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USING THE MEDIA IN THE PROPER CULTURAL CONTEXT
TO WIN IRAQI AND US HEARTS AND MINDS IN SUPPORT
OF OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

by

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	3
Winning Hearts and Minds in Iraq.....	6
Using the Media to Foster Independent Opinion Forming	
Cultural Context: Equality vs Individual Liberty	
Cultural Context: Relationship of Church and State	
Cultural Context: All Iraqis are not Alike	
Credibility is Key, No Matter Who the Messenger Is	
Winning Hearts and Minds in the US.....	21
Cultural Context: Statistics and the American People	
Military Role in Winning US Hearts and Minds	
Conclusion.....	26
Recommendations.....	28
End Notes.....	29
Bibliography.....	32

Introduction

Media sources (newspapers, magazines, television programs, radio broadcasts, etc.) are not capable (on their own) of winning the hearts and minds of any given population. The media is simply a tool which delivers heart-changing and mind-changing ideals (such as the greatness of democracy and respect for minority rights) and information (such as the positive results of the US-led occupation of Iraq). These ideals and information will change the hearts and minds of a populace. The media is simply a conduit of these ideals and information.

The following model is the author's interpretation and will serve as a useful tool in analyzing the process of communication: When communicating, there is a messenger (the USG and military), a message or idea (the goodness of democracy or the success of OIF), and a receiver (the Iraqi or US populace). The message is delivered by a conduit (the media) and is filtered (through a cultural context) as it travels to the receiver.

The cultural context of the Middle East, more specifically, of Iraq needs to be taken into account when using the media to advance ideals and information which will make success more likely for the accomplishment of US government (USG) objectives. The USG and military must use the media to combat the poisonous ideals being communicated by the insurgents in Iraq who use terrorist tactics against coalition forces and noncombatant civilians. By understanding the cultural context that the insurgents manipulate to garner support in Iraq, the USG and military will be able to use the media to win the hearts of the Iraqi people. "Obviously, the West must defend itself by

whatever means will be effective. But in devising means to fight the terrorists, it would surely be useful to understand the forces that drive them.”¹

There are two groups of hearts and minds who the USG aims to win to affect the success of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): those of the Iraqi people and those of the American people. The role of the US military commander in Iraq should be to use the media to directly win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people since the US armed forces interact with the Iraqi people on a daily basis. Due to America’s cultural context, the role of the military commander in using the media to win the hearts and minds of the American people is significantly different. The role of the military commander should be to provide pertinent objective information about OIF to the USG and American people while depending on the political branches (Executive and Legislative) of the government to use that information to actually win the hearts and minds of the American people. In essence, the military commander should not play the primary role in using the media to win the hearts and minds of the American people.

More Iraqi support for US operations in Iraq will result in a less disruptive insurgency. This will translate into fewer US casualties, thus, stronger US public support. US public support will ensure the political will of US leaders is strong enough to allow US forces to remain in Iraq long enough to successfully complete OIF. This paper will use the descriptive methodology to show how the various forms of the media must be used in the proper cultural context both in Iraq and the US to garner support for OIF. The research will conclude with recommendations which will improve the US effort to win the battle for hearts and minds.

Background

Overwhelming success in achieving the political goals for the United States Government (USG) can be attained at the tactical and strategic military levels through the adroit application of the operational art of warfare. America's enemies must be rendered unable to endanger the United States (US) if the hard won victories enabled by lethal military force are to be enduring. In order to disable the enemy, the proper centers of gravity must be identified and dominated. Although not the only center of gravity, in the case of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), public opinion is a key center of gravity which must be dominated in order to ensure lasting victory. Clausewitz recognized the fact that in some conflicts, public opinion is a key center of gravity which cannot be neglected:

In countries subject to domestic strife, the center of gravity is generally the capital. In small countries that rely on large ones, it is usually the army of their protector. Among alliances, it lies in the community of interest, and *in popular uprisings it is the personalities of the leaders and public opinion*. It is against these that our energies should be directed.²

A healthy perspective must be kept about the focus of military operations. Solely winning the hearts and minds (public opinion) of the people will not win the war. Clausewitz goes on to emphasize that destruction of the enemy's army is the best place to start in order to achieve victory: "Still, no matter what the central feature of the enemy's power may be-the point on which your efforts must converge-the defeat and destruction of his fighting force remains the best way to begin, and in every case will be a very significant feature of the campaign."³

The application of punitive and destructive military operations is admittedly the best place to start in defeating the enemy. But after the military victory, the political goals must be instituted. As seen in OIF, the success gained by military victory is not enough to attain the overall political goals of the USG. Even though the US-led coalition of willing nations swiftly defeated the Iraqi military led by Saddam Hussein, overall political victory has suffered numerous setbacks. These setbacks are due, in large part, by the inability of the USG and military to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

In order to affect a somewhat smooth and orderly transition to peace, public opinion must be won in the theater of operations in order to prevent physical or moral support to insurgents. On May 1, 2003 President Bush declared on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln that “major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.”⁴

Unfortunately, the President’s declaration of victory was short-lived. As of February 5, 2006, 93.8-percent of the 2,259 US dead and 96.6-percent of the 16,185 wounded have occurred because of an insurgency during the transition from major combat operations to civilian control of Iraq by the Iraqi people.⁵ Clearly, a violent insurgency has taken root in Iraq. If the public opinion of the Iraqi people can be won over to support USG goals, the insurgency will eventually be defeated. Without safe haven, monetary, or moral support, the parasitic nature of the insurgency will cause it to wither. Effective use of the media must be used to convince the Iraqi people that USG goals are beneficial to them. The media must be used in the correct cultural context, though, in order to be effective.

