information Operations and Counter-Propaganda: Making a Weapon of Public Affairs," (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 1999), 13-16.

<sup>135</sup> Spears, "Evaluating the Professional Status of the U.S. Army's Public Affairs Program," 48-50.

<sup>136</sup> HQDA, DA PAM 600-3, 3-4.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

Georgetown graduates have questioned the applicability of the course to their roles within the Army.<sup>139</sup>

### Misinformation vs. Disinformation

Misinformation, defined in chapter 1, is any information that is inaccurate and is shared unknowingly by an individual. This definition differs from FM 3-61, *Communication Strategy and Public Affairs Operations*. Army PA defines misinformation as “a subset of information that includes all incorrect information.”<sup>140</sup> This definition of misinformation does not include a critical distinction between disinformation and misinformation: intent.

The terms misinformation and disinformation are constantly used interchangeably within Army publications. The distinguishing factor between disinformation and misinformation is the intent behind the individuals using the incorrect information. If an individual intentionally and knowingly spreads erroneous data, it no longer becomes misinformation and transforms into disinformation. Subsequently, if a recipient of disinformation believes it to be accurate and spreads that incorrect information unknowingly, the data is no longer disinformation but rather misinformation.

For the purpose of this paper, disinformation is defined as the methodological distribution or intentional dissemination of false or inaccurate information to deceive, delay, degrade trust, or coerce a misinformed decision. This definition also differs from

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<sup>139</sup> Spears, “Evaluating the Professional Status of the U.S. Army’s Public Affairs Program,” 55-56.

<sup>140</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 158.

Army regulations that define disinformation as “the deliberate use of incorrect or false information with the intention to deceive or mislead.”<sup>141</sup> According to the definition offered by the Army, any lie would be a form of disinformation. Disinformation is not just lying and must include intentional methodological distribution or intentional dissemination.<sup>142</sup>

The DoD Defense Information School defines disinformation and misinformation differently from Army and joint publications. DINFOS defines misinformation as “the spread of false or inaccurate information, not intentionally harmful.”<sup>143</sup> DINFOS defines disinformation as “the intentional spread of misinformation; deliberately misleading biased information, intended to harm.”<sup>144</sup> Differences in the definitions of misinformation and disinformation are essential to understanding different perspectives.

Misinformation and disinformation are distinctly unique, yet they are consistently linked in Army regulations. Chapter 8 of FM 3-61 is titled “Countering Misinformation and Disinformation.” While Army regulations differentiate between the two terms, regulations do not provide different techniques or training for countering misinformation instead of disinformation. Information professionals debate the distinction between misinformation and disinformation. Information professionals like Dr. Cronkhite argue that because the intent is difficult to ascertain, the difference between misinformation and

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>142</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 10-14.

<sup>143</sup> Defense Information School (DINFOS), “Information Warfare,” (PowerPoint presentation, Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), slide 28.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

disinformation is hard to identify and does not offer the PA professional any additional information.<sup>145</sup> Others argue that identifying misinformation and disinformation provides insight into how to correctly counter or correct the incorrect information.<sup>146</sup>

### Role of Disinformation

Disinformation does not seek to convince an individual to believe a new fact but causes an individual to question the facts they think they know.<sup>147</sup> The goal is to obfuscate the truth and cause doubt about what can be considered and what cannot.<sup>148</sup> While the modern disinformation, 2016-2022, age has increased the spontaneity, speed, and access to disinformation, it remains a methodical output targeted at the cognitive domain.<sup>149</sup> It attempts to operationalize an element of truth to cause the public to question what they know and who they can trust.<sup>150</sup>

Disinformation practitioners attempt to erode the foundations of a free and open society and press. They try to capitalize on communities that value individual freedoms offered by liberal democracies.<sup>151</sup> These efforts deteriorate the legitimacy of the

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<sup>145</sup> Amanda Cronkhite, “Review of Disinformation,” (Lecture, Information Advantage Scholars Class, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, January 26, 2022).

<sup>146</sup> Stengel, *Information Wars*, 287-293.

<sup>147</sup> Rand Corporation, “About Truth Decay.”

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 10-14.

<sup>150</sup> Holiday, *Trust Me I’m Lying*, 120-125.

<sup>151</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 12.

organizations targeted. This deterioration is further amplified if a democratic country decides to engage in its disinformation. A country that regularly participates in disinformation weakens its democratic moral status and makes its populace more willing to believe the disinformation targeted at its government.<sup>152</sup>

“The way to beat the enemy is not to become like them, or to adopt their unseemly values. It is to double down on our own values, confident that they are superior.”<sup>153</sup> The increased communication advancements of technology necessitated a change in counter disinformation tactics while staying true to Army Ethics. The internet has made “operations more scalable, harder to control, and harder to assess once they have been launched.”<sup>154</sup>

### How and Why Disinformation Works

Disinformation works by playing off the cognitive biases involved with how human beings process information. Adversaries can directly affect the general public’s thinking by focusing on how individuals receive and why individuals believe the information. Disinformation relies on cognitive biases to be effective. Motivated reasoning, cognitive dissonance, illusory truth, the first mover effect, and the backfire effect are essential aspects of why individuals are deceived by disinformation. Each of these cognitive biases is important to understand when analyzing the ability of public affairs to counter adversarial disinformation.

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<sup>152</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 216.

<sup>153</sup> Davis, “Lessons from the Information Battlefield.”

<sup>154</sup> Rid, *Active Measures*, 14.

## Motivated Reasoning

Dr. Ziva Kunda asserted motivated reasoning in 1990, describing it as “people motivated to arrive at a particular conclusion attempt to be rational and to construct a justification of their desired conclusion that would persuade a dispassionate observer.”<sup>155</sup> Simple stated, motivated reasoning is why a person tends to believe the information they already agree with. Disinformation works because it embraces and utilizes the motivated reasoning cognitive bias. Individuals easily believe information that supports their ideas and beliefs.

The 2016 election utilized motivated reasoning to spread the message of disinformation and sow doubt in the electoral process of the United States government. Information Science Institute from the University of Southern California displayed that political ideology was the single most significant indicator of whether an individual spreads misinformation or not.<sup>156</sup> In analyzing the largest 215 social media Twitter accounts, the Information Science Institute found that 108 reports were highly liberal, and 107 were highly conservative.<sup>157</sup> Both groups targeted users who were inclined to retweet or share information that their followers would readily believe. The 2016 election

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<sup>155</sup> Ziva Kunda, *The Case for Motivated Reasoning* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1990), 482.

<sup>156</sup> Adam Badawy, Emilio Ferrara and Kristina Lerman, “Analyzing the Digital Traces of Political Manipulation: The 2016 Russian Interference Twitter Campaign,” in *IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)*, ed. IEEE Press (Piscataway, NJ: Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, 2018), 258-265.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

highlights how individuals will accept information they already want to think about, whether “Pizza Gate” or GOP officials exempting themselves from health insurance laws.

### Backfire Effect and Cognitive Dissonance

A core principle of Army Public Affairs is, to tell the truth, or more specifically, “Be truthful at all times.”<sup>158</sup> The backfire effect provides cognitive evidence on how the truth can reinforce incorrectly held opinions. Corrective information can make false beliefs more prevalent. Dr. Robert Cialdini best describes the backfire effect in *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*. Dr. Cialdini describes a North American cult that journalists infiltrated.<sup>159</sup> The cult believed that the end of the world was nigh; the journalists wanted to know what would happen to the individual’s beliefs when/if the doomsday prediction did not come true.<sup>160</sup> Would the member’s realities be shattered if the forecast was incorrect? Would their world come crashing down after realizing that their life commitment was mistaken? Would their cult be dissolved?

