

# Comprehensive Approach to Information Operations

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## Table of Contents

<b>Part One</b> <u>Setting the Scene</u> .....	1
<b>Part Two</b> <u>Understanding the Human Terrain</u> .....	9
<b>Part Three</b> <u>Effective Engagement</u> .....	13

# Comprehensive Approach to Information Operations

*“Insurgencies are primarily concerned with the struggle for men’s minds”  
Sir Frank Kitson*

## Part One - Setting the Scene

### Current Situation

The importance of Strategic Communications and Information Operations (to include PSYOP) has finally been recognized by the U.S. Army and the Informational Logical Line of Operation (LLO) has now been accepted as one of the five critical LLOs in a successful Counter Insurgency operation, along with the Political, Diplomatic, Economic and Military LLOs. Indeed the new Army COIN manual (FM 3-24), rightly states that in COIN operations, Information Operations (IO) is likely to be the most important LLO, and if not the most important, then certainly critical to the success of any of the other four. To quote directly from FM 3-24:

*“Arguably, the decisive battle is for the people’s minds; hence synchronizing IO with efforts along the other LLOs is critical. Every action, including uses of force, must be “wrapped in a bodyguard of information.”*

This idea - that everything we do and say in a COIN operation should be “wrapped in a bodyguard of information” is revolutionary. Especially when one considers that as little as two years ago, most commanders saw IO, and the other tools of soft power, as simply secondary functions designed to create the freedom of maneuver needed to facilitate combat operations. By adopting this concept, the US Army will quickly deny our enemies a critical advantage. If we adequately explain our every word and action, we will gain far greater support from the local population; we will minimize the misunderstandings that can so easily arise when we do what we have to do; and we will significantly reduce an adversary’s opportunities to distort, denigrate and deny our intentions, words and deeds.

However, while significant progress has been made over the last two years, we are not yet out of the woods. As highlighted in my recent article in the fall edition of Middle East Quarter, U.S. Information Operations remain but a shadow of our opponents, despite the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Overall, Coalition media strategies in both Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in only limited success and it can be argued that our adversaries still maintain the information initiative.

Insurgent IO capabilities are advanced. Violence is their most effective propaganda tool. This is not a new strategy. For example, Johann Most, a nineteenth-century German pamphleteer, described

terrorism as “propaganda of the deed.”<sup>1</sup> In both Iraq and Afghanistan, violence intimidates the uncommitted, undermines confidence in the authorities, demonstrates potency, and can provoke a disproportionate military response from both the Iraqi authorities and the coalition. When insurgents, terrorists, and militiamen do attack, they use multimedia to amplify their actions and convey sophisticated messages to multiple audiences.

Their IO strategy is broad: They employ low technology strategies to permeate their themes down to the grassroots and exploit mosques both to convey their point to the faithful and to suggest religious legitimacy. Extremist graffiti provides a constant reminder of their presence. In both countries, insurgents and militiamen utilize the arts, including paintings, poetry, and songwriting, and post flyers, distribute leaflets, author articles, and even publish their own newspapers and magazines. They are also highly proficient in high technology messaging. They use SMS text messaging and Iraq’s telephone system to intimidate Iraqis and even coalition members. They produce CDs and DVDs, which they distribute widely within communities that U.S. forces and the Iraqi government also seek to influence.

The insurgents, terrorists, and militiamen are adept at the art of manipulation. They need not rely only upon their own terrestrial and satellite stations but can also use foreign journalists and media outlets to ensure that their messages and actions are conveyed to the widest possible audience. But perhaps their most important tool is the Internet. It provides not only a mass audience but also enables a quick response to Iraqi and Afghan government and U.S.-led coalition arguments.

In contrast to this sustained information onslaught on all contested audiences, there are significant shortcomings in the Coalition influence strategy. These shortcomings include a lack of central coordination; campaigns focused too much on abstract concepts without relevance for ordinary Afghans and Iraqis; too much investment in strategic advertising at the expense of far more effective grass roots campaigns; undue focus on generic audiences; a cumbersome approval process prior to product release; a shortage of qualified personnel; failure to effectively utilize and properly manage private contractors; metrics focused on performance rather than effectiveness; failure to develop local spokesmen; and a failure to convince the U.S. public about the importance of information operations thereby securing the support and funds need to undertake effective IO.

