McCormick Tribune
Conference Series

Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords

Advances in communication technology since the Iraq War began have radically changed how the media and military gather and disseminate information. Communications equipment has continued to advance and proliferate. More important, that technology is now available to a wider range of operators, including reporters, soldiers and terrorists. The availability of the technology has affected print and broadcast media, as well as the public affairs and operations functions of the military.

A group of media and military experts met at a McCormick Tribune Foundation conference in September of 2006 to explore the impact of the new technology. Issues discussed included:

- Communicating with U.S. audiences in an era of 24-hour-a-day news
- The changing role of the mainstream media as blogs and citizen journalism proliferate
- How the new media is influencing the way foreign audiences view the United States
- How enemy and other hostile forces use technology to disseminate and distort “news”
- The unintended consequences of instant information in time of conflict
- How the media and military can work together to serve the public

McCormick Tribune Conference Series

Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords: The Military, the Media and Communication Technologies

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The Military, the Media and Communication Technologies
September 27-28, 2006

Sponsored by:

McCormick Tribune
Foundation

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For more than 15 years, the McCormick Tribune Conference Series has fostered collaboration between the Foundation and other organizations to address issues consistent with the Foundation's mission. The mission of the McCormick Tribune Foundation is to advance the ideals of a free, democratic society by investing in our children, communities and country.

The McCormick Tribune Conference Series aims to:

- **Create impact on policy or academic investigation by facilitating balanced and challenging discussions of issues crucial to communities and nation.**
- **Bring together people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to reach new levels of understanding and develop long-term solutions.**

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McCormick Tribune Conference Series Call for 2008 Conference Proposals

The McCormick Tribune Foundation constantly seeks to build on the quality and tradition of our Conference Series by addressing a range of timely and challenging issues.

Academic institutions, policy experts, and public, nonprofit and private sector professionals from all fields are welcome to submit proposals for our next conference season.

For detailed submission guidelines and application instructions and to print a hard copy of this report, please visit our website at www.McCormickTribune.org

Proposals must be received no later than July 2, 2007, to be considered for conference support.

We look forward to your ideas!

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Sponsored by McCormick Tribune Foundation

Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords

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Table of Contents

Foreword

The military and the media historically share a complicated relationship. At times they have seemed to work at cross purposes: the military with its obligation to fiercely protect sensitive information, and the media with its desire for open and immediate access.

Nonetheless, they are joined in a crucial alliance to communicate with the American public. The rules of engagement in this sometimes uneasy alliance have become even more challenging in a global information environment impacted by camera phones, e-mail, blogs, the endless 24-hour news cycle and fierce media competition.

I feel very strongly about the role of communication in times of conflict. During a 30-year Army career, I came to appreciate the value of building relationships with journalists. The best of these relationships are based on trust, candor, respect and mutual understanding of the pressures each side faces.

That doesn't mean the friction and uneasiness will disappear. But in the end, both the military and the media serve the same customer—American citizens—and are guided by the same document—the U.S. Constitution.

My view is that if you are doing things the right way, believe in your mission, your organization and the ability of your soldiers to accomplish their objectives, you should welcome the opportunity to convey that to the press. I have always tried to help reporters do their jobs, as long as the information was not classified, would not jeopardize the success of the mission or place soldiers and civilians at risk.

As the president and CEO of the McCormick Tribune Foundation, I now have the honor to be a part of preserving and perpetuating Col. Robert R. McCormick's dedication to the military and the media. Our founder lived in both worlds, serving in the U.S. Army's First Infantry Division during World War I and as a member of the National Guard, and as publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* until his death in 1955.

The McCormick Tribune Foundation was pleased to host the Ninth Military-Media Conference in September 2006. Since 1992, these conferences have brought together key members of the media and senior military officers to foster an open dialogue about the issues surrounding a relationship vital to a free democratic society.

The conference is usually held bi-annually, but we felt that this year's topic—the effects of technology on military and media communications—was important enough to warrant a timely gathering of the top minds in the military and the media. Advances in communication technology have made it easier and faster to send information across the globe—and have increased the importance of keeping this information secure from those who would misuse or intercept it for their own purposes.

While the media grapples with the impact of new technology in reporting information, the military now realizes that information is pivotal in defining power, shaping opinion and winning wars.

The 2006 conference attracted a diverse group of journalists with varying levels of experience, from high profile newspaper reporters who have embraced the online revolution to younger, independent journalists who are cutting their teeth in the technological age.

The conference also featured military professionals in public affairs or operational roles, along with civilian consultants who help them get their message out. We learned about their special challenges in coping with technology, and also received interesting perspectives on tools such as the Pentagon Channel, which was developed for internal military communication but is available to the public through cable and satellite outlets across the nation as well.

Like earlier Military-Media conferences, post-panel discussion was on the record, but not for attribution. You will notice that participants in these discussions are not cited by name, as we have found that this policy encourages a more candid exchange. Remarks by panelists are on the record and fully attributed.

Special thanks go to Harry Disch, president of the Center for Media and Security Ltd., who has expertly organized every Military-Media Conference since 1997. Harry and his colleague Helen Chayefsky work year round to build public understanding of national security policy issues with the center's Defense Writers Group and off-the-record dinner discussions for broadcast journalists. We also extend appreciation to Ralph Begleiter of the University of Delaware, who again did an exceptional job moderating the panels. And thanks to John McWethy, formerly of ABC News, who teamed with Begleiter to present a stimulating scenario exercise on the last day of the conference.

We also thank Roy Gutman, Craig LaMay, David Nelson and Jon Ziomek—faculty at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism—for serving as rapporteurs and facilitators during the breakout sessions; and Ellen Hunt, who served as a breakout rapporteur and wrote the report.

Finally, we would like to salute all of our participants for their invaluable contributions to the discussion. The willingness to share their insights is the key factor in the success of these conferences.

Our intent is that the ideas and concerns addressed at the conference will lead to increased understanding of the effects of the new communication technology on how the military and the media communicate and serve the American public.

We encourage you to share with us your questions or comments on this conference report.

Sincerely,

David L. Grange
President & CEO
McCormick Tribune Foundation

Introduction

A shared belief that military officials should respond more quickly to media inquiries and that media must ensure that they report accurate, unbiased information to the public were two of the issues uniting participants at the McCormick Tribune Foundation's ninth military-media conference. But media and military participants did not always agree on how these objectives should be accomplished, as they discussed the advances in communication technology and the problems and controversies resulting from those advances.

At the same time that 24-hour cable news networks and the Internet have created a demand for constant information, media organizations are dealing with budget cuts and staff reductions, further intensifying the pressure to produce. Reporters feel compelled to generate news "product" in a shorter time and to get it aired quickly.

The 24-hour news cycle has also taxed the information resources of the military. It is inundated with requests from a burgeoning number of news outlets from blogs to CNN. Yet military public information staffing has not been increased because of budget cuts. This combination of increasing demand for information and reduced staff for both the military and the media has ramifications for accuracy and context in covering news on defense and security issues, in particular the news from conflict areas.

The military now employs communication technology such as the digital video and imagery distribution system (DVIDS) that allows direct feeds from the battlefield. And many reporters now have equipment enabling them to be on the air live virtually anywhere at any time. The same technology revolution, however, also made it possible for a Reuters photographer to digitally alter a photograph from the conflict in Lebanon in the summer of 2006. And the digital manipulation was matched by the political manipulation of planting first-person stories by "Iraqis" in Iraqi media that had actually been written by soldier-journalists at Fort Bragg, N.C.

"Has this made the public better informed or more than ever victims of manipulation, not just by governments—though of course by governments—but by information publishers of various ilks and motives?" asked moderator Ralph Begleiter, distinguished journalist in residence at the University of Delaware, in his opening remarks.

Introduction

"The 2006 conference is an outgrowth of something that happened spontaneously at a similar program just a little over a year ago, right here in this room," he said. "A group just like this had been touching on important changes in the way the media and the military work with one another, and we realized that although our two institutions always have worked together and always have been in some ways cooperative in disseminating and controlling information about conflict situations, developments in information technology seem to have made control over information a thing of the past. We decided to follow up that thread with this conference.

"Each of our institutions—the military and the media—serves important, perhaps indispensable, roles," Begleiter said. "All of us know we both exist for just one purpose, and that's to serve the American people. And we know we have an adversarial relationship. I'm sure that'll be well reaffirmed this week. But that's no reason to avoid understanding the changes being forced on all of us by technology."

Chapter 1: Military and Media Communication with U.S. Audiences

In the few years since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, communications equipment, used by an increasing range of operators, has continued to advance and proliferate. For instance, the military's digital video imagery and distribution system (DVIDS) has more than 50 satellite teams operating in Iraq, Afghanistan and areas nearby, an increase of more than 800 percent over the original six units in use when it was launched in 2004. The DVIDS' satellite transmitters have been used to broadcast live interviews with soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen in the field, and have also been employed by journalists in Iraq and other conflict areas to file stories.

The availability of technology has affected print and broadcast media, as well as the public affairs and operations departments of the military. It has even changed the who, what, when, where and how of newsgathering and dissemination.

When everyone is a reporter

Reduction in size, price and difficulty of using technology enables all media to produce more real-time shots and stories. Even veteran print reporters now carry cameras. Meanwhile, CNN reporters in the Middle East are equipped with a camera-broadcasting combination—including a computer, camera, and broadband terminal—that weighs a few pounds and fits into a case about the size of a laptop computer. It enables reporters to transmit live on television after only a 10-minute setup. In summer 2006, CNN reporter Aneesh Raman did just that to capture the reaction of the populace to Iran's refusal to halt its nuclear program.

"Iran's response was 'No,' but on the street you could tell that Iranians really didn't care that much. They were going about their business as usual. So visually it showed that disconnect between the people and the government," Raman recalled.

"Now all of this could have been shot and sent in later, but at CNN, there's a seduction to live," he added. "And so the live imagery that we can do with just three components provides immeasurable opportunities for us in the field."

While instant news can show a reality that contrasts to enemy propaganda, it has a downside, too. Previously, the hours it took arranging a satellite feed to send video back to the United States allowed time for editorial discussion in the newsroom. Today, the speed and ease of transmission, coupled with the competitive pressures of a 24-hour news cycle, can have an

adverse effect on editorial judgment about what a news organization should show and how it should show it, Raman cautioned.

