

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

EMBEDDING SUCCESS INTO THE MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

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The intent of this research paper is to analyze the embedded media policy via the relationship of the media and military prior to, during, and following major hostilities in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Focus will be on the development, execution, and effectiveness of the embed policy vis-à-vis DoD's efforts to leverage the media in its information campaign.

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EMBEDDING SUCCESS IN THE MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONSHIP

The lessons learned and commentaries regarding the Defense Department's media embedded reporter policy and resulting coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are still being written. It is clear that the wider use of embedded reporters provided the world an unprecedented view of combat and of the warfighters. This state-of-the-art view brought the public real-time images, sounds and soldiering via gyroscopic satellite vehicles, videophones, cell phones, and night vision photography.

However, what exactly has this 21st century coverage provided the American public and the world? Has it provided a comprehensive, balanced, and true perspective of the prosecution of war and its effects, a higher level of journalism, or just merely "info-tainment"¹? Or could it be the media utilizing its new technology in an attempt to fill the 24-hour news cycle and feed the public's hunger for knowledge about the war? These questions will continue to be debated by the fourth estate, academia, the military and the public.

Information is power. As one of the four elements of power in a Grand Strategy, its proper management is vital to our national interests as stated by David Jablonsky, instructor at the U.S. Army War College, "This combination of enhanced communication and dissemination of information, however, is a two-edged sword that cuts across all the social determinants of power in national strategy."² With the impending battle with Iraq as part of the Global War on Terrorism, the Department of Defense was concerned with implementing a policy to counter disinformation and to disseminate international messages, which would provide the media greater access to the battlefield in delivering accurate combat reports. In return DoD would be able to get out its message about a smaller, swifter, highly technical, fighting force engaged in liberating a people from the hands of a brutal and desperate dictator.

THE MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONSHIP SINCE VIETNAM

The historic relationship between the military and the media has been a mix of cooperation and tension. Members of the fourth estate seek to obtain and report the truth while the military, seek to control the flow of the truth. This tension combined with goals and unique personality traits of those called to each profession has been cause for a multitude of disagreements and high level of distrust.

In no other conflict was the relationship between the two more strained and distrustful than in the Vietnam conflict. This adversarial relationship during the conflict was "intensified and then institutionalized ... when the Pentagon and the press both seemed to lose respect for the mission, veracity and honor of the other side."³

According to William V. Kennedy in *The Media and the Military*, the roots of this conflict arose from cultural and ideological differences between those who enter the military and those who serve in the media.⁴ He asserts that these differences combined with reporters' lack of knowledge of the military prior to assignment in the field resulted in uninformed or negative reporting. This reporting caused the leadership to, "view these stories as a major reason they were losing the war at home while they were winning the battles in Vietnam."⁵

Following the Tet Offensive a "credibility gap" emerged, as "the disturbing images on the TV screen were in sharp contrast to the official reports that the United States was ... winning the war and would be out of Vietnam soon."⁶ Negative reporting and decreasing public support led to a "lasting distrust for the press ... on the part of many, if not most, U.S. officers of all services..." which, "shorn of the pretenses necessary to maintain a workable day-to-day relationship, ..." was "hatred."⁷

From the conclusion of the conflict in Vietnam and throughout the next two-plus decades, journalists and military members were ingrained with enmity towards each other. Due to this bitter relationship, the military limited press access in later conflicts.⁸ Two such conflicts with no or limited press access were Grenada and Panama.

In 1983, during the invasion of Grenada, there were no reporters accompanying U.S. troops. "Reporters who traveled to the island in boats were turned away at gunpoint."⁹ In 1989, at the onset of the invasion of Panama, despite the Pentagon's promises to assist the press in reaching the island, hundreds of reporters were stranded in Miami, FL, and Costa Rica.¹⁰ As a result, "there were no pictures or eyewitness accounts of three battles the first day, in which 23 U.S. soldiers were killed and 265 wounded."¹¹

For the Gulf War, the military eased the severe restrictions to access and employed a pool system. Critics noted that, "the Pentagon micromanaged coverage, setting up a pool system where specially chosen 'pool' reporters were taken to the front to gather material to share with other journalists. But the pool was never allowed to witness a battle as it unfolded."¹² John MacArthur, Harper's magazine publisher and author, wrote, "the government and media misled the public and that pool reporting was a 'crushing defeat' for freedom of the press."¹³

In Kosovo and during the early action in Afghanistan, both largely air campaigns with the exception of Special Forces ground units, "there was no concerted effort to put reporters near the fighting and the press complained bitterly that the Pentagon was slow to confirm events on the ground."¹⁴ According to the media, the pool system was not working.