Journalists were surprised to note that the lack of the end of the earth strengthened the belief of the cult members rather than destroying it. The cult’s “truth” was countered by reality but strengthened their beliefs.<sup>161</sup> The backfire effect explains why literature remains unsettled as to exactly when and how misperceptions can be corrected. America’s adversaries understand that once an individual believes something, it is tough

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<sup>158</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1, 3.

<sup>159</sup> Cialdini, *Influence*, 143-169.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.



to change that belief.<sup>162</sup> Much like law, the burden is on the prosecution, or in the PA's case, the corrector of disinformation, to prove the facts beyond doubt. The backfire effect shows that even "beyond a shadow of a doubt" may not be enough.

The bias of cognitive dissonance strengthens the backfire effect. Cognitive dissonance refers to the mental discomfort of an individual to believe two contradictory things.<sup>163</sup> As such, an individual will evaluate circumstances to reach congruity. According to Cialdini, in the cult example above, a cult member likely had two beliefs that were incongruent in their minds:

1. I am an intelligent person.
2. Only dumb people fall for doomsday cults that turn out to be wrong.

When faced with these contradictory beliefs, individuals sought other information to reinforce their strongest held beliefs.<sup>164</sup> In this instance, the stronger faith was that they were intelligent people. Rather than believing their cult prediction was incorrect, cult leaders informed the group that doomsday was avoided because their "little group had spread so much light that God had saved the world from destruction."<sup>165</sup> The group could believe no other truth because no different reality would be congruent with their different beliefs. Disinformation utilizes this principle by providing evidence to support previously held beliefs. If an individual believes America is an evil country that hates immigrants,

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<sup>162</sup> Stengel, *Information Wars*, 75-81.

<sup>163</sup> Leon Festinger, "Cognitive Dissonance," *Scientific American* 207, no. 4 (1962): 93.

<sup>164</sup> Cialdini, *Influence*, 143-169.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

they will latch on to disinformation that supports this belief. If an individual believes immigrants make America a worse government, they will readily believe the disinformation that supports this belief.

### Belief Persistence and Illusory Truth

Viral misinformation is often countered by correcting the facts shortly after, yet the original misinformation often spreads faster.<sup>166</sup> A saying attributed to Mark Twain says, “A lie makes its way across lots, while the truth has to go around by the dirt road.”<sup>167</sup> A lie may travel faster because of its sensational nature or but it is often believed more strongly in the face of a truthful counter due to belief percentage and illusory truth. Dr. Gilbert Harman explained belief persistence in 1986 by stating that humans, “in response to new evidence, continue to believe as many of the old beliefs as possible.”<sup>168</sup> Belief persistence serves as a defense mechanism for humans and a way to vet incoming information, but it has flaws.

Stanford experiments since 1954 have consistently shown that individuals will hold on to aspects of incorrect information even after the news was revealed to them it

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<sup>166</sup> Holiday, *Trust Me I'm Lying*, 208-211.

<sup>167</sup> “A Lie Can Travel Halfway around the World While the Truth Is Putting on Its Shoes,” Quote Investigator, July 13, 2014, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2014/07/13/truth/>. Note: No verifiable linkage to Mark Twain has been found.

<sup>168</sup> Gilbert Harman, *Change in View: Principles of Reasoning* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986), 23.

was false.<sup>169</sup> Even after the data is corrected, and when an individual honestly believes the updated information, there remains a tendency for misinformation to influence an individual's beliefs. These experiments also highlighted a preference for the first information received. The tendency to have more excellent recall of the first information an individual hears is an aspect of the primacy effect.<sup>170</sup> Combined with the primacy effect, a constant repetition of incorrect information creates an illusory effect.

### Summary

This literature review provided the creation and history of PA, providing context for the operational role that PA fulfills. Understanding of the historical context and use of PA provided insights to the current use of PA. An examination of the rules and regulations that govern PA provided a framework that PA operates in. The chapter also provided a deeper understanding of the cognitive reasons people believe both truthful and inaccurate information. It further expanded on the role that cognitive biases play in the successful proliferation of disinformation.

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<sup>169</sup> Craig Anderson, Mark Lepper, and Lee Ross, "Perseverance of Social Theories: The Role of Explanation in the Persistence of Discredited Information," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39, no. 6 (1980): 1037-1049.

<sup>170</sup> Anderson, Lepper, and Ross, "Perseverance of Social Theories," 1037-1049.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology used to answer the study's primary and secondary research questions. The findings from this study may identify the readiness of U.S. military PA practitioners to contribute to strategic operations by countering disinformation in the media environment, including traditional media outlets and social media platforms, and other emerging sources of news and information. This chapter covers selecting a qualitative approach to research and the data collection and analysis. Importantly, this chapter covers the ethical considerations applicable along the way.

#### Method

The methodology used is a document analysis qualitative research study. The qualitative method is appropriate for this study in public affairs as a social science. This thesis evaluates "the readiness of Army Public Affairs to adequately fulfill its role in correcting misinformation and countering disinformation to achieve information advantage?" While examining this question and accounting for the regulatory requirements and training for PA practitioners, a secondary research study and document review was the most applicable research method. This method used Army and PA regulations, emerging ADPs, communication studies from experts within the cognitive and media domain, and public affairs and media academic literature. This study also involved a thorough examination of the Public Affairs Communication Strategy

Qualification Course (PASC-Q) Training Program of Instruction and over one thousand related training documents that support the program of instruction.

### Data Collection

Data, by its nature, is the raw material needed to provide insight. Data must be gathered, organized, and analyzed to ascertain a conclusion. While the analysis and organization of data are essential, the building block for the thesis is the data. Data collection focused on understanding the requirements of Army Public Affairs Officers and the training assigned to support those requirements. This comparison examined if the training environment is appropriately aligned to train PA professionals' tasks.

This study evaluated the readiness of PAOs in response to the emergence of new regulatory requirements, explicitly correcting misinformation, and countering disinformation. Will the emerging tasks require a change in the instruction of PAOs, or are these emerging tasks already covered in PAO training? The examination must ascertain what material needs to be added to the education to maintain readiness. Further discussions may focus on if it is possible to counter disinformation if it is helpful to bring attention to disinformation by opposing it, and if the military is the proper organization to dispute this information. This paper assumes that an organization can successfully counter disinformation and that the military is the appropriate organization for countering disinformation.

The primary documents for assessing public affairs requirements are FM 3-61 *Communication Strategy and Public Affairs Operations*, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, and JP 3-13, *Information Operations*. These documents expand on the role of public affairs by

highlighting the importance of public communication.<sup>171</sup> JP 3-0 highlights the use of information to shape the perceptions and decisions of individuals in power. JP 3-0 further states that while data is often underutilized or underestimated, it holds the power to shape the cognitive domain.<sup>172</sup> The Army provides operational guidance to public affairs professionals in AR 360-1. “The Army defines the PA Program as the guide to conducting public communication strategy for information, command information, leader engagements, and community outreach activities directed toward both the external and internal publics with interest in the Department of Defense.”<sup>173</sup> All of these documents highlight the need for public affairs training. The primary documents for examining the readiness of PAOs to meet these requirements are the PASC-Q Training Program of Instruction and its Terminal Learning Objectives (TLO).

### Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis focuses on the time allotted to countering disinformation and correcting misinformation within the PASC-Q course. An examination of the terminal learning objectives and training program of instruction is used to analyze the desired end states related to mis/disinformation. This thesis examines dedicated instructional hours associated with the other terminal learning objectives and PA tasks.

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<sup>171</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-13, *Information Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014).

<sup>172</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2017).

<sup>173</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1.

Findings are displayed using applicable tables and direct quotes from regulations and training materials.

