
Strategic Communication Plan



April 2008

OVERVIEW

“The counterinsurgent is tied to his responsibility and his past, and for him, facts speak louder than words. He is judged on what he does, not on what he says.”¹

— Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice

The concept of *strategic communication* is an often-discussed topic within government policy circles and at all levels of professional military education. Doctrinal definitions are continually updated and refined to the point that few appear to agree upon the role that strategic communication should play as either a diplomatic function, an aspect of military operational planning, or a process to be executed in the course of national policy. There are, however, a set of key points that all sides seem to agree upon.

The first is that effective strategic communication is essential to winning the “information war.” Conventional wisdom suggests that this is undoubtedly true, and the recognition that our struggle against violent extremism is a “war of ideas” seems to be almost universally accepted.

The second point is that strategic communication involves the larger effects of what a given entity—be it a nation, a people, an organization, or even an individual—says and does in pursuit of a goal. This may seem overly broad, but it is important to note that the most substantive discussions of strategic communication center on closing what is sometimes called the “say-do gap.” That is, aligning the way a body explains, justifies, frames or mitigates its actions relative to the actions themselves in the face of public scrutiny.

For our purposes as the counterinsurgent force, we will consider it an absolute imperative that our actions are fully congruent with the ideals that we promote. There can be no “gap” between what we say and what we do.

Leaders must understand the importance of this last statement; it is the keystone of our communication efforts. As the above passage from *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* makes clear, we have the responsibility as the counterinsurgent to “walk the walk” as well as we “talk the talk.” Our priorities and values must be displayed in every deed, and reflected in the actions of every man and woman serving in internment facilities throughout the Iraqi Theater of Operations.

What you will find here is far more than a collection of talking points or a series of taskings for the Public Affairs Office and Information Operations Cell. The doctrinal information functions of PA and IO certainly serve to support select aspects of our strategic communication initiatives, but they are not the main effort. Rather, ***this plan places the emphasis on the conduct of the individual service member to demonstrate who we are, what we do, and what we stand for.*** This point is critical to the ultimate success of the plan.

What makes the plan actionable, however, is comprehensive command involvement. Soldiers cannot be expected to spontaneously embrace the concepts outlined herein when little, if any, of their training has prepared them for detainee population engagement. Consequently, I am making the execution of the Task Force 134 Strategic Communication Plan a command priority, and its stewardship the duty of every commander in the task force.

This plan has no end date; it continues in effect so long as its objectives remain unchanged. While it is expected that any alteration to the Coalition Force mission and authorities under the United Nations Security Council Resolution would require shifts in communication themes, the larger purpose of our Strategic Communication Plan is enduring.

PURPOSE

“In COIN environments, distinguishing an insurgent from a civilian is difficult and often impossible. Treating a civilian like an insurgent, however, is a sure recipe for failure.”²

— FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*

Winning a counterinsurgency requires gaining the support of the population. In the case of Iraq, defeating the insurgency means empowering moderates to marginalize the violent extremists. Detainee operations are a major front in that struggle because internment is, at its best, population engagement.

Simply stated, waging a successful counterinsurgency “inside the wire” can mean the difference between winning and losing the war in Iraq, and it is the responsibility of every leader conducting internment operations in this theater to fully understand the nature of the fight.

Make no mistake, detainee operations is certainly a battlefield; it is the battlefield of the mind, and it is one of the most important fights in counterinsurgency.

When viewed at the operational level, coalition detainee operations in Iraq directly affect more than one-half million Iraqis.³ The civilian internees, their families, friends, tribes and communities are all impacted by their captivity in ways that influence the course of the war here. What this means to us tactically-speaking is that there are two distinct populations whose support we must gain: The detainees and the detainees’ immediate network of friends, family and tribesmen. These populations interact and affect one another’s attitudes and decision-making, meaning that how we engage one will significantly impact the other. If done well, we stand to gain the support of many; but done poorly, we risk losing the support of all.

Further, we must understand that ***in the larger strategic context, it is how we are perceived to conduct these operations that has the broadest impact***—reaching far beyond those who are directly involved, and stretching to touch virtually every one of the more than one billion Muslims worldwide.

Unfortunately, we have already seen the effect that humiliating and degrading treatment of detainees—real or alleged—can have on the global view of our mission here. The reality is that we are waging this counterinsurgency on the world stage, and the manner in which we conduct internment operations here will not only mean the difference between success and failure in Iraq, but in the war against violent extremism worldwide.

