

Foreign Disclosure

What Marines need to know

by the Staff, Strategy and Plans Division, PP&O

Most likely, everyone reading this can think about a few times they have had professional interactions with one of our allies or partners. This encounter may have been a combat deployment, combined exercise, or as a member of a mobile training team. Did you discuss tactics, techniques, and procedures? Lend out a copy of a doctrinal publication that you never received back? Give the foreign partners a familiarization ride in a vehicle and provide an overview of its capabilities and limitations? Did your commander, at the last minute, decide someone needed to give hip pocket training to fill white space or volunteer a sergeant to teach Combat Hunter? The fact is, these seemingly innocuous events may have been policy violations. Marines travel all over the world, working with countless foreign partners, to build interoperability among allies and develop complementary capabilities to enable future Marine Corps operations. A nineteen-year-old private first class showing a foreign national how to buddy rush can be an important tool in U.S. foreign policy, strange as that might sound. Considering the security challenges we face today and the understanding that no Service or country has enough to go around, these types of engagements will only become more important. Security cooperation is a cornerstone of the Secretary of Defense's guidance. According to the new National Defense Strategy (Department of Defense, [Washington, DC: 2018]),

By working together with allies and partners we amass the greatest possible strength for the long-term advancement of our interests, maintaining favorable balances of power that deter aggression and support the stability that generates economic growth. When we pool resources and share re-



Marines travel all over the world and train with countless military forces. (Photo by Sgt Averi Coppa.)

sponsibility for our common defense, our security burden becomes lighter.

We cannot go to war alone, and the success of a combined force requires familiarity and interoperability, which necessitates the sharing of controlled unclassified information (CUI) and classified military information (CMI). For a long time, the authority to disclose CUI and CMI to foreign partners was held only at the highest headquarters, leaving commanders in the field with little guidance on what disclosure authority they had, if any. Without any foreign disclosure subject-matter experts to turn to, and with no direction from their chain of command, commanders either clamped down and refused to share any information—hindering the success of military relationships—or opened the floodgates and shared everything. There is nothing inherently wrong with discussing tactics, techniques, and procedures, or a ve-

hicle's capabilities. However, the proper authority needs to sign off on sharing information CUI or with a foreign government. Regarding the examples in the opening paragraph, Training and Education Command (TECOM) must be contacted for tactics, techniques, and procedures and other formal training; Marine Corps Combat Development Command authorizes doctrinal publication release; and ground equipment information must be approved by Marine Corps Systems Command (MARCORSYSCOM). In fact, the sharing of either CUI or CMI without the proper foreign disclosure approval is a violation of national policy. This in turn requires an understanding of what exactly constitutes CUI or CMI. The annual security training seems easy and straightforward while we are clicking through it to get our certificates, but when confronted with a decision about whether something is unclassified, controlled unclassified, or classified, the

answer is not always intuitive. While we learn early in our time with the Corps that we must protect classified information, many are surprised to learn that something unclassified cannot be shared freely. It is a common misconception that “if you can Google it, you can share it.” It may sound like it takes a lot of coordination to make these disclosure

to make disclosure decisions on behalf of the commander. Foreign disclosure representatives (FDRs) may also be appointed to assist the FDO or be located at lieutenant colonel- and colonel-level commands as unit points of contact/subject-matter experts, but only FDOs can make the final disclosure decision. Typically, there is an FDO at the Divi-

you loop the FDO in on the planning conferences. Early coordination can help your command successfully pull off the Secretary of Defense’s direction to work with allies and partners while preventing any unintended legal or policy violations.

How do FDOs make their decisions? The holy writ of the military foreign disclosure community is known as National Disclosure Policy (NDP-1). This policy is published by the National Disclosure Policy Committee (NDPC), which consists of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Secretaries of State, Defense, and the military departments; and other special members, as needed. It sets out cohesive guidance for every country regarding what, if any, information may be shared and at what maximum classification level. NDP-1 is a controlled document that is only accessible by those who have been appointed in writing as an FDO at a command with disclosure authority. This document additionally contains policy statements published by the NDPC on individual countries, organizations, or disclosure considerations regarding certain equipment or systems. Regardless, NDP-1 requires that any foreign disclosures satisfy the following criteria:

- Disclosure is consistent with U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives.

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determinations; however, you only need to reach out to a single person to ensure the information you would like to share is authorized.