For instance, when CNN reporter Brent Sadler became the first reporter to enter Tikrit in April 2003, he was carrying a videophone. When his vehicle was fired upon and the private security guards protecting him fired back, he broadcast live. "Now if you're a viewer at home—and this was broadcast simultaneously in the U.S. and around the world—you might now think that Tikrit is this battleground waiting to happen, that there are these huge amounts of forces perhaps waiting for the U.S. to get there, and Brent had gotten there first," Raman said. "Or it could have been just one guy who fired on Brent's vehicle. It was tough at that moment to give the broader picture." The incident prompted discussion in the CNN newsroom about having a "hold-back moment" for these kinds of images. Sadler, by the way, escaped unscathed from the attack.

"The fact that we can go live anywhere at any time—does that necessarily mean we should?"

"The fact that we can go live anywhere at any time—does that necessarily mean we should?" asked Raman, citing the detrimental effects on verification and context for stories.

Current technology will continue to get smaller, better and more accessible. In the future, camera phones will be used for live broadcasts from around the world. "And when that happens, the average citizen will have the same equipment that we reporters have, and the line will start to blur between reporter and eyewitness," Raman said.

Recently, CNN launched a program called "I Report," which transforms viewers into "citizen journalists," something that has caused concern inside CNN. "How much should we give away of our real estate in this world to people who are simply closest to a news event or have the best video?" Raman asked. Shows like "I Report" could change the value of reporters to television news. "Who takes precedence, the guy who's closest to the scene or the reporter who isn't as close to what's happening but has better sourcing and perhaps better context?" he asked.

"The ease of the technology allows terrorists, who are the closest to their own attacks, to send video—or what they represent as video—from an attack," Raman said. "But television news stations have already been duped by terrorists who have used old video and repackaged it to represent a current event." He wondered if anyone can authenticate video shot by terrorists in particular or the enemy in general.

In the not-too-distant future, as the technology continues to improve, television and the computer may merge, creating a 24-hour news portal, Raman suggested. In that world, he said, viewers could log on to a site and become their own reporters, culling information from a variety of sources—from Google News to the *Washington Post* and CNN, for example. But they might also log onto a Web site run by Al Qaeda.

To counterbalance this, mainstream news must reaffirm basic journalistic principles and try even harder to live up to them. "We as news organizations will have to fight to be even more unbiased, more balanced, to maintain relevancy," Raman warned. He fears that without the point of view provided by mainstream media lending balance to discussions of major issues, viewers will believe anything that supports what they want to hear, whether it comes from Al Jazeera or the Pentagon Channel.

Debate on the Pentagon Channel

What are the ramifications of a news and information program run by the United States Department of Defense that can be broadcast via cable or satellite to living rooms across the United States?

The Pentagon Channel was launched in 2004 as part of a Defense Department effort to develop better internal communications, according to Allison Barber, deputy assistant secretary of defense for internal communications and public liaison.

While many major private sector corporations—like Home Depot, Federal Express, Saturn and others—have sophisticated communications efforts aimed at employees, the Department of Defense had none. "Companies like this spend two-thirds of their communication budget on internal audiences. At the Department of Defense, we spent zero," Barber said. Although the Pentagon could reach the troops in 177 foreign countries by broadcasting through American Forces Radio and Television Services (AFRTS), no broadcast vehicle existed to reach the troops in the United States.

"Many of you were or are in the military. You remember when AFRTS was one channel, right? Now you get nine channels," Barber said. "We still print *Stars and Stripes*, we still use the Web site, but we didn't really have an interactive real-time way to communicate the Pentagon's news and information." Acting on a request by then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to improve communications to stateside military personnel, Barber hired outside consultants for a six-month study to identify the needs for Defense

Department communication to the military, while she studied the communications programs of major corporations. Her solution was to develop a channel to provide Defense Department information that would be broadcast domestically and overseas.

Barber said the channel has allowed the department to broadcast news that is important to active and reserve military personnel but of little interest to the broader world. The Pentagon Channel newscasts, anchored by uniformed military personnel, are available free of charge on Webcast and podcast and via many cable and satellite providers. With a current annual budget of $7 million, the Pentagon Channel now reaches 12 million households across the United States. The podcasts were initiated to reach military members 35 and under. "We launched that four months ago. The first month we had about 20,000 downloads—last month we had 181,000," said Barber.

Journalists at the conference raised concerns that the Pentagon Channel could cross a line into propaganda.

Journalists at the conference raised concerns that the Pentagon Channel could cross a line into propaganda. The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948, which authorized U.S. information programs overseas, including the Voice of America, bars the U.S. government from propagandizing the American public with information and psychological operations intended for foreign audiences.

Barber said that the Defense Department recognizes it can't propagandize the American people, and asserted that there are safeguards to prevent this. "We don't do propaganda," she said. "When you stay true to your mission and you stay focused on your audience, it drives your content. And that's how we get to do some pieces that are good for the morale of our military." However, Barber pointed out, the Department of Defense also has a Web site that anyone can access. To fully comply with the Smith-Mundt Act, "You'd have to put that same discipline on the Web site. And you can't control that—anybody can go to our Web site," she said.

She said that the Pentagon Channel relies on experienced military and civil servants who have good judgment of what news and information from the Department of Defense is appropriate for the military audience. Programs are prepared in a similar manner to corporate internal communications programs and do not use multiple sources as journalists would, she explained. When asked by moderator Begleiter about whether the Pentagon released the names of casualties during its news reports on Iraq, she said

that casualty reports were not necessarily in the news segment on a battle, but that the Pentagon announces the names of casualties at least twice a day during news updates.

When a reporter asked Barber if she was concerned about reaching a non-military audience, she pointed out that her specific audience is men and women in the military and not the general public. She added that the Pentagon Channel is not the only source of information for the military, most of whom also watch mainstream cable and network news.

The issue of whether the Pentagon Channel can become an outlet for propaganda was not a major concern to military participants. In general, military participants defended the Pentagon Channel as a legitimate internal communications vehicle. "This is a channel designed to provide information to the armed forces like a company would do on the Internet," said one military officer. As for its power to set an information agenda, military officials dismissed that, describing the channel as "fairly boring" and "cheerleading."

In general, military participants defended the Pentagon Channel as a legitimate internal communications vehicle.

One admiral expressed confidence that the rank and file view the Pentagon Channel as just one information outlet. "They take it with a grain of salt." For that matter, he added, "Young people don't fully trust any of the news."

"Are you saying it's okay for the government to propagandize?" asked a reporter.

"No, but it's okay for the government to offer its communication plan," a military official replied.

Responding to journalists' accusations that a government outlet like the Pentagon Channel edits the news, the military countered that the regular media routinely edit to follow a point of view. According to one military official, the government has created "this avenue of information flow," consisting of the Pentagon Channel and other military-backed information outlets. "At some point this could be subverted," he acknowledged. "Right now, the No.1 trusted people on public opinion surveys are military officers. We have a responsibility to maintain that trust."

"Right now, the No.1 trusted people on public opinion surveys are military officers. We have a responsibility to maintain that trust."

A reporter said, "I know we're not there yet, but you talk about reaching the Guard and Reserve, which could be a rationale for getting this into every home in America on every cable system." He expressed concern that cable operators, who depend on favorable government regulation, would feel compelled to carry the Pentagon Channel.

Reporters' reservations were best expressed by a representative of a wire service. "It's a good thing to communicate with your people," he said. "But there is a slippery slope there if you're making a lot of decisions and it suddenly starts leaning toward propaganda. And then suddenly somebody in the administration says, 'Well, why isn't there a White House channel? Why does only the Pentagon have a channel?' Well, before you know it, the United States starts looking like all these tin pot dictator countries out there in the world that have their official channels, and the United States has lost something very, very significant in terms of being a model of democracy around the world."

Effects of changes in technology on print journalism

Although print journalists are later arrivals to the era of transmitting news around the clock from around the world, many are now embracing the new technology to survive, and it has affected the way they do their jobs. Previously, the longer turnaround time in print newsrooms encouraged more fact checking and more editors asking tough questions.

"Like most other American newspapers, we have had a business process in which we spend all day gathering facts, the afternoon writing, the evening editing and the overnight hours printing," said *Washington Post* reporter Rajiv Chandrasekaran. Today, all that has changed. "All of us journalists are moving to an instantaneous world where the demands for information are, quite frankly, immediate," he said. Chandrasekaran is author of the recently published *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, an account of Baghdad under the American-led Coalition Provisional Authority from May 2003 to June 2004. He served as Baghdad bureau chief for the *Post* from 2003 to 2004.

Chandrasekaran is now assistant managing editor at the *Post*, and heads up the paper's continuous news desk, which is intended to "transform an old-line newspaper into a 24/7 Web-friendly organization." Reporters who were formerly print-only often carry handheld video cameras that can be used for still photos as well as video good enough to be shown on the paper's Web site.

Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords

As every part of the American news media becomes a 24-hour news environment, public affairs staff and others in the military must deal with increasing demands for breaking news. "You can't just triage anymore and say, 'Look, we're going to deal with CNN and Fox right now, because they're going live, and we can handle the newspapers later on in the day.' It's no longer that way," Chandrasekaran said. Although the production values may be minimal, print journalism is now as capable as television of doing "real-time" breaking news on their Web sites.

"One of our *Washington Post* foreign correspondents was with a convoy of water trucks heading up from Kuwait to Baghdad when they came under an ambush," Chandrasekaran recalled. "Instead of cowering in the front seat, as I might have done, he just held up his video camera and shot five minutes of ripping video. That was up on our Web site later that day." The paper's Web site in a sense competes with the print edition. The Web site may sometimes break a story that previously would not have appeared until the morning newspaper was printed.

Because of the variety of methods available to the military to get its story out, from the Pentagon Channel to soldier e-mails to sympathetic independent bloggers, the military may well underestimate the benefits of the mainstream media. Echoing CNN's Raman, Chandrasekaran said he fears that the military may increasingly bypass mainstream media in favor of methods such as blogs or DVIDS that the military feels get the unfiltered story directly to the public. He warned that the military would be making a mistake if they use these methods to the exclusion of the mainstream media.