In the face of these continuing shortcomings, how does one plan, organize, execute and properly measure the success of an effective IO campaign that will reach, be understood and positively impact key audiences in Iraq, Afghanistan and anywhere else. This article and the two that will follow will seek to outline an integrated approach designed to achieve this vital objective.

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Most, “Action as Propaganda,” *Freiheit*, July 25, 1885.

# The Glevum Comprehensive Approach

*Understanding through Research*

*Engagement from Understanding*

*Influence through Engagement*

The development and execution of a successful Public Diplomacy, Strategic Communications, or Information Operations campaign requires a combination of American, international and local professionals consisting of experts in the development of Human Terrain Analysis and target audience selection; attitudinal research including polling, focus groups and structured interviews; the planning, creative development, testing, production and placement of multimedia products; and the comprehensive and impartial measurement of effectiveness and performance. Success also requires an integrated methodology that combines the very best practice from academia, the public (Information Operations, PSYOP, Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy communities) and private sectors (advertising, marketing, public relations, crisis communications and political campaigning).

In order to better support U.S. Government Strategic Communication effort, Glevum Associates has developed a unique approach to IO campaigning. Our comprehensive approach is designed to ensure that we are able to understand, reach and positively influence the attitudes and, ultimately, the behavior of any and all target audiences in support of our client's strategic objectives.

## Three Phase Approach

The key to our approach is to provide clients with a genuinely full spectrum Strategic Communications and IO capability. This is achieved in three parallel phases – **Research, Engagement and Measurement**. The **Research Phase** begins with the development of an intimate understanding of the audiences we need to influence; our adversary's propaganda efforts; and the wider information environment in which we will operate. From this analysis, we are able to determine which specific audiences can and should be influenced and why. We are also able to determine, with considerable accuracy what they will and will not understand – the narratives they accept and use – and what means and medium to use to reach them. Once this vital task is complete, we can then begin the **Engagement Phase**, which includes the creative development, testing, production and placement of multimedia products as part of an integrated IO or strategic communications campaign that exploits every possible tool of influence in order to reach the intended target audience and change attitudes and behavior. The impact and success of Phases One and Two are assessed in the **Measurement Phase**, which involves the impartial assessment of both performance and effectiveness. This constant and consistent parallel review process ensures that each campaign remains precisely focused on achieving our client's objectives. **The overall aim of our approach is to achieve Understanding through Research; Engagement from Understanding; and Influence through Engagement.**

## Essential Prerequisites

### Making the Case for Influence and Information Operations

*Everything we say, every thing we do, and everything we fail to say or fail to do, will have its impact in Foreign lands”*

*President Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Before one can commence an effective IO campaign, it is critical that operational commanders fully understand the strengths and weakness of IO and are willing to use it a) as their primary line of operation or b) as an integrated part of every other operation. If commanders do not understand that everything they do and say will determine the relationship that they will have with the local population, then no matter how effective the IO professional is, he or she can never be heard above the noise generated by other uncoordinated and often counterproductive operations, particular kinetic operations. Every operation, even something as simple as driving between two forward operating bases can have a profound impact on how we are perceived by the local population. Running one Afghan or Iraq driver off the road or forcing one proud and innocent Pashtu tribesman to the ground, hooded and cuffed, in front of his fellow tribesmen and family can undermine months of work designed to win hearts and minds and will often result in a kinetic response. In COIN operations actions really do speak louder than words.

The successful commander must therefore understand that he or she is engaged in an influence operation that is designed to secure and hold the support of a growing percentage of the local population. Without that support the collection of intelligence becomes increasingly difficult and without intelligence our operations become even more unfocused and unnecessarily provocative. With local support anything is possible, as we have seen so vividly in al Anbar province over the last nine months. The first and perhaps most important task of the IO professional is therefore to influence his own command and commander, rather than the local population.