Following a raid on Mullah Omar's headquarters by Army Rangers with no pool reporter, news organizations executives were up in arms to the Pentagon. Shortly afterward, the Navy

and the Marine Corps began to embed reporters on ships and with Marine units on a trial basis. Because of the much positive coverage of operations by the Marines, the Army decided to embed as well.¹⁵

BATTLE FOR PUBLIC OPINION PRE-OIF

Following the tragedies of September 11, 2001, U.S. and international public opinion firmly supported military engagement in retaliation against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan as part of the war against terrorism.

When public debate shifted to the question of Iraq's role in terror, U.S. policy support waned at home and internationally, including that of some long-standing allies. The battle lines were drawn between those who supported toppling Hussein preemptively to eliminate the growing threat of Iraq's possession of weapons of mass destruction, and those who opposed invading a sovereign nation with a duly-elected president who had neither attacked nor threatened a neighboring country.

The battle for public opinion was debated in all available media: print, television, radio and the Internet. Much of U.S. opinion favored action against Iraq while much of the international community opposed it. Adding to the anti-invasion fervor was incendiary, anti-U.S. reporting by Al-Jazeera, the Qatar-based satellite network that broadcasts throughout the Arabic-language region.

With United Nations resolutions, U.S. ultimatums, and deadlines drawing near, the Department of Defense faced the distinct prospect of fighting a U.S.-led coalition of willing countries against an Arabic-speaking nation in an unpopular war. For the United States to exercise informational power in the impending crisis, a different strategy would have to be employed. This strategy would leverage the media in accurately depicting coalition military and the compassionate actions of liberation. This could only be accomplished in cooperation with the media, whose members had vocalized discontent at military-media relations for quite some time. It would be necessary to devise a media policy that would strike a balance between the relatively unfettered access and reporting in Vietnam and the severe restrictions of Grenada, Panama, and the Gulf War. Enter Victoria Clarke, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and her Deputy Secretary, Bryan Whitman, a former Army officer.

EMBEDDED MEDIA POLICY

In October 2002, Clarke and Whitman developed a plan to assign or "embed" reporters with the troops. Limited embedding was tried in limited usage with around 40 reporters in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom in response to media objections that they had

no access to the battlefield. Clarke's embed vision would be "dramatically different in scope and numbers than anything tried before."¹⁶

Whitman voiced the objectives for DoD's media policy: "to neutralize the disinformation efforts of our adversaries ... we wanted to build and maintain support for U.S. policy as well as achieve information dominance. We wanted to be able to demonstrate the professionalism of the U.S. military."¹⁷

Assistant Secretary Clarke, in a briefing of the policy to public affairs officers, stated that the strategy was to "expose audiences to the complete picture:

- Show combat, humanitarian, and coalition ops
- Demonstrate commitment to avoid civilian casualties
- Make the case against Hussein – his intent to develop and use WMD; record of torture and oppression
- Preempt Iraqi attacks by demonstrating past behavior
- Rapidly respond & refute Iraqi charges
- Facilitate robust media access
 - To counter likely Iraqi lies and distortions
 - To highlight professionalism of U.S. forces."¹⁸

The embedding plan would assign more than 600 reporters at a ratio of 80 percent U.S. reporters to 20 percent non-U.S. reporters, to include Arabic outlets such as Al-Jazeera. Ten percent of the U.S. reporters were to be selected from "local media that were from the towns where (the) troops were coming from."¹⁹ The military distributed assignments but allowed the news organizations to select their own reporters.

War coverage would not be limited to embedded reporters. News organizations could send non-embedded reporters, or "unilaterals," but Clarke emphasized that due to the inherent dangers in combat that the safety of non-embedded reporters could not be guaranteed. In fact, unilaterals were discouraged from approaching the battlefield as they or their vehicles could be misidentified as combatants.

EMBED GROUND RULES

DoD released a nine-page document detailing the ground rules for which the embed journalists had to agree in order to be assigned to a unit. The document detailed a variety of responsibilities for the media as well as the military, and do's and don'ts that defined the conditions for access and coverage. The following is excerpted from the ground rules:

2. Policy

2.A. ... The Department of Defense (DOD) policy on media coverage of future military operations is that media will have long-term, minimally restrictive access to U.S. Air, Ground and Naval Forces through embedding. Media coverage of any future operation will, to a larger extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. ... We need to tell the factual story--good or bad--before others seed the media with disinformation and distortions, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story--only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops.

2.C.3. Units should plan lift and logistical support to assist in moving media products to and from the battlefield so as to tell our story in a timely manner. In the event of commercial communications difficulties, media are authorized to file stories via expeditious military signal/communications capabilities.

3. Procedures

3.F. Embedded media operate as part of their assigned unit. An escort may be assigned at the discretion of the unit commander. The absence of a PA [public affairs] escort is not a reason to preclude media access to operations.

