

McCormick Foundation 10th Military-Media Conference

**Current State of Military-Media Relations:  
Where Do We Go From Here?**



September 23–24, 2009

Sponsored by:

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 **McCormick  
Foundation**

## About the McCormick Foundation

The McCormick Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to strengthening our free, democratic society by investing in children, communities and country. Through its grantmaking programs, Cantigny Park and Golf, museums, and civic outreach program the Foundation helps build a more active and engaged citizenry. It was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune. The McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest charities, with more than \$1 billion in assets.

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# **Current State of Military Media Relations: Where Do We Go From Here?**

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# Foreword

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**The McCormick Foundation 2009 Military-Media Conference was the 10th in a series that began in 1992. The meetings are intended to bring together leaders in both the military and the media for candid discussions in hope of improving their very important, but complicated, relationship.**

As a former publisher, I am aware of the pressures on reporters to cover more news in less time as newspapers are engaged in their own battle for survival amidst the upheaval in the media world. When coverage involves complex and rapidly shifting issues, such as insurgencies and coalition politics, the task is definitely daunting. At the same time, the military is engaged in a difficult war in which information is part of the battlefield. And they are doing so in an era in which reporters, soldiers and civilians close to the conflict can instantly communicate throughout the world using only a cell phone.

The military is dedicated to protecting our democracy and defending our national security. That sometimes compels them to protect information that they believe might compromise their mission. The media demand open and often immediate access to tell the whole story to the American people. At times, these goals conflict. Both groups, however, are committed to protecting our nation. These gatherings foster dialogue about issues that are critical to preserving the values and principles of our country.

The conference was held west of Chicago at Cantigny, the former home of Col. Robert R. McCormick. He named it for the city in France that was the site of the first World War I engagement of the U.S. Army First Division, in which Col. McCormick led an artillery battalion. Editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* from 1914 until his death in 1955, Col. McCormick had a lifelong love both for the news business and for the military. These meetings, covering sensitive and important issues, are a tradition that would make him proud.

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If the first McCormick Foundation Military-Media Conference was fiery and contentious, participants at the 2009 conference seemed at times more concerned with their own organizations and with the new media than they were with one another. Perhaps the hottest debate arose between journalists from the traditional mainstream media and those representing online media.

Participants included some of the most experienced and respected members of the military and the media. We are grateful for the knowledge and influence of Harry Disch, president of the Center for Media and Security, who since 1997 has organized these conferences, along with his colleague, Helen Chayefsky. Moderator Ralph Begleiter, director of the Center for Political Communication at the University of Delaware, kept discussions focused and peppered with incisive and provocative questions. As usual, Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University provided facilitators for the breakout discussions, including Ellen Shearer, Timothy McNulty, David Nelson and Craig LaMay. Ellen Hunt served as a rapporteur and wrote this report.

Most of all, we thank all of the participants for taking the time to come to the conference, bringing their experience and wisdom—and civility—to this important discussion. We deeply appreciate the various ways in which they serve our country.

We hope that the ideas and challenges addressed at the conference and summarized here will lead to increased understanding of how the military and the media serve the American public in this difficult time. We encourage readers to share with us questions or comments on this report.

Sincerely,



David D. Hiller  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
McCormick Foundation

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**Facebooking.**  
**Crowdsourcing.**  
**Tweeting.**  
**Opinion masquerading as news.**  
**The battle for hearts and minds.**  
**Insurgency.**  
**Counterinsurgency.**  
**Embedding.**

# Introduction

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**One constant idea repeated at the 10th Military-Media Conference was a belief in the power of information, whether the information is true, misleading or blatantly false.**

In fall 2006, approximately 140,000 American troops were deployed in Iraq, compared with about 20,000 in Afghanistan. By September 2009, there were 65,000 U.S. troops and nearly 40,000 NATO soldiers in Afghanistan, with 124,000 still in Iraq. During those same three years, reporters and the news organizations that they represent also have confronted enormous change. Print and broadcast news outlets are struggling both to adapt to and compete with online media. Although people are reading newspapers in record numbers, many are reading them online, a factor that has toppled the traditional advertising model. Plummeting ad revenues have led to layoffs, slashed budgets and closures. Meanwhile, broadcast news organizations seem to compete for audience by increasing the number of shouting matches rather than nuanced, unbiased coverage of important stories.

A few figures reveal the changing landscape. A 2009 report from the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism shows that the Internet surpassed newspapers as a main source of news for those surveyed, growing from about 10 percent in 2001 to 40 percent in 2008. During the same period, newspapers dropped as a main source of news from more than 40 percent in 2001 to 35 percent in 2008. While television still leads the pack, it has fallen from a peak of 90 percent in 1996 to 70 percent in 2008. (See chart "Main News Sources for Americans," page 7.)

"Viewership of serious news programs in broadcast is turning down sharply, so broadcasters are turning even more toward less serious news," said conference moderator Ralph Begleiter, director of the Center for Political Communication at the University of Delaware. This strategy has had a major impact on coverage of Iraq and Afghanistan. "Let's face it, most Americans could care less whether the lights are on in Baghdad today or whether young women in Afghanistan are going to school," said Begleiter. "Most Americans just want to know when our boys are coming home."

Against the background of these changes in the news business are two wars that are extremely complicated to cover, Afghanistan even more than Iraq. How does the military deal with reporters who are bloggers with strong points of view and no organizational affiliation? "You're dealing with irregular media as well as irregular warfare," said Begleiter. This puts an added strain on an adversarial relationship. Irreconcilable differences exist between the way the military and media carry out the same mission: to support the nation. "Many people in

## Rules of the Game

Ground rules have governed attribution since the McCormick Foundation military-media conference series began in 1992. All discussions and presentations at the plenary sessions are recorded. Remarks from anyone making a formal presentation from the podium are attributed by name, title and organization, such as the U.S. Marine Corps or the *Wall Street Journal*.

Although nothing said in the room is off the record, remarks from participants off the dais, or answers to questions by panelists after their formal presentations, are considered to be on deep background.

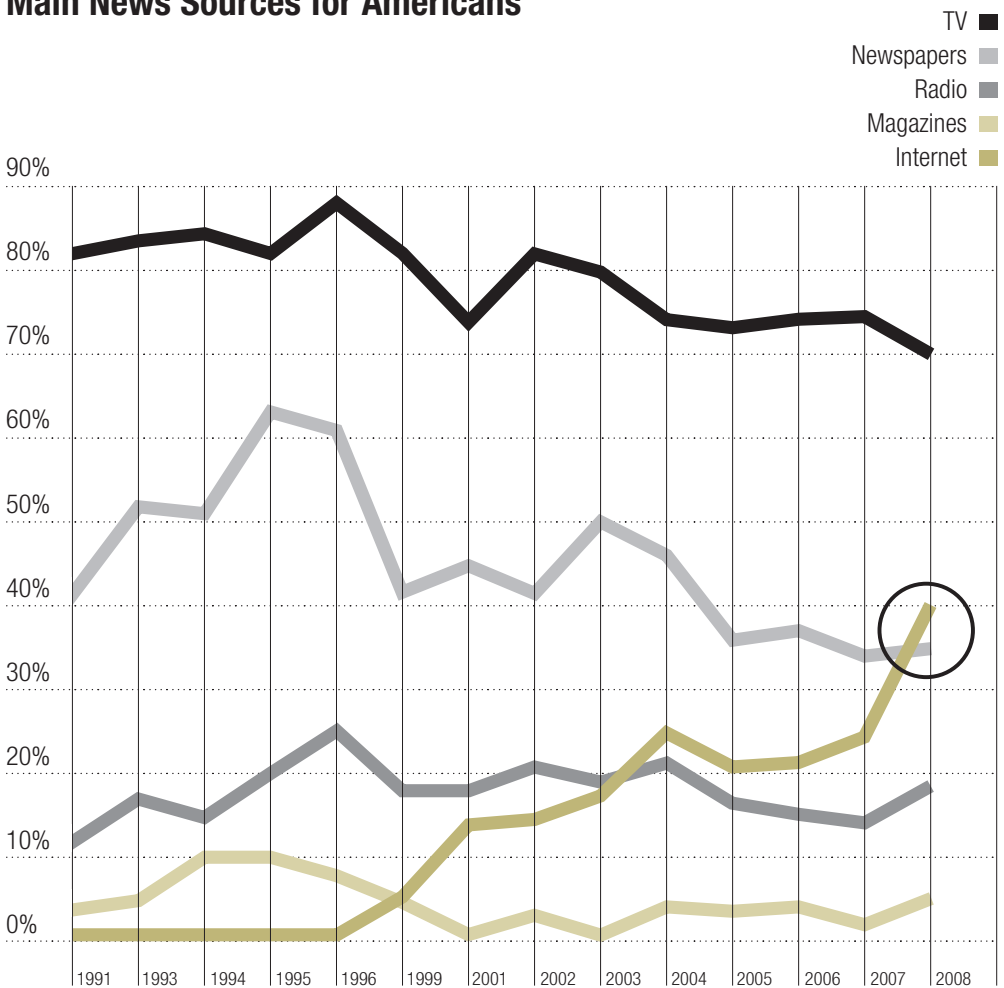
Breakout sessions are also on deep background. Rapporteurs took notes, but in a change from previous years, quotes are attributed only by institution—military or media—not by name or organization. By removing organization names, such as the Marine Corps or cable news operations, participants' identities are better protected, a move to encourage more candor in the exchanges. ■



the military believe that the way to be a team player is to support winning the war, which supports the nation. It's a logical conclusion."

The media, on the other hand, play the role of devil's advocate in monitoring institutions like the military and the government. "Their purpose in life is to pick at the scab, to find out where the problem is. Of course, the ultimate goal is to help fix the problem," Begleiter said.

### Main News Sources for Americans



Source: Periodic Surveys  
Pew Research Center

# Chapter 1: Information Environment in Irregular Warfare

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**“Too often the ‘what’ and  
the ‘how’ get reported, but  
the ‘why’ is missing.”**

**—Military officer**

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**According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 140 journalists have been killed in Iraq and 18 in Afghanistan since 1992. (See chart “Journalists Killed,” page 14.) Recently, McClatchy Co. news reporter Jonathan Landay took up arms. Landay was with a Marine unit that was ambushed in Ganjgal, Afghanistan. During a heated battle in which four U.S. Marines and eight Afghans were killed, a Marine threw Landay an M-4 assault rifle. Landay later wrote of deciding that he’d use the weapon if he had to.**

Covering the war in Iraq and Afghanistan is dangerous and complex. And the battle lines between Allied troops and the insurgents are fuzzy. The demarcation between the military and the media also has softened as reporters increasingly depend on the military for transportation, protection and even permission to be there.

“There’s no way to understand what it’s like to be a soldier on those streets until you’ve been in that Humvee and looked at every car around you and wondered who is going to try to kill you,” said Nancy Youssef, chief Pentagon correspondent for McClatchy. “And there’s no way to understand what it’s like to be an Iraqi than to be in one of those beat-up old cars and watch a convoy go by and not know if you’re going to be attacked or not.” In an insurgency, Youssef said, battle lines, “are not made up of thousands of soldiers, but of a squad and a family.”

“I was in Sadr City in 2004, in a convoy, in a Humvee, looking out the window at these befuddled, frightened Iraqis,” she said. “And it occurred to me that when a Humvee or a patrol goes out onto the streets, that’s the battle line, the collision between those two worlds,” she said. “My job is to bridge those two worlds and to show where they intersect and what that intersection means. But it’s a blurry line.”

And the lines are blurred for soldiers, media and locals alike. “The soldier doesn’t understand your relationship sometimes. Sometimes he’s in that vehicle with you and he thinks you should be his advocate,” Youssef said. Journalists can have a hard time criticizing soldiers to whom they are entrusting their lives, she said. And locals see embedded reporters, assume they are part of the military and are reluctant to talk to them.

