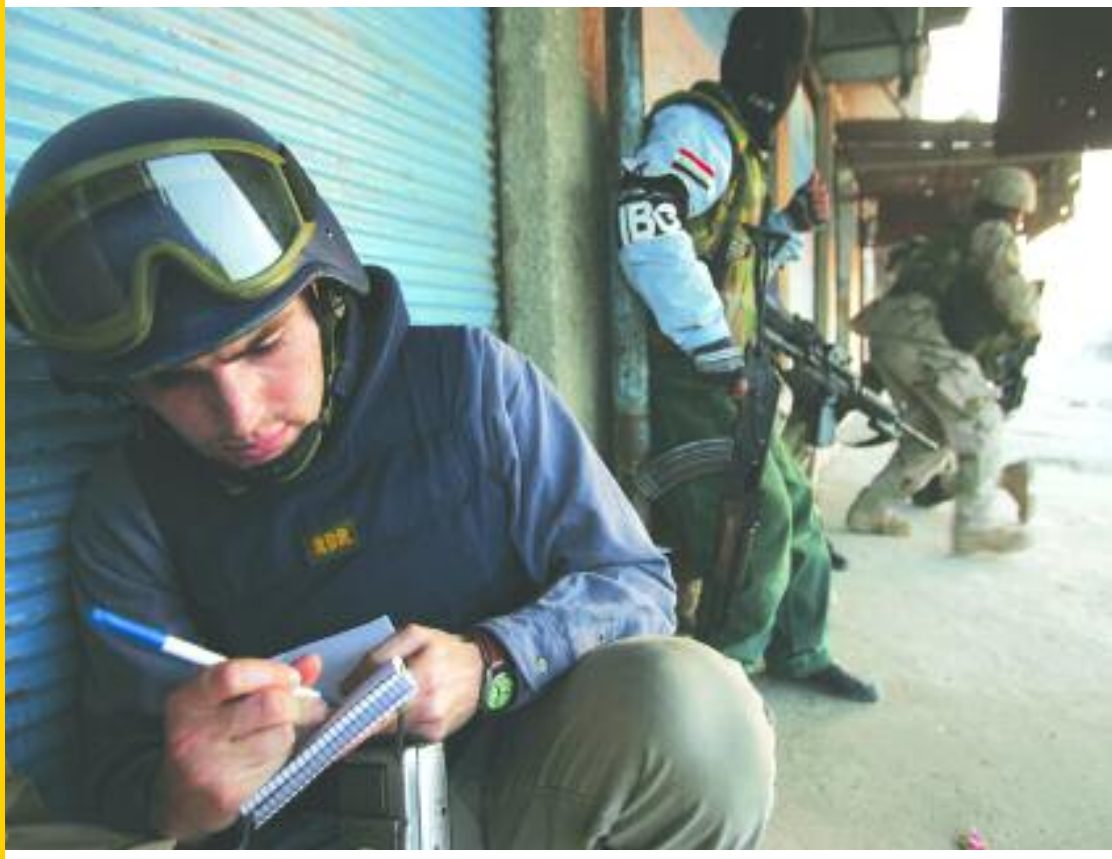
McCORMICK TRIBUNE CONFERENCE SERIES
Conference Report



The Military-Media Relationship 2005

How the armed forces, journalists and the public view coverage of military conflict

McCormick Tribune Foundation

The McCormick Tribune Conference Series is sponsored by the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

The conference series offers the opportunity for collaboration between the foundation and other organizations that are addressing issues consistent with the foundation's mission. Conferences are conducted on the grounds of Cantigny, the former estate of Col. Robert R. McCormick, located in Wheaton, Ill., approximately 35 miles west of Chicago. McCormick was the longtime editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune.*

The McCormick Tribune Foundation is one of the nation's largest charitable organizations, with combined assets of approximately $1.4 billion. In 2004, the foundation approved the distribution of more than $109 million to invest in our children, communities and country in an effort to strengthen our democratic society through innovative partnerships.

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Foreword

The military and the media share a relationship constantly in flux and presently influenced by the combat atmosphere. Although this relationship is often characterized by misunderstanding, these institutions have a common purpose at the heart of their operations: to serve the American public.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation is committed to fostering military-media dialogue because of its dual commitment to both institutions and the roles they play in our democratic society. This commitment reflects Col. Robert R. McCormick's legacy as both soldier and journalist.

In August 2005, the foundation hosted its eighth Military-Media Conference. These conferences, which have taken place approximately every two years since 1992, bring together a select group of military leaders and journalists who cover national security issues.

The foundation convenes these meetings with long-term as well as practical goals:

- assess the current state of the relationship between the two institutions;
- increase mutual understanding at both personal and institutional levels;
- offer practical solutions to challenges in the relationship.

We knew that the situation in 2005 would be quite different from the last conference in 2003. The near euphoria experienced by both sides at the close of the second Iraq war, in particular the proximity and shared experiences brought on by embedding, was replaced by the tensions caused by a protracted insurgency and strained resources.

In addressing the military-media relationship in 2005, we expanded our focus to include the perceptions of the American public. We turned to the Gallup Organization, as we had in 1999, to take a snapshot of how the public views the information it receives on issues of national security. The 2005 survey added significantly to understanding on both sides and challenged assumptions about how the public perceives and evaluates the military and the media.

Readers will notice that some of the exchanges at the conference were for full attribution, while others were not. This agreement was to assure candor on the part of participants. When giving prepared comments, speakers agreed to be quoted by name. In all other exchanges participants are usually identified only by whether they are military or media, but not by name.

A number of people played critical roles in executing this conference. Geoffrey Stone of the University of Chicago delivered a keynote address that set the tone for the conference with thoughtful, provocative reflection. Ralph Begleiter of the University of Delaware was an expert conference moderator, drawing out participants on a variety of complex issues. David Moore of the Gallup Organization brought considerable insight to the task of designing and carrying out the nationwide poll. Ellen Shearer and her team from Northwestern University – Ava Greenwell, Craig Lamay, David Nelson and Jon Ziomek – contributed by moderating and reporting on breakout sessions. Special thanks go to the conference's executive agent, Harry Disch, president of the Center for Media and Security

Ltd., and his colleague Helen Chayefsky, for their instrumental role in shaping this conference. Nancy Ethiel and Ellen Hunt played special roles in making this conference report possible.

This report summarizes the exchanges at this conference, and includes some of the Gallup poll findings. On behalf of the McCormick Tribune Foundation board of directors, we invite you to view the entire poll results on the foundation's Web site, www.mccormicktribune.org.

David L. Grange
President & CEO
McCormick Tribune Foundation

Introduction

In 1992, the McCormick Tribune Foundation launched a unique conference series, bringing together representatives of the military's top brass and the media's reporters on all things military. The resulting report noted: "The close though frequently strained relationship between America's media and its military can be traced throughout our country's history. During times of peace, particularly when the lessons of wars recently fought are being digested, the two institutions move closer to each other. There is an appearance of healing, in which each side pledges to do better the next time around, having resolved, seemingly once and for all, the dilemmas of access, control, and culture that so often hinder a genuine understanding between the two. But each time the shooting begins anew, all the old wounds are reopened."

At the first conference in 1992, the relationship was strained over the military's tight control of the media during the recent Gulf War. But by the next conference in 1993, participants found more common ground and the military-media relationship began and continued to improve. Perhaps the high point came in 2003, shortly after President George W. Bush declared, "Mission accomplished," in Iraq. Military and media alike were full of praise for the Pentagon's policy of embedding journalists with troops in the field and a feeling of victory was in the air.

By 2005, however, it was clear the conflict in Iraq was far from

over. In looking back over the last two years, the media had begun to question its coverage of the run-up to the war. There was mounting frustration at the difficulty in getting answers from the nation's civilian leadership, and reporting from the field had become so dangerous and expensive that few reporters were able to venture outside of Baghdad.

For the military on the front lines, accomplishing the mission had become increasingly difficult and dangerous. Commanders were placed in the position of being spokespersons for government policy, which took them beyond their role of carrying out policy rather than making or promoting it.

In 1999, two years before the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, the foundation commissioned a Gallup poll at a time when America had not been entangled in a war for years. In 2005, it was certainly time to massage the pulse of the military, the media and American citizens. The resulting poll, presented in this book, reflects a profound shift that had occurred among the American people since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The large majority that had supported the invasion had dwindled and Americans were increasingly disaffected with the Iraq war.

One area of enormous change was the increasing sophistication and proliferation of communications technology. From the soldier on the ground with a camera phone to a military system that can communicate instantly from the battlefield, information had become almost impossible to control. Families could find out directly and immediately from their loved ones what was going on in Iraq and Afghanistan – and so could the media, here and abroad.

The issue of technology and its responsible use in military and media communications came into discussion at several points throughout the conference. Participants were both excited by the new capabilities and cautious about incorporating them into their

communications. The foundation plans to host a 2006 Military-Media conference on this topic.

The 2005 military-media conference was the first to be held during an ongoing war. The military felt aggrieved that their successes were not given more coverage by the media, while the media felt stymied by not being provided the context they needed to tell a complete story. In contrast to earlier conferences, in which participants could examine their relationship through the lens of "emotions recollected in tranquility," discussions in 2005 reflected the intensity of current feeling.

Chapter 1
The Military-Media Relationship in 2005: Beyond Embedding

Geoffrey Stone, the Harry Kalven, Jr., distinguished service professor of law at the University of Chicago, kicked off the conference by emphasizing the vital importance of the First Amendment and the difficulties in applying it during wartime.

He said: "Not only does the danger to the nation in wartime dwarf the kinds of issues that ordinarily arise in attempting to make sense of the First Amendment, but the value of speech may be at its greatest in wartime. In a self-governing democracy, it is fundamental that citizens openly discuss policy and debate freely who their leaders should be. And there is no issue more important than whether and how to go to war. So, on both sides of the equation, both the speech side and the government interest side, the stakes are especially high in wartime."

But criticizing a war raises complicated issues, he explained: "The person who stands up and says the war is immoral...is frequently attacked by those who support the war, because the very same speech that appeals to citizens in the political process may also have the effect of strengthening the enemy's resolve."

On the other hand, "nothing serves those in power in a democracy more than silencing their critics," he added. "Therefore, the mixed motive problem is present both on the speaker's side and on the government interest side."

Exploring these tensions from the Sedition Act of 1798 to

today, Stone raised questions on navigating the "uncertain waters" of war time:

- How can we maintain a vibrant, robust freedom of expression in wartime while at the same time protecting the nation's capacity to fight the war effectively?
- How much should the media know and be able to communicate to the public about battlefield engagements and casualties?
- What kinds of images can the government legitimately prevent being shown out of fear that they might "demoralize" rather than simply inform American citizens?
- How are these boundaries drawn, and by whom?
- What are the proper roles of courts, presidents, generals and journalists?

Ralph Begleiter, distinguished journalist in residence in the University of Delaware's communications department, moderated the conference. By stating that most Americans know the military through its portrayal by the press, he set up his goal for the conference: "It's certainly useful for us to get along well, but we should not set ourselves a goal of resolving disputes, settling differences or coming up with a platter full of common ground. It will be better if we recognize the boundaries of our relationship so we know there are lines that neither of us should cross. It will be better if we can get a handle on what the public wants from our relationship.

"Each of our institutions – the military and the media – plays a fundamental role in the American democracy," he said. "All of us know that we exist for one purpose only, to serve the people of this country. All of us know that our jobs in both arenas can be done better when there's a certain level of cooperation among us. But we also know that sometimes serving the public can be done better on both

sides when we don't cooperate, when we maintain an adversarial relationship.

"When this conference convened two years ago, it was consumed by the subject of embedded journalism in the Iraq war," Begleiter said. "Two years later, the focus has shifted to insurgency, the political battle among Iraqis over their political future; the continuing war on terrorism within and beyond Iraq; the broader policy questions of what happens to Iraq now and to the U.S. role in Iraq in the future; and the emerging political battle inside the United States over the continuation of the war."

In August 2003, journalists were still excited about the opportunities of working among the troops in Iraq. The war appeared to be going well. President Bush had declared "Mission accomplished," on May 1 of that year, and the military and the media had been brought closer by their shared experiences.

At the 2005 conference, both groups found much to re-examine about their relationship since the 2003 meeting at Cantigny.

* * *

The opening panel addressed issues and developments in the military-media relationship since the 2003 conference. The first speaker, Bryan Whitman, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, was a panelist at both conferences. In 2003, Whitman had said of the Department of Defense's (DOD) public affairs strategy for the Iraq war: "We wanted to neutralize the disinformation efforts of our adversaries. We wanted to build and maintain support for U.S. policy as well as the global war on terrorism. We wanted to take offensive action to achieve information dominance, to demonstrate the professionalism of the U.S. military. And we wanted to build and maintain support for the war fighter out there on the ground."

In 2005, Whitman addressed three areas that had changed in the past two years: "First, changes in how the military is being covered in this current conflict and in the global war on terror; second, changes

in who is covering the war; and third, how the changes in the communication environment are changing the way we communicate.

"In 2003, we spent a lot of time talking about embedded reporters," he said, adding that the number of embeds has dropped precipitously since then: "Yesterday there were 26 reporters embedded with military units in Iraq. There were six reporters embedded with military units in Afghanistan." [This is down from a peak of about 700 prior to May 1, 2003, when victory was declared by President Bush.]

The perception is that the media and the military are not doing enough to give a complete and broad perspective on what's going on in the war.

Partly because of the decline in media numbers, Whitman said, covering the conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan has become "the near-exclusive domain of large news organizations, and as a result of fewer resources covering it, the coverage has become more centralized. The perception is that the media and the military are not doing enough to give a complete and broad perspective on what's going on in the war.

"In my institution there is a belief that the coverage tends to be more one-dimensional, that it tends to be oriented only to the security aspects of the global war on terror and less about the political, the economic ramifications, the legal, the financial efforts, as well as the diplomatic efforts," he said. "Because less time and resources are being devoted to the efforts in the theater itself, there tends to be a focus away from the individual soldier and the unit actions that are taking place, and more coverage from capitals."

As a result, he said, "What you see in the Defense Department, in the military, is a very aggressive media outreach effort."

Whitman gave two examples of how DOD and the military are looking beyond the large news organizations to reach a broader

audience: "If you look at what U.S. Central Command is doing with the digital video and imagery distribution system – DVIDS as it's known – they're conducting about 128 interviews a week, sending back 400 video clips a month and conducting about 95 radio interviews every month. Within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the leadership has started a very aggressive regional media program and has done 86 regional radio interviews since we started keeping records."

Whitman next addressed the changes in who is covering the war. "There's not as diverse a representation of news organizations with the financial resources for the long haul covering the news in Iraq and Afghanistan. And it's increasingly not an American reporter on the ground gathering the news. There is a growing reliance by news organizations on hiring local employees to go out and bring back news."

As a result, he said, "Some second- and third-hand reporting occurs. You've all heard the criticism of hotel reporting from places where there's relative safety, where you can husband your resources to be able to cover what's going on politically within the capital – or perhaps not have the resources to get out into the rest of the country.

"Sometimes reporters who are 8,000 to 9,000 miles away from the activity are called upon by their news organizations to report tactical details of an ongoing operation," Whitman said. "That's a pretty tough thing to do, but their news organizations are calling upon them to try to do that.

"The other effect is that unfortunately we have found people who represent themselves as journalists who are either compliant with or directly involved with the insurgency, and reporters who are using news organizations as a cover and forging press credentials to gain access to our military forces.

"When you have even a few of these activities, they tend to

breed suspicion and distrust of anyone you don't know who comes up to you on the battlefield and reports himself to be with the news media," he added.

Whitman discussed changes in the global information environment and how they affect both obtaining and communicating information. What the U.S. news media reports and how they report it does matter, because our adversaries are watching and reading that information, he said.

"It's an increasing challenge to employ all the communication tools and methods necessary for successful military operations," Whitman said. "Sometimes when we communicate in a global environment like this, communications targeted to a particular audience end up being communicated to an audience we had not intended them for.

"The results of that are heightened awareness, greater sophistication in how we reach various audiences that are important to reach, and using new organizations and structures to communicate – some of which make people in this room uncomfortable – as well as increased calls from the department for greater precision, accuracy, context, completeness and care in reporting."

* * *

Bradley Graham, Pentagon correspondent for the *Washington Post*, spoke next. "With the nation embroiled as it is in a difficult conflict and national opinion increasingly divided over what should be done, it's particularly important for the media and military to try to get their relationship right," he said.

"I take the embed experience during the invasion as a starting point," he said. "What's really puzzled me is that I would have thought the real progress made in terms of the kinds of communication that occurred with many of those embeds would have spilled over into improved dealings here at home – at the Pentagon and on the military beat in the United States. And I haven't seen as much of

that as I would have expected. What I've seen and heard from many colleagues is a lot of frustration about greater difficulty in getting information and access.

"Here's the central irony for me," he said. "In the field, where troops are under fire and facing a heightened threat, it is often easier to get information than it is back home at the Pentagon. It seems one of the scariest things defense officials face is talking about policy or the making of policy.

"In the field, where troops are under fire and facing a heightened threat, it is often easier to get information than it is back home at the Pentagon."

"One of the Gallup findings that really struck me was that when it comes to voicing objections about official policy, only about a quarter of the military respondents said they were comfortable doing so, even off the record," Graham noted. "There is still this very deep reservation about discussing policy, whereas if you're out in the field, officers will discuss what they're doing much more freely.

"In Washington, the circumstances in which we have to operate remain very structured and much less forthcoming," he said. "We often have layers and layers of public affairs people to go through. I had one interview last week where there were about 10 people involved in the briefing, and four of them were public affairs officers.

"There's also a tendency at the Pentagon to wait until an issue is completely decided and tied up neatly in a bow before it's presented or briefed on," Graham said. "At times the increased efforts at regional outreach we've seen have come at the expense of attention to larger media organizations. It shouldn't be an either/or situation.

"I appreciate what Bryan [Whitman] says about the greater need for security," he said. "I realize that may be responsible for

some of this greater tightfistedness about information. But I think there's a much more sophisticated way to think about using information as a strategic weapon and that the knee-jerk response to keep a tight hold on it can be counterproductive. I think you can make an argument that in some cases, getting more information out, not less, can be to the strategic advantage of the United States in a conflict like this.

"I think there's also still an issue in handling bad news," Graham said. "The classic case of this over the past two years is the Abu Ghraib scandal. I'm sure everybody in the public affairs operation at the Pentagon knows that the basic rule when you get bad news is fast and full disclosure. That certainly was not the case when Abu Ghraib began to surface. The determining consideration was worry about how disclosure of the scandal might affect military operations in Iraq, how it might affect the morale of the troops, how it might affect the training of Iraqi security forces, how it would play in Iraq and in the Middle East. And from what I understand from Bryan [Whitman], that drove the decision to mention only in passing that there was 'this case that was being investigated.' The full impact of what had happened was not revealed until the *New Yorker* article and broadcast stories appeared.

[On April 28, 2004, CBS's *60 Minutes II* broke the story that American soldiers and members of the intelligence community had been torturing and abusing prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison, a detention facility used by the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. Subsequently, many national and international media followed up on the story, illustrating it with photos of the abuse taken by American soldiers at the scene.]

"Overall, my greatest concern about the media-military relationship now is the claim we've started hearing again about how our reporting, particularly about the war, is so negative," Graham said. "To some degree this is a perennial complaint about the press, but

coming now with such intensity by some very senior people in the administration – Secretary [Donald] Rumsfeld and others – I think it risks obfuscating the real point, which is what is happening out there. And I think the argument can be made that the press should be, not necessarily more negative, but more skeptical. The press has been very critical of itself for its pre-war reporting. I don't think that it now ought to be concerned about not highlighting things that are not working well in Iraq or elsewhere."

* * *

Army Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, now deputy director of plans and policy for Central Command, offered a military perspective. "Like Bryan [Whitman], I'd like to narrow my comments to three issues in media-military relations during the past two years," he said. "My perspective was formed from an operational position, primarily at the hub of unilateral media operations in Baghdad.

"I agree that a close professional and collegial relationship needs to be maintained between the press and the military," he said. "This has served us well during the good times and became even more important during the tough times. Since [Sept.11, 2001] there has been a sea change in the relationship between the media and the press, one clearly catalyzed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense embed decision, in which both the military and the press have worked to take the relationship to what I believe to be the next level of professionalism, which I call active engagement. Both sides have made significant strides in appreciating the different cultures.

"In many ways, it's very different from the Army I grew up in, when hearing of a reporter anywhere within a square mile of your position usually caused you to find a reason to be somewhere else," he said. "Those days are over. Our leaders demand that we talk more to the press. And frankly, and far more important, our troops demand that we tell their experience to their families through the press.

"The military recognizes that the news is best told if we provide facts, provide context and also provide explanations," he said. "And those opportunities only come about if one has built and sustained a professional relationship with the media. We have to demonstrate the tactical patience to understand that over time the story will come out, and we still believe that truth is our best weapon. One can only hope that a policy of active engagement with the press will continue.