This is the ultimate purpose of our strategic communication plan:

Demonstrate to the citizens of Iraq and the greater Muslim Umma⁴ that we are dedicated to establishing an alliance with moderate Muslims and empowering them to marginalize violent extremists.

Faithful execution of this plan is critical to our success, and it is the duty of every leader within the task force to understand its purpose and apply its guidance. Each and every warrior in this command must understand that all we say and do will be judged by the peoples of the world, and it is our inherent responsibility to inform that judgment through the values demonstrated in our every action.

KEY ELEMENTS

In communication terms, success requires effectively articulating who we are, what we do, and what we stand for. The key elements defining our organizational culture establish the foundation of this plan.

- **MISSION STATEMENT – This is what we do:**

In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolutions, Task Force 134 detains persons deemed an imperative risk to Iraqi security, assesses and engages internees, and releases those no longer considered a threat in order to *empower moderates, marginalize violent extremists and defeat the insurgency within our battlespace.*

- **CORE VALUES – Justice, Character and the Warfighter’s Spirit**

It has been said that the question of what a man stands for is answered in the action he takes when no one is watching. We don’t have the relative luxury, however, of only being tested against our own honor. Our reality is that everyone is watching—all the time. Our duties are subject to the greatest scrutiny, and judgment is cast on the basis of the most fleeting impression. It is therefore necessary that each and every action we take be indicative of the high standards we demand of ourselves. These are the core values that will guide us. Every warrior in this command will consider them his most sacred charge. *Make these values apparent in all that we do and show the world what we stand for.*

Justice. As an organizational value, *justice* has been described as “the first virtue of social institutions.”⁵ As the first value of Detainee Operations, the concept of justice is manifest in our duty to protect victims, pursue perpetrators, and provide for the fair and equal treatment of all. This is not to say that it is our responsibility to administer deserved punishment. Rather, it is a necessity that each of us endeavor to demonstrate genuine respect for the Rule of Law and uphold what is just—especially fair treatment in accordance with legal and ethical standards.

Character. An individual’s honesty, integrity and adherence to moral and ethical principles contribute to the soundness of his character. As we have regrettably observed, it takes only one individual lacking character to devastate international opinion of a nation. It is therefore imperative that our high standards extend beyond the individual and permeate throughout the task force in order to convince the world that our resolve is a national value, shared across the entire organization, whole and undiminished. *This means you are not only responsible for your own conduct, but also for the conduct of your fellow service members—regardless of the uniform you wear or the patch on your shoulder.* I will hold you to this.

Warfighter’s Spirit. We are warfighters engaging in one of the most critical battles of this war. Never lose sight of that fact. The enemy can attack us here, and he is capable of defeating us here. The environment inside the wire is every bit as dangerous as the streets of Baghdad or Fallujah once were, and each and every one of our warriors must remain vigilant. We will not surrender this battlefield; we will be warriors to the last.

PRIORITY #1 – Care & Custody

We are dedicated to providing the highest standard of care for civilian internees in our charge.

In everything we do, without question, we will always treat internees with respect for their individual dignity and humanity. Some may respond with hate and aggression, but as men and women of character you will meet hostility with a measured, professional response that reflects your integrity and dedication to proper care and custody. When your fellow service members struggle, support them. When they show courage, protect them. Set the standard for one another.

We must also embrace the fact that many of our “extremists” are potential “former extremists,” and understand that our greatest achievement is the internees who leave our custody, return to their families and prosper in Iraqi society—never again to take up arms against us. *Upholding these standards is a reflection of all we, as free men, hold dear.*

PRINCIPLES

Outlined below are what I have identified as *Principles for Detainee Operations in a Counterinsurgency*. ***These principles define my priorities for this task force and effectively set down the strategic communication themes that all subsequent communication efforts will support.***

The eight principles outlined here—or, as we will view them for the sake of this plan, our strategic communication themes—provide the building blocks for key messages that describe our principal efforts and force operating concepts. It is essential that communication activities across all warfighting functions⁶ employ these messages in order to achieve the stated purpose.