Context is also tough, especially in Afghanistan, with such vast cultural differences from one place to another. “Ultimately as a journalist you have to ask yourself what are you seeing and where does it fit in the broader counterinsurgency war, and how do you make sure that that microcosm is reflected accurately in your story,” she said.

The embed system tends to narrow the scope of reporting, said Terry Leonard, editorial director, *Stars and Stripes*. “You’re only reporting with one small unit for a period of time.

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We need to find ways to broaden that coverage—frankly, we need to do a better job on our embeds and the military needs to let us do it.” The number of embedded reporters has greatly diminished since 2003, when the Pentagon reported 750 embeds in Iraq. Up through June 2009, the last month for which the Pentagon has complete figures, there were only 276 embeds in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### Chasing the News in Irregular Warfare

For the military, embedding requires staff to take reporters to the action, and sometimes to make sure they get out alive. For example, a military officer told of receiving a call from a bureau chief saying that one of her stringers had been shot. “I told her, ‘If you can get him to the green zone we’ll get him to the military hospital.’”

Despite the danger, the counterinsurgency often doesn’t provide the kinds of action reporters are expecting from a war zone. “Reporters want to go in where there’s constant fighting, constant action. Irregular warfare can seem boring,” said a military officer. “Engagement with local officials is not exciting. If you go into an Arab home, you’ll spend five hours drinking chai.” But, he said, “Engagement with local leaders is the tip of the spear.”

The nature of an insurgency means the enemy may be hiding out among civilians, and civilian casualties sometimes result from self-defense actions by the U.S. military. The fallout from this horrendous situation is only magnified when the insurgents employ Facebook, YouTube and other new media to exaggerate or even lie about civilian casualties.

“When you identify an insurgent who has been killing police officers and their families, you usually go get him in the middle of the night,” said Col. Bryan Salas, director of public affairs for the U.S. Marine Corps. “So the press coverage you’re getting is of the Marines going in, arresting this guy out of his bed with his family in tears around him. But you don’t have the context,” he said. “We need to figure out how to turn intelligence into evidence we can present to Americans without compromising methods or security.”

Many in the military feel that embedding can serve as a buffer against such false accusations. Embedded reporters can spend weeks with a unit and speak to a variety of military personnel from generals down to rank and file, and can give a context for their reporting.

“I encourage commanders to embed media because they can wear embeds like armor,” said Salas. “I call the embeds their armor against accusations of atrocity.” However, he has no illusions that he’s going to “hoodwink an embedded journalist,” even if he wanted to. “It’s rather the steady actions and trust that we build over time through our actions that will win the day.”

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Bloggers are increasingly welcomed as embeds, another military officer said. “In 2006, as Combined Press Information Center director, I was the guy who turned on bloggers being able to come back and embed with units,” he said. “That had been outlawed before I got there. I started asking questions why and couldn’t really find a good answer, so I turned it back on and I allowed Michael Yon to embed. (Since 2004, Yon, a former Green Beret, has been reporting from Iraq and Afghanistan online at [www.michaelyon-online.com](http://www.michaelyon-online.com).) The information officer said he did not allow his staff to discuss whether reporters were positive or negative, left or right politically. “I don’t think that that’s my job as a public affairs guy—my job is to facilitate the conversation.”

Some reporters felt that a few commanders were too ready to kick out embedded reporters simply because they didn’t like the kind of coverage. “Public policy doesn’t change by single stories—it changes by bodies of work. The military shouldn’t be so sensitive to single critical stories,” Leonard said.

Leonard suggested ground rules for embedded reporters. “If we’re going to have embed rules, they need to be agreed to by both sides,” said Leonard. “If my reporters violate those rules, if they put a unit at risk or endanger operational security, they should be kicked off, no question about it. I would support that 100 percent. But if a reporter is kicked off because the commander didn’t like his story, I think the military should say, ‘Wait a minute. This isn’t right.’”

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**“Public policy doesn’t change by single stories—it changes by bodies of work. The military shouldn’t be so sensitive to single critical stories.”**

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A military officer agreed. “I’m willing to take you with me whether it’s a good story or a bad story,” he said.

Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner, Army chief of public affairs, said, “One consequence of eight years of war, eight years of embedded relations, eight years of growing and fighting right alongside journalists, journalists who accept the same risks, the same dangers, who lose their lives and their limbs right alongside our soldiers, has actually brought our tribes into a different arrangement, one where there is greater shared respect, a greater shared understanding.”

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## **Struggling with Speed of Adaptation**

If information is part of national power, and many in the military believe it is, the Army needs to devote the same effort it brings to combat to dealing with the media on the battlefield, said Brig. Gen. Jefforey Smith, deputy director for Politico-Military Affairs, Middle East, on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon. He said that the military is a generation behind and needs a “huge culture change” to keep pace with technological advances.

“We don’t have the kind of approach doctrinally to develop the right business practices, to develop the right training, to resource our units with the right equipment to enable media on the battlefield to be effective and timely,” he said.

The speed of the Internet and an increased understanding of the importance of good media relations have pushed the U.S. military to embrace what one participant called “a culture of engagement.”

And according to Bergner, the Army needs to recognize the importance of public affairs in helping to get its message out, because public affairs officers are trained to work with the media, not to avoid them. One positive signal is that the Army has started promoting some former public affairs officers into high ranks. For example, conference participant Lewis Boone was recently promoted to brigadier general. Boone is the first Army officer with a career solely in public affairs to be named a brigadier general.

Yet the Army continues to struggle with what Bergner called “the speed of adaptation.” In a desire to make sure all the facts are correct, the military may let hours or days go by while an erroneous story remains in circulation. This old problem of slow military response to information requested by journalists is magnified in an age when anyone with the right cell phone can post on the Internet. No rules of engagement or lead-time are required for posting and this often results in lack of context and inaccuracy.

“Does the audience believe a story just because it’s out there or do they stop, step back and analyze it?” asked Maj. Gen. Mark Graham, deputy chief of staff for the U.S. Army Forces Command. “In many cases they don’t stop and spend time to research it and find out. I think we have a challenge: How do we make sure that the right information gets out there?”

Graham acknowledged, “We always tell you the initial report normally is not quite right—just wait for the second report to get some real meat and details. We want to get information out and make sure we are being open and transparent. But we also want to protect the individual rights of our soldiers and their families, and not violate the private medical rights of those soldiers.”

While the Army values accuracy and chain of command over quick response, the communications world is as fast as a tweet. During the time needed to verify facts, erroneous information can remain floating in cyberspace.

## Location of U.S. Troops Deployed for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom

December 2009

Operation Iraqi Freedom ■  
Operation Enduring Freedom ■



Source: Defense Manpower Data Center

## Chapter 1: Information Environment in Irregular Warfare

Despite a structure that is not conducive to quick turnaround and response, the military has been increasing its efforts to respond quickly to negative reports. One vivid example is the 2006 killing of an Iraqi civilian by seven Marines and a Navy corpsman in Hamdania. “We got the report from the local folks. We briefed the leadership in Baghdad and planned to put out a release two hours after notifying the general,” said the Marine Corps’ Salas. The eight squad members were arrested and court-martialed. “We think we’re the good guys in the battle, but we’re not the perfect guys. And if we let people know that we know we’re making mistakes out there and trying to correct them, I think that’ll help us out in the long run.”

The situation is complicated by disinformation and misinformation released by the Taliban. “Every civilian casualty was attributed to either our indirect fire or our attack on civilians,” Salas said. “Even al-Qaeda murders were attributed to U.S. forces’ action. And the burden fell on us to prove that there were no casualties from our actions. It is extremely challenging to prove that nothing happened.”

### Number of Journalists Killed on Duty

Year	Afghanistan	Iraq
2009	2	4
2008	2	11
2007	2	32
2006	3	32
2005	0	23
2004	0	24
2003	0	14
2002	0	—
2001	9	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>140</b>

Sources: Committee To Protect Journalists



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## Return on Media Investment in the Internet Age

Whether in Afghanistan or at the Pentagon, military officers are confronting communications technology that seems to get faster, simpler and cheaper by the day. Old questions of access are reframed in the age of the Internet, but the issue is not new. Some in the military feel that because of the new media, the number of media people seeking access to military officials has expanded, creating a difficult problem of triage.

“I think it’s fair to say that we’re all still wrestling with how we deal with the different organizations that fall into new media,” said Marine Col. Dave Lapan, director of press operations for the Defense Department. Staffing is one of the problems, with increasing inquiries from smaller media outlets. In the Internet age, smaller can mean, as one of the participants joked, “A guy blogging in the basement in his underwear.”

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“There are no more people to answer the queries, but the queries are coming in from all these different sources,” Lapan said. Pentagon public affairs officers might field queries from a typical traditional outlet like the *New York Times*, or a new kid on the block, such as the influential Politico, a news organization started in 2004 that publishes on politico.com as well as through a newspaper with circulation of 32,000 in Washington, D.C.

Lapan said that the Internet complicates evaluating demands for access to high-level Defense Department officials, such as Undersecretary of Defense Michelle Flournoy. “How do we serve her and serve the department?” he asked. “Do we sit her down for 30 minutes with Politico or with foreignpolicy.com instead of the *New York Times* or CNN?” He said that the military has to be careful not to create a tiered system that makes hierarchies of reporters and news outlets.

But media participants insisted that a tiered system has always existed and will continue to exist. And some felt that’s not such a bad thing.

“I think that the military rightly makes a distinction between the kinds of media they are dealing with,” a reporter said. “The serious newspapers, which are going to treat something with more space and more depth, deserve more attention from the public affairs people because it’s time better spent.”

## **Determining Media Access**

Representing a major news outlet doesn't guarantee a warm welcome from the military. One military officer said that some reporters with major news outlets are so uninformed that their coverage is of limited or no value. Military officers also are influenced by the knowledge, preparation, listening ability and analytical skills of journalists.

"I've been working in this field for a couple of decades, and with all due respect, I've met a lot of people coming from the so-called big stations who basically had no clue on the subject that they were coming to talk to me about," a military officer said.

A reporter argued that the military is better served by someone experienced in the field than someone from a television network who makes a quick stop in the war zone and acts like an expert, when "all his expertise about the Middle East came through a falafel sandwich that he ate in the cafeteria next to his station."

Another reporter agreed. "We all know that there are some great reporters who work for very small organizations and there are some incompetents who work for very prestigious organizations," he said. The military should be careful not to judge reporters' competence by the prestige or size of their organizations.

Even if public affairs officers don't reflexively judge journalists on the basis of their affiliations, the military does want to reap some benefit from the time and effort spent to accommodate reporters. "We always go into this knowing that we cannot predetermine the outcome, but we go in there using our best judgment and some analysis of return on investment," said a military officer.

As a reporter pointed out, however, estimating return on investment is not quite so simple in the virtual world, which sometimes has a permanence beyond that of a physical newspaper or a broadcast program. "When you reported a story on television, it would be seen by whoever was watching when it aired—then it would be gone. Now, you write your story and maybe it's on a Web site that gets only a thousand hits a day at the time. But that piece of writing remains there and stays there and can bounce around and ricochet." So judging the value of that is not as simple as counting the number of subscribers or viewers. "It's completely legitimate to try to weigh the return that you get on your investment in terms of the impact of the journalism. But I think that impact is not always obvious," he said.

Reducing reach to just numbers can be short-sighted, both military and media agreed. Special-interest publications such as the *Economist* are read by opinion leaders and legislators. Though small in circulation, they wield great influence. A journalist suggested that the military

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needs to take into account small but influential outlets online, including social media. Referring to blogger Mona Eltahawy, he said, “I do think if you have 5,000 followers on Facebook, as Mona does, or you have a large number of Twitter followers from a particular community, you can make a case,” he said. He said he was glad to hear that public affairs people are giving increased attention to these emerging audiences.