"Let the bloggers come and embed if commanders feel happy with that. Let the military go out and be very savvy with disseminating Webcasts and podcasts and information over satellite television and cable television," he said. "But you should also remember that the mainstream media still has advantages in this very diffuse and rapidly changing media environment. Among them is reach. We still get more eyeballs per day than those bloggers who might come to embed with a unit for 30 or 60 days," he said. "When you look at the largest television and newspaper Web sites, when you look at the continuing circulation of print newspapers, when you look at the viewership of the largest cable television news programs and broadcast TV news programs, there's still no comparison in terms of reach."

"…the mainstream media…still get more eyeballs per day than those bloggers who might embed with a unit for 30 or 60 days."

The mainstream media can also add depth and breadth to the coverage that bloggers and others cannot, he said. "We can't forget the ability of the mainstream media to go to places like Iraq, to set up bureaus there, to operate in not just a dangerous environment, but a very costly environment. Those things are just beyond the reach of a lot of others," he said. He added that the mainstream media can bring information from the field back to the United States, where colleagues, such as Pentagon reporters, can analyze it and see where the parts fit into the whole.

Complicating the media's job of delivering accurate and unbiased news from Iraq, however, is its reliance on local journalists and stringers to report on the conflict. All Western news organizations have faced this problem in Iraq. An international journalist asked Chandrasekaran, "Because it is almost impossible to find a neutral Iraqi in this conflict, how do you verify the material—video or scripts or still pictures—for information that is neutral and objective?"

"I like to joke that while I was the Baghdad bureau chief for the *Washington Post*, from April '03 to October '04, I wasn't just running a bureau and writing stories for the *Post*, I was also running a journalism school," Chandrasekaran replied. He explained that when he was in Iraq, he recruited "very smart, very brave Iraqis" committed to the concept of a free press in their country. "I regard them as some of the bravest people who work for my newspaper," he added. "These are people who put their lives on the line every day, who are repeatedly threatened, whose families are threatened."

Chandrasekaran said he tried to teach them the fundamentals of U.S. journalism, including multiple sourcing and putting aside personal biases in their reporting. He said the *Post* tries to use a system of checks and balances, including taping interviews when possible and comparing reports from the stringers in the field with those from wire services. The *Post* also gives the U.S. military and the Iraqis a chance to respond to allegations reported by stringers across the country. He admitted that the system is imperfect, and that sometimes stringers may embellish or only talk to sources who represent certain constituencies.

A reporter commented that a mistake by a stringer—even an innocent one—could show up in several outlets because some stringers in Iraq work for more than one organization. Like Chandrasekaran, he tries to verify all facts by checking with the source. "But I think we're making the best of a

very difficult situation. We're going into it with our eyes open, realizing that there are flaws to this and trying through all the means that we have to ensure that ultimately we are conveying things in the most accurate and unbiased manner possible."

A reporter who had spent time in Iraq said that he had faced similar problems, especially with man-on-the-street information, often obtained through stringers, and had decided to stop using such information. He said that most unreliable stringers were biased—one of his stringers even liked to watch jihadi videos.

"You know, we can have a very spirited day-long discussion here about just how balanced mainstream media news sources are in covering the war on terror," Chandrasekaran concluded. "But as a representative of the mainstream media, I posit that we still are, on average, day in-day out, fairly balanced folks who try to tell all sides of the story and try to be fair."

Instant communication and the military mission

Not surprisingly, the military would prefer positive coverage of the Iraq conflict, and has attempted to do that through strategic communications balanced against operational objectives. Like the other military branches, the Air Force is placing greater emphasis on strategic communications.

The Air Force, however, is in a unique position since the conflict in Iraq is largely a ground war, which means its good news is no news. While the Air Force plays a vital role in weapons delivery and satellite communications, when its job is done correctly with no collateral damage, the work is virtually invisible. "I had lots of stories to tell, but, quite honestly, I had to scratch and pull for reporters to come," said Brig. Gen. Frank Gorenc, director of operational plans and joint matters for the Air Force.

He added that efforts to accommodate the media's needs in Iraq must be balanced against operational issues. "Most of us in uniform want the information to get out, particularly when we're talking about stories about our fabulous airmen, soldiers and Marines. But we have to be good stewards of the mission and make sure the mission isn't compromised," said Gorenc, who recently returned from a year-long tour in Iraq.

"I'm worried about the unintended consequences to the mission the same way that you're worried about unintended consequences to the credibility of the information," he said. "If everybody's reporting on the same story and

the reports are all different, which one is the truth? It's like having two clocks on the wall with different times. Which one's correct?"

"If everybody's reporting on the same story and the reports are all different, which one is the truth? It's like having two clocks on the wall with different times."

Panelist Raman responded that the mainstream media seeks "to be the clock on the wall that has the right time." He added, "I think that we in the mainstream media will deal with the knock-off effect of the unintended consequences. It is to everyone's advantage for the mainstream media to be seen as unbiased and to be unbiased, so there is one place people can go to get what they perceive as 'straight-down-the-middle truth.' "

"In the end, we're all here to serve the American people, and we all walk the tightrope," said Gorenc.

Chapter 2: Military and Media Communication with Foreign Audiences

With the public launch of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s, simple text could be e-mailed instantly around the office or around the world. Developments led quickly to downloading of graphics, sound and video images. Today, automated information feeds—called RSS for real simple syndication—can instantly dispatch news items to Web browsers, e-mail systems and personal digital assistants (PDAs).

This process allows for communications to be targeted directly to the e-mail inbox at the click of a mouse. At the same time, it enables news to be sent scattershot around the world. The Internet has erased borders not only between countries but between continents. Instantaneous communication from one part of the world to the other in some ways makes the idea of "targeted communication" obsolete.

"Globalization has ushered into the ash heap of history the idea of being able to tailor information flows for audiences separated merely by geography and time zones," said conference moderator Ralph Begleiter. "Everyone pretty much has access to everything, if they wish it."

"Globalization has ushered into the ash heap of history the idea of being able to tailor information flows for audiences separated merely by geography and time zones."

The global access to information complicates communication efforts by the Defense Department and the military "Audiences abroad frequently, if not always, contain people the military would refer to as hostiles," said Begleiter. "This includes governments and people whose aims are not necessarily the same as those of U.S. forces and officials, people the United States call terrorists, insurgents or just plain enemies."

Politics no longer simply local

"If we can turn upside down [the late Massachusetts Congressman] Tip O'Neill's famous saying that all politics are local, now everything is global," said Mohammed Alami, Washington correspondent for Al Jazeera, a global media organization based in Qatar. The immediacy of news transfer means that remarks, especially those that might be considered inflammatory, travel as fast as an e-mail from Tennessee to Iraq.

Alami, formerly a reporter for Voice of America, warned that every time someone in the United States says anything that appears disrespectful of Islam or of people in the Middle East, the remarks instantly become fodder for terrorists in their campaign to position the conflict as a war against Islam.

"My main concern in this world we live in is that information gets used and abused by the good guys and the bad guys," he said. Alami cited Pentagon estimates of 5,000 jihadist Web sites using "anything and everything they can put their hands on to portray this as a war between Islam and the United States." He said that the terrorists are using the new media to rapidly spread that message. "Everything gets carried almost instantly, with or without translation," Alami said. "If we journalists don't have really honest, respectful conversations [about Muslims and Islam]—I think we are going to have to pay the price eventually. There are plenty of platforms to carry the message and to change minds with the truth. You don't have to spin the bad news, just tell people the way you see things and be respectful of the other audiences."

Although allowing access to reporters may result in stories with which the military is uncomfortable, he said that disclosure still is the best practice, because it shows those in countries without press freedom that people in the United States are able to talk to journalists and speak their minds.

Although Al Jazeera has had difficult relations with the U.S. military in the past, Alami attributes this to the fact that "the U.S. government sometimes blames bad news on the messenger." He described an incident that occurred during the war in Afghanistan. "In that week, a not-very-smart bomb hit. Being the only news entity in Afghanistan then, we got very awful footage. And the Secretary of Defense [Donald Rumsfeld] was on ABC News that Sunday, and he went on and on attacking Al Jazeera. Later, I asked him, 'Mr. Secretary, do you think we made up that footage? Do you think it was faked?' And that brings me to the point I'm trying to make. Sometimes when the pictures are bad, the technology helps bring it immediately to living rooms around the globe. People in the administration tend to attack the messenger instead of clarifying the message."

"Sometimes when the pictures are bad… People in the administration tend to attack the messenger instead of clarifying the message."

Moderator Begleiter commented that Al Jazeera often breaks news from sources not available to American news organizations, and asked how Al Jazeera makes decisions on airing such things as videotapes of beheadings or alleged Al Qaeda tapes. Alami began his response by setting the record straight.

"Let me talk about the beheadings first, because Jazeera never showed a beheading, period. I know Mr. Rumsfeld said that, Mr. O'Reilly [Bill O'Reilly of Fox News] repeated it on his show and others kept repeating it. It's just an urban myth. Jazeera never showed a beheading."

Alami added that Al Jazeera operates in a region that has become a combat zone. "Wars are part of the landscape from Lebanon to Iraq to Somalia to Sudan to Palestine. Those extremists are part of the landscape, part of the news, as well." But Alami explained that Al Jazeera does not usually air tapes in their entirety because the organization is leery of allowing the terrorists to spread propaganda. For instance, when Al Jazeera received tapes of *Christian Science Monitor* freelancer Jill Carroll as a hostage, the newsroom decided not to use the audio of the journalist begging for her life. "We thought that was helping the bad guys, so we put the picture silent," he said.

He said Al Jazeera worked closely with the *Monitor*'s Washington bureau chief and Carroll's family to put them on the air as much as they wanted until she was released in spring of 2006.

In terms of the tapes, he added, "At the end of the day, they are just human decisions. You know, somebody in the newsroom has to decide: Is this newsworthy or not?"

He acknowledged that during the war, Al Jazeera—like other media outlets—made errors, but said that the organization tries to maintain balance by getting opinions from the State Department or from a right-leaning think tank. "Our motto, after all, is 'The opinion and the other opinion,' and that's got us in a lot of trouble in the Arab world," he said. "We tend to call it as we see it. This is the first time ever in the Arab world that people are talking about these problems openly."

Most journalists at the conference agreed that Al Jazeera is an important journalistic outlet in the Arab world. A television reporter said the organization is "revolutionizing" coverage in the Gulf region. In fall 2006, Al Jazeera launched an English-language Web site and broadcast network with 20 English-language news bureaus around the world.