Theme analysis analyzes the frequency of misinformation and disinformation instruction and whether the education focuses on understanding the problem or techniques and tactics to counter and correct misinformation. This paper compares the training of countering disinformation to AR 360-1 regulatory requirement and the public affairs role within ADP 3-13.

### Ethical Considerations

This thesis does not include human research; however, ethical considerations are included in the study to safeguard any potential information as necessary. The paper examines how public affairs training, aligned with Army moral values, prepares PAOs to operate in the cognitive domain while maintaining public trust.

### Summary

The Public Affairs' role in defining the informational environment provides the opportunity to increase government transparency, combat disinformation, and strengthen public trust within the Army institution.<sup>174</sup> By examining the educational training PAOs receive concerning countering disinformation and correcting misinformation, this thesis better prepares public affairs professionals to use information-related capabilities in future communication. The findings also provide PA leadership with a current situational understanding of the ability of PAOs to meet emerging requirements. A document

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<sup>174</sup> CJCS, JP 3-61.

analysis method is the most logical method for examining the problem set and determining a way ahead that impacts the future of public affairs.



## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

This study used four methods to evaluate the readiness of Army Public Affairs to counter or mitigate disinformation. These methods analyze the goals, resources, training focus, time, and themes of PA to train its forces to complete the regulatory requirements of the profession. The methods are the following:

1. Compare the stated PASC-Q goals with PA AR 360-1 stated goals
2. Analyze the Enabling Learning Objectives (ELOs) compared to the ability to counter disinformation
3. Analyze the education and training of incoming PAOs
4. Analyze testing and verification of PAOs to conduct counter disinformation tasks

## Method 1: Compare Goals

<u>Public Affairs and Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Objectives</u>	<u>Public Affairs Core Tasks</u>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters.</li><li>2. Leverage relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners and stakeholders [influencers] to accomplish a mission.</li><li>3. Employ a communication team in accordance with DoD and service policies and tactics, techniques and procedures to achieve the commander's desired end state.</li><li>4. Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios to accomplish missions.</li><li>5. Execute communication tactics in alignment with the commander's desired state and higher-level guidance.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Provide advice and counsel to commanders and appropriate staffs on PA matters.</li><li>2. Conduct PA planning and develop and assess unit communications strategy, plans, campaigns, and engagements in coordination with the commander, staff, and next higher echelon PA staff, as appropriate.</li><li>3. Facilitate all media interactions between news representatives and their organizations.</li><li>4. Conduct PA training for commanders and members of their organizations.</li><li>5. Conduct public communication.</li><li>6. Assess effectiveness of commander's PA communication strategy.</li><li>7. Mitigate misinformation and disinformation.</li><li>8. Visual Information Planning.</li></ol>

Figure 1. Public Affairs Core Task

*Source:* Created by author using information from Defense Information School (DINFOS), "Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction," (DINFOS, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 7-9; Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Regulation 360-1, *The Army Public Affairs Program* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2020), 5.

The first test evaluated the stated goals of both PASC-Q and Army Regulation 360-1 to ensure they are aligned. Figure 1 above lists both the stated goals for PASC-Q and Army PA. PASC-Q lists five goals focused on educational learning objectives required to certify a PAO to operate in the military. Army core tasks indicate the baseline tasks any PAO should be capable of executing. Because PAOs graduate PASC-Q and often go straight into their first PAO assignment, these goals should be aligned and mutually supported. While PASC-Q has five goals, and the Army lists eight core tasks,

further study was required to examine the alignment. Army core tasks and PASC-Q goals were used in Table.

DINFOS is a DoD school that is provided training input from the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. PASC-Q is the only required training a PAO must complete throughout their career, and no additional testing or certification of a PAO is done after completion. The Army relies on PASC-Q to ensure all graduates can execute the eight PA core tasks without additional oversight. This study evaluated the five course objectives of PASC-Q with the eight PA core tasks. A cross chart considered the PASC-Q course objectives with the PA core tasks.

Training applicability was determined by examining the Enabling Learning Objectives (ELO) for each of the five Training Learning Objectives (TLO). Applicability is analyzed for all core PA tasks to analyze training alignment. An assessment was conducted on the ELOs to determine their relevance to the Army's core tasks. Each ELO was evaluated for applicability to the Army core tasks and was given an "X" to annotate a positive correlation. If no correlation was found, no "X" was given. The number of "X" marks given was added up for each Training Learning Objectives (TLO). The number of "X" s was then divided by the total number of ELOs for each TLO. The training applicability is annotated with an H for high, M for moderate, or L for low.

High = 76% - 100%. Medium = 50% - 75%. Low = 00% - 49%

Table 2. PASC-Q TLO and AR 360-1 Core Tasks Crosswalk

[illegible]

*Source:* Created by author using information from Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Regulation 360-1, *The Army Public Affairs Program* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2020); Defense Information School (DINFOS), “Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction,” (DINFOS, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 7-9.

Table 2 provides an in-depth examination of the TLOs and accompanying ELOs compared to the Army core PA tasks listed in Figure 1. This crosswalk examination of Public Affairs core tasks and PASC-Q TLOs with accompanying ELOs is used to assess the alignment of the training with desired organizational goals. Each ELO was given an ‘X’ to mark its relation to the corresponding core task. The relation was determined through a qualitative analysis of the DINFOS training material. Each TLO was given a rating of H, M, or L based on the percentage of supporting ELOs that received an ‘X.’

Alignment of TLOs and PA core tasks indicates that of the eight-core PA tasks, three are aligned at a high level, three are at a moderate level, and two are at a low level. The author acknowledges that many additional ELOs could impact PA core tasks not annotated in figure 3. However, the selection criteria of what constituted an alignment with an ELO were specific to the focus of the training and the detailed definitions of PA core tasks within regulations. Over 1000 PASC-Q documents were reviewed to assess the intent and impact of the ELOs training.

The course is designed to provide entry-level public affairs training. “Instruction focuses on the foundational elements of the communication planning process, principles, and techniques associated with implementing effective communication strategies.”<sup>175</sup> This aligns with the emphasis DINFOS training and staff place on planning. Army core tasks 2 (Conduct PA Planning), 5 (Conduct Public Communication), and 8 (Visual Information Planning) were all rated as high. This alignment correctly supports the main

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<sup>175</sup> DINFOS, PASC-Q POI, 3.

functions newly graduated PAOs are expected to excel in upon graduation from the PASC-Q course.

Public Affairs core tasks 1 (Provide Advice and Counsel to Commanders and Appropriate Staff on PA matters), 3 (Facilitate All Media Interactions Between News Representatives and Their Organizations), and 6 (Assess Effectiveness of Commander's PA Communication Strategy) were all scored at as having moderate alignment with DINFOS PASC-Q TLOs. AR 360-1 Assessment indicates that the PA core tasks and DINFOS TLOs prioritize advising the commander. Public Affairs lists this as their top priority for PAOs, ensuring that PAOs are prepared to "serve as the principal communication advisor to the commander, advising commanders on all communication."<sup>176</sup> PASC-Q also lists advise commanders as their top education priority. Given the focus of both PA regulations and PASC-Q TLOs, it would be understandable to assume that a high level of alignment would follow; this is not the case. Medium-level alignment is acceptable as PASC-Q graduates are not immediately expected to advise commanders above the Brigade Combat Team level.

Alignment of training for tasks 3 (facilitate all media interactions between news representatives and their organizations) and 6 (assess effectiveness of commander's PA communication strategy) are listed as moderate. This rating is not an indication of training provided, nor does it indicate misalignment. Media interactions and assessments are both tasks that are focused on heavily within PASC-Q training. Both tasks are adequately trained. The moderate rating occurs due to the additional training required and

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<sup>176</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1, 7.

the compartmentalized training needed for these specific tracks. Task 6 (assess effectiveness of commander's PA communication strategy) requires less training as a selection of PAOs through the Volunteer Transfer Incentive Program is designed to select Officers already capable of entry-level assessments.