Some military participants said they check out bloggers by using online services such as Technorati.com, which is a search engine for user-generated media. Technorati also posts a “Top 100” popularity index, which is updated every day. It lists more than 100 million blogs and more than 250 million pieces of tagged social media. In 2009, Technorati’s sixth “Annual State of the Blogosphere” focused on “professional bloggers.”

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While there have always been unaffiliated journalists, their numbers and audiences are larger than ever before. One military official said that the Defense Department has a system in place to evaluate those writing books and filming documentaries. The system, which involves reviewing previous work, also can be used for bloggers and other online journalists.



The military is better served by journalists experienced in war coverage.

Sometimes unaffiliated journalists have to “prove” that their work will see the light of day. For instance, one military officer cited a respected military blogger who wanted to embed with the officer’s unit in Iraq. Before the blogger was allowed to embed, he had to bring a letter from a publication that agreed to publish his work.

Bloggers and unaffiliated reporters have filled the gaps created when traditional journalists’ interest in the embed program in Iraq diminished. From one public affairs officer’s perspective, “If they could show that they did have some kind of reach—hey, better to have someone like that embed than no one.”

A reporter suggested that the traditional media feel threatened by their colleagues in the world of blogs and tweets. “I was with Reuters and the *Guardian* for many years, so I know what it’s like to come from that world. But now I’m a freelance online journalist and what I’m hearing is a lot of resistance from those in the traditional mainstream media fearing they are going to be replaced by those in the new media,” she said.

While military participants said they accept new media and use bloggers, comments at the conference indicate that new media have not completely proven their value. While some online sites, like politico.com, actually produce fresh, relevant content, many do not. “They’re typically opining on work that’s been done by those who produce original content,” said a military officer. “I’m probably less likely to go to someone in the social media or new media arena, because a lot of these folks just do not do original work.”

On the other hand, a journalist commented, this could be an advantage for the military. “You could also just avoid it by giving the story to someone who will post it and get the attention you need and get all of us running back to you. You can give it to Drudge or the *Huffington Post*. They’ll write exactly what you want and millions of people will read it.”

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Although one military officer said he will use new media channels more if they can prove their value, another admitted that a blogger might not be his first choice. “There are bloggers out there who do have an impact. But I’m not taking them over someone in traditional media, but taking them because there may be no alternative at that point.”

A reporter commented that the whole discussion about access, affiliation and hierarchies of outlets makes an erroneous assumption about bloggers and reporters. “They’re not interchangeable,” he said. “And not because bloggers aren’t important, because they are, and not because blogs aren’t good—many of them are excellent—but because journalists and bloggers often come from a different mindset.”

“For all the many flaws we all have—that we lacerate ourselves for and are lacerated for by others—journalists strive for objectivity,” he added. “No matter how far short of it we fall, that’s the goal. Generally speaking, no matter how good their reporting, bloggers are coming at it with opinion as the driving force.” He cautioned the military that when evaluating bloggers versus reporters, they need to take into account the blogger’s viewpoint.

“Frankly, the bloggers I’ve seen in Iraq or Afghanistan are uniformly to the right of center, the conservative, pro-military side of the blogosphere,” another reporter said.

One journalist countered that singling out bloggers for having strong points of view doesn’t take into account the changes in the entire media industry, in which viewpoint is increasingly replacing unbiased reporting. “It’s not just the bloggers who have an opinion,” he said.

## Chapter 2: The Changing Information Landscape

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**“Changes in the media business threaten to undermine quality journalism, just when it’s needed most.”**

**—Journalist**

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**According to the Pew Research Center's 2009 report on the media, national Web sites and aggregators like Google are fast making inroads in attracting local advertising. So news organizations may not regain traction even if online advertising returns to big growth rates.**

Over the past decade, the share of Internet advertising derived from local businesses has doubled, by some estimates to 40 percent, but most of those ads are now going to national Internet-only sites like Google and Yahoo, not to local news organizations.

"Right now we're at a period of profound change in technology. This is almost comparable to the Gutenberg printing press or the Industrial Revolution," said freelance journalist Jamie McIntyre. Since July 2009, the former CNN correspondent has had a blog at Military.com that he joked "receives dozens of hits a day."

McIntyre covered the Pentagon at CNN from 1992 to 2008, a time when reporters worked their beats covering stories that they decided viewers ought to know, which the editors at CNN put on the air. "It was all a sort of top-down approach. We were the professionals deciding what the news is."

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**"We're really seeing an information revolution that has completely changed the way we do things."**

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"We're really seeing an information revolution that has completely changed the way we do things," McIntyre said. As an example, he pointed to CNN's Rick Sanchez. Sanchez's Web site <http://ricksanchez.blogs.cnn.com/>, announces on its homepage, "Rick's newscast is not a CNN newscast...it's YOUR newscast!" The page invites audiences to follow Sanchez on Twitter, be friends on Facebook and Myspace and text their feedback to him. It positions itself as "like no other program on CNN or anywhere." Like many other print and broadcast reporters, Sanchez also blogs.

"Rick Sanchez describes his newscast at 3 p.m. on CNN as 'a conversation.' And in many ways it kind of is," McIntyre said. If viewers are contributing to the story, whether through comments or additional information, the reporter no longer has control, so he can no longer ensure accuracy and context, said McIntyre. "Is there a role for traditional journalism, or is it completely changing to something else?"

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### Niche audiences

The Internet not only encourages “conversation,” it allows people to converse in communities that have no geographic boundaries. Online “communities” are defined by interest rather than physical location. Local news stations post video and print stories online that can be accessed around the world by anyone interested in the topic, from Baghdad to Baltimore. These niche audiences present a challenge to news organizations like the Associated Press. Steve Komarow, deputy Washington bureau chief for AP, said that as a wire service, AP is carefully watching online trends to figure out how to serve the general public as well as niche audiences, which are often well-informed in their areas of interest. Special audiences may range from fantasy baseball followers to AARP members, political groups and the military. Since niche audiences know their subjects of interest well, an ill-informed reporter or Web site will quickly lose credibility.

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**“...we lose credibility with audiences if we call a Bradley an Abrams, or if we call an F-16 an F-18.”**

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“I guarantee you that the people who are getting news on Medicare know more about how the system works than our reporters who are covering it,” he said. “I’d argue the same is true in the military, which is why we need to be working with people like General Bergner and Bryan Salas to get our people more closely connected, because we lose credibility with audiences if we call a Bradley an Abrams, or if we call an F-16 an F-18,” he said. On the other hand, with declining revenues, they can’t afford to hire reporters to cover every special interest area.

### Is Traditional Media Obsolete?

The new technology also affords the military another way to disseminate information, although military participants at the conference insisted that they are not trying to go around the media. As one military officer said, “We can’t afford to communicate with the American people without the established ‘brand’ of the traditional media.” Another military officer added, “The traditional media still holds an incredible amount of credibility with the audience we’re trying to reach in the military, which is the public.” The military insisted that there is no “back door,” as moderator Begleiter dubbed it, to the American public through new media. But several military participants described using new media to go directly to the public.



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“We can’t afford to ignore the traditional media,” said the Pentagon’s Lapan. “But new media is another tool for us to disseminate information, and that’s our job. Whether it’s Twitter or Facebook, or whether it’s just a Web site or an electronic newsletter, those are all means for us to get out information to the public, and we use those.” Web sites for all four armed services have homepage links to Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube.

Lapan said that if he can’t get a major news outlet, such as the *New York Times*, interested in a story, he will use other methods, so that he doesn’t have to rely solely on the traditional media to get a message out.

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**“We can’t afford to ignore the traditional media. But new media is another tool for us to disseminate information, and that’s our job.”**

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A Web site created by the Army to honor Sgt. 1st Class Jared Monti demonstrates the point. Monti, who died in Afghanistan in June 2006 while trying to rescue a wounded fellow soldier in the face of enemy fire, was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama in September 2009. The Web site ([www.army.mil/medalofhonor/monti/](http://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/monti/)) not only shows the presidential citation, but photos of Monti at home and in Afghanistan, maps with the route Monti took to rescue his comrade, audio and video testimonials from fellow soldiers, and links to external media reports of the award and Monti’s heroism.

“For the first time that I’m aware of, the United States Army created a Web site, a microsite, specifically about a soldier’s valor,” said a military officer. “It’s the first time we’ve really had the technology to do it,” he said. The officer insisted it was not marketing, but “a way to better connect the American people with something that’s important enough for the president to present this medal.”

The military acknowledges that new media provides an alternative, especially when traditional press are not interested in a story. But participants pointed out that new media also lacks some of the protection offered through the military’s relationships with traditional media organizations and the organizations’ chains of command.

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### Using the Chain of Command

An advantage of traditional media for the military is that news organizations often alert the military to a potentially controversial story or image. Relationships within the hierarchy of a news organizations also play a role in these situations. A military officer said this occurs often. “If there is a reporter who is going to publish something that I feel is inaccurate or incorrect and they don’t want to change it, I may go to their editor and appeal at that level. And if that doesn’t work, I kick it up higher.”

Disagreements over stories also can be kicked up higher in the military chain of command, as happened in September 2009, when the Pentagon tried unsuccessfully to stop AP from distributing a picture of a dying Marine in Afghanistan. Despite protests from Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the wire service responded that it was its “journalistic duty to show the reality of the war there, however unpleasant and brutal that sometimes is.”

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**“If there is a reporter who is going to publish something that I feel is inaccurate or incorrect and they don’t want to change it, I may go to their editor and appeal at that level. And if that doesn’t work, I kick it up higher.”**

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Even when stories cannot be stopped, the custom of the traditional press informing the military in advance of a highly controversial story sometimes allows negotiation. This was the case with the Sept. 21, 2009, *Washington Post* story by Bob Woodward publishing a confidential memo from Gen. Stanley McChrystal to Defense Secretary Gates assessing the war in Afghanistan. A military officer said that after officials couldn’t convince Woodward or the *Post* not to run the story, they looked for compromises. “We said, ‘Okay, how do we negotiate? How can we at least lessen the impact, if you’re going to do this anyway?’” At the urging of the White House, the assessment story was delayed for a day and parts of the 66-page memo were redacted. The officer said that they would have done the same thing if a blogger had come to them, but he acknowledged that negotiating with established news organizations is easier than dealing with most online journalists.

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Another military officer agreed that bloggers and others in the new media can be difficult. “If you object to a story and they say, ‘Screw you, I’m doing it anyway,’ there’s very little recourse.”

A reporter commented that if the sensitive memo had been obtained by an online journalist, “they wouldn’t even know who to call at the Pentagon, and it would have gone up in an unredacted form. The only reason that the Pentagon had any leverage at all is because of the relationship with the *Post* and with Woodward,” he added.

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**“We have these relationships with you. We don’t always agree. We’ll continue to frequently disagree. But at least I know who Nancy Youssef is, and she knows me, and we have some shared experiences.”**

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A military officer speculated that while there often is no chain of command in the new media, a “chain of credibility” should exist. “It’s the credibility that the public affairs officer has with the reporter and that the reporter has with the military. That’s one of the compelling challenges for us,” he said. “We have these relationships with you. We don’t always agree. We’ll continue to frequently disagree. But at least I know who Nancy Youssef is, and she knows me, and we have some shared experiences.” We don’t have that in the new media. And it’s profoundly more difficult to search those out, much less establish them in this domain,” he said. (For creative ways that military public affairs officers are using new media, see “Reshaping Media Relations,” page 33.)

“Increasingly you’re going to be dealing with the kind of situation that you’ve described. No one’s going to go to you ahead of time,” a reporter said. “And the reverse of that question is: To what extent do you employ the same strategy in just taking your message directly to new media and bypassing all these annoying questions by these traditional journalists who want to do things the old-fashioned way?”