Al Jazeera was thrown out of Iraq early in the war, Alami said, but that was more an Iraqi decision that the United States went along with, because the Iraqis thought Al Jazeera was pro-Saddam. Al Jazeera currently has access to Iraq by phone and satellite and Alami has received some help from members of the U.S. military.

Military officials agreed that they need to engage with Al Jazeera just as they would with any other media outlet. Several military participants said they regularly talk to the news organization. In fact, sometimes Al Jazeera is the preferred outlet, because it reaches the regional audience that the military is trying to address. A public affairs officer said that his experience with Al Jazeera has been good and he feels "he's gotten a fair shake" when he's been on Al Jazeera.

Adapting military public affairs in Afghanistan

In addition to engaging with regional media, success in communications in the Middle East and Central Asia will require creativity, understanding of the culture and quick response. Public relations professional Pam Keeton said the military has a lot to learn, after reflecting on her recent deployment to Afghanistan.

Communicating with audiences in developing regions brings a host of challenges that have little to do with technology and a lot to do with understanding the people and their culture, she said. To deliver the message to international audiences that the United States is a friend will require a coordinated effort centrally managed from the top of the government.

Communications consultant Keeton was an Army reservist with only nine days to go until retirement when she was deployed to Afghanistan as director of public affairs for U.S. and coalition forces in fall of 2004. She faced a host of problems. A disconnect between public affairs and operations meant that initially she found out about operations from the news media rather than from her colleagues. "The enemy, however, had a spokesman with a satellite phone, hundreds of informants and what seemed like unfettered access to the news media," she said. "It was amazing how quickly he learned of downed aircraft and could get on the phone and take credit. It was also amazing to me that at times the media, both local and international, simply took his word for it and didn't bother to check with us."

"The enemy, however, had a spokesman with a satellite phone, hundreds of informants and what seemed like unfettered access to the news media."

There were only about 20 reporters in the country, and the international media presence was limited to four main sources: Agence France Presse, AP, BBC and Al Jazeera. Other reporters—such as those from major news-

papers like the *Washington Post* had to be brought up to speed on events as they rotated through Afghanistan.

On top of this, traditional communications tools proved useless, since many Afghans are illiterate, most do not have televisions and only a small percentage have Internet access. Most receive their news by radio or word of mouth. "The Afghans might be riding a mule for their transportation, but they are talking on a cell phone," she said. "And they seem to have the number to the Associated Press or BBC handy." Consequently, Keeton found that quick release of information after an incident was essential to getting out the U.S. side of the story. "Usually within two hours of becoming aware of any incident, we went to the media with whatever information we had and followed up with updates," she recalled. This sometimes caused conflict with her colleagues in special operations and intelligence, who wanted to withhold information until all the facts were in. But she had the support of her superiors, and was made part of the commander's primary staff, giving her access to the top brass when she needed answers.

"The Afghans might be riding a mule for their transportation, but they are talking on a cell phone."

"Nobody could ignore me—and they did try," she said. "When I had the Associated Press or the BBC calling me for information, I was not going to leave anyone's office until I got what I needed. I had access at the highest levels, and I will tell you that after 18 years in Army public affairs, it was the first time I saw that kind of access—it was really refreshing."

Working in an environment without fax machines or e-mail required creativity and ample staff to get the news out to local media. The coalition press information center posted press releases on a blog so that reporters with access to the Internet could access them. Keeton had to hire a driver to hand-carry press releases to other reporters. The driver also picked up the reporters for press conferences, since many of them had no cars. Keeton also used the press conferences as an opportunity to mentor the local reporters.

"I worked very hard to establish good relations with the reporters," she said. "I feel very good about the fact that as I was leaving, many of the reporters called me to say that they found working with me to be the easiest that they had in a long time. And I helped them do their job, and I feel like that was my job as a military public affairs officer." Keeton again stressed that she was able to succeed because she had support from above.

One modern communications strategy that she found useful was media analysis, done by an outside contractor. “When we saw that our actions were leading to bad reactions from the local population, we adjusted our operations if at all possible,” she said.

Despite her success, Keeton said that she and other public affairs officers are not debriefed about their experiences. She believes such evaluation would help the military to improve its communications efforts overseas.

Communications as part of operations

The counter-insurgency in Iraq has forced military commanders to expand their area of responsibility to include intelligence and information operations. “If commanders today are not directly engaged in both of them, then they don’t understand this conflict,” said Brig. Gen. Michael Barbero, deputy director for regional operations on the Joint Staff J-3 Operations Directorate.

“This conflict is being fought on two grounds,” he added. “The first is obviously the battlefield tactical operations. And the second, which is in some ways more important, is for the perceptions and mind of the people.” He said that winning the second will require a change in the military culture.

Military leaders must lead communication efforts, drive the process of engaging with local populations and understand the local culture. First, commanders and other military leaders need to try to influence the American public, largely using the mainstream media. They should connect to reporters and supply context for them. To do that, the military needs to respond faster, with fewer bureaucratic hurdles and less central supervision, trusting junior officers to engage with media and audiences.

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“The military is still too slow and too cumbersome in a lot of ways,” Barbero said. And that can have consequences that derail everything the military is trying to do. An example occurred in 2005, he said, when intelligence reports showed that a mosque in Iraq was being used to store weapons. After meticulous planning, a military unit entered the mosque, equipped with cameras and accompanied by Iraqi security forces. Careful to disturb nothing, they found the weapons, took still and video pictures and quickly left.

"Forty-five minutes later—thanks to the insurgents—the Web and other media carried stories of desecration of the Koran and of the mosque. *Forty-eight hours* later we responded with absolute facts and accuracy," said Barbero. "Which do you think stuck? Which do you think was more effective?" he asked. "If we are 48 hours to their 45 minutes, we are going to lose every time, even though we are accurate and truthful."

"If we are 48 hours to their 45 minutes, we are going to lose every time, even though we are accurate and truthful."

He said that the best way to speed the process is to relinquish control from a central command and allow the local junior officers to engage with the media. The military leadership needs to accept the possibility of errors by less experienced spokespeople and support the officers when they make mistakes. "One out of every 10 lieutenants who gets in front of a camera or talks to a print reporter may not get it right and may say the wrong thing," he explained. "That's okay."

In addition to responding more quickly, engaging the local population in Iraq and reaching a level of understanding with them is critical to success. He said it makes sense to engage local media and to use Iraqi military officers rather than U.S. military as spokespeople. He added that getting the message to the American people is not the most important goal. "It's more important for the local commander to have a meeting with the local leaders—religious, tribal, whatever—and take the video and have an Iraqi military leader explain it to them," he said.

The counter-insurgency requires engaging the regional audience and explaining to them what the military is doing and why. Barbero questioned whether the latest communications technology is the most important factor in that engagement. "I would ask you, which is more effective: a silver iPod that plays announcements or a lieutenant executing medical outreach in a local village at 8,000 feet up in Afghanistan, treating the men and women, and using a veterinary team to treat their animals?" he asked. "Outreach efforts like this are going on every day, and the military commanders see it as part of their job. But they are not always good at communicating this to the outside world."

"Which is more effective: a silver iPod that plays announcements or a lieutenant executing medical outreach in a local village at 8,000 feet up in Afghanistan?"

Technology can be important, Barbero acknowledged. "When satellite dishes are starting to grow like flowers across Iraq, then we need to be in the game. But commanders must focus the communications effort and lead it."

At the same time, military leaders must be realistic and perhaps reassess what they can achieve in terms of Iraqi response to their presence in the country. So far, they have received mixed reviews at best, he said. "Is it because, as Americans, we're genetically inept in trying to reach out to other cultures?" he asked. "Or is it because we have to lower our expectations?" He added, "As I drove around the streets of Tikrit and looked at the faces of some of those young men, I realized that we were never going to be welcomed fully as liberators with flowers. Maybe the best we can hope for is grudging acceptance."

Improving communications in Iraq

The highest echelons of the military have been trying to come to grips with the kind of communications problems encountered by Barbero and Keeton. The military's public affairs leadership recently presented two briefs to the Joint Chiefs of Staff about improving the process. The 24-hour news cycle combined with the enemy's excellent understanding of how to use and misuse technology in the media mean that the military has to change its culture and its way of reporting on operations, said Rear Adm. Frank Thorp, who at the time was special assistant for public affairs for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In 2005, after a review of the problems, the Joint Chiefs concluded that public affairs needed to be part of operations, instead of a separate staff function, according to Thorp, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs.

"There are two principal challenges," he said. "One is creating a culture of communication and the second is creating a communication capability."

The military must communicate more quickly and must interact with international media, such as Al Jazeera. And it has to do this with the same or maybe even reduced staffing than it had in the past. For example, the Air Force has cut almost 25 percent of its public affairs budget, Thorp said. And changes in the way the communications game is played, especially in the Middle East, have made following the rules a challenge.

"I'm not sure we in the military have yet adapted to the 24-hour news cycle—CNN, etc., much less the technology age, with iPods and the Web and so forth," he said.

"As representatives of the military, we learned the first principle of maximum disclosure/minimum delay," he explained. He added that following this principle is sometimes difficult in practice. "There are reasons why we don't disclose things, such as security and privacy, and we can debate how effective we are at that. But we find ourselves today faced with an incredible demand to put out information that we're trying hard to answer in a truthful way."

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Guided by the military adage, "First reports are always wrong," public affairs had traditionally adhered to a policy in which "minimum delay" included not confirming an operation, such as a bomb attack, until all the details were known. But in Iraq this has led to the military finding out about incidents from the media, or worse, to public affairs officers losing credibility with reporters by refusing to confirm information until the military gathered all the facts.

An example of this was brought home to Thorp recently, when a producer returned to the United States after running a Baghdad news bureau for one of the networks and told Thorp he wanted to "set him straight" on military-media relations in Baghdad.

" 'First of all, you all lie to us every day,' " the producer said. "I was crushed. I went on my apple pie thing, 'That's not us, we don't do that. If any of us ever got caught lying, it would be the end of our career,' " Thorp recalled.

The producer explained the routine. He would get a call from some unknown person, saying that the United States had dropped a bomb at a certain intersection in Fallujah, killing innocent women and children. He would call the Multi-National Force Iraq (MNFI) and an official would say, "No, haven't heard of it. No bomb, nothing from us." The producer would kill the story. And then 24 to 36 hours later, the MNFI would issue a press release confirming the bombing.

