

**DEADLINE**  
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for *JFQ* Issue 48

**JFQ**  
**Dialogue**

Open Letter to *JFQ* Readers

*Joint Force Quarterly* is distributed to senior interagency leaders as well as to all flag officers, military Services, and combatant commands, and it is translated into several languages. The journal has increased in size 150 percent over the past year, and the number of private subscriptions is at a record level. *JFQ* owes its success to the high-quality manuscripts that National Defense University Press receives from national security professionals in and out of uniform. Thanks to the generous support of the National Defense University Foundation, three *JFQ* authors each year receive special recognition for articles of exceptional quality. Twenty professors from all senior military educational institutions convened on May 22–23 to judge articles from the July 2006 through April 2007 issues, and they awarded three \$1,000 cash prizes to the authors of the articles they deemed to be most influential. The winning authors will be acknowledged in the October issue of *Joint Force Quarterly*.

The *JFQ* staff would like to solicit manuscripts on specific subject areas in concert with future thematic focuses. The following topics are tied to submission deadlines for specific upcoming issues:

**September 1, 2007** (Issue 48, 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2008):  
The Long War  
Homeland Defense  
U.S. Northern Command

**December 1, 2007** (Issue 49, 2<sup>d</sup> quarter 2008):  
Focus on Air and Space Power  
U.S. Special Operations Command

**March 1, 2008** (Issue 50, 3<sup>d</sup> quarter 2008):  
Weapons of Mass Destruction  
Stability and Security Operations  
U.S. Central Command

**June 1, 2008** (Issue 51, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2008):  
Focus on Naval Power  
National Security Council

*JFQ* readers are typically subject matter experts who can take an issue or debate to the next level of application or utility. Quality manuscripts harbor the potential to save money and lives. When framing your argument, please focus on the *So what?* question. That is, how does your research, experience, or critical analysis improve the reader's professional understanding or performance? Speak to the implications from the operational to the strategic level of influence, and tailor the message for an interagency readership without using acronyms or jargon. Also, write prose, not terse bullets. Even the most prosaic doctrinal debate can be interesting if presented with care! Visit [ndupress.ndu.edu](http://ndupress.ndu.edu) to view our NDU Press Submission Guidelines. Share your professional insights, and improve national security.

Colonel David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.)  
Editor, *Joint Force Quarterly*  
[Gurneyd@ndu.edu](mailto:Gurneyd@ndu.edu)



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**The Long War  
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# Joint Doctrine Update

## Joint Chief of Staff J7 Joint Education and Doctrine Division

The joint doctrine development community continues its aggressive pace of publication revision. Among more than a dozen titles already signed this year, of most significance is the approval of the Capstone joint publication in the joint doctrine hierarchy. Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, recently signed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, provides the overarching, authoritative guidance for the employment of the Armed Forces. The importance of the Capstone publication cannot be overstated, particularly with its treatment of warfare and unity of effort.

“Foundations,” the first chapter of JP 1, captures for the first time in joint doctrine the intellectual framework surrounding traditional and irregular warfare. At the crux of this discussion with regard to the two types of warfare is the fundamental difference between them—the *strategic purpose*. Whereas traditional warfare aims to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies, irregular warfare seeks to gain legitimacy and influence over a relevant population.

JP 1, the consolidated product of its previous version and JP 0–2, *Unified Action Armed Forces*, also provides clarity with respect to the relationships between national strategic direction, unified action, and unity of effort. According to JP 1, *National Strategic Direction*—governed by the Constitution, Federal law, and U.S. Government policy regarding internationally recognized law—leads to unified action. JP 1 redefines *unified action* as the “synchronization, coordination and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.” *Coordination*, a word absent from the previous definition, acknowledges the lack of a hierarchical relationship between myriad organizations that may work together. Defense Department terminology no longer

recognizes the phrase *Unified Action Armed Forces*. Finally, JP 1 introduces the joint definition of *unity of effort*: “Coordination and cooperation toward common objectives, even if the participants are not necessarily part of the same command or organization—the product of successful unified action.” The exact wording of these definitions provides accuracy and precision to often confusing relationships (that is, does unity of effort lead to unified action, or vice versa?). Simply stated, national strategic direction leads to unified action; successful unified action produces unity of effort.

The revision of JP 1 followed shortly after the approval of the Keystone publications for personnel, operations, and planning (JPs 1–0, 3–0, and 5–0, respectively). With the projected approval of the revisions of the intelligence and logistics Keystone publications (JPs 2–0 and 4–0, respectively) anticipated for later this year, joint doctrine will remain relevant, consistent, and beneficial to the joint warfighter. These documents will guide the doctrine for their subordinate publications.

Publication revision must not be viewed as an endstate, but rather a starting point for common reference. The joint force—the combatant commands, Services, and Joint Staff—has an inherent responsibility to determine what fundamentally works best throughout the planning, preparation, execution, and assessment activities of operations. Capturing these best practices based on extant capabilities—the essence of joint doctrine—serves to increase the overall effectiveness of the U.S. military.

For access to joint publications, go to the Joint Doctrine, Education, and Training Electronic Information System Web site at <https://jdeis.js.mil> (.mil users only). For those without access to .mil accounts, please go to the Joint Electronic Library Web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine>.