The IO professional must find ways to properly educate the Commander and his staff regarding the impact of all actions undertaken by the unit or formation and how every soldier or marine is in reality the front line IO warrior. This means finding creative ways of reminding commanders of some of the core principles of COIN as articulated in FM3-24. These include the following:

- All Operations will positively or negatively influence local attitudes
- Sometimes, the More You Protect Your Force, the Less Secure You May Be
- Sometimes, the More Force Is Used, the Less Effective It Is
- Sometimes Doing Nothing Is the Best Reaction
- Some of the Best Weapons in COIN Do Not Shoot
- In COIN relationships are everything

Next the IO professional must explain what IO can and cannot do for the commander. Here are some examples:

- Manage the expectations of the local population by promising less and delivering more
- As a tool to restore or bolster the morale of the local population, which has likely been stressed by years of conflict, deprivations, and perceived and real slights
- Open a dialogue with local population, perhaps over the heads of obstructive leaders
- Build and reinforce relationships with individuals and communities
- Inform local population about our intentions and explain our actions – something they deserve and have a right to expect. Doing so will significantly reduce misunderstandings and forestall enemy attempts to distort, denigrate and deny what we are doing and why
- Apologize when we do something wrong as perceived by the local population. This is not a sign of weakness rather the appropriate response of an ally and friend
- Respond to and properly publicize complaints and our effective respond to those complaints
- Highlight the vices of opponents and counter adversary propaganda on a 24/7 basis
- Warn, threaten or deter in order to reduce the number of occasions when we must act aggressively and use force
- To publicize the successes that the Iraqi government, local communities and individuals achieve, in the face our common enemies, and to selectively publicize our own success when appropriate.

The first and most important role of the IO professional is therefore to educate commanders, staffs and units so that they understand that they are the front line of the IO battle and that their actions and words are likely to have the greatest informational impact. Front line units can lead the IO battle in one of three ways - through Communication, Engagement and Direct Support.

Firstly, in the course of their normal duties units can deliberately exploit every opportunity to communicate with the local population – for example while on patrol, at checkpoints and during meetings. All soldiers can be given talking points to use with the local population. Second leaders and units can plan operations with the specific intent of engaging in a dialogue with a local leader or community. For example, by undertaken meetings and social gatherings designed simply to foster better relationships or by holding “town hall” meetings to explain actions or even to apologize. Thirdly and perhaps most importantly units can do things by providing direct support to a local community designed to build respect and trust. For example:

- By providing security and protection

- By showing respect and being courteous
- Through humanitarian assistance
- By rebuild communities, infrastructure and the economy
- By assisting and supporting the local government and security forces

If the unit or formation that an IO professional supports understands their vital role in the influence battle then an IO campaign can be focused on exploiting and publicizing the success that will inevitably follow, and on attacking our enemies and countering their propaganda. If units do not fully understand their role on the IO frontline, then the IO campaign itself will likely only ever be defensive and reactive. Failure to understand that every operation will influence will more than likely hand the informational initiative to our enemies.

While it is a significant challenge for IO professionals to convince the warrior of this reality, we can be sobered by this one thought. If we cannot convince our own commanders of this reality, how are we going to convince the Iraqi or Afghan populations to support their Governments and the Coalition and resist a deadly and merciless insurgency?

## **Task Order Analysis**

As with the planning of any success operation, planning for all information operations must commence with a detailed review of each task order, to ensure that a client's requirements are fully understand, as well as any operational constraints. Such analysis is also needed to ensure that the full extent of all of the challenge that will be faced are identified and understood. This should be a formalized process that ensures that there is no ambiguity or misunderstanding and that all parties fully understand, from the outset, exactly what is desired and what is achievable. The questions/issues that the IO professional should seek to answer/confirm include the following:

- Overarching objectives (e.g. Inform, Warn, Coerce, Deter, Motivate)
- Desired message themes (e.g. AQI, CoV, GoI, FaQ)
- Intended/desired audience(s)
- Effects to be achieved
- Success criteria including MoP and MoE
- Timeframe
- Resources
- Task Constraints
- Coordination Requirements (with other IO/PAO activities)

This initial coordination and assessment process ensures that the Io professional is:

- Fully appraised of, and focused on, a client's desired goals, specific objectives and desired effects

- Agile and has the awareness needed to quickly modify an ongoing campaign to meet changing operational requirement
- Able to provide timely recommendations for future campaigns, products and measurable objectives.