Likewise, domestic US public opinion must be won. Thus, the domestic, information, military, and economic (also known as the DIME) instruments of national power will be given time to complete the job in Iraq for which the instruments were used, to begin with. Without public support, political leaders will not possess the political will to continue to spend American 'blood and treasure' on an effort in which the American people do not support. President Abraham Lincoln recognized that "public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail. Without it, nothing can succeed."⁶ One of the most effective ways to garner public sentiment is to use the media as a vehicle to do so.

Winning Hearts and Minds in Iraq

Using the Media to Foster Independent Opinion Forming

In a free and democratic society, the media is the town square for the open exchange of ideas. It is used by both the government and private citizens, corporations, and other organizations for official information and the free expression of beliefs and opinions. Sometimes, it is critical of the government, thus serving as a check and balance in favor of the people to prevent abuses of power by the government.

Traditionally, in the Middle East, the media has been tightly controlled by the government and is used as a tool to pass on official information and to otherwise control the populace. Independent expression of thought has not traditionally been tolerated by the authoritative governments in the Middle East. “There has traditionally been a very close relationship between the mass media and the state in the Middle East. In fact, throughout the first decades of its existence, the press of the Middle East was restricted to official journals, the sole function of which was to communicate government announcements and proclamations and to provide certain technical information instrumental in laying the basis for governmental media controls.”⁷

Historically, Iraq’s regimes have held closely to the tradition of tightly controlling the media to manipulate the opinions of the Iraqi people. The Arab Baath Socialist Party (ABSP) in Iraq published its view of the media role through its Ministry of Information and Culture in 1977 and is included below:

- A disseminator of ABSP principles and of the president’s ideologies.
- A reinforcer of the faith in the revolution and its future.

- An instructor of Iraqi development achievements.
- A supporter of Iraqi national unity and physical and spiritual harmony among different social classes.
- A combator against destructive dogmas and rumors targeted at the revolution and the ABSP in general.
- A creative inspirer of youths.⁸

Clearly, the Baath Party used the media to dispense propaganda in support of its political goals and discouraged “dogmas and rumors” targeted at the Baath Party. Thus, it is likely that the Iraqi people view the media as mouthpieces for the government rather than a tool to be used to shape opinion. In essence, tight government control of the media ruins its credibility in the minds of the people. If the message has no credibility, it can’t win the hearts and minds of the people.

Even though authoritative regimes have historically used the media as a mouthpiece in Middle Eastern societies, there are many opportunities to encourage a free exchange of ideas. Ironically, it was a Baath party initiative which can be exploited by the US to promote ideals of freedom and progress to the Iraqi people:

Increases in oil revenue after the government nationalized the oil industry in 1972 made it possible for the state to spend resources on improving social economic conditions...A massive literacy campaign promoted through television, resulted in an increase in adult literacy from 42 percent to 93 percent in 1992...The government provided television sets, free of charge to popular organizations and societies...According to recent statistics made available by the Central Statistical Organization for the Ministry of Planning, 86 percent of the population possess television sets.⁹ Despite the damage done to the credibility of the Iraqi media by authoritative

regimes, the ground in Iraq is fertile for a free exchange of ideals with such a large number of literate adults and available television sets. Sometimes the messages transmitted and written will be critical of the new Iraqi government and the US.

However, that is one of the prices of freedom. If newspapers and television reporters occasionally produce stories critical of the new Iraqi government or the US, those media

outlets will be seen as independent of the government (not mouthpieces) and they will gain credibility. To replace Saddam's pro-Baath censorship with another pro-US censorship is unacceptable. The USG and military commander must resist attempts to control Iraqi media outlets and encourage the free and open exchange of ideas.

The internet has opened a whole new world to Iraqi citizens which will surely encourage independent thought and opinion forming:

Internet service has been one of the most dramatic changes in Iraq since 2003. Like cell phone service, it has expanded sharply. Mohammed Rafiq, director of Internet services for Iraq's Ministry of Communication, says service was tightly controlled under Saddam. In 2003, there were only 10,000 users in a country of 26 million people. Content was filtered and sites offering free e-mail were blocked, forcing people to use the government-monitored e-mail. Today, the state company has 200,000 subscribers on dial-up, for which it has a monopoly. And it increasingly offers services to private internet cafes, universities and other public buildings. New technologies are arriving rapidly, including DSL broadband and wireless broadband for government offices around the country.¹⁰

Independent thought and the unfettered exchange of ideas will allow the positive ideals promoted by the USG and moderate Muslim voices to win out over the destructive messages of radical Islam.

It has often been said that light is the best disinfectant. The revolution toward openness brought about by the US-led regime change in Iraq will expose the lies of elements which oppose progress for the Iraqi people. Omar Muwafaq, an Iraqi contractor, says he didn't use the Internet under Saddam because he considered it dangerous with the government watching every word. "Now I have friends everywhere in the world, especially from the US, and they're always asking me about the situation here in Iraq," he says."¹¹ As Mr Muwafaq's comments indicate, government censorship of communications should also be discouraged. The censorship is contrary to a free and

open democracy and will breed distrust of the government. