USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

LEVERAGING THE MEDIA:
THE EMBEDDED MEDIA PROGRAM IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

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ABSTRACT

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In the planning for the war in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld took a bold step and enacted a major change to the public affairs approach for military operations. In February 2003, he approved the concept of embedding reporters with frontline forces. The Defense Secretary, along with other strategic leaders seeking to end Saddam Hussein's regime, wanted the American people and the world to see, hear and feel the war, up close and personal. The embedded reporters told a story that otherwise would not have been told.

The Embedded Media Program was also an essential part of the Information Operations Campaign. Strategic and operational leaders leveraged (not manipulated) the media in order to enhance and in some cases achieve information operations objectives. Specifically, the US-led coalition countered Iraqi propaganda while affecting tactical and operational actions on the battlefield. The ability to leverage the media coverage of the war assisted the coalition in achieving information superiority. The Embedded Media Program allowed the military to harness an important tool in waging war in the 21st century.

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LEVERAGING THE MEDIA: THE EMBEDDED MEDIA PROGRAM IN OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

> "We need to tell the factual story – good and bad – before others seed the media with disinformation and distortion, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story – only commanders can ensure the media get to the story alongside the troops."
>
> —Donald Rumsfeld

Margaret Belknap writing in Parameters in 2002 commented, "The fourth estate [the media] offers a superb mechanism for strategic leaders and warfighters to transmit operational objectives and goals, as well as to reinforce policy objectives." Ms Belknap stated that strategic leaders must be proactive in leveraging the media in order to inform audiences concerning objectives and end-states. She warned that if the military failed to leverage the media, they risked having the graphic images of war shown to the world and the American people in a distorted manner. Inaccurate or deceitful reporting of military actions could drastically affect the will and support of the American people, which is the strategic center of gravity for the United States (US). Loss of public support for a war could also affect the decision-making process at the strategic level.[1] Essentially, Ms Belknap echoed the sentiment of many others who recommend the military cease holding the press at arm's length. Instead, the military should embrace the press and leverage the media's technology and worldwide reach to further strategic goals.

SECRETARY RUMSFELD'S DECISION

During the build up to the war in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld faced an important decision regarding the military's public affairs policy. He needed to decide the way in which the war would be covered by radio, television, and print media (hereafter referred to as the media). The Defense Secretary had three courses of action. He could continue the practice of limiting the media's access to the battlefield and simply conduct press briefings at the Pentagon and the military's operational headquarters as done during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Secretary Rumsfeld could employ a second option that envisioned a return to the management of the media through the creation and use of media pools as had been done during Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM, now known as Gulf War I. A third course of action suggested that the Department of Defense (DoD) and the military leverage the media using an extremely radical public affairs plan now referred to as the Embedded Media Program.

In consultation with his Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Victoria Clarke, Secretary Rumsfeld chose to implement the Embedded Media Program because he understood that the media coverage of the coming war would "shape public perception of the National Security Environment." The technology used by the media to report instantaneously from distant locations, along with the rise of non-American news agencies (specifically the Arab news agency, al Jazeera) would overpower military public relations efforts. The American and international media had to have freedom of access and reporting, free of the restrictive nature of press pools and without unnecessary censorship. Secretary Rumsfeld announced his decision in his Public Affairs Guidance message dated 10 February 2003, "We need to tell the factual story - - good or bad - - before others seed the media with disinformation..."[2]

THE MEDIA AND THE MILITARY

While the concept of embedded reporters during war was not new, the number of reporters envisioned under the Embedded Media Program was much more robust than ever attempted in any previous conflict. Unfathomable to many strategic leaders was the fact that many of the reporters would be able to go 'live' from anywhere in the battlespace with news of battles, complete with audio and television images of death and destruction. Remembering the impact of edited and delayed film reports during the Vietnam War, several military leaders had difficulty trusting the media enough to allow unlimited access. The by-product would be brutal images of war and death - instantly televised to every American living room.

Much of the senior/career level leadership (officer and enlisted) of today's military remains scarred by Vietnam and its aftermath. A whole generation of military leaders believe the US lost the war in Vietnam because the media turned public opinion against the soldier in the field. This belief in a media betrayal shaped the military's view of the media and the ethics of reporters during the past two decades. Many Americans (both military and civilian) agree with the worries expressed by General Colin Powell during the planning for the first Gulf War. In 1990 he felt that instantaneous battlefield reporting via television would bring home the horrors of war, along with graphic scenes of combat and death. Reporters and cameras recording every step in a prolonged offensive ground war would create disillusionment and anti-war sentiment at home. These fears led to the policy of press pools.[3]

To make the Embedded Media Program work, Secretary Rumsfeld had to first demonstrate that the press pools of the first Gulf War were not the optimum way to use the media in a war. While the military liked the coverage of Gulf War I and the American public was ecstatic with General Norman Schwarzkopf's briefings and aerial bomb footage, the media left

the war saying “never again.” Walter Cronkite, writing in February 1991, decried the military’s control of the media coverage through the press pools and the monitoring of stories and interviews with the soldiers in the field. In his opinion, the military was attempting to hide something. Cronkite believed that if the ground war had lasted longer than a few weeks, this sense of hiding something would have led to a breakdown of popular support for the war.[4]

THE POWER OF INFORMATION

In 1991 Saddam Hussein controlled the media in Baghdad, using it as a propaganda tool to show the death and destruction caused by the coalition bombing. Secretary Rumsfeld understood that if the American-led coalition failed to leverage the media in the coming war, the enemy might win the information battle by using the media to their advantage.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Bryan Whitman remarked that the control of information was a major objective of the American-led coalition in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF). The military needed to “take the offensive to achieve information dominance and to counter Iraqi lies.” Under Secretary Rumsfeld’s guidance, the military planners came to understand that the “robust coverage” envisioned in the Embedded Media Program could build and ensure domestic/international support for the war.[5]

Major General J.D. Thurman, the Operations Officer for the Coalition Forces Land Component Commander in OIF, remarked that the presence of the embedded reporters on the front lines and the reports they filed countered the Iraqi propaganda during the assault on Baghdad. While ‘Comical Ali’ or ‘Baghdad Bob’ (as the Iraqi Minister of Information was known) continued to announce that the coalition forces were nowhere near Baghdad, embedded reporters simultaneously reported the crossing of bridges leading into the city, the taking of the international airport, and the seizure of key points throughout the city.[6] The noted writer and commentator, Joseph Nye, referred to the military’s ability to leverage the media as the “weaponization of reporters.”[7]

In a sense Mr Nye is correct. During OIF, the military succeeded in leveraging the media as part of its Information Operations Campaign. The Embedded Media Program was both a propaganda tool for the strategic war effort and an operational counter-propaganda asset. Many readers may cringe when the word ‘propaganda’ is used to define the leveraging of the media. Propaganda is not a dirty word. It is loosely defined as using any form of communication to influence an intended audience via rational or emotional arguments and personal opinion. When applied to military situations, propaganda seeks to gain audience support of military objectives.[8]

In the past few years, the strategic leadership of the military has begun to realize that public affairs (and by extension, the media) have a role in information operations. The Concept for Information Operations sees the role of public affairs as "a timely flow of information to both external (public) and internal (government/military) audiences." Public affairs is a "perception management tool."[9] During OIF the Embedded Media Program assisted the military in achieving information superiority over the Iraqis without disinformation or deception. Embedded reporting assisted decision makers at the operational and strategic levels in achieving information superiority.[10]

BENEFITS OF THE EMBEDS

WILLIE AND JOE

In Operation IRAQI FREEDOM there were over 770 journalists embedded with coalition military forces, with over 550 positioned with ground forces. At the height of the conflict these reporters generated over 6000 stories each week.[11] As a battalion commander in the conflict, I witnessed first hand the impact these reporters had on both the military and the people back home. My observations confirmed what Philip Knightley wrote on the effect of leveraging the media over a decade ago: "On the home front, information – news – is used to arouse the fighting spirit of the nation, to mobilize public opinion about the war, to suppress dissent and to steel the people for the sacrifices needed for victory."[12] Lieutenant General William Scott Wallace, Commander of the US Army V Corps during OIF, remarked that the embedded media told the story of the soldier to the nation. Otherwise it would not have been told. The stories filed by the embedded media gave the public something to hold onto at the 'mom & pop' level. The embeds gave the people back home the 'Willie & Joe' of OIF.[13]