"A second issue is less pleasant to discuss, but this is probably the venue in which to discuss it," Kimmitt added. "In Iraq the soft option whereby the press can freely circulate on the battlefield as a recognized and respected neutral presence may be over. In the case of unilaterals, it may be possible to mitigate some of that risk by camouflaging your colleagues in local garb, hiding in beat-up cars and trying to move from story to story. But the situation in Iraq is such that the press is at personal risk of targeting by terrorists and insurgents.

"Last is the enduring question about balance and completeness in reporting," he said. "There remains a concern on the part of many that the Iraq narrative has leaned too heavily on the bang-bang – the daily car bombs, casualties and contacts – that the narrative being told is nothing more than a series of daily dots that are not being properly formed into a comprehensive whole. This is frustrating not only to the senior military but to the thousands of troops currently in and recently returned from Iraq. They feel a cognitive dissonance created by what they've seen and heard on the ground and what they see and hear in the media, because they are most times completely different.

"While most would look to the press to fix this, the military does have a part to play through an aggressive effort to tell the story and continue to tell that story until we're blue in the face," Kimmitt said. "Our troops deserve that effort, they demand it of their military lead-

ers and we need to keep working it. We don't need to work it by messaging or by spinning, but by simply telling the facts, providing the information put in the proper context and balance.

"Frankly this is important beyond Iraq, because it's clear that al-Qaeda, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Ayman al-Zawahiri and their legions of extremists are not simply in Iraq," he said. "We find them throughout the Central Command region, and they are using those fundamental underpinnings of a liberal democracy – freedom of speech and freedom of the press – against us. They understand that they cannot beat us militarily, so they are trying to erode our will and our determination to see this through.

"No one is suggesting that we need to restrict our fundamental freedoms, which our troops and your reporters are facing deadly risks each day to defend and uphold," Kimmitt said. "Those freedoms are not at risk. Nonetheless, while a free press cannot and should not be an active cheerleader of this war effort, it's equally important and fair to ask if the press has a responsibility to guard actively against imbalance and lack of context, to the detriment of the war effort."

* * *

Jane Arraf, senior Baghdad correspondent, Cable News Network (CNN), who has spent several years covering Iraq, spoke next. "A couple of things have stood out to me in covering the military over the last two years in Iraq," she said. "One is that we are still a long way from trusting each other there on the ground – the other is that we have never needed each other more.

"It is extremely hard to over-emphasize how much reporting has changed there over the last year," she pointed out. "A year and a half ago we had unimaginable freedom. We could be in Baghdad, we could drive to Karbala, to Mosul or to Fallujah. We did not have to be embedded. We could stay in Iraqi hotels and speak with Iraqis and the military as well.

"That's impossible these days," she said. "The only way I've been able to show our viewers parts of the country that normally don't get covered – and, ironically, the only way I've been able to talk to large numbers of Iraqis – is to be embedded with the Army and with the Marines.

"People here are wondering how mistakes are made. People are wondering about the morale of the troops. People are wondering what it's actually like over there," she said. "I'm on air in Baghdad every day, and that is where we need to be. We can't be behind the front lines. We need to be there showing people what it's like in Iraq."

"But the best thing you can do for the military's credibility is to show us everything and let us make up our own minds."

She turned to the topic of favorable coverage: "We generally hate the term 'good news stories.' I probably do more stories that fall into that category than a lot of people, just because I've been in Iraq for a long time and I can see the changes. When it looks bad, I know it was worse before. However, I still get a lot of military people saying, 'You need to do more good news stories. Why are you doing stories that make us look bad?'

"I hope there is a realization that we would be doing you a disservice if all we did were things that looked like good news stories," Arraf said. "As bad as Iraq looks on television and in the news, most of you know that in a lot of places it's a whole lot worse. I can't describe to you the horror of what it's like to live in Baghdad every day for Iraqis.

"It's not black and white – we all know that," she said. "And there has to be a balanced picture. But the best thing you can do for the military's credibility is to show us everything and let us make up our own minds."

She said that on an individual level, "The military-media rela-

tionship is wonderful, and there is a lot of trust. When people get to know us, they often say, 'We normally don't like reporters, but you guys are okay.' But generally the expectation is that we are out to get them. We're out to tell bad stories, we're not going to understand, we're going to misquote them, we're going to make them look bad. That perception has to go away.

"A lot of the criticism I hear is that journalists are only looking for the sensational stuff: the explosions, the gunfire, people dying. I'm sorry to say that perhaps some editors and maybe a lot of viewers are only looking for that. No matter how many wonderful stories I do about people rebuilding in Fallujah, they either get knocked off the air by a missing girl in Aruba or by our people at the network and viewers who want the daily violence. That's more exciting than people rebuilding. And that is a serious problem that we really have to try to face.

"Bryan [Whitman] mentioned that there are only 26 embedded reporters. A year ago there were about 200. You need to embed a lot more reporters. It needs to be easier to do that. Even for people like me who are embedded 90 percent of the time, there are places that are extremely difficult to go to."

Arraf made suggestions about what the military on the ground can do to get its message across: "You need to embrace the Iraqi media. I know there is a concern about security, but I'm surprised to hear that reporters are under suspicion of being insurgents. Almost every news organization I know has had a stringer of some sort – cameramen, not necessarily reporters – in jail at some time. I'm not sure that it's in your best interest as the military not to reach out to Iraqi media.

"The military cannot be so picky in general in dealing with the media," she added. "I've been on bases where they've refused to deal with a specific news agency because they don't like one of their stringers. I've been on bases where they've said that they would

rather deal with another network that's seen as more patriotic. You have to talk to everyone. You cannot complain that we're not telling your story if you're not letting us tell the story.

"I'm willing and my crew is willing to be blown up, to be shot, to happily eat MREs, to sleep in the dirt, to go for days without showers if we absolutely have to. We will do that if we're allowed to see what's going on, if we're allowed to report," she said. "The couple of times I've felt that it is not worth the risk and the discomfort have been when we have not been given the information we need.

"I have to be on air every hour. If I don't have the information to tell people what's going on, I'm going to go to another place where they will tell me what's going on," she pointed out. "This should be self-evident, but there is a glaring difference in the depth of coverage you're going to get from being with a unit where the commanding general doesn't like the media or isn't comfortable with the media and being with those who do.

"Every day when I'm out there we generally go out, shoot, come back, write the story, edit, transmit it, go on air, wake up a few hours later, and do it all over again," she said. "And I'm sorry, there have to be accommodations made. We don't have time to wait for hours for a log pack. We don't have days to wait for a flight because some unit has decided that media can only travel space available. You have some great people out there, but the system in Iraq at the moment is just not working.

"I worry a lot that people are forgetting about this war," Arraf concluded. "Everyone in this room knows there are people dying every day in Iraq. There are Americans dying. There are Iraqis dying. And we cannot let the American people forget – we can't be sidetracked by the politics of these stories. We have to find a way together that more reporters can get out there, can show what's going on, and let people make up their own minds about the politics of it."

* * *

Army Brig. Gen. Carter Ham, deputy director of regional operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke from the perspective of having served in Mosul as commander of the coalition forces in the north: "The first thing to remember is that Mosul is a long way from Washington, and it's a long way from Baghdad. That distance between those two capitals tends to mitigate some of the differences that exist between the military and the media. As you move farther and farther away from national capitals and get closer to where squads and platoons and companies are interacting with reporters and Iraqis every day, the issues of national policy and strategic objectives tend to become a little cloudy, perhaps even a little less relevant.

"I'll state for the record that while I like the media, I'm very uncomfortable serving around the media," Ham conceded. "Many of you have become friends, and I treasure that, but it's not what I chose to do with my life."

"First and foremost, that difference is what Jane [Arraf] just talked about – the very real physical danger for both groups," Ham said. "For the military, that means we have to find a way to balance security with access. And while we always like to say that a reporter with a unit conducting operations will not be obtrusive or intrusive, that they won't place any added demands, the fact is they do. So you have to find a way to deal with that and provide security for those reporters to make sure they are able to accomplish their job.

"I'll state for the record that while I like the media, I'm very uncomfortable serving around the media," Ham conceded. "Many of you have become friends, and I treasure that, but it's not what I chose to do with my life. However, clearly there becomes a closer partnership between the military and the media at the tactical level. It's often less adversarial and a little more personal sometimes.

There's an inter-reliance."

Ham also spoke of what might be improved: "From the tactical commander's perspective, what we would ask is that you help us understand what you want to see. What is the story you're after? Rather than just say, 'I want to come spend three days, or five days, or two hours with you,' what is it that you're specifically focused on? Help us focus your efforts and be able to do what Jane [Arraf] has talked about – help get you to the place you want to be.

"Help us understand your timelines," he added. "We have a lot of timelines we have to meet, certainly, in the conduct of our operations, but we don't generally have a good appreciation of your timelines. If you need to file a report by such-and-such a time, or if you'd like to make a broadcast, tell us that. Will we always be able to accommodate you? No, but we could certainly make that effort.

"Give us feedback," he said. "Tell us what we can do to improve, to help us achieve what we hope in most cases is a mutual goal."

He added: "I would also second what Jane [Arraf] said about helping to build the Iraqi media. Like it or not, you're role models. Most of you interact with the Iraqi media, and you know they have very, very little experience in this arena. Likewise, Iraqi government officials have no experience with a press that can report and say things the government doesn't necessarily like. It's our responsibility to help Iraqi government officials deal with that.

"Bryan [Whitman] cited some very real security concerns. They are real and they are very dangerous, but we have to find a way together to work through those. We just can't exclude the participation of Iraqis.

"Those of us in uniform are learning that while we often have differing opinions with the press, we also often have shared goals, and we can best address those by developing personal relationships," he said. "Mostly I think what has changed from the early days of my service is that there is a growing trust between the military and

the media, and I think that's quite a healthy thing.

"In sum, I would say that the military-media relationship is much like the conditions in Iraq today," Ham said. "A great deal has been accomplished, but there is so very much yet to do. It will require all of our best efforts in the days, weeks, months, and years to come."

* * *

At the conclusion of the panel, Begleiter addressed conferees: "If we combine Bryan Whitman's complaint about hotel reporting and not enough embeds out there with Jane Arraf's comment that it's hard to get out there, and Bradley Graham's comment about how we can't get at the classified information in Washington, and the comment from Mark Kimmitt that the press may be targeted by insurgents and the narrative leans too much toward bang-bang, it seems to me we've got a situation where the military itself isn't sure which it would prefer. Do you want reporters to be embedded where they can do more bang-bang or do you want to do digital videos, which almost never involve bang-bang? I sense an ambivalence within the military – do you want more embeds or fewer embeds? More bang-bang, less bang-bang?"

A senior government official responded, "Jane [Arraf] also said that embeds are the only way to go today. That's for a variety of reasons – safety and security being one – but the other is that embedding gives reporters a chance to see what's really going on. They're going to see hostile events, they're going to see violence, but they will also see the tremendous amount of progress that's taking place.

"If the question is, do we think embedding is good and still relevant? Yes, we do," he said. "If the question is, should we be trying to reach other segments of America through technology and means that go beyond a Washington filter, yes, we do believe that too. One is not at the exclusion of the other. We try to dedicate equal effort and resources to accommodating both."

A reporter commented that he has had "the same conversa-

tion dozens of times with guys rotating back – 'It's not the way it looks on TV.'"

Some of the problem, he said, is simply the result of "sensationalizing – 'If it blows, it goes. If it burns, it earns.' For TV there's a flash-to-bang ratio that's a component of infotainment and image-driven TV news" that squeezes out long-term and evolving stories.

He said the economics that drives this kind of coverage feeds the activities of the insurgents to some degree: "They understand our weakness is the craven appeal of sex and violence."

Another reporter said: "There is as much bang-bang in press releases of good news. As much as the media may not give context for violent events, public relations gives no context for good news – for instance, is something more systemic happening? In the embed operation, we knew the goal in advance so we could write that something was 75 percent successful. With rebuilding roads, we're not being told in advance what the plan is – so how can we judge success? There's no context."

A retired military public affairs officer asked, "Why is the embed program so broken? We invested enormous resources in the run-up to Iraq, and the Marine Corps invested a lot of time and effort before Afghanistan in getting press to the fight. It used to be a default question before a major military operation, 'How are we going to get the press to cover the story?' I don't understand how it got so broken, because the same mechanics that worked before ought to work again with some modifications for an ongoing insurgency.

"We expected after Baghdad fell that the press would want to go unilateral as quickly as possible because it's cheaper – it costs the press a lot of money to do the embed program, too," he observed. "Is the problem with embeds now financial resources on the part of the news media? Or is it a lack of interest on the part of the national and international media in being embedded again because there is some dead time if your unit doesn't do much?"

A senior government official responded, "What I hear from news organizations and from reporters is that they would like the opportunity to go out and embed with our units, but they can't commit the time. And I think we have to be careful about the way we use the terminology. Embedding was designed as a method to foster relationship, to garner respect, to build trust based on relationships. There is a difference between a media visit to a unit and a media embed. To spend a day or two days with a unit is good, but that's not what a media embed was intended to do.

"...the last two years haven't gone the way anyone expected. It's been longer, costlier, and bloodier in Iraq. And the media have covered, whether fairly or unfairly, what has happened."

"Many of the reporters and the news organizations I talk to say they would love to go outside, but because their resources are small, they have to be in Baghdad," he said. "There are important political decisions taking place, there is a conduit of information in Baghdad. So, when they get the opportunity to go out, it is only for a couple of days, and then they've got to come back, because the news organization needs the insurance of having somebody who's there and available to go live from the seat of government."

If the 2003 military-media conference was a near "love-fest," because of the euphoria about embedding, it was clear from the outset of the 2005 conference that the love-fest was over. The military and the government had many complaints about media coverage – and the media, in turn, argued that they were not getting the whole, true story from military and government sources.

As a reporter put it, "Two years ago we had all just gotten done covering a very, very successful military campaign. The military and the media were very much in line with what we wanted out of it. The

media all got rides to Baghdad. We covered a very successful military effort, and the military enjoyed the coverage they got.

"I think that was why we were all very happy with each other and patting ourselves on the back two years ago at this conference," he added. "Very simply, though, the last two years haven't gone the way anyone expected. It's been longer, costlier, and bloodier in Iraq. And the media have covered, whether fairly or unfairly, what has happened."

Chapter 2
The Military, Media and American Public: Gallup Takes a Snapshot of Views

In 1999, the McCormick Tribune Foundation sponsored a military-media conference to explore the results of a Gallup poll that examined public perceptions of the military and the media as well as perceptions each group had of the other. The resulting book began, "The Cold War has ended; the draft has been out of existence for so long that many Americans have no personal knowledge of or contact with the military."

The destruction of the World Trade Center by al Qaeda suicide pilots on Sept. 11, 2001, made the civilian population acutely aware of the fragility of American security and the need for a strong military to protect the country. When American troops invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 in search of Osama bin Laden and his followers, they did so with strong support from the American public.

The embedding of more than 700 U.S. media with American troops at the beginning of the Iraq war gave the nation an almost real-time view of modern-day warfare and its consequences. News coverage of the dangers faced by soldiers and the conditions under which they fought further strengthened America's bond with the military.

In preparation for the 2005 media-military conference, the McCormick Tribune Foundation commissioned the Gallup Organization to again measure public perceptions of the military, media and the Iraq war, and how the military and the media viewed each other in regard to issues related to their mutual obligation of

informing the American public.

The public survey was conducted using telephone interviews of a nationally representative sample of 1,016 adults between May 31 and June 16, 2005. Gallup estimates the margin sampling error at +/- 3 percentage points.

The survey of military officers was conducted through Internet interviews with 279 military officers from the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy, all of whom are general or flag officers. Names were provided by the Department of Defense.

Results of the survey of 90 media respondents were based on mail questionnaires sent to specially selected media personnel, with names provided by the Center for Media and Security.

The situation that America finds itself in 2005 is far different than what existed at the time of the 1999 Gallup Poll. Though some perceptions registered in 1999 had changed little, there were some striking differences. The 2005 conference provided an opportunity to look both back and forward at questions that confront the military, the media and the public. All conferees received the Gallup poll results prior to the conference, and the results were formally presented to the group by David Moore of the Gallup Organization. The findings were then analyzed by Brig. Gen. Vincent Brooks, the Army's Chief of Public Affairs, and Timothy McNulty, associate managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune's* foreign desk. What follows is taken from information included in the Gallup report as well as comments made during the presentation and discussion. A copy of the complete Gallup Organization report is available on the Web at: www.mccormicktribune.org.

Keeping the Public Informed

In 2005, majorities of both military and the media registered a skeptical view of the public's understanding of the role of the military in

the world. Only about a third of military and media respondents say the public understands the role of the military very or fairly well. Yet, 81 percent of the media and 69 percent of the military respondents say it is very important for the public to be informed.

Public Interest in Military News Stories

Although the 1999 poll focused on different aspects of public perception of the military and the media, results from both surveys suggest how much more interested the public is in national security issues today than it was in 1999. *(see charts 1A, 1B on pages 50-51)*

In 1999, just 49 percent said they "wanted to know" about "terrorist threats" to the U.S. homeland. In 2005, 77 percent of Americans say they are "very interested" in news coverage of terrorist threats against the United States.

Similarly, the current poll shows that 60 percent of Americans say they are "very interested" in hearing about human casualties inflicted by military operations. The 1999 poll showed that only 45 percent of Americans said they "wanted to know" about the same issue.

Military and media respondents say the public is interested in stories about terrorism, performance of the armed forces during war, war casualties and discussion of reasons for the war. Indeed, more than six in 10 Americans profess to be interested in each of those subjects.

It appears the media and military may significantly underestimate the public's interest in news stories about individual members of the military, cost of military operations and rebuilding of Iraq. Vincent Brooks suggested that conferees should note that in terms of the military strategy being used in a war, "While it's kind of low on the totem pole for all concerned, it's more important to the public than either of us thinks. Forty percent of the public say they're very interested in that. And the public has more of an

interest in the progress on rebuilding Iraq than we thought it did by a pretty long shot."

Tim McNulty said he thinks the poll reflects "the politicization of the public debate about the war and the occupation of Iraq, especially as the administration tries to sustain political support in the face of an effective insurgency and slow progress, at least relative to early expectations.

"There was one curious question that the public was 'very interested' in – the costs of the war and the rebuilding of Iraq," McNulty said. "It may suggest a desire to have more reporting about the internal U.S. costs, not just monetary and not just in lives, but to see the impact on the U.S. It also may be an interest in nation-building."

Fifty-seven percent of military respondents are dissatisfied with the media's overall coverage of military and national security issues in recent years, while media respondents are about evenly divided between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. But a clear majority of the public, 62 percent, is satisfied.

When it comes to level of satisfaction with media coverage in 11 specific areas, the military and the media have some disagreements. The military is least satisfied with coverage of the progress in the war. Only 16 percent of military respondents are satisfied, compared with 48 percent of media respondents.

Both military and media respondents are most satisfied with news coverage of individual members of the armed services and terrorist threats. The media express more satisfaction with news coverage of each area than the military does, except for discussion leading up to the decision to go to war, in which half the military respondents are satisfied, compared with only a third of media respondents.

Media Access to Military Officers and Officials

A major conflict between the military and the media exists around the amount of access the news media should have. The poll shows that 72 percent of military respondents say the media have enough access to military officers and government officials to cover stories the public needs to get. But 83 percent of media respondents disagree. *(see chart 2 on page 52)*

The poll also shows major differences in the perceptions of each group as to how much access is needed – maximum, limited or none. In peacetime, 99 percent of media respondents want maximum access, but only 78 percent of military respondents would be willing to grant that. When military action is being planned, 54 percent of media respondents, but just 12 percent of military respondents, would grant maximum access. And during conflict, 84 percent of media respondents, but just 33 percent of military respondents, would grant maximum access. *(see charts 3A, 3B on pages 53-54)*

Rating Coverage of Military Issues and the Iraq War

Overall, most Americans say they do not get enough information about military matters to make informed decisions. Sixty percent express that view, while only 39 percent say they get enough. This is a major decline since 1999, when a majority of Americans said they did get enough information, by a 54 to 43 percent margin.

A major reason for this change in view may reflect respondents' ratings of questions dealing with coverage of the Iraq war. Only 32 percent of Americans say the government did an excellent or good job, while 68 percent said it did only a fair or poor job of pre-war coverage of the reasons for going to war. The media fare only a little better – 39 percent of Americans say the news media did an excellent or good job, while 61 percent answered fair or poor. *(see*

chart 4 on page 55)

Brooks saw this as a very important issue: "The public, or at least the American public, is saying it's not getting enough information to make informed decisions. It's a challenge for us all in terms of how much more open we should be in order to get that done, how much more information of all sorts we should provide."