Misalignment occurs when examining task 4 (Conduct PA Training for Commanders and Members of Their Organizations) and task 7 (Mitigate Misinformation and Disinformation). Conducting PA training for commanders and members of their organizations is not a focus of PASC-Q training. Assessed aligned areas are divergent and not the focus of initial training. The Army relies more heavily on online PA training for non-PA Soldiers through Joint Knowledge Online and DoD Public Cyber websites. The Army mandates only OPSEC training for social media training.<sup>177</sup> While misalignment exists between the stated goals and the training provided, the training provided is adequate for an entry-level course.

Officers who attend PASC-Q are trained on PA and communication tasks and are not focused on providing training. PAOs are assessed in the schoolhouse on training soldiers via mock interviews and media training briefings. As discussed, the selection of PAO candidates is designed to choose Officers already capable of providing training. This misalignment is negligible.

Misalignment of PA core task 7 (Mitigate Misinformation and Disinformation) is evident in the ELOs and the training provided within the PASC-Q course. Method 2 further examines each of the ELOs and their alignment to the ability of PAOs to mitigate

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<sup>177</sup> Kristyn M. Felix, "Division Level Social Media," (Master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2015), 61.

misinformation and disinformation. Disinformation is only directly linked to one of the thirty-one ELOs; the rest are minimal linked. Minimal linkage refers to the ability of an evaluated ELO to increase counter misinformation ability without it being the main focus of the training. An example of this would be ELO 3.2, “Identify capabilities and resources.” Identifying capabilities and resources is essential for aligning assets to counter disinformation but is not directly linked. Training evaluated for ELOs only mentions disinformation or misinformation during ELO 1.2.



Table 3. Training Task Inventory

Terminal Learning Objective	Competency (K/P)	Training Importance (High – Medium – Low)				
		USA	USAF	USN	USMC	USCG
- Enabling Learning Objectives						
<b>1. Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters</b>	<b>P</b>	H	H	H	H	H
- 1.1 Reference applicable guidance, policies, and historical precedent to inform command-level decisions		H	H	H	H	H
- 1.2 Advise commander on aspects of the information environment relevant to their operations (e.g., disinformation, misinformation, propaganda)		H	H	H	H	H
- 1.3 Coordinate communication activities in participation with information-related capabilities and operational planners, other partners		H	H	H	H	H
- 1.4 Counsel the commander on the impact of proposed COAs and command policy		H	H	H	H	H
<b>2. Leverage relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners, and stakeholders [influencers] to accomplish a mission</b>	<b>P</b>	H	H	H	H	H
- 2.1 Identify strategies for building relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners, and stakeholders [influencers] to facilitate effective communication		H	H	H	H	H
- 2.2 Provide truthful, accurate, and timely public communication that aligns with commander's objectives and higher-level guidance		H	H	H	H	H
- 2.3 Safeguard sensitive and privileged information		H	H	H	H	H
- 2.4 Describe cultural characteristics that affect cognition and emotion		H	H	M	H	M
<b>3. Employ a communication team in accordance with DoD and service policies and tactics, techniques and procedures to achieve commander's desired state</b>	<b>P</b>	H	H	H	H	H
- 3.1 Determine the requirements of the mission		H	H	H	H	H
- 3.2 Identify capabilities and resources		H	H	H	H	H
- 3.3 Identify gaps in capabilities and resources		H	H	H	H	H
- 3.4 Make recommendations for gap remediation		H	H	H	H	H
- 3.5 Prioritize activities based on available capabilities and resources		H	H	H	H	H
- 3.6 Communicate link between team operations, commander's desired state, and higher-level guidance		H	H	H	H	H
- 3.7 Assess team performance based on mission requirements		H	H	H	H	H
<b>4. Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios in order to accomplish missions</b>	<b>P</b>	H	H	H	H	H
- 4.1 Identify informational and operational factors that impact command through environmental scanning		H	H	H	H	H
- 4.2 Forecast communication challenges/opportunities that may impact the command and key publics		H	H	H	H	H
- 4.3 Match current and emerging communication practices to publics		H	H	H	H	H
- 4.4 Write a communication plan that aligns with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance		H	H	H	H	H
- 4.5 Write documents to support the JPP (e.g. PA Estimate, PA Annex, PPAG)		H	H	H	H	H
- 4.6 Write MOEs and MOPs based on commander's desired state and higher-level guidance for a command-level challenge/opportunity		H	H	H	H	H
- 4.7 Adjust the communication plan based on relevant data (e.g., assessment against MOPs/MOEs and environmental scanning)		M	H	H	H	H
- 4.8 Communicate ethically in accordance with PA/VI guidance, federal law, and DoD and service policies		H	H	H	H	H
<b>5. Provide communication tactics in alignment with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance</b>	<b>P</b>	H	H	H	H	H
- 5.1 Develop communication products in accordance with DoD and service policies, VI Styleguide, and/or AP Stylebook where appropriate		H	H	H	H	H
- 5.2 Proofread communication products for proper spelling, grammar, and syntax		H	H	H	H	H
- 5.3 Accession, market, and distribute communication products		H	H	H	H	H
- 5.4 Write executive communications		H	M	H	H	H
- 5.5 Engage in a digital environment		H	H	H	H	H
- 5.6 Facilitate media engagements		H	H	H	H	H
- 5.7 Conduct media engagements		H	H	H	H	H
- 5.8 Facilitate key influencer engagements		H	H	H	H	H

Source: Created by author using information Defense Information School (DINFOS), “Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction,” (DINFOS, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 7-9.

NOTE: Table 3 displays an assessment of the importance of each TLO and ELO according to the military service. No rationale or assessment tool was provided in the evaluation. Yellow highlights were added to annotate any ELO or TLO not provided an “H” rating.

PASC-Q Program of Instruction (POI) assigns training importance to each TLO and ELO according to each military service. Table 3 displays the final assessment of each military service provided to DINFOS. The High – Medium – Low ratings are assigned by the services. Neither DINFOS nor the service components offer a method for their ratings nor explain what they mean. These ratings are designed to drive training focus. A higher importance rating should correlate to a higher level of training provided. As seen in Table 3, all except four of the tasks are rated high importance, preventing DINFOS from focusing on training in specific areas.

Only four are listed as medium importance among the five TLOs, thirty-one ELOs, and training preference for each military service. The remaining 176 training importance identifications are listed as high. Of note, two of the four medium assessed training importance identification are listed on ELO 2.4 “describe cultural characteristics that affect cognition and emotion.” Of the thirty-one ELOs, ELO 2.4 ranks the lowest in assigned importance.

DINFOS listing of training importance of the TLOs and ELOs is not aligned correctly to provide training priority. American author and leadership consultant Patrick Lencioni explains the logical fallacy of the figure below succinctly by stating, “If everything is important, then nothing is.”<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Patrick Lencioni *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2012).

Method 2: Analyze the Enabling Learning Objectives (ELOs)  
Compared to the Ability to Counter Disinformation

Method 1 examined the whole of PASC-Q compared with the stated PA core tasks. Method 2 focuses on the emerging core task of mitigating misinformation and disinformation. Table x displays the analysis of the ability to incorporate PA core tasks into the ELOs. This table utilizes the same format as the importance chart that PASC-Q created for their ELOs. High, Medium, and Low are calculated by their importance in countering misinformation or disinformation according to current counter disinformation guidance in Annex B of FM 3-61.