### Joint Publications (JP) Revised, Calendar Year 2007

JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*

JP 1–04, *Legal Support to Military Operations*

JP 2–03, *Geospatial Intelligence Support to Joint Operations*

JP 3–01, *Countering Air and Missile Threats*

JP 3–03, *Doctrine for Joint Interdiction Operations*

JP 3–05.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Joint Special Operations Task Force Operations*

JP 3–07.3, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Peace Operations*

JP 3–07.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations (renumbered as JP 3–68)*

JP 3–13.1, *Electronic Warfare*

JP 3–15, *Joint Doctrine for Barriers, Obstacles, and Mine Warfare*

JP 3–16, *Multinational Operations*

JP 3–33, *Joint Task Force Headquarters*

JP 3–34, *Joint Engineer Operations*

JP 3–35, *Joint Deployment and Redeployment Operations*

JP 3–50, *Personnel Recovery*

JP 3–60, *Joint Doctrine for Targeting*

JP 3–07.3, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Peace Operations*

### Joint Publications Near Revision (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, Fiscal Year 2007)

JP 2–0, *Doctrine for Intelligence Support to Joint Operations*

JP 3–04, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Shipboard Helicopter Operations*

JP 3–07.4, *Joint Counterdrug Operations*

JP 3–26, *Homeland Defense*

JP 3–28, *Civil Support*

JP 3–63, *Joint Doctrine for Detainee Operations*

# Strategic Communication and National Security

By JAMES G. STAVRIDIS

*I don't know what the hell this [strategic communication] is that Marshall is always talking about, but I want some of it.*

—Attributed to Admiral Ernest King during World War II

Winston Churchill is said to have observed that the principal difference between management and leadership is communication. Effective communication requires the leaders of an organization to take an early and persistent role in deciding how ideas and decisions are shaped and delivered. Certainly in the national security context, a leader can improve the effects of operational and policy planning by ensuring that the communications implications of that planning are considered as early as possible in the process. If planning is done in this fashion, then it is likely that the communications associated with it will indeed be strategic in their effects.

Simply stated, the objective of strategic communication is to provide audiences with truthful and timely information that will influence them to support the objectives of the communicator. In addition to truthfulness and timeliness, the information must be delivered to the right audience in a precise way. This generalized approach can be applied to essentially any organization, to the Department of Defense (DOD) broadly,



Admiral James G. Stavridis, USN, is Commander, U.S. Southern Command.

and specifically to the individual nine combatant commands of the United States.

Our approach at U.S. Southern Command is to consider strategic communication as an enabling capability for our policy and planning decisions and actions; provide truthful information about those decisions or actions; communicate it in a timely and culturally sensible fashion; use messengers who are likely to be well received; measure the results of our efforts diligently (clearly our hardest challenge and greatest shortcoming); and adjust both message and method of delivery accordingly. In the Southern Command's region—32 countries and 13 territories including some 450 million people speaking 4 principal languages and dozens of dialects—our view is that nothing we do is more important than strategic communication. This is a part of the world, thankfully, where it appears highly unlikely that we will launch Tomahawk missiles. It is, however, an area where it is necessary to launch ideas, concepts, information, conferences, viewpoints, interviews, and the many other streams of data that constitute effective strategic communication. It is, in every sense, our “main battery” at U.S. Southern Command.

As Newt Gingrich, an astute student of strategic communication, has written, “Strategic Communication in a real-time worldwide information system is a branch of the art of war comparable to logistics or intelligence. It will require staffing, educating and practicing at about the same level of resources as intelligence or logistics to be successful.” It also will require the early and persistent involvement of commanders at all

levels. That is precisely our approach from our headquarters in Miami looking south, and we are working to add resources to this important—indeed, vital—aspect of our mission in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

In attempting to discover the right approach for strategic communication in the Southern Command's diverse region, we have examined a series of historical examples of strategic communication. Some of the more famous include the announcements surrounding the assassination of Julius Caesar in the first century CE, Abraham Lincoln's campaign to publicize the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Japanese Empire's “Economic Co-Prosperity Sphere” in the mid- to late 1930s. More recent examples of strategic communication that we have examined include the announcement of involuntary feeding of detainees at Guantanamo Bay; publicity for a humanitarian exercise in the Dominican Republic; and the cruise of the Navy's hospital ship, USNS *Mercy*, through the Pacific. Each of the recent case studies is worth thinking about in somewhat more depth as we consider an appropriate approach for the Southern Hemisphere.

## Case Studies

The first case study was largely a public relations challenge and required a response at the tactical level. A group of detainees in Guantanamo Bay's detention and interrogation facility began a large coordinated hunger strike on August 8, 2005. DOD policy is to always preserve the lives of the detainees, and, as a result, 43 hunger strikers were enterally fed, using U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons guidelines, which include use of a restraint chair and a very small diameter flexible rubber tube inserted through the nostril, down the throat, and into the stomach. A motion was filed in February 2006 alleging torture through the use of the restraint chair to assist in involuntary feedings.

Given the DOD policy of preserving life, the leadership view at Guantanamo Bay was that a detainee on a hunger strike requiring feeding clearly qualified as a lifesaving emergency. However, there was significant public outcry concerning the procedure, which we failed to anticipate. In particular, the use of a restraint chair—necessary to accommodate the procedure—was

categorized as “torture,” despite the fact that it is an entirely humane and common procedure in U.S. and other prison systems worldwide to preserve life.

