ISAF THEATRE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

REFERENCES

A. SG (2007)0771 SECGEN Report to NAC "Enhancing NATO's Strategic Communications" 7 NOV 07

B. SACEUR OPLAN 10302 (REV 1) 4 MAY 06

C. ACO Strategic Communications Directive 95-2 (Draft) MAR 08

D. SHAPE Higher Headquarters Strategic Communications Plan for NATO's Engagement in Afghanistan.   Draft V2. SEP 08

E. COM JFCB OPLAN 30382 (REV 3) 7 JAN 08

INTRODUCTION

1. This defines the ISAF Theatre Strategic Communications Strategy and lay out Ends, Ways and Means for its successful execution.

2. Winning in Afghanistan is building Afghan capacity, competence and credibility to an end state of adequate security, stability and popular support for GIRoA. ISAF is committed to a comprehensive approach to winning through improving security, supporting the extension of Afghan governance, and supporting the social and economic development of Afghanistan.

3. Winning will not be achieved by defeating the enemies of Afghanistan in battle alone. Victory in the information war is as, and possibly more, important. A coherent and focused Theatre Strategic Communications Strategy must therefore underpin each of the lines of effort (security, governance, and development) to help gain public support and confidence in Afghan government institutions, gain broad public support for our common objectives, and undermine support to the enemies of a viable Afghanistan state.

4. Afghan public support and confidence in government institutions is critical to a viable Afghan nation-state. Afghan public and international public support of ISAF's mission is critical for legitimacy, freedom of action, and the resources required to win. International and regional public support is needed to improve regional cooperation and dissuade actions to de-stabilize Afghanistan. Finally, denial of support and freedom of action to our opponents are critical to undermining those who threaten Afghanistan's stability.

5. If done properly, coherently and aggressively, StratCom will be an enabler and a force-multiplier of ISAF operations and those of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) and other partners.

6. **Definition**. The ISAF definition of StratCom, which has been aligned with the existing draft Allied Command Operations definition, is as follows:

    In concert with other political and military actors and with higher headquarters, Strategic Communications advances ISAF's aims and objectives through the coordinated use of Public Affairs (PA), Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Information Operations (INFO OPS), and Key Leader Engagement (KLE)

ENDS

7. **Objectives**. The objectives of ISAF StratCom are to:

• Build and strengthen public confidence in Afghan institutions.

• Maintain Afghan public support for ISAF.

• Improve commitment and responsiveness of GIRoA to Afghan public.

• Maintain and strengthen public support of contributing nations' domestic audiences for the mission.

• Undermine support for the insurgency (and other threats to stability).

• Encourage acceptance and cooperation across the Afghan neighbourhood for the mission.

8. **Target Audiences**. ISAF StratCom target audiences[1] are therefore defined as:

• The Afghan population, including refugees and Diasporas.

• GIRoA elected and appointed leaders at all levels.

• Domestic audiences within troop contributing nations (TCN) and major donor nations and organizations.[2]

• The insurgents (and others who threaten stability).

• The Afghan neighbourhood, meaning both bordering nations and nations with significant influence in the region.

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9. ISAF StratCom objectives will be addressed through the campaign effects identified in the COMISAF Operational Plan 38302. While ISAF StratCom may identify additional effects related to StratCom audiences, these supporting effects will be nested and not separate from the campaign effects.

10. **Effects**. ISAF StratCom supporting effects and master themes and messages have been developed for each of the campaign effects (listed in the table below) and are detailed in the StratCom Effects Matrix. The StratCom Effects Matrix is maintained by Information Coordination Branch and disseminated as revised. ISAF StratCom is a lead means to achieve campaign effect "ISAF Maintains Public Acceptance," while it supports other ISAF or partner actions to achieve the remaining effects.

Effect	Title	LOP
	Primary	Security
Effect 1	Insurgency Defeated	
Effect 2	ANSF Provides a Secure Environment	
Effect 3	ISAF Maintains Public Acceptance	
Effect 4	Narcotics-Insurgency Nexus is Broken	

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[1] Target audiences are further refined in development of specific messages and StratCom activities, which differentiate between leaders (political, military, tribal, religious, business), key influencers, focused groups, national publics, as well as different threat elements.

[2] This will be primarily achieved through engagement in-theatre with media and key leaders. External engagement will remain the primary responsibility of NATO HQ, SHAPE and JFCB.

Effect	Title		LOP
	Integrating		Cross-cutting
Effect 10	Security, Governance, and Development Activity in Support of Afghanistan is Coordinated and Aligned in Support of the ANDS.		
Effect 11	Afghan People Perceive a Sense of Progress		
	Supporting		
Effect 5	GIRoA Establishes and Upholds the Rule of Law		Governance
Effect 6	GIRoA Combats Government Corruption		

Effect	Title	LOP
Effect 7	GIRoA Continues to Extend Effective Authority Across Afghanistan	
Effect 8	Afghan People Benefit from Improvements in Health, Education, Water, and Electricity.	Development
Effect 9	Afghan Economy Benefits from Development of Roads, Agriculture, Employment and Industry.	