No. 1 – Rule of Law

- The legal restraints and constraints under which we operate have been handed down from the United Nations Security Council. We will exercise these authorities in cooperation with the sovereign Government of Iraq.
- We will work closely with the Iraqi military, governmental, and non-governmental entities to promote and strengthen Rule of Law in Iraq. We must be professional in every aspect of our duties—particularly as they relate to the law—with the hope that the Iraqis will learn from us and follow our example.
- We will respect the Islamic ethic that precludes separation of religion and state. Our engagement must be culturally appropriate; Iraqi values, not Western, must have primacy.

No. 2 – Security

- Detaining individuals and groups deemed threatening or dangerous removes them from the greater populace and tends to promote stability by reducing violence. This contributes significantly to Iraq’s overall security *in the near term*.
- Building toward *long-term security* requires that we interrogate, parse out, identify paths to engagement and enable reconciliation that ultimately sets the conditions for reintegration of the predominance of internees back into Iraqi society.

— Our contribution to security is essential to setting the stage for progress by allowing for economic growth, continued political participation and the restored hope that define lasting victory.

No. 3 – Care & Custody

— Care and custody must always remain an organizational priority. It is essential to maintain the highest standard of care, understanding that success begins and ends with the manner in which the internees are treated and provided for.

— Proper care such as access to medical services, religious services and activities, and quality nutritional meals is not only a moral and legal obligation, but also offers essential pathways to assessment—an indispensable tool for identifying and separating the moderate population from extremists.

— Effective care and custody neutralizes the extremist's ability to recruit and train, and destroys the insurgency's capacity to continue the fight from inside the wire.

No. 4 – Education

— Within the battlefield of the mind, ideology defines the terrain. To win in this domain, it is not necessary to control the terrain; the objective is to cut-off certain territory—that is, the most violent and destructive ideology—by isolating its proponents. Education is a powerful tool in pursuit of this objective.

— Education empowers internees to develop their own world view, making them less reliant upon others to shape their ideology and less vulnerable to exploitation. Providing educational opportunities also serves to make them less susceptible to financial coercion and less likely to be influenced by religious or sectarian motivators.

— Continued offering of education to extremists is one of the most effective means to achieve our long-term goals. When extremists step forward to participate in our programs, their eyes and attitudes are opened to a wider world of choices and opportunities, and the positive effects of peaceful coexistence.

No. 5 – Engagement

— Through continual re-assessment and communication with our internees, we will be sensitive to their changes in behavior and the personal journey that some of them will make from extremism to moderation. We will support them in their journey.

— We will actively maintain family visitation services for our internees and their families. The family is an essential part of Iraqi culture and central to every successful anti-radicalization program. Families who visit our facilities go home to networks that are the most disenfranchised from the coalition and the Government of Iraq. By engaging with them and supporting them, they witness our core values and we come to better understand and respect one another.

— Detainee operations are dynamic, so we must work to maintain the initiative in our facilities 24/7. Active documentation of individual internee behaviors, participation in reconciliation programs, and accomplishments is essential to properly assess and communicate with our internees working toward reconciliation.

No. 6 – Dignity

- Respect for the dignity of our internees is of paramount importance. Every principle discussed here relies upon demonstrating humane and respectful treatment toward all those in our custody, both individually and collectively, whether as a legal requirement, a standard of care or a pathway to engagement.
- Violating the dignity of persons and groups in our charge places the stated purpose of our communication efforts at risk. It drives a wedge between us and our internees that destroys hope for future engagement and, in turn, facilitates extremist recruiting.
- Adherence to this principle is a 24/7 requirement. One breach, actual or perceived, can inflict irreversible damage on our efforts to defeat the insurgency.

No. 7 – Cultural Relativism

- Most American service members are not familiar with the Iraqi culture and find it difficult to comprehend. Our own individual view of the world tends to limit our perceptions, creating risk when we make the mistake of judging a detainee's actions in the context of our culture rather than his own. This is one of the most significant challenges we face in detainee operations.
- It is critical we understand that conceptions of truth and moral values are not absolute, but are relative to the persons or groups holding them. In the case of Iraqi culture it is the group—or the collective—rather than the individual that drives beliefs and activities. We must set aside our preconceptions and work to assess each detainee's actions in the context of the collective.
- This approach is fundamental to our success here. The importance of local context in evaluating and understanding the meaning of our detainees' actions cannot be over-emphasized. We must be vigilant against our own bias.