Is War Coverage Fair and Accurate?

While 88 percent of the media respondents say that the coverage of the Iraq war has been fair and accurate, military respondents are more evenly divided. Just 50 percent say coverage has been fair, and 52 percent say it has been accurate. *(see charts 5A, 5B on pages 56-57)*

Effect of Embedding on Coverage of Iraq War

Though embedding is of major interest to the military and the media, only 56 percent of Americans have heard either a great deal or a fair amount about embedding reporters. Another 30 percent say they have not heard much, while 14 percent profess complete ignorance of the practice.

Americans who have heard of embedding mostly give the practice a favorable review, as do military and media respondents in the survey. Majorities of all three groups believe that embedding enhances the public's understanding of the war, helps the morale of the troops, improves the public's perception of the military and improves the credibility of the media coverage.

Only 16 percent of military and 5 percent of media respondents say embedding hinders military operations, but 45 percent of the public say they think it does. *(see chart 6A on page 58)*

McNulty said, "Old suspicions remain between the military and the media, and certainly among the public. I was surprised to see

that so many people still thought that reporters endanger troops or jeopardize operations, regardless of the evidence of the last few years. Part of this, I suspect, reflects the national division that may contribute to the large majorities of the military and the public who think that all the stories are too negative."

In addition, 40 percent of media respondents and 36 percent of the public believe that embedding causes reporters to lose their objectivity because they are too close to the troops. Only 9 percent of the military express that view, however.

While 61 percent of media respondents believe that embedded reporters miss the larger picture of the war because of their focus on the unit they are with, only 26 percent of military respondents agree, as does 41 percent of the general public.

Rating Unilateral Coverage

Media respondents also give high marks to unilateral coverage. They were just as likely to say that unilateral coverage enhances the public's understanding of the war as they were to say that embedded coverage enhances it, and also as likely to say that it improves the credibility of media coverage. But media respondents are much more positive about the effect of embedded coverage on improving the public's perception of the military: 93 percent say that is an effect of embedded reporting, while only 53 percent say that about unilateral reporting. *(see chart 6B on page 59)*

The military clearly favors embedded reporting, with many more military respondents having good things to say about the embedded reporting than unilateral reporting.

Brooks commented, "I've been of the view that the key recipe for precise, focused, accurate reporting is the combination of access and context. It seems that embedding, a close experience that happens over an extended period of time, provides both. That

may be why it's seen as having so much value."

Military Assistance to Reporters Before and After May 2003

When asked about the amount of military assistance reporters received before and after May 2003, the point at which President George W. Bush announced the end to major fighting in Iraq, the military and the media provided somewhat different responses.

Large majorities of both groups say the military provided "the right amount" of support to embedded reporters. Still, 26 percent of media respondents, but only 12 percent of military respondents, said the military provided too little support.

Those differences are minor compared to the two groups, different perceptions about the amount of support for unilateral reporters. While a majority of media say the military provided "too little" support to unilateral reporters, a majority of the military say the military provided "about the right amount" of support.

The Military as a Source for Journalists

Among the military officers interviewed in this survey, 95 percent say they are willing to speak with the media. In addition, 84 percent say they are encouraged at least occasionally to speak with the media by their chain of command. In fact, 86 percent say that speaking with the media is part of their official duties.

When media respondents were asked whether "military officers" (not necessarily general or flag officers) are willing to speak with the media, about two thirds say military officers are willing, while a third disagree.

Compared with five or six years ago, military officers are perceived as more willing to cooperate with journalists in these areas. Large majorities of the military and media respondents say that

military officers are willing to speak with the media, provide journalists access to military operations and personnel to help reporters write their stories, and provide security assistance to journalists. But majorities of both groups say military officers will not provide journalists access to actual decision-making, though more than a third of each group say military officers will do that. *(see charts 7A, 7B on pages 60, 61)*

Who Constrains the Military from Speaking with the Media?

Responses by the military remain virtually unchanged from 1999 to 2005 regarding who keeps the military from speaking with the media. The poll finds that general and flag officers interviewed are most likely to be constrained in their discussions with reporters by civilian leaders, followed by their superior officers, public affairs officers, foreign officials and their peers.

The media respondents have quite a different perception of how frequently military officers are constrained in their comments to reporters. *(see charts 8A, 8B on pages 62, 63)* However, the media are responding about military officers overall, while the military respondents are responding specifically about themselves – all of whom have at least one star.

Virtually all media respondents say that military officers are frequently constrained by their superior officers, an increase of 28 percent since 1999. Ninety percent of media respondents also believe that military officers are frequently constrained by civilian leaders, an increase of 10 percent since 1999.

More than 60 percent percent of media respondents also feel that military officers are frequently constrained by public affairs officers and by the officers' peers. Foreign officials are perceived as least constraining – only 26 percent of media respondents think such officials frequently constrain military officers.

Brooks said he sees "a skewed perspective on who's doing the constraint. Without a doubt, there's a limitation on communication – the military is not always comfortable in communicating. There's more freedom of speech within the military ranks than you expect, a lot more. But there's also a lot more self-control – self-control, not external control – in play here.

"The choice of communicating is really made by the individuals themselves," he said. "Some commanders have been active communicators. Others have not, and it's by their choice that that happens, not by any design or structure. As the person responsible for helping to shape the Army's culture, I look at it as a cultural issue."

The Effectiveness of Anonymous Sources

When it comes to voicing objections about official administration or Defense Department policy, few of the military respondents are comfortable speaking with reporters on the record – only 27 percent. Given the implied insubordination of that action, that may be a substantial percentage. *(see chart 9A on page 64)*

A somewhat smaller percentage of these officers, 22 percent, would feel comfortable speaking with reporters off the record about their disagreements with administration policy. *(see chart 9A on page 64)*

And 46 percent say they would feel comfortable criticizing government policy on background, no doubt believing that on deep background they would be more protected than with an off-the-record understanding. *(see chart 9B on page 65)*

But when it comes to being an anonymous source, 81 percent of the military respondents say they have never done that, though 7 percent admit to doing it at least "some of the time."

Brooks said, "The differing degrees of comfort with on the record, off the record and on background may have surprised some

of the journalists in the room. What it shows me is what I expected, which is that we're just always uncomfortable communicating about policy decisions in a public forum, because the place to have that discussion for us is not in the town square. It's not a matter of the method of communication – on-the-record, off-the-record, on background – it's a matter of the topic."

The military respondents are somewhat divided as to whether anonymous sources, or sources cited as off the record or on background, are more or less credible than identified sources. Thirty-nine percent of these respondents say such sources are more believable, while 23 percent say less believable. Another 31 percent say it doesn't matter. *(see chart 10 on page 66)*

But 58 percent percent of Americans think that such sources are less credible, while only 6 percent say they enhance credibility, and 35 percent say it doesn't matter.

Brooks said, "There was perhaps a surprising distribution that showed the military believes you can be anonymous and still have value, whereas the public doesn't see that. I think it goes to the question of integrity."

Accuracy

Both media and military respondents are somewhat critical of the accuracy of information either provided by the military or reported in the news. Sixty-eight percent of the military respondents say the media accurately represent their views at least most of the time. *(see chart 11A on page 67)* And 67 percent of media respondents say that military officers provide them with accurate information at least most of the time. *(see chart 11B on page 68)*

But an overwhelming number of Americans, 77 percent, believe that the military at least sometimes gives false or inaccurate information to the media. *(see chart 12 on page 69)* The public is

evenly divided as to whether the military should ever give false information – 49 percent say the military should sometimes do it, while 48 percent say never.

"The public expects the military to not tell the truth," said Brooks. "Yet in my world, by policy and by practice, we don't impart false information to the public. Sometimes we make mistakes, sometimes we say the wrong thing, sometimes we put out the wrong number. But the fact of the matter is that those who are receiving the communication have a very different view of those who are communicating with them, and it's a gap that ought to be closed. You would expect us to be truthful with the media. In fact, we believe we are and that we should be held accountable for that."

Conflicting Opinions about the News

Large majorities of both the military respondents and the public believe that news stories about the military tend to be too negative, while a large majority of the media respondents say the news has the right balance of negative and positive stories. *(see chart 13 on page 70)*

These views are consistent with the general criticism by the military and the public that the news media are too liberal. Sixty-seven percent of the military hold that point of view, compared with 47 percent of the public and only 20 percent of media respondents. *(see chart 14 on page 71)*

In contrast, 74 percent of the media respondents say the news media are neither too liberal nor conservative, a view held by only 18 percent of military respondents and 31 percent of the public. Just 18 percent of the public, 6 percent of media respondents and 1 percent of military respondents say the news media are too conservative.

Ralph Begleiter launched the discussion of the Gallup Poll results by saying: "When 77 percent of the public believes the military intentionally gives false information and 49 percent believe the military sometimes ought to intentionally give false information, I would suggest that everybody in this room has an educating job to do with the American people.

"And look at the media side," he added. "Seventy percent believe the media are too critical, while only 20 percent of the public believe the media are balanced. So there's a credibility gap, both on the media side and on the military side."

A journalist responded, "As you said, there is a credibility issue for both the military and the media. In some ways this may be a result of success, because there may be higher expectations. People have more interest in military issues since Sept. 11, 2001, but less faith in the military and media to report them accurately. Maybe that's also because it means more to the whole citizenry."

Another journalist commented on the poll results that 39 percent of the military think speaking anonymously makes stories more believable, while 58 percent of the public finds this makes them less believable. He pointed out that these opinions were expressed after there had been a run of news stories based on anonymous sources that fell apart upon closer scrutiny.

He said: "This is scary, because the military – though Bryan [Whitman] has tried to change this at the Pentagon level – frequently gives background interviews. Nobody wants to go on the record even for benign information. Frankly, this is against the trend in the news industry right now, which is to bend over backwards to at least pay lip service to being transparent about not using anonymous sources," he added.

Another journalist said, "One thing that struck me when I came on this beat a year ago from financial reporting was the discord within the Pentagon press corps about what should be on the

record and when. Although most of us can see the utility of a one-on-one interview that's on background to give some context, it can be harder to understand why a briefing to a roomful of 40 people needs to be on background when there's a transcript that's going on the Web site.

"I was really struck by the fact that while some reporters would say, 'Why is this on background? Why can this not be on the record?' other reporters would say, 'Well, background's fine with me. I'm not going to run any tape from it.'

"When you're covering Alan Greenspan at the Federal Reserve Board or when you're covering John Snow at the Treasury Department, you don't ever say, 'Oh yeah, let's go on background,'" she pointed out. "You accept it if you have to, but it really disturbed me that there wasn't more solidarity among the press corps to push to say, 'This is a briefing in a roomful of 40 people. We all know who you are. The only people who don't know who you are are the public. Why should we be keeping your name from them?'"

"When 77 percent of the public believes the military intentionally gives false information and 49 percent believe the military sometimes ought to intentionally give false information, I would suggest that everybody in this room has an educating job to do with the American people."

A senior government official said, "I think we should be on the record more, and I think you should be on the record more, too. I think when officials go on background and off the record, sometimes, quite frankly, they aren't careful to be precise enough in a business that is very precise and needs to be precise.

"Does that mean that there's not a place and a time for background briefings or background sessions?" the official asked. "I

would say no. It is a tool like any other tool, though one we should use selectively. In the Pentagon, typically we use it for what we call our process briefings, where you're getting into how the sausages are made as opposed to what the hotdog's going to look like at the end.

"I have tried to be responsive to the strong desires by the Pentagon press corps to try to do more of those things on the record," he noted. "But I face the same challenge when I ask news organizations to do exactly the same thing – that is, not to allow department sources that are on the record to be given equal weight or equal representation in a story with an anonymous source. The reader does not have the ability to make the judgment, 'Is that person qualified? Does he have the experience and knowledge to present an argument that's given equal weight to the person who's on the record?'"

Begleiter closed the session by pointing out how evenly divided the military is on coverage of the run-up to the war. In contrast, only 32 percent of the media and 39 percent of the public expressed satisfaction with pre-war coverage.

He said, "I'm really curious to know if the military was split on pre-war coverage because they didn't think the media were supportive enough of the arguments in the run-up to the war or because they thought the media didn't do a good enough job of revealing things about the run-up to the war that came out only after the war began. Were you unhappy with the media because they followed the party line too closely or because they didn't follow the party line closely enough?"

A military officer responded, "I think the fundamental reason is: it doesn't matter. We don't get to choose where and when we conduct military operations. We have, as many of you know, a wide variety of personal opinions about how this came about and what we're doing today. But that doesn't in any way affect the level of commitment we have to the mission."

A journalist asked if there was any disagreement now about how the war is being prosecuted and about policy. An officer replied that while there is disagreement about how the war is going, to comment on policy is not appropriate.

A second officer put the issue even more strongly, saying that the policy line is a line the military cannot cross. "Civilian control of the military is something we hold sacrosanct in this country," he said. "We can't afford a controversy between the military and civilian leadership."

Chart 1A

Public Interest in Military News Stories

How interested (are you/is the public) in reading or hearing stories about the following types of issues?

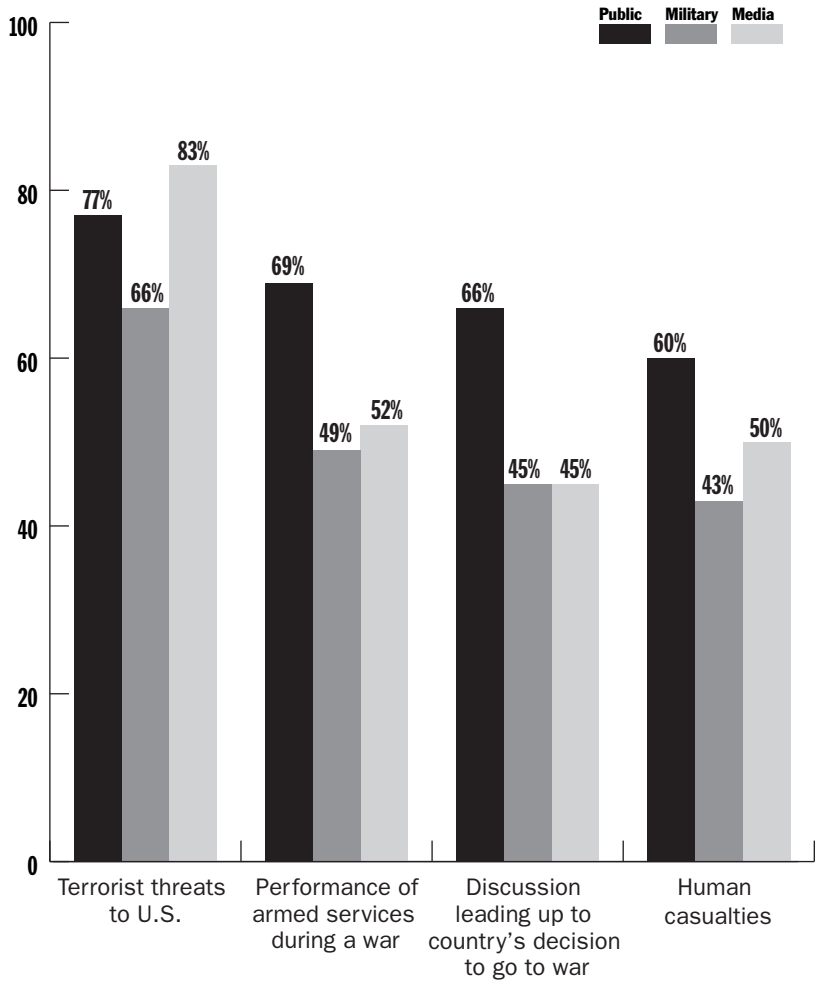


Chart 1B

Public Interest in Military News Stories

How interested (are you/is the public) in reading or hearing stories about the following types of issues?

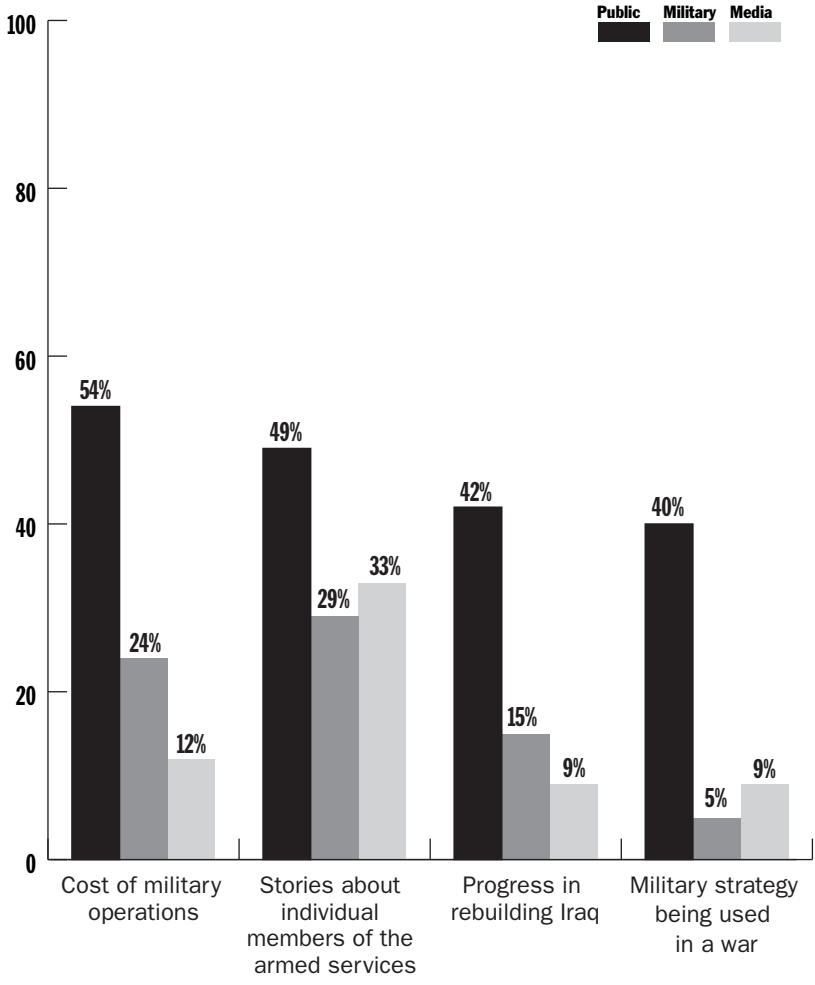


Chart 2

Media Access to Military Officers and Officials

Do you think media access to military officials and officers is sufficient to cover most military-related stories the public should or wants to know about?