3.G. Commanders will ensure the media are provided with every opportunity to observe actual combat operations. The personal safety of correspondents is not a reason to preclude media access from combat areas.

3.Q. The standard for release of information should be to ask "Why not release?" [rather than] "Why release?" Decisions should be made ASAP, preferably in minutes, not hours.

3.S. Media will only be granted access to detainees ... within the provisions of the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

4. Ground rules

4.A. All interviews with service members will be on the record. Security at the source is the policy. Interviews with pilots and aircrew members are authorized upon completion of missions; however, release of information must conform to these media ground rules.

4.C. Media embedded with U.S. Forces are not permitted to carry personal firearms.

4.G. The following categories of information are *not* releasable:

4.G.14. Information on effectiveness of enemy electronic warfare.

4.G.17. Information on effectiveness of enemy camouflage, cover, deception, targeting, direct and indirect fire, intelligence collection, or security measures.

4.G.18. No photographs or other visual media showing an enemy prisoner of war or detainee's recognizable face, nametag or other identifying feature or item may be taken.

TABLE 1

It was clear by the ground rules that the military intended to allow as much access, interaction and coverage as possible while maintaining tight operational security.

MEDIA BOOT CAMPS

In an effort to familiarize reporters with the military and the possible conditions in which they would work, the military offered news organizations orientation training. Many reporters spent one week at one of the Pentagon's "Embed Boot Camps," where they "were given a crash course in all things military ..."²⁰ to include nuclear, biological, and chemical training and first aid. The boot camps were held at Ft. Benning, GA; Ft Dix, NJ; and Quantico Marine Corp Base and Norfolk Naval Station in Virginia. The training was not required but encouraged. Reporters hoping to be selected for "choice" embed assignments hoped to improve their chances by participating in the boot camps. The training was designed to be educational and challenging. Andrew Jacobs, a New York Times prospective embed, termed the week as, "alternately enlightening, entertaining, horrifying, and physically exhausting."²¹

Training camps tested the mettle of embed hopefuls. The training “weeded out those who mistakenly thought that covering a war would be a heck of an adventure. After barely surviving pretend war, some opted to not experience the real thing.”²²

In addition to the boot camps, many reporters were given the opportunity to spend time with military units training in the U.S. prior to going off to war. This allowed the reporters and military to build trust in each other and to get familiar with each other’s terminology and routines. It also allowed the news organizations and reporters the opportunity to test their new equipment, techniques, and procedures for reporting in what would be a fluid, hectic environment.

Walter Rogers of CNN noted, “that the U.S. Army was nothing short of brilliant in terms of the way they prepared us for it... you get to know the people you’re covering... and you build a rapport. And that rapport stands you through the whole time very well.”²³

NEWS ORGANIZATIONS PREPARE FOR WAR

With the embed policy in place, journalists volunteering to go, and new-generation communication technology available to them, news organizations spent millions of dollars in ramping up to cover a war like never before. As with any costly, large-scale operation, proper planning and preparation by the news organizations was essential. There were a multitude of logistics questions and internal policy issues for which to plan and factor, which were not present in the previous war with Iraq.

Important questions included --

- What type of communications equipment and how much to bring?
- How do you get the equipment inside Iraq?
- What type of vehicles could be obtained and used?
- What type of safety equipment was needed?
- What would be the safest way to travel?
- Do we send unilaterals? If so, how many?

Factors to plan for included --

- Passports, visas
- Food
- Coordination between anchor desks, CENTCOM and the Pentagon
- Utilization of on-air retired military for analysis
- Injury or death of a reporter
- Loss of equipment

Planning for large-scale, fast moving operations far from home is not common to news organizations as it is in the military, so they had to learn fast and on-the-job.

CONCERNS OVER THE EMBED POLICY

Despite the tremendous momentum for both the military and the media in gaining access to cover battlefield operations live, the policy had many detractors from the outset. With the plan for the embedded journalists to live, eat, sleep and do everything their military counterparts would do, except to carry arms, some questioned whether they would grow too “close to the military personnel with whom they are traveling” and “could sacrifice objectivity and a broad range of reporting in return for access.”²⁴ These voices argued that embeds would be “in bed” with their military units. Dan Rather of CBS News quipped about the arrangement that, “there’s a pretty fine line between being embedded and being entombed.”²⁵

Many countered this concern by noting the close working relationships of those who cover political campaigns or police beats and manage to maintain objectivity.

Other concerns related to possible censorship by the military. Critics speculated that the press might not be allowed to operate freely or film and report on what they desired, especially if the coverage was disturbing or unflattering to the military.