No. 8 – Transparency

- The open society we desire to see across Iraq must be reflected inside the Theater Internment Facilities. Our willingness to open these operations to public scrutiny speaks well of our intentions here, and shows the world we have nothing to hide.
- In order to influence public opinion of detainee operations in Iraq, and demonstrate to the world that we respect the Rule of Law and individual human dignity, we must display our priorities through concerted efforts that reveal the consistency in all we say and do (see figures 1 and 2).
- The principle of transparency pertains to both action and intent. It must apply across all warfighting functions, to include areas traditionally considered to be protected. As such, we will make every effort to provide access to the full range of detainee operations. Our only restraint in this regard is under circumstances where release of information is precluded by national security considerations, operations security, or valid statutory mandates. We will not, however, withhold information or otherwise close a door in order to protect ourselves from criticism or embarrassment.

TARGETING

“Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing.”⁷

— John D. Rockefeller

To echo the sentiment of this great American industrialist, showing the world what we do is very nearly as important as doing it well. But the fact of the matter is that the world—not the least of which the Arab world—does not know the reality of our practices and policies. We must correct this, and doing so involves a process of targeting that all warfighters should find familiar.

Strategic communication targeting is similar in form to fire support targeting in that both processes seek to identify targets based upon their importance to the success of the plan. Much like the modern battlefield, today’s information environment presents numerous targets of different types, as well as an ever increasing arsenal of engagement modes. This requires us to prioritize targets relative to our overall purpose, and identify the most effective means by which to engage those targets relative to the communication themes.

KEY AUDIENCES

In fire support terms, *High-Payoff Targets* (HPTs) are those targets whose loss to the enemy will most contribute to the success of the friendly course of action.⁸ In communication terms, high-payoff targets are most often referred to as *Key Audiences*—that is, those audiences who can appreciably affect the success or failure of the counterinsurgency mission here.

- **The Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen of Task Force 134**
Each and every one of our warriors must fully understand our priorities and objectives. They are our most important spokespersons—communicating primarily through their actions—and they must possess the knowledge necessary to be effective in that role. Whether being observed by members of the press, interacting with elected officials, or simply working a shift in the TIF, the interpersonal contact they engage in daily is the most effective means of communicating our values and priorities. As the backbone of this organization, they are without question our most important audience.
- **Internees and their families, Tribal Chiefs and Sheiks**
The Iraqi social outlook stresses human interdependence and the importance of the collective, rather than the importance of the individual. This collectivist view focuses on community, where society as a whole can be seen as having more meaning or value than the separate individuals that make up that society. Given the importance of gaining their support, this audience is our operational priority.
- **The Iraqi People and their Leaders**
Counterinsurgency expert Dr. David Kilcullen has written that in counterinsurgency, the “people do not have to like you but they must respect you, accept that your actions benefit them, and trust your integrity and ability to deliver on promises, particularly regarding their security.”⁹ We must therefore consider the Iraqi people our top strategic priority for external communication. Indeed, the vast majority of our internees are Iraqi, and it is their people who are most impacted by the detainment of thousands of their citizens.

- **The Middle Eastern Islamic Community**
Today, the Muslim Umma is a religious community of more than 1.2 billion people—a majority of whom live in the greater Middle East. Our operations are geographically situated in the virtual center of that world, and our actions influence all those around us. We will make it a priority to speak directly to neighboring Islamic nations and the greater Islamic community.
- **Coalition Nations, United Nations Partners and Non-Governmental Organizations**
The authorities by which we operate have been granted through the United Nations and are supported by our coalition partners in Iraq. Maintaining the trust and confidence of these world leaders and their constituencies will remain important so long as we remain in Iraq. Further, the global organizations which provide oversight of our operations are not only scrutinizing our activities, but also looking to us as the gold standard. We will consequently present our principles as international “best practices” of detainee operations.
- **Our Own Communities and U.S. National Decision Makers**
We must never take for granted the support we have at home. Without it we would be unable to persevere; a necessity in times such as these. Sharing our successes with those at home is essential to preserving U.S. popular and political will.

TARGETED AREAS OF INFLUENCE

In fire support targeting, the best places to engage HPTs are called *Targeted Areas of Influence* (TAIs).¹⁰ In communication planning, these points or areas where the organization can best influence a target are not only geographic, but modal as well. That is, organizational communication engages key audiences regionally and through various targeting modes to include traditional news media and interpersonal transactions that encourage supportive behavior.