## Conduct Self Appraisal

*“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle” - Sun Tzu*

Sun Tzu understood that it is vital to know both ones enemy and oneself in order to succeed in any conflict. A rigorous self appraisal ensures that ones strengths are exploited to greatest effect and ones weaknesses can either be eliminated or protected. This effort requires an exceptional degree of honesty and introspection to ensure that no issue can emerge during a campaign that will deflect the IO professional from the core message or will undermine the confidence of an audience in the message or messenger. Few problems are so severe that they cannot be overcome if identified in advance and measures taken immediately to mitigate or ameliorate negative consequences. Indeed, some issues can be turned into an advantage if dealt with well in advance. Also, few internal issues are likely to emerge that cannot be predicted well in advance through a careful self appraisal. In any conflict we can be certain of one thing - our opponent will be conducting a thorough review of us to find any weakness in our armor which they can and will ruthlessly exploit. Therefore, we seek to mirror image our enemy’s review process in order to understand what they perceive to be both our strengths and weaknesses.

This self appraisal process does not take very long (typically a few of hours) but is vital to establish a baseline understanding of our strengths and weakness, as we perceive them, and as our adversaries and contested audiences perceive them. Listed below are examples of the questions that we ask ourselves and our clients:

- Who are we? (personal, collective and political identities)
- What do we stand for?
- What do we oppose?
- How are we perceived?
  - By Allies
  - By Opponents
  - By the Uncommitted & Third Parties
- Who are our Allies and why?
- Who are our Opponents and why?
- What are our public strengths & weaknesses?
  - As we see them?
  - As our Opponents see them?

- As the Uncommitted & Third Parties see them?
- What resources do we have at our disposal?
- What are our constraints? (external, self imposed)
- What is our timeline?

This self appraisal process ensures that we begin the development of each new IO campaign with an objective understanding of ourselves and our strengths and weaknesses as we, our target audiences, and our adversaries see them. Sun Tzu understood that such knowledge is vital in order to succeed in any conflict. Only Glevum Associates has a proven method for quickly and cost effectively conducting a rigorous self appraisal that will ensure that our client's strengths are exploited to greatest effect and any weaknesses detected can be eliminated or protected by a "bodyguard of information".

### **Summary**

Having undertaken these three essential prerequisites, the IO professional is optimally placed to begin the target audience research and selection phase. This research phase will be explained in the next edition of Serviam followed by an article that outlines the Glevum approach to target audience engagement and campaign measurement.

# Comprehensive Approach to Information Operations

## Part Two

### Understanding the Human Terrain

#### Introduction

In the first part of this three part series, the case was made for a revitalized approach to Information Operations designed to seize the initiative from our enemies in the battle for the hearts and minds of all contested audiences. This second article will focus on how to develop the essential Human Terrain knowledge that the Information Operations operator must have in, order to connect with and effectively influence ethnically, culturally and ideologically diverse target audiences.

#### Determine Information Gaps and Develop Collection Plan

To ensure that an Information Operations campaign reaches and impacts the correct target audience as intended, one must first collect all of the information needed to intimately understand ones opponents and the various target audiences that must be reached. Once all existing data has been collected, evaluated and information gaps have been identified, one must then develop a list of specific IO Information Requirements (IR). Once these IRs have been determined, a coordinated information collection plan should be developed to ensure that all available resources are exploited. This collection effort ensures that the planning of an IO campaign; the selection of target audiences, messages and mediums; and the assessment of effects is underpinned by the best available intelligence drawn from the widest possible range of sources, quickly, and at minimum cost.