Of concern to all was the safety and security of the embedded journalists. Being “up close and personal” with front line troops in the line of fire, and possible chemical attack, called for equipping crews with body armor, helmets and gas masks. Corresponding training on the proper wear and use of the equipment became a necessity. Despite the precautions, the nightmare scenario of journalist vulnerability on the battlefield was realized.

COVERAGE DURING DECISIVE OPERATIONS (WAR)

The challenge facing news organizations was to provide an accurate depiction of war from a variety of angles and from numerous resources. In addition to the “embeds” and unilaterals, reporters were stationed on ships, at CENTCOM headquarters in Doha, Qatar, in Kuwait staging areas, and at the Pentagon. As reporters in the field covered only their “slice” of the war, the big picture of operations would have to be assembled at media headquarters by producers, anchors, and editors.

To aid in providing newsrooms, on-air anchors and the public a better understanding of military operations, scores of retired military experts were hired. In the lead-up to the war, they assisted news organizations in developing briefing materials regarding the variety of military hardware and systems as well as offering insights as to how the war might be fought. During the combat operations they were available for 24/7 analysis.

At the onset of combat operations, the television media utilized their state-of-the-art technology in providing captivating, real-time images of the battlefield: tanks speeding through the desert, firefights and close air support. This riveting coverage fueled the public's thirst for information in a manner never before achievable. It was as if the public was drawn and glued to their televisions like motorists ubiquitously peering at an accident scene.

U.S. broadcast networks and cable news outlets were on the air live twenty-four hours a day displaying virtually all that the embeds could provide - from exciting confrontations with the enemy to the mundane chores shoveling foxholes. It was during these alternating events that the Pentagon claimed its largest public relations success - the display of American soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors as everyday people in extraordinary circumstances who were dedicated to serving their country and protecting their buddies. These images of bravery and camaraderie combined with the "shout outs" to family and friends back home were priceless in lifting the level of patriotism, appreciation, and support for the troops.

Shortly after combat operations commenced, it was clear that embedded journalists were the center of the coverage. Television reporters beamed back real-time visuals to the short-attention spanned, instant gratification, TV/video game-nurtured viewer. Print journalists transmitted their fascinating, detailed accounts of the battlefield to traditional newspapers and Internet sites.

However, there were drawbacks to this new type of coverage, mainly with the amount and scope. Initially, there was a deluge of reporting. As Andy Rosenthal, managing editor of The New York Times, stated, "It's the Powell Doctrine of coverage – overwhelming force."²⁶ The torrent of information and reports coming into newsrooms proved challenging to those charged with assembling the big picture.

As anticipated, a "soda straw" effect emerged from the perspectives of the widely stationed embedded reporters. Some embeds covered raging firefights and others experienced no battles. Often, there would be conflicting reports on the same issue, such as the availability of food for the troops. There were reports of some units conserving their meals-ready-to-eat or MRE's by limiting troops to two meals a day rather than three. But other embeds, like retired Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North of Fox News Channel, reported no such shortage with his Marines. Conflicting reports led to questions regarding troop's speed of advance, operational pauses, logistics and supply chains, and the preparation and overall effectiveness of the war plan.

Often there were disconnects between the reports from journalists, CENTCOM briefings and the Pentagon. After a few iterations of these disconnects, frustration developed when

neither CENTCOM nor the Pentagon could/would not confirm reports from reporters in the field. These situations became prominent during events that could place the military in a negative light, such as incidents of fratricide or the apparent bombing of Iraqi civilians. Often the reporters stationed at CENTCOM and the Pentagon pressed hard for answers to pointed questions about these incidents as well as the progress of the war versus the plan. The military-media relationship at these two venues appeared to be more adversarial. This was the complete opposite of the relationships that had been forged between the commanders, troops, and embedded journalists. The most heated exchanges between reporters and the military occurred away from the battlefield where reporters demanded more than what they could see, hear, touch in order to report.

This soda straw effect also resulted in what Defense Secretary Rumsfeld termed as media “mood swings” upon the cyclical reporting of rapid troop movements and battle successes as opposed with aviation crashes, service member casualties, and apparent fratricide. By the fifth day of the war, criticism of war planning, tactics, and personnel strength were rampant from many segments of the media, including that of retired military analysts in newsrooms. Matthew Rose and John J. Fialka, journalists for The Wall Street Journal, commented on the public mood in writing, “the overload of scenes and dispatches is delivering an illusion that each hour’s installment adds up to total insight – whipsawing the public mood from highs to lows...”²⁷

The mood swings were quite evident with the first images of U.S. prisoners of war and of their fallen, mutilated comrades transmitted by Al-Jazeera. Iraqi television displayed U.S. POWs being questioned about their jobs and purpose within the country. This act hit the U.S. military hard as it was an apparent violation of the Geneva Conventions. There was outrage directed at both the Iraqi government for this display as well as at the U.S. government by those opposed to the war. It was not until the joyous images of the rescue of Pvt. Jessica Lynch and the continuing rapid advancement of Army and Marines Corps units toward Baghdad that the public mood shifted upward. It was clear that the U.S. will was a center of gravity.

