

2013 MajGen Richard C. Schulze Memorial Essay

# Communication

The continuation of policy by yet other means

by Helio Fred Garcia

The U.S. Marine Corps entered Baghdad, Iraq, on 9 April 2003. As 3d Battalion, 4th Marines, arrived at Firdos Square, a crowd of Iraqis cheered them on. The Palestine Hotel, home base for a number of journalists, was on the square, and television and still cameras captured the scene as it played out. As the crowd got more

excited, several Iraqis tried to knock down a giant statue of Saddam Hussein. The crew of an M88 recovery vehicle, after receiving permission from its commander, deployed a crane to loop a chain around the statue's neck to help bring it down. A 23-year-old corporal about to attach the chain was handed an American flag by his captain and told to "show the boys the colors."<sup>1</sup> He dutifully climbed the crane and draped the American flag over the statue's head, an act that would be broadcast across the globe.

The flag stayed on the statue for less than 2 minutes, at which point a lieutenant took the initiative to send up a pre-1991 Iraqi flag to replace the American flag. At the same time, the chain of command, starting with then-MajGen James N. Mattis, sent word to the M88 to remove the American flag from the statue. The flags had been exchanged by the time the order reached the vehicle, but it was too late. The defining image of America's arrival in Baghdad was that of the American flag on a statue that an American vehicle eventually brought down. It was the lead on the evening news and on front pages around the world, and the story was all wrong. It was the story of American triumphalism, documenting the behavior of an occupying power, not of a liberating power. Just before the start of an earlier Iraq war, then-Joint Chiefs Chairman, GEN Colin Powell, told a class at the National Defense University the following:

Once you've got all the forces moving and everything is being taken care of by the commanders, turn your attention to television, because you can win the battle but lose the war if you don't get the story right.<sup>2</sup>

For 10 years I have taught the Firdos Square case study to many people, including Marines. One year, at a workshop

## MajGen Richard C. Schulze Memorial Essay

The MajGen Richard C. Schulze Memorial Essay honors the memory of the Marine Corps general officer for whom it is named. MajGen Schulze, a native of Oakland, CA, died in November 1983, 2 years after his retirement. An enlisted Marine at the time of his commissioning in 1951, he earned his B.A. in Far East history from Stanford University in 1954 and later earned an M.S. in public administration from George Washington University (1971).



He was a mortar section leader with the 1st Marines in Korea and commanded 3d Battalion, 3d Marines, in Vietnam. MajGen Schulze served as director of three different divisions within the Manpower Department at Headquarters. He also served as Inspector General of the Marine Corps and as Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. He was a frequent contributor to the *Gazette* and wrote with philosophical insight on many of the intractable problems confronting the Armed Forces—thus the naming of this annual essay in his honor is singularly appropriate.

The Schulze Memorial Essays have been published each year since 1984. They are made possible by the earnings of an endowment fund established by friends of MajGen Schulze. Essay authors are chosen by the Editorial Advisory Panel of the *Gazette*.

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**What message do we want to send?** (Photo by LCpl John-Paul Imbody.)

for newly selected brigadier generals, a senior officer took me aside to privately challenge my conclusion. He had been in the square that day. He argued—forcefully, as Marines are wont to do—that the Iraqis in the square were very pleased to see the American flag and had cheered as it went up. I asked him just two questions: Were the Iraqis in the square your audience? And why would the chain of command react so quickly with an order to take the flag down? He turned ashen at the recognition that he had been justifying the flag at the tactical level, but he was about to become a general, and he had to see the bigger picture.

### The Power of Communication

Communication has power, but like any powerful tool, it needs to be used effectively or it can cause self-inflicted harm. Harnessing the power of communication is a fundamental leadership discipline, and it is too important to be left to the commanders alone. Indeed, Gen Charles C. Krulak noted the following when he described the “strategic corporal”:

In many cases, the individual Marine will be the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy and will potentially influence not only the immediate tactical situation, but at the operational and strategic levels as well. [ . . . ] All future conflicts will be acted out before an international audience.<sup>3</sup>

And on that day in Baghdad in 2003, Cpl Edward Chinn of Brooklyn, NY, became the most conspicuous symbol of American foreign policy before an international audience.

But the Marines didn’t get the story wrong just in their arrival in Baghdad. Indeed, 18 months earlier, Mattis, who in Baghdad saw the misstep in Firdos Square and ordered it fixed, had committed his own faux pas as Americans arrived in Afghanistan. In late November 2001, Marines established a foothold about 65 miles west of Kandahar. Then—Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld had been telling reporters that the United States had no territorial ambitions. Rumsfeld told *The New York Times* the following:

Their purpose is to establish a forward operating base to help pressure the Taliban forces in Afghanistan, to prevent Taliban and Al Qaeda terrorists from moving freely about the country.<sup>4</sup>

The same day, then-BGen Mattis, Commander, 1st MEB, was asked in a briefing with reporters, “Would you say that the Marines have landed and you now own a piece of Afghanistan?” He agreed. The next day the *Guardian* rendered it as a direct quote, which was picked up by other media:

General James Mattis of the U.S. Marines put it succinctly yesterday: “The Marines have landed and we now own a piece of Afghanistan.” These were not designed as words for the politically squeamish, but they mark a key moment in the unfolding of the crisis nevertheless. To the dates of September 11, when the terrorists struck, and October 7, when the U.S. bombing began, we must now add the date of November 25, when President George Bush sent the first U.S. ground troops on to Afghan soil. For America, which has hitherto fought the Taliban on the ground through proxy local forces, this is now a different kind of war.<sup>5</sup>

A slightly irritated Rumsfeld tried to reconcile his and the general’s accounts, saying that Mattis was “clearly exuberant” and that he was “unquestionably speaking figuratively.”<sup>6</sup>

Both the Iraq and Afghan wars began before the age of social media, social networking, and smartphones that can

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***The new battlefield is one where every action is potentially immediately public.***

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be used to take pictures and video and can instantly upload them. Today anyone with a phone anywhere in the world can be a broadcaster and publisher. The new battlefield is one where every action is potentially immediately public. In the battle to win the support of those who matter, both at home and in the theater of operations, Marines—from four-stars to privates fresh off of Parris Island—will have greater power than ever before, and they need to harness that power effectively. A corporal draping a flag on a statue, a handful of Marines urinating on the bodies of enemy dead, or U.S. servicemembers burning Qur’ans communicate far more loudly than any words, and they send exactly the wrong message.<sup>7 8</sup>



**Right monument, wrong message.** (Photo by Derrick Jensen.)

*On War and Communication*

Carl von Clausewitz defined war as “an act of will directed toward a living entity that reacts.”<sup>9</sup> This simple observation is quite profound. War, at its essence, isn’t about fighting or killing, at least not for their own sakes. Rather, war is about an outcome, a reaction, a change—and so is effective communication. I have long taken the metaphor Clausewitz provides and translated it this way: *Communication is an act of will directed toward a living entity that reacts.* Let’s parse this definition:

- *Communication is an act of will . . .* Effective communication is intentional, goal oriented, and strategic. It isn’t impulsive, top-of-mind, or self-indulgent. And communication isn’t just about what one says—it’s about anything one does or is observed doing, and about any engagement with an audience, including silence, inaction, and action.
- *. . . directed toward a living entity . . .* Audiences aren’t passive vessels that simply absorb messages; rather, audiences are living, breathing human beings and groups of human beings. They have their own opinions, ideas, hopes, dreams, fears, prejudices, attention spans, and appetites for listening. Most important, it is a mistake to assume that audiences think and behave just as we do. Most don’t. Understanding an audience and its preconceptions and the barriers that might prevent an audience from accepting what one is saying are key parts of effective communication.
- *. . . that reacts.* The only reason to engage an audience is to change something; to provoke a reaction. Effective communication provokes the desired reaction—ineffective communication does not. Ineffective communication isn’t noticed, confuses, and causes a different reaction than that desired.

Effective communication is hard. It requires discipline. It requires understanding the desired reaction among the groups with which one communicates, which in turn requires knowing all one can about those groups, and then requires

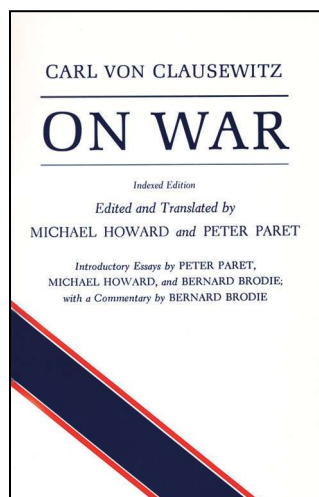
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***Effective communication also requires understanding both the intended and unintended predictable consequences of words. . . .***

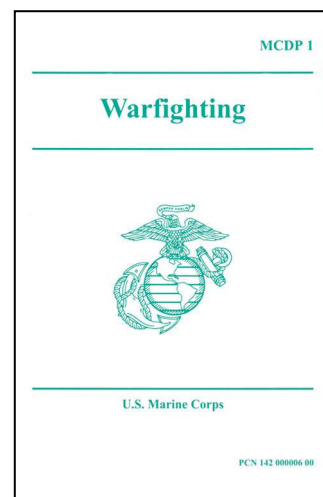
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saying and doing all that is necessary—and only what is necessary—to provoke that desired reaction. Effective communication also requires understanding both the intended and unintended predictable consequences of words, silence, inaction, and action.

In 2009, ADM Michael G. Mullen, then the newly appointed chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, addressed the failure of recent U.S. efforts to win hearts and minds in Muslim communities, including Iraq and Afghanistan. In an essay for National Defense University’s *Joint Force Quarterly*, ADM Mullen acknowledged that much communication during the



***Communication can also be viewed as the continuation of policy by yet other means. (File photo.)***



***MCDP 1, Warfighting. (File photo.)***

ongoing wars was more focused on how we feel and less about the needs, interests, or concerns of our audiences, writing:

We’ve come to believe that messages are something we can launch downrange like a rocket, something we can fire for effect. They are not. Good communication runs both ways. It’s not about telling our story. We must also be better listeners. [ . . . ] The Muslim community is a subtle world we don’t fully—and don’t always attempt to—understand. Only through a shared appreciation of the people’s culture, needs, and hopes for the future can we hope ourselves to supplant the extremist narrative. We cannot capture hearts and minds. We must engage them; we must listen to them, one heart and one mind at a time—over time.<sup>10</sup>

ADM Mullen also noted that many failures attributed to communication actually reflect deeper problems:

I would argue that most strategic communication problems are not communication problems at all. They are policy and execution problems.<sup>11</sup>

Clausewitz’ most famous principle is that war is merely the continuation of policy by other means. According to Clausewitz, “The goal of the war is not to fight, but to accomplish a political objective.”<sup>12</sup> I translate Clausewitz’s principle as the following: *Communication is merely the continuation of policy by yet other means.* The goal of communication is not to convey information, but to accomplish some tangible goal, whether at the tactical, operational, or strategic level. The example of the strategic corporal shows that the ability to avoid provoking a counterproductive reaction, or better yet, to provoke a positive reaction, becomes a critical warfighting skill.

If we take seriously that communication is the continuation of policy by yet other means, we can apply the same doctrine to the power of communication as we do to the other forms of power that Marines are trained to use. We can find that doctrine through a slight adaptation of *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, Warfighting (MCDP 1)*.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the preface by



then-Commandant, Gen Charles C. Krulak (who conceived of the idea of the strategic corporal), noted that, despite its name, *MCDP 1* is more about thinking than fighting:

Very simply, [*MCDP 1*] describes the philosophy which distinguishes the U.S. Marine Corps. The thoughts contained here are not merely guidance for action in combat, but a way of thinking. [*MCDP 1*] contains no specific techniques or procedures for conduct. Rather, it provides broad guidance in the form of concepts and values. It requires judgment in application.<sup>14</sup>

I have, with the Marine Corps' permission, performed an adaptation of *MCDP 1* for civilian audiences in my book, *The Power of Communication: Skills to Build Trust, Inspire Loyalty, and Lead Effectively* (FT Press, Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2012). I have found that, by changing just a few words, we can extend the doctrine beyond the use of arms to the winning of public support, at home and abroad, through effective communication, but it requires taking it as seriously and as professionally as we do every other element of projecting power.

For example, *MCDP 1* begins by noting the following:

War is fundamentally an interactive social process.<sup>15</sup>

We can render that as:

Effective communication is fundamentally an interactive social process.

*MCDP 1* continues:

War is thus a process of continuous mutual adaptation, of give and take, of move and countermove.<sup>16</sup>

Which we can render as:

Effective communication is thus a process of continuous mutual adaptation, of give and take, of move and countermove.

Also from *MCDP 1*:

Since war is a fluid phenomenon, its conduct requires flexibility of thought. Success depends in large part on the ability to adapt—to proactively shape changing events to our advantage as well as to react quickly to constantly changing conditions.<sup>17</sup>

This statement becomes:

Since communication is a fluid phenomenon, its conduct requires flexibility of thought. Success depends in large part on the ability to adapt—to proactively shape changing events to our advantage as well as to react quickly to constantly changing conditions.

Says *MCDP 1*:

It is critical to keep in mind that the enemy is not an inanimate object to be acted upon but an independent and animate force with its own objectives and plans.<sup>18</sup>

This becomes:

It is critical to keep in mind that the audience is not an inanimate object to be acted upon but a collection of living, breathing human beings with their own goals, concerns, needs,

priorities, attention spans, and levels of desire even to be in relationship with us.