The surprise negative press and false characterizations, which reinforced challenges to DOD detention operations, compelled the Department to conduct a reassessment of policies and procedures in order to counter the impression that the United States had something to hide. This campaign included a wide variety of tactical responses, which were orchestrated loosely out of the Pentagon. They included bringing a team of distinguished physicians to Guantanamo to observe the procedure; publishing articles on the process; emphasizing the lifesaving character of the operation and the common procedures used in accredited prisons; and sending representatives to conduct interviews with the media to describe the procedure in detail. The commander of the Joint Task Force, Rear Admiral Harry Harris, USN, had the procedure performed on himself so that he could correctly describe it and personally refute allegations of torture. While an initial challenge was apparent, particularly in not correctly predicting the response to the feeding techniques, DOD eventually turned the corner, and when publicity died down, the vast majority of hunger-striking detainees began eating again.

A second case study involved a humanitarian exercise (New Horizons) in the Dominican Republic in the spring of 2006. Troops from U.S. Southern Command were sent to participate in a series of joint endeavors with the Dominican armed forces to build clinics and dig wells. Unfortunately, our strategic communication plan was not well executed, and as the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “As the equipment and troops amassed over weeks with little explanation in the local media, suspicions deepened that the Americans were engaged in something more than a humanitarian mission.” As a result of not thinking through and executing a well-constructed strategic communication plan, our erstwhile effort actually created a negative backlash in the local media. We also need to link such events into 3-year plans for strategic communication, not treat each as an isolated event.

The third case study was an unqualified success and involved the strategic communication associated with the voyage

of the hospital ship USNS *Mercy* through Southeast Asian waters in 2006. The cruise was conceived as a follow-up to American assistance rendered during the tsunami crisis of late 2004 and early 2005, and the ship’s sailing a month later was designed to show continuing U.S. involvement, commitment, and presence in the region. During the course of the 60,000-ton ship’s cruise from May to September, the crew of nearly 700 (including many volunteers from international relief organizations) performed over \$30 million in services and goods transfers and saw over 200,000 patients. All of this was aggressively communicated using a detailed strategic communication plan. The onboard public affairs team, supplemented by people in each of the various ports of call, was able to have a measurable impact on the impressions Southeast Asians have about the United States.

### Communication Guidelines

Drawing on these three case studies, as well as many others, we have developed a series of principles that serve to guide strategic communication, with a focus on our own efforts in the Southern region.

*Tell the Truth.* The first principle is the simplest: always provide the truth to the audiences with whom you are communicating. Nothing will more quickly doom strategic communication to failure than even a single instance of falsehood. A strategic communication team can have superb messages, excellent messengers, a carefully crafted plan—yet all of it can fail if they are proven to be lying about anything. This has been demonstrated most often in the history of “damage control” types of strategic communication. Many political scandals, for example, tend to explode when revelations of lying to investigators after the fact emerge, as opposed to during or immediately after the initial malfeasance. The truth, throughout a program of strategic communication, constitutes absolute bedrock. Tell the truth, and emphasize that you do tell the truth. Over the long run, it is unquestionably the best approach.

*Have a Good Message.* All the brilliant strategic communication in the world will not sell a bad message, as the Japanese Empire discovered with the East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. A brutal, extractive regime that brought little or no benefit to the “partner” nations could not be dressed

up as anything other than imperialism. Again, this seems quite simple, but in practice, there are many in the world of strategic communication who believe that a bad message can be sold effectively. It cannot. The strategic message must resonate with the audience because it shares appropriate human values, such as liberty, justice, honesty, economic improvement, security, fair treatment, and so forth.

Naturally, there are times when the message is, in fact, bad news. The world will always be full of mistakes, disasters, failures, and acts of incompetence. But when that happens, the effort must be made not to spin the truth, but rather to tell what happened honestly, let people know truthfully how bad it was, apologize when warranted, pledge improvement, and outline measures taken to prevent reoccurrence. Torie Clark, in her excellent book on strategic communication, describes this as “not trying to put lipstick on a pig.”

*Understand the Audience.* This is the constantly rediscovered golden rule of strategic communication. Too many communicators develop plans in a vacuum without spending the necessary time and resources to understand the nuances of the audiences to whom they are pitching the product. A classic example of this is in Central and South America and the Caribbean, where one message definitely does not fit all audiences. Can there be two more different countries in the world than enormous Portuguese-speaking Brazil and tiny English-speaking St. Kitts? Or more different than Spanish-speaking, economically strong Chile and poverty-stricken French-/Creole-speaking Haiti? In each country or territory, to each group of people, during each particular season, the audience is different, and therefore the messages must be evaluated and tailored with the diverse qualities of the receiver in mind.

*Pull the Trigger Promptly.* This seems self-evident, but all too frequently an excellent plan comes to naught because we are unable to execute in a timely manner. Do not let “perfect” become the enemy of “very good.” In other words, develop a reasonably good plan fast and execute it. Otherwise, it is far too easy to end up “back on your heels” in the world of the perpetual news cycle.