11. **Principles**. In prosecuting the ISAF StratCom Strategy ISAF must compete directly with the insurgents' propaganda; it must also compete for space within the information market. This demands a proactive and assertive approach; we must fight the information war as relentlessly as we fight the physical war and we must fight it continuously. ISAF StratCom will therefore adhere to the following principles:

   a. **Be First with the Truth**. We must get accurate information on ISAF activities to external audiences, key leaders and the media as soon as possible. We must beat the insurgents and their supporters to the headlines and pre-empt propaganda and rumors. We cannot just be accurate and truthful, we must be first. We cannot mislead in doing so; we must remain a trusted source of reliable information. We will acknowledge inadvertent casualties, damage, and mistakes and then explain what we do to avoid them and what we will do in the future to do better. We must also hold the media and influential communicators accountable for accuracy and context.

   b. **Focused and Proactive Targeting**. All StratCom is conducted for a purpose and should therefore be clearly focused to achieve the desired effect. We must plan for and anticipate future events. Pre-planned StratCom themes and messages delivered in support of known or likely events or operations help set or shape the conditions we desire. We will analyse each target audience, identify key means of influencing that audience and then pursue those means proactively and persistently. We will build relationships with key opinion leaders as required. Finally, we must demonstrate the agility to exploit tactical events for StratCom effect. The insurgents have demonstrated significant capability in this regard and we must be equally adept. We must be rapidly capitalize on good stories to our benefit and exploit insurgent activity to undermine them.

   c. **Unity of Voice**. ISAF will portray a consistent and coherent perspective across all levels of command. Whilst the level of detail and point of emphasis will vary the themes must remain consistent. ISAF will also seek to ensure that its information remains consistent with higher headquarters in NATO and is coordinated or shared as appropriate with OEF, UNAMA and IC partners in Afghanistan.

d. **Ensure Actions Match Words**. We must ensure we do what we say we do. Our actions will invariably have a greater impact than what we communicate verbally or in writing. Consistency between "video" and "audio" will reinforce our StratCom messages and maintain ISAF credibility.

e. **Counter Disinformation and Correct Misinformation**. In an environment where fact is hard to come by and where insecurity hampers access rumour, misinformation and disinformation flourish. The longer a false piece of information is circulating without a response, the greater the likelihood of it being accepted as fact. ISAF will therefore firmly and rapidly counter disinformation and correct misinformation. To achieve this frequent messaging from Regional Commands (RC) is required and should include not just the hard facts but also the human interest 'vignettes' that bring the facts to life.

f. **Be Culturally Appropriate**. ISAF will communicate with target audiences in ways that are culturally sensitive and effective. ISAF StratCom activities will ensure respect for Afghan culture and traditions. Cultural advisors will be integrated to maximum extent to ensure accurate and appropriate StratCom themes and messages.   Wherever possible Afghans, supported by ISAF, will be used to define and present messages to Afghan audiences.

g. **Building Afghan Capacity, Competence and Credibility**. Winning is about Afghan capacity, competence and credibility. ISAF StratCom, within means and capabilities and in co-operation with the NATO SCR's office and other international actors, will focus on improving Afghan capacity and competence in StratCom. Additionally, ISAF StratCom will attempt to give maximum credit to Afghan institutions whenever possible. ISAF will seek to reinforce the capacity of the Government Centre for Media and Information. Whilst there will be occasions where ISAF will wish to take the lead, the majority of engagements will be organized and executed through the centre with centre staff taking an increasing lead.

12. **Functions Required**.

   a. Coordination of ISAF StratCom activities:

      i.   both enduring and in response to rapidly developing situations:

      ii. across multiple levels - within ISAF HQ, within ISAF commands, within NATO, within Afghanistan, within the Afghan Neighbourhood, within the International Community.

   b. Collection and dissemination of accurate and timely information across ISAF StratCom operators and external actors.

   c. Development of master and situation-specific themes and messages.

   d. Assessment, monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the impact of StratCom activities, including the effectiveness of means used for StratCom.

   e. Development of Afghan StratCom capacity and competence.

   f. Conduct of StratCom lessons learned after action reviews.

MEANS

13. **StratCom Operators**. In order to achieve ISAF StratCom objectives the different operators within the ISAF information domain will act in a coordinated and mutually supporting manner under the direction of COM ISAF and DCOM ISAF. The main HQ ISAF StratCom operators are as follows:

   a. COM ISAF, DCOM ISAF, ISAF Flag Officers and Commanders.

   b. ISAF Spokesperson

   c. Strategic Advisory Group

   d. Information Coordination Branch.

   e. Information Operations Branch.

   f. Public Affairs Branch.

   g. CJPOTF.