Note that these principles, as adapted, are completely consistent with ADM Mullen's admonition in *Joint Force Quarterly* to see effective communication as starting from an understanding of one's audience and goals.

In Table 1 on page 21, I provide more examples of how these adaptations can work, but for now, let's turn our attention to how to implement this principle effectively. The starting point is to note that every Marine is a rifleman, regardless of his primary occupational specialty. Whether a lawyer, a mechanic, or a pilot, a Marine must be skilled in the use of

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***And because communication is the continuation of policy by yet other means. . . .***

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firearms and infantry tactics, which means he needs to invest in those skills by staying in top physical condition, periodically practicing his shooting skills, and staying current on military doctrine and tactics, even if he spends most of his time editing briefs, fixing truck engines, or flying helicopters.

And because communication is the continuation of policy by yet other means, and as we saw with the strategic corporal, every Marine is also a spokesman. At whatever level a Marine may be, he needs to take communication seriously.

From *MCDP 1*, yet again:

Marine Corps doctrine demands professional competence among its leaders. As military professionals charged with the defense of the Nation, Marine leaders must be true experts in the conduct of war.<sup>19</sup>

Adapted:

Marine Corps doctrine demands professional competence among its leaders. As military professionals charged with inspiring trust and confidence and winning public support, Marine leaders must be true experts in the persuasive art.

The higher one rises in rank, the less he is judged on his warrior skills and more on his ability to move people. Supporting this idea, former Joint Chiefs Chairman, ADM William J. Crowe, in his memoir of his time in uniform, said:

Few officers these days make it into the higher ranks without a firm grasp of international relations, congressional politics, and public affairs.<sup>20</sup>

So the burden on commanders is high: They need to be excellent communicators in their own right, and they also need to create environments in which their Marines understand how everything they say and do—and everything they *don't* say and *don't* do—creates an impression that can affect the reputation of the Corps and the national security interests of the United States.



**Our message must be consistent. Every Marine is a rifleman.** (Photo by SSgt Ezekiel R. Kitandwe.)

### Adapting to the New Realities

As the Nation's crisis response force, the Marine Corps needs to recalibrate itself to new realities such as going from fighting two simultaneous wars to fighting none by the end of next year, to asymmetrical warfare, to reduced budgets, to a smaller fighting force, and to new missions where winning public support is as important as securing territory. The

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**. . . accountability for communication needs to rest with each Marine, from the commandant to the strategic corporal to the private leaving Parris Island. . .**

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Marine Corps has begun to adjust itself with the pending reorganization of what is the Division of Public Affairs into the Office of U.S. Marine Corps Communication and the pending realignment of public affairs resources to the Operating Forces, both of which are a start.

But just as communication is too important to be left to commanders alone, it is also too important to be left alone to communicators. Communicators can advise and be catalysts for good practice, but ultimately, accountability for communication needs to rest with each Marine, from the commandant to the strategic corporal to the private leaving Parris Island, which requires making communication an essential part of Marine Corps training, both as stand-alone curricula and integrated into leadership training in general. Communication becomes a critical component of the projection of power, and it needs to be part of every Marine's toolbox.

From *MCDP 1*:

The purpose of all training is to develop forces that can win in combat. Training is the key to combat effectiveness and therefore is the main effort of a peacetime military. However, training should not stop with the commencement of war;

training must continue during war to adapt to the lessons of combat.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly:

The purpose of all training is to develop forces that can win. As the ability to inspire trust and to win public support becomes an essential part of our mission, communication training therefore is a key effort of a peacetime military. However, training should not stop when that trust and loyalty have been won; training must continue throughout a leader's tenure in office, to adapt to changing circumstances and needs.

The next war is likely to be fought not on a field of battle, but on television, the Internet, and social media. The tip of the spear needs to be as competent in the modern arenas as in fields of fire.

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### Notes

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13. Headquarters Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, Warfighting*, Washington, DC, 1997.
14. Ibid., foreword.
15. Ibid., p. 3.

16. Ibid., pp. 3–4.

17. Ibid., p. 9.

18. Ibid., p. 4.

19. Ibid., p. 56.

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21. *MCDP 1*, p. 59.