#### Human Terrain Understanding and Selection

In order to fully understand, select and engage the right target audience, at the right time, using culturally appropriate narratives and the right media, it is essential to conduct a detailed target audience assessment or Human Terrain analysis for each likely audience. This analysis must cover every relevant factor that influences a community or individual to behave in a particular way and/or is a source of their individual or collective identity. Key factors that need to be reviewed including the following:

- Ethnic and Tribal Background of the TA (to include kinship and descent)
- History & Language
- Demographics (male/female, young/old, rich/poor, urban/rural)
- Religion & Superstitions, Ideology, and Belief Structures
- Social Structure (values, class and caste, symbols, artifacts, mores, traditions)
- Legal System (formal and informal - rule orientated and relationship orientated)

- Elites and Traditional/Non-traditional leadership systems
- Education System (How much can they understand/what have they been taught/who taught them and why?)
- Political System (parties, platforms, personalities)
- Economic System (e.g. land rights, black market)
- Arts, Entertainment, and Sports
- Human Factors (individual and collective psychology)
- Methods of Communication (visual, verbal, or non-verbal)
- Prejudices, Enmities, Vendettas and Hatreds
- Security Systems (state, tribal, family, political)
- General attitudes on key issues

The ultimate aim of this process is to develop a detailed, nuanced and culturally attuned understanding of all potential audiences prior to the selection of specific segments to target.

## **Research Methodology**

The Human Terrain research methodology advocated by Glevum combines qualitative and quantitative research techniques organized around through the proven intelligence collection cycle. This multidisciplinary approach utilizes specialists drawn from the intelligence community, relevant social sciences (e.g. history, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology); experts in the assessment of current attitudes, utilizing proven attitudinal research tools (polling, focus groups and semi-structured interviews); commercial market and political research experts; and by media research professionals (broadcast, print and new media). These specialists must fully cooperate with local subject matter experts drawn from the same disciplines.

## **Target Audience Selection**

Having undertaken detailed Human Terrain research, it is then possible to begin the target audience selection process. The IO professional should always resist attempts to define the target audience before this research process is well underway. It is also vital that previously selected audiences are regularly re-evaluated as their relevance, attitudes and preferences can change over time. The real value of proper research is that it allows for the partition of the target population into segments based on the level of their anticipated support or lack thereof for our goals and objectives. Once the research effort is well underway it is possible to select which segments of the population we should target using the appropriate narratives and mediums in order to achieve the desired effect.

During the selection process, and in order to complete the research process, one must finally determine what the chosen target audience actually understands about the key issues that the campaign is designed to impact. In the Glevum comprehensive approach these are known as **“Ground Truths”**. The reality is that audience’s perceptions on a range of issues are likely to be

profoundly different from those of the IO professional. It is therefore necessary to establish what these ground truths are, before developing what might otherwise be a flawed campaign. If done properly, an IO campaign that is properly grounded by an intimate understanding of the world as it is and not as we might like it to be, stands the greatest chance of success.

## **Adversary and Propaganda Analysis**

Our enemies have shown themselves to be highly adept at releasing timely and effective messages that undermine support for our mission and which bolsters their own reputation and perceived potency. They are quick to exploit Coalition failures and excesses; they respond rapidly to defend their own actions; and they are able to hijack Coalition successes and present them as proof that change only occurs as a result of their own violent campaign. Glevum believes that it is vital to conduct an objective and comprehensive appraisal of each opponent before developing an IO campaign. This research seeks to identify the opponent's strengths and weaknesses; determines who they are; what they have already done or will do to influence contested audiences; and what impact their campaign has or will likely have on these key audiences. Armed with this knowledge, it is possible to develop an IO campaign that avoids or mitigates an opponent's strengths and ruthlessly exploits their weaknesses.