Giving reporters fast information in war time is still a challenge to the military.

### New Venues for Military Video

“Should the U.S. military be using socially interactive multimedia sites like YouTube, Flickr, Vimeo and Hulu to disseminate material without even calling up the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or CNN to say they’re putting it out on these sites?” Begleiter asked.

A reporter questioned the military’s ability to move quickly enough to supply its own video or other images. He said that it took the Navy five or six days to release one still overhead image of the lifeboat holding Richard Phillips, the American cargo ship captain who had been rescued from Somali pirates by Navy SEALs. “Anybody who’s dealt with the Pentagon in terms of trying to get gun camera footage or laser-guided bomb footage knows they do not move fast. It takes days and days,” the reporter explained.

Military participants said the problem is not technical, but the same old issue of gaining approval through the chain of command. The issue was again raised of the military’s need to change to keep up with today’s world of instant communication.

“In general I would suggest that the Department of Defense can do a much better job in—I want to be careful the way I phrase this—using information in a way that can facilitate the accomplishment of their strategic objectives, by being much more responsive than perhaps they’ve been in the past,” said a military officer.

Another military officer said, “We want to be first with the truth. The truth is easy, because that’s whatever is in the video. It’s the ‘first’ part that becomes difficult, because we have so many gates for clearance before we can even release the video.”

“Our objective should be to be as timely as possible in making that available so that people can see for themselves,” another military officer added. Slow response is a problem that concerns top brass all the way up to Gen. McChrystal, military participants said.

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Since 2004, the military has employed a digital video and imagery distribution system (DVIDS) that uses satellite transmitters to distribute broadcast-quality video from a hub in Atlanta. Once clearances are obtained, often a slow process, video is released to the DVIDS site and can be downloaded by anyone. “Some of the easy-to-understand videos we put up on our YouTube site,” said a military officer. The Pentagon acknowledges that the DVIDS site ([www.dvidshub.net](http://www.dvidshub.net)) is not easy to navigate, but Web programmers are working on making it easier to find video.

One military officer said that when he was in Iraq, the Multi-National Force-Iraq set up a YouTube site, which remains online. Ground rules were needed to ensure that soldiers would not put up video recorded during a military operation that could jeopardize the safety of the mission. “So if you go to the MNF-I YouTube site ([www.youtube.com/user/MNFIRAQ](http://www.youtube.com/user/MNFIRAQ)), it explains our ground rules.” The Combined Joint Task Force, the U.S. command in Afghanistan, has had its own site ([www.youtube.com/CJTF82afghanistan](http://www.youtube.com/CJTF82afghanistan)) since June 2009.

Military participants agreed that they would not want to jeopardize a long relationship with a reporter by going directly to YouTube or Facebook with a story. Most said footage that they put up on YouTube is not breaking news, but is already available somewhere on a military Web site.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan attributes almost 70 percent of the more than 1,500 civilian deaths in the first eight months of 2009 to “anti-government” elements. A military officer asked journalists what they would do if the military released video to them that showed the Taliban’s violence in Afghanistan. “If I’ve got footage or a still photo of a young Afghan woman in her dying moments as a result of a pressure-plate IED [improvised explosive device] set by the Taliban, do you want that from the U.S. military?” he asked. “Or would it look like propaganda?”

“I think you will get criticism if you do that, but not for propaganda. I think you’ll get criticism for hypocrisy,” a reporter responded. “Because if the military is going to be adamant to the point of kicking out reporters when they show dead or dying Americans, I think it would be really, really, really problematic for you to release photos or images of dead or dying Afghans that you yourself took or disseminated. You can’t have it both ways.”

Several military participants agreed and said that when they have had photos of wounded American soldiers, “we look at the propriety and human decency, and the same standards have to be applied to everybody.”

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## **Social Media and the News Media**

The U.S. Army's Facebook page had 72,000 fans in October 2009. A look on [www.army.mil/info/a-z/](http://www.army.mil/info/a-z/) shows links to Army on Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube and Delicious.com. Military participants said that this world is such a part of the lives of soldiers that commanders have to use it and be clued in to its messages.

Military officers said that most things posted by the military on Facebook are also on the dot-mil Web sites, but Facebook is more of a "conversation." Facebook is also used to communicate within the larger military community. "It could be everything from something as routine as the Army's birthday," said one officer. "There are mothers and dads and sisters and brothers out there who are interested. And we use it to share the same messages that we press-release out."

Another military officer added that it's just another method of communicating. "So I don't think we've done anything exclusively Facebookish," said another. Becoming a fan on Facebook means signing up for pushed content just like signing up for RSS feeds on many Web sites. And the interactive nature of social networking sites can help commanders directly connect to the rank and file.

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**"Social media demand a continuous interaction and we're not an institution that's well-g geared for continuous dialogue."**

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"Many commanders use those mediums to receive information from the target audience as well," said a military officer. "So it's really a two-way street in some cases. Some commanders use it to get better insight into what's going on inside their command that they're not necessarily getting through the staff or otherwise."

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But using social media can result in loss of control. The Army's Bergner says that if a commander posts on Facebook, people may write on his wall, or send an e-mail. "Social media demand a continuous interaction," he said. "And we're not an institution that's well-gearred for continuous dialogue, not to mention one that's as dynamic and unregulated as the conversations that take place in the social media." It's just one more thing, he said, for the tradition-bound military to adapt and adjust to.

As one military officer put it, "How do you consider which blogs to get involved in? They may only last a moment, or they may be important places to share information. How many conversations do you have to consider? But I think it's important for us to be there."

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**"To somebody who is attuned to what a blogger like Mona Etahaway is putting out every day, mainstream is not newspapers and television. It's a different world."**

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In April 2008 the Army appointed a director of online and social media. But having a presence online and in social media and using it effectively are not the same thing. "If you're going to just regurgitate your news releases and your command information products right back onto your social sites, then nobody's going to come and nobody's going to read them," said Brig. Gen. Lewis Boone, deputy chief of public affairs for the Army.

Another military officer pointed up the key value and challenge. "There's an expectation of a conversation with the person who owns the Facebook site. That's why it's called your 'friend.' And when the secretary of the Navy or Admiral Mullen 'Facebooks,' people expect to be able to ask him a question, and they expect an answer back, or else it's just another official Web site or blog. And it takes time to do that."

The military has also used social media to alert personnel to a story in the traditional media and give its side. *Navy Times* was doing a story for its August 23, 2009, issue about the unprofes-

## Reporting by Crowdsourcing

A form of “Crowdsourcing” was used recently by a military trade publication to report on a Marine killed playing a deadly game of “Trust.” Crowdsourcing is a term used when online communities help to solve a problem or gather information. Reporters are increasingly using the technique to fill in details of breaking news or confirm a rumor, said several journalists at the conference.

Trust is the name given to a kind of dare game involving combat troops. The “game” turned tragic for some U.S. Marines in Iraq in March 2009. “They’d pull a pistol on someone and they’d point it and say, ‘Do you trust me?’ And you weren’t supposed to have a round chambered. But the guy [Cpl. Mathew Nelson] screwed up and fired a round right through his buddy’s forehead,” said Tobias Naegele of Army Times Publishing. The buddy, Lance Cpl. Patrick Malone, was pronounced dead 20 minutes later.

The initial reaction of officials to negative stories like these is to call them isolated incidents, Naegele said. But reporters at his newspaper discovered a similar incident involving another Marine and thought there might be something going on. “We used a message board system on our site to pose the question to help gather content,” he said. The board generated conversation on the stupidity of the game, but also posts from people saying, “‘Yes, I’ve seen this. I first saw it in Iraq in 2004’ or ‘I saw it in this place, that place,’” Naegele said. “We were able to then reach out to some of those guys, to get more insight, and it made for a much more informative story.” The story “Do You Trust Me” became the cover story in the Sept. 7, 2009, *Marine Corps Times*.

“I think that’s where that social media can really push forward the story and drive something positive to protect people,” he said. ■



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sional bearing of some chief petty officers, said a military participant. “And the master chief petty officer of the Navy, Rick West, did an interview for that story and the day before it was due on the stands he posted on Facebook. He said he saw no systemic problems with unkempt sailors or with enlisted leaders taking the time to correct them. *Navy Times* wrote a follow-up story about the Facebook posting in the next week’s issue.

A journalist said that some reporters use social media as a backdoor to sources. “One of the interesting things is the reporter who’s using Facebook to put his story out to his ‘friends,’ some of whom are his sources, to backdoor the public affairs guys to get to those sources,” he said. “Once he is friends with General So-and-So,” the reporter can question him directly, saving what might be up to a week navigating the public affairs chain of command. Other reporters are beginning to use crowdsourcing to check out details of a story or discover whether an individual incident may occur more widely. (See “Reporting by Crowdsourcing,” opposite page.)

Perhaps the term mainstream media, used by some at the conference, needs to be redefined, said a military officer. “I think that we need to be able to see that through the lens of a different demographic and that mainstream is in the eye of the beholder. To somebody who is attuned to what a blogger like Mona Eltahawy is putting out every day, mainstream is not newspapers and television. It’s a different world.”

A media participant worried that both military and media are too busy reacting to new media to think clearly. “I think there’s also a concern of ‘the distraction of the cool.’ Yes, there’s Facebook and Twitter and various ways of communicating, but how much is the effort to create content distracting from things like pitching stories?”

“It becomes a question of what is the result of trying to accommodate all these new media. Is it just to say that you’re doing it, or have you really evaluated the impact of spending the effort of doing that at the expense of really making sure you’ve got the right communications message, not just for traditional media, but to the significant new media that you do deal with, like the *Long War Journal* or “Danger Room.” “Danger Room,” a blog on Wired.com, publishes content on military, law enforcement and national security. *Long War Journal* is an online news site of Public Media, Inc.

He said the media is pulled in the same way. “We’re evaluating how much attention we need to spend on a TV story versus then doing it for radio and dot-com and Facebook.”

“I think you’re exactly right,” a military officer responded. “Where are the metrics for effectiveness? And each of us have probably a different threshold of what’s worth investing time, energy and resources, because they’re all limited. And this bang-for-the-buck stuff I think is right on target. Where’s the structure that allows you to do that analysis for our business case or yours?”

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### New Policies for New Media

Like much of the rest of society coping with etiquette for everything from cell phones in restaurants to using the Internet on the job, the military has yet to adapt its rules to the new media. Some participants said no new policy is needed.

“If you’re talking to CNN or to a blog site, the rules are the same, so the policy is the same,” said a military officer. “You don’t need new policy. As far as the U.S. military is concerned, if a soldier in the field decides to engage on Facebook with TobiasNaegele, that soldier knows that that engagement is subject to the same rules as if the soldier were standing there with Jamie McIntyre with a microphone and a camera in front of them.”

Another military officer countered that although the rules are the same, the distinction may not be clear to a soldier, especially when it comes to social networking sites. “We expect that people know that, but there’s nothing written down to say that. So I couldn’t swear that every soldier, sailor, airman or Marine knows those things.” Assuming that soldiers know the public nature of social media has led to some military personnel getting into trouble for doing things such as underage drinking and posting it on a Facebook page.

A journalist said that the Facebook site, where you can talk to Facebook “friends” as well as real friends, has blurred the line between the public professional self and the personal self. “I’ve just noticed some of my friends in the military made political comments on the Facebook site that I can see, comments that I don’t think they’d ever make in any kind of professional environment, because they’re really not supposed to.”

“Because people think that saying that on Facebook between friends is somehow in some way personal and anonymous even though clearly it is not,” Begleiter commented.