Overall, TLO importance is be calculated by analyzing the ELOs. Each ELO is assigned a point value, High- 3 points, Medium- 2 points, and Low- 1 point. Points are added up and divided by the total points possible. Scores from 75-100% will receive an overall high importance rating. Scores from 60-74% receive a medium importance rating. Scores 59% and below receives a low importance rating.

Table 4. Mitigate Disinformation Rating

	Mitigate misinformation and disinformation.	Score
1. Provide communication strategy counsel to command and higher headquarters.	High	75%
1.1. Reference applicable guidance, policies, and historical precedent to inform command-level decisions	Medium	2
1.2. Advise commander on aspects of the information environment relevant to their operations (e.g. misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda)	High	3
1.3. Coordinate communication activities in participation with information-related capabilities and operational planners, other partners	High	3
1.4. Counsel the commander on the impact of proposed COAs and command policy	Low	1
2. Leverage relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners and stakeholders [influencers] to accomplish a mission.	High	75%
2.1. Identify strategies for building relationships with the command, the community, the media, partners, and stakeholders [influencers] to facilitate effective communication	Medium	2
2.2. Provide truthful, accurate, and timely public communication that aligns with commander's objectives and higher-level guidance	High	3
2.3. Safeguard sensitive and privileged information	Low	1
2.4. Describe cultural characteristics that affect cognition and emotion	High	3
3. Employ a communication team in accordance with DoD and service policies and tactics, techniques and procedures to achieve the commander's desired end state.	Medium	66%
3.1. Determine the requirements of the mission	Medium	2
3.2. Identify capabilities and resources	Medium	2
3.3. Identify gaps in capabilities and resources	Low	1
3.4. Make recommendations for gap remediation	Low	1
3.5. Prioritize activities based on available capabilities and resources	Medium	2
3.6. Communicate link between team operations, commander's desired state, and higher-level guidance	High	3
3.7. Assess team performance based on mission requirements	High	3
4. Communicate in steady-state and event-driven scenarios to accomplish missions.	Medium	71%
4.1. Identify informational and operational factors that impact command through environmental scanning	High	3
4.2. Forecast Communication challenges/opportunities that may impact the command and key publics	Medium	2
4.3. Match current and emerging communication practices to public	Medium	2
4.4. Write a communication plan that aligns with commander's desired state and higher-level guidance	Medium	2
4.5. Write documents to support the JPP (e.g. PA Estimate, PA Annex, PPAG)	Low	1
4.6. Write MOEs and MOPs based on commander's desired state and higher-level guidance for a command-level challenge/opportunity	Medium	2
4.7. Adjust the communication plan based on relevant data (e.g. assessment against MOPs/MOEs and environmental scanning)	High	3
4.8. Communicate ethically in accordance with PA/VI guidance, federal law, and DoD and service policies	Medium	2
5. Execute communication tactics in alignment with the commander's desired state and higher-level guidance.	Medium	66%
5.1. Develop communication products in accordance with DoD and service policies, VI Styleguide, and/or AP Stylebook where appropriate	Low	1
5.2. Proofread communication products for proper spelling, grammar, and syntax	Low	1
5.3. Accession, market, and distribute communication products	High	3
5.4. Write executive communications	Low	1
5.5. Engage in a digital environments	High	3
5.6. Facilitate media engagements	Medium	2
5.7. Conduct media engagements	High	3
5.8. Facilitate key influencer engagements	Medium	2

*Source:* Created by author using information from Defense Information School (DINFOS), “Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction,” (DINFOS, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 7-9. Army counter disinformation strategies gathered from Headquarters, Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-61, *Communications Strategy and Public Affairs Operations* (Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate, 2021), 99-107.

NOTE: Table 4 displays an assessment of the relevance of each TLO and ELO to countering disinformation based on Army counter disinformation strategies in FM 3-61.

Table 4 displays the thirty-one ELOs and five TLOs and analyzes their ability to contribute toward the counter disinformation task. Counter disinformation applicability was determined by a learning objectives alignment to Army counter disinformation strategies gathered from FM 3-61.<sup>179</sup> Due to the high importance rating the services give on ELOs and TLOs, this table provides a more accurate assessment of the training importance ratings needed to align core tasks and goals. This table indicates multiple areas where training can be adjusted to support educational goals.

TLO 1 Provide Communication Strategy Counsel to  
Command and Higher Headquarters

Current training alignment: Current training alignment is moderate. Training materials indicate an alignment on ELO 1.2 and 1.3. No training alignment currently exists in ELO 1.1 and 1.4.

Potential training concerning disinformation: The impact of misinformation and disinformation has impacted the U.S. fight against terrorism, America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Commanders must understand the effects of disinformation on the current environment (ELO 1.2) and the historical precedent and use of disinformation in the operational environment. Commands and PAOs should consider counter disinformation plans in their COAs (ELO 1.4), but it does not rise above a low importance rating. Focus on ELO 1.2 is currently adequately aligned, but ELO 1.3 is not sufficiently aligned with Army regulations. FM 3-61 emphasizes the relationships

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<sup>179</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 99-107.

between PAOs and IRCs to combat and mitigate disinformation properly. PASC-Q training does not assess or train IRC coordinating to combat disinformation

TLO 2 Leverage Relationships with the Command, the Community, the Media,  
Partners, and Stakeholders [Influencers] to Accomplish a Mission

Current training alignment: Current training alignment is moderate. Training materials indicate an alignment in ELO 2.2 and ELO 2.4. Potential training in relation to disinformation: Former Press secretary Richard Stengel noted that combatting disinformation by the U.S. government is complicated. Governments are often politically motivated, and independent voices are more equipped to counter disinformation. ELO 2.1 is essential to developing relationships with influencers necessary to combat future information. ELO 2.2 describes the release of timely and accurate information, the current strategy by the U.S. PA to counter disinformation. This ELO is correctly aligned with the current U.S. strategy, but the emerging *pre-bunking* tactic provides nuanced differences from this tactic. Pre-bunking is the proactive declassification and release of information to dispute a disinformation campaign before it has been launched. Some data may be “more restricted in peacetime by policies, doctrine, or operational plans that will require high-level permissions for their execution.”<sup>180</sup>

Regarding importance, ELO 2.4 was rated the lowest overall objective by DINFOS. This low importance rating does not align with military doctrine or industry understanding of disinformation mitigation. As discussed in the literature review, the

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<sup>180</sup> Secretary of Defense, *Department of Defense Strategy for Operations in the Information Environment* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2016), 6.

battle against disinformation is a battle against cognitive biases. By rating ELO 2.4 as low, PAOs do not possess the required training to understand the problem appropriately.

### TLO 3 Employ a Communication Team in Accordance with DoD and Service Policies

Current training alignment: Current training alignment is low. Training materials indicate an alignment in only ELO 3.1. Potential training in relation to disinformation: Two of the seven ELOs in TLO 3 are assessed to have low importance. Three additional ELOs are evaluated to be of medium stature. Potential training alignment and relation focus on ELO 3.6 and ELO 3.7. ELO 3.6 and ELO 3.7 focus on the ability to properly align and assess the PA team operations about higher-level guidance. In combatting disinformation, understanding the information environment quickly and accurately is vital. The digital information space moves faster than traditional news distribution methods, and PAOs must be prepared to operate expediently. AR 360-1 reinforces the need for increased counter disinformation assessments,<sup>181</sup> and FM 3-61 highlights timeliness and deterrence as the most critical resource to mitigate disinformation.<sup>182</sup>

### TLO 4 Communicate in Steady-state and Event-driven Scenarios

Current training alignment: Current training alignment is low. Training materials indicate an alignment in only ELO 4.1, ELO 4.3, and ELO 4.7. Potential training related to disinformation: ELO alignment with FM 3-61 occurs at a moderate level with ELO 4.2, ELO 4.3, ELO 4.4, ELO 4.6, and ELO 4.8. High-level alignment is called for with

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<sup>181</sup> HQDA, AR 360-1, 2.