## **Understanding the Media Environment**

An expert from Voice of America once wrote that "if a message does not show it does not sow". His point was that even a perfectly constructed and culturally attuned message will not achieve the desired impact if it is not seen, heard or read by the right target audience. It is vital that we fully understand the media environment that we encounter in each AO. This enables us to select and focus on those specific media channels that ensure that we reach and impact our chosen audience exactly as desired, thereby saving time and money. When conducting detailed media analysis the following factors need to be considered:

- Mediums available
- Ratings (Broadcast, print, new media)
- Impartiality and/or bias of outlets
- Popular preferences
- Impact of each media on target audiences
- Popular and/or respected media sources and personalities
- Non-traditional media sources

The overall aim is to develop and maintain a comprehensive overview of the multimedia environment in and around the AO, which can then be exploited to reach most critical audience.

## **Summary**

Having properly prepared oneself, to include conducting detailed human terrain research, the IO professional is now optimally placed to begin the engagement and campaign measurement phases. These final two stages of the comprehensive approach advocated by Glevum Associates will be summarized in Part Three of this series.

# Comprehensive Approach to Information Operations

## Part Three Effective Engagement

### Introduction

The second part of this four part series, focused on how to develop the essential Human Terrain knowledge that the Information Operations (IO) operator must have in, order to connect with and effectively influence ethnically, culturally and ideologically diverse target audiences. The output of this comprehensive social science based human terrain research phase should be the development of a detailed understanding of each likely target audience, to include the identification of those issues that matter to them; the narratives that can be exploited to impact them; and the most appropriate mediums that can be exploited to reach them. The IO professional is then optimally placed to partition the population into selected groups or segments based on the level of their anticipated support for ours or our enemies' goals and objectives. Having selected and evaluated these segments, these segments can then be effectively targeted. Armed with this extensive and comprehensive body of knowledge, the IO operator can then begin the process of developing and deploying effective multimedia campaigns.

Rather than explain the mechanics of how to commission, produce and deploy an effective information campaign, which should be well known to the IO professional, the author will focus on certain ground truths that need to be fully understood to ensure effective engagement with all target audiences. Challenges and pitfalls that if ignored can derail in the most well planned effort.

### Effective Engagement – “Locals Know Best”

At the beginning of a mission like Operation Iraqi Freedom, where direct access to the local population is denied, it is likely that the IO or PSYOP professional will need to rely on their own resources to identify and segment desired target audiences; determine the most suitable narratives and mediums that can be exploited; and in order to produce and deploy the multimedia messages that will facilitate effective engagement. At the outset, it is unlikely that we will have access to the domestic media, although we may still be able to reach the target audience via satellite radio and TV stations, especially as satellite dishes continue to proliferate, even in countries such as Iran. At the outset however, efforts to reach the population are likely to be localized, using the military's own somewhat limited multimedia broadcast capabilities and the ubiquitous leaflet drop.

However, as soon as a locale has been secured, every effort should be made to engage with, and exploit local experts, companies and media in order to achieve a sustained impact as quickly as

possible. This recommendation is made because the author strongly believes that that the campaigns, themes and products that stand the best chance of resonating with the local population as desired, are those that are developed by the locals themselves. Similarly, the messages that will achieve the most impact are those which address the issues that matter most to the local population and connect with them on a personal level – only they know with certainty what those issues are and how we connect with them. The role of the IO professional should therefore be to exploit local knowledge, expertise and outlets in order to translate our desired effects, derived from our carefully selected lines of persuasion, into a form that can be absorbed, understood and will resonate with the local population.

The temptation of course is for the IO professional to develop their own Western based, English language ideas and concepts, translated into the local language, expecting them to have the same impact in Arabic or Farsi that they might have in English. While these types of campaigns and products are easily understood by senior commanders and lawyers, rarely do they resonate as desired with the target audience. This process also works in reverse, as evidenced by the hugely successful anti terrorism pop song “This is not Us –We Are Not That”. The lyrics of this charity song, recorded by top Pakistani pop-stars, and sold or downloaded in huge numbers, has little meaning when translated into English. However, when performed in the native Urdu of the writer, it has profound meaning to Pakistani Muslims tired of terrorism defining their country and faith. That is why companies like Ford and Coke do not use English speaking Madison Avenue-based advertising teams to sell their products in China or India. Instead, they use local advertising personnel to develop campaigns that have meaning with the Chinese or Indian populations. To use a relevant analogy to illustrate this point - the IO professional should become, as quickly as possible, the impresario of their campaign delegating the duties of song writer, conductor and orchestra to local experts and companies rather than trying to trying to write the score and play the music themselves.