ENSURING PUBLIC SUPPORT

Dan Rather of CBS News saw another benefit of the Embedded Media Program. As with all conflicts for the past 50 years, a small but vocal antiwar movement existed in the United States during OIF. Left to its own devices, this anti-war element could have become extremely vocal. The embed reports, carried 24 hours a-day on the cable news channels and as lead stories within the standard news agencies, focused audiences on the fighting men and women and silenced or smothered national dissent. Everyone, regardless of their opinion on the war, developed a "sense of pride and admiration" for those fighting on the frontlines.[14]

Max Boot, writing in Foreign Affairs, echoed Rather's observations with a slightly different spin. Saddam Hussein failed to turn public opinion against the coalition even though

he waged a strong propaganda campaign using the Arab news agencies. His attempts to sway public support through televised images of US prisoners of war and Iraqi civilian casualties, along with reports of coalition atrocities, were successfully countered by embedded media reports. These reports provided *believable accounts* of the "professionalism, heroism, and restraint" of coalition forces. The world listened, watched, and believed these reporters more than they believed Arab news reports.[15] If the embedded reporters had not been present, the propaganda war would have had a much different outcome.

TRUE IMAGE OF WAR

Joe Galloway, the award-winning war correspondent, commented during the *Reporters on the Ground* conference (held at the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania) that the Embedded Media Program allowed the men and women on the front lines to be the military's best spokesman. Gulf War I was a "Nintendo War." Ninety percent of the coverage of the war originated from Riyadh and the Combatant Commander's Headquarters. This provided the American public a "false image of war." Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and the embedded reporters corrected that image of war.[16]

The embedded reporters brought more than their ability to report the war first hand through the eyes and voices of soldiers. They also commented knowledgeably on the ability of the US forces to improvise and adjust when the tactical situation forced a modification to combat plans. The embeds had access to the original plans and were aware of the commander's intent. They also understood that no plan survives the first shot. In OIF, instead of criticizing the tactical situation as plans changed, the embeds knew the whole story and reported to the American public the brilliant modifications to tactical plans that allowed the military to continue the offensive.[17]

The Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, had a different viewpoint on the benefit of the Embedded Media Program. He felt many of the great conflicts of the past century might have been fought differently or ended more quickly if embedded reporters had been present on the battlefield and in the commanders' headquarters. The Prime Minister doubted "that public opinion in great democracies would have allowed [the wars to continue], if they had known the full measure and impact of the horrendous loss of life that occurred in those tragic battles …"[18]

Prime Minister Howard has a point. Embedded reporters brought the war into every living room in America. Their reporting held commanders accountable for their actions and leadership. The American public relished the reporting and fully supported the war. If the military leaders had been incompetent and prosecuted a bloody nonsensical war, the embedded

reporting would have shown that incompetence and led to a change in commanders and tactics or an end to the war.

LEVERAGING FOR INTELLIGENCE VALUE

Maintaining the support of the public back home while countering the lies emanating from Baghdad was only one of the benefits of embedded reporters. Commanders in Iraq leveraged the media for intelligence value to achieve immediate success on the battlefield. During the fighting in East Baghdad, a CNN television crew provided live footage of an infantry battalion's movement into the city. The senior Marine commander, Lieutenant General James Conway, watched the live CNN coverage in his headquarters east of the city. He saw friendly Iraqi civilians on the streets and noted the absence of enemy forces. Acting on these real time images, LtGen Conway immediately approved a request to let the advancing forces continue until they hit enemy defenses. Similar live feeds from other embeds convinced the general to modify his entire plan and speed up the attack.[19] CNN coverage, from the embedded reporters, enabled LtGen Conway to make his rapid assessment, change his plans, and speed up the assault on Baghdad.

Of course the enemy can also leverage the media for intelligence value. During the Battle for Nasiriyah in late March 2003, the Iraqis reinforced the irregular forces fighting in the city with additional Fedayeen forces based on the embedded reporting of the battle on 23 and 24 March 2003.[20] Clearly, gathering intelligence from media reports is a double-edged sword. Commanders at all levels must be aware that their words and actions will be reported and leveraged by all participants.