Though embed coverage was exciting, not all were satisfied with the journalist standards. Criticism was leveled at the embedded journalists due to their apparent lack of reports critical of coalition forces. Allegations were that the embed reports were skewed in favor of the military and displayed imbalanced coverage. Reporters stationed forward at CENTCOM commented to briefers that there was a dearth of reporting on Iraqi casualties, either combatant or civilian. Iraqi state-run media or Arab media outlets had been running daily video of civilian casualties credited to errant bombs or attacks that CENTCOM could not readily confirm nor deny.

CENTCOM briefers offered details of these incidents following full, detailed investigations, but detractors saw this as stonewalling to cover up unflattering incidents.

Embedded reporters traveling with the troops were unable to report on the Iraqi war crime claims. Neither embedded journalists with U.S. units nor unilaterals in Iraq had the range of access that necessary to verify or repudiate such claims. Unilateral reporters, who managed to remain in Baghdad or traveled within Iraq by other means, were able to report on bombed sites and the accusations. However, questions arose about their possible manipulation by Saddam's Ministry of Information. Were the unilaterals allowed to freely report on what they saw or were they being used as part of Saddam's information campaign? A blast at a Baghdad marketplace exemplified the coverage dilemma. Unilaterals there could not independently determine if it were caused by an errant U.S. bomb or an Iraqi bomb planted to turn international opinion against the U.S. and the coalition.

EMBED VS. UNILATERAL COVERAGE

Embedded and non-embedded reporters, in search of the "truth" of war, faced many challenges in order to do so. Both took risks of personal harm, but the unilaterals did not have the protection of coalition forces. News organizations faced a standoff with sending embeds or unilaterals: enjoy virtual freedom of reporting in a dangerous war zone with no assurance of safety or accept guidelines on reporting in return for improved access to the battlefield and additional safety. Unilaterals, indeed, undertook safety risks of in providing their reports. There were fourteen journalists killed in the war and the majority of the casualties were unilateral reporters.

Jon Donovan, an ABC unilateral news correspondent, said, "we go in to talk to the civilians, then we hear the Pentagon tell us that a lot of civilians are soldiers pretending to be civilians. We're prime hostage material."²⁸ During the early stages of the conflict, he and his team of six would enter Iraq only during the daytime hours and into sections under American control. He stated that he felt that he did not believe that his perspective of the war was better than that of the embedded journalists, "just a different one."²⁹ His charge from ABC news was to cover segments of the war with the Iraqi people to gain insight as to their aspirations for the future in light of the coalition action and promises.³⁰ Embedded reporters on the move with the fast-advancing troops could not be afforded this opportunity.

POST- REGIME CHANGE COVERAGE

By April 8, 2003, with the fall of Baghdad imminent, many embedded reporters left their assignments in support units or units far from the front. They knew that the story and the visuals were in Baghdad and they quickly sought units that would be entering the capital city.

Shortly after the toppling of Saddam's statue in Paradise Square, signaling regime change but not an end to combat operations, the news organizations shifted course. ABC, CBS, and NBC returned to regular programming. Cable news outlets resumed airing commercials and stopped operating live 24/7. In light of the millions of dollars spent in preparing for and operating in Iraq, economics dictated that television resume income-generating operations.

With the major conflict apparently over, many embeds left their military units and stationed themselves in makeshift bureaus at the Palestine Hotel. From there, they reported on coalition efforts to restore services and rebuild infrastructure. This story soon was overtaken by the Iraqi's expressions about newfound freedom following years of oppression and depravity— the looting of government facilities. Other embeds returned to family, showers, and familiar food, and offered retrospective reports of their war experiences.

With the loss of the majority of the embedded journalists, there was a distinct change in the tone and focus of coverage from Iraq. In contrast to the soldier-centric coverage in the major combat phase prior to entering Baghdad, the next phase of reporting targeted many aspects of Iraqi life, the capture of Ba'athist leaders, and insurgent attacks against coalition forces. There was little war coverage despite the fact that there was still fighting ongoing in the Northern region of the country.

As the weeks passed and the military transitioned to stability operations, the two primary two categories of stories to cover were the efforts to restore services and rebuild the country and the challenges that the coalition faced - protests over the lack of services and security; increased crime, casualties due to roadside bombs, and sabotage to oil pipelines.