14. **Roles and Responsibilities**. Roles and responsibilities of ISAF StratCom operators, key supporting staff and select NATO StratCom operators follow:

   a. **COM ISAF**. Key StratCom messenger. COM sets the objectives and priorities for ISAF StratCom. Chairs the ISAF StratCom Executive Group, approving ISAF StratCom target audiences, supporting effects and enduring StratCom themes and messages.

   b. **DCOM ISAF**. Director of Strategic Communications for ISAF. Runs the ISAF StratCom Executive Group on behalf of the COM chairing it in his absence. DCOM manages the priorities for and actions of ISAF StratCom, provides direction and guidance for rapidly evolving situations, approving new shorter-term StratCom themes and messages as required .

   c. **COS**. Overall responsibility for the coordination of ISAF staff effort to support StratCom objectives and activities. Responsible for ISAF staff structure and procedures; proposes and coordinates revision as required or as directed by COM ISAF.   Approves release of StratCom direction and guidance. Assists in coordination with subordinate commands.

   d. **DCOS Ops**. Overall responsible for synchronization of effects and actions, kinetic and non-kinetic. Approves release of all plans, orders, and FRAGOs. Ensures INFO OPS coordinates related disciplines and activities for all operations.

   e. **ISAF Spokesperson**. Represents ISAF with the media and consults with the NATO Senior Civilian Representative (SCR), GIRoA, UNAMA, IC and media agencies in accordance with SACEUR approved Terms of Reference.

   f. **Strategic Advisory Group.** On behalf of COM ISAF develops the ISAF Theater StratCom Strategy, assists ICB with ISAF StratCom Executive Group, and helps communicate COM / DCOM priorities and guidance through attendance at StratCom meetings and input to select StratCom related products.

   g. **Information Coordination Branch (ICB)**. Develops ISAF StratCom themes and messages. Maintains the ISAF StratCom Effects Matrix. Coordinates the execution of the StratCom strategy with ISAF StratCom operators. Ensures StratCom input to OPLANs, Orders and FRAGOs is incorporated in INFO OPS input. Leads on StratCom coordination with NATO higher headquarters, and with external StratCom

partners (GIRoA, UNAMA, IC) in Afghanistan, supported by other ISAF StratCom operators as appropriate. Leads on evaluating the impact of ISAF StratCom strategy.

h. **Public Affairs (PA) Branch**. Coordinates and synchronizes media activity and engagement in line with the StratCom strategy within ISAF, with NATO higher headquarters, and with external PA partners and media agencies in Afghanistan. Develops ISAF Media Master Narrative in concert with NATO HQ. Assists in the development of GIRoA PA capability. Reports on media engagements and provides media monitoring and analysis to support the planning and targeting of StratCom activity and evaluation of the StratCom strategy.

i. **Information Operations (INFO OPS) Branch**. Leads on the coordination and synchronization of all INFO OPS activities within ISAF AOO. In conjunction with other ISAF StratCom operators coordinates the development of INFO OPS input (including RC level Themes and Messages) to OPLANS, Orders and FRAGOs in support of ISAF operations.   Leads on the planning, coordination, execution and reporting of Key Leader Engagement. Monitors and assesses the impact of INFO OPS activities to support evaluation of the overall StratCom strategy.

j. **CJPOTF**. Plans, coordinates, executes, synchronizes and reports on Psychological Operations within Afghanistan and the Afghan neighbourhood as a part of wider INFO OPS activity and in support of the ISAF StratCom strategy. Provides analysis of PSYOPS and StratCom target audiences (Afghan national, Afghan neighbourhood and INS audiences) and effects to support planning and evaluation across the information domain as a whole.

k. **CJ2**. Provides threat analysis, recommends INS vulnerabilities for exploitation, and supports CJPOTF assessment of Afghan and Pakistan attitudes.

l. **CJ3**. Ensures that ICB is aware of emerging StratCom threats and opportunities and that information domain activity is incorporated within broader operational activities.

m. **CJ5**. Ensures that StratCom input is incorporated within ISAF OPLANS and provides requests to ICB for StratCom support to planning.

n. **OAB**. In coordination with offices designated with responsibility for effect assessment, provides analytical support and assists in development of related Measures of Effectiveness.

o. **POLAD**. Provides political analysis to ICB to assist in the identification and conduct of suitable information domain activities supporting and reporting on the impact of political and diplomatic key leader engagement.

p. **NATO SCR**.   Represents NATO Secretary General with IRoA authorities, International Community principals, International Organizations and the diplomatic community.

q. **NATO Spokesperson**. Represents NATO with the media, coordinates with GIRoA, UNAMA, IC and media agencies. As part of the NATO SCR's office has an important role within ISAF StratCom to facilitate rapid co-ordination with NATO HQ and to engage with the media in and out of theatre. Close co-operation, especially

with Chief PAO and ISAF Spokesperson and as part of the StratCom Executive Group, is expected to ensure unity and amplification of messaging.