### **Effective Engagement – “Keep it Real”**

All too often IO campaigns and products are based on abstract concepts and Western ideals that have little relevance or are poorly understood by the local population. For example, as lines of persuasion go; the promotion of democracy, law and order or the local security forces are perfectly appropriate. However, these somewhat abstract concepts must then be translated into a form that will be understood by the local population. A Pashtu tribesman living in a rural community in Southern Afghanistan does have a refined understanding of the concept of representative legitimate governance but in his case this is the traditional authority of village elders and tribal leaders rather than elected politicians. Similarly most Sunni tribal leaders in Western Iraq support the restoration of law and order and accept the need for an effective and reliable police force. However, many have great difficulty in accepting a Shia dominated police force, certain elements of which have participated in the torture and murder of hundreds of their fellow Sunni. The key therefore is to connect our lines of persuasion to the issues that matter most to the local population, using narratives that they themselves understand and accept. “Keeping it real’ for influencers and the

population in general is absolutely the best way to achieve our desired objectives. Again this necessitates the use of local expertise not simply as subcontracted labor, controlled by English speaking foreign-owned prime contractors, but by drawing local vendors into the center of the IO planning and creative development process. Western media and advertising companies can facilitate this relationship but should not control nor dominate it, not least because if the main profits from these contractors are secured by international vendors, local capacity and capabilities will never expand or mature.

### **Effective Engagement – “Think Strategic But Act Local”**

The largest concentration of IO professionals and resources is not at the Brigade or Battalion level where the greatest impact is achieved in Counter Insurgency operations. Instead, it is at the Corps and Army level, where literally hundreds of personnel are deployed and hundreds of millions of dollars are spent. The natural tendency when authority and resources are concentrated at the highest levels is for this assembled expertise to seek to develop a top-down national-level IO campaign rather than a bottom-up grassroots one. This mistake is compounded by an overreliance on expertise provided by international advertising and strategic communications companies similarly concentrated at the Army and Corps levels of command. These experts have focused IO efforts, especially in Iraq, on national and regional advertising campaigns deploying broad concepts aimed at a generic audience. The reality in places like Iraq is that we are not selling products and the audience is far more complex and diverse than those who might buy cars or soap powder. Rather, we are conducting simultaneous multifaceted national and local political style campaigns, undertaken in the midst of a major counter insurgency operation.

Successful multi-issue political campaigns of this type – the upcoming American presidential and congressional elections being an excellent example - are not won through national advertising campaigns. Not least, because there are few issues that the majority of voters can agree on, even those in the same political party. Instead, the candidates in these elections run grassroots focused campaigns reinforced by local and regional advertising and occasionally by national advertising. Such a campaign allows the candidates to deploy messages that connect with the issues that matter most in each state and congressional district, and even county by county and town by town in so-called swing states. Many of these messages are deployed by the candidates themselves at local events or by key local influencers who have message authority within a narrow community. Similarly in places like Iraq, our IO effort needs to be focused at the grassroots level, where we can tailor our messages to focus on the specific issues that matter to the population in each community; reinforcing and amplifying the far more important actions and words of the Brigades operating in these areas. At this level, we can also exploit local influencers with real credibility and visibility within the community. This grassroots approach to IO, compliments the Main Effort of COIN operations, which is at the Brigade and Battalion level, where the war is won individual by individual, street by street and community by community. The role of national and regional advertising should be to support the grassroots effort by focusing on those few issues that are common across

communities and by broadcasting successes achieved at the local level. This begs the question - why then are hundreds of millions of dollars being spent at the national level in Iraq, while many battalions and brigades operate with insufficient experienced IO personnel and resources? Artillery would never be concentrated at the Army or Corps level to the exclusion of lower units and neither should IO personnel and budgets. The key to IO success is to “think strategic but to act local”.