## Reshaping Media Relations

Building relationships in the new media may require nontraditional methods that are different from chatting with a reporter on the phone. The Army recently responded to a negative story online by replying on the writer's comments page.

The military response followed a report by writer Elspeth Reeve that soldiers at Fort Benning, Ga., who were considered suicide risks were forced to wear orange reflective vests. She also charged that this policy further stigmatized the soldiers. The posting appeared in the May 11, 2009, Daily Beast, an online news outlet that bills itself as "curated news aggregation plus original reporting and opinion."

"They didn't come to us first, but they did publish it," a military officer said. "And we took it seriously enough to go check it out. We found out one of our units was actually doing that." The vice chief of staff of the Army, Gen. Peter Ciarelli, wrote to Reeve on her blog, a response that was posted on the blog May 18, and said in part:

*Because of Elspeth's posting, we identified a very few leaders who were using orange vests to identify soldiers who might harm themselves...*

*While the intent of using orange vests was isolated, she was correct in stating that it contributes to the problem of stigma; therefore, it has been stopped. Commanders will identify soldiers needing help through other, more discreet, methods.*

The Army responded on the Web site because they wanted to acknowledge the error, the military officer said. "We also wanted to go back and close the loop with them because we valued that." Several military participants agreed that this was a typical occurrence: Information is posted on a blog, they check it out and sometimes very high-ranking commanders respond. ■

## Chapter 3: Communicating with Foreign Media

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**“You can explain all day,  
but you can never control  
the message.”**

**—Journalist**

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**At the end of 2009, about 110,000 U.S. and NATO troops were serving in Afghanistan, about two-thirds of them American (See chart, page 36). By mid-2010, an additional 30,000 American and 7,000 NATO forces are expected to be deployed to the region. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under NATO now includes troops from 42 countries, including all 28 NATO members.**

In a country like Afghanistan, where some people are crowded into cities and others are living in tents in remote villages with no electricity or running water, engaging with the ‘media’ can range from tweets and blogs to tea with tribal elders. To military commanders accustomed to a world where the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff tweets and has a Facebook page, an assignment in Afghanistan can be a new universe.

That was the case with friends of Navy Capt. John F. Kirby, special assistant for public affairs to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He recalled recent requests for public affairs advice from friends who were sent to command provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan and are not public affairs officers. The first wanted advice on working with radio, because that was how the locals got information, and Kirby doled out some “radio basics,” which seemed a bit old-hat to him. But the next friend’s request seemed from another century. “He was a PRT commander in a place in Afghanistan where it was literally word of mouth. Forget cell phones and radio—the only way to communicate was through the elders. And so he was writing to me asking for my advice on things he should say to the elders so they could help communicate the right messages to the locals there.”

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**“It really matters more what we do and less what we say. So you can say all you want that you want to reduce civilian casualties, but unless you’re doing something about it to stop it, the message falls flat.”**

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Kirby said that in Afghanistan especially, the United States is judged more by its actions than by any kind of communication, however effective. “It really matters more what we do and less what we say. So you can say all you want that you want to reduce civilian casualties, but unless you’re doing something about it to stop it, the message falls flat.”

## Average Monthly Troop Levels

Afghanistan and Iraq: 2002 to 2009

Year	Afghanistan	Iraq	Total	Percentage Change		
				Annual	Since 2003	Since 2008
2002	5,200	0	5,200	NA	NA	NA
2003	10,400	67,700	78,100	1402%	NA	NA
2004	15,200	130,600	145,800	87%	87%	NA
2005	19,100	143,800	162,900	12%	109%	NA
2006	20,400	141,100	161,500	-1%	107%	NA
2007	23,700	148,300	172,000	7%	120%	NA
2008	30,100	157,800	187,900	9%	141%	NA
2009 (Dec.)	70,000	114,000	184,000	-2%	140%	NA

Source: Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Boots on the Ground," Monthly Reports

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## The Cultural Key to Information War

Kirby also said that Americans need to better understand the Arab culture to see that there is often a disconnect between the messages sent and the messages that are understood, and they need to monitor the people to see how they are reacting to the military's messages and actions. "What do they hear when they listen to us? We need to better understand their culture, and not just the culture today, but the history," he said. "For us something's old if it's 225 years old. Some of these places that we're in have histories that are thousands of years old, and things that happened thousands of years ago still matter to them today. And we don't have as much of appreciation for that as I think we should."

Barbara Ferguson, Washington bureau chief for *Arab News*, an English-language daily based in Saudi Arabia, agreed. She said that the military's battle for hearts and minds is hampered by the fact that the Americans have little knowledge of the culture and religion of the people they are not only fighting against, but also fighting to protect. She is now helping the Marines to change that, but her first embed with the Corps in Afghanistan started with a hostile reception.

"When I was brought to my unit by the public affairs officer, the colonel could be heard from his tent screaming at the top of his voice," she recalled. "What in the hell am I going to do with a female reporter working for *Arab News*?' he said."

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**"We need to better understand their culture, and not just the culture today, but the history."**

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Ferguson said that the attitude of unit leaders sets the stage for the treatment of embeds. After the colonel's outburst nobody in the unit would talk to her. Young Marines would grab her ID badge and say, "'AY-rab News. Does that mean you're working for the enemy, ma'am?'" she said. "So I had to explain to them that last I heard that the enemy was one regime and not 22 Arab countries."

### Chapter 3: Communicating with Foreign Media

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She said that the colonel ultimately came to value her skills and knowledge of Arab culture. Ferguson was able to carry out reporting duties and, at the colonel's request, educate the troops. Ferguson currently does double duty helping Marines learn about Middle Eastern and Afghan culture at the Center for Advanced Operational Culture and Learning at Quantico, Va. She said cultural problems range from mispronouncing Iraq as "EYE-Rack," which insults Iraqis, to having no knowledge of Islam. "You are never, ever going to succeed in Iraq or Afghanistan if you don't get the religion. Muslims believe that the United States is deliberately trying to weaken and divide the Muslim world with our presence in Muslim countries."

Representatives of other foreign media agreed that ignorance of the culture in the Middle East and South Asia affects the way people there, including journalists, view Americans.

"We need to do a better job of helping our troops and helping Americans understand that not every Muslim is our enemy," said Ferguson. Reading, watching and listening to foreign press is essential for the military, Ferguson said, but she pointed out that she has never met any military personnel in the United States who watch Al Jazeera English, though it is available on satellite TV and online.

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**"We need to do a better job of helping our troops  
and helping Americans understand that not every  
Muslim is our enemy."**

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Military officers disputed that. Many said they are aware of the need to work with the Arab world and engage with Arab journalists, and that they have already dealt with Arab media. A military officer spoke of having Al Jazeera English aboard his ship, and others said they had worked with embedded Al Jazeera reporters. "This is not something new to us. We communicate with legitimate news organizations regardless of their national affiliation. I don't know how many times I interviewed with Al Jazeera, both Arabic and English-language, while in Iraq," a military officer said. "Wherever we are, we have an obligation to communicate to the American people what our Army is doing. But that's not to the exclusion of the rest of the world, whom we have to communicate with as well."

Another military officer said he watches Arab media in the United States. "It helps me see through their eyes and understand the perceptions of others around the world that I deal with professionally."



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## Dealing with Arab Television

The proliferation of satellite dishes in the Middle East has helped provide alternatives to government-controlled media. Satellite television reaches 100 million people in Arab League countries, not just via Arab networks, but increasingly through Western and Israeli news organizations. In March 2008, for example, BBC Arabic began broadcasting in the region, one of more than 500 television networks broadcasting in Arabic, “all trying to advance their ideas to the 300 million people living in the region,” said Jamal Dajani, senior director of Middle Eastern programming for Link TV, an American satellite television network. “Arabs are being bombarded by all these different flows of information.”

In an attempt to rein in satellite stations and prevent what they fear is anti-government programming, the Arab information ministers in the Arab League issued guidelines for broadcasters in 2008. But satellite signals and streaming video and audio over the Internet make it all but impossible to enforce the guidelines. “So someone who is sitting in Morocco can watch in real time what’s going on in Baghdad,” said Dajani. If the message is anti-American, or shows only the killing of civilians, this damages public opinion of the American presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The broadcast axiom, “If it bleeds, it leads,” is as true in the Middle East and Afghanistan as it is in the United States, said Dajani. “Your average Arab is sitting watching the death and the destruction inflicted on Iraq. They’re seeing images of dead children, images of women wailing.” And stations in the region are often biased in their coverage. “When we talk about the war in Iraq or the war in Afghanistan, the most important war is the war of information, or misinformation,” he said. “And this is where the U.S., in my opinion, has lost that war of information.”

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**“There are some media outlets that simply don’t follow ethical standards by any means that I recognize.”**

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The Navy’s Kirby agreed with Dajani that most media in the Middle East and Afghanistan are aggressive at putting out stories that aren’t reliable. So Kirby deals with them using what he calls “informed engagement upfront.”

“There are some media outlets that simply don’t follow ethical standards by any means that I recognize,” he said. “And when you’re talking to them you have to know the lay of the land and who you’re talking to, and how they’re going to use it.”



Western media in Afghanistan sometimes try to correct lies and exaggerations spread by the Taliban.

Both military and media seem to agree that failures in the information war are due in part to an inability to get stories out fast enough and to have a clear message for Afghans and Americans of why the United States is in Afghanistan. Other NATO partners aren't doing so well either, according to German journalist Uli Gack, a reporter for *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (ZDF)*, Germany's national public television broadcaster. He said when he hears of an incident involving his country's troops, a Taliban spokesman responds with details before Gack's own government, usually exaggerating the number of casualties.

"This is a very, very serious problem for Afghanistan. It is a country of rumors. And the better the stories are, the more people believe the rumors," Gack said. "The Taliban is sitting in the corner and clapping their hands saying, 'Guys, this is what we want.' You play into their hands if you don't release information in time."

As the media in Afghanistan propagate the rumors, the people believe the Taliban's lies or exaggerations and they don't believe the corrections made by Western journalists, he said. Gack agreed with Dajani about the information war. "We are right now on the way to losing any influence on public opinion. And if you have lost the influence on public opinion, you can go home."

A reporter asked, "Isn't that really the battlefield right there? By the time ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] can respond, it's already become assumed fact because it's entered the mythology."

A military officer responded, "If you're right and information is the battlefield, then we're never going to win, because you can never beat a lie. It's impossible. And the Taliban are going to get out there quick, and they're usually going to be wrong. But they'll be believed."

But the reporter urged the officer to consider the importance of speedy reaction. "I think if you can be faster, then you can enter the argument. Part of what we're hearing is by the time you come back and say, 'Here's the answer,' they don't care anymore."

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A military officer said the Allied forces issued information soon after the Sept. 4, 2009, NATO air strike on two fuel tankers hijacked by the Taliban that killed 90 people, including civilians. “ISAF got something out within the hour, which is the fastest they’ve ever moved on something like this,” he said. “But there were already a spate of stories out there and various online sources that had contrary information, not all of it true. It’s not just speed, it’s credibility. And we’re struggling there.”

In Afghanistan in particular, rumors and stories can spread from the Internet through word of mouth and back to the Internet, another example of the unbounded reach of the Web. “And bad news is always spread very fast,” said Gack. He urged the military to embed more Afghan journalists, “because the Afghan people don’t understand what’s going on in this country and they don’t understand the goals of the Americans in Afghanistan.”

Another military officer said that the United States isn’t losing the information war, as journalist Dajani said, it isn’t even *in* the war. “To lose a war, you have to be involved in a war of information, and we’re not organized to do so. Our national security apparatus is organized around what? The National Security Act of 1947?” He said security restrictions governing information need to be reorganized to meet the times.

