

McCormick Tribune Conference Series

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# Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords:

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



Sponsored by:

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 McCormick Tribune  
Foundation

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**The McCormick Tribune Conference Series aims to:**

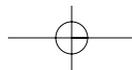
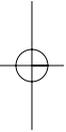
- Create impact on policy or academic investigation by facilitating balanced and challenging discussions of issues crucial to communities and nation.**
- Bring together people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives to reach new levels of understanding and develop long-term solutions.**

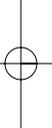
**McCormick Tribune Conference Series:  
Summary and Highlights**

# **Crossing Wires, Crossing Swords:**

## **The Military, the Media and Communication Technologies**

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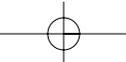


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Summary and Highlights

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## Foreword and Introduction

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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 and strategic information, and the media with its desire for open access. That was the message of David Grange, the president and chief executive officer of the McCormick Tribune Foundation and a retired U.S. Army Brigadier General.

Nonetheless, the military and the media 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.

Advancements in communication technology since the Iraq War began have radically changed how the media and military gather and disseminate information. More important, that technology is now available to a wider range of operators, including reporters, soldiers and terrorists. And these communication tools have greatly affected print and broadcast media, as well as public affairs and operational departments of the military.

A group of media and military experts met at a McCormick Tribune Foundation conference in September of 2006 to explore that impact. The 2006 Military-Media Conference attracted a diverse group of journalists with varying levels of experience, from veteran newspaper reporters who have embraced the online revolution to younger, independent journalists who are cutting their teeth in the technological age.

The conference, the ninth in a series that began in 1992, also featured a number of military professionals in both communications and operational roles, as well as some public affairs consultants who help them get their message out.

## Foreword and Introduction

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Issues discussed at the conference included:

- Communicating with U.S. audiences in an era of instant 24-hour-a-day news
- The changing role of the mainstream media as blogs and citizen journalism proliferate
- How 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 continue to serve the public.

Participants discussed their special challenges in coping with technology. In addition, they also received interesting perspectives on tools such as the Pentagon Channel, which was developed for internal military communication but also is available to the public through cable and satellite outlets across the nation.

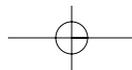
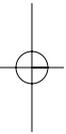
A shared belief that military officials should respond more quickly to media inquiries and that media must ensure that they report accurate, unbiased information to the public were two of the issues uniting participants at the ninth Military-Media Conference. But media and military participants did not always agree on how these objectives should be accomplished. Adding advances in communication technology to the mix further clouded the discussion.

“Each of our institutions—the military and the media—serves important, perhaps indispensable, roles,” said conference moderator Ralph Begleiter, distinguished journalist in residence at the University of Delaware.

## Foreword and Introduction

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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

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Reduction in size, price and difficulty of using technology enables all media to produce more real-time shots and stories. It also allows others to present—and distort—the news. “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,” said panelist Aneesh Raman, Baghdad bureau chief for CNN. “But television news stations have already been duped by terrorists who have used old video and repackaged it to represent a current event.”

To counterbalance this, mainstream news must reaffirm its 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.

The Pentagon Channel was launched in 2004 as part of a Defense Department effort to develop better internal communications, according to panelist Allison Barber, deputy assistant secretary of defense for internal communications and public liaison. And with a current annual budget of \$7 million, it now broadcasts to 12 million U.S. households.

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 Voice of America, bars the federal government from propagandizing the American public with information and psychological operations intended for foreign audiences.

Barber said that the Pentagon Channel relies on experienced military and civil servants who exercise good judgment in selecting appropriate news and information from the Department of Defense for the military audience.

## Military and Media Communication with U.S. Audiences

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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.”

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 sometimes questions the benefits of mainstream media coverage. “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,” said panelist Rajiv Chandrasekaran, assistant managing editor for continuous news at the *Washington Post*.

Complicating the mainstream 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. “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 said.

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* uses 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.

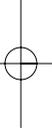
## Chapter 2

### Military and Media Communication with Foreign Audiences

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“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.”

Although allowing access to reporters may result in stories that make the military uncomfortable, disclosure still is the best practice, because it shows the world that people in the United States are able to talk to journalists and speak their minds, said panelist Mohammed Alami, chief Washington correspondent for Al Jazeera.



Military officials at the conference 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 Arabic news organization, headquartered in the Persian Gulf. In fact, sometimes Al Jazeera is a preferred outlet on stories aimed at the regional audience served by the network. One public affairs officer said that he’s “gotten a fair shake” when dealing with Al Jazeera.

Communicating with foreign audiences also can produce challenges that have less to do with technology and more to do with understanding the people and their culture, said panelist Pam Keeton, a former military public affairs officer. Convincing hostile international audiences that the United States has friendly intentions will require a coordinated effort centrally managed from the top of the government.

On top of this, traditional communications tools proved useless in a country like Afghanistan, where many are illiterate, most do not have televisions and only a small percentage have Internet access. Most Afghans receive their news by radio or word of mouth. “Afghans might be riding a mule for their transportation, but they are talking on a cell phone,” said Keeton.



## Military and Media Communication with Foreign Audiences

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“And they seem to have the number to the Associated Press or BBC handy.” Consequently, she 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.

“The military is still too slow and too cumbersome in a lot of ways,” said panelist Brig. Gen. Michael D. Barbero, deputy director of regional operations for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. And that can have consequences that derail everything the military is trying to do. For example, after coalition forces quietly and carefully removed insurgents’ weapons from a mosque in Iraq, the enemy was quick to communicate its version of the story.