### **Effective Engagement - Actions Speak Louder than Words**

Effective IO is not simply about what we say it is far more about what we do. Our actions can say far more about who we are, what we want, and how we feel about the local population than any multimedia information campaign. Perhaps the greatest impact an IO professional can therefore have, is not in developing a kick-ass IO campaign or product but rather in assisting frontline commanders to develop and undertake combat and civil military operations that secure maximum positive influence with the local population; enhance trust in American and Iraqi government intentions; and discredit the arguments and actions of our adversaries. The author therefore strongly recommends that IO professionals deploy their intimate understanding of the local population to assist commanders to plan and conduct effective full spectrum operations designed to take and hold local support, rather than undermine it. This reality is no different in the commercial world. The greatest advertising campaign in the world will ultimately fail if the product it is promoting does not meet the needs of the market or fails to perform as promised. Ultimately a product must deliver to sell and no amount of “snake-oil” can change that essential dynamic. By focusing on actions as well as words in order to help shape combat and civil military operations, the IO professional can quickly work themselves out of a job as the actions of the units they support win and hold the hearts and minds of the local population.

### **Effective Engagement – Entertain as well as Inform**

Many IO products are frankly rather dull, in the same way that most domestic public service announcements while vital do not exactly inspire or excite. There is absolutely no reason why this should be the case, other than a lack of ambition on the part of the IO professional and/or a lack of trust from commanders. It is possible to both entertain and inform. Indeed if one does not entertain the audience is far more likely that they will tune out our messages. Humor and ridicule can be effective weapons to disarm an audience and make them more receptive to our ideas. It is also highly effective at discrediting our opponents. Drama has long been a tool to convey political messages to audiences who might otherwise be unwilling to listen. The use of poetry, music and songs are highly effective ways to energize target audiences and have been used in Arabic and Afghan culture for centuries to inform, criticize and debate. These methods also tend to be more effective for crossing cultural, religious, and generation boundaries delivering subtle implied messages. Whether it is a pop song, the insertion of a character in a soap opera, a comedy show, a “Made For TV” movie, or a poem - entertainment is often the best way to reach and impact any audience.

Certainly Western educated English speaking IO professionals are not going to be able to develop this type of programming themselves. But by working with local experts and vendors, it is possible to produce cost effective and culturally sensitive programs that will entertain and inform and do so in subtle ways that circumvent audience bias and preconceptions. Such subtle messaging is also more effective because it is “home grown” and properly respectful of cultural, family, and religious values, ensuring maximum impact with audiences that can easily detect and often dismiss non-locally developed messages and messengers.

### **Effective Engagement – Always Seek Independent Second Opinions**

Even where local vendors are used to develop culturally sensitive creative concepts and prototype products, all should still be independently tested with representative sample audiences. At a minimum, this should include focus groups drawn from the same demographics as those the product is aimed at. Ideally products should also be shown to larger test audiences, although security considerations may sometimes preclude this. The author strongly recommends that such research is not undertaken by the same team or vendor that produced the concept or prototype product. That is because it is very difficult for the creator to objectively review their own products and because occasionally some vendors will chose the reviewers and reviews most likely to favor their designs and products. Seeking independent second opinions from individuals or audiences as similar as possible to the selected target audience will ensure that a campaign theme or product stands the best chance of being understood and of resonating as desired. The test audience will tell the IO professional if a concept does or does not work as long as the review process is properly undertaken and independently managed.

### **Summary**

Of course the IO professional needs to follow the campaign approach defined in their doctrine and outlined in their manuals and training. However, there are still many pitfalls that are not always reflected in the manuals and in training, challenges that can undermine the efforts of the uninitiated or inexperienced operator to reach and impact an audience. In this article, the author has tried to highlight some of the most important ground truths issues that need to be understood when developing and deploying a campaign with recommendations for how to overcome these challenges. This should enable the IO operator to facilitate effective communications with the local population regardless of culture, ideology or ethnicity. In the fourth and concluding article of this series the author will focus on the most difficult task for the IO professional – the RELIABLE measurement of performance and effectiveness – some might say the “holy grail” of IO.