- **Command Leadership**
Communicating with the troops is a command responsibility; true leaders walk the lines and mentor the troops. Leaders at all levels in Task Force 134 will focus their efforts and presence in our detention facilities 24/7. Without success here, the entire plan fails. Take the time.
- **Iraqi News Media**
Nearly 80 percent of Iraqis cite television as their most important source of information. We will be aggressive in securing their interest, and open to providing them the greatest access possible.
- **Middle Eastern News Media**
Arabic-language news organizations have tremendous reach; we will leverage this capability to speak to the greater Islamic community throughout the region.
- **Arab Religious and Academic Influencers**
In collective societies such as those in the Middle East, men of power and tradition have a kind of influence that is far less common in the West. Our efforts will recognize this by reaching out to these influencers in direct, personal meetings—to include various international executive and diplomatic engagement opportunities outside the Iraqi theater.
- **Senior Coalition, United Nations and Non-Governmental Leaders**
We will continue to educate global decision makers on our principles and operating concepts. Organizations such as the UN, NATO and the ICRC must understand what we are doing, and why it is important. We will teach them.

- **Western News Media**

The western press is here in Iraq, and they are curious about what we do. Again, transparency is essential, and our enthusiasm in providing access speaks volumes of our intentions. The same can be said of the so-called “hometown” news agencies, which might not have a presence in Iraq, but can certainly be targeted through direct communication.

IMPLEMENTATION & EXECUTION

This plan will serve as the capstone document for all Task Force 134 communication activities. Detailed communication campaign plans designed to address specific key audiences will follow; we must certainly prioritize and shape the communication themes relative to each target to achieve our objectives. But regardless of the activity or operation, all task force actions must support or—at a minimum—remain congruent with the overall themes found here.

As commanding general I take responsibility for the implementation of this plan. Once signed, it is considered to be in immediate force and effect. The plan’s execution, however, is not the exclusive responsibility of any staff section or individual officer. Rather, I expect every leader in Task Force 134 to read and understand this plan. Make no mistake; our success in this war and the broader struggle against violent extremism relies upon our ability to demonstrate to the citizens of Iraq and the greater Islamic community that we are dedicated to establishing an alliance with moderate Muslims and empowering them to marginalize violent extremists.



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Figures

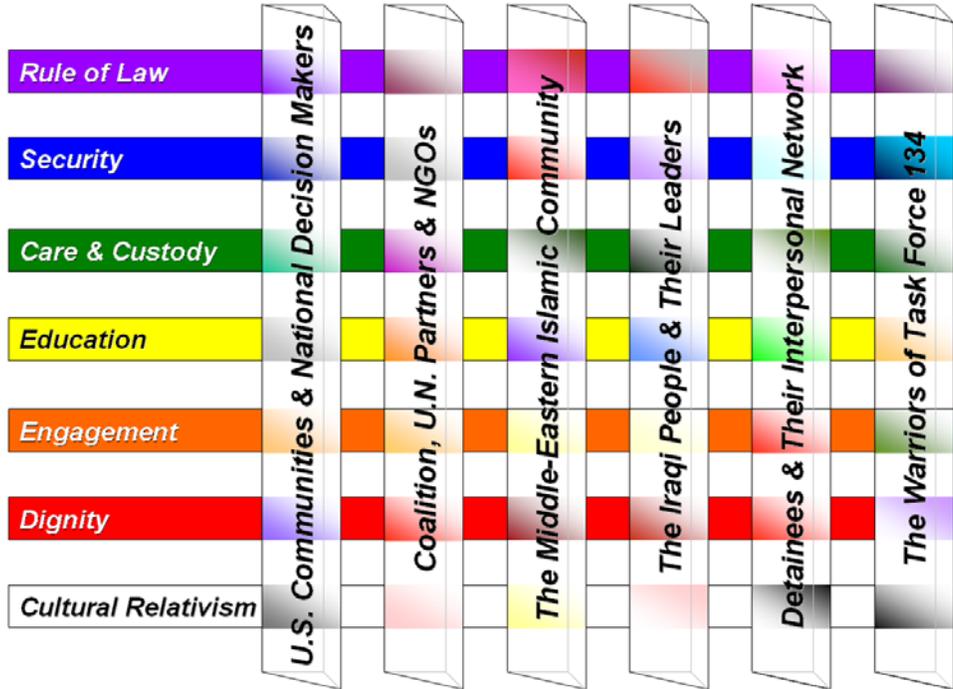


Figure 1. In the context of strategic communication, Task Force 134's operating principles function as communication themes. Here, the themes are shown in relationship to Key Audiences; that is, the *High-Payoff Targets* that will be the focus of follow-on communication campaign plans. The strategic vision represented here illustrates how the same principles will be viewed differently across the various Key Audiences.