*Think at the Strategic Level.* Public affairs and strategic communication are two very different things. A strategic communi-

cator must stay at the strategic level and not dip down to the tactical level represented by public affairs. Strategic communication consists of a wide variety of tools and processes within a command such as U.S. Southern Command, to include public affairs, protocol, legal, political-military analysis, medical outreach, engineer and construction support, logistics, personnel, and many more. Each has a role to play in effective strategic communication at the tactical or operational level, but none of them is a substitute for a strategic plan operating at the level of the entire theater, across time, space, language, and culture. At the strategic level, the intellectual firepower of the command must be brought most distinctly to bear.

*Organize at the Operational Level to Enable at the Tactical.* For a combatant commander, the place to “organize” strategic communication is at the operational level. This means that strategic communication plans must be developed that can operate across subregional sections of the command area. In U.S. Southern Command, we divide the region into four subregions: Andean Ridge (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela); the Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay); Central America; and the Caribbean. By organizing in this fashion, we can better tailor messages, maximize resources, find



synergies, and move out on the strategic plan that we have developed for the region as a whole.

After organizing at the operational level, we try to execute smoothly. Tactically, in the sense of strategic communication for U.S. Southern Command, we are operating at the individual national level. This is where all the components of the strategic communication plan must fit together, and most particularly our plan must be fully coordinated and synched up with the Embassy’s efforts. The

tactical level is where public affairs and all the associated efforts are linked together and execution of the plan occurs—all of it fast, furious, and energetic. This is not the cerebral part of the operation, but rather the place where instant response, dynamic creativity, and good language skills matter most.

*Measure Results.* So many strategic communication plans flounder because the implementers, thrilled with having developed and “sold” the plan, are completely consumed with execution—but then end up not doing what is the most important single step: measuring results. The absolute key

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*For a combatant commander, the place to “organize” strategic communication is at the operational level*

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to effective communication is rolling out a plan, organizing it widely, executing energetically, and then measuring results. There are obviously many means of doing so, but a few crucial ones include polling by reputable local firms and backing up the polls with an international polling firm; contacting individual trusted and sensible interlocutors for candid assessments; monitoring articles in journals, newspapers, and other publications; sampling Web content, including blogs; observing television and radio coverage; and working with a local public relations firm. We are in the infant state of this at U.S. Southern Command but are working hard to improve because it is the critical path for achieving results.

*Adjust Fire.* No strategic communication plan is perfect from conception. All must be put into practice and adjusted as time goes by. A way to approach measurement is to adopt a short-, medium-, and long-term view. Short term is immediate reactions, say 24 to 48 hours. Medium-term measurement is after 30 to 45 days. And finally, long-term measurement must occur at the 1-year point. After each of these measurement windows, the plan should be evaluated and recast, after reacting to what is working and what is not.

*Add Spice.* Strategic communication should not be boring. A look at the “strategic communication” of the Cold War by both sides shows a pattern of rote, predictable, and almost entirely ineffective patterns of communication. It was not until late in the Cold War with the arrival of the Reagan

administration that spice was added to the diet with strategic communication tactics (for example, describing the Soviet Union as the “evil empire” and President Reagan ordering, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall”). When looking at successful strategic communication plans, industry is often a good guide. The performance of Chrysler Corporation under Lee Iacocca provides a wonderful example of a plan perfectly executed. To communicate his vision, Iacocca began with a simple message that inspired customers and employees alike: “Quality, hard work, and commitment—The

stuff America is made of. Our goal is to be the best. What else is there? If you can find a better car, buy it!”

Chrysler’s remarkable turnaround resulting from Iacocca’s leadership shows that following each of the principles above—from having a truthful plan to constantly measuring and adding spice—is the best approach. In the case of U.S. Southern Command, we are constantly seeking new ways to describe the benefits of partnering with the United States in our areas of expertise (for example, military-to-military relations, counternarcotics, antimuggling). These can range from new techniques (use of unmanned vehicles and subsurface surveillance) to better packaged training for officers and soldiers of individual countries back in the United States. Mix it up!

*Steady Pressure.* Very seldom do strategic communication plans succeed overnight. Just as careers of individuals take time to build to fruition, a good strategic communication plan needs steady pressure over a significant period to bear fruit. In U.S. Southern Command, we have been working hard over the long term to make improvements across the board in reducing human rights violations by military forces in a region with a long tradition of such problems. This is a strategic communication plan that takes a long time, sometimes generations, to fulfill. It includes sending key officers and enlisted leaders to schools in the United States; our leadership giving speeches and writing articles on the subject; hosting regional conferences, often including international

human rights groups; and a myriad of other initiatives. It is gradually bearing fruit, but there will be setbacks. The key is applying steady pressure.

*Bursts of Energy.* The analog to steady pressure, of course, is bursts of energy. In any strategic communication plan, there will be moments when it is opportune to hit with bursts of energy. Such a moment might be immediately before or after an international conference or a national election; it might occur following a natural disaster; it could be on the anniversary of a particular event. A creative strategic planner is constantly looking for the right moment to come in high and hard with a burst technique. Such moments become efficient ways to increase “bang for the buck” of a particular event, speech, or other strategic communication resource.