LOSING THE INFORMATION WAR

For all its successful efforts in leveraging the media to achieve information operations objectives during the combat phase of the war in Iraq, the military failed to follow up and ensure success during the Stabilization Phase of the war. With the fall of Baghdad and Saddam's regime, embedded reporters left the front and returned home to new stories. By the end of April 2003 less than 40 embedded reporters remained in Iraq. With their departure, the military lost the ability to leverage the media. They no longer enjoyed information superiority. With the loss of the embeds, there were too few public affairs officers in the stabilization force to ensure the remaining reporters, now based in Baghdad hotels, covered the good news stories (previously observed by embedded reporters). Charged with getting a story to lead the hourly news coverage, the reporters concentrated on sensational stories of ambushes and riots/looting/ sabotage vice stories of schools opening, water or power restoration, etc.[21]

IMPROVING FOR THE FUTURE

UNILATERALS

If 'embedding' is the future of wartime public affairs, the military and the DoD must act now to correct the problems identified during OIF. The military must decide how to deal with the reporters who will be present on the battlefield but not embedded with a particular unit. Many news agencies feel they lost the big picture of the war because their reporters did not have the freedom to move around on the battlefield or to stop for in depth stories on a particular event. At the *Reporters on the Ground* conference, news editors indicated a desire to increase the number of unilateral reporters in the next conflict. (Unilaterals are non-embedded or free-ranging reporters traversing the battlespace on their own, seeking a story.) Military leaders dislike unilaterals because they do not follow the rules. They endanger themselves, expect support and safety from the military forces, and claim ill will if they are shut out of interviews or worse, shot at by attacking forces. One Marine general called the unilateral reporters "leeches [who] take food and water, then run off."[22]

During the *Reporters on the Ground* conference, a number of panel members spoke at length on how unilateral reporters create dangerous situations in a war zone. At times these free-ranging reporters might find themselves ahead of advancing forces and in the middle of a deadly firefight. If operating on their own, they might be mistaken for the enemy. In August 2003, a freelance cameraman died while covering an insurgent attack near an Iraqi prison. As coalition armor forces approached the prison to respond to the incident, the cameraman leapt from his civilian vehicle and brought his camera to his shoulder to film the engagement. From a distance, the cameraman's actions resembled those of an insurgent preparing to engage the armor force with a Rocket Propelled Grenade. The US forces shot and killed the cameraman from long range because they felt threatened by his actions.

A Special Forces panel member at the conference related an incident from Operation ENDURING FREEDOM further demonstrating the dangers of unilateral reporters. Terrorists, masquerading as unilateral reporters, were able to breech the external security of a northern tribal leader's encampment. Once the terrorists got close enough, they detonated a car bomb, killing the tribal leader and setting back the war effort. If editors and media organizations want to employ more unilaterals in the future, they must realize that the trust and cooperation the unilaterals receive will not be the same as reporters enjoy in the Embedded Media Program.[23]

THE RULES

The Public Affairs Guidance (PAG), signed by Secretary Rumsfeld, contained over five pages of rules for the reporters and the military. Although extensive and detailed, these rules were not well known. At the tactical level, commanders and reporters used common sense to determine what could be reported and when a reporter could transmit or 'go live.' Joe Galloway commented that in Vietnam a single page of rules sufficed (essentially a commander's intent or concept for media relations). While technology has improved, the basics of combat reporting have not changed. Common sense should be the basis for rules for embedding reporters.[24]

The scope of this paper does not lend itself to suggesting a complete modification of the rules. I believe they could be combined and/or reduced. One of the rules that should be changed concerns the embedding of local media (i.e., from the military unit's hometown). The PAG allowed a regional/local reporter to embed and cover the preparation and deployment of a unit from home station to its arrival in the war zone. After arrival in theater, the reporter was required to apply to the OASD(PA), Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), to be assigned as a combat embedded reporter. Unfortunately, the regional/local reporter had very little chance of being assigned to the hometown unit he had followed from the United States.[25] Accommodations should be made to allow one regional/local reporter to embed with a hometown unit from preparation through redeployment. If the rule is modified, the decision on which regional/local reporter should be allowed to embed must remain with OASD(PA). Commanders should not be placed in the position of choosing among reporters when they are preparing to deploy or engage in combat.

REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO CASUALTIES

The rules prohibited the embedded reporters from reporting the names of casualties and required that they refrain from filming casualties. However, the rules allowed the embeds to report when a unit was in contact or had fought a battle. They could report there had been casualties, and even detail the exact number of dead and wounded if they knew for certain from first hand knowledge.[26] While this seems an appropriate approach to combat reporting, the real time reporting of casualties in a unit caused a number of families at home to worry and wait for the feared visit from a military casualty assistance call officer.

