



ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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WASHINGTON, DC
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JUL 01 2015

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM FOR CHIEF OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES ARMY
U.S. NAVY CHIEF OF INFORMATION
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
OF THE AIR FORCE
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, UNITED STATES MARINE
CORPS
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU

SUBJECT: Personally Identifying Information (PII) in Public Affairs Products

The Joint Staff recently led a review which affirmed the use of the current Department of Defense (DoD) policies and principles on the inclusion of personally identifying information (PII) in public products. Our mission to inform and educate as we connect our military with the American people is vitally important, and having our men and women in uniform tell their stories and be identified by their name, rank, job title and unit in articles and photos should remain the general rule.

The review, which included representatives from all the Services and OSD, followed a public release of personal information for 100 U.S. service members by an Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-affiliated group. The effort was a clear attempt to intimidate and to dissuade our forces participating in the counter-ISIL campaign. While unsettling, this type of invasive tactic was not unexpected, and it is entirely likely we will experience similar such ploys in the future.

The review examined the appropriate balance of maintaining a credible line of communication with the American people and the requirements of force protection. I am convinced the most appropriate way ahead is for us to maintain our present policy. There is inherent risk for our uniformed personnel who are often easy to identify in or out of uniform whether at home or deployed. However, there is no credible intelligence that suggests terrorist organizations are actively targeting or have historically targeted military members identified in the media. Our obligation to connect America's sons and daughters and their extraordinary missions to those they serve is too important. As we engage, we must also ensure that we employ the existing policies to protect the privacy of our people, and our public affairs community is uniquely qualified to carry out this task.

Embracing the DoD Principles of Information remains essential to our credibility, and we should avoid reactions or overly restrictive unit practice which may compromise our legitimacy and risk widening the gap between our military and the American people.

Brent Colburn

Attachment:
DoD Principles of Information





Principles of Information

It is the policy of the Department of Defense to make available timely and accurate information so that the public, Congress and the news media may assess and understand the facts about national security and defense strategy.

Requests for information from organizations and private citizens will be answered in a timely manner. In carrying out the policy, the following principles of information will apply:

Information will be made fully and readily available, consistent with the statutory requirements, unless its release is precluded by current and valid security classification. The provisions of the Freedom of Information Act will be supported in both letter and spirit.

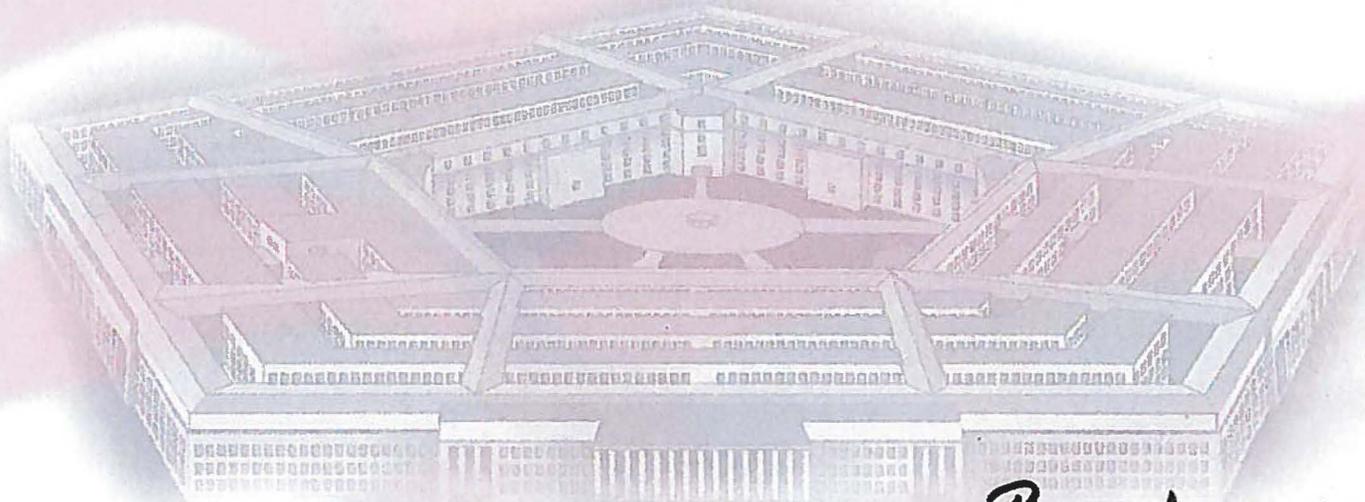
A free flow of general and military information will be made available, without censorship or propaganda, to the men and women of the Armed Forces and their dependents.

Information will not be classified or otherwise withheld to protect the government from criticism or embarrassment.

Information will be withheld only when disclosure would adversely affect national security or threaten the safety or privacy of the men and women of the Armed Forces.

The Department's obligation to provide the public with information on its major programs may require detailed public affairs planning and coordination within the Department and with other government agencies. The sole purpose of such activity is to expedite the flow of information to the public; propaganda has no place in Department of Defense public affairs programs.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs has the primary responsibility for carrying out this commitment.



November 9, 2001

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Donald H. Rumsfeld".

Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense

THE PENTAGON