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**“Before you conduct an operation, you need to anticipate the expected reaction across a whole spectrum of possible outcomes. You need to think about the information piece going in, so you can respond rapidly.”**

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“Before you conduct an operation, you need to anticipate the expected reaction across a whole spectrum of possible outcomes. You need to think about the information piece going in, so you can respond rapidly,” he said. When pressed by Begleiter about whether the reorganization he referred to would include using Special Operations, he answered, “I’m not suggesting anyone use information to manipulate, but we need to understand how rapidly information can be used going in.”

Begleiter asked the military participants if they had embedded any Afghan journalists. “They’re trying to get the embed program more organized over there under ISAF,” said a military officer. “And they’re really doing a lot of restructuring. But they are trying to pay more attention to Afghan media. One problem is that there aren’t a lot of them.”

### Chapter 3: Communicating with Foreign Media

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“For a long time there was no embed program in Afghanistan, and media was the lowest priority in terms of transport in and out of country and within country,” said a military officer. Now the military is trying to get the embed program up and running because it represents third-party validation of the facts.

“It’s very difficult,” said Kirby. “I hear from reporters all the time, asking me to help them get embedded. And I do the best I can, but they just don’t have the infrastructure right now.” He said that public affairs staffing is among the top priorities for Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Another military officer said, “General McChrystal is paying a lot more attention to indigenous media there and trying to get them out as much as they can, but it’s a challenge.”

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**“You can have trained media and they can be out there doing the best they can, but it’s of little value if it’s not being digested and understood.”**

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A military officer said that there are fewer trained reporters among Afghans, a comment that was disputed by a journalist who works in the area, “I know a lot of good trained Afghan journalists.”

Some military participants agreed, but said that the military needs to influence public opinion in places where media channels are not the best way to accomplish the task. “You can have trained media and they can be out there doing the best they can,” said one officer, “but it’s of little value if it’s not being digested and understood. So helicopter diplomacy and that kind of public relations in the physical sense are also very, very valuable.” For instance, print media have no influence in parts of Afghanistan where the literacy rate is in the single digits. “An effective way that I’ve seen done is where commanders meet with tribal sheikhs and you have media that accompany you to meet those tribal sheikhs,” said a military officer.

Both military and media participants agreed that the communications landscape in Afghanistan is a mixed bag, much more than in Iraq. “You can go to southern Afghanistan or eastern Afghanistan and see hundreds of villages that don’t have electricity, let alone Internet or Internet cafes. And it’s very important in Afghanistan to realize that what is known in the cities and what is known in the country are not the same, and in some ways one is not relevant to the other,” a journalist said.

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## Foreign Media and New Media

In the Middle East, where much news is government-controlled and censorship is common, social networking sites have provided a venue for free speech, according to blogger Mona Eltahawy, who has 4,900 “friends” on Facebook and who also tweets. “The reason that I do it is because Facebook and Twitter have become central,” she said. “Facebook has been used in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Arab world for several years now.” Political activists in the Middle East use Facebook and Twitter to organize demonstrations, and texting is used in high-conflict areas to help people find safe ways home, she said.

Eltahawy said that governments in the Middle East have embraced the new media. For example, Israel used both YouTube and Twitter during the Gaza conflict in January 2009.

As the Jan. 3, 2009, *New York Times* reported, the Israel Defense Forces set up a military channel on YouTube, where viewers can watch suspected Hamas sites being obliterated by ordnance and read blogs from the foreign minister. The *Times* also reported that Israel conducted a news conference via Twitter. “Now can you imagine answering questions about an ongoing war in 140 characters or less?” asked Eltahawy. She said that new media will only continue to grow in the area, because the Internet offers the only way for people to try to learn the truth about what’s going on.

“And you’ve got to stop thinking about bloggers as these weirdos and nerds,” she said. “Egyptian blogger Wael Abbas has a million hits on his blog, Egyptian Awareness (<http://misrdigital.tk/>), every day. That’s more hits than most Egyptian and Arabic newspapers get on their Web sites.” In 2007, Abbas became the first blogger to receive a Knight International Journalism Award, recognizing “extraordinary commitment to the highest professional standards,” from the International Center for Journalists.

“There are people out there doing really important work online, such as bloggers with a huge and massive reach that you’ve never heard of. When you do think of new media and social media, you think of the U.S. landscape,” Eltahawy said. “Think of another context— what’s happening in the Middle East and how important bloggers are becoming there, in languages that you need to be heard in. You’re not being heard in Arabic.”

Another reporter agreed. “I think the U.S. government has bungled the whole message, particularly in reaching out to the Arab world, but even to the American people,” he said. “They don’t know what they hell we are doing in Afghanistan now anyway. And a lot of the soldiers and Marines don’t know either.”

Military and media agree that in many ways there is no longer such a thing as an exclusive U.S. audience. “Anything you put out there in the information domain goes anywhere around the world, which presents its own challenges,” the Defense Department’s Lapan said. In the past, the military could concentrate on ensuring that its messages resonated with the American public alone. “Now you have to think of how those messages resonate with the world public, because they’re getting that same information.”

## Chapter 4: Finding Ways to Cooperate

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**“I can’t believe I heard in this room that we don’t have enough embedded reporters. Next thing I’ll hear is that we don’t have enough lawyers.”**

**—Military officer**

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As this report was going to press (December 2009), President Barack Obama announced plans to send 30,000 more American troops to Afghanistan. A few days later, Secretary Gates testified before Congress that the mid-2011 date the president set to begin withdrawing troops from that country was “the beginning of a process, not the end of a process.” Gates said that “there is no deadline for the withdrawal of American forces in Afghanistan.”

The Pentagon reaffirmed plans to withdraw more than 50,000 U.S. combat units from Iraq in 2010 despite violence in Baghdad. In the meantime, the United States remains mired in two wars. (See timeline “New Strategy in Afghanistan,” page 48.) Discussion at the conference centered on this anticipated situation and its effects on the media’s duty to keep the public informed.

“Can the U.S. military fight two wars?” moderator Begleiter asked. “Can the U.S. media handle more than one or two wars at a time? With reduced staff, diminishing budgets, and with all the large issues of defense, national security and military budgets that need to be covered by the same reporters, can the media do it?”

A reporter said, “No. We can only cover one war. We choose which war to cover and we ignore the other at the time. So currently we’re ignoring Iraq and covering Afghanistan. We ignored Afghanistan for a long time while we were covering Iraq.”

Another reporter said that although his organization has bureaus in both Kabul and Baghdad, he has been arguing for the last year to downsize Iraq and push more into Afghanistan, “Because that is the big story. And I’ve thought for more than a year that the Iraq story is pretty much over.”

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**“Can the country’s attention span, as fragmented and as short as it is, stay focused on two wars?”**

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“I worry that as we downsize in Iraq and up in Afghanistan, we’ll hit this point where we’re, say, at 80,000 troops in both conflicts,” said another reporter. “How are we going to go about covering that?”

The question isn’t just media resources, it’s audience interest, another reporter said. National security news in general does not have the same hold on the public as sensational media. “Can the country’s attention span, as fragmented and as short as it is, stay focused on two wars?” he asked. He questioned whether the American public was even interested in following

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one war. He said there has been less interest in stories about Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008 than there was in 2002 and 2003. Several programs are under way to help educate reporters on how to cover media and security issues, which may help news organizations to provide more informed coverage. (See Director's Note, page 59.)

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**“Counterinsurgency is nuanced and it’s boring to a lot of people. And that affects how much we are able to cover it.”**

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“I work for an organization that looks at the bottom line of how many people are interested in a story,” another reporter said. “And if my story on the Quadrennial Defense Review didn’t get a lot of hits the day before, that helps determine what I’ll write about the next day. Counterinsurgency is nuanced and it’s boring to a lot of people. And that affects how much we are able to cover it.”

Another reporter said, “It’s partly a function of public interest, but it’s also undeniably a function of resources as well.” He said that his paper embedded between six and nine reporters in 2003, and probably can’t afford that now, since embedding is labor intensive and not really efficient. He said that reporters often spend days on airstrips and helipads waiting for flights. His paper currently has no embedded reporters.

## Covering War as Media Budgets Shrink

Reduced staff and resources are creating the necessity for inventive solutions for media organizations, especially those covering conflicts overseas.

It is common to see reporters carrying their own cameras, and increasingly they are using social media to gather information. And as bureaus close down, one said, “You’re going to depend more on stringers and probably more on Twitter, Facebook, all these other social media in the region to get instant answers. If North Korea launches rocket attacks into Seoul, you’re going to be depending on the indigenous capability—you’re not going to have your staff there immediately.”

In addition to relying on stringers and Facebook, news organizations known historically for wanting to scoop competitors are now piggybacking with former rivals.

In 2008, McClatchy Co. signed an agreement to share content with the *Christian Science Monitor*. The content-sharing agreement allows each news organization to use edited stories from reporters working out of several foreign cities, including Caracas, Mexico City, Nairobi and New Delhi. A reporter said this kind of collaboration will likely increase if conflicts erupt and resources continue to be tight.



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## Improving Media Access

For those reporters who do make it to Afghanistan, economic pressures mean they have to be able to show a “return on investment” for their organizations. “Embedding has become an almost impossible task in Afghanistan. We must feed the machine with daily new feeds. Context suffers,” said a reporter. Because they are expected to write more stories per trip, which is probably a shorter trip than in the past, some journalists are reaching out to the military to help them do their jobs. Reporters said that recently the military seem more willing to bring reporters to news scenes, even scenes of inadvertent civilian casualties. Many military officers support this more open approach to crisis communication.

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**“Embedding has become an almost impossible task in Afghanistan. We must feed the machine with daily new feeds. Context suffers.”**

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“If we believe bad news is going to get out anyway, then we should build a culture in the organization that it’s better to have the information upfront early to stay ahead of the problem,” a military officer said. “And if you wedge it by having the right reporters or the right facts early, then you might be able to avoid some of the larger, more complicated challenges that come with crisis.”

A reporter said that in the past, the military often bargained with reporters to cover stories that the public affairs officer wanted covered before taking journalists to where the news was happening. “‘You first have to go and spend some time with the water purifiers, because that’s an important story that needs to be told,’ they might say,” a reporter recalled. Reporters will listen to the importance of the water purifiers, he said. “But, if it’s just not what our readers want right now, we need to have the military hear us on what we’re saying the important story is.”

“Afghanistan is beyond anything that we’ve ever seen in Iraq,” said reporter Nancy Youssef. “And I think with fewer journalists, that challenge is going to become more pronounced. As you deal with us in the future out on the field, I just want to give you a sense of how we’re thinking when we’re in those embeds and what our relationship is to you and what we’re trying to communicate. Because the challenge is that much harder in Afghanistan.”

A reporter complained that print journalists, even heavy hitters from the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*, sometimes take a back seat to television reporters. With reporters pushed to do more stories and with budgets tight, the military and its public affairs

## New Strategy in Afghanistan

In late 2009 President Barack Obama outlined his decision to expand the U.S. role in the war in Afghanistan by ordering an additional 30,000 troops over six months.