Despite hundreds of "good news" stories like soldiers providing food and rebuilding schools, media coverage quickly refocused on problems. "If it bleeds, it leads" stories became the norm during stability operations. With the loss of the embedded journalists, and no American-led/Iraqi-run television news outlet to cover the positive developments in Iraq, the information advantage enjoyed during combat operations eroded. Maj. Gen. Thurman, stationed at the headquarters of the Combined Force Land Component Commander during the war, speaking as part of the Embedded Media Conference at the US Army War College in September, 2003, said "we lost the information superiority edge in some manner with the departure of the media ... suddenly all of the positive stories you had with the embeds are to a

degree less visible³¹ during stability operations. Moreover, the U.S. information campaign, which had dropped millions of leaflets to communicate directly with the Iraqi people, suffered greatly by not setting up local television with Arabic speaking correspondents to show the positive works by the coalition in the effort to “win the hearts and minds” of the Iraqi people.

EMBED POLICY AFTER ACTION REPORT

So what is the best description of the war reporting from the embedded reporters? Truthful? Fair? Accurate? Jingoistic? Unbiased? Pro-military? Anti-Iraqi? Was it more infotainment or substance? It is a matter of debate that most likely depends on one’s pre-war perspective. Most likely, all of the adjectives applied in some part. What is known is that the embedded reporters offered coverage of combat operations like that of no other conflict due to the dazzling array of technology available to them.

In measuring success, the media and the military must examine their objectives and expectations prior to the war. The news organizations had hoped that the embedded journalists would deliver real-time reports of battlefield close to the action with reasonable freedom to report as they pleased. The military had hoped for the same as part of their information campaign as well as to counter inaccurate reporting of the war by either the Iraqi Ministry of Information or news outlets with an anti-war or anti-coalition agenda. It is fair to state that each side achieved its aims, though not without controversy or obstacles.

Alicia Sheppard, in *“Narrowing the Gap: Military, Media and the Iraq War”* sums up the success from the perspective of American public opinion. They “gained a better comprehension of what the military does and of the sacrifices and hardships thousands of Americans make on a daily basis. And it renewed pride in the U.S. military.”³²

Sheppard credited the media: “They were able to broadcast live in the midst of a battle – an astounding feat. They saw and reported what was happening on the ground without censorship and without information being filtered through military briefers. And in the process, they got an education on today’s military, which the press admitted they sorely needed.”³³

FACTORS LEADING TO SUCCESS

The military successes or outcomes in the Iraq war did not lead to an improved relationship between the military and the media. The groundwork was laid in the preparations for the upcoming conflict.

A major factor in the improving relationship was Victoria Clarke’s development and selling of the embed plan to both her superiors and to the media. Allowing battlefield access to military commanders and troops to reporters from around the world on a large scale was

unprecedented. This was an important first step in healing old wounds of media resentment regarding previous conflicts' restrictions.

With the policy in place, operational commanders were clear on DoD's position on media inclusion and participation. The next big step was in making the embed policy a major portion of the concept of operations. Commanders, senior and junior alike, were directed to support the embed policy and media plan. The shift in the military's perspective of the media from that of an adversary to an ally was central to the mission.

Another factor in the improved relationship was the preparation offered to media via "boot camps" and early embedding. A better media understanding of the units and missions, coupled with investments in building rapport, paid off for both media and the military due to greater respect for each other's roles.

Thorough preparation by the news organizations and professionalism of the embedded journalists in their desire to cover battlefield operations accurately despite the military's ground rules cannot be discounted. With ground rules set, soldiers and "embeds" in place, and the missions of the military and media clear, working relationships took root. An example of such a relationship between an embedded journalist and a military commander was that of CNN's Walter Rogers and U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Terry Ferrell, a cavalry squadron commander. They met up in Kuwait and immediately worked on building a rapport based on cooperation and honesty. There would be no off-the-record discussions. There would be no need. By the time the orders were given to move into Iraq, their relationship was strong. Ferrell encouraged his troops to be as open with Mr. Rogers as he was. Additionally, Ferrell kept Rogers informed of the plan and daily operations. Rogers understood and respected operational security and guarded it as a soldier would. Ferrell admitted that, at times, he would "vent his frustrations about situations to Walter," with the knowledge that their confidential talks would not be reported.³⁴ Such confidences were unthinkable in Vietnam's later years.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Though successful in many ways, there is room for improvement with the embed policy and execution. The improvements can be classified as logistical, procedural, and journalistic.

A major complaint from the media was the inability to drive their own specialized armored satellite vehicles into the theater. This forced the media to strip the equipment from their vehicles and squeeze them into the military's "humvees." This resulted in cramped quarters for troops and reporters alike.

Media representative would prefer ground rules with fewer restrictions. At after-action public affairs conferences held following major combat operations, media and military conferees recommended that improved and longer embed training would mitigate the need for some of the current restrictions.