*Accepting Defeat and Moving On.* Some strategic communication battles are unwinnable. There will be moments when no matter how effective the plan, the message is not going to have any effect. This can occur for a wide variety of reasons, generally when the audience is simply unwilling to listen to anything at all. For example, when the Persian empire sought to invade Greece in 300 BCE, the Persian emperor Darius crafted a clever strategic communication plan that sought to divide the Greek city-states and offered reasonably benign terms to any state willing to sign on with the Persians. But the Greeks were utterly devoted to their nascent form of democracy and were unreceptive, leading to war. Despite having a rational message, a fairly good series of messengers, and a coherent strategy, Darius was unable to find an outcome other than war. And when he was eventually defeated by a coalition of the Greek city-states, he was wise enough to turn his attentions to the east and move on. So it must be, occasionally, in the world of strategic planning.

*Knowing When You Win.* Sometimes the hardest thing for any strategic planner is not accepting defeat but rather recognizing victory. As a general rule, “winning” in the world of strategic communication is never clean and seldom obvious. If your charter is to convince the populace of a given region that democracy and liberty are important values, it will not suddenly be obvious that you have succeeded. Tipping points are often hard to spot. But gradually, the benchmark measurements should turn in the right

direction, media outlets should repeat messages, and trends should begin to turn. At such times, a determination must be made as to whether it is time to back out and let the audience find its own way forward, apply a final burst of energy, or continue steady pressure. It is an art, not a science.

### Recommendations

In addition to the principles above, there are four final recommendations worth considering as we approach strategic communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

First, strategic communication is the ultimate team sport. It must be done as part of a joint, interagency, and commercial system. It does no good whatsoever to have a perfect strategic communication plan that is ultimately contradicted by other U.S. Government agencies, as—unfortunately—is often the case. Each plan must be vetted properly and hopefully become a combined effort. It should take into account what U.S. private industry is doing in a given country or region so that inherent contractions between public and private institutions do not undermine the entire effort. It must be crafted in a sensible, collaborative, collegial way and done in an appropriate voice.

Second, at least for strategic communication that goes beyond the shores of the United States (a safe assumption for virtually everything we do in this arena), the international community must be considered and often consulted. In other words, the impact on individual countries and international organizations should be considered, and—if possible—they should be part of the plan. In particular, international organizations have resources that can be used in execution and even in planning, as they were, for example, in the voyage of the *Mercy* and the Pakistani earthquake relief effort. Likewise, little can be done effectively in a foreign country without the cooperation of the host nation and regional organizations. Often, they can contribute to strategic messaging and should be consulted in many instances. While there are clearly exceptions, such consultations and cooperation can frequently pay enormous dividends.

Third, as we develop and execute our strategic communication plans, we should ask the simple question: Who are the thinkers? It is not inherently obvious who is “good” at strategic communication. Many commands, including U.S. Southern

Command, have hired individuals and sometimes commercial consulting firms to participate. We can find thousands of such entities by Googling “strategic communication.” But each strategic plan and each organization—and indeed each time a plan needs to be developed—may need a different set of thinkers. So look around the organization and even outside it, especially to non-U.S. sources of input and criticism, for advice, execution, measurement, and judgment. Also, recognize that the “strategic communication director” is more like the conductor of a band than an expert on a given instrument. Moreover, give the director of strategic communication unfettered access to the commander. At U.S. Southern Command, our director of strategic communication attends the daily morning standup with the commander, interacts constantly with the senior leadership of the command, and is a prime mover in every sense in our organization.

Fourth, and finally, we in the business of national security must work together to arrive at a shared understanding of what constitutes strategic communication in an international context. This is an effort that must involve practitioners at the Department of Defense, Department of State, and indeed at all Cabinet organizations and national agencies engaged in international strategic communication on behalf of the United States. It is also an effort that can be informed by those in private industry who work in this milieu.

In the end, working in strategic communication for national security is a bit like working in a laboratory trying to find a cure for cancer. There are many false starts, mistakes, and incorrect leads. Resources are often difficult to obtain, especially because it is often hard to show prime results. Steady pressure is generally the right solution, and occasionally a true burst of energy can make great strides. There is unlikely to be a perfect single-point solution, but one should expect incremental progress, measured in years, and only a series of partial palliatives obtained along the way. But it is all in a worthy cause, the work is fascinating, and in the end, the efforts of the strategic communicator can be of enormous benefit to the national security of the United States, especially in the emerging complex world of this unsettled 21<sup>st</sup> century. **JFQ**

# “Deconfusing” Lethal and Kinetic Terms

By KARL E. WINGENBACH and DONALD G. LISENBEE, JR.

It is time to “deconfuse” ourselves concerning the words *lethal* and *kinetic*. The joint force—in both its doctrine and concepts communities—must not only adopt standard definitions and usages of these terms but also achieve a common understanding of the ideas *behind* the terms. As the joint force continues to advance its doctrinal and conceptual language beyond today’s environment, we find ourselves searching for words to describe the ideas, actions, and consequences necessary for complex operations where both lethal and nonlethal methods must be skillfully intertwined.

The use of the words *kinetic* and *nonkinetic* has proliferated beyond the merely colloquial into formal concepts and doctrinal literature. Unfortunately, use of these terms has been inconsistent and ill defined without a proper foundation built on Defense Department usage.