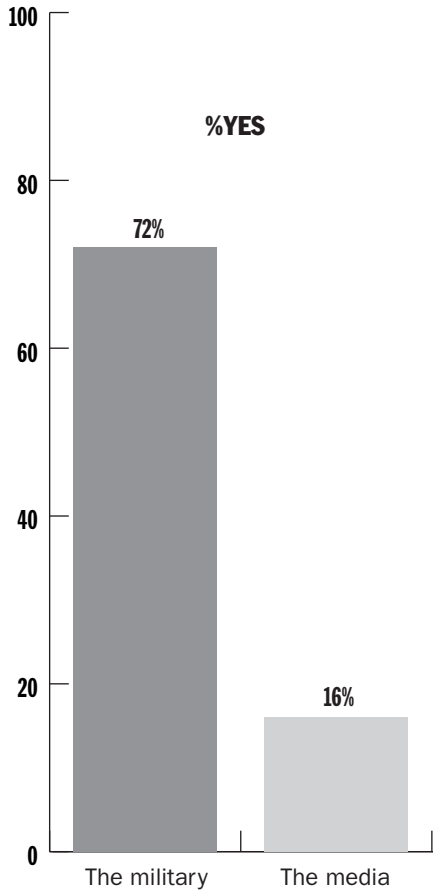


Chart 3A

Media Access to Military Officers and Officials

How much access to the military should the media have in the following situations:

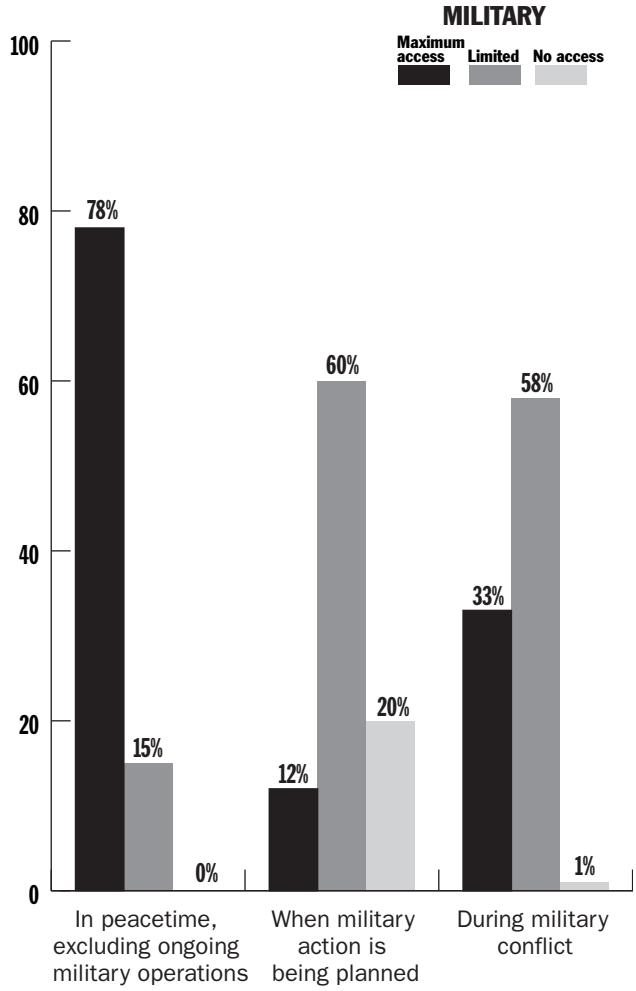


Chart 3B

Media Access to Military Officers and Officials

How much access to the military should the media have in the following situations:

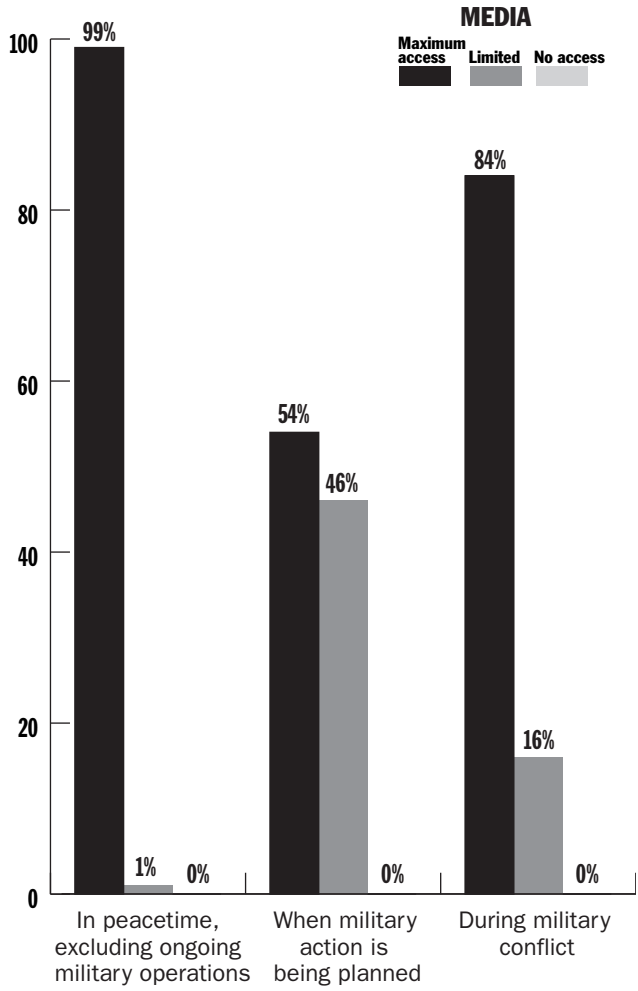
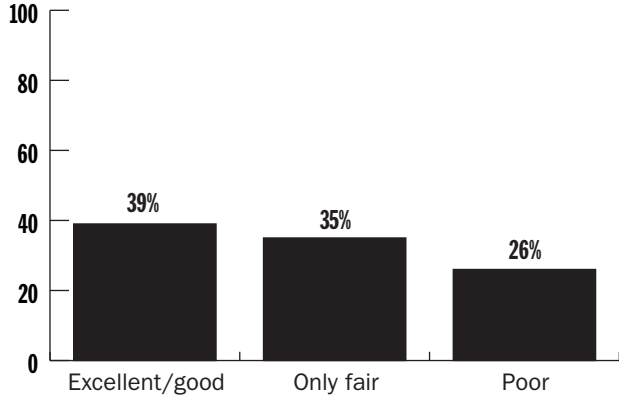


Chart 4

Public: Rating News Media Coverage

News media's coverage *before* the war began, on the reason for going to war



The job the government did in informing the public *before* the war about the reasons for going to war

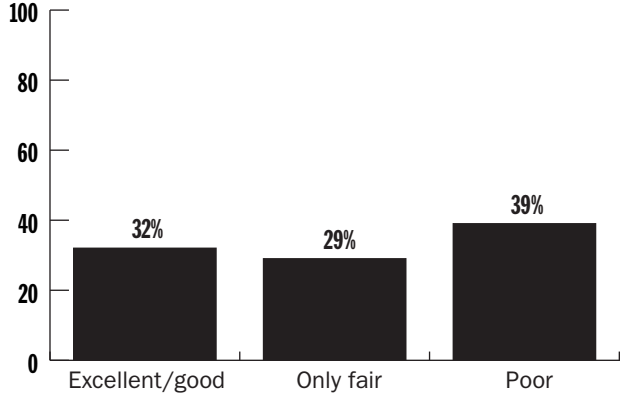


Chart 5A

Fairness of Coverage of Iraq War

Overall, how would you rate the fairness of the Iraq war coverage?

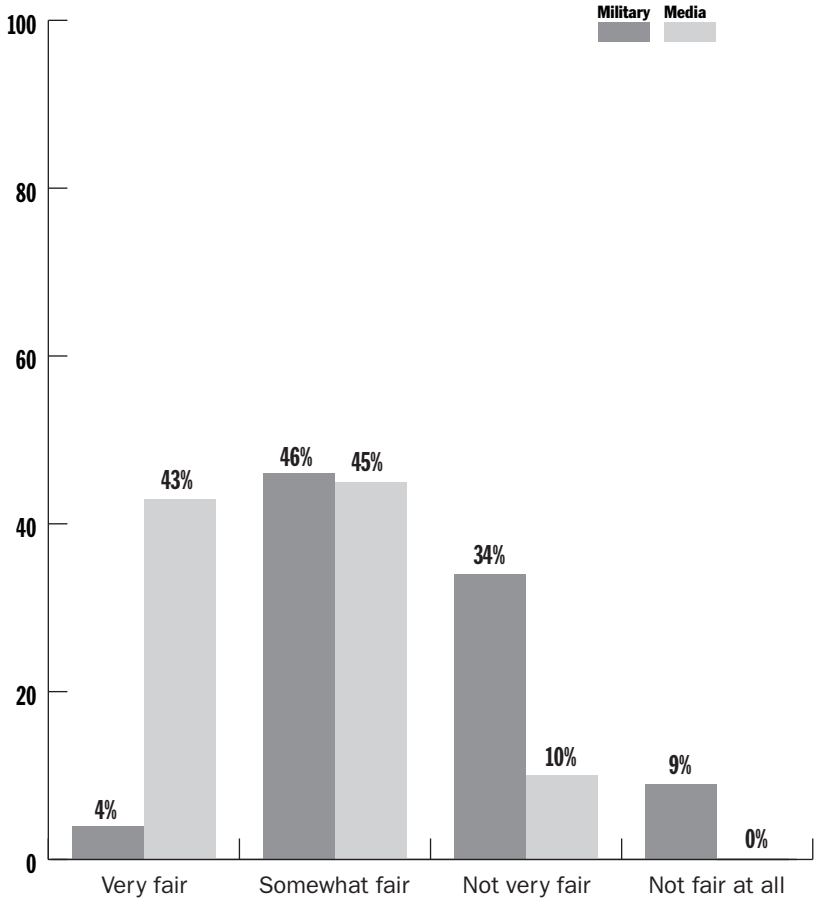


Chart 5B

Accuracy of Coverage of Iraq War

Overall, how would you rate the accuracy of the Iraq war coverage?

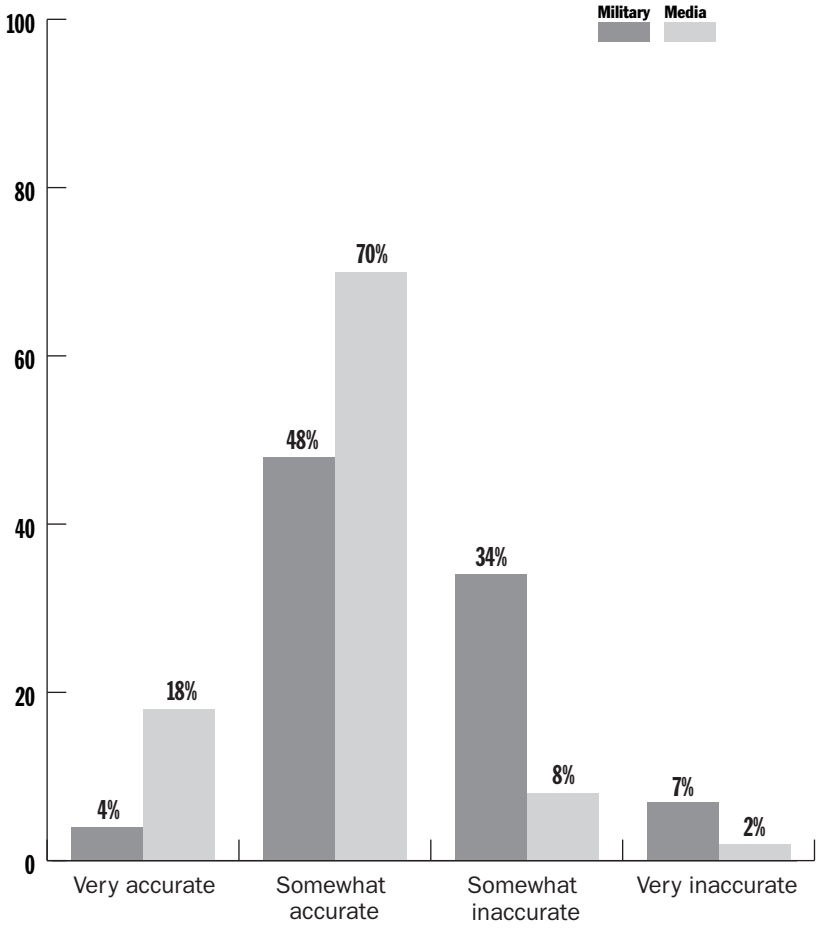


Chart 6A

Effect of Embedding the Media

% "Yes"

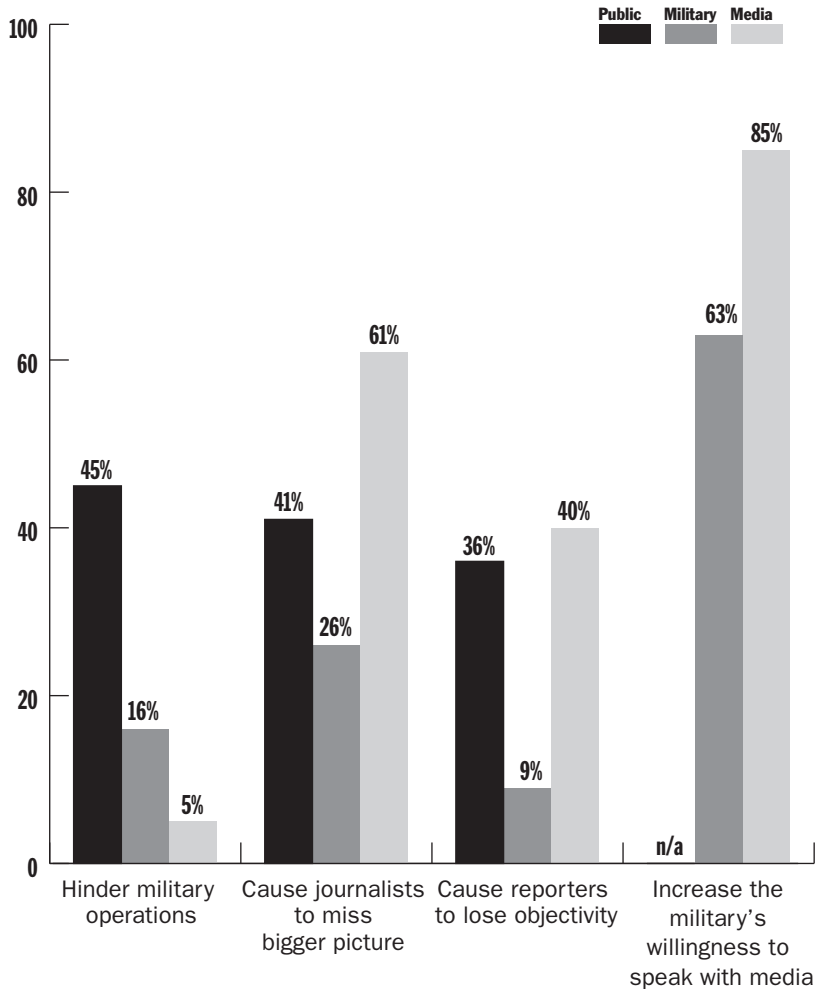


Chart 6B

Effect of Embedding the Media

% "Yes"

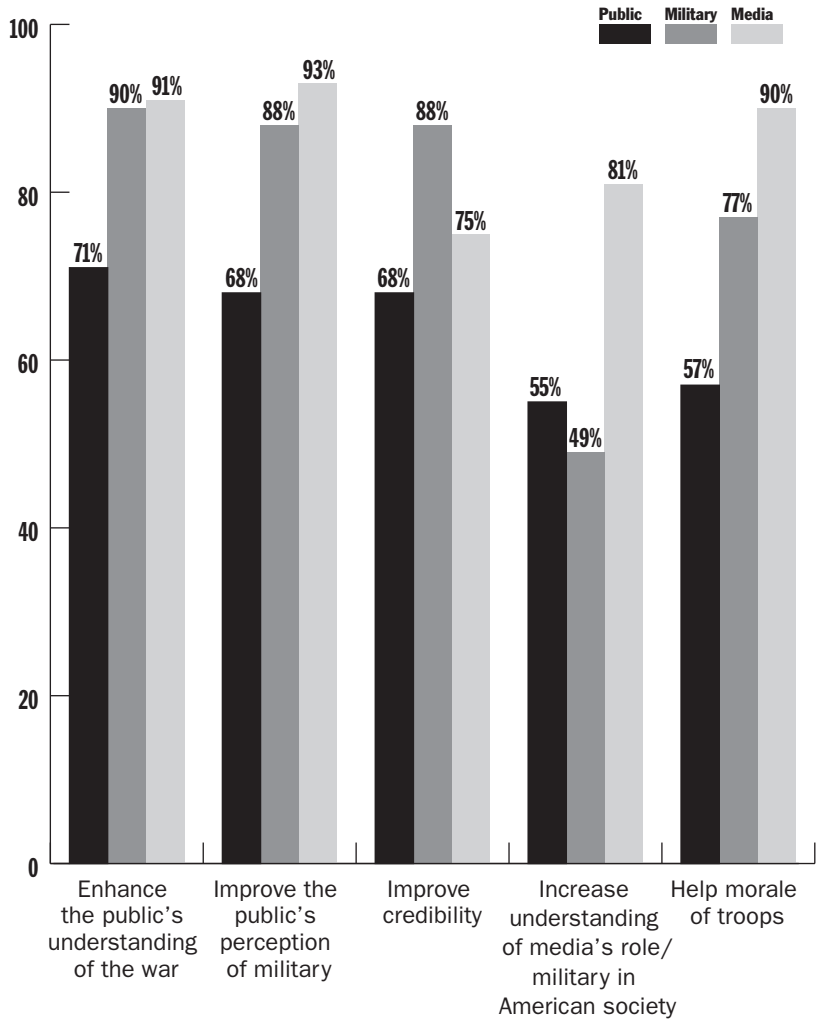
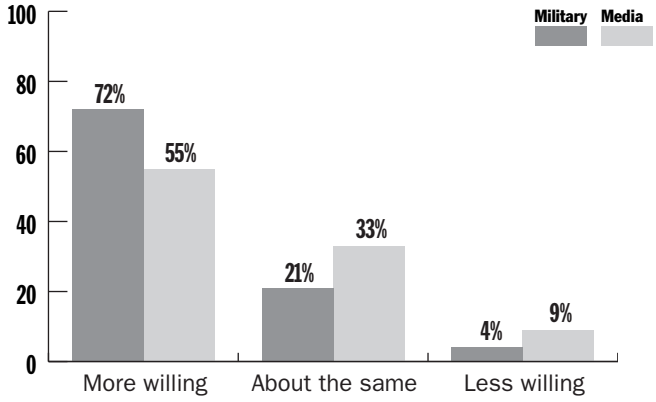


Chart 7A

How Willing?

Compared with five or six years ago, do you think military officers are more or less willing in wartime to:

Speak with the media?



Provide journalists access to military operations and personnel so they can report first-hand observations?

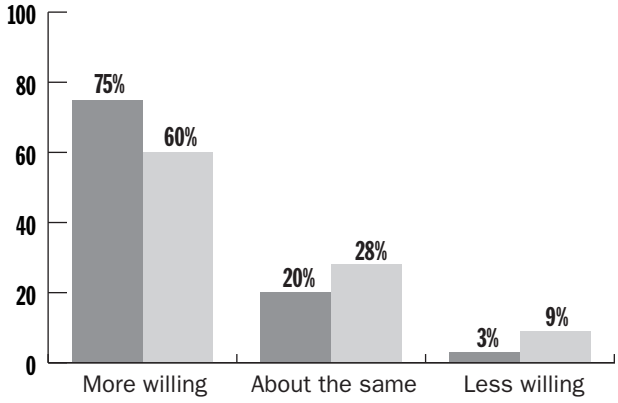
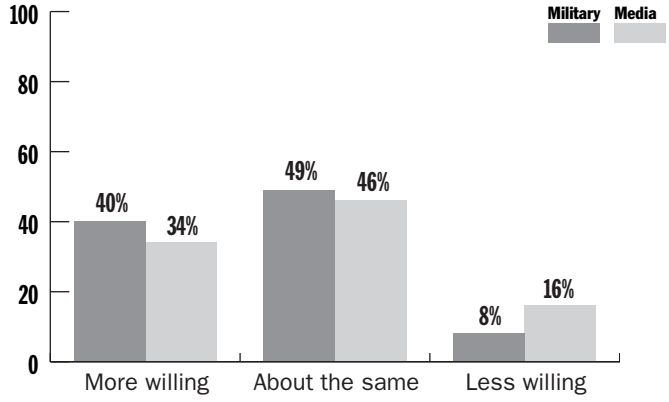


Chart 7B

How Willing?

Compared with five or six years ago, do you think military officers are more or less willing in wartime to:

Provide journalists access to decision-making so they can better understand strategic considerations?



Provide journalists logistical or security assistance?