### Afghanistan

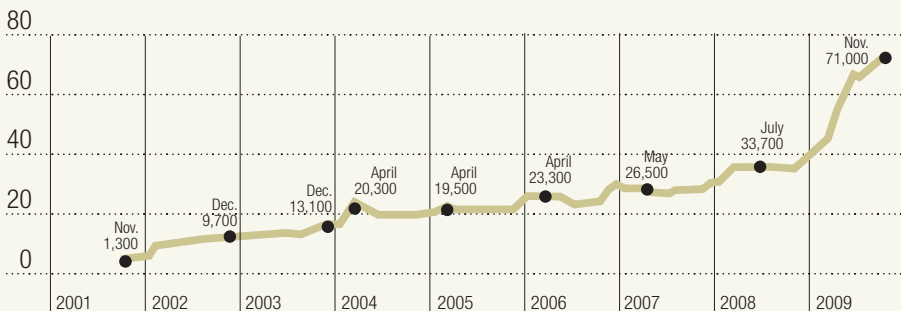
- July 2002:** Vice President Abdul Qadir is assassinated.
- Dec. 2002:** Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, is sworn in as head of a six month interim government.
- Oct. 2004:** Karzai wins Afghanistan's first-ever presidential election.
- Sept. 2005:** The first parliamentary elections in more than 30 years seats a new National Assembly and councils in all 34 provinces.
- June 2007:** Karzai accuses NATO and U.S.-led forces of carelessly killing over 200 Afghan civilians.
- Nov. 2008:** Karzai calls on the international community to set up a timeline for ending the war.
- Nov. 2008:** Karzai bows to intense U.S. pressure and agrees to a runoff election. Two weeks later his challenger drops out of the race, and Karzai is declared the winner.

### United States

- Oct. 2001:** U.S. and British forces begin airstrikes in Afghanistan after the Taliban refuse to hand over Osama bin Laden, blamed for the Sept. 11 attacks.
- Aug. 2003:** NATO deploys troops to Kabul for a peacekeeping mission. The force later expands to other areas and numbers 11,000. The U.S. has more than 10,000 troops in Afghanistan.
- Sept 2008:** Extremist attacks have made this the most violent year since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion began with at least 120 U.S. troop deaths and 104 from other NATO nations.
- Feb. 2009:** President Obama approves adding some 17,000 U.S. troops to the 36,000 who are already in Afghanistan.
- Sept. 2009:** Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, says without additional forces, the war against insurgents will end in failure.
- Oct. 2009:** The deadliest month ends with 58 U.S. troops killed. Officials expect President Obama to make a decision soon to deploy 32,000 to 35,000 more U.S. forces.

### United States/NATO

U.S. Troops in Afghanistan, as of the last day in each month  
(Numbers in thousands)



Sources: AP News Research Center; Department of Defense

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officers have to do better by them, he said. “It has to be communicated to the division-level PAOs, the lieutenant colonels on down, that getting reporters in and around quickly is an absolute priority, even if they’re not TV, which means we’re not as good-looking, but we’re decent at our job all the same,” he said. Other non-television media participants agreed.

Military participants responded that commanders already have latitude to put journalists on aircraft. “I think the bigger question is one of priority and emphasis,” said a military officer. “Do we make media travel a routine or a priority requirement for the effort that’s under way? And what are the advantages for both sides of doing that?”

Moderator Begleiter asked military participants if there is an understood or explicit exclusion for international journalists or international organizations. A military officer responded that there would be no exclusion if he were in charge of such decisions.

Another military officer said, “You know, we can’t bump a soldier off a flight to put on a reporter. It’s those types of things that matter, not whether a reporter is from this organization versus that organization.”

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**“If we believe bad news is going to get out anyway, then we should build a culture in the organization that it’s better to have the information upfront early to stay ahead of the problem.”**

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Begleiter urged military participants at the conference to make sure that when they discuss improving reporter access, they include the issue of foreign journalists. “I think it would be a mistake to pretend that question doesn’t exist,” he said. “When you have ABC News and the *Wall Street Journal* and Al Jazeera all in Washington knocking on the door for a ride to Afghanistan, either there’s no distinction made or there is some criterion for who gets priority access.”

Other advice for the military in dealing with foreign journalists came from a reporter based in the Middle East. “When I was based in Paris and London, the foreign minister would have his spokesperson brief foreign journalists once a week,” she said. “They knew that if they wanted their foreign policy to be understood, they needed to have a good relationship with foreign correspondents. And I think it would be really advantageous for DOD and the Pentagon to think about doing something like that.”

Others suggested that the military consider blogging or using Twitter in languages other than English, such as Arabic and Farsi.

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## Using New Media Effectively

Participants talked about the impact of social media, the lack of accountability and verification, and the need for both the media and the military to be strategic about dealing with it, using those sites that matter. Most information that starts as a tweet or from a blog doesn't become a big story until the mainstream media use their amplification to get the story out there, they said.

The military and the media are concerned that with rushing to respond to new media, they will forget tried and true public affairs efforts. "Have we been pitching stories to you?" a military officer asked. "It really concerns me that perhaps as we have rushed into making sure that we're Facebooking, we might have lost the art of that personal relationship, knowing what you're all working on, knowing what you're keying on, and having that dialogue one on one and getting you the stories that you need."

Another military officer pointed out that traditional media coverage is still viewed as a profession, like the military. Traditional journalists are given specific training to do the job that social media users don't necessarily receive, and straying too far from the traditional media erodes confidence in the military's message. Online media are still evolving. "We can't figure out the chaotic new model," he said.

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**"We need to recognize that it's a different technology, a different audience, and a different kind of information that people are looking for. If the military doesn't recognize this, they'll become irrelevant."**

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Both military and media participants raised concerns about content and who's creating it. One from the media said there's a price to be paid for the fact that there are fewer people with notebooks chasing information and more people commenting on it. "I think people will wake up in 10 years wondering where traditional reporting is and how do we replace it," he said. A member of the military agreed that "the new technology is hollow without compelling writing."

One journalist said, "The impact of the social media are exaggerated," and compared the new channels to a water cooler, where everyone gathers around to comment and get information. "It's a fad," he said, and not where people would be getting their primary information.

A military officer responded, "I don't know if it's a fad, but it's another way to communicate. You have to stay balanced. You need to know how to deal in that media and how to access it."

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Another journalist emphatically rejected the idea that the new media constitute a fad, calling new and social media “the new way.” She called texting “a new frontier” in disseminating information.

Another journalist said, “We need to recognize that it’s a different technology, a different audience, and a different kind of information that people are looking for. If the military doesn’t recognize this, they’ll become irrelevant.”

“We are cognizant of the need to engage in new media and *with* new media, whether those are bloggers or others,” said a military officer. “It is a challenge and I don’t think we’ve figured out yet exactly how to do it.”

## Giving the Media a Ride

Should the military help financially strapped news outlets get more reporters to Afghanistan by taking them there on military transports? As budgets continue to tighten at news organizations, some have no funds to send reporters to Afghanistan. Military officers at the conference discussed the idea of the military not just taking reporters around in-country, which they are already doing, but getting them directly from the United States to combat zones. “Could we explore a manner in which the military might help get reporters there who otherwise couldn’t get there? Could we facilitate flights for reporters into war zones?” a military officer suggested. “Might that also help increase the level and quality of coverage?”

He said he knew ethical questions might require news organizations to pay for the trips. “But when we have reporters in Afghanistan or Iraq, the military is flying them everywhere on helicopters, feeding them, putting them in tents,” he said. “We certainly don’t charge for those services. Why should we charge for a flight to take these reporters to the place where they’re going to be working?”

A reporter said that journalists were concerned whether “if we take free rides from the military we can still claim objectivity.” On the other hand, it is expensive and time-consuming to get to the combat zones, especially in Afghanistan. While it might be to the advantage of the military, he wondered what criteria they would use to decide whom to take. “Where do you draw the line between who gets a free ride and who doesn’t?” he asked.

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Another journalist worried that this could lead to a one-sided view of the conflict. “If media organizations find that this is a way to cut costs, are they then going to forego the other side of the story from the Afghan perspective, which is also a very costly venture. Will they as organizations lean more towards military reporting and less towards reporting on what’s happening on the streets outside of the somewhat narrow perspective that embedding gives you?”

### **Some Advice for the Military**

One of the challenges facing the military is dealing with the immediacy of the new and social media. A military officer commented that all branches of the service are held to an extremely high standard of truthfulness and that it can take weeks to get the correct information. The speed of information, however, has prompted more military support for providing the “unvarnished, warts and all” look at the facts and to go toward more transparency.

A journalist suggested that there is a way for the military to adjust to use new forms of media to put out more and different information. Although it’s not part of the culture of the military to give out incremental information, commanders and public affairs officers could rethink this in order to use the social media. They might conduct a “tentative briefing,” putting out some information and indicating that more would be forthcoming.

A journalist urged the military to consider using crowdsourcing—gathering information via Facebook, Twitter and other sites to try to figure out what’s going on. “Imagine using social media to increase your awareness in certain areas, or to augment your intelligence by pulling on the experience and expertise of a larger number of people,” he said.

## Conclusion

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Dealing with reporters who may want to be embedded with an already short-staffed unit and trying to release information in advance of the enemy are among the problems that confronted the military in Iraq. They also are hot-button issues in Afghanistan. And reporters who rely on the military to keep them safe worry about losing their objectivity.

Meanwhile, the architecture of the media landscape has so radically shifted due to economic and technological issues that both the media and the military are puzzled about what to do. As a journalist said, “There’s a little bit of fatigue, a little bit of despair, but no defeatism.”

Nancy Youssef said it well: “I think that our challenge going forward is how to remain unbiased as we’re so close to people we’re covering and counting on to keep us alive, and in some cases fighting alongside them. At the same time we’re taking this very, very narrow view, which is all we can get in the counterinsurgency. And we are using it as a way to educate the public about the broader issues and implications of counterinsurgency warfare.”

A military participant advocated more media training beginning with junior officers. “A lot of what we do in terms of how we deal with the media and with information is a result of lack of training and development that we have over the course of a career,” he said. “The first time that I was required to have any kind of media training is when I became a general officer. It’s the same for everybody in the Army. And that speaks volumes in terms of how much focus we put on media training at the junior level.”

Army chief of public affairs Bergner demonstrated the collegial tone that largely characterized the conference. “We are always going to be from different tribes—that has to be okay. But we can do a lot to foster a better understanding of our different norms, our different expectations, our values, and how all of those wrap up in our culture. “Participants at the conference seemed to have taken steps toward a better understanding as they struggled to address new challenges raised by technology joined to old issues that threaten democracy, said Donald Cooke, the McCormick Foundation’s senior vice president for philanthropy.

“There have been good nuts-and-bolts discussions on logistics, transportation, credentialing and communications, as well as increased understanding on both sides,” Cooke said. “I’m always struck by how important relationships and trust are in these conversations.”

“One word sums up to me where we’re going and how this is working out. That’s the word *respect*,” Cooke said. “Clearly, respect for each other at the conference and for each other’s opinions. Respect for the vital role and responsibility that both the military and the media play in serving our free, democratic society. Respect for those with a common mission, albeit with very different tools. Respect for the citizens of the United States.

“But most important, respect for the Constitution, starting with the preamble that states ‘to provide... for the common defense,’ all the way to the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.”

## Conference Participants

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**Brig. Gen. Juan G. Ayala** is commanding general of the 2nd Marine Logistics Group, which provides support to Marine ground combat forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ayala has extensive experience in Iraq, including serving as assistant chief of staff for the 3rd Marine Air Wing.

**Julian E. Barnes** is Pentagon correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Chicago Tribune*. During the initial invasion of Iraq, he embedded with the 101st Airborne Division and has since made seven trips to Iraq and two to Afghanistan, embedding with a variety of military units.

**Ralph Begleiter**, moderator of the last three military-media conferences, spent more than 30 years in broadcast journalism, visiting more than 97 countries. An instructor at the University of Delaware, where he directs the Center for Political Communication, he conducts media programs abroad under the auspices of the U.S. State Department.

**Maj. Gen. Kevin Bergner** is chief of Public Affairs for the United States Army. In 2007-2008, he served as the deputy chief of staff for Strategic Effects, Multi-National Force, in Baghdad, Iraq. Previously, he served with the National Security Council staff as special assistant to the president and senior director for Iraq.

**Brig. Gen. Lewis Boone** is deputy chief of Public Affairs for the U.S. Army. Most recently, he was chief of public affairs for U.S. Army Europe and the 7th Army in Heidelberg, Germany. He also served three years as media advisor to the chief of staff of the Army.