A standard dictionary defines *kinetic* as “of, relating to, or produced by motion.” Our military will often redefine words to provide clarity or specificity to our usage; we make certain words part of our jargon. Common examples include “operation” or “maneuver.” These definitions, however, rarely contradict accepted usage. First used as shorthand for any bomb or bullet, the use of “kinetic” evolved, somewhat logically, to mean any lethal action. However, the

converse, “nonkinetic,” does not follow the same logic. *Nonkinetic* denotes inaction or lack of motion. Clearly, this is not the intent of those who would classify, for example, psychological operations as nonkinetic. There is a great deal of action, motion, and effort to the deliberate, successful use of psychological operations against an adversary. Our use of the term nonkinetic is more likely an attempt to describe actions that do not intentionally or normally have lethal consequences. The imprecision that has evolved is confusing and not helpful to military art.

Kinetic and nonkinetic are not good replacements for words describing and differentiating lethal and nonlethal actions. We should discontinue the indiscriminate use of the word *nonkinetic* when we really mean *nonlethal*. Lethal and nonlethal are clearly defined, objectively understood terms.<sup>1</sup>

It is generally understood what is meant by application or use of lethal force; it is a phrase that has specific legal implications in the military and in law enforcement. Lethal weapons can have both kinetic and nonkinetic properties. Moreover, kinetic energy weapons are not necessarily lethal (for example, a rubber bullet). Correct usage can be determined by a simple two-part test:

1. If it is desirable to differentiate between kinetic energy or explosive weapons

and those that can disrupt, degrade, or disable without a physically destructive effect, then kinetic and nonkinetic can be used as shorthand for kinetic energy and nonkinetic energy weapons. Weapons are classified based on the source of energy that the weapon delivers to a target or the method of lethality. This point deserves elaboration; there are families of weapons:<sup>2</sup>

- kinetic energy (bullets, sabots)
- potential energy (grenades, bombs, nuclear weapons)
- directed energy (lasers, particle beams, high-power microwave)
- chemical (not to be confused with chemical explosives, which are part of the potential energy family)
- biological.

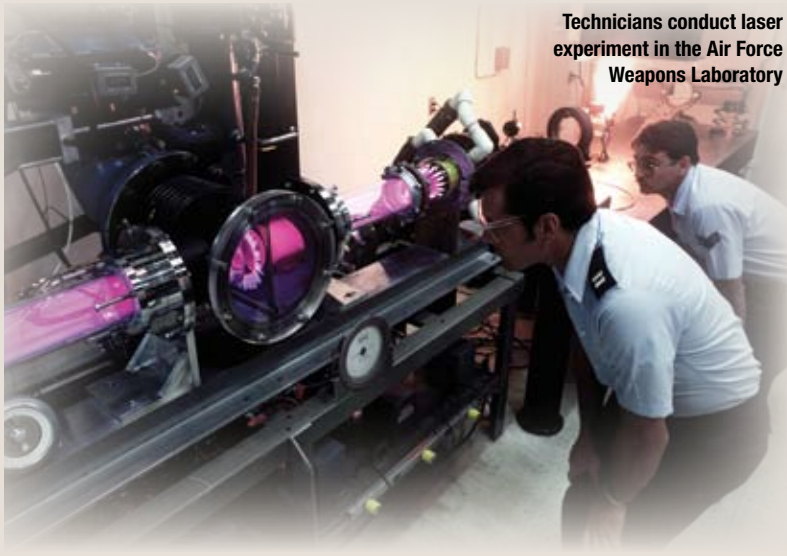
So nonkinetic would include everything *except* kinetic energy weapons. There is little doubt, though, that the users of nonkinetic understand that meaning. The use of the word *kinetic* when referring to weapons could apply to potential energy weapons because they have kinetic terminal properties (that is, the blast creates fragments with kinetic energy). Also, some directed energy weapons, such as lasers and particle beams, deliver kinetic energy to a target and have physically destructive effects, so they could be considered kinetic.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to band kinetic energy, potential energy, and some directed energy weapons together and call everything else nonkinetic.<sup>4</sup>

2. If it is desirable to differentiate between lethal, physically destructive actions and nonlethal actions, then lethal and nonlethal should be used. *Lethal actions* include the entire range of offensive military operations (including kinetic weapons and some nonkinetic weapons, as discussed above) designed to result in the destruction of the target.<sup>5</sup> *Nonlethal actions* include psychological operations, some elements of information operations, civil affairs operations, and some unconventional warfare or foreign internal defense activities, among others. Lethal and non-



Soldier displays rubber bullets, used for riot control

Lieutenant Colonel Karl E. Wingenbach, USA, is Senior Joint Doctrine Developer in the Joint and Allied Doctrine Division at the Army Capabilities Integration Center. Colonel Donald G. Lisenbee, Jr., USA, is Chief of the Joint and Army Concepts Division.



Technicians conduct laser experiment in the Air Force Weapons Laboratory

U.S. Air Force

lethal can apply to actions, capabilities, or effects. It is commonly understood that one can use lethal force in a nonlethal manner. The fact that a lethal weapon can be used in a nonlethal way does not change its lethality. Conversely, it is possible to apply lethal force with an instrument (such as an entrenching tool) that is designed for nonlethal purposes. Since the definition of *nonlethal weapons* includes the statement that they are designed to “minimize fatalities,” the potential to use nonlethal weapons in a lethal manner is understood.