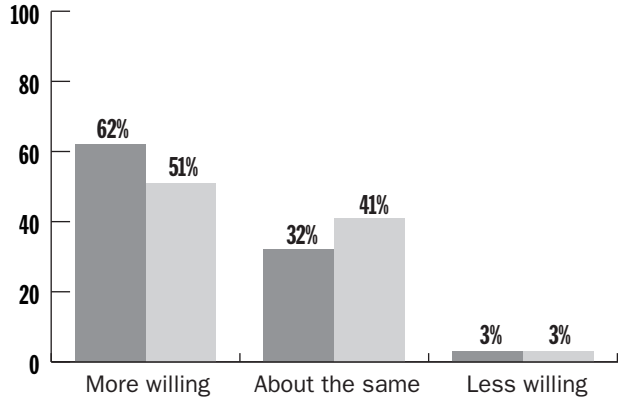
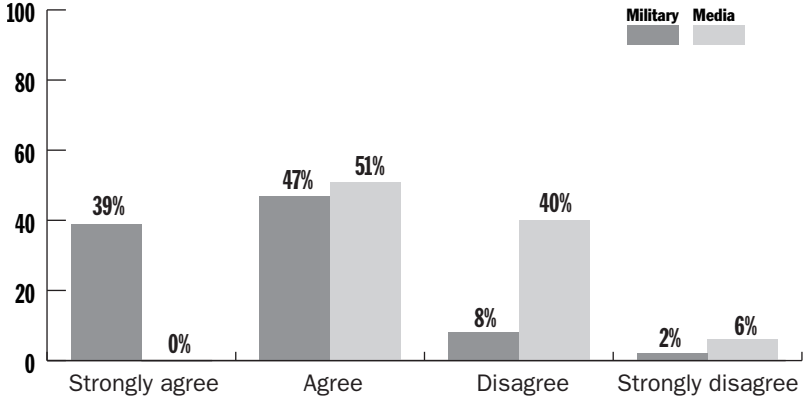


Chart 8A

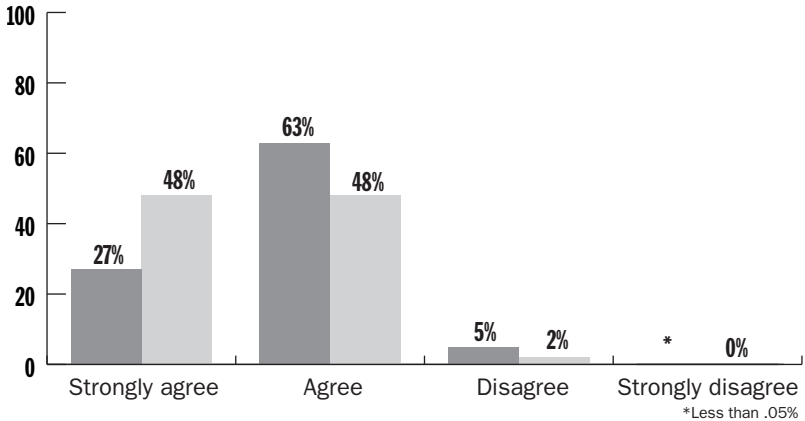
The Role of Public Affairs

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Military Public Affairs encourages military officers to speak with reporters



Military Public Affairs tends to follow the orders and desires of senior civilian and military leadership in deciding how to approach setting levels of access



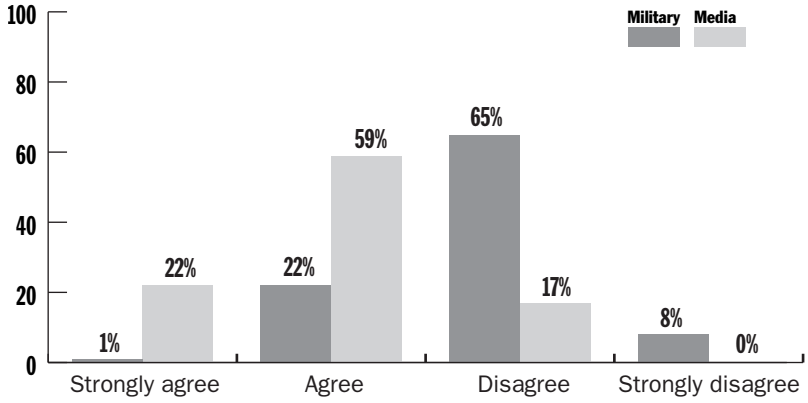
*Less than .05%

Chart 8B

The Role of Public Affairs

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Military Public Affairs tends to restrict media access to information



Military Public Affairs tends to have little effect on what is released to the press

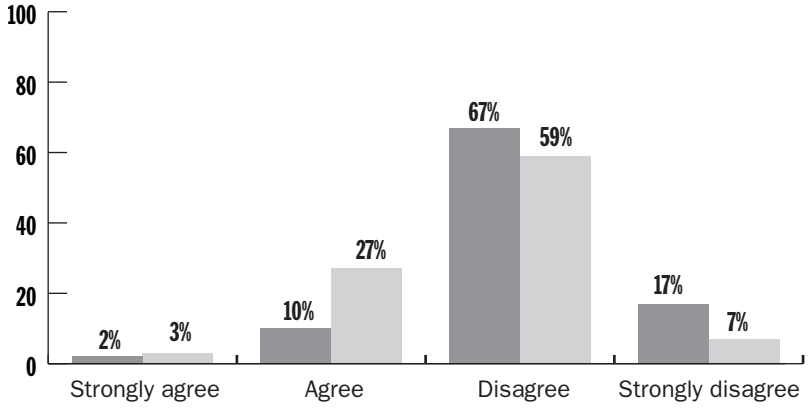
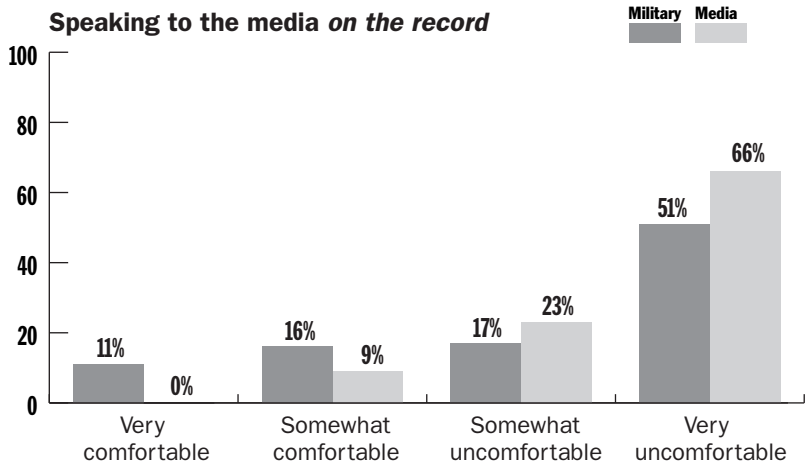


Chart 9A

Risk and Comfort for Military Officers

Military: How comfortable are you *in the following situations* in voicing any objections or doubts you might personally have about official Administration or Defense Department policy:
Media: How comfortable do you think military officers are *in the following situations* in voicing any objections or doubts they might personally have about official Administration or Defense Department policy:

Speaking to the media *on the record*



Speaking to the media *off the record*

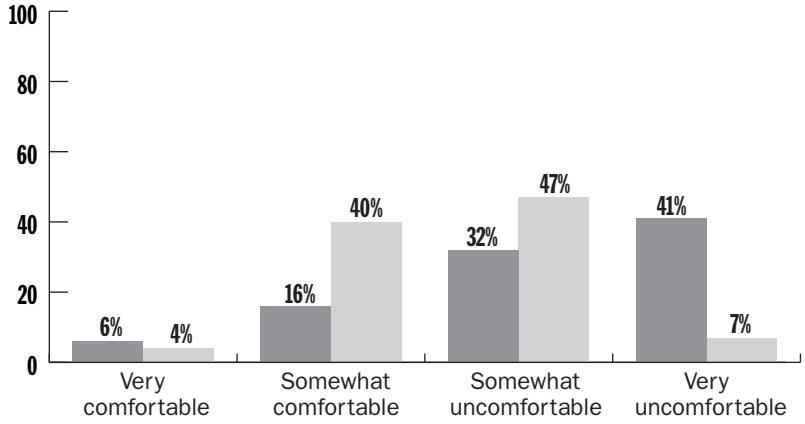


Chart 9B

Risk and Comfort for Military Officers

Military: How comfortable are you *in the following situations* in voicing any objections or doubts you might personally have about official Administration or Defense Department policy:
Media: How comfortable do you think military officers are *in the following situations* in voicing any objections or doubts they might personally have about official Administration or Defense Department policy:

Speaking to the media *on background*

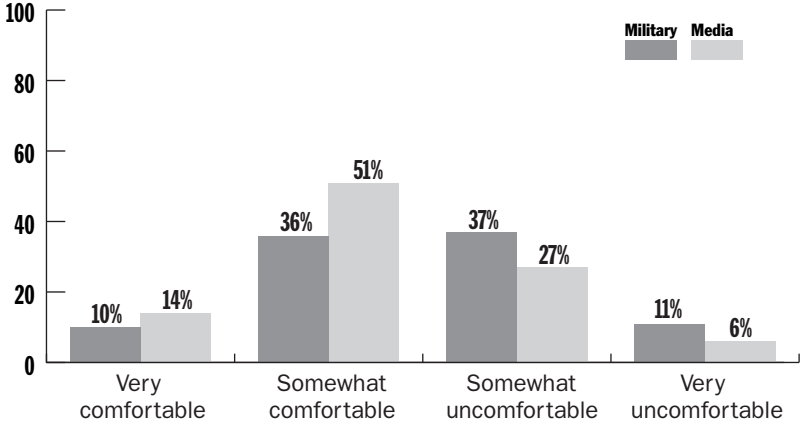


Chart 10

Credibility of News

Military: Does speaking to the media on background or off-the-record enhance the validity of the news reported? Does it make the news:

Public: How do you feel about news reports that are based on information from sources that are not identified in the story? Does the use of anonymous sources make the news report more believable or less believable to you, or does it have no effect?

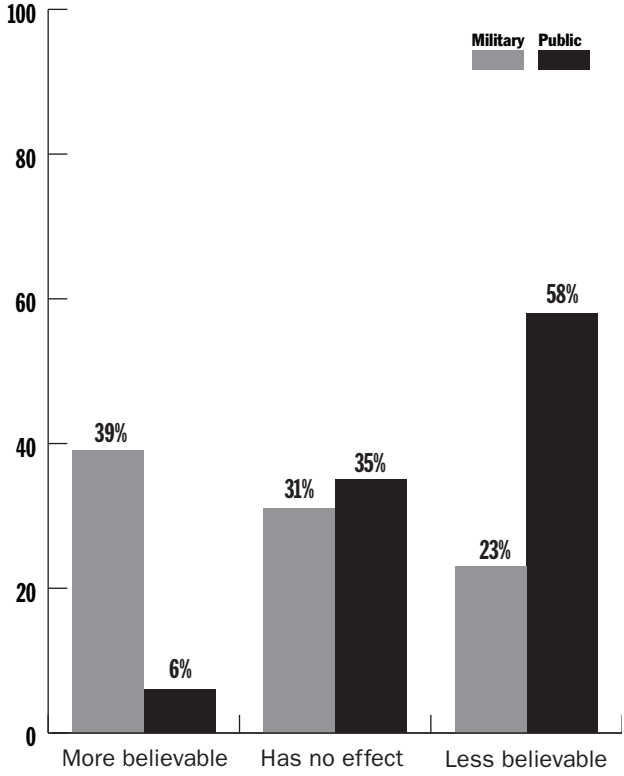


Chart 11A

Accuracy

When you speak with the media, how often do they accurately represent what you say?

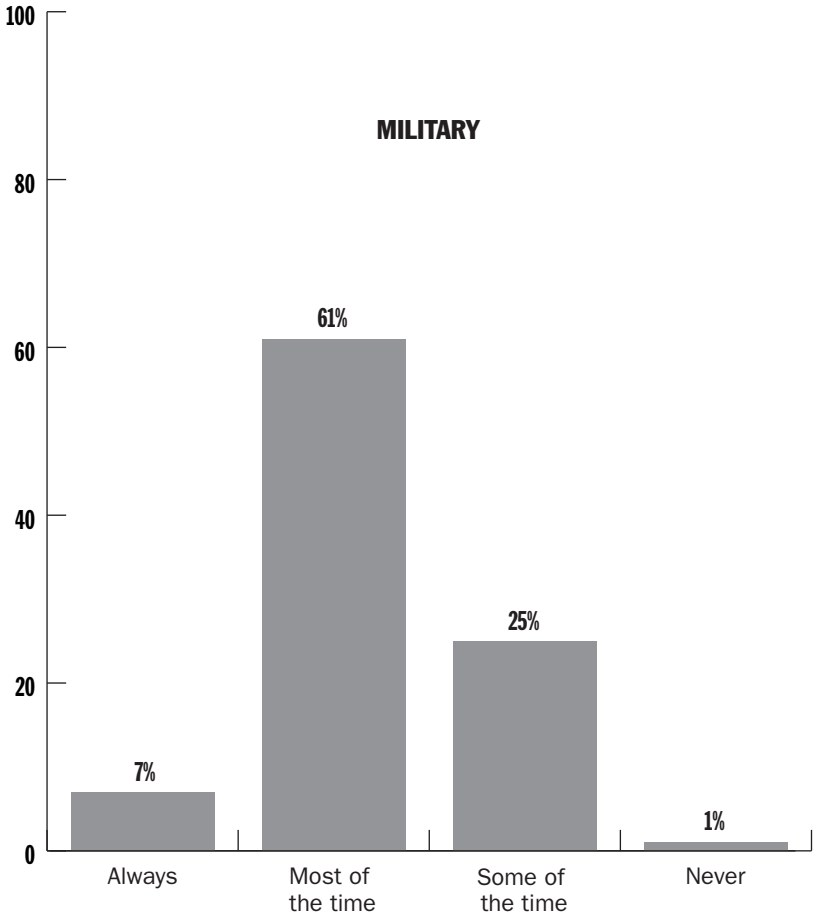


Chart 11B

Accuracy

When military officers speak with the media, how often do they provide accurate information?

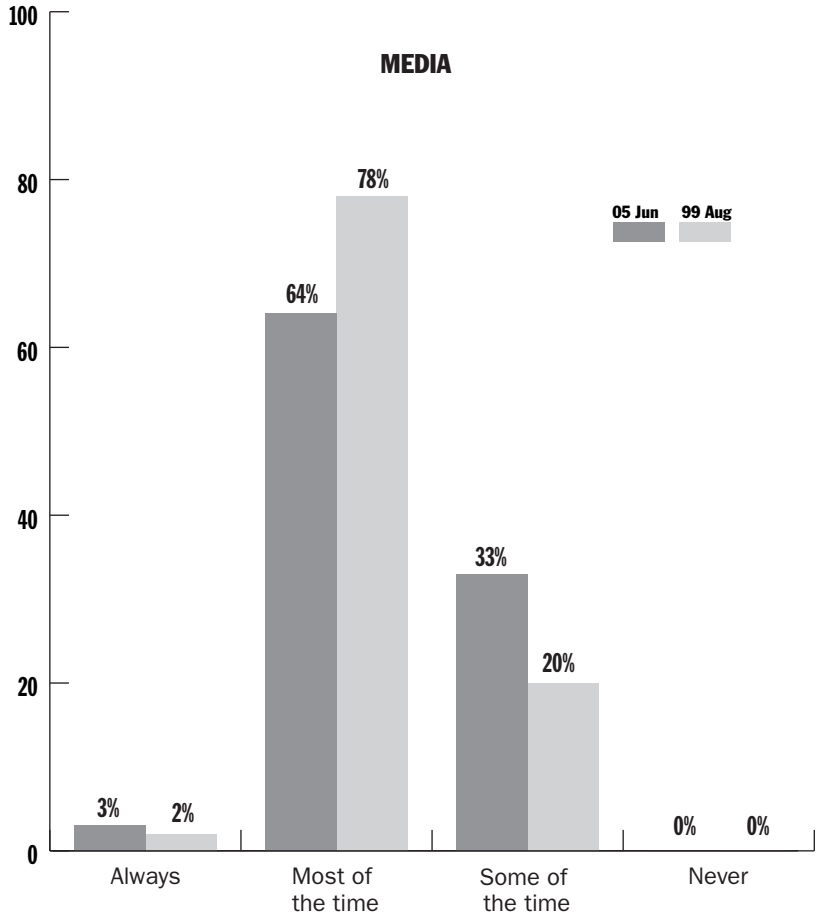


Chart 12

Inaccurate Information

Do you think the military ever intentionally gives false or inaccurate information to the media, or doesn't the military ever do that?

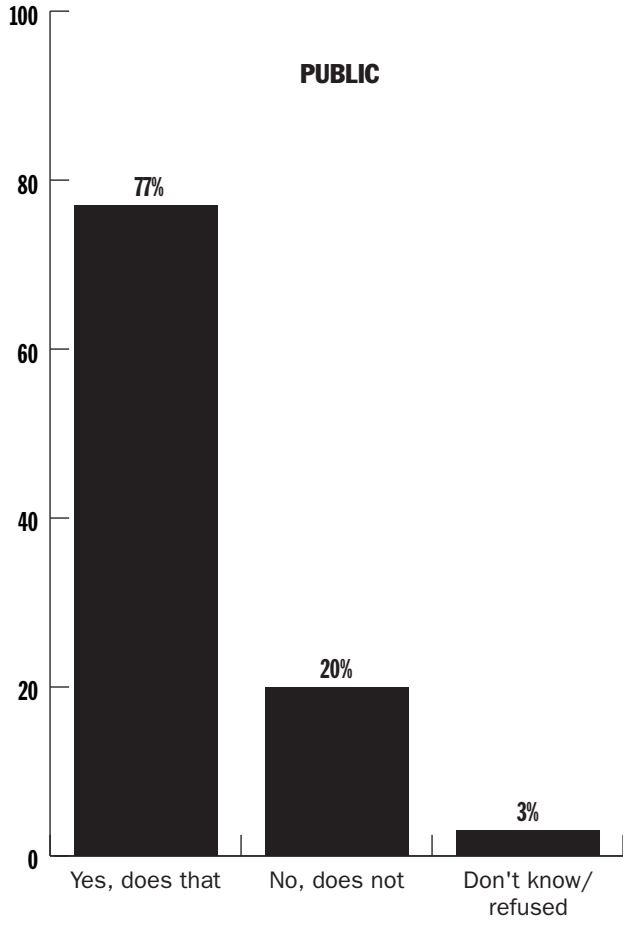


Chart 13

News Stories – Too Negative or About Right?

Which do you think is the most accurate characterization of the news media's coverage of military and national security issues:

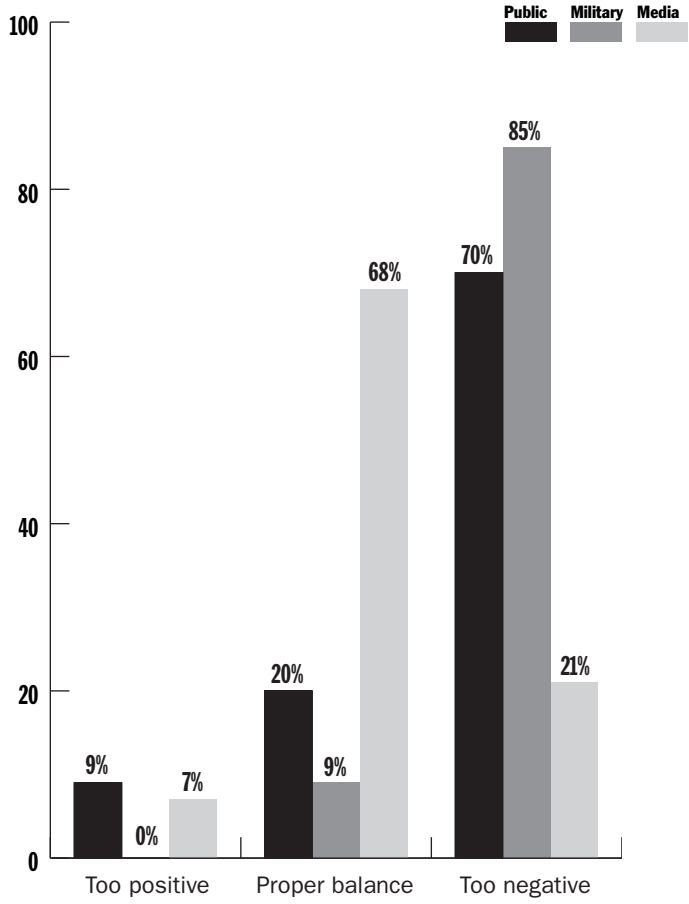
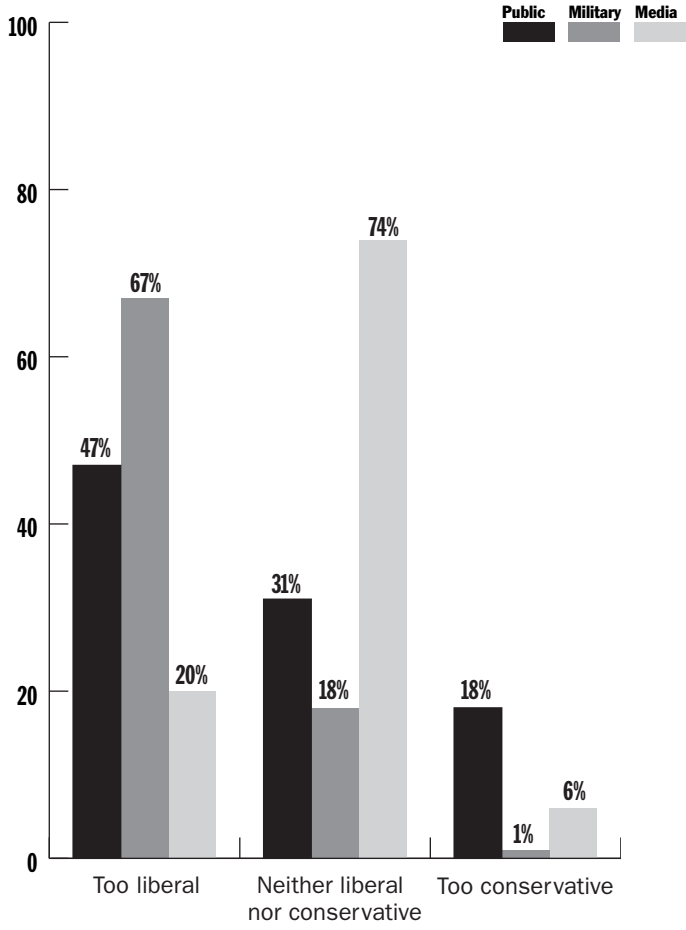


Chart 14

News Stories: Too Liberal or About Right?

Would you characterize the news media as:



Chapter 3
Dueling Roles: Support Versus Skepticism

How does the relationship between the media and the military change during war? Can and should the two groups support each other? As Iraq has become more dangerous, physical support from the military is often crucial if reporters are to cover stories outside Baghdad. A different sort of support – access and openness from military officers and troops – is also crucial for the media to get the facts they need to tell the American public the full story.