**Tom Bowman**, National Public Radio's Pentagon correspondent, has made numerous trips to Iraq and Afghanistan during the past five years, spending most of his time in the field. His six-part series on the National Security Agency for the *Baltimore Sun*, "No Such Agency," was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1995.

**Tony Capaccio** covers defense and national security issues for Bloomberg News, joining Bloomberg in 1997 after an 11-year stint with *Defense Week* in Washington, D.C. Capaccio is a regular participant on C-SPAN's "Washington Journal," and has won awards from the National Press Club and Newsletter Publishers Foundation.



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**Brig. Gen. Michael J. Carey** is deputy director, Global Operations, U.S. Strategic Command, Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska. He is responsible for situational awareness, command and control, and integrated plans across space, nuclear and cyber operations. He has also served as director of Space Forces for the Central Air Force Commander.

**Rear Adm. James D. (Dan) Cloyd** is associate director, Assessment Division, for the chief of Naval Operations. He has served in various joint operations, strategy and policy positions, and has commanded both aviation squadrons and ships, including the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Dwight D. Eisenhower.

**Jamal Dajani**, a news producer and senior director of Middle Eastern programming at Link TV, has produced more than 2,000 installments of the Peabody Award-winning “Mosaic: World News from the Middle East.” He is a commentator on international television and radio, hosts a radio talk show on KPOO and blogs on the *Huffington Post*.

**Lt. Gen. David A. Deptula** is deputy chief of staff for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance for the U.S. Air Force. He has significant combat experience and has held leadership positions in several major joint contingency operations, including two tours as a joint force commander.

**Yochi J. Dreazen** is military correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*. Dreazen has made more than 30 trips to Iraq and Afghanistan, spending more than two years in Iraq beginning in April 2003, when he arrived with the Fourth Infantry Division as the *Journal's* main Iraq correspondent.

**Mona Eltahawy** is an Egyptian-born commentator and blogger on Arab and Muslim issues. Her opinion pieces have been published frequently in the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the pan-Arab *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper and Qatar’s *Al-Arab*.

**Barbara G.B. Ferguson** is Washington bureau chief for the London-based *Arab News*, the leading English-language daily in the Middle East. A journalist and bureau chief in Paris, London and now Washington for 24 years, she also works part-time as a consultant to the U. S. Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture in Quantico, Va.

## Conference Participants

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**Hans-Ulrich (Uli) Gack** is a reporter for ZDF German Television, Germany's national public television broadcaster based in Mainz, Germany. Gack has covered the war in Afghanistan as a front-line correspondent for more than five years, spending several months a year in areas throughout the country.

**Lt. Col. Christopher Garver** is deputy chief of Media Relations for U.S. Army Public Affairs at the Pentagon. While assigned to the Multi-National Force–Iraq, Garver was Combined Press Information Center director, where he managed media operations for MNF-I, the American Forces network broadcast hub and the Iraqi media team.

**Maj. Gen. Mark Graham** is deputy chief of staff, U.S. Army Forces Command at Fort McPherson, Ga. Graham has served in various command and staff positions in the United States and overseas.

**Capt. John F. Kirby** is special assistant for Public Affairs to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kirby has served on the staffs of the chief of Naval Personnel, the commander of U.S. Naval Forces–Europe and the chief of Naval Operations. He was editor in chief of the Navy's flagship monthly magazine, *All Hands*, from 1997 to 1999.

**Steven Komarow**, deputy Washington bureau chief for the Associated Press, has extensive reporting background in Washington, Europe and the Middle East. As a *USA Today* reporter, he covered the U.S.-led military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, was embedded during the Iraq invasion and covered the capture and trial of Saddam Hussein.

**Col. Dave Lapan** is director of the Defense Department press office at the Pentagon. He previously served as director and deputy director of Public Affairs for the U.S. Marine Corps, and from 2000 to 2003, he was public affairs liaison to U.S. Central Command in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Terry Leonard** is editorial director of *Stars and Stripes*, a Defense Department-authorized independent daily for the U.S. military overseas. Previously, Leonard spent 28 years with the Associated Press, the last 20 as a foreign correspondent, including a recent stint as AP bureau chief for Southern Africa, directing coverage in 11 countries.

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**Adam Levine** is supervising producer for CNN's Pentagon unit, overseeing coverage of defense, military strategy, veterans and other national security topics. Previously at CNN, Levine helped oversee the 2004 presidential election coverage, manage the business news desk and coordinate coverage of embedded reporters during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

**Gordon Lubold** is Pentagon and national security correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and has covered the Pentagon and the military since 1999. He joined the *Monitor* in 2007 after eight years writing for *Marine Corps Times*, including embedding with U.S. military forces in Kuwait and Iraq prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

**Jamie McIntyre** brings 16 years of frontline reporting experience to "Lineofdeparture," a daily blog on Military.com, which he joined in July 2009. McIntyre has covered every U.S. military operation in the past two decades, from the Pentagon and war zones, breaking the news of Saddam Hussein's 2005 capture by American forces.

**Jim Michaels**, a former Marine Corps infantry officer, covers military issues for *USA Today*. He has covered conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti and Central America. Previously he was deputy world editor at *USA Today*, managing coverage of Iraq and the Middle East and supervising the paper's six embedded reporters.

**Dave Moniz** became the U.S. Air Force's civilian media advisor in 2005, after 25 years as a newspaper reporter in South Carolina and Washington, D.C. Previously, he covered the Pentagon for *USA Today*, reporting on all facets of military life. He covered military life and culture for the Columbia, S.C., *State*, South Carolina's largest newspaper.

**Rear Adm. Dennis Moynihan** is the U.S. Navy's chief of information, principal spokesman for the Navy Department and communication counselor to the secretary of the Navy and the chief of Naval Operations. He leads the Navy's public affairs community, which includes more than 2,500 active and reserve officers, and enlisted and civilian communication professionals.

**Tobias Naegele** is editor in chief of Army Times Publishing Company, overseeing all of the company's editorial operations, including six weekly newspapers — *Army*, *Air Force*, *Navy*, and *Marine Corps Times*, *Defense News* and *Federal Times* — four magazines and a weekly television program, "This Week in Defense News."

## Conference Participants

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**Christof Putzel** is senior correspondent and producer for Current TV, a youth-oriented cable network. In the last two years, Putzel has been nominated for three Emmys and several other journalism awards, including a National Headliner Award for investigative reporting. He has produced documentaries about war and conflict in the Middle East.

**John Robinson** is editor of *Defense Daily*, where he has worked for more than 19 years. A former sportswriter, Robinson has covered the defense industry and acquisition for *Defense Daily*.

**Col. Bryan Salas** is director of Public Affairs for the U.S. Marine Corps. Prior to his present post, he served in Norfolk, Va., as an operations planner for the European and African Region. He also served as the senior Marine spokesman from 2006 to 2007 in Anbar Province, Iraq.

**Brig. Gen. Jefforey Smith** is deputy director for Politico-Military Affairs for the Middle East Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate on the Joint Staff. He is responsible for politico-military advice and strategic vision, representing the interests of the combatant commands and the chairman in the Middle East and the Maghreb region of Africa.

**Rear Adm. Robert Thomas, Jr.** is director of the Strategy and Policy Division for the chief of Naval Operations. He was previously in the secretary of the Navy's Office of Program Appraisal, and has served as assistant deputy director for Western Hemisphere Politico-Military Affairs on the Joint Staff in the Pentagon.

**Nancy Youssef**, McClatchy Co.'s chief Pentagon correspondent, spent the past four years covering the Iraq war, most recently as Baghdad bureau chief. Her pieces focused on the everyday Iraqi experience, civilian casualties and how U.S. military strategy was reshaping Iraq's social and political dynamics.

## Director's Note

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The McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest journalism grantmaking organizations, with an annual budget of more than \$6 million. The Journalism Program invests in grants that enhance content, build audience and protect the rights of journalists. This strategy provides us an opportunity to further honor the legacy of Col. Robert R. McCormick. Our founder was passionate about quality journalism, First Amendment values and news media innovation. He believed that nothing is more critical to the vitality of a democracy than a free, vigorous press that provides citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions.

This devotion to quality news is clearly illustrated by our initiatives in national security reporting. The 10th Military-Media conference is just one example of events that help journalists prepare for and better understand military affairs. Below is a sampling of other McCormick journalism initiatives that foster military-media understanding:

The **Center for Media and Security**, begun in 1986 as the National Security Program of the Scientists' Institute for Public Information, is one of the first efforts to encourage better relations between the military and the media. The center offers three outreach programs:

- The Defense Writers Group, including national security reporters from more than 40 organizations, meets up to 35 times a year for on-the-record breakfast briefings with top military commanders, international security officials, diplomats, legislators and other experts.
- The Television and National Security Project dinner series brings together television and radio correspondents and producers with leading international security experts for off-the-record discussions.
- An informal luncheon series includes print and electronic media representatives discussing national security and defense issues with officials and experts.

For more information, email Harry Disch at [hdisch@att.net](mailto:hdisch@att.net).

**The University of Kansas** William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications hosts an annual weeklong military and media workshop for journalists. The series of meetings, cosponsored with the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, has been offered the past two years as part of efforts to increase mutual understanding between the military and journalists. The 2009 workshop held at Fort Leavenworth and nearby Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, included an "embedding" of journalists with military students from

## Director's Note

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Fort Leavenworth. The university's journalism school also offers a Military and the Media class every year for both journalism students and military officers, with sessions both at the university and at Fort Leavenworth. The course is designed to help the groups develop mutual understanding and learn about each other's work environments, professional demands and culture. For more information, contact Tom Volek at [twvolek@ku.edu](mailto:twvolek@ku.edu)

In early 2009, **Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism** launched a three-year initiative to build a specialty in national security reporting. Medill will expand previous courses for graduate and undergraduate students on covering conflicts, terrorism and the Pentagon and offer new classes focused on national security, homeland security and civil liberties. The school also offers professional development classes and workshops for journalists, taking advantage of its Chicago, Washington and Qatar locations and distance learning technology to enable wide participation. Initial workshops have focused on Afghanistan and reporting on the military justice system. A symposium on national security is planned for 2010. For more information, contact Timothy-McNulty@northwestern.edu.

As Journalism Program director, I am fortunate to manage these important conferences, classes, workshops and mid-career training opportunities for the McCormick Foundation. I also am grateful to Aaron Smith and Janice Belzowski for handling the arduous administrative tasks associated with the Military-Media Conference.

Clark W. Bell  
Journalism Program Director  
McCormick Foundation

## About McCormick Foundation Journalism Program

The McCormick Foundation believes there is nothing more critical to the vitality of a democracy than free, vigorous and diverse news media that provide citizens with information they need to make reasoned decisions. The Foundation's Journalism Program invests in projects that enhance content, build news audiences and protect the legal rights of journalists. The McCormick Foundation, which honors the legacy of Robert R. McCormick, is one of the nation's largest charities, with more than \$1 billion in assets.

For more information visit [www.McCormickFoundation.org](http://www.McCormickFoundation.org).

## About the McCormick Foundation Military-Media Conference

If the first McCormick Foundation Military-Media Conference in 1992 was fiery and contentious, participants at the 2009 conference seemed more concerned with their own organizations and with the new media than they were with one another. The hottest debate arose between those from the traditional media and those from the new media.

Military officers with vast experience in combat and in public affairs joined with expert national security journalists at the McCormick Foundation conference in September 2009 to discuss the rapid changes in communications technology and in the news business and their effects on coverage of irregular warfare.

- How does embedding affect objectivity and context?
- What is the role of new media in newsgathering and military communication?
- How does the military communicate with foreign journalists and their audiences?
- Can journalists cover two wars with slashed staff and tight budgets?