I understand the embedded reporters were simply doing their job. As long as they did not identify the casualties or breach operational security, the military could not censor their efforts. On the other hand the military must acknowledge the speed of real time reporting and video images of battle and improve its casualty notification process. There is no way to get

ahead of the news of battle or the reporting of casualties in a particular unit. But the military's laborious notification process for death or injury did not work in OIF and will not suffice in the next war. It is a given that the families of those in combat will be sitting at home hanging on every word concerning their loved one's unit. They will laugh and cry at the good news stories and wait in fear when reports of combat and casualties mention their units. The military must leverage technology to speed up the process of reporting battlefield casualties. Without improvements in casualty reporting, the military risks the erosion of credibility. [27]

THE NEWS CYCLE

Beyond the narrow rules in the PAG, and indeed beyond the remit of military public affairs officers, there is room for improvement in how editors and commentators respond to reports from their embedded reporters. Rachel Smolkin writing in American Journalism Review commented that "the relentless news cycle and the drama of a war unfolding live on television spurred a crush of grandiose pronouncements just days into the fighting - - too early for journalists to offer any true perspective." Ms Smolkin cautioned that editors and news directors should guard against reading too much into a single day of stories. Too often during OIF the 'talking heads' in the studios jumped to conclusions that had to be re-evaluated an hour later when a new report arrived or an old report was revised.[28] The lesson here is one that military leaders know well – 'first reports are almost always wrong and always incomplete.' For the Embedded Media Program to survive and be relevant editors, news presenters, and commentators must learn to manage the news cycle and raise the threshold for news alerts. This is not something the military can teach. It remains the responsibility of the media and those who manage the media to learn this lesson and to improve their profession.

CRITICS

Many military leaders who were s keptical of the Embedded Media Program prior to OIF are now singing its praises. On the other hand, journalists and editors are less than unanimous in their praise of the program. Robert Jensen, writing in Progressive, called the Embedded Media Program a "failure of success" of journalism. The technology that allowed instantaneous reporting was a success. But the reporting was a failure because the embedded reporters were unable to inform. They failed to provide the fullest possible understanding of the 'what, why and so what.'[29]

Mr Jensen and others feel the embedded reporters identified too closely with their military subjects. Critics of the program believe the embeds allowed themselves to be censored by allowing the military to control their movements and reporting. Since only good stories

appeared, the critics reason the military prevented the embeds from telling the whole story. Additionally, these critics suggest that the military staged many of the historic events telecast live. The most referenced photo-op was the pulling down of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad.[30] The military and the reporters who embedded with combat units deny any claims of censorship or staged photo-ops. Critics like Mr Jensen seem to be living in the past, specifically the era following the Vietnam War where the military and the media were at opposite ends of every imaginable spectrum. Journalists of Mr Jensen's cut are distrustful of the military and believe uniformed leaders practice lying and misinformation. These critics possess a misconception of wartime journalism.

RESPONDING TO THE CRITICS

In the forward to CBS News' chronicle of the war in Iraq, Dan Rather defends the embedded reporters and the Embedded Media Program. Rather, who was a war correspondent in Vietnam, admits that wartime journalism cannot be expected to provide the full story of all that is happening on the battlefield. In war there is no time for reflection on how the events unfolding before the camera lens fit into world events. In most cases the reporter will be unable to provide a general context for the images. Wartime journalists can only provide "a first draft of history," incomplete and possibly wrong or misleading.[31]

As to the claims of censorship or letting reporters only see the good news stories, one must consider the source of the criticism. The embedded reporters have not criticized the program. Those media professionals who remember other conflicts know that censorship was very much alive and well in World War II and later. The openness of the military in OIF was far beyond anything ever experienced. As a battalion commander with embedded reporters, and having talked to many other reporters, not one reporter mentioned a time when the content of his stories had to cleared or "OK'd" by the military.