Unless the media are willing to provide their own support in terms of the financial and human resources to cover the war, the full story will not be told. But the number of embedded journalists has fallen from more than 700 in 2003 to approximately 25.

Should the media ask what effect their coverage has on the American public, the international audience or the enemy? Do the media tell stories that could harm the American effort to win the war? Does any of the coverage encourage or inform the enemy? And how much influence does coverage have on public opinion and consequently on the morale of the troops?

One of the main complaints by the military is that not enough "good news" stories are being reported. Should certain events be reported rather than others? Do news organizations find it "sexier" to report on battles and casualties than on reconstruction efforts? How can one determine what is fair reporting and what is most important for the public to know? These questions are pushed to the

forefront when things are not going well on the ground.

At the 2005 conference, both media and military acknowledged that the situation in Iraq was far from optimal. There was little sense of the shared experience that had brought the two groups closer at the 2003 conference. Some frustration seemed born of the fact that the Iraq story is increasingly framed as a policy story – how the U.S. got into the war and the terms on which it will get out – a topic the military present were clearly uncomfortable addressing. Their job, they said, is to execute the plan, not question it.

"What I hear from you is frustration that the media are making your job harder. You'd like to have it make your job easier, help you achieve your mission. But that's a dictatorship, not a free press."

The most frequent complaint from the military was that the reporting from Iraq is overwhelmingly negative. Progress and positive stories are not reported, they said. One officer voiced a frequent military grievance: the lack of context in reporting.

Another officer said that the media ought to help win the war through their reporting. This notion was quickly dismissed by members of the media. As one journalist put it, "What I hear from you is frustration that the media are making your job harder. You'd like to have it make your job easier, help you achieve your mission. But that's a dictatorship, not a free press."

Another officer spoke up: "Clearly, each organization – the media and the military – has its roles and responsibilities as part of our democracy. We rely on each other, and it's important that we recognize that and support each other in trying to get the mission accomplished, whatever that mission might be – the military helping the media do its job, the media supporting the military in getting its job done. How you do that can be interpreted in a lot of different ways."

* * *

The officer who thought part of the media's mission should be to support the military in winning the war said he also thought the media should be held accountable for what they report. Though he said he was aware that negative stories get attention and sell newspapers, he was upset by the negative stories coming out of Iraq, as well as the lack of attention to military operations.

Begleiter asked a journalist if he thinks his role is to "help the military get its job done or help win this war." The journalist replied, "No, not at all. My role, according to the journalistic code of ethics – we actually do have one – is to seek and report the truth."

"It takes a whole country to win this war," he said. "The media should help communicate what the military is trying to do so that the families understand why their children are in Iraq. The military's bearing the burden. You have a role to play in helping win the war."

He said, "There are systems to hold commanders accountable for what they do and don't do. Is there a system in your field to do the same thing?"

A reporter replied, "There's not a system of accountability, except institutionally. We have a large policy manual that's constantly being revised, but it varies even within organizations. But in terms of being held accountable – it's not like journalism school, where fact errors got 'F's. Could the standards be better? Yes."

A senior government official said, "The perception is that there is no penalty for getting it wrong." Several reporters responded quickly that in fact reporters can get fired when they make errors, and not just in the high-profile cases.

"I think the folks in this room understand there are mechanisms

for internal policing in the media community," an officer said. "I think that it's not well understood that there is a code of ethics. In many cases, the person being disciplined is fired from his or her position. I think it would be helpful to us in the military to have a broader understanding of what the procedures are that allow for persons who violate those standards to be disciplined."

Another journalist said: "I've been at a lot of these military-media conferences over the last 15 years or so, and this whole issue of accountability keeps coming up. The military needs to realize that over the last three or four years the press has become more introspective and scared of itself than ever before. And there are semi-organized ways you can complain. This is not perfect, but there are ombudsmen at just about every major newspaper now who will take complaints. But you need to know the structure by which you can complain effectively.

"There are organized ways, like e-mails to the editors," he explained. "Letters to the editor start a chain of response – they are not ignored. Some news organizations, like mine, correct at the drop of the hat. The worst thing you can do is complain to the reporter without going above his or her head, because then it could just fall flat and we'll forget about it.

"But be aware," he cautioned. "If there's a story out there, you need to get in the loop early to try to get it corrected, because the first editions of a wire are often what get put into a newspaper and kind of set the tone of things."

* * *

Begleiter asked a journalist if he thinks his role is to "help the military get its job done or help win this war."

The journalist replied, "No, not at all. My role, according to the journalistic code of ethics – we actually do have one – is to seek and report the truth. There are other elements as well: to be accountable to our subjects, our sources and our readers – also to be independent.

It is a requirement of a free press in a democracy that we're independent of government institutions, independent of the military. And if we don't very clearly walk that line, then we suffer the possibilities of being co-opted, of losing our credibility, of being ineffective."

A former military PA officer said, "We can't possibly get this information out to all our own people, let alone to the public, no matter how good our Web sites or anything else are. So in that regard, the media can be a useful part of our communication strategies, part of our team."

He continued: "If folks in the military start thinking the press has a responsibility to do anything other than accurately report what's happened and what's been said by knowledgeable individuals – any responsibility to help win the war or support the military in doing their job – that is not institutionally true of our press, and it certainly is not true of the international press and the adversary press. You're a lot safer if you just assume they can be a very useful occasional teammate in having shared objectives. But they don't have a responsibility to help us do anything."

Responding to the issue of a journalist's mission, a journalist said: "I would hope it's the same for everyone: accurately reflecting what is going on and trying not to get caught up in winning or losing the war, which does a disservice to everyone. People have to know what's going on to make their own decisions. When I'm looking at Iraqi policemen beating up a suspect, for instance, that to me is part of a very complex story. The story to me would be 'Isn't it great there are Iraqi policemen?' and, 'Gosh, they're beating somebody up, and what does this mean for the future?'"

Another journalist said, "Covering any war is very difficult from whatever position you're covering it, whether you're getting ground truth in some platoon somewhere or you have privileged access to headquarters. The truth is, nobody knows what's going on.

"That's doubly true when we're grappling with an insurgency,"

he said. "Historically, we've had poor luck against insurgencies. We've had to learn on the job on this one because the insurgency was very largely unforeseen and it has changed its nature and scale and ambitions over time, so we're all of us fumbling in the dark.

"The best we can hope to do is to show our readers a series of snapshots," he said. "What we choose to take snapshots of, well, that's a matter of judgment."

Another journalist agreed that the changing nature of the war has made covering it more difficult. "It was easy in 2003," he said. "Look at the conventional portion of the war with its iconic images of falling statues, and so on. That's easy to cover, and we do that well." He said that except for the purple-ink-stained fingers associated with the election, "the icons of the last two years have all been very negative."

"The best we can hope to do is to show our readers a series of snapshots," he said. "What we choose to take snapshots of, well, that's a matter of judgment."

Another journalist commented: "For us to say that our mission is to help you win the war requires us to make a judgment that this war is just and right, which is a moral decision we probably should stay away from. So we have to fall back on our mission to tell the truth as we see it and then let the American public decide whether you should win this war or not."

And another journalist said, "It troubles me when people start talking about 'Get on the team, and be part of the team, and help us win this.' That's not our role. Our role is to be watchdogs."

He acknowledged that part of the media's role is to be fair and accurate: "I think a lot of people here have raised very valid criticisms of us, that maybe we have to be more balanced, look at the totality of what's going on in Iraq. But we're not going to win or lose this war. It's going to be the generals and the policymakers who are

going to win or lose this war."

A military officer objected: "I have to disagree with you about whether you're going to win or lose it. To the extent that you are reporting accurately, that you are pursuing the truth, that you are watching the activities of the government, and reporting those to the public to keep them informed, you're contributing to the information aspects of a success that is already happening in the physical sense. There's a correlation between the two.

"It's not just the government of the United States or the coalition that will be seeking to communicate to populations throughout the world through you," he said. "Our adversaries know how to do that. They'll highlight things you'll be attracted to because they understand how your market works. You are also a commercial entity, not just a watchdog of the government. You have people who make other choices as to what your content contains, what comes out, what gets printed, what gets repeated, how many times it gets repeated in an hour. There are commercial reasons that come into that, not just news reasons. We have to recognize that that's the case, and we've got to be honest with ourselves here."

Begleiter asked, "Is it also true that people could say, 'Well, there are political reasons why he's saying that'? There are political reasons, just as you said there are market reasons for the media."

"Absolutely, especially if it's positive," the officer replied. "Anything that's articulated about a success, or about an estimation that we've accomplished our objectives and now we're on to something else is often seen as a politicized comment. That's where the great role comes in for the third-party observers to our operations: You report whether or not it was indeed accomplished. There seems to be a concern among many journalists that if you report something positive you're being used and therefore you don't report on it. I'm curious about why that happens."

A journalist responded, "Where I work, and I imagine at some

other organizations, we actually have people on staff whose job it is to think about the consequences of airing, for example, insurgent videos that you might have seen a lot more of earlier in the conflict. You're not seeing very many of those now. We take a great deal of care in deciding what goes on the air. It's not as if we are a 'tool of the insurgency.'"

A military officer described the disconnect between his experience in Iraq and what he saw in the media. He said, with tongue in cheek, that until he came back and read the newspapers, he hadn't realized the war was going so badly. But he added that the optimism he was hearing from the Pentagon also was not realistic.

The result, he said, is that he doesn't trust the media and he doesn't trust the civilian leadership. He's in the middle – he doesn't know whom to believe except the people he talks to on the ground.

A journalist said the middle is a good place to be. What he's looking for is the difference between what the civilian leadership thinks and what the military thinks. He knows the military could get in trouble for speaking out on policy and is not looking for them to give opinions on policy, but does expect them to comment on how well policies are working.

Begleiter asked a former military PA officer if he thinks "the main goal of media relations is to maintain the support of the American public."

"As a public information officer, my primary audience of concern throughout my career was the American public," the officer acknowledged. "My goal was always to maintain the confidence and support of the American public. And a tool in achieving that goal was the press, because I couldn't reach every person in the public as efficiently by myself as I could through them."

A journalist said, "I don't think reporters have a responsibility to help win the war, but I do concede that the news media can play a role in the way this officer describes. It's a two-part process. First,

the military, the policymakers, the people prosecuting the war, have to take actions in a way that will engender support. And two, they can facilitate, arrange and encourage the coverage of that activity in a way that will further their goals."

* * *

Begleiter asked if the American public was the only audience the military was trying to reach.

A military officer responded, "It certainly is not just the American public we're talking about. I was the Combined Joint Task Forces commander in Afghanistan, and we had media from many different nations, friendly and not so friendly.

"If you look at the media's role from a military standpoint, you've got to go to our doctrine," he said. "Our doctrine describes the media not so much as an antagonist or a protagonist, but as part of the environment, just like the weather or the terrain. The media is there – it's a presence. Commanders are encouraged to take account of that presence just like they take account of the terrain and the weather, and take advantage of it. I don't mean that in any pejorative sense, but to take account of the media's potential as purveyor of information and see what we can do to shape the whole fight to achieve our objectives."

Begleiter asked him for an example of taking advantage of the media environment.

The officer responded, "In Afghanistan, for example, if we knew we had an interest from the French press in what we were doing, we would see if we could shape an operation with the French contingent and then invite the media to watch that operation, to analyze it and to assess it with us, hoping to get a broader support for coalition operations in Afghanistan."

Begleiter asked, "Did it work?"

"Sometimes it did, sometimes it didn't," the officer replied. "Sometimes shaping an operation with the thought in mind that

every operation has information content and value and that the information will be reported by media present meant we got very, very powerful and good effects."

A journalist commented, "In our world, we call that marketing."

Another journalist added, "Imagine if you convinced us and we decided we were going to write nothing but glowing reports about Iraq. We're not the only game in town anymore, you know. This is a global media environment. My mother can sit at home and watch BBC. She can watch other international reports. She can go on the Internet. That would undermine the credibility of what we're doing if we're painting a rosy picture to try to help you win the war. It's apparent to anybody who wants to look beyond the *Washington Post* and ABC and CBS that that's not what everyone else in the world is seeing."

"The news organizations generally felt they had done the war, and they didn't know how to cover all this other stuff."

A third journalist referred to a comment made by John McWethy of ABC at the military-media conference in August 2003. "He said that news organizations would like nothing more than for the whole Iraq story to just go away. We had done the war, and the insurgency that was just starting at the time was keeping a lot of journalists in the country. It was very expensive, it was difficult to cover, and it was dangerous. The news organizations generally felt they had done the war, and they didn't know how to cover all this other stuff.

"Two years later we're still forced to cover it," he said. "And we probably all agree that it's hard to comprehensively cover this story in a way that makes anyone happy.

"So the focus of major news organizations has become the strategic issues," he said. "What are the most important issues facing the 138,000 U.S. troops? That's the security situation, and what progress is being made on that? And what about the political

progress of the constitution and the elections? In the minds of Americans that is ultimately what is going to get U.S. troops home. We're looking at the big issues of this war in Iraq and how it is going to be resolved, in a good way or a bad way."

One journalist expressed concern about not being able to cover memorial services. "These kids mourn their buddies. It is the most moving thing many of us have ever seen, and we are not allowed to show it. Is that not in a sense a good news story – the resilience of the American military, the resilience of Iraqis?"

Another journalist asked, "Who prohibits you from covering the memorial services?"

"It's determined by the units," she replied. "And I do understand why. Sometimes they say they do not want the families to see the memorial service on air before they can get a tape of the service to them. I understand that reasoning, but I don't think it serves the greater good."

A military officer said he wants people to know the cost of freedom. He added that he had never found anyone who said not to talk about the number of deaths. "There's a cost to policy, whether it's right or wrong," he said. However, he said, the media should not just report numbers, but should look at context – for example, how hard the military works to prevent people from dying. "Talk about how we honor the dead, their families; the number of deaths in this age group from non-war," he suggested.

A government official interjected, "I think we are over-dwelling a bit on the good of good news. I think there is an expectation on the part of American citizens that news will be newsworthy, and we ought to understand that as a premise of this whole discussion.

"I think there's a lot of good coverage," he said. "I'm using that term in a very broad context. That doesn't mean it's good news – it's newsworthy and it has value.

"I think there is a lot of information that's not communicated

very well," he added. "I think the government, and military PAs, and military leaders are somewhat guilty of not getting that information to reporters."

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A third journalist said, "I think one of the troubles we all have in trying to get our arms around the coverage of this situation is that this is an insurgency. This isn't like World War II, despite the fact that this administration wants to wrap itself in the mantle of World War II again.

"What are the benchmarks for progress here?" he asked. "We need greater detail about the training of Iraqi forces. At the last briefing we had at the Pentagon by General Myers, he said 178,000 are trained. How many can sustain themselves in the field? How much money is it going to take to get everyone to sustain themselves in the field?

"We're not getting detailed information," he pointed out. "It's very frustrating for us at the Pentagon. Clearly, nobody wants to say what everybody knows: Insurgencies generally take a decade to turn around.

"We need more reporters embedded," he added. "The Pentagon's been doing a fairly good job at that, but we a lot more people from the field telling us what's going on."

The former military public affairs officer agreed that the public may not have been represented well enough in the current debate about the war. "Don't sell the public short," he said. "We should tell them this is going to be harder than we thought. Say it."

"That's exactly the point I was trying to make," the journalist said. "We're not hearing that from this administration. There's fear because of an election coming up next year. They aren't going to say 80,000 to 100,000 troops for at least five years."

A senior government official was dismissive of the reporter's complaints. "That's not an accurate depiction of the answer," he

said. "When we try to explain things that are not black and white and that have multiple variables that has a tendency not to penetrate the reporting. It gets simplified."

A journalist said, "I understand why some military personnel are gun-shy about answering these questions because there will be very little sympathy if the facts change and they have to change their answers. You'll see senators pounding the table. Somebody is going to make a big deal out of it."

"It's pretty easy to have civil relations when a war's not on. When a war's on, it's not so easy."

"You're damned if you do and damned if you don't," a military officer commented, with murmurs of agreement from several other officers.

The third journalist was frustrated. "So we don't ask how long it will take?"

"You do ask," replied the journalist who had said military personnel are gun-shy.

The third journalist went back to the timing of reductions in U.S. forces and the conflicting messages from the Secretary of Defense and Iraq Commander General George Casey.

"Casey said it standing next to Rumsfeld," he insisted, referring to Gen. Casey's prediction that troop reductions would begin in 2006.

"Any number of leaders have explained this," replied the senior government official. "The media are looking for the precise date and time when there will be drawdowns. Life isn't that simple. You won't write about the uncertainty of the situation, and your readers are the lesser for it."

A journalist wouldn't yield the point: "You have created the impression that specific cutbacks will happen next spring."

The official was ready with an answer: "General Casey put eight or 10 conditions on that announcement, but those didn't make it into the vast majority of the stories."

Another government official said, "That's a good point. Though I've expressed frustration with a number of you, we need to have our military commanders out there talking more to you. I can say it from the Pentagon studio every week, but it doesn't have the same texture."

The journalist observed, "It's pretty easy to have civil relations when a war's not on. When a war's on, it's not so easy."

Another journalist said: "The point we started out with about winning the war implies a team concept that most news organizations don't endorse anymore. For a lot of the news editors, their frame of reference is Vietnam. It's not how the press lost it, but how the Johnson administration lied us into it. A lot of editors remember that. They remember the lies of the Gulf of Tonkin – which never got as much publicity as the WMD issue in Iraq. It's not just the war, it's the whole relationship with the executive branch over the last 40 years. We don't want to become a team player with the executive branch.

"Geoffrey Stone talked about this," he said. "In wartime there is this great predilection of the executive branch to try to suppress a free press, to suppress free and open dissent. We're supposed to be out there as a watchdog, guarding against the abuses of the executive branch, not just the Pentagon and the military."

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A reporter observed, "Reporters are mistrustful of the civilian DOD leadership. We're very jaded, even if we have access. I want more access to uniformed guys because I worry about spin from the top."

And another reporter agreed, "We've been spun so much there is an ingrained cynicism about the civilian leadership. So we put filters on everything. That means for a true positive trend, you have to make an extra push that this is a good story."

Yet another reporter added that he "found it really tough in the Pentagon, where the Joint Staff is more remote each year. It's even

hard to get the public affairs officer of Joint Staff to return your calls, which is really strange since I thought his job was to talk to me."

Making matters more difficult, he said, is that officers in the field toe the DOD line. "I worry it's the drip down from political folks," he said. "The military guys who work with the civilian leadership look to them for guidance, and they don't want to send a different message."

The discussion turned to why officers are so circumspect on the big policy questions, questions that put the lives of their soldiers at stake. Several reporters indicated that while they were sympathetic to the difficult position their military colleagues are in, they also thought there are higher – or at least competing – moral values at stake.

One reporter talked about "going around Iraq and talking with lots of brigade and division commanders who say off the record, 'I need more troops. I don't understand why you don't write that.'

"I don't write it because no one will say it on the record," the reporter said. "The message from the Pentagon is that troop levels are right. You can't get crosswise with the Pentagon. You'll ruin your career."

A military officer asked: "When does it become a moral requirement to lay out that we need more troops, or whatever? If we had soldiers and Marines everywhere, and robust police in every precinct, and quick reaction forces netted together, then we could lock down everything. But there is an unrealistic level of troops, too. This is all part of the art of command. It's a hard balance."

Another reporter agreed, "I hear that all the time. A colonel in western Iraq told me, 'Anyone in D.C. who thinks 140,000 troops are enough is out of his mind. This is what they need for the Euphrates valley alone.' At what point do you raise the question with your civilian superiors? Let's say things turn worse, and some correction is needed. Would you say that to a reporter, or do you always feel you

have to go through the chain of command?"

An officer responded, "The first place you have to go is internal. Make your case. At that point, if you've made your case and you've been told no, you have to decide if you can live with that. And if you can't, you resign or you go public. You get one shot at that. It better be worth it. You fall on your saber one time."

"I'll put this cynically to get a response," said another reporter: "The Army is given most of the responsibility by the Bush administration for the success of the mission. You are being forced steadily into being the optimistic face, while the administration is desperately worried inside the White House. I detect the Bush administration pushing the military into being the front man for a situation that is rapidly going south."

"Journalists being skeptical is probably helpful," a military officer conceded, "but it has to be counterbalanced by another point of view. Without it, the nation will quit, and the media's cynicism will be a part of the reason."

"You're fundamentally wrong," said a senior government official. "There's no one telling the generals what they should be saying."

Another journalist responded, "No one has to tell the generals what to say, but they know what to say to help their mission. Go back and look at the briefings by General Wesley Clark about what was going on in Kosovo in the 1990s. He was publicly positive and privately furious."