After this had happened a few times, the producer grew increasingly skeptical of MNFI's official answers. The next time the third party gave him a video, showing women and children being dragged from a bombsite. The producer still tried to stick with his military source, but again, 36 hours later the military issued a press release confirming the bomb. "So the fourth time, the producer ran the video," Thorp said. The traditional approach to disclosure created considerable problems of trust and credibility, he added, and the problems may still not be resolved.

As an alternative to this scenario, Thorp said that the public affairs officer should release the details he can, rather than waiting until all the i's are dotted and t's are crossed, letting reporters know that other information may follow. Thorp suggested that it would be even better if the military commander had a relationship with the reporter, and called him the minute the bomb was dropped or scheduled to be dropped. "He could say, 'I just got confirmation that we dropped ordnance in Fallujah. I can't tell you exactly the target, I can't tell you we hit it, but let me tell you why we did it.' And we explain, within the level of security, that we dropped a bomb because we had a report that there was an insurgency meeting. Then that's what will be reported. But instead we deny it for 36 hours," he said.

The enemy often uses these occasions to exaggerate the damage to innocent people. If the military moves more quickly and gets its report out first, "The report will be what happened, as compared to what somebody else says," he said.

Unless the military changes its culture, it will continue to lag behind the capabilities of communication technology. "The reason it took 48 hours, in Mike's [Barbero's] example, to get that video out is that nobody thinks to get the video out until after they've gone into the mosque and come out," he said. "If we had a culture of communication, there would be a mindset to say, 'We are going to have a video camera in there well before the plan is even executed. Let's ensure that we have a process in place so as soon as they come out, we've got the video and then we make a decision to release it or not.' "

Until the military changes its culture, it will continue to lag behind the capabilities of today's communication technology.

In the discussions that followed, a former Army public affairs officer commented that the Army sometimes uses communication technology quite effectively. For example, recently she saw public affairs soldiers blogging from the field to the Joint Forces Command's Web site. But the decision to use technology is made commander by commander rather than being an institutional decision.

In response to a reporter's question as to why it hasn't been institutionalized, Thorp said, "First of all, because it's really hard. A commanding general like Mike is already incredibly busy and he's got a gazillion things on his hands already," he said. And staffing hasn't increased in 20 years. "Back

then, I was answering to three networks and a couple of newspapers, and now I'm getting calls and having to spend 20 minutes on the phone with a blogger, because who knows where that's going to go?" he said.

Another military official said that limited resources are part of the reason the military hasn't made the culture change from a reactive to proactive mode. A military communications consultant said, "It's not a core capability. Military people are comfortable with bombs and bullets and airplanes and ships and things like that. Information warfare, the information age, is new to them."

"Military people are comfortable with bombs and bullets and airplanes and ships and things like that. Information warfare…is new to them."

A reporter questioned whether the military should even be involved in this sort of strategic communication. "Everything I'm hearing says that the military doesn't do this business of strategic communication very well," he said. "Either it doesn't have the right technology or it doesn't have the right culture or it's not a core capability. I just want to throw out a question for us all to think about, whether this is a business that the military very aggressively and quickly ought to get the heck out of," he added.

"That's why this is so hard," Thorp responded. "And oftentimes somebody will say, 'This really is an interagency problem, and it's important to have a good interagency process to make sure we get the right themes and messages.' But one of the things that I try to remind people a lot is, we're DoD, we're the military, we're the war department. Our job is to kill people and break things," he said. "That's what the taxpayers expect when diplomacy fails." He said that the military should limit itself to providing information about military operations to its various audiences.

"…we're DoD, we're the military, we're the war department. Our job is to kill people and break things…that's what the taxpayers expect when diplomacy fails."

Panelist Barbero said that the counter-insurgency in Iraq requires that the military be involved in communicating information about the war. "If you accept the fact that the goal of a counter-insurgency is to neutralize insurgents faster than they can be created—neutralize is not just a euphemism, it describes the balance of lethal and nonlethal. And you may neutralize insurgents by doing a raid and killing a key leader or by dropping a 500-pound bomb, and you may neutralize them by

"You may neutralize insurgents by doing a raid and killing a key leader or by dropping a 500-pound bomb, and you may neutralize them by meeting with the leaders of Al Anbar province."

meeting with the leaders of Al Anbar province to try to generate their resistance to the insurgency there."

"I think what you're talking about is the battle of credibility," said Thorp. "That's what it comes down to on the information side. When we're talking about our operations or when a commander on the ground is talking about his operations, he has developed and maintained the highest level of credibility that he can. So when he's discussing that with the local leaders, he is as believable, hopefully more believable, than anybody else."

A journalist said that he felt no matter what technology the United States uses, the case in Iraq is lost because early on "the bad guys were better, were faster, were surer, and the people all tend to believe the worst about the U.S. government in the Middle East."

"As far as I know," he said, "Most people in the Middle East love America: They love the pop culture, they love Hollywood movies, they drink Coca-Cola. But they don't like the policy of the United States in the Middle East, and I don't know how you can rectify that in the minds of the Arabs and Muslims by saying, "We're going to give you the information fast."

Private contractors and public opinion

What happens when the job of public affairs or even "strategic communications" is farmed out to outside consultants? Private contractors have been used by the U.S. government as far back as the Revolutionary War. And post-Cold War defense cuts in the late 20th century have stimulated a flourishing private military contractor industry.

Many activities, from laundry to cooking to plane manufacturing, are outsourced in an effort to trim costs. But the outsourcing of public affairs and public diplomacy raises issues not only about the relationship between the media and the U. S. government, but between the U.S. government and the public, and between one government and another.

According to journalist James Bamford, author of "The Man Who Sold the War," which appeared in November 2005 *Rolling Stone Magazine*, one of these contractors is responsible for setting up a political organization in Iraq that was instrumental in pushing America into the war.

Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords

The Rendon Group, a Washington, D.C.-based public relations firm, was one of the key companies involved with Iraq in the years leading up to the war. Companies like the Rendon Group and the Lincoln Group, which was awarded a $6.2 million contract in 2006 to provide media monitoring, training, and strategic communications advice for the U.S. Army in Iraq, are "covert private contractors" who have great access to intelligence information, according to Bamford.

John Rendon, CEO of the Rendon Group, worked as a campaign consultant for a variety of Democratic candidates in the 1970s, and also served as executive director of the Democratic National Committee. In the early 1980s, he started the Rendon Group, and in 1989 was hired by the CIA to influence public opinion in Panama, Bamford said.

"The CIA needed somebody to help prop up the guy who was going to be taking the place of Noriega," he said.

Rendon was a success, Bamford said, at making lawyer Guillermo Endara "look presidential." Endara was elected president of Panama in 1989. Shortly after, the United States invaded Panama and deposed Noriega, who had refused to accept the election results.

According to Bamford, in 1991, the CIA hired the Rendon Group to build support for Saddam Hussein's ouster. "The Rendon Group basically helped to create the Iraqi National Congress (INC) and helped to put in Ahmed Chalabi as its head," he said. "And the whole purpose of the INC was to be the opposition group to Saddam Hussein." The Iraqi National Congress was an umbrella organization for anti-Saddam groups. In the early 1990s Rendon was top adviser to the INC, Bamford said, and the INC spent much of its time advocating the reasons the United States should go to war and overthrow the Hussein government.

"So here what you have basically is a private company that's created an opposition group to overthrow a foreign government. It's a little bit like, if during the Kennedy administration, they'd hired a public affairs firm to overthrow Castro in Cuba at the Bay of Pigs," he said.

Bamford said the CIA funneled payments to Chalabi and the INC through the Rendon Group until a failed coup against Hussein in 1996, when the CIA lost confidence in INC and Chalabi.

But five years later, shortly after 9/11, he said, the INC manipulated the news to gain support for an invasion of Iraq because of weapons of mass destruction hidden there. At that time, defector Adnan Saeed Haideri,

allegedly a contractor in Iraq, told the INC that he had eyewitness accounts of weapons of mass destruction buried all over Iraq, Bamford said.

Although the CIA's lie detector experts concluded that Haideri was lying, Bamford said, the INC pitched the story to then *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller and an Australian television station.

In December 2005, a headline in the *New York Times* read: "An Iraqi Defector Tells of Work on at Least 20 Hidden Weapon Sites." "That was the first sort of public confirmation that Saddam really had weapons of mass destruction," Bamford said.

According to Bamford, the INC's representative in Washington, Francis Brooke, admitted that the goal of the Haideri operation was to pressure the United States to attack Iraq and overthrow Saddam Hussein. "This is a role that public affairs/public relations has never played before, where you hire a public relations company to work covertly, to get the United States into a war, which obviously was successful," he said.

"Let me make clear that the Rendon Group had nothing to do with this defector. This is the INC, Chalabi's group, which was created by the Rendon Group," he said.

(James Rendon was invited to participate on the panel, but was unable to attend. A representative of the Rendon Group at the conference told participants that the firm had offered a rebuttal to Bamford's article, which is posted on the *Rolling Stone* Web site.)

In the discussions that followed, journalists spoke out strongly against using contractors for public relations, saying that private contractors do not give them access, are not subject to freedom of information laws and "peddle lies."

While military officials said that they would "get sacked" if they told lies to the press and deplored this practice if it is true, they felt that contractors had a place in the military. For one thing, using consultants circumvents the military bureaucracy, a former military public affairs officer said. And consultants may sometimes have sophisticated communications expertise that the military lacks, said another, adding, "We need to arm our soldiers with information as much as bullets."

A military official added, "Why does it trouble you if we use contractors for something we don't have the capacity for? We don't have the capability for analysis of media and effects on population of media messages."

Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords

Contractors have their place, as long as there is a commander who is ultimately responsible for overseeing their work, panelist Thorp said. But when private contractors are used to fill the gap in communications expertise, he asked, are the military still able to maintain their first principles of maximum disclosure/minimum delay?

"We pay people to build F-18's, we don't pay people to fly them. We do that ourselves."

"We pay people to build F-18's, we don't pay people to fly them. We do that ourselves," he said. "And there are people who are willing to fly them now for us. That should be a concern."

Chapter 3: Intended and Unintended Consequences of Communication Technologies in Regional Conflicts

As communications technology continues to get smaller, faster and cheaper, the avalanche of information will only pile higher and higher. When the information is used in ways that affect the future of governments and individual lives, what are the unintended consequences? To use a military term, what is the collateral damage that might be caused? These are questions that need to be answered by the media to continue to fulfill its role as a government watchdog. In the face of hundreds of Internet outlets presenting conflicting versions of events in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, the military needs to consider how to ensure that Americans and the world at large see the events that unfold promptly, accurately and in context, while protecting the lives of the troops.