<sup>182</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 158.

ELO 4.1 and ELO 4.7. Current PASC-Q training sufficiently incorporates training on ELO 4.1 and offers tangential relationships on many of the additional ELOs. PASC-Q training does not correctly align with training requirements with ELO 4.7; adjust the communication plan based on relevant data (e.g., assessment against MOPs/MOEs and environmental scanning).

As addressed in TLO 2, a failure to train and understand the cognitive impacts and bias involved in disinformation limits the ability of PASC-Q instructors to train PAOs to adjust the communication plan based on relevant data. The digital world and the speed of information require PAOs to quickly and confidently change counter disinformation tactics to achieve strategic success. “PA personnel must maintain a consistent and an effective presence on social media to counter disinformation.”<sup>183</sup> Training and evaluating the ability of PAOs to assess and adjust counter disinformation plans is essential.

#### TLO 5 Execute Communication Tactics in Alignment with the Commander’s Desired State and Higher-level Guidance

Current training alignment: Current training alignment is low. Training materials indicate an alignment in only ELO 5.5 and ELO 5.7. Potential training about disinformation: TLO 5 focuses on the tactical application of PAO. Current activity is not focused on counter disinformation. Newly published FM 3-61 counter disinformation tactics for public affairs is to “use timeliness and deterrence to counter adversary

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<sup>183</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, A-6.



misinformation and disinformation efforts.”<sup>184</sup> Additional methods of counter disinformation include synchronization with IRCs, pre-bunking, and media/influencer communication. These tactics are not part of the PASC-Q Curriculum.

### Method 3: Analyze the Education and Training of Incoming PAOs

The Army is the only service component that restricts Officers from becoming a PAO until they are Lieutenant-promotable. The Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy allow officers to commission as PAO (Strategic Communications in the Marine Corps and Navy).<sup>185</sup> Army enlisted personnel may enlist directly as mass communications specialists. Army Officers are not eligible to apply to be a PAO until they are Lieutenant-promotable, roughly four years in the Army. Many PAOs serve ten years in their basic branch before transferring to PA, placing them ten years behind their Sister Service peers in PAO experience.<sup>186</sup> The Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps model of PAO development focuses on on-the-job experience, producing specialized experts. The Army model develops Officers in operational experience outside of PA to add credibility and breadth of knowledge.<sup>187</sup>

To serve as a PAO in the U.S. Army, Officers must apply through the VTIP process. Selected Officers then attend the PASC-Q course before their first assignment as

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<sup>184</sup> HQDA, FM 3-61, 8-5.

<sup>185</sup> Rumi Nielsen-Green, “Fighting the Information War but Losing Credibility,” *Military Review* (July-August 2011): 13-14.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

fully qualified PAOs. To fully assess the alignment of training to PAO's ability to meet regulatory obligations, this study examined the selection criteria of VTIP personnel. FA 46, the Army Public Affairs functional area, lists six minimum requirements:

(1) Officers must be between their 4th and 14th year of commissioned service, have completed the captain's career course (CCC), or have a valid ATRRS Reservation to attend a CCC. KD time as a CPT in an officer's basic branch is not required. As a general rule, Officers that are competitive for promotion are competitive for Public Affairs accession.

(2) Officers who are already committed to another program (i.e., fellowships, USMA) may not be eligible to compete since those commitments may not support timeline to begin training as a FA46. Officers who cannot meet the prescribed timeline below will not be approved for transfer and should plan to apply at a later time.

(3) Officers must be available to transition to FA46 and complete the FA46 qualification course within 18 months of being approved for transfer.

(4) Officers must have a valid secret security clearance prior to attending the FA46 qualification course.

(5) Applicants must submit a two to three-page writing sample on a topic concerning public affairs, community relations, and/or their unit or installation activities. Should be in the form of an article or newsletter highlighting Soldiers, family members, programs or events on or near their installation. This may be a past work or current sample based on this requirement. Writing samples will be uploaded and reviewed by the Public Affairs Proponent for grammar, logic and ability to clearly state and support a position or fact. Samples will not be reviewed or scored on AP writing style or topic. Applicants will submit this writing sample to as part of their VTIP packet.

(6) Officers should possess a high degree of physical fitness and be immediately world-wide deployable IAW DA PAM 600-3. Any permanent profile or other limiting circumstance or factor for assignment or deployment, outside of MACP or EFMP, should be addressed in the officer's request to branch transfer.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> HQDA, MILPER 22-125, Appendix 1, 4-5.

There are no public affairs-specific selection requirements as part of the VTIP process. Selection criteria focus on officer development timelines, clearance, and physical fitness. The writing sample required by requirement five does not assess public affairs knowledge or skillset. This level of writing would be expected of any officer between their 4th and 14th year of commissioned service.

Prior experience in the communication field is preferred for PA VTIP candidates but is not required.<sup>189</sup> Requirements focus on the Officer's timeline, security clearance, and physical fitness, with little emphasis placed on the ability of personnel to execute PA tasks. This study found no literature or research discussing PA candidates' previous PA experience or communication education. This places PAOs at a disadvantage when compared to their peers at the Brigade staff level and higher. Staff officers likely have years of experience preparing them for their roles compared to the nine-week training PAOs receive.<sup>190</sup>

VTIP requirements do not include any previous experience or education, and current selection criteria assess only the ability to write effectively as a precursor to selection. Without stringent selection criteria, the education provided by PASC-Q increases in importance. PASC-Q serves as the only ability for PAOs to gain academic knowledge of their career field. A previous MMAS study by Major Chase Spears analyzed the professionalism of the public affairs functional area. Spears's findings

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<sup>189</sup> HQDA, MILPER 22-125, Appendix 1, 4-5.

<sup>190</sup> Mervin Brokke, "A Comparative Study of Job Burnout in Army Public Affairs Commissioned Officers and Department of the Army Civilians," (Master's thesis, Marshall University, 1993), 20.

concluded that “Current public affairs training is not adequate for the realities that U.S. Army public affairs officers operate in.”<sup>191</sup>

Additional educational opportunities exist in the Joint Contingency Public Affairs Course, Joint Intermediate Public Affairs Course, Training with Industry (TWI), and Advanced Civil Schooling (ACS) programs. These educational opportunities provide a gap-fill solution to supplement PASC-Q training, but none of these courses are required of PAOs. These courses are designated voluntary self-development courses, and “commands often do not prioritize sending their public affairs officers.”<sup>192</sup>

#### Method 4: Analyze Testing and Verification of PAOs to Conduct Counter Disinformation Tasks

U.S. Army doctrine identifies PAOs as personal or special staff, subject matter experts who advise commanders within their expertise area. A denomination accredits chaplains before attending their training. Lawyers must pass the Bar exam and retain accreditation throughout their careers. As discussed previously, PAOs have no such accreditation requirements. PAOs are not required to gain or maintain industry-standard communication accreditation. No testing program within the Army’s Office of Inspector General exists. The only testing of PAOs occurs during the PASC-Q course.

No training directly relates to or evaluates the ability of PAOs to mitigate misinformation and disinformation. PASC-Q states that ELO 1.2, the only current ELO

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<sup>191</sup> Spears, “Evaluating the Professional Status of the US Army Public Affairs Program,” 85.

<sup>192</sup> Spears, “Evaluating the Professional Status of the US Army Public Affairs Program,” 11.

to mention disinformation, is assessed in the following measurement areas: Research Brief, Environmental Scanning Log, Issue Analysis, Staff Brief, and Capabilities Board. Evaluation of PASC-Q literature indicates that the training focus is not aligned with testing counter misinformation tactics. The evaluation measurements at PASC-Q focus on the communication process's foundational elements.