“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.”

## Chapter 3

# Intended and Unintended Consequences of Communication Technologies in Regional Conflicts

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“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,” said panelist John McWethy, former ABC national security correspondent. Fewer bureaus and beat reporters results in fewer journalists who understand nuances and can provide context for their stories. At the same time that this is occurring, reporters are being pressured by their bosses to generate more “editorial product.”

To make matters worse, the increasing number of news outlets—including blogs—seeking information from the military has overwhelmed its ability to answer questions. As a result, “You have a breakdown in the real flow of communication between the major news organization and the public despite this marvelous technology.”

At the start of the Iraq war, the military found it difficult to operate in a global information environment. “And when we did operate, we did not operate very effectively,” said Col. James Yonts, director of public affairs for Joint Forces Headquarters National Capital Region, (NORTHCOM). Although many in the military 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 respond faster with facts and explanations, rather than waiting for reports to be completed. “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,” Yonts explained.

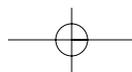
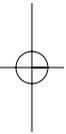
## Chapter 4

### Issues Revisited

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Throughout the conference, the term “strategic communications” was 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.” The participants discussed what it is, how it fits into public affairs and its impact on military-media relations.

Although they disagreed on the implications of strategic communications, the military and media participants agreed 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 and cell phones—that allow rapid exchange of information, may inadvertently diminish the face-to-face contact so important in strong professional relationships.



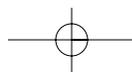
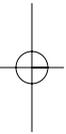
## Chapter 5

### Breaking News Scenario

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Co-moderators Ralph Begleiter and John McWethy presented a hypothetical scenario that focused on many of the topic areas and issues discussed at the conference. Participants discussed 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 quickly unfold and identified sensitive issues requiring military and media reaction. It involved an alleged anthrax threat, a military operation overseas, politicians' posturing and public policy concerns. 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.

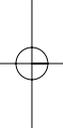


## Conclusion

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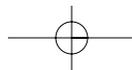
The conference showed that both the military and the media are just beginning the serious discussion of technology's effects on information in time of conflict. And no matter how fast and how often they talk, it will be difficult to keep up with changes in technology. Although technology is just a tool, it is a tool that affects everyone.

The real challenge in adapting to communications technology is altering the culture and behavior of institutions, as well as the expectations of individuals within those institutions. For example, how does the military community adapt to the 24-hour news cycle and the proliferation of sources, and should it?



In his closing remarks, Don Cooke, the McCormick Tribune Foundation's senior vice president for philanthropy, outlined other pertinent issues. "How do individual journalists handle the multiple tasks of reporter, engineer and cameraman while maintaining high professional standards and the ability to get the story? And although we might embrace unlimited voices, how does the public learn to differentiate among them?"

"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.



# Participants

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**Mohammed Alami**  
Chief Correspondent  
Al-Jazeera, Washington  
Bureau

**Capt. William Jeffrey (Jeff)  
Alderson, USN**  
Chief of Public Affairs  
U.S. Pacific Command

**James Bamford**  
Writer/Author

**Allison Barber**  
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U.S. Department of Defense

**Brig. Gen. Michael D.  
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Deputy Director, Regional  
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U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff

**Ralph Begleiter**  
Distinguished Journalist in  
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**Barbara Cochran**  
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*Time Magazine*

**Brig. Gen. Mari K. Eder, USA**  
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**BG Frank Gorenc, USAF**  
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Chicago Tribune

**John Hendren**  
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**Greg Jaffe**  
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Independent Consultant

**Steven Komarow**  
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**Rear Adm. Samuel J.  
Locklear, III, USN**  
Director, Programming Division  
(N80), Office of the Chief of  
Naval Operations

**Aamer Madhani**  
Staff Reporter  
*Chicago Tribune*

**John McWethy**  
Former Correspondent  
ABC News

**Brig. Gen. Robert (Boomer)  
Milstead, Jr., USMC**  
Director, U.S. Marine Corps  
Public Affairs

**Rear Adm. M. Stewart  
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Director, Standing Joint Force  
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**Eileen Parise**  
Senior Consultant  
The Rendon Group

**Brig. Gen. Charles S. (Steve)  
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U.S. Joint Forces Command

**Kyra Phillips**  
Anchor  
Cable News Network

**Aneesh Raman**  
Baghdad Bureau Chief  
Cable News Network

**John A. Robinson**  
Managing Editor  
*Defense Daily*

**Col. Sam Taylor, USA**  
Director of Public Affairs, U.S.  
Special Operations Command

**Rear Adm. Frank Thorp, USN**  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of  
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**David B. Wood**  
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**Paul Wood**  
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**Col. James Yonts, USA**  
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# About the McCormick Tribune Foundation

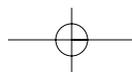
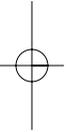
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The McCormick Tribune Foundation is one of the nation's largest charitable organizations and encompasses:

- Five grantmaking programs: citizenship, communities, education, journalism and special initiatives
- Cantigny Park and Golf
- Three world-class museums: Cantigny First Division Museum, the Robert R. McCormick Museum, and the new McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum.

A focus on children, communities and country unites the foundation and its many parts and keeps us true to our mission of advancing the ideals of a free and democratic society.

For more information about the foundation and its efforts, please visit [www.McCormickTribune.org](http://www.McCormickTribune.org).



# **McCormick Tribune Conference Series Call for 2008 Conference Proposals**

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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](http://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!

## **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”
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