15. **Battle Rhythm Events – Enduring Activities**. ISAF StratCom operators and supporting staff will participate in various working groups and decision-making boards to ensure execution of StratCom activities per command guidance to achieve ISAF aims and objectives. StratCom related working groups are described here. Relevant SOPs described the INFO OPS Branch, PA Branch and CJPOTF working groups and boards to coordinate and execute their contributions to StratCom activities.

a. Direction and guidance for ISAF StratCom will flow from COM ISAF and the StratCom Executive Group, normally chaired by DCOM ISAF. COS releases StratCom direction and guidance in the form of MCI; where appropriate DCOS Ops releases StratCom guidance incorporated in plans, orders, FRAGOs. Routine coordination across the ISAF information domain will be managed within Information Coordination Meetings chaired by Chief ICB. Routine coordination with UNAMA and the IC will take place through weekly UNAMA StratCom meetings. Coordination with NATO HQ will take place through the Information Working Group VTCs chaired by NATO HQ (and including JFCB and SHAPE).

b. A key tool for StratCom coordination across ISAF StratCom operators is the ISAF StratCom Effects Matrix managed by ICB. The ISAF StratCom Effects Matrix, approved by COM ISAF, serves as guidance on ISAF StratCom themes and messages (nested by campaign effects and StratCom supporting effects) and identifies StratCom operators and units responsible for delivery of messages. The ISAF StratCom Effects Matrix is regularly reviewed and updated through the StratCom Executive Group process.

c. PA Branch will contribute to StratCom through coordination in PA-related meetings, conference calls, and VTCs and through execution in press conferences, media events and daily responses to queries, media releases and media reviews.

d. INFO OPS Branch will contribute to StratCom through Key Leader Engagement planning meetings and will synchronize INFO OPS activities with StratCom priorities, themes and messages through INFO OPS working groups and coordination board.

e. CJPOTF will contribute to StratCom through PSYOPS planning and products (broadcast TV, radio and print) and target audience assessment (TAA) focused on Afghan and Afghan Neighbourhood audiences. CJPOTF will synchronize PSYOPS with StratCom priorities, themes and messages through CJPOTF-led working groups, meetings and boards.

f. Direction for and coordination of StratCom actions and tasks will be captured and disseminated through FRAGOs or input to OPLANs.

g. StratCom-related assessments will be reported per command guidance during Commander's Update Assessment – CUA (i.e. Media, PSYOPS TAA), COS Coordination meetings (ICB) and Quarterly Campaign Assessments.

16. **Battle Drill** – **Emerging Situations**. Whenever a potential StratCom threat or opportunity arises, any StratCom operator may initiate an emergency meeting of the StratCom Executive Group.

a. The DCOM or COS will lead an emergency meeting of the StratCom Executive Group to identify the situation, desired effects, concept of operations and activities to respond to the situation. In the absence of DCOM or COS, Chief ICB may chair an emergency meeting. The results of an emergency meeting of StratCom Executive Group will be briefed to the COM or DCOM for confirmation and then passed as a draft FRAGO (in conjunction with other StratCom operators input) to DCOS Ops, then CJOC for dissemination. The StratCom Crisis Executive Group should provide guidance and direction for the preparation, execution and assessment of StratCom activities for the identified threat or opportunity.

b. Participants in StratCom Executive Group emergency meetings will vary with the situation, but should normally include DCOM or COS, ISAF and NATO Spokespersons, Chief ICB, Chief PAO, Chief INFO OPS, COMCJPOTF, and representatives from CJ2, CJ3 and SAG.

c. Battle Drills related to Friendly Force Information Requirements (FFIR) may have StratCom implications (i.e. events likely to cause significant media attention, civilian casualties, enemy activity exploitable for INFO OPS gain). CJOC, INFO OPS Branch, and PA Branch participate in ISAF responses to these FFIR and will coordinate with other StratCom operators (e.g. COMCJPOTF, ICB, SAG) as appropriate.

d. To facilitate exploitation of tactical events as well as speed and coherence of response to FFIRs a StratCom Duty Officer post has been established on a 24/7 basis within the CJOC.

CONCLUSION.

19. The ISAF Theatre StratCom Strategy is meant to be dynamic and evolutionary. We are fighting a multifaceted counter-insurgency within a complex context without the benefit of an established coalition doctrine or policy. To be successful we must seize and maintain the initiative in StratCom. We must understand the operating environment, be agile and versatile to respond rapidly, and have the foresight and agility to adapt faster and with greater effect than our adversaries.