Measurement	Weight
Functional Area 1: Foundations	33%
Research Brief	10%
Public Affairs Audit	10%
Environmental Scanning Log	10%
Issue Analysis	10%
Social Media Strategy Brief	10%
Playbook	10%
Individual Communication Plan	30%
Functional Area 2: Scenario	33%
Annex F	20%
Staff Brief	5%
PA Training Plan and Execution	20%
Public Affairs Guidance	10%
PA Estimate	10%
Communication Plan	5%
Evaluation Report	10%
Public Engagement Plan	10%
Functional Area 3: Integration	34%
Capabilities Board	45%
Communication Portfolio	45%

\* Additional percentage points are team assessment and participation scores

Figure 2. PASC-Q Grading Rubric

*Source:* Created by author using information from Defense Information School (DINFOS), “Public Affairs Communication Strategy Qualification Course Training Program of Instruction,” (DINFOS, Fort George G. Meade, MD, 2021), 7-9.

Figure 2 displays the evaluations and exams that contribute to a PASC-Q student's final grade. As can be seen in the figure, some evaluations test a student's ability to complete many of the Army core tasks. Still, none directly correlate to the two tasks rated with a low alignment in table 2: core task 4 (Conduct PA Training for Commanders and Members of Their Organizations) and task 7 (Mitigate Misinformation and Disinformation). As previously discussed, core task 4 has mitigation at the unit level by requiring Soldiers to conduct online PAO training. Core task 7 has no mitigation and is not explicitly tested as part of the PASC-Q course.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to examine PA functional area related to countering disinformation. Exploration of the literature conducted on both PA and disinformation in Chapter 2 framed the study area. Chapter 3 highlighted the approach this thesis took in examining the data. The data analysis in Chapter 4 led to the findings, recommendations, and future areas of study listed in this chapter.

#### Research Questions

This study's primary research question asked what is the readiness of public affairs to counter disinformation, and does the training PAOs receive to prepare them to accomplish this task?

The study's secondary questions asked:

1. Is Public Affairs training adequately aligned with the roles and responsibilities of PAOs?
2. How should public affairs be task-organized to achieve its regulatory obligations?

#### Readiness to Counter Disinformation

Countering disinformation is not a new task for public affairs, but its inclusion of a core PA task indicates a shift in PA priorities. PA training and education have not adapted to focus on counter disinformation readiness. Career progression for PAOs does not support on-the-job training for individuals to collaborate with an experienced PA professional. Overall, PA is not prepared to counter disinformation.

The findings indicate PA's ability to counter disinformation is currently reliant on individuals. While DINFOS has taken steps to address the lack of education and training PAOs to receive to counter disinformation, much of the PA functional area remains untrained on these tasks. PASC-Q modernization increases future graduates' ability to operate within the digital disinformation environment. Still, it has not provided the depth of understanding for PAOs to be effective in the digital environment. Senior PAOs graduated from the PACS-Q course during a period where disinformation was not a core task and thus not a focus of training. Those senior PAOs rely on operational experience and on-the-job training to formulate methods for countering disinformation.

Counter disinformation tasks are rarely accomplished by one military discipline. At a minimum, intelligence staff must declassify information, operations security staff is needed to review information for exploitive information, and deconfliction on narrative war is necessary by intergovernmental agencies, multinational partners, and information operations staff. Currently, the Army does not possess a codified method for incorporating all these actors into the combatting disinformation task. Current integration methods in 2022 rely upon the individuals' personalities in critical positions to be successful. Without an established process for counter disinformation, readiness to counter disinformation will remain low.

### Training Alignment

Chapter 4 highlighted Army public affairs training and core tasks have a high alignment in three of the eight core tasks. Medium alignment exists in an additional three of the eight core tasks. Low alignment occurs with the final two core tasks. Those alignments are negligible and allow for on-the-job training other than counter



disinformation. Public Affairs training is adequately aligned with public affairs core tasks.

Public affairs operate in all aspects of the combat continuum. PA Operations occur in both steady-state and event-driven scenarios and require PAOs to be trained to operate when they arrive at their first assignment. DINFOS is tasked with training all PAOs, from every military service, on 5 TLOs and 31 ELOs within 45 days. Instructors and staff within DINFOS utilize the training importance table to focus on training, but the table evaluates 176 of the 180 as “High” importance. The “High” rating on 176 of the 180 categories does not allow DINFOS to focus on training. PASC-Q’s prioritization of PA tasks is in line with the overall everyday mission of Public Affairs.

#### Task Organization

The career timeline of PAOs must adapt to increase the mentorship and training necessary to counter disinformation. Currently, Army officers are ineligible to transfer to the PA functional area until they achieve the rank of Captain. The Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard allow their officers to commission directly into PA. Service members in the other military branches begin their PA careers by serving on a PA staff, gaining the necessary skills to impact the military at higher levels. PAOs in 2022 arguably perform their duties differently and with different platforms than in previous conflicts.<sup>193</sup> Additional research should be done to examine if the task organization has adapted to meet the new requirements.

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<sup>193</sup> Chad G. Carroll, “The U.S. Army Public Diplomacy Officer: Military Public Affairs Officers’ Roles in the Global Information Environment,” (Master’s thesis, University of North Carolina, 2007), 24.

Allowing Army officers to commission directly into PA will increase the readiness of the career field to counter disinformation and the efficiency of all PA-related tasks. If PA becomes an army branch, there would be increased time for PAOs to experience tactics and strategies, recognize patterns, and employ new concepts.<sup>194</sup> To commission as a PAO, PA will need to transform from a functional Area to a career field. The transformation would allow increased management of personnel and education. PA would have the option to accept VTIP officers into the branch but should develop more stringent requirements and qualifications for acceptance.

### Findings

The PA functional area training requirements provide only rudimentary education on countering disinformation. This education is not designed to prepare PAOs for operational counter disinformation tasks. PASC-Q education is intended for PA beginners with no knowledge of the IE. Rudimentary education is required due to the knowledge level of PAO candidates assessed. By not considering PAO understanding or education of PA tasks, DINFOS is forced to develop its education to match. Unless selection requirements for PAO candidates change, PAOs will continue to graduate from the PASC-Q without the ability to counter disinformation.

This study concludes that the public affairs functional area is not adequately trained to counter disinformation. PA training is not sufficiently aligned to prepare PAOs to operate in the IE effectively. While the PASC-Q does provide training on how PAOs

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<sup>194</sup> Sebastian Bae, “Just Let Them Compete: Raising the Next Generation of Wargamers,” *War on The Rocks*, October 9, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/10/just-let-them-compete-raising-the-next-generation-of-wargamers/>.

should respond to misinformation and disinformation, the education does not provide the depth of understanding necessary to operate at a superior level. No validation or accreditation process assesses PA's ability to counter disinformation effectively. PASC-Q does not evaluate or assess the ability of PA to counter disinformation. There remains a significant gap in U.S. Army Public Affairs' ability to understand and react to misinformation and disinformation in a timely manner.

Trust is linked to the reputation of an organization.<sup>195</sup> Chapter 3 described public affairs' historical inconsistency with conducting media relations and its effect on the military's reputation. No solution offers a quick fix to media and military relations; some even believe the antagonistic relationship serves as a health motivator for both sides.<sup>196</sup> The U.S. Army and PA limited media access to journalists during conflicts in WWI and WWII. The Espionage Act and Sedition Act controlled the information coming out of warzones. False reporting and inflated battle estimates in Vietnam mislead the American public.