"Journalists being skeptical is probably helpful," a military officer conceded, "but it has to be counterbalanced by another point of view. Without it, the nation will quit, and the media's cynicism will be a part of the reason."

"The difference between what's reported and cynicism is

whether the reporter allows that there's another possible outcome besides the negative," the journalist said. "If you say only that this policy is doomed and won't succeed, that's cynical. If you allow that there are various possible outcomes, you do a more responsible job."

The officer liked that explanation. "What you describe is a healthy skepticism. It can't drift into cynicism. The same applies for a healthy optimism. But that includes the realization that things could go to hell in a handbasket tomorrow."

The journalist summarized: "The area between healthy skepticism and healthy optimism – that's the battleground between the media and the military."

Chapter 4
Strategic Communications: Transmitting and Shaping the News

With the advance of technology – satellite communications, the Internet, new broadcast technologies, new linkages – once a news story is "out there," it is everywhere. Further, these technologies are available not only to us and our allies, but to individuals, organizations and governments of every kind – including our enemies.

At the same time that these technologies are advancing, the United States government is seeking to redefine its use of strategic communication. Within the nation itself, this has involved drumming up support for going to war in Iraq as well as for "staying the course." The government has also worked to find allies for the war outside the U.S and to improve the perception of American society in regions where our values are not understood or respected.

The military is engaged in its own efforts to communicate more strategically. Its members are frequently called on to serve as spokespeople for America's military and national security policy, a position requiring sensitivity to the goals of current public diplomacy. And along with its responsibility to ensure that the American public gets timely and accurate information about Iraq, the military desires to put its best foot forward, spotlighting its successes as well as the problems it faces dealing with a determined and deadly insurgency. The military also uses information operations in its communication strategy, both to gain the support of the Iraqi people and as a tactical tool against the insurgents.

During the past decade, as access to new technologies has spread rapidly, it has become obvious that information cannot be controlled. Rapidly advancing technologies used by the military include DVIDS (digital video imaging and distribution system), with small portable satellite transmitters that allow broadcasting from virtually any combat unit in Iraq. And cameras, cell phones, and Web logs, or blogs, are being used increasingly by the troops themselves to communicate from Iraq.

The implications of this are profound for the military-media relationship and, more important, for the American public. How can the media and the military cooperate to ensure that the American public gets truthful, timely and accurate information? What are the dynamics of the media-military relationship in this context and what are the issues that must be wrestled with? This was the focus of the final session of the conference.

What is DVIDS?

The digital video and imagery distribution system is a network developed by the Department of Defense – Third Army Public Affairs that uses small video and still cameras and a small portable satellite transmitters positioned with Army public affairs units in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. The system, in use since April 2004, connects to a distribution hub in Atlanta run by Crawford Communications Company and can transmit video and still images to the U.S. in real-time 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

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Independent journalist Kevin Sites launched the discussion by offering vivid examples of how new technologies are being used.

"I've found myself at the nexus of this new journalism, using digital technology to shoot, edit and actually transmit the news," he said. "We're seeing this new technology emerge, not only in the way we gather news, but in the way we deliver it over the Internet. The spread of broadband has allowed us to see video from pretty much

anywhere in the world."

Sites said, "For some reason people seem to like the authentic approach of getting news from the front line in a way that it hasn't really been delivered before."

He showed conferees video clips from "this kind of one-man-band news gathering." One clip was a controversial tape containing footage of a Marine corporal shooting an unarmed, wounded prisoner in a mosque in Fallujah on Nov. 13, 2004. It dramatically raised the issue of whether and how the media should report on such incidents.

"The mosque shooting is the primary reason I'm here – I think people wanted to hear about this," Sites said. "When I had discussions with NBC after we got the videotape, I think we all realized just how important this was and how potentially impactful it could be in different ways – negatively, there was the possibility of putting other Marines in danger and potentially continuing a battle that was starting to die down a bit.

"We had a lot of ethical discussions on how we should play this," he recalled. "Should we show the whole video? Should we only show part of it? Ultimately, we decided to stop it before the actual trigger was pulled. But I want to show you the whole piece, let you see what actually happened there."

Sites described the background to events in the clip: "This is the fifth day of fighting in Fallujah, and we're going back to a mosque where there had been a fire fight the day before – 10 insurgents killed, five wounded. Five insurgents were left in the mosque. Their weapons had been taken from them."

As the video showed the Marines entering the mosque, Sites explained, "This squad had been in the mosque already, the day before when the shooting occurred."

He continued, "I tell the lieutenant that these are the guys that were left in here from yesterday.

"What happens here is that one of the insurgents pops out from under a blanket. The Marines cover him," Sites said. "He tells us, 'We were here yesterday – you saw us, you shot us with your camera.'"

A Marine corporal then shoots one of the insurgents.

"I saw a lot of killing during that period in Fallujah," Sites said. "But I had never seen something quite like this, where it seemed to me there wasn't any danger posed by these guys. They had been in there yesterday and had been disarmed.

"I wonder if this would have taken place in front of my camera had I been carrying a big Sony on my shoulder?" he mused. "These Marines knew I was there. I had been embedded with them for three weeks prior to that. They had a certain comfort level with me.

"I think this story encapsulates a lot of the ethical dilemmas we face as journalists working with the military, and also how the information flow has changed," Sites said.

"Our role as journalists is to seek and report the truth, show what happens, try to give a full context, report the mitigating circumstances," he said. "The mitigating circumstances here were that there were bodies being booby-trapped in this fight. This particular Marine had received some type of facial wound the day before – it could have been friendly fire, could have been enemy fire. The environment was still very hot. There was a lot of anger because of all the roadside bombs and some of the fighting techniques the insurgents were using. We reported all those aspects, and took people through

"I walked out of there with a videotape," he added. "I was in the middle of a war zone; the Marines didn't take the tape from me, they didn't shoot me, and I was able to broadcast with their assistance this entire piece of video that in some ways would look very damaging to them."

our report up until the point where the Marine points his weapon, but we didn't show the firing. We blacked it out at that point.

"There was a question of whether we ever should have showed the video," Sites said. "I was told by a lot of people it should have been destroyed; it should have been turned over to the Marines. Other people said, 'Why didn't you show the entire video? You didn't really show what happened there.' And still other people said, 'Why show this video? What good can come of it? You're going to put Marines in danger. The insurgents aren't going to surrender.'

"To be honest with you, there isn't really any good answer," he said. "The only thing I had to fall back on in this particular instance was our journalistic code of ethics. That sounds kind of 'Journalism 101,' but the idea is that if you seek and report the truth, if you put it out there, hopefully justice will prevail through allowing people in a democracy to make their own choices and decisions about what's happening out there.

"I walked out of there with a videotape," he added. "I was in the middle of a war zone; the Marines didn't take the tape from me, they didn't shoot me, and I was able to broadcast with their assistance this entire piece of video that in some ways would look very damaging to them."

Sites showed the video to the commander within 30 minutes of its being shot, something he said he would not have done if he had thought the video would be confiscated. The commander, who was shocked, took immediate action: The Marine who had shot the prisoner was relieved of duty, and an investigation followed.

Sites acknowledged that the story he'd shot wasn't a "victory for any of us. But if you can shoot that video, it's a victory in showing our values to Americans and the enemy alike. I think it sends a message that this particular country and this particular country's military adheres to its democratic principles."

Sites also showed a piece shot in Fallujah just prior to the inva-

sion in November 2004, which stimulated lively discussion.

"This was a feint," he said, "an operational fake-out, where the Marines started shelling the southern part of Fallujah. We talk so much about good news stories and bad news stories – I think this particular piece encapsulates both."

Though a young Marine who was injured during the fight was quite heroic, Sites said, "At the same time, we illustrated some of the shortcomings of the weaponry systems, and also the cost of doing this kind of thing.

"I probably wouldn't have been able to get this piece on the air without the assistance of the Marines and the DVIDS system, because they allowed me to use a voice track and send it over the system," he said. "My transmission system at that point had only been a satellite phone, and I wasn't able to get a proper voice track. With the Marines' assistance, I was able to get this piece on the air, even though not all aspects of it were positive."

Jamie McIntyre of CNN interjected, "We also reported from the Pentagon on that feint operation in Fallujah, and we also made use of the DVIDS system, but it was a completely different experience from my end.

"We knew Fallujah was heating up," he said, "but we also knew the big Fallujah assault wasn't supposed to be starting immediately, partly because we were supposed to be embedded in the operation and our embedded reporter wasn't there yet."

He recalled, "I was told by the Pentagon that they were going to do something they hadn't done before: They were going to provide us with access to a military commander from the front lines using the DVIDS system, but they couldn't tell us anything about what this 'very significant operation' was, or who or where the commander was, or what they were going to be doing. We debated whether we should carry this military commander live on the air, and we decided not to because we didn't know enough about what it was."

It turned out the "military commander" was instead Marine Lt. Lyle Gilbert, a public affairs officer. McIntyre said that in describing the operation that was about to occur, Gilbert used what was "perhaps technically accurate, but very misleading terminology about crossing the line of departure and created the impression that this operation was a major assault into Fallujah."

In fact, "The idea was, as Kevin [Sites] reported, to sort of probe the enemy, see how they were going to react," he said. "In retrospect, it appears that Gilbert's interview with us was part of an effort to create the illusion that this was a bigger operation than it was. This appeared to be an information operation, as opposed to a public affairs operation."

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Later, McIntyre defended Gilbert: "If he were here, I think he would say that it was not his intention to mislead CNN, that he did not say anything that was inaccurate – although I thought the language he used was very misleading – that it was his attempt to use this new capability that allowed him to conduct an interview directly with a reporter back at the Pentagon, to get information out in a new, faster way."

He added, "But the way it was handled, and the way it was pitched to CNN – it went through our international desk – could have easily been handled in a way that solved a lot of these problems."

"I felt I was misled," McIntyre said. "But I'd be really interested to hear what Kevin [Sites] has to say. He was there."

"I want to say that I had conversations with Lyle Gilbert, who is a good Marine doing his job pretty much every day as a very

strong professional, and I never felt I was misled," Sites said.

He added, "In fact, when he talked to me about this operation, he told me it was a feint, that the idea was that they would go past the line of departure, but they would come back. Somewhere in the information given to CNN, that information may have been omitted by accident."

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Begleiter asked a journalist to describe how she has used the DVIDS system.

"When it works, it works beautifully," she said. "The company has people affiliated with the military who go around to different places. We can transmit live interviews, we can feed tape. We're in a bit of a unique situation. It's a perception of a conflict of interest, to be perfectly honest, for us to use DVIDS on a routine basis, so we have imposed on ourselves a charge that makes using it prohibitively expensive. Most networks do not do that."

"So DVIDS has no editorial personnel, is that correct?" Begleiter asked the officer who was familiar with DVIDS. "They make no editorial judgments? The personnel are simply running technical equipment. They're not gatekeepers, right? The equipment is turned on and nobody has control over it."

The officer said, "It's a system that makes it possible to move digital video and imagery. There are military journalists on the battlefield, there are combat cameramen. Military journalists often produce video news releases that can go in a variety of directions. There's B-roll footage provided that goes onto a hub that subscribers can draw on as they desire."

The journalist said, "There is a gatekeeping function in a sense. For instance, in Fallujah, it was up to the military there to decide whether they wanted to dedicate public affairs people to get up at 3:00 in the morning to support those portals."

Begleiter said, "I'm asking because Kevin [Sites] made a point

that to me is politically significant, that for whatever reason he chose to utilize this technical system called DVIDS for his voice track – which means the sound of his voice – which could have been transmitted any number of ways, including recording it on the computer he edited the video on and transmitting it that way."

Sites responded, "We had transmitted the story through a BGAN [Broadband Global Area Network] portable satellite modem, which is a method all journalists use right now. We had some problems in recording a solid voice track. We wanted to make sure the track was very clear, that it wasn't muddy, and I went to Lieutenant Lyle Gilbert, who was the public affairs officer for First Marine Division, and asked him, 'Do you have a means by which we can transmit this?' And lo and behold, the DVIDS system was there. They were using it to do video press releases and reports from the field. We asked them if we could use it for our track, said we would pay for it, as CNN also does.

"It was a decision we had to think about, because I wasn't sure I wanted the military to hear our voice track on this piece prior to its airing. At the same time, the concept of getting this on the air in a clean efficient fashion is very attractive to us, especially when there aren't a lot of other transmission options. And there was no editorial control whatsoever. Lieutenant Gilbert offered this to us on this single-issue basis and did not in any way ask to see the script beforehand."

Begleiter asked the military officer, "Did you know in advance that this particular voice track was going to be transmitted?"

The officer replied, "There are hundreds of users on this thing on a daily basis. It's an open system. But there's no editorial control on anything that moves through there other than the editorial control we do on our own productions."

The first journalist interjected, "During the battle for Fallujah, everything that went through the DVIDS system that was fed by

pool was overseen by one of the PAOs to say whether it contravened Operations Security or not, so there is control in some cases."

Begleiter said, "My question is, had Lieutenant Gilbert known the content … had he exercised any kind of up-the-chain discussion of it, would there have been any, could there have been any editorial control? Under the policies that now exist would there have been an opportunity for somebody to say, 'Whoa, we're not putting that over a system we're running. Let them find their own way to get their audio out.'"

The officer responded, "The option is always there to say, 'No, not over our system,' but that has not happened in an extended period of time."

The journalist pointed out that the issue was the military's ability to reject content.

The officer said, "If someone reviewed your content, that's the same thing that happens when they give you access to their unit, ensuring that the ground rules are being enforced. It's nothing different than that, wouldn't you say?"

She responded, "I would say, actually there was a disagreement between Lieutenant Gilbert and the other more senior public affairs people in Fallujah as to whether the footage we were trying to feed should go out. In the end, after some discussion among three of them, they sided with us. They said, 'Yes, it's fine, put it out.'"

The officer said, "If we're going to do an interview with you and your interest is in a vulnerability, we have an interest in articulating to you that we have concern about that part of the story. There's nothing unusual about that, given that it's our system that made it possible to get your story across.

"All of you have used this thing and enjoyed it very much," he added. "It's a wide-open system. It's a partnership that makes it possible for the American people to be served. We ought to all be very happy about it, not trying to find ways to unravel the one con-

nection we have out there right now. I find this amazing, I'll be honest with you."

The journalist said, "I don't think we're trying to unravel the connection. I think it has to be properly used. It's a great tool for us, but it's one we use very cautiously."

McIntyre added: "DVIDS is just a transmission system. It's a new capability, and what we're talking about on this panel is how technology has changed and raised new questions. This capability, which allows people to file from the field and for people to be offered to us for interview, has created situations in which other questions arise. But the technology itself is just technology. It's a good thing in that we can get stories out."

Begleiter agreed. "Obviously, it's not the technology that's the problem, it's the other issues that arise in the course of using it," he said. "And I feel certain new ones are going to arise tomorrow."

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Jamie McIntyre tackled the ramifications of evolving technology from a media perspective: "In the past year, we're really beginning to see the maturation of some of the things we've been talking about for years," he said. "Kevin Sites' reporting from the field using a small digital camera, editing and transmitting his own stories over the Internet, is going to become the standard way that everybody does television. CNN has converted to a system where all its reports in Washington are edited on Apple computers. We're already using the same methods Kevin used in the war zone to transmit stories and material. Taking advantage of the increasing high-speed broadband access to the Internet to transmit our images is not necessarily faster yet, but it is definitely cheaper and more convenient than the old system of using satellite trucks and expensive satellite time. And that's only going to expand.

"We've already seen how the explosion of digital technology and recording technology has affected the news itself,"

McIntyre said. "Secretary Rumsfeld has remarked several times about how U.S. troops everywhere have little cameras, and they take pictures, and these images are sent out. Of course that was an essential element in the Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal – what made that story so resonant were the images captured by the soldiers' own cameras and stored on computers.

"After that incident, the question was raised of whether the U.S. military might tell soldiers they couldn't take small cameras," he said. "That basically has not happened and probably isn't or shouldn't happen because it's becoming a fact of life.

"We understand there's a shadow audience out there, but we also understand that for every service member who's out there, there's a mother, a father, an uncle, a brother, and there's a nation that wants to know about what their loved ones are doing in this war on terror."

"And of course the other really profound difference with this war and the technology environment and the communications environment is the advent of blogs," McIntyre said. "Talk about bypassing the filter of the mainstream media – you can log onto these blog sites and get a riveting and detailed account about the lives of the troops, firsthand accounts that are unprecedented. That's been a huge change.

"One other item I want to raise is the evolution of the Pentagon channel," McIntyre said. "The Pentagon channel is an internal – well, it used to be internal – channel that's just seen in the Pentagon. It used to simply be a vehicle for broadcasting briefings to offices in the Pentagon so people could see what was going on without having to go down to the briefing room, where there's limited space. It began to provide additional programming over time. It's gotten more sophisticated. It started picking up hearings on Capitol Hill in which the Defense

Secretary or senior military officials were testifying. It has sometimes added speeches the Defense Secretary has given. Then they added tape-delayed broadcasts of Rumsfeld's travels overseas. The individual news shows that were done by the services and sometimes aired on AFRTS [Armed Forces Radio and Television Service] have been added, so you can see the Marine Corps news and the Navy news. The Army is done by military journalists.

"The Pentagon channel now has little updates, sometimes on the hour, with two minutes of headlines of military news," he said. "And every day you see a little advisory of a new cable system that's picked up the Pentagon channel around the country, so it's no longer just in the Pentagon. Military bases, and military communities, and some local cable systems are picking it up. They stream video on the Internet as well.

"So what it has morphed into, for better or for worse, is essentially the first U.S. Government news channel," McIntyre said. "It's even done some original programming. I was flipping through the other day and saw a documentary called 'Behind the Wire.' It was about what was going on at Guantanamo – what the government says is the real story of how detainees are treated in Guantanamo. I think it's a very interesting development."

Another journalist said, "Right now, I think the motives are benign. It's the structure that's being set up and where that could be taken in the future that's the problem – we live in an uncertain universe.

"A really cynical way to look at this is, the U.S. military has created a national television channel that is being carried on some of the same major cable networks we are," he said. "They've created an amazing distribution system for audio, video, still pictures and text with DVIDS, and we use it. It's a great infrastructure. They have a big, fat pipe that goes to every TV station in the country if somebody wants to use it." That, he said, is where the potential for trouble lies.

In a later discussion, Begleiter asked: "If there was a program called 'Behind the Wire' that dealt with the Pentagon's view of what happens at Guantanamo, would the Pentagon Channel cablecast or broadcast a program like that, not just internally, but also to the American people?"

A senior government official responded, "Look, we're an organization that has some 2.4 million men and women and DOD civilians out there working for the department. There is no organization in this world with that many people that wouldn't say you have a responsibility to communicate to your internal organization. Any large company has a corporate information arm they use to talk to their people."

Begleiter said, "There isn't anybody in this room who would disagree with that."

The official said, "And part of communicating is providing them information about things they may have heard that may not be accurate and providing information to them in a way that we think keeps them well informed about activities going on."

Begleiter replied: "You've talked extensively about communicating with your 2.4 million personnel. What about the question of communicating with – I don't know whether this is what you mean by a shadow audience, but it's hardly a shadow audience when it's hundreds of millions of people, including the American people – through broadcast, or cablecast, or Webcast channels for that matter?"

"My view is that the Defense Department needs to use all the means it can to not only communicate externally, but internally," the official said. "And part of that is using the technology as it emerges to allow us to reach our audiences better."

Begleiter said, "No holds barred."

The official responded, "I don't know that I want to say no holds barred. These are things that certainly we think about, talk

about, wrestle with. We understand there's a shadow audience out there, but we also understand that for every service member who's out there, there's a mother, a father, an uncle, a brother, and there's a nation that wants to know about what their loved ones are doing in this war on terror."

* * *

Begleiter asked conferees to address another aspect of emerging technologies: the increasing ability individual members of the military have to express their views directly through podcasting, videocasting, and blogging.

"We've talked about DVIDS, but are the military or are journalists thinking about individual service personnel at the other end of the DVIDS system?" he asked. "They're not only taking little snapshots with their mini-digicams, but now they're doing podcasts, which they can put together in no time. And very, very shortly, they'll be able to do videocasting.

"A podcast is an audio stream, whereas videocasting involves editorial judgment," Begleiter explained. "You actually have to edit the video. You have to decide, 'Are we going to use the picture of my colleague right over there who's actually firing at a guy, or are we not going to use that?' – the kind of editorial judgments that all of us in this room have made at one point or another. Are those issues on the agenda?"

"I can tell you that CNN is producing podcasts now that are downloadable," Jamie McIntyre said. "Jane Arraf could appear on a podcast – her material might be taken and redone. Then you download it to your iPod, you listen to it on the way to work and erase it later. But I'm not aware that we've received podcasts from the people we would cover – soldier's podcasts, as opposed to soldier's blogs."