As we attempt to describe our capabilities in the most clear, correct, and concise manner possible, we should ask, “What is the intent or purpose of the action?” If the intent is to influence an adversary through a combination of lethal and nonlethal means, it is not essential to describe whether the action or capability is kinetic or nonkinetic. In today’s, and even in tomorrow’s, operational environment, commanders will continue to determine objectives and decide how they want to achieve those objectives using lethal or nonlethal means. Will the commander tell his staff, “Don’t kill them, but use some kinetics”? Or, conversely, “Kill the scoundrels, but don’t use kinetics”? Doubtful—it makes little sense. How, then, does it help to have a list of capabilities categorized into kinetic and nonkinetic bins?

Clearly, our military language has room for colloquialisms. However, in formal writing or military orders, it is important to be clear, concise, and accurate. Therefore, when speaking of actions or effects, use the

terms *lethal* and *nonlethal*. When describing weapons and ammunition classifications, continue to use the terms *kinetic* and *nonkinetic*. The proper use of terminology, including the preferred lethal and nonlethal over the less precise kinetic and nonkinetic, reduces the ambiguity in professional writing and, more importantly, helps “deconfuse” us as we attempt to describe the range of military actions and capabilities. **JFQ**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Joint Publication 1–02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, November 30, 2004) for the definition of nonlethal weapons.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Naval Academy, *Fundamentals of Navy Weapon Systems*, chapter 12, “Military Explosives.”

<sup>3</sup> Without movement and mass, there is no kinetic energy ( $E_k = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ ). Projectiles, fragments, and particles have mass and can generate kinetic energy. Waves (for example, radar, microwave, sound) do not have mass and cannot generate kinetic energy. Photons (lasers) are in the middle; they are packets of electromagnetic radiation without mass, but they clearly deliver energy to the target and are technically kinetic.

<sup>4</sup> Nonkinetic does not imply nonlethal; obviously, directed energy, chemical, and biological weapons can be quite lethal. Also, kinetic would not equate to lethal; rubber bullets, for example, are nonlethal kinetic munitions.

<sup>5</sup> It is not necessary to kill a person for something to be considered lethal.

**To the Editor:** After reading the Special Feature on U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) in the last issue of *Joint Force Quarterly* (issue 45, 2<sup>d</sup> quarter), I wanted to share my own experiences and insight as the foreign policy advisor (POLAD) to the USEUCOM commander.

All five geographic combatant commands have senior foreign policy advisors who assist in facilitating continuous and effective interface for their senior military commanders with the Washington, DC, interagency community. As a career diplomat in the Foreign Service, I have spent my professional lifetime serving the United States through diplomacy. My fundamental objective is to offer the interagency point of view and to assist the command with its expanding responsibilities.

Despite troubling and persistent setbacks in the international arena of public opinion, Americans must continue to try to influence events with soft power aspects of U.S. strength, particularly in the USEUCOM area of responsibility. In many situations, this kind of approach promises to be more effective than the traditional “hard power” aspects of our lethal force projection capabilities. Whatever the appropriate course of action, maintaining a mix of capabilities is absolutely essential across the spectrum of conflict and will mandate that all U.S. Government agency actions be synchronized. The expression “one team, one fight” is more than just a slogan.

Emphasizing our focus on hearts and minds does not redefine warfare, but rather enhances and optimizes the options for response. Among the most critical questions asked at USEUCOM are those that relate to long-term engagement—where and how we apply limited resources to shape a battle and favorably determine its outcome. There is clear recognition at this headquarters that certain regions of our area of responsibility demand increasing attention. In these locations (many of which are in Africa), responding to the multifaceted challenges of fragile states, poverty, disease, corruption, helplessness, and alienation may help prevent the rise of extremism and ultimately avoid the necessity of future traditional combat actions.

Challenges such as those faced in Africa mandate a U.S. command structure that directly and explicitly oversees engagement there. Moreover, as a result of Africa’s



unique environment, this new structure most likely will deviate from traditional military staff models and more effectively capitalize on interagency expertise and resources. USEUCOM already recognizes the need for this interagency approach and is at the threshold of substantial changes. In the near future, a new command will be created to deal more directly and effectively with the problems facing Africa.

With almost 12 million square miles of territory and 800 million inhabitants, Africa is a continent of extraordinary human and natural resource wealth. A number of its 53 countries are considered developing democracies, but these nations are also challenged by economic, social, and health problems that defy purely military solutions and call for a new and more integrated U.S. Government approach. All Americans are filled with a sense of democratic freedom and dignity for human rights. Acting in the spirit of brotherhood and partnering to share our common values to live in a free society is the essential message that can be delivered by U.S. military personnel working alongside the Department of State Foreign Service. The notion is to make available the correct set of tools to address the multiple, complex, and varied problems across so huge a continent.

However, as if Africa did not offer enough challenges, Eastern and Western Europe along with Russia also face problems and uncertainties. Significant terrorist attacks have taken place in major European capitals. Demographic trends, immigration, and the resulting backlash have brought concerns for cultural clashes and intolerance to the forefront. Resurgent nationalism and religious extremism have been unforeseen outgrowths of globalization. Finally, USEUCOM must be sensitive to the competing and often divergent requirements of emerging democracies in the Caucasus. Considered collectively, the scale and complexities of these disparate international challenges appear daunting and certainly defy simplistic solutions. Fortunately, a fully integrated U.S. Government interagency response offers a new approach and a promise of long-term success.