The February 2022 Pew Research poll shows that only 25% of Americans have great confidence in the military to act in the public's best interests.<sup>197</sup> While this poll did not ascertain the reason for the loss of confidence, it likely includes numerous variables. With the loss of trust in the military, Army PA must recognize that countering

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<sup>195</sup> Bedford, "Social Media," 16.

<sup>196</sup> Michael J. Burbach, "Public Affairs in the 21st Century," (Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, 1999), 36.

<sup>197</sup> Brian Kennedy, Alec Tyson, and Cary Funk, *Americans Trust in Scientists, Other Groups Declines* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 2022), 23.

disinformation by telling the truth may not be effective. Training and education on countering disinformation requires a depth of knowledge not provided during PASC-Q.

### Recommendations

The ability to combat disinformation in both stability and conflict remains a nuanced and challenging task. It requires an understanding of the form and function of disinformation, a willingness of the information-related capabilities to engage, and the experience of a seasoned professional to strike the right tone and tenor in the response. This study's recommendations for Army Public Affairs to increase its readiness to counter disinformation focus on the education of what disinformation is, the formalized process for countering disinformation, and the restructuring of PA to improve the educational and on-the-job training of PAOs.

The disinformation education at DINFOS does not provide the depth of education required to understand the role and function of disinformation. Army PA should develop disinformation education training necessary for all PAOs. The training should focus on the cognitive biases that cause individuals to believe the disinformation, particularly in the digital environment. Course instruction should include the history of disinformation and its impact on military engagements.

Finally, education should study how different adversaries view information and attempt to weaponize disinformation. Instruction in these areas would impact the readiness of PAOs to combat information and would add increased understanding of the importance of PA to warfare. "The 'press-as-enemy' syndrome, so common during and

after Vietnam, is still alive among general officers in today's Army."<sup>198</sup> Increased time working with media and reporters may begin to dismantle this belief

Counter disinformation lacks a formulated process within Army doctrine. Developing a counter disinformation battle drill is necessary for formalizing the process. Public affairs inclusion of counter disinformation tactics in FM 3-61 is a vital first step. Developing a structure for countering disinformation that integrates the information-related capabilities is crucial to long-term sustainment. Until counter disinformation is a formalized process, albeit a necessarily fluid one, units will continue to struggle with timely responses to disinformation. Counter disinformation should not be restricted to the army, but a joint and governmental process designed to defeat our adversaries.<sup>199</sup>

#### Further Research Required

While researching this thesis, numerous additional areas of importance were highlighted. This study answers the question of PA readiness and training alignment to counter disinformation tasks, highlighting areas of strength and weakness before offering recommendations for addressing PA gaps. A logical next research topic is to assess the feasibility of the recommended changes.

PA is currently restructuring the functional area to remove PAOs from the Brigade level. This change will allow Division and Corps staff a more powerful force and

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<sup>198</sup> James T. Currie, "Will the Army Ever Learn Good Media Relations Techniques? Walter Reed as a Case Study," *Military Review* (May-June 2008): 99.

<sup>199</sup> Patrick R. Sieber, "Are Army Public Affairs Officers trained and educated to meet the challenges of the Contemporary Information Environment?" (Master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2007), 71.

increase mentorship opportunities. During the transition, researcher opportunities exist to measure the effectiveness of this change. Further studies should be done to assess the creation of PA as a branch. This research should attempt to propose the actions required to formalize PA as an Army branch and the impacts it would have on the force.

In analyzing the readiness of public affairs to counter disinformation, this study focused on the training received at DINFOS. PASC-Q is essential training that all PAOs from each military branch attend. However, each military branch sees PA or Strategic Communication differently and uses its forces uniquely. Additional research should be conducted to assess to diverse use and effectiveness of PAOs in each military branch. The study should attempt to highlight why each branch uses PA in the manner they do and how each branch could adjust to be more effective.

When discussing counter disinformation tasks, a recurring theme is the equipment required to assess and understand the information domain domestically and abroad. When evaluating the impact of disinformation on a foreign audience, public affairs can use intelligence assessments to determine the effectiveness of messaging. Previous studies recommended DINFOS develop a course on determining measures of effectiveness but did not address the technology or method by which assessment information is gathered.<sup>200</sup> Domestically U.S. law prevents the military from collecting intelligence on “US persons.” This is commonly referred to as an “Intel Oversight” violation. Proper PA operations require assessments of the American public to measure the effectiveness of themes and messages.

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<sup>200</sup> David M. Gerken, “Where Do We Stand? The Army Public Affairs Officer and the Dominant Coalition,” (Master’s thesis, University of North Carolina, 2007), 68.

Due to intel oversight, these assessments often come from PA shops with minimal staffing. Technology offers the ability to assist PAOs in the domestic evaluation of themes and messaging. Still, there currently exists no equipment or program of record to do domestic audience analysis within the Army. Further research should be done to identify the equipment upgrades or acquisitions required to increase PA readiness and productivity. The lack of proper equipment wastes valuable time and minimizes PA and commander's understanding of the communication environment. Further research into PA equipment should standardize the use of technology in countering disinformation and should be incorporated into PASC-Q training and education.

Finally, the Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Air Force, and Navy commission their Officers directly into Public Affairs or Strategic Communications. Army Officers are eligible to apply for a VTIP PAO position at roughly four years. Army officers are generally around six years into the Army when accepted and attended PA training. This method of developing PAOs places Army PAOs approximately six years behind their peers in terms of PA experience. On the other hand, Army PAOs have an operational understanding of different branches within the Army and may be more rounded than their Air Force, Navy, Marine, and Coast Guard Peers. Research should be done on the effectiveness of both methods of PAO development. Studies should seek to assess the readiness of PAOs among the military branches.

## APPENDIX A

### APPENDIX 1 TO THE VTIP MILPER DTD 14 APRIL 2022

#### **F. Officers selecting FA46-Public Affairs must meet the following minimum requirements:**

- (1) Officers must be between their 4th and 14th year of commissioned service, have completed the captains career course (CCC), attending, or have a valid ATRRS Reservation to attend a CCC. KD time as a CPT in an officer's basic branch is not required. As a general rule, Officers that are competitive for promotion are competitive for Public Affairs accession.
- (2) Officers who are already committed to another program (i.e., fellowships, USMA) may not be eligible to compete since those commitments may not support timeline to begin training as a FA46. Officers who cannot meet the prescribed timeline below will not be approved for transfer and should plan to apply at a later time.
- (3) Officers must be available to transition to FA46 and complete the FA46 qualification course within 18 months of being approved for transfer.
- (4) Officers must have a valid secret security clearance prior to attending the FA46 qualification course.
- (5) Applicants must submit a two- to three-page writing sample for publication (such as an article, Op-Ed, Speech, Press Release etc.) on a topic concerning your community and/or their unit or installation. It must clearly define the following:
  1. Communication Problem or Opportunity it seeks to accomplish
  2. Intended Audience (who can correct the problem or issue)
  3. Delivery Medium (where should it get published and when)
  4. Action Response Desired by Audience (what do you want the audience to do?)
  5. Method of Measurement of Desired Action Response (how will you know your published work achieved the desired response?)

\*You can outline this at the end of your writing sample for clarity.

This may be a past work or current sample based on this requirement. Writing samples will be uploaded and reviewed by the Public Affairs Proponent for grammar, logic and ability to clearly state and support a command communication goal. Samples will not be reviewed or scored on AP writing style or topic. Applicants will submit this writing sample to as part of their VTIP packet.



(6) Officers should possess a high-degree of physical fitness and be immediately world-wide deployable IAW DA PAM 600-3. Any permanent profile or other limiting circumstance or factor for assignment or deployment, outside of MACP or EFMP, should be addressed in the officer's request to branch transfer.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> HQDA, MILPER 22-125, Appendix 1, 4-5.

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