An officer said, "We are absolutely looking at that kind of thing. Any kind of broadcast medium that is out there we have to take a

look at. Maybe we could issue an iPod to everybody, and that's a way to push information out quickly to our soldiers. Also, we ought to think about it in terms of public communication."

Begleiter asked, "Should troops in the field be allowed or enabled to write their own blogs? Can you get on the DVIDS system and have folks, instead of writing e-mails, writing blogs in real time?"

A journalist said, "I was at a conference last week at Space and Missile Defense Command, and General Cartwright said he has started a blog at Strategic Command because he wishes to know what's going on in the command, and he wants everybody to take part in it. And that is everybody. It's a restricted circuit, but everybody from junior to senior officers is supposed to weigh in on the problems of the day or week."

The officer said, "Well that actually causes some concerns, because our culture is to control our own internal communications that are going to the public. I don't know that we can control that. We'll probably find it very much like blogging, very much like e-mails, very much like chats. Our soldiers who have grown up with this have long since moved past us technologically, and we've got to catch up in terms of how we use the environment they're already in."

Strategic Communications and the Military

Kevin Sites experienced no military interference in what he was able to videotape and report, and he was told the truth about the Fallujah feint. On the other hand, Jamie McIntyre felt he was at least inadvertently misled.

McIntyre's experience might be described as a botched attempt at strategic communications – a concept that is itself fraught with confusion. In 2005, there are a variety of views among the military services, the Department of Defense, the State Department and the

White House as to the meaning of strategic communications.

For the last three months, Navy Capt. John Carman, deputy director for strategic communication at Joint Forces Command, has been assisting with the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) strategic communication working group. The QDR's report will be delivered to Congress with the budget early in 2006.

"The communication environment has also changed the way military people think about information and communication activities," Carman said. "Web sites, blogging, the many 24/7 news sources, the tremendous increase in Arab language media – TV stations and Web sites particularly – have really opened up these communication channels to a lot of folks who previously didn't have access."

"Within DOD, we've been working at this very hard as part of the QDR process. Forty-some people have come together to focus on all communication activities to illuminate where we have inadequate policies and where we have inadequate resources and methods.

"Our focus has been to strengthen the communities of practice: public affairs, psychological operations and information operations," Carman said. "It has not been to define a new organization called 'strategic communication.' What we've done is to identify the characteristics and tenets of strategic communication. Using those tenets we are going back into the communities of practice that support them.

"One of the first things this working group has accomplished is defining defense support to public diplomacy," he said. "This area draws upon the psychological operations community and the public affairs community; the information operations community is involved with this as well. The work is being done very earnestly in Afghanistan and in Iraq, but

up until a month or so ago, we didn't have a working definition of this functional area.

"Our effort has also illuminated several other communication assumptions," Carman added. "Senior military commanders are increasingly viewed as U.S. Government spokesmen on national policy matters. It's just a fact. And as a part of that, senior military commanders in operations have to be communicators. Communicating is not limited to a spokesman or public affairs officer, it also has to be seen as an element of command.

"The communication environment has also changed the way military people think about information and communication activities," he said. "Web sites, blogging, the many 24/7 news sources, the tremendous increase in Arab language media – TV stations and Web sites particularly – have really opened up these communication channels to a lot of folks who previously didn't have access."

He added, "For many years TV stations and radio stations have had 'shadow' audiences in addition to their intended or paid audience. I think we were slow to realize in the U.S. Government and DOD that some of these shadow audiences have become primary audiences that are hugely important to advancing U.S. interests.

"Clearly, our adversaries have adapted quickly and fairly effectively to use some of these communication channels," he said. "And the U.S. Government and the U.S. military haven't been as quick to adapt and employ them as we probably should have been, in spite of the fact that we've recognized them for quite some time.

"As a result, some people claim that we're losing the information war," Carman said. "I don't believe that, but I'm also a dedicated optimist and believe it's never too late to fully engage and deal with the situation we've got here.

"There's a lot happening in DOD communication activities," Carman concluded. "I think there has been more change in the last three to five years than I've seen in 30 years of government service.

And there's more to come."

* * *

Air Force Gen. Erwin Lessel explained the nature of the military's strategic communications in the context of the Iraq War. "I was selected about 14 months ago to go over as military spokesman, and ultimately as director of strategic communications for Multinational Force Iraq [MNF-I]. My background with the media in the past had only been as a commander," he said. "I had done interviews, but had nowhere near the experience that I gained in Baghdad as the spokesman for MNF-I.

"Before going over there, I stopped by to see General Casey in Washington. He told me I needed to focus on strategic communications – that it was broke and needed to be fixed. As I walked out of that office, my first question was, if I'm going to fix it, what is strategic communications? People generally think about it in terms of combining information operations, public affairs and public diplomacy. It wasn't until later in the summer, when I actually got to Baghdad, that I saw a draft definition out of the Joint Staff. That was approved in September as a working definition.

"I think it's incorrect to state that we just merged information operations and public affairs," he said. "What we did of utmost importance was maintain the credibility of the information we put out. The function that public affairs traditionally performed was not changed.

"When I arrived, there was basically no organization and few processes. Public affairs was separate from information operations, and psychological operations' functions had a very, very small staff – just a personal security detail and an executive – supporting the military spokesman functions.

"I started out to build an organization that had three primary tasks," Lessel said. "One was conducting strategic communications for Multinational Force Iraq – getting information out to the media

and working the inner mechanisms of the staff itself."

Second was the interagency aspect, he said. "At that time, the embassy was new and we had a lot of work to do to ensure that we were coordinating and synchronizing our efforts with what was happening in the U.S. Embassy and associated agencies.

"The third area was helping the interim Iraqi government, now a sovereign government, conduct its strategic communications. They had very little capacity in those early days to convey any type of message, to put out press releases or any information, let alone synchronize a message within their government, their cross-ministries," Lessel said. "We had a concerted effort to help provide information to the Iraqi government so they could put out those types of news items that were rightfully in the purview of the Iraqi government."

Lessel said that a senior representative of the Mujahideen Shura Council in Fallujah admitted that the council had "lost the media fight in Fallujah."

"I attribute a lot of that to the preparation we did, the embedding of journalists, the way we countered misinformation. I think it's a pretty strong statement of effectiveness when you can get an adversary to admit that.

"The view from Washington was very much focused on public perceptions, public information within the U.S. That support, that information, is necessary," he said. "You can't fight a war, you can't go forth successfully, without popular U.S. support.

"But to win success in Iraq," Lessel added, "the Iraqi people have to be able to understand what their government is all about, understand the security environment, understand how the economy is doing. So a lot of our focus was on informing the Iraqi people of what was happening, why we were there and what we were doing to support them.

"Cultural understanding certainly is a big piece of it," Lessel

said. "Who says what is equally important. There are a lot of things that wouldn't mean a whole lot if we as Americans said them to the international press, but if they came from an Iraqi government official, they would mean something completely different. Certainly the Iraqi people, the pan-Arab audience would much rather get their information from Iraqi leaders, Arab speakers. It gives greater credibility.

"Unfortunately, the Iraqi government did not have a good spokesperson for the government for many, many months," he said. "It wasn't until about September that the prime minister had a spokesman who could go out and speak on his behalf."

Lessel said his greatest accomplishment was the increased understanding by MNF-I of the importance of strategic communications. Second, he said, was that their speed of information exceeded that in strategic operations.

"We were able, through the processes we established, to provide more accurate and truthful information than traditional processes," he added. "I think we did fairly well at actively countering misinformation. Rapid response to inaccurate reports was vital to keeping certain incorrect information from getting completely out of control."

A journalist asked: "I have no doubt you were able to keep IO, PA, and PSYOPS separate at the lower level," he said. "But at the highest level, which is you, they're totally merged, and you ultimately would be advising General Casey on IO, PSYOPS, and PA. One person would perform all those functions. As a reporter, what concerns me is that the top U.S. commander in Iraq would have his advice on all these fronts coming from one person. How do you keep those separate?"

Lessel responded, "We put in safeguards as we built the processes and established how we were going to do business. I had two deputies. I had one who did broad strategic communications, a lot

of the IO and PSYOPS piece. I had a deputy who was a career public affairs officer. As my deputy he had purview over all the PA functions within the organization.

"Second, those who dealt with the media were all PA – we didn't cross that at all," he said. "A third thing was that there was a separate PAO who was the public affairs officer for General Casey. He was there to support General Casey in all media engagements, and, second, he supported me as the military spokesman, because I still had that role and responsibility. He worked for General Casey, so he was an independent voice working for the commander, who advised the commander on PA and advised me as well. There were a number of checks and balances to make sure things stayed in the proper lane. The feedback I got from the junior officers, career PA, career PSYOPS, was that the bounds were maintained better in this organization than in the traditional organization.

"The other check and balance was that we did not deal with misinformation and disinformation," Lessel said. "There are a lot of truthful aspects to PSYOPS, and that's what we focused on in trying to coordinate those messages."

He added, "Some of the PSYOPS stuff – when I first got there, I couldn't believe some of the things I was reading, what that community was trying to put out as information to foreign audiences. So we refined it and made sure it was synchronized and properly coordinated with our PA efforts.

"I'm not necessarily espousing that what we did over there needs to be exported and the whole Department of Defense needs to change," Lessel added. "It worked in Iraq."

* * *

Stephen R. Pietropaoli, a retired military PA who is now executive director of the Navy League Foundation, spoke from the perspective of his years of experience in military public affairs.

"I so desperately want to be cutting edge, and yet I'm so certainly

going to come across as old school and a throwback here," he said. "There's no doubt about what Jamie [McIntyre] said, what Kevin [Sites] demonstrated so clearly – that technology's changing and we are certainly communicating in a more complex environment.

"And I have no doubt that General Lessel found a broken public affairs communications operation when he got to Baghdad," Pietropaoli added. "Most of you would admit that a lot of the communications efforts have been broken for a long time in a lot of places. I just hope the cure isn't worse than the ailment in this case.

"In thinking about communicating in a complex environment, first of all, these conferences are probably more important than they have been at any time in the last 20 years," he said. "There really are some very fundamental issues about the relationship between the government and the public, mediated by the press, and how we're going to deal with that.

"In my view, everything General Lessel said they accomplished in Baghdad is fully within the mission as currently defined at public affairs," he said. "I don't have any problem with fixing public affairs, but I've got a real question about why you need to throw the IO/PSYOPS part in there in order to fix it. Public affairs operations have been under-resourced for years, and if we could have the kind of resources that frequently go to the operations side of the house for feedback and polling, we could do a better job. But the critical element of it is, who reports to whom?

"I'm here to argue that I agree with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and Congressman Skelton, and John Carman in his presentation, and others who have said we ought to keep these functions separate, because it's easier to prevent confusion," he said. "We can do all that coordination – it has been done in the past. It's not reinventing the wheel. We've coordinated IO and PA ops without combining the functions in the Joint Chiefs and interagency and elsewhere for years."

[In a February 2005 letter to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers, Congressman Ike Skelton, ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, spoke out against incorporating information operations into public affairs, as apparently was being done under General Casey's command in Iraq. He referred to a memorandum from General Myers' that "rightly stresses that while both PA and IO play an important role in supporting a commander's needs, they differ in role and intended audiences and should remain separate and distinct entities."]

"...There really are some very fundamental issues about the relationship between the government and the public, mediated by the press, and how we're going to deal with that."

Pietropaoli said, "What's important is that we're wondering whether that young Marine was out there to purposefully mislead Jamie [McIntyre] and millions of people across the country to affect a half-dozen insurgents who might be getting the CNN feed inside Fallujah – the end doesn't justify the means on some of these things.

"According to the Gallup poll, 77 percent of the American people think the military routinely lies to the media from time to time," he said. "That's appalling. And I'm not surprised that half of them think that's okay.

"I'm not surprised that 77 percent think we lie to the media," Pietropaoli repeated. "For every military officer here, that's got to be of concern to you. But sooner or later, Americans are going to figure out that when the military lies to the press, they're lying to the American people.

"Maintaining the trust and confidence of the American public is job number one for us," he said. "Do we in communications have a role to support public diplomacy? Yes. Commanders have a real stake in what communication services do. But our external com-

munication effort needs to be focused primarily on maintaining the trust and confidence, and therefore the support of the American people. Anything that detracts from that needs to be weighed against the ultimate price we'll pay in lives if we don't have that support, because we won't get the money we need, we won't get the people we need to do the job.

"The one thing in the QDR precepts John Carman talked about that contributes to this confusion is the presumption that American military commanders are seen as spokesmen for U.S. government policy, and, therefore, we need to make them better spokesmen," he said. "I think we need to figure out how to undo that perception, because policy is not our lane in the military. Do we get involved in the policymaking process? Yes. But we've always tried very hard, particularly in time of war, to talk about operations and what's going on.

"We are the instruments of policy, not the explainers or defenders of policy," Pietropaoli said. "Once you accept that we are the explicators of policy and defenders of policy, it's 'Katie bar the door,' because then we have to be responsible for convincing all these other audiences. Then we're not as worried about what mom and pop back home think. We're worried about explaining this to audiences that aren't our primary target audiences."

Carman responded: "There is a de facto appearance that senior military commanders speak for the United States Government. And as a part of speaking about tactical actions and operations under their responsibility, there is the need to be in harmony with U.S. policy. That's the only point I was trying to make."

Lessel said: "I just wanted to state that there are still a lot of misperceptions when you use the terminology of combining IO and public affairs. The way strategic communications was done in Iraq and is still being done did not deal with what some would consider the nefarious aspects of IO – the misinformation/disinformation. A

lot of what goes on in information operations is truth-based, and that is what was brought into the strategic communications organization. If misperception, disinformation, military deception, was being done, it was still being done within strategic operations and not in communications."

* * *

The lively session concluded with a retired military public affairs officer exhorting his colleagues to stick to the facts. "Though I agree with everything Erv Lessel said about the ability to keep this stuff separate, and certainly it can create synergies and whatnot, it is still a dangerous way to go," he said.

"Look at what just happened, a lesser but significant example, with the 3rd Infantry Division putting out press releases with anonymous quotes in them," he said. "We've been putting out press releases for hundreds of years in this country, and I don't know of any time that the DOD has ever put out a press release with anonymous sources in it. Larry DiRita [acting assistant secretary of defense for public affairs] came right out, and slammed that door, and said, 'Don't do that again.' But these are things you wouldn't even think you had to tell a PA.

"The fact that we're having all these discussions is because we've already pulled some of the bricks out from the foundation of the credibility of the U.S. military that we have with the American people," he said.

He concluded, "That's where I started in the PA business. Twenty years ago, every reporter I talked to assumed I was lying because my lips were moving. It took me a long time, personally and as a service, to get past that. If the people don't trust you, and the troops don't trust you, then it's 'off to the races.'"

Conclusion

When participants met at the McCormick Tribune Foundation military-media conference in 2003, President Bush had already declared "Mission accomplished" in Iraq – three months after the U.S. invasion began. By the time of the 2005 conference, however, it had become apparent that fighting was far from over. Both the military and the media were caught up in the hard slog of a protracted struggle, and the differences between the two groups seemed sharpened by the strains of war.

Though the military's desire for good news stories and the media's argument that they needed more access were still flash points, two issues emerged as central to their current relationship.

One issue was the encroachment of IO and PSYOPS into mainstream public affairs. While Gen. Lessel made a strong argument for bringing the three together, Adm. Pietropaoli gave a ringing rebuttal.

Second was the issue of civilian leadership. As the war goes on, more and more Americans have begun to question why we are in Iraq and when our troops will be able to come home. The civilian leadership continues to repeat that we are there to "stay the course," and the military is left with no option other than to carry out that charge. Although some members of the military may disagree with government policy, the officers at the conference made clear that their job is to carry out policy, not to challenge it. When the media,

frustrated with lack of answers from the civilian leadership, asks the military for information, they are likely to hear only boilerplate. Both groups appear to understand the dilemma, but neither has a solution for it.

As Don Cooke, the foundation's senior vice president for philanthropy, said at the close of the conference: "There is tremendous goodwill in this room, but the relationship seems strained. The advances discussed in 2003 seem vulnerable, and the near euphoria around embedding already runs the risk of becoming a blip in our past. At the same time we're struggling with issues of access, of what constitutes good contextual coverage, it turns out that the American public really cares – you saw this in the Gallup poll – perhaps even more than we suspected. This relationship happens to have a huge audience, of course: the American public and beyond.

"Above all," he concluded, "the general agreement here is that it's the public who's the client. Both military and media are here to serve them, albeit in very different ways."

Conference Participants

Jane Arraf
Senior Baghdad Correspondent CNN

John Barry
National Security Correspondent
Newsweek

Austin Bay
Author, Columnist
Creators Syndicate

Ralph Begleiter
Distinguished Journalist in Residence
University of Delaware

Tom Bowman
Washington Bureau Correspondent
The Baltimore Sun

BG Vincent K. Brooks, USA
Chief of Public Affairs
Department of the Army

Robert Burns
Military Writer
Associated Press

Tony Capaccio
Pentagon Correspondent
Bloomberg News

John Carman
Deputy Director for Strategic Communication
U.S. Joint Forces Command

Rebecca Christie
Washington Defense Reporter
Dow Jones Newswires

Sally Donnelly
Washington Bureau Correspondent
Time Magazine

LTC David Farlow, USA
Deputy Director of Public Affairs
U.S. Central Command

Bradley Graham
Pentagon Correspondent
Washington Post

BG Carter Ham, USA
Deputy Director, Regional Operations (J3)
National Military Command Center (Joint Chiefs of Staff)

RADM Harry Harris, USN
Director, Information, Plans and Security Division, Navy Staff
U.S. Navy

Brian Hartman
Pentagon Producer
ABC News

Robert Hodierne
Senior Managing Editor
Army Times Publishing Company

Greg Jaffe
Pentagon Correspondent
Wall Street Journal

James Janega
Staff Reporter
Chicago Tribune

RADM Nathan Jones, USN
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BG John F. Kelly, USMC
Legislative Assistant to the Commandant
U.S. Marine Corps

BG Mark Kimmitt, USA
Deputy Director, Plans and Policy
U.S. Central Command

Durrell M. "Otto" Kreisher
National Security Reporter
Copley News Service

BG Erwin F. Lessell III, USAF
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Air Force Materiel Command

Mark Mazzetti
Pentagon & Military Affairs Correspondent
Los Angeles Times

Jamie McIntyre
Senior Pentagon Correspondent
CNN

Timothy J. McNulty
Associate Managing Editor/Foreign
Chicago Tribune

LTG Thomas F. Metz
Commanding General
III Corps and Fort Hood

Dave Moniz
Military Reporter
USA Today

David W. Moore
Senior Editor
The Gallup Organization

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Col. Hector E. Pagan, USA
Special Assistant to the Commanding General
U.S. Special Operations Command

RADM Stephen Pietropaoli
Executive Director
Navy League Foundation

BG Douglas Raaberg, USAF
Deputy Director of Operations
U.S. Central Command

BG Frederick F. Roggero, USAF
Director of Air Force Public Affairs
Acting Director of Air Force Communications

BG Eric Rosborg, USAF
Special Assistant to the Vice Chief of Staff for Warfighting Headquarters Implementation
U.S. Air Force

Geoffrey R. Stone
Harry Kalven, Jr. Distinguished Service Professor of Law
University of Chicago

Mary Walsh
Producer, CBS News

Bryan G. Whitman
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs (Media Operations)

BG Richard C. Zilmer, USMC
Commanding General
Marine Air Ground Task Force Training Command

VADM James Zortman
Commander, Naval Air Forces
Naval Air Force Pacific

NOTES

McCormick Tribune Foundation Military-Media Reports

The Military-Media Relationship 2005: How the armed forces, journalists and the public view coverage of military conflict (2005)

Narrowing the Gap: Military, Media and the Iraq War (2004)

The Military, the Media and the Administration: An Irregular Triangle (2002)

Terrorism: Informing the Public (2002)

The Military and the Media: Facing the Future (1998)

Reporting the War When There is No War (1996)

The Military and the Media: The Continuing Dialogue (1993)

Reporting the Next War (1992)

The Military-Media Relationship 2005

Since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the climate under which the military and the media operate has intensified. This change is reflected in both the public perception of the military and the media, and in both groups' perceptions of each other.

An elite group of experts met at a McCormick Tribune Foundation Conference in August of 2005 to address important issues in the continuing improvement of military-media relations, such as:

- The practice of embedding reporters: an evaluation of its success, a comparison to unilateral reporting and the obstacles that must be overcome to maximize accurate reporting of military and national defense issues;
- A Gallup poll comparing public perceptions and the changes that have occurred in the military-media relationship since a similar poll was conducted in 1999;
- The role of the media in covering military and national defense issues, specifically the nature of coverage and the tone – supportive versus skeptical;
- The development of strategic communications in transmitting and shaping the news, and the appropriate and strategic implementation of new technologies that influence the military-media relationship.

McCormick Tribune Foundation