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One of the potential keys to this interagency response will be the POLADs at combatant commands. With a heritage of service that stretches back to World War II, these Foreign Service officers have long brought multiple capabilities to the senior military officers they advise. Schooled in the nuanced art of diplomacy, and often equipped with specialized regional expertise and foreign language skills, they have succeeded precisely because of their ability to examine strategic issues from political dimensions and to bring the Department of State point of view to bear on regional problems.

Also key have been the advisors' abilities to build relationships, mitigate interdepartmental confusion, and harmonize the commanders' intentions. Almost one-third of current POLADs have served as U.S. Ambassadors and have developed skills in orchestrating interagency constituencies and resources. Moreover, as civilian contractors assume a larger and larger role in U.S. national security policy implementation, POLADs are positioned to facilitate interaction. Changes in the nature of the threat mandate the need for more interagency dialogue.

As effective as the POLAD can be in advising the commander regarding the employment of the instruments of power, it is important to understand the limitations and boundaries. Foreign policy advisors do not, in the strictest sense, act as Ambassadors to a specific country and cannot proceed as if they were. Accordingly, their facilitation, communication, and synchronization of State Department policy across numerous countries in the combatant command often present considerable challenges. Similarly, foreign policy advisors are not military staff officers, although they and their support staff are frequently and appropriately tasked to illuminate and evaluate political and foreign policy dimensions of various operations, programs, or initiatives. The POLAD's office does not generally provide action officers or planners. Organized to handle and deconflict more routine staff coordination activities at the headquarters, this function should be considered separate and distinct. To be most beneficial, the foreign policy advisor

and associated office staff should remain an independent advisor team reporting directly to the command leadership. Traveling with the commander and sitting beside him at meetings with foreign heads of state and military officials present an integrated U.S. Government team. An experienced POLAD can provide valuable input during diplomatic meetings. For a diplomat, the key decisive engagement occurs most often at that critical meeting with foreign decisionmakers.

The major question addressed by this office is how to bring added value and enhanced mission effectiveness to USEUCOM. Senior American defense officials have long engaged with the changing conditions of the strategic environment, under terms that might best be described as operational uncertainty. The latest Quadrennial Defense Review underscores the notion that within the next 10 years, American forces are likely to be needed in areas of the world where they are not engaged currently. This being the case—and considering that the mission is so broad—the Department of Defense cannot accomplish the task alone. In Europe, Africa, and elsewhere, success ultimately depends on partnerships and unity of effort.

Ultimately, eliminating transnational terrorism, restoring stability to troubled regions of the world, and ensuring the future security of the United States and its allies will require well managed and thorough integration of our primary elements of national influence with those of our allies and friends. Considering the challenges facing us today, foreign policy advisors at the geographic combatant commands should be an increasingly vital asset. By building and strengthening relationships between the military commander and other governmental agencies, particularly the Department of State, a broad range of interagency tools may be effectively brought to bear to address the complex and significant challenges we face in every combatant command area of responsibility.

—Ambassador Mary C. Yates,  
Political Advisor to the Commander,  
U.S. European Command

**To the Editor:** Working my way through *JFQ* 45 (2<sup>d</sup> quarter, 2007), I came upon a jarring sentence on page 30. Concerning the internal political situation in Nigeria, Lieutenant Commander Patrick Paterson, USN, in “Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea,” writes:

*According to some U.S. officials, the worst-case scenario for America would be the emergence of a northern Muslim general or politician into the presidency, either democratically or through unconstitutional means. The United States could then find itself facing a Muslim population—nearly three times that of Iraq—in control of vast energy resources. Such a situation could result in U.S. military intervention on a much larger scale than in Iraq.*

There’s no indication in the sentence, or the surrounding context, that the author’s concern is with the emergence of an Islamist, jihadist, or otherwise extreme Muslim faction controlling Nigeria’s oil—as written, he seems concerned that control of these resources by Muslims of any description would be a threat potentially justifying U.S. military intervention.

Given our relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates, professing the Muslim religion does not disqualify a government from playing a longstanding and relatively stable role as an American energy supplier. I have a difficult time believing our government would choose to intervene by force to overturn the results of a democratic Nigerian election that returned a Muslim as president. Naturally, our Islamist enemies would like the world to believe that the United States will support our “coreligionists” in places such as Nigeria at the expense of Muslims, and they would be happy to seize on any evidence that we do in fact harbor anti-Muslim intentions, such as the portion of the article cited above.

There are a number of scenarios that might argue for U.S. intervention in the Gulf of Guinea, but a Muslim’s assuming the presidency of Nigeria, in itself, is probably not one of them.

—LtCol Matthew L. Jones, USMC  
Quantico, Virginia



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These competitions were held in late May at Fort Lesley J. McNair and judged by 20 professors from the senior service schools and colleges. The winners have been posted on the NDU Press Web site at:

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*The next issue of JFQ (Issue 47, October 1, 2007)  
will include the winning entries  
from the essay competitions as a special feature.*

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