NEED FOR A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

One criticism of the Embedded Media Program that is valid and needs to be addressed by the DoD concerns a lack of strategic reporting and analysis. The embeds provided tactical play-by-play. Their daily or hourly reports reflected the ebb and flow of the operation. Without someone at the Pentagon to put these reports into a strategic context, the media turned inward to poorly informed studio presenters or retired military officers from a past generation. Tactical stories of long supply lines and halted forces were taken out of context and turned into a bad news story. That bad news story was then fanned into a wild fire in a matter of hours.[32]

Consider LTG Wallace's comments on 27 March 2003. In response to a question from an embedded reporter, the V Corps commander commented, "The enemy we're fighting is a bit different than the one we war-gamed against." The Washington Post ran the story with Wallace's comments but deleted the word 'bit' from the quote. Television news presenters and military experts began talking about the war going badly based on the general's words. These discussions fed a media frenzy and created doubt with the American public concerning the military operations in Iraq. The Bush administration was seen as hiding the truth about the war. Much of this doubt began from a truthful story with an incorrect quote.[33] Even worse was the response from the Pentagon. Instead of providing an overlying strategic context to the Corps commander's tactical analysis, the Pentagon sought to down play the comments and appeared to refute the commander on the ground.

An article in USA Today commented that, the Pentagon must stop providing perspective (another word for 'spin') and instead provide a strategic context to the Pentagon reporters. By providing the strategic context, the Pentagon could counter the current American penchant for "fast forward thinking." The embeds gave the American public "Victory on Fast Forward." The "euphoria of liberating Baghdad" lasted eight hours or one day's news cycle. Then the public and the studio-based presenters back in the states started clamoring for something new. The military had not completed the liberation of Baghdad before the public was asking for a redeployment and 'Welcome Home Parades.' Knowledgeable spokesmen working for the major news agencies conveniently based in the Pentagon could have proactively countered this 'fast-forward mentality' by offering a strategic context for the actions being reported by the embedded reporters.[34]

A FINAL DISTURBING THOUGHT

There exists one disturbing aspect of the embedded reporting experiment. Is it healthy for a tactical commander's decisions to be affected by how the outcome of his actions will be reported in the news? It is well understood that the Pentagon wanted to leverage the media as part of its information operations campaign, but should tactical commanders become worried about how their actions might influence information operations?

David Zucchino, writing for The Los Angeles Times, told of how the commanding officer of 2nd Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division made a critical decision during the battle for Baghdad based on his ability to affect information operations through the reporting of his embedded reporters. On 7 April 2003, Colonel David Perkins, commander of the 2d Brigade, received orders to conduct a reconnaissance in force from the international airport into the heart of Baghdad to

“test the city’s defenses, destroy as many Iraqi forces as possible, and then come out to prepare for the siege of the capital.”

US forces had previously seized the airport and were continuing to engage targets throughout the city. Colonel Perkins had heard news reports of the Iraqi Minister of Information declaring the Iraqi forces were winning in the city, even claiming that Iraqi forces were in possession of the airport. Perkins wanted not just to attack the city but also to stay there. He knew the attack would be reported live by his embedded reporters and thus counter Iraqi propaganda. The brigade’s attack drove deep into downtown Baghdad, ending with the capture of one of Saddam Hussein’s palaces. Once the attack was over, Colonel Perkins along with two of his battalion commanders participated in live interviews with an embedded Fox TV news crew. The brigade commander’s decision and actions appeared to be working until he received word that his brigade headquarters (at the airport) had been hit by missile fire. Simultaneously, Colonel Perkins learned his supply line was in danger of being cut off and overrun.

Without a command post to serve as the brigade’s command and control nerve center and a supply line to refuel and rearm the force, the brigade could possibly become trapped in the city and overrun. As Mr Zucchino writes, “Perkins knew the prudent move was to pull out ...” He had no reserves and no hope of immediate resupply. But Colonel Perkins also knew that pulling out would validate the Iraqi propaganda lies. Trusting in his soldiers’ ability to overcome the enemy attacks and keep the supply line open, the brigade commander elected to stay in the city. His decision proved to be the right one. His command center was able to recover and the supply line defense held.[35]

Regardless of the outcome, the real question is whether Colonel Perkins made his decision based on the tactical situation or on how his brigade’s actions would be reported? If the embeds had not been present on the mission to telecast the brigade’s actions, what benefit would have there been in staying at the palace? He had achieved the division commander’s objective by conducting the reconnaissance in force. His command was in danger yet he elected to affect information operations through the media vice conservatively fighting the tactical battle. Colonel Perkins’s actions demonstrated initiative and fearless nerve but I am concerned that his decision process was corrupted by the presence of the embedded reporters. If my concern is founded in truth, senior leadership must recognize that embedded media will invariably affect the decision process of battlefield leaders. Media training for officers and senior enlisted must become an integral part of the training syllabus at all levels of military schooling. As part of tactical exercises, military leaders need to study and critique possible situations involving media reporting and their effect on operations.

