



Allies, enemies influenced by U.S. military's low-cost PA campaigns

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When over 100 U.S. Army vehicles, including armored Stryker vehicles, traversed across six eastern European countries in 2015, the response of European citizens there was exactly what the U.S. military had idealized. After Russian forces had seized the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine a year earlier, Polish citizens were fearful of a westward Russian expansion.

“I am very worried and afraid about what Russia might do next,” Urszula Wronko, a Polish citizen, said as Stryker vehicles stopped in her town for a static display. “It gives us all comfort to see these American soldiers and to know they are here for us.”¹

The convoy of vehicles from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment at Vilseck, Germany – dubbed Operation Dragoon Ride in honor of the “Dragoons” of the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment – was designed for a twofold purpose: as a show-of-force deterrent against Russian aggression, and as a means of strategic communication. The mission helped reassure nervous allies about U.S. support, and allowed European citizens to interact with American Soldiers.

Low-cost, high-visibility missions, such as Operation Dragoon Ride, yield remarkable dividends for the U.S. military, and as a means of strategically communicating with foreign publics, should be intensified. The Department of Defense must continue developing missions that require little overhead, but produce a vast “Return-On-Investment” in deterring enemies.

After North Korean officials conducted a hydrogen bomb test in January 2016, the DoD responded by flying a nuclear-capable U.S. Air Force B-52 bomber low over the South Korean border. The move was intended to dissuade North Korean authorities from acting on additional tests, and demonstrating a steadfast U.S. to the Korean peninsula.

“This was a demonstration of the ironclad U.S. commitment to our allies in South Korea, in Japan, and to the defense of the American homeland,” Adm. Harry B. Harris Jr., commander U.S. Pacific Command, said in a statement. “North Korea’s nuclear test is a blatant violation of its international obligations.”²

Senior leaders have increasingly understood the value of information as an instrument of national power. When initial planning commenced at U.S. Army Europe’s headquarters for Operation Atlantic Resolve, the end state written in the operations order was typical of a large-scale operation, “U.S. demonstrates its airborne capability and resolve to defend NATO allies and partner nations. The U.S. is prepared for future training, exercises, and operations...” However, an additional sentence in the end state initially puzzled USAREUR staffers:

“...Key audiences are informed of U.S. commitment to our allies and partner nations...”³

From that sentence, came the key task of “conduct Public Affairs activities” and an acknowledgement by Lt. Gen. Donald Campbell, then-Commanding General of USAREUR, that public affairs was decisive to the operation.⁴

“One of the most important things we did was acknowledge early on that there was going to be a heavy public affairs component to (Operation Atlantic Resolve), and get the capabilities we needed on the ground in the Baltics and Poland,” Campbell said in an interview.⁵

Public Affairs (and Public Relations) and strategic communication can play pivotal roles in crafting DoD



strategy. With the military drawing down, and defense budgets declining, low-cost/high visibility missions can aid allies, deter aggressors, and be representative of a mindful use of taxpayer dollars.

In an article written for *Military Review* magazine in 2011, then-Lt. Col. Rumi Nielsen-Green wrote that the U.S. military has paid nearly \$1 billion to fight the “information war” against America’s enemies.⁶ Missions like the B-52 bomber flyover and positioning stealth fighter jets in South Korea can appear cost-prohibitive on the surface, but in reality, they save the United States from engaging in a costly – and lengthy – war with world enemies.

Planning these high-impact missions may merit embedding a senior military official from the Office of Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), generally in the ranks of O-6 or O-7, onto the Department’s operational planning teams. In doing so, the military communicators’ community would be represented at a strategic level, while also developing innovative messaging operations. Integrating Army communicators, such as Public Affairs Officers, onto a planning team ensures the information war receives just as much attention as any other fight.

By demonstrating its power, resolve and commitment to our nation’s allies, the United States can leverage low-cost, high-visibility missions to achieve its objectives. In flying a nuclear-capable bomber near the North Korean border or simply convoying 120 Army vehicles through Eastern Europe, the U.S. Department of Defense sent a powerful message: We will stand by our allies, and respond appropriately to defend that valued relationship.

Mission success in these operations can be seen through children waving American flags as Stryker vehicles roll through their town, or an elderly citizen who feared a hostile takeover of her country, hugging an American Soldier. More importantly, mission success can be demonstrated through continued deterrence to attack by our world’s enemies.

NOTES

1. Rick Lyman, “An American Military Convoy in Europe Aims to Reassure Allies,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2015, accessed 23 February 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/30/world/europe/an-american-military-convoy-in-europe-aims-to-reassure-allies.html?_r=0.
2. Foster Klug and Ahn Young-joon, “U.S. B-52 Bomber Flies over South Korea as Standoff Deepens,” *MilitaryTimes.com*. January 10, 2016, accessed 12 January 2016, <http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2016/01/10/us-b-52-bomber-flies-over-south-korea-standoff-deepens/78588954/>.
3. Jesse Granger, “Operation Atlantic Resolve: A Case Study in Effective Communication Strategy” *Military Review* (January-February 2015): 116-23.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Rumi Nielsen-Green, “Fighting the Information War but Losing Credibility: What Can We Do?” *Military Review* (July-August 2011): 8-15.