

Contesting the Information Battlespace

By JOHN C. KOZIOL

It is clear from the events of this decade that we live in a world filled with global security challenges that will not go away—from terrorism to countering weapons of mass destruction to nation-states bent on challenging peace and stability. The battlespace for dealing with these challenges extends in many directions. One of the most important is the information battlespace, where hearts and minds are either won or lost. Within U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), the commander, General James Cartwright, sounds the alarm that we must challenge adversaries in contesting this battlespace: “Our enemies know how to operate there. We’ve got to be able to do it, too. We’ve got to contest that battlespace!”

With an incredibly dynamic operations tempo, commanders of joint force commands (JFCs) employ information operations (IO) and related capabilities to contest this information battlespace. IO capabilities range from technical warfare means such as computer network operations and electronic warfare to more cognitive capabilities such as psychological operations and defense support to public diplomacy. Key to successful information operations is the presentation and integration of these capabilities within an overall campaign plan and their synchronization with related activities of the U.S. Government.

For its part and based on its unified command plan tasking, U.S. Strategic Command works to grow IO capabilities for commanders and to pull together IO capabilities across plans, regions, and functions. USSTRATCOM and joint force commanders turn to the command’s Joint Information Operations Warfare Command (JIOWC) to integrate IO capabilities.

Headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, the JIOWC accomplishes its mission by growing and sustaining qualified IO experts to support each geographic combatant commander, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), and the USSTRATCOM joint functional component commands (JFCCs). Additionally, over the course of the past 2 years, the JIOWC has stood up four capability



55th Signal Company (Jane Laroque)

Above: Members of V Corps IO Working Group discuss critical missions at Camp Virginia, Kuwait. Right: IO officer conducts checks during emergency response exercise



U.S. Army (Randy Opea)

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centers to enable electronic warfare, specialized IO planning, operations security, and strategic communication support planning. Support to strategic communications, in particular, is an area that the JIOWC is focusing on at the behest of commanders.

Beyond its San Antonio-based experts and capability centers, the JIOWC partners with Service IO organizations and other capability centers, such as USSTRATCOM’s JFCC for Network Warfare and USSOCOM’s Joint Psychological Support Element, to bring the best capabilities forward into IO and strategic communications planning.

As a presenter of global force capability, the JIOWC is focused on moving more and more IO knowledge “to the edge” for best supporting JFC commanders. Key to this effort is increasing the understanding of what IO and related strategic communications assets are available and ready to support JFC planning and operations. Rather than always sending experts forward to commanders in the field, the JIOWC is developing portals and asset visibility approaches to move knowledge rapidly to the commander and warfighter. Working with geographic and functional planners, JIOWC experts then

help to match available assets to requirements, develop courses of action, and deconflict requirements.

Critical to building confidence in the area of information operations is an ability to predict and assess effects. For its part, the JIOWC is again partnering with others in the Defense Department, the U.S. Government, and the commercial sector to pull together best practices for understanding the information battlespace and to target audiences operating in this space. In developing metrics for this effort, the JIOWC is working with planners to predict and measure effects. Modeling, simulations, polling, foreign media analysis, and red teaming are all activities that feed this assessment methodology and support measurement of local, regional, and transregional activities.

In looking back over the past year, General Cartwright notes, “We made progress in growing Information Operations into core military competencies. We will continue to develop these and related Strategic Communication planning capabilities to ensure that all Joint Force Commanders gain and maintain the information advantage over our adversaries through the entire spectrum of regional and trans-regional engagement. As we move beyond today, the JIOWC will be a critical enabler for all JFCs to contest this information battlespace.” JFQ

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