"For instance, is a local news director at a television station or the editor of a local newspaper in the American heartland substantively equipped to make sound editorial judgments about national or even foreign policy when she agrees to broadcast a DVIDS-provided feed of information from military personnel abroad?" asked moderator Begleiter.

"Or what should people abroad make of the contrasting views of a conflict situation when they compare, say, Fox News or DVIDS stories against Al Arabiya, [a pan-Arab satellite news outlet launched in February 2006] when all of those delivery mechanisms are instantly available all around the world on the Internet?" he asked. "How are people going to make their judgments about which one is the truth? What about Web sites displaying so-called citizen journalism, such as video of beheadings? That's citizen journalism. How should news consumers, and journalists, for that matter, determine what's credible and what's not?"

Some journalists believe that good, solid, thoughtful reporting has been a casualty of changes in the news environment.

More may be less for journalism

While the quantity and speed of information available through the media are unprecedented, more is not necessarily better. Some journalists believe that good, solid, thoughtful reporting has been a casualty of changes in the news environment.

"The 24/7 news cycle is not necessarily a plus for journalism," said John McWethy, former chief national security correspondent for ABC news. McWethy argued that at the same time that Web sites requiring "content"

have proliferated and the number of cable television stations has grown, the resources of the news business have shrunk.

"We talk about the proliferation of channels on television. It used to be we only had three or four—now we have hundreds," McWethy said. "What we are seeing is a broad horizon of many outlets, very few of which actually do journalism. They read the news, they read the wires, they assemble the news, but there are very few news organizations in the United States anymore that really send reporters out who generate real new hard-hitting information.

"The news organizations represented in this room are shutting down foreign bureaus, we are reducing the number of reporters who go on the streets, even in the United States," he added. Fewer bureaus and beat reporters means fewer journalists who understand nuances and can provide context for their stories. At the same time, reporters are being pressured by their bosses to generate more "editorial product," McWethy said.

To make matters worse, the increasing number of news outlets—including blogs—demanding information from the government and military has overwhelmed its ability to answer questions.

"In addition to that, we have the hostile environments that reporters are now going into, which adds an additional layer in the specific case of Iraq to go out and get real information in real time," he said. As a result, "You have a breakdown in the real flow of communication between the major news organizations and the public despite this marvelous technology."

He said that as a result of the increasingly available technology and the flood of information, "We have a proliferation of inaccurate, distorted and incorrect information."

A cable television journalist at the conference disagreed that all television news stations are cutting budgets. She said that her news organization is opening new bureaus, including in the Gulf, and that the station is making a commitment to cover the military and wartime scenarios more in depth. "I guess ever since 9/11 we realized that we're going to cover the military and we're going to cover international news in a way that we have never done in the past," she said.

Military must transform to confront instant global communication

The military was ill-prepared to deal with the instant communications aspects of the war in Iraq, and will require a new approach to confront them in the future. "The military found itself in a global information envi-

ronment in a position where we could not operate. And when we did operate, we did not operate very effectively," said Col. James Yonts, Headquarters National Capital Region, (NORTHCOM).

This caused great frustration to both the military and the media, Yonts said. Although many in the public affairs arena are aware of the need for cultural changes to keep pace with the technological changes, adjusting the culture has been a slow process. To do this successfully, the military will have to accept its lack of full control and the warts-and-all information that results.

"There has to be a mindset change, all the way from the soldier on the ground to the leadership at the highest part of our administration," he explained.

"There has to be a mindset change, all the way from the soldier on the ground to the leadership at the highest part of our administration."

In an age where everybody instantly has access to every kind of information, the military needs to recognize and accept a loss of control. "You are a user in this environment and user only. You do not control it," he said. "Our ability to try to control the information that comes out or direct it to a certain audience is probably not a feasible or attainable goal when you really get down to it."

Instead, the military should accept that the new communications environment has negative aspects, he said. "It comes with good parts, but it comes with a lot of warts, and we have to get used to those bad points and accept that and understand that it's part of the business."

"If you're timely and accurate with the information, all your audiences, whether they're your intended or your unintended audiences, will see that. And over time they will understand that it is factual and truthful," he said. He warned that attempts to try to modify information to influence particular audiences could be dangerous. If the military does that, he said, "We're going down a road I'm not sure our military wants to go."

In addition to training, public affairs must "transform into a joint community," he said. "Our military is now routinely responding to global emergencies and conflict as part of a multinational force," he said. "Our military public affairs communities need to restructure our doctrine, education and resources in line with this." To implement this new structure, the Joint Forces

Command has set up a joint public affairs support element (JPASE) to provide training and support.

Yonts also predicted that in the future the military and the media will need to cooperate more than ever to do their respective jobs. "I think the military and the media need to understand that we're in this environment together. We have our own purposes and our own objectives for that, but we will need to work together," he said. This will be necessary both to gain access to stories in a dangerous environment and to share technological resources, such as DVIDS.

"I think the military and the media need to understand that we're in this environment together."

"As we work closer, build our relationships, our understanding of each other's purposes and their objectives, the payoff really will benefit the American public," he added.

"Old" media still matters in age of new media

Reaching the public is the goal of information purveyors from bloggers to the mainstream media. Although new media, such as blogs, Internet magazines and video on demand are receiving a lot of attention as the new kids on the block, traditional media is still a major player, particularly local newscasts.

A recent survey by the Radio and Television News Directors Association found that 65 percent of those surveyed named local television news among their top three sources of news. "This was six times the number who mention the Internet as one of their top three choices," said Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio and Television News Directors Association. The survey also showed what other speakers at the conference had maintained: that people want more control over how and when they get their news.

The survey also showed…that people want more control over how and when they get their news.

To give the public as much of that targeted news as possible, many local television stations, especially those in markets with large military bases, became part of the embedding operations at the beginning of the Iraq war. But that has changed during the last two years. "That's definitely dried up, in part because of the cost, and I think also because of the danger," Cochran said.

Since the stations still need to cover the Iraq conflict, they have had to devise different ways to bring the war home for their audiences. "They have

expanded their news hole without necessarily expanding their staff," said Cochran. "They have a huge number of minutes every day that they have to fill, and they aren't always capable of doing it themselves."

Although public relations people are eager to fill that news hole with video news releases, and the military is happy to supply DVIDS coverage, local news stations say this is not the answer. In fact, there has been a backlash at many news stations on video news releases. "They look like news, but they're also a pitch for something, for whoever is paying that PR person to put out the release," said Cochran. "And the stations have been burned."

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission sent letters of inquiry to 77 stations around the country asking about material they have used on the air without acknowledging its source, which has made the stations wary of using video news releases.

"The stations are presenting themselves as organizations that are independent," Cochran explained. "And so if they are going to take something that's been produced by someone else without subjecting it to the same editorial scrutiny that they would their own work and not say where it came from, they're fooling the audience. Now that the FCC's gotten into the act, I think that stations are really going to think twice before they use any outside material."

Using prepackaged items from DVIDS can be a problem, not only because of the outside material issue, but because it's hard to even notice government-produced footage amid the flood of information that news desks receive daily. As one news director explained to her, "In an era when I usually receive about 200 e-mails a day, it's very, very hard for anyone to cut through the clutter." The news director recommended that someone from the military establish a real relationship with someone in each newsroom.

The news director, himself a veteran, also said that his station is ideologically neutral on military matters. "What we are biased against is third party content provided by anybody," he said. "We feel obligated to label third party material as such, and consequently use little of it." His station has used holiday greeting DVIDS and a few other soft features supplied by the military, he said, where "telling our audience someone else provided the story would not give our audience undue reason to question its message."

Touching on a continuing theme at the conference, Cochran said that verification and credibility have become even more important to local stations in today's changing news environment, as exemplified by the news of Abu

Ghraib. "Not only do news organizations not have a monopoly on the distribution of news, because anybody can go on the Internet and start a blog, they don't even have a monopoly anymore on the gathering of news. Two things will distinguish the mainstream media: that the information they present is verified and independent and that the source of the information is transparent." Without these two things, she said, the mainstream media will lose credibility with their audiences.

Unintended consequences are order of the day

One of the unintended consequences of the Internet is that people an ocean apart can find out information about one another with a quick Web search. That's what Associated Press reporter Steve Komarow discovered to his dismay after he filed a story at the beginning of the 1999 Kosovo campaign. Working closely with Air Force personnel aboard a B-52 that launched Cruise missiles, he completed a cover story for *USA Today* on a successful Air Force mission. Enter the Internet.

"Everything was splendid until the families of the airmen on board started getting threatening e-mails and letters from Serb supporters who figured out who they were and where they lived on the Internet," he recalled. "These are guys I have obviously bonded with, and their families are getting scared as a result of my story." As a consequence, he said that the Air Force developed a policy of airmen giving only first names during that air campaign.

But cooperation between the military and the media can also subvert hostile attempts to distort war news after the fact.

But cooperation between the military and the media can also subvert hostile attempts to distort war news after the fact. One example occurred in Afghanistan in 2002. A bomb mistakenly hit a wedding party, and the military public affairs officers allowed embedded reporters to accompany the team sent to investigate. When stories were sent out from Afghanistan charging a cover-up, "Well, the fact that there were embedded journalists with the investigators just destroyed that story. It had no legs whatsoever," Komarow said.

"The fact is that there are going to be unintended consequences in everything we do—they come around, they whip around, very, very quickly these days," he said.

The ability to misrepresent the facts and to present a biased story as objective is easier than ever in the era of the Internet. “When you’re in the grocery store and you see the *Weekly World News* has a picture of Bill Clinton and an alien, you know it’s made up,” said Komarow. But the public has not yet figured out how to tell truth from fiction, biased stories from unbiased on the Internet.

Like others at the conference, Komarow emphasized that this situation heightens the responsibility for the mainstream media to be accurate and fair. The burden is especially heavy on wire services such as Associated Press, which supply information to mainstream media and Internet sites. “It’s very important to us to maintain that level of trust and to make sure our stories are policed and are as accurate as we can possibly make them, and we aggressively run corrections when they’re not.” he said.