Along journalistic lines, conferees at the U.S. Army War College Embedded Media Conference held in September 2003 detailed media criticism on the coverage of the war as a whole. These include:

- Inadequate coverage of the big picture – including disconnects between headquarters and the front
- Inadequate coverage from the Iraqi perspective
- Inadequate coverage of the non-U.S. and non-Iraqi perspectives
- Lack of questioning of leaders into the cause to go to war
- Apparent sanitization of the horrors of war – no images of casualties on either side as restricted by the ground rules.

Military conferees commented on improved media coverage in the stability operations phase. An observation at the conference was that the media left too soon following the President's declaration of an end to major combat operations. The departure of the majority of the media and the military's public affairs representatives left a void in reporting about many ongoing unit operations. After the fact, a conferee suggested that reporters be embedded with civil affairs units specifically to cover activities involving civilians.

POLICIES FOR FUTURE CONFLICTS

The future of war is not entirely clear. In a globalization scenario, the possibility of large armies going head-to-head is greatly reduced, if not, unlikely. Therefore, asymmetrical conflicts such as the Global War on Terrorism are more likely. Retired Army Major General Robert Scales, former Commandant of the U.S. Army War College, envisions that "future conflicts will be fought by smaller, less-conventional, more technical teams...(which are) more SOF-like."³⁵

The modern military has been utilized increasingly in operations other than major combat. These operations are termed, Military Operations Other than War or (MOOTW). The U.S. scalable military of the 21st century will be employed in appropriately sized "packages" depending on the operational scenario. Table 1 shows the range of military options and a proposed level of media involvement. By utilizing this chart, the military and the media can customize a scalable media plan of media personnel and resources depending on the nature

and size of the operation. The criteria for customizing a proper media plan would include the level of and nature of hostilities expected, operational security, security of reporters, cooperation and support of host nation versus non-permissive entry minus support.

Military Operations	U.S. Goals	Examples	Media Involvement
WAR	Fight and Win	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large-scale Combat Operations • Small-scale combat operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embedded and Unilateral reporters • Pool reporter(s)
MOOTW	Deter War and Promote Peace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace Operations • Counter Terrorism • Show of Force • Raids/Strikes • NEO • Nation Assistance • Counterinsurgency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pool/Unilateral • Small Pool • Pool • Small Pool • Unilateral • Unilateral • Small Pool
MOOTW	Promote Peace and Support US Civil Authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of Navigation • Counter-drug • Humanitarian Assistance • Protection of Shipping • US Civil Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pool • Small Pool • Unilateral • Pool • Unilateral

TABLE 2

An example of utilizing a scalable media plan is illustrated in comparing the two categories of war and MOOTW. In the decisive operations phase of a large-scale war, there would be a large number of troops of all branches of service from coalition countries over a vast area. Since the nature of major combat is hostile and fluid, the military should maintain a tight control over the battlefield in knowing the location of friendly forces, enemy forces and media. Therefore, development of an embedded journalist media plan as in OIF would be appropriate for the efficiency of operations and for the safety of the journalists. Similarly, embedding a pool reporter or two with a unit during the stability operations phase, where forces are employed on a smaller-scale in equally dangerous combat situations to that of major conflict, is advisable. Operations of this nature include combating insurgents, raids on high-value targets, and actions involving volatile situations or culturally sensitive locations. Embedding one or two pool journalists would allow for appropriate media coverage and reduce the risks to media personnel. Assignment of the journalist(s) can be made via pre-arranged schedule based on days of the month or by a particular week.

In MOOTW, the nature of the mission, size of the forces, area of operation, level of hostilities, host nation support, and media access will vary greatly. The first section under MOOTW in Table 1 shows the variety of missions involved. Though military operations may be smaller in scale, the military may not be able to control the area of operations such as in war. The media will be less likely to accept guidelines in these operations though DoD should still offer access to units involved. Operational commanders can expect the media to operate independently of the military in covering peacekeeping operations, NEO, and nation assistance. Commanders should leverage the media during these operations as they could depict American troops in a positive light in support of U.S policy.

However, DoD should insist on a small pool of reporters to accompany forces in peacemaking operations, raids, strikes, counterinsurgencies, and counter-terrorist operations involving increased operational security requirements and greater risks to forces and journalists. While a small group of journalists can accurately and credibly report on the scope of operations, a larger group of reporters covering these swiftly moving and potentially lethal operations can be a hindrance to the forces and negatively influence the mission.

In the remaining segment of MOOTW in Table 1, the operations are less likely to involve hostilities and operational security. Again, DoD should offer and encourage media access to units throughout these operations. The limiting factor in these operations would be those involving Navy vessels, where space may be at a premium. Therefore, in freedom of navigation operations, counter-drug operations via the sea, and protection of shipping operations, pool reporters are recommended.