CONCLUSION: EMBEDDED MEDIA - HERE TO STAY?

Using the hindsight we all possess, it is hard to understand why it took so long for the Department of Defense to adopt the Embedded Media Program. Following Operation URGENT FURY (Grenada) in 1983, the *20th Century Fund Task Force on the Military and the Media* found that "[the] free press, when it accompanies the nation's soldiers into battle, performs a unique role. It serves as eyewitness, it forges a bond between citizen and soldier. It also provides one of the checks and balances that sustains the confidence of the American people in their political system and armed forces."[36] Military leaders will resoundingly deny any need for the media to be watchdogs. What is lost on the military leader is that the American public has become all too familiar with its leaders requiring checks and balances. If the presence of the media within units in combat at all levels ensures the trust of the American public and strengthens their support, the military should look for ways to further improve the Embedded Media Program for the future.

At the *Reporters on the Ground* conference, a reporter asked whether embedding would be the standard public affairs policy for the future. The Pentagon officials at the conference avoided a definitive response saying that the situation will dictate the policy. Phil Nesbitt, a media consultant, commented that embedding would have to be the future policy. "The genie is well out of the bottle."[37] I agree with Mr Nesbitt. The American public wants reality TV. Instant battlefield reporting will be expected. If the military tried to fight a war without embeds, the claims of cover-up and deceit would once again rule the airwaves.

In August 2003, the military experienced a sample of the potential backlash and suspicion arising from a failure to employ the Embedded Media Program in a future conflict. By the end of Phase III Operations, the Embedded Media Program had become an integral part of the military's public affairs policy. Even with the departure of most of the embedded journalists, the few that remained with the deployed forces continued to enjoy a level of access to operations never before imagined by the military or the media. Relations between commanders and reporters were at an all time high and the military was continuing to reap the benefit of embedded reporting. Then, in mid August, the Coalition Joint Task Force in Baghdad directed all commanders to deny reporters, photographers, and television crews access to 'some' operations. The directive was a "significant shift" in the relations between the media and the military. Confusion reigned for a short time as it appeared operational security had won out over information operations. The directive was quickly rescinded, but the damage was done.[38]

Since the beginning of Phase IV - Stabilization Operations, the relationship between the military and the media has worsened. There are fewer embedded reporters and more unilaterals. The reporters feel they need the freedom to move throughout the city and country to

get to the action. The military believes that only the bad news stories are getting told. Every reporter at the *Reporters on the Ground* conference admitted that they believe the military is hiding something or conducting a cover up anytime the Pentagon announces that an incident 'is under investigation.' Distrust between the media and the military can easily be rekindled. The media will expect the Embedded Media Program to be employed every time America goes to war. The military will need to employ the program if they are to win the public affairs battle and the information operations campaign.

It is clear that Secretary Rumsfeld made the right decision regarding public affairs policy in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. The Embedded Media Program was a resounding success for both the military and the American people. The military and the media overcame many barriers of distrust and antagonism. The task before us is to build upon the successes enjoyed in OIF and attempt to correct or minimize the problem areas. While the Pentagon might claim that each future conflict will have to be examined before determining a public affairs policy, the truth is that the 'fork in the road' has been taken and there is no turning back. The Embedded Media Program is here to stay.

WORD COUNT = 5,994

ENDNOTES

[1] Margaret H. Belknap, "The CNN Effect: Strategic Enabler or Operational Risk," Parameters, 32 (Autumn 2002), 110.

[2] Secretary of Defense Message, "Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on Embedding Media During Possible Future Operations/Deployments in the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR)," Washington, D.C. 101900Z February 2003; and Justin Ewers, "Is the New News Good News?" U. S. News and World Report, 134 (7 April 2003) [database on-line]; available from H. W. Wilson; accessed 23 September 2003.

[3] Bob Woodward, The Commanders, (New York: Simon and Schustler, 1991), 315.

[4] Phillip M. Taylor, War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf War, (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1992), 273. Cronkite was a battlefield reporter in World War II as well as Vietnam, his ideas of press pools are most likely shaped from his own experiences.