Chapter 4: Issues Revisited: Strategic Communications

Technology has increased the pressure on battlefield commanders to release information more quickly, as well as providing equipment for them to instantly communicate the information. But this has brought to the forefront the role of information as a tactic in war and increased pressure on the military to control the information environment. Throughout the conference, the words "strategic communications" were used frequently, often followed by the comment, "whatever that is." In breakout sessions, military and media tried to sort out the meaning of, as one public affairs officer put it, this "new buzzword in public affairs offices." They discussed what it is, how it fits into public affairs, and what effect it has on military-media relations.

Today, most military commanders understand the importance of communications, but they don't necessarily understand the strategic aspect. As a public affairs officer put it, "The difficulty is: one, we're still trying to define it in a way that everyone agrees on, and two, who does exactly what?"

A public affairs officer attempted to explain the origin and purpose of strategic communications, which began shortly after 9/11. "John Rendon [of the Rendon Group] approached leadership and told them they had a problem with strategic communications and that he could help them," he said. "The problem is that it needs to be defined."

The officer explained that strategic communications involves considering not just what to say, but what to say and do. It should begin while the operation is in the planning stages and include assessing the environment in which the operation will occur. "The days are over when a policy or operation is planned and we then figure out what we're going to say about it." Commanders must think about the intent from the beginning and plan how to communicate the proper message when the time comes.

"The message is an outcome of the operation," a military official said. "That's why the information outcome is hugely important. We have to look at this proactively. Is information going to result in killing people?"

"We have to look at this proactively. Is information going to result in killing people?"

Another military official added, "What you need are processes that enable you to reach your goals. We used to not understand our audiences very well. And we didn't understand the effects of our efforts very well, either." He said that communications, especially during war, needs to be professionalized. He offered four steps in the strategic communications process: research, planning, execu-

tion and assessment.

The military officials agreed with reporters that good commanders have always done this, but that the process needs to be implemented across the services, with public affairs working with operations early on. Well-qualified, trained and trusted public affairs officers are needed who will be able to address questions such as a commander's intent when he takes an action.

In time of crisis, the information may become "global, instantaneous information." Some military officers said this pressures commanders to try to control the information environment.

But the media are concerned that strategic communications is "an added layer of bureaucracy slowing information to them in the field when so little information is coming out," said one journalist. At a time when news is instantaneous, this causes even greater problems than it would have in the past. She complained that too much of what she gets from public affairs offices is "managed and scripted."

A public affairs officer acknowledged that the military has to "fix public affairs or the media will turn to someone else. No longer is the PAO the media's advocate," he added. "We're not doing a good job of that. A good PAO knows the information before you ask for it."

Another public affairs officer agreed. "If the media feels there's so much spin in the message, we're losing our bread and butter, which is getting information to the reporter."

A broadcast journalist called public affairs the "biggest obstacle to getting stories" and said that without higher-level contacts and sources, she would not be able to obtain the information she needs. "I don't deal with lower level public affairs guys because they don't know what's going on, or are scared of the media," she said. She acknowledged that there are exceptions to the rule—well-informed public affairs officers who deal honestly with the media and don't beat around the bush.

Asked by a public affairs officer what they should do, a print journalist responded, "Answer questions honestly—forget strategic communications."

"There shouldn't be a separation between public affairs and strategic communications," said a military official. "You have to determine where strategic communications really is and should be and communicate it through public affairs elements of that plan."

A print journalist expressed his concern about merging public affairs and strategic communications. In an environment in which speed is so impor-

tant, he wants to be confident in the accuracy of information he receives from public affairs officers.

A military official said that strategic communications is an interagency issue and asked if U.S. support for the war was a political or policy issue, since the military is not supposed to politicize. Members of the military stressed the importance of working with U.S. allies and having good military-to-military relationships, saying that they send a message by their deeds and actions without politicizing. It is important for our allies to know what happens so that their press will cover it accurately, they said.

Throughout the discussions, military participants seemed divided on the value of strategic communications. The journalists in general associated it with spinning the message or even giving misleading or false information.

A military official put his finger on why the military and media may never agree on strategic communications. "One of the problems of the military culture is to maintain control of the situation. Everything we say and do is synchronized and integrated," he said. "The media needs, in an uncontrolled fashion, to find out what's going on."

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Adversaries not enemies: working together

Although they disagreed about strategic communications, both military and media participants seemed to agree on the importance of trust between the two groups and the role of relationships in building that trust. Changes in technology—such as e-mail—that allow instant communication may inadvertently diminish the face-to-face contact that builds relationships. Coupled with reductions in journalistic resources, technology encourages reporters to produce stories that fail to put events in context. At the same time, political and other pressures on the military not to release damaging or incomplete information cause frustration for reporters working on increasingly short deadlines.

Changes in technology—such as e-mail—that allow instant communication may inadvertently diminish the face-to-face contact that builds relationships.

In tackling the scenario (Chapter 5)—which allowed them to act out their roles during a breaking story—and in breakout sessions, both military and media participants said they wanted to find better ways to do their jobs and yet work together to serve the public.

Improvement requires that the military respond more quickly and openly and that the media get to know and understand the military and its operations. "Our relationship has a huge effect on the audiences. It's not pre-9/11 anymore," said one military official. "Now it's war." Issues discussed included the value of public affairs officers, the perception of media bias, the struggle between building trust and maintaining objectivity, and the military's motivations for withholding information.

"Our relationship has a huge effect on the audiences. It's not pre-9/11 anymore."

The military participants were concerned about lack of context in an era of image-driven anecdotes. More human-interest stories, and features resulting from a long visit with a unit, would balance out the stories of suicide bombers. And they advised reporters to do more background preparation.

Military representatives also felt that reporters' rush to report can cause errors. One of the reporters conceded that the time crunch of 24/7 news coupled with staff cuts means that they don't always abide by the long-standing journalism rule to check three independent sources before running a story. But reporters in general said they make every effort to make sure that what they run is correct, and suggested that the military officials "need to be fast and honest."

Public affairs officers said that sometimes their hands are tied, especially when events involve military investigations, such as Abu Ghraib. Although communication technology enabled prison guards to use camera phones to photograph prisoners being abused and e-mail pictures home, military public affairs officers said that they didn't realize the impact of the devastating pictures in the beginning. They weren't allowed to see them since the pictures were considered evidence. "We eventually did see all the pictures—we saw them from the Pentagon press corps," said a former public affairs officer.

"We report things that are inconvenient for the military," said one reporter. "I don't think we report things that are wrong."

But some reporters said that the military seems afraid to release anything negative and accuses the press of spreading misleading information when such stories appear. "We report things that

are inconvenient for the military," said one reporter. "I don't think we report things that are wrong—my editors would be furious if I got stuff wrong."

Military and media agreed with journalists that only through objectivity will major news organizations keep their audience as the popularity of the blogosphere increases. But several military officials said that they felt media bias is real. "The truth is somewhere in between the *New York Times* and the *Washington Times*," said one.

A Pentagon public affairs official spoke of a disturbing comment he'd heard from a journalist at the conference. "A reporter said that he's more skeptical of me than an Al Qaeda spokesman," he said, "I don't think that's right. As much as I think you should hammer us if we give you a video that's incomplete … the standard should at least be the same, if not higher," for the enemy.

A reporter said that he'd worked for a dozen news organizations during his career, and it would be impossible to change his ideology to slant the news to fit the "bias" of each outlet. "We try very hard to shoot straight down the line," he said.

Perhaps the perception of bias exists because reporters don't understand the military well. "The military is a different world," a journalist said. "Both sides have a lot of work to do." A public affairs officer responded that the media needs to take the time to get to know individuals in the military, and to "invest the intellectual energy to engage when there's not a crisis and make an effort to understand us."

Reporters would understand the military better and also have better context for their stories if they did more homework, a military public affairs officer said. A military commander warned that embedding may give reporters the illusion that they understand the complexity of the issues when they really don't. "Too many conversations with reporters start with, 'When I was embedded,' " he said. "You get a better discussion if you can get past a drive-by question," he added, alluding to easy questions journalists pull from their own, usually limited, experience. He acknowledged that embedding is an important experience for reporters and does provide them some context, "But we have to look for opportunities to establish long-term relationships."

"In this quick-paced, high-velocity information age, there has to be room for in-depth reporting."

He recalled spending five months with a film crew on his ship. "I saw both sides change their

perspective. In this quick-paced, high-velocity information age, there has to be room for in-depth reporting," he said.

A television news representative, however, said she expects that fewer news organizations will send reporters on such assignments. "Some don't see the return in sending a reporter out if there isn't going to be a story right away," she said. "And resources are getting scarcer."

A television reporter argued that embedding doesn't just generate "drive-by" questions, as the military officer had phrased it. She maintained that embedding has "dramatically changed the relationship between the military and the media." She said that there's a cadre of journalists who have been embedded and whose understanding of the military has forever been changed. The military should reach out more to these people, and to others who haven't yet been embedded, to nurture a relationship. Other reporters agreed that embedding provides context and helps reporters understand what the military is up against.

"Reporters should be made uncomfortable—every one," said a reporter who has spent significant time with the military. "Deprive them of sleep, as if they were in a combat zone, and you'll get a sliver of empathy," she said.

Military officials worried that the ground forces are losing the connection with American living rooms that existed at the beginning of the war. "We have to keep the local sergeants in the living rooms, on the front pages," said one military official. He suggested more profiles and feature stories.

"We have to keep the local sergeants in the living rooms, on the front pages."

"We're in the business of covering the news," a television reporter responded. "If there's no story, my editors won't send anyone."

But the military official argued that if reporters haven't grounded themselves in the human-interest aspects of the military, then "You've got no base when there is a story." Another military officer argued that the big networks have the time and money to invest in long-term reporting and that human-interest stories have value to viewers. But instead of this, he said, Americans too often see coverage of suicide bombers blowing up cars.

Reporters felt that the military often bears the brunt of stories that are really critical of Bush administration policy. "We're at war and we're losing, despite the best efforts and courageous efforts of our military," said one reporter. He suggested that there were two groups involved in the conflict—those doing the fighting and those making the decisions that were pushing

the war in the wrong direction—and the two groups weren't being reported equally. "Is it unpatriotic for me to write about stupid mistakes?" he asked.

A television reporter said that those executing the policy sometimes get tangled into the reports about the bad policy. "You have to write hard about what you see and the difficult job the troops are doing," he said. "It's painful and the units are often angry. The majors hate my guts. But there's the policy and the executors, and you can't take the executors away from the policy." The reporter added that the struggle of separating the policy from the executors of the policy "haunts us in every conflict."