<i>MCDP 1</i>	Adaptation for Communication
It is essential that we understand the enemy on his own terms. We should not assume that every enemy thinks as we do, fights as we do, or has the same values or objectives. (p. 77)	It is essential that we understand the audience on its own terms. We should not assume that every audience thinks as we do, decides as we do, or has the same values, goals, or concerns as we do.
We must try to see ourselves through our enemy's eyes in order to anticipate what he will try to do so that we can counteract him. (p. 82)	We must try to see ourselves through our audience's eyes in order to anticipate what the audience will do so that we may adapt our engagement to secure the desired outcome.
Maneuver warfare attacks the enemy "system." We should try to "get inside" the enemy's thought processes and see the enemy as he sees himself so that we can set him up for defeat. (p. 76)	Effective communication focuses on the audience's worldview. We should try to "get inside" the audience's thought processes and see the audience as it sees itself.
It is important to recognize that many political problems cannot be solved by military means. Some can, but rarely as anticipated. War tends to take its own course as it unfolds. (pp. 23–24)	It is important to recognize that many political problems cannot be solved by communication means; some can, but rarely as anticipated. Communication tends to take its own course as it unfolds.
We must make our decisions in light of the enemy's anticipated reactions and counteractions. (pp. 84–85)	We must make our decisions in light of the audience's anticipated reactions and counteractions.
We should recognize that war is not an inanimate instrument, but an animate force which may have unintended consequences that may change the political situation. (p. 24)	We should recognize that communication is not an inanimate instrument, but an animate force that may have unintended consequences which may change the political situation.
Speed over time is tempo—the consistent ability to operate quickly. Speed over distance, or space, is the ability to move rapidly. Both forms are genuine sources of combat power. In other words, speed is a weapon. (p. 40)	Speed over time is tempo—the consistent ability to operate quickly. Speed over distance, or space, is the ability to move rapidly. Both forms are genuine sources of competitive advantage. In other words, speed is a weapon that provides competitive advantage.
The offense contributes striking power. We normally associate offense with initiative: The most obvious way to seize and maintain the initiative is to strike first and keep striking. (p. 33)	The offense contributes the first mover advantage. We normally associate offense with initiative: the most obvious way to seize and maintain the initiative is to communicate first and keep communicating.
Also inherent [in maneuver warfare] is the need to focus our efforts in order to maximize effects. We must focus effects not only at the decisive location but also at the decisive moment. We achieve focus through cooperation toward the accomplishment of a common purpose. This applies to all elements of the force, and involves the coordination of ground combat, aviation, and combat support services. The combination of speed and focus adds "punch" or "shock" effect to our actions. It follows that we should strike with the greatest possible combination of speed and focus. (pp. 41–42)	Also inherent in effective communication is the need to focus our engagements in order to maximize effect. We achieve focus through consistency of message and tone, delivered in a timely way, across multiple spokespeople and multiple communication channels. The combination of speed and focus provides maximum impact. It follows that we should engage stakeholders with the greatest possible combination of speed and focus.
Minor actions and random incidents can have disproportionately large—even decisive—effects. (p. 8)	In communication, incremental changes of content or timing can have a greater-than-incremental impact on outcomes.
All actions in war, regardless of the level, are based upon either taking the initiative or reacting in response to the opponent. By taking the initiative, we dictate the terms of conflict and force the enemy to meet us on our own terms. The initiative allows us to pursue some positive aim even if only to preempt an enemy initiative. It is through the initiative that we seek to impose our will on the enemy. (p. 32)	All communication are based upon either taking the initiative or reacting in response to the audience, adversaries, or the environment. By taking the initiative, we dictate the terms of discussion and the communication agenda. It is through the initiative that we seek to influence our audience.
The Marine Corps concept for winning is a warfighting doctrine based on rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver. The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some kind of advantage over the enemy as a means for accomplishing our objectives as effectively as possible. (p. 72)	Our concept of effective communication is based on rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver. The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some competitive advantage to influence audiences so as to accomplish our objectives as effectively as possible.
The flux of war is a product of the continuous interaction between initiative and response. Actions in war more or less reflect the constant imperative to seize and maintain the initiative. The initiative is clearly the preferred form of action because only through the initiative can we ultimately impose our will on the enemy. (p. 33)	Communication is a product of continuous interaction between initiative and response. Effective communication is more or less the constant imperative to seize and maintain the initiative. The initiative is clearly the preferred form of action because only through the initiative can we ultimately impose our will to influence our audience.
The defense, on the other hand, contributes resisting power, the ability to preserve and protect ourselves. The defense generally has a negative aim: that of resisting the enemy's will. (p. 33)	The defense, on the other hand, contributes resisting power, the ability to preserve and protect ourselves. The defense generally has a negative aim: to avoid losing the trust and confidence of audiences.

**Table 1: The adaptation of MCDP 1.**