[5] John Cook, "Military, Media Meet Off Battlefield to Debate War Coverage," Chicago Tribune, 18 August 2003.

[6] Katherine M. Skiba, "Journalists Embodied Realities of the Iraq War," Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 14 September 2003.

[7] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "U.S. Power and Strategy After Iraq," Foreign Affairs 82 no.4 (July/August 2003), 67.

[8] W. C. Garrison, Information Operations and Counter-Propaganda: Making a Weapon of Public Affairs, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 17 March 1999), 4-5.

[9] U.S. Army War College, Information Operations Primer, Department of Military Strategy, Planning and Operations (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, January 2001), 48.

[10] Ibid., 2. Information superiority is defined as the collection, processing and dissemination of information without interruption or interference while at the same time exploiting or denying the enemy the ability to do the same.

[11] Skiba.

[12] Taylor, 18-19.

[13] Gathered from notes taken at a conference conducted by Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College, *Reporters on the Ground*, held 3-5 September 2003 at Carlisle Barracks. Willie and Joe are famous cartoon characters of World War II depicting the average American 'dog-face' soldier on the European war front.

[14] Dan Rather, America at War: The Battle for Iraq: A View From the Frontlines, CBS News (New York: Simon and Schustler, 2003), ix.

[15] Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," Foreign Affairs 82 no. 4 (July/August 2003), 54.

[16] Skiba.

[17] Boot, 55.

[18] "Embedded Media 'Shorten Wars'," News.com.au, [journal on-line]; available from http://www.news.com.au/common/printpage/06093,6260149,00.html internet; accessed 23 September 2003.

[19] Bing West and Ray L. Smith, The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division, (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 2003), 226-227. The Battle for Tikrit (described on page 251) affords another example of leveraging the media for intelligence value. Brigadier General John Kelly commanded Task Force Tripoli whose mission was to capture Saddam's hometown following the fall of Baghdad. As his task force approached the town, BGen Kelly called up the reporters embedded with his unit along with some local Iraqi tribal leaders. He told them to spread the word that the Marines were here, and that anyone threatening the life or property of another individual (Iraqi or American) would be dealt with - with deadly force. The word was dispersed via the news and word of mouth that afternoon and evening. By the next morning the Kurds who had planned to attack the town had withdrawn and the town quickly surrendered to the Marines.

[20] Ibid., 48.

[21] Skiba.

[22] Cook.

[23] *Reporters on the Ground* conference.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Secretary of Defense, "Public Affairs Guidance."

[26] Ibid.

[27] Robert S. Pritchard, "The Pentagon is Fighting – and Winning – the Public Relations War," USA Today (July 2003) [database on-line]; available from H.W. Wilson; accessed 23 September 2003.

[28] Rachel Smolkin, "Media Mood Swings," American Journalism Review (June/July 2003) [database on-line]; available from Infotrac; accessed 23 September 2003.

[29] Robert Jensen, "The Military's Media," Progressive 67 (May 2003)[database on-line]; available from EBSCO Host; accessed 23 September 2003.

[30] USA Today; Ewers; and Jensen.

[31] Rather, xii. Philip Taylor, writing about war and the media in the 1990's (page 12 of his book, War and the Media), supported the concept of war correspondents being neither all seeing nor all knowing. Journalists in war "chronicle only what they see … even their judgment of what is important is determined by the same sort of experience, perception, education, even emotions, that effect all human beings."

[32] Smolkin.

[33] Boot, 48.

[34] Pritchard. Brigadier General Vincent Brooks said much the same thing during the *Reporters on the Ground* conference. It was not the job of the commanders or reporters at the tactical and operational level to provide a strategic context for OIF operations. That duty fell to Defense Department personnel in the Pentagon. The fact that the Pentagon failed to provide that strategic context and instead let the analysts in studios fill in the strategic 'holes' needs to be rectified for all future conflicts.

[35] David Zucchino, "Thunder Run," Los Angeles Times , 7 December 2003.

[36] John J. Fialka, Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf War, (Baltimore, Maryland: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1991), xiv.

[37] Skiba.

[38] Stephen R. Hurst, "New Restrictions for Embedded Media Imposed, Then Rescinded," Associated Press, Air Force Times , (14 August 2003).

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