One of the reporters jokingly suggested "embedding" public affairs officers in a newsroom so they would better understand what a reporter is trying to do. Reporters from a newspaper and a wire service said they have had military public affairs officials at their editorial meetings.

"If information is the war, where's the line where we don't draw you into being tools of the military?"

A military operations officer offered an important insight on relations between military and media. He said he had a realization about how important it is to control information in war. "We are attempting to influence populations," not just conduct military operations, he said. "If information is the war, where's the line where we don't draw you into being tools of the military? What we're doing here this week is building relationships. The key to the week is the credibility of each group."

Chapter 5: Breaking News Scenario: Role-Playing in a Developing Crisis

Written by Ralph Begleiter and John McWethy

Co-moderators Ralph Begleiter and John McWethy presented a hypothetical situation that involved many of the topic areas and issues discussed at the conference. Participants were divided into two groups to discuss how they would handle the situation, set in a conflict environment, in terms of communicating to U.S. civilian and military audiences and to foreign audiences.

The scenario showed how a crisis situation could unfold and how the military and media might react. It involved an alleged anthrax threat, a military operation overseas, politicians and public policy issues. The scenario relied heavily on cutting edge media technology to illustrate the demands that today's information environment places on public affairs officials and news organizations.

The case also involved foreign media, satellites, Web sites and other technology. Thus the exercise demonstrated technology's effects on reporting a breaking story with ramifications affecting the safety of Americans at home and of American troops on foreign soil.

As each stage of the scenario unfolded, participants from both the media and the military were asked how they would react, not only with their opposite numbers, but also within their own institutions and organizations. Moderators John McWethy and Ralph Begleiter posed additional questions to stimulate discussion.

Below is the essential information about the scenario, including questions posed to journalists and military officials.

September 10

- U.S. intelligence picks up first signs of possible anthrax manufacturing facility in Sudan.
- Vague indications that shipments out of Sudan may have already occurred.

September 11

- U.S. government orders intensive satellite imagery of Sudan.
- U.S. government also directs a series of Global Hawk flights over Sudan equipped with Measurement Intelligence and Signal Intelligence packages.

Q for military: At this point, would your PA officers even know about this effort?

Q for military: Would the military have begun preparing press guidance?

September 13

- Honest John, Pentagon correspondent for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, learns (by "leak") of unusual reconnaissance activity of a suspected weapons of mass destruction (WMD) facility in Sudan.
- He obtains location coordinates and asks his editors to purchase commercial satellite imagery.

Q for journalists: How much detail would you tell your editor at this stage? Would you identify your sources?
Q for journalists: How specific would you be in describing sources?

September 14

- U.S. government picks up intelligence of Satellite Earth Observation System (SPOT) image directing its satellite to shoot over Sudan.
- United States attempts to block the shoot.

Q: Why would the United States want to block the SPOT Image?
Q for military: How would you block SPOT Images? (What are the diplomatic and political efforts? technological steps? Other?)

September 15

- Attempts to block SPOT Image fail.
- Honest John sees first imagery from Sudan and intensifies his reporting among Washington intelligence sources.
- U.S. Special Operations Command in Tampa, coordinating with U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), prepares plan to destroy facility, seize documents and capture those involved in the manufacturing in Sudan.

Q for military: By now, would PA officers have received information on dealing with the press on this?

September 17 –
4:30 a.m. EDT

- National Security Agency (NSA) intercepts two phone calls indicating anthrax has already been shipped to the United States by courier. Timeframe unknown.
- Nationwide threat level raised to ORANGE.
- Meanwhile, the military launches mission to Sudan

Q: What are the implications of entering or attacking another country without permission (Covert action)?

Q: What would happen when the public alert level is raised? How would journalists respond? How would the military respond?
Q for military: What should you tell the public about raising the threat level?

4:35 a.m. EDT
- Special Operations team flies directly from the United States and establishes secret staging base in the southern Egyptian desert near the Sudanese border.
- Carrier USS *Enterprise* is moved to Red Sea in support.

Q for the military: Would you have a plan for public disclosure?
Q for journalists: Would you have to debate with editor over what to report? Would your editor want to alert the White House?

6 a.m. EDT
- The president of the United States is on a three-day trip campaigning for his immigration and border protection initiative.
- The White House orders Pentagon to handle all public affairs related to the Sudan operation.

9:30 a.m. EDT – Washington
- Honest John intensifies reporting after learning specific details about Sudan intelligence and possible military action.
- He begins asking well-informed questions of Defense Department and CIA officials.

11:45 a.m. EDT – Washington
- U.S. government begins phone taps on Honest John's office, home, cell.
- U.S. government implements NSA eavesdropping on Honest John's e-mail.

1 p.m. EDT
- In Paris, French journalist from Agence France Presse is tipped about SPOT image photos of Sudan.
- AFP Web site posts images with sketchy story indicating U.S. newspaper has urgently purchased them.

1:15 p.m. EDT

- U.S. government discovers AFP Web site, covertly shuts it down.
- Images and story are public for just 15 minutes.

Q: How do you monitor Web sites? What steps would you take?

Q: Does U.S. government have the right or power to censor a foreign news organization?

September 18 –
3 p.m. CDT – Chicago

- Fans at afternoon Cubs game experience symptoms consistent with anthrax.
- Four sites in the Chicago area report similar symptoms.

Q for military: If local government officials asked, would you reveal the connection to Sudan operation?

3:15 p.m. CDT

- U.S. forces in Sudan attack rural compound.
  - Three prisoners taken
  - Documents collected
  - Anthrax found
  - Site destroyed

5 p.m. CDT

- Cook County's Stroger Hospital confirms symptoms at Wrigley Field were caused by anthrax.

6 p.m. EDT – Washington

- Claim of responsibility for anthrax emerges in e-mails received by ranking members of Senate Intelligence Committee.
- Messages contain this threat: *"We are starting in Chicago. We can do other things."*
- Messages are signed "Holy Jihad," a group not previously known to United States intelligence.
- Intern reads e-mail, instant messages her boyfriend.
- Government asks senators to withhold information. They comply.

6:20 p.m. EDT

- U.S. Special Operations forces safely depart Sudan airspace.

6:25 p.m. EDT

- *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* editors prepare headlines for tomorrow's paper:
  - "Chicago attacks"
  - "Exclusive details of military operation in Sudan"

6:37 p.m. EDT

- CNN reporter in Atlanta gets tip that print competitor has blockbuster story of covert military operation in Sudan and suspected link of operation to Chicago attacks.

7:05 p.m. EDT

- U.S. government asks AJC and CNN to hold the story.
- Newspaper and CNN executives reluctantly agree to hold the news until 6 a.m. Sept. 19.
- Special Ops forces land safely aboard USS *Enterprise* in the Red Sea.

Q: How could the U.S. government discover that AJC and CNN are poised to publish?
Q for military: Why might you ask reporters to hold a story even after troops clear the Sudan airspace?
Q for press: Why would your executives be nervous? Why would they agree to hold the story?
Q for press: Would your publisher call Washington?

Midnight

- Sudan's government-controlled television station broadcasts grainy video purporting to show an "attack" on Sudan.
- Details are sketchy.
- Sudan publicly accuses Israel of masterminding the "attack."

September 19 –
2 a.m. EDT

- Agreement to withhold disclosure begins to break down.
- At CNN, an inexperienced Web producer, unaware of embargo, releases details on CNN.com.
- Automated news e-mails instantly disseminate bulletin, setting off alarms on Blackberries worldwide.

Q for military: How would you handle press inquiries once details begin to go public?

4 a.m. EDT

- Aboard the USS *Enterprise* in the Red Sea, Special Ops commander Dick Bravely is hooked up through DVIDS for live transmission to the Pentagon Channel.
- No video feeds offered to any other media.
- DoD and White House refuse all comment, telling reporters "Watch the Pentagon Channel."
- Pentagon Channel interviews are conducted by government employees.
- Washington reporters are unable to directly question the commandos.
- Program is rebroadcast in Internet blogs, Web sites…and…on the new White House "video wall."

Q for military: Does this last development bother you?
Q for press: How would you react? Would you have any choices about how to handle this?
Q for both: What is the significance of having U.S. government employees controlling questioning? Does this matter to serving the public good?

Participants at the conference found the scenario challenging and enlightening. Both military and media representatives felt that they had learned a lot about each other's professions and the processes and restrictions that affect decision-making. The scenario is a useful exercise for experienced journalists and public affairs officers as well as for students and military trainees.

Conclusion

The role of technology in media-military relations is not a new one. During the Civil War, Gen. Robert E. Lee read days-old northern newspapers, which provided useful information on troop movement, which could take weeks. Technology, in the form of the telegraph, sped up news delivery quite a bit. But telegrams had to be encoded and decoded by the operator and ran along lines that were vulnerable to nature and to attack during wars. Today, information travels 3.5 million times faster than the military can move troops.

And the availability and low cost of technology makes everyone a communicator, although not everyone is a journalist. "You can shut down the telegraph, but you can't shut down the infinite number of voices. Everyone has rights, but who takes the responsibility?" asked Don Cooke, the McCormick Tribune Foundation's senior vice president for philanthropy, at the close of the conference.

The ninth Military-Media Conference showed that both the military and the media are just beginning this discussion. And no matter how fast and how often they talk, it will be difficult to keep up with changes in technology. In the end, the technology is just a tool, but it is a tool that affects everyone. The real difficulty will be making changes in the culture and behavior of institutions, as well as the expectations of individuals within those institutions and within the public at large.

"There are a lot of issues to consider, and some of the more important issues came out at the conference," Cooke said. "How can the military function effectively and not face greater additional risk, in the face of instant communications? How can the journalism community consider, verify and balance the enormous inflow of information and maintain journalistic standards in the content-hungry, competitive 24-hour news cycle? How does the military community adapt to the 24-hour news cycle and the proliferation of sources, and should it?

"How do individual journalists handle the multiple tasks of reporter, engineer, cameraman while maintaining high professional standards and their ability to get the story? And although we might embrace unlimited voices, how does the public learn to differentiate among them?" he asked. "And last, can the military and the media work together with this new technology to better serve the citizens of the United States, as well as people around the world?" Questions like these will be debated at future Military-Media conferences.

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