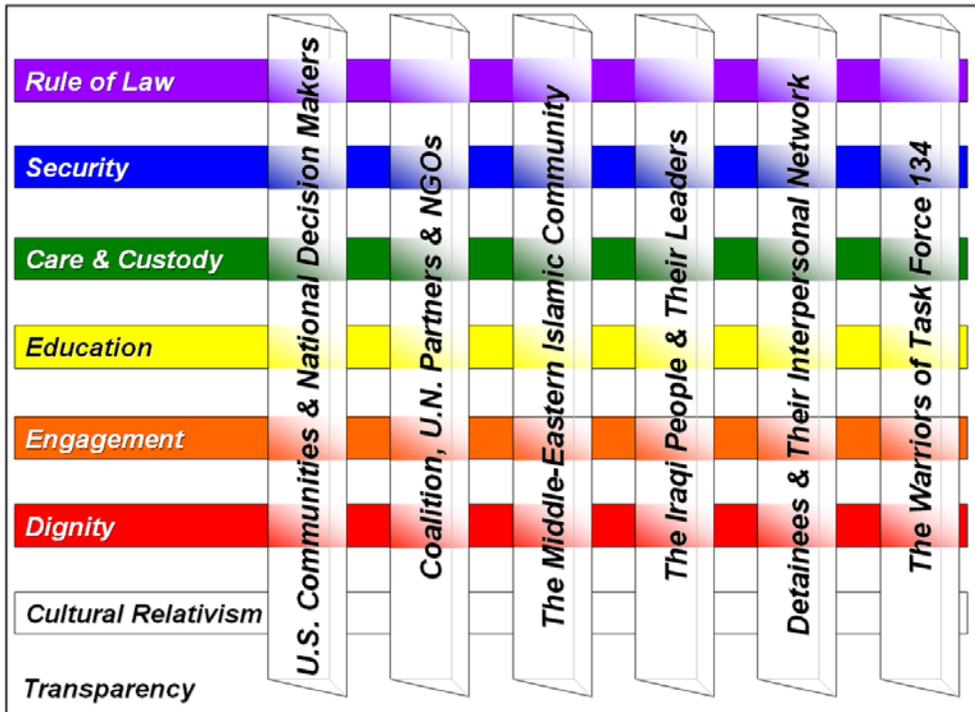


Figure 2. When the principle of *transparency* is applied to operations, many of the barriers to effective messaging are lifted. Consequently, the themes are better able to resonate with Key Audiences, permitting the full context of each operating principle to be clearly understood and accepted.

Notes

1. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (St. Petersburg, Florida: Hailer Publishing, 2005), 14. Galula was a Tunisian-born French army officer who fought in the European theater during WWII and served in Algeria from 1956 to 1958. The book's foreword states that his counterinsurgency precepts are "drawn mainly on observations and reflections derived from experience in China, Greece, Southeast Asia and Algeria." vi.

2. U.S. Army, *Counterinsurgency, FM 3-24* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), 7-40.

3. Mason Brooks, *Detainee Background and Motivation Assessment* (Institute for Defense Analysis briefing prepared for the Commanding General, TF-134, Baghdad, Iraq, June 2007).

4. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. <http://dictionary.reference.com>. *Umma* is "the Islamic community" founded by Muhammad and bound to one another by religious ties and obligations. From Arabic, "people, community, nation."

5. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971), 16.

6. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Operations, JP 3-0*, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2008). The *Joint Warfighting Functions* are command and control, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment.

7. John D. Rockefeller, <http://www.wordpower.ws>.

8. Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Targeting, JP 3-60*, (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2007), I-5.

9. Dr. David Kilcullen, Ph.D., "Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-level Counterinsurgency," *Small Wars Journal*, March 2006, <http://smallwarsjournal.com>. During 2007 Kilcullen was Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor to General David H. Petraeus, USA, Commander of Multi-National Force, Iraq. Dr. Kilcullen now serves on the personal staff of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as a senior policy advisor. For more information on his experience and writings, see <http://en.Wikipedia.org>.

10. *Joint Targeting*, II-6.