CONCLUSION

In the information age with access to billions of people via worldwide 24-hour news outlets, the Internet, and a variety of traditional media, the significance of information as an element of national power is highlighted, particularly during times of crisis and war. Following the tragedies of September 11, 2001, the messages emanating from the U.S. government and that of our enemies and detractors have been diametrically opposed.

As a super power, the United States can stand mightily against those who have harmed it or have aims to do so. But in the court of public opinion, might does not always mean right. Therefore, it is essential that informational power be utilized in support of our national policies and actions.

The primary goals of the unprecedented access to the battlefield by the world's media via the embedded media policy were to demonstrate the professionalism of coalition troops and to counter disinformation by our adversaries. These goals were met.

Coalition troops, and especially the American soldier, sailor, airman, marine and Coast Guardsman, were portrayed by embedded journalists as fierce, efficient warriors as well as compassionate individuals. Reporting from embedded battlefield journalists countered disinformation generated by the Iraqi propaganda machine as well as coverage from other outlets opposed to the campaign or U.S. policies and allowed the world to decide the truth for itself.

The strategy to achieve these goals was an unprecedented level of cooperation. The cooperation was initiated with the planning and preparation leading up to conflict and forged between the troops and journalists throughout the conflict. The cooperation fostered improved relationships between the media and the military. The result was that each party benefited from the relationship and the coverage.

Can these same goals be met in future conflicts when there is less motivation toward cooperation, or when operations do not support embedding journalists? The conditions around future conflicts will certainly be different and the relationship between the military and the media may have taken a new direction. Future conflicts will be covered by the media in some manner with or without the full cooperation of the military. It is in the best interest of the military, in support of national policy, that a certain level of cooperation be maintained in order to leverage the media in shaping its messages and images to be reported.

With the Global War on Terror, the continued threat of asymmetric warfare, and the transformation of the U.S. military to lighter, more rapid and capable, scalable forces, operational plans need to be developed to provide for the utilization and optimization of the media. These plans need to take into account the lessons learned from Operation Iraqi Freedom and need to allow for scalable media presence.

During OIF, critics leveled allegations that objective journalism suffered because of the close relationships that developed between the embedded journalists and their assigned units. The media will weigh that criticism and will not accept the same guidelines as in OIF. Issues that media organizations will push for in future conflicts include:

- increased independence of embedded journalists
- roving embedded journalists
- media-specialized vehicles for transmissions
- media-contracted translators for covering opponents and local citizens³⁶

These issues will challenge the military in developing any future embedded journalist policy for major combat. They pose problems in the areas of the military's control over the area of operations, operational security, and the safety of journalists. Allowing journalists to roam from unit to unit is not recommended, as it will increase the likelihood of their injury due to combat fire or capture.

Allowing roving embedded journalists, in fact, may erode the basis for an improved relationship with the media and military troops: trust. By spending time with one unit, the journalists were able to develop trust with commanders and troops based on the esprit de corps of living and working together under the same conditions. U.S. commanders may be less trusting and less likely to share information with roving embedded journalists, such as what occurred with the unilateral journalists in OIF.

Media heads and Department of Defense personnel should continue to meet regularly to hammer out the issues presented. DoD should also encourage media embedding during scheduled military exercises in order to expose more journalists to a better understanding of the military as well as to highlight the military in transformation. Additionally, embedding journalists in exercises can act as a proving ground for new or improved media technology.

A forward look must also be given by the military concerning future conflicts that may strain the military-media relationship. The last two major conflicts have been won due to overwhelming power assembled against an under-matched opponent, with relatively few casualties compared to Vietnam and World War II. Future conflicts may bring mass casualties; journalists will have to report on this. A unit may be consumed by hostile fires or by an attack by chemical, biological or nuclear means; the images would be devastating to the American psyche. Even on a minor scale, the aftermath of reports unflattering to the military, such as American casualties, human rights violations, and civilian deaths, may again strain the relationship between the military and the media.

The military's goals in the future in working with the media should be the same as they were in OIF. The military and the media are dependent on each other despite their rocky history. Flexibility in the future will be the key for each organization. Future strategic leaders must incorporate planning for media operations into U.S. information strategy. If we do not, our adversaries will. As the numbers of fallen forces increases, hostage videos displayed, insurgent attacks covered versus efforts into winning the "hearts and minds," the likelihood of erosion in U.S. public support increases. It is incumbent that the good relationship built during Operation Iraqi Freedom continues to grow.

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ENDNOTES

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⁶ Ibid.

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⁹ Howard Kurtz, *Washington Post*, Washington, DC., 28 April 2003, pg A01. Available from <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A46401-2003Apr27>>, Internet; accessed 18 October 2003.

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