The purpose of the Marine Corps’ foreign disclosure program is to ensure that there are personnel at every level trained and empowered to advise their commanders, make foreign disclosure decisions and recommendations, and understand their left and right lateral limits from a legal and policy standpoint. Foreign disclosure authority originates from the President of the United States and makes its way down to the Commandant through the Department of Defense and of the Navy. Through *MCO 5510.20, Disclosure of Military Information to Foreign Governments and Interests* (Washington, DC: December 2012), the Commandant has delegated disclosure authority for all Marine Corps information (excluding military intelligence) to the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations. The Marine Corps’ Foreign Disclosure Office in the Strategy and Plans Division exercises that authority on behalf of the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations. Disclosure authority has been redelegated to every Marine Corps Component Command and MEF, as well as most of their major subordinate commands—down to the general officer level. At each of these commands, a foreign disclosure officer (FDO) is appointed

sion/MAW/MLG level or even down to the MEB/MEU level. These FDOs are trained on the information they are authorized to release to foreign partners themselves and which information requires them to coordinate with other organizations for approval. Regardless, FDOs are the single point of contact for Marines in their commands when it comes to sharing information with foreign governments or international organizations. The earlier you involve your FDO in planning, the better. As soon as someone says “foreign nationals” or “combined,” make sure that



Marines must know what information can be shared. (Photo by LCpl Jose D. Lujano.)



Units can have MTPs conduct a two-day foreign disclosure course. (Photo by Cpl Austin Livingston.)

- Disclosure is consistent with U.S. military and security objectives.
- Disclosure will result in a clearly defined benefit to the United States.
- Disclosure is limited to information necessary to the purpose for which the disclosure is made.
- The recipient government has the capability and intent to protect the information.

FDOs will use the guidance from NDP-1, their experience, and full coordination with other FDOs to ensure a proper balance between sharing and protecting CMI/CUI that is consistent with national policy and meets operational requirements.

To prepare a strong cadre of Marines to act as FDOs and FDRs, a mobile training team consisting of instructors from HQMC, TECOM, and MARCORSYSCOM conducts the two-day Foreign Disclosure Officer Course at every major command at least once a year. This course is required training for anyone appointed as an FDO or FDR and is good knowledge for any SNCO or officer at commands with significant interactions with foreign nationals. In particular, this knowledge is useful for Marines working as planners in the G-3 (operations) of a major command headquarters or as part of a unit that operates independently with foreign partners, such as a MEU or Special Purpose

MAGTF. The course focuses on putting students in the role of an FDO with a heavy emphasis on practical application and exercises vice lectures. Additionally, courses are available on MarineNet to provide a baseline of training on foreign disclosure. *Introduction to Foreign Disclosure, FDO1INTR01*, (Washington, DC: 2015) is designed to provide all Marines with a quick overview and is a prerequisite for anyone attending the two-day, instructor-led course. If you are a battalion or regimental commander, you should identify a Marine on your staff to be an FDR (preferably an SNCO or higher in the S-3) and direct him to the higher headquarters FDO to ensure he is enrolled in the next training event. If you work at the headquarters of a division, MAW, MLG, or MEB, you should ask if your command has been delegated disclosure authority. If the answer is yes, identify and start coordinating with your command FDO. If the answer is no, work with your MEF FDO to get disclosure authority delegated to your commander and make sure a trained FDO is appointed. Commands should ensure that the maximum amount of disclosure authority allowed has been delegated to them and that it is exercised by trained and knowledgeable personnel.

There are two additional foreign disclosure courses on MarineNet that are open to all Marines but more tar-

geted to specific roles: the *Commanders Course, FDO3CMDR01* (Washington, DC: 2015), a short overview for unit commanders on their responsibilities and limitations regarding foreign disclosure, and *contact officer training, FDO2CTOF01* (Washington, DC: 2015), a must for any unit that will be hosting foreign visitors. The contact officer training provides an in-depth look at the roles and responsibilities of contact officers, often called escorts, who are the front line of defense from unauthorized disclosure during interactions with foreign partners. Any time a foreign national visits a Marine Corps installation or organization on official business, there must be a designated contact officer to monitor and support this engagement. This training is required for anyone who is appointed as a contact officer.

At the end of the day, it is in our interest to share as much information as possible with our allies and partners. Fighting side by side is inherently less effective if we do not train together, build complementary capabilities, and establish strong relationships beforehand. Increasing interoperability and mutual understanding requires the disclosure of CUI and CMI if we are to meet the intent of the National Defense Strategy. But, this disclosure must be balanced against the need to protect certain information and only to disclose what is necessary. We also have to be mindful not to damage our long-term strategic goals for the sake of a short-term advantage. The Marine Corps Foreign Disclosure Program promotes that the FDO should not be a stumbling block but an enabler for the warfighter and the overall mission. Reach out to the FDO or FDR in your command to learn more about foreign disclosure or to see what they can do to aid in mission accomplishment.

>Authors' Note: Please email us at PP&O_FD@usmc.mil if you would like the contact information for the first FDO in your chain of command, inquire about FDO training, or learn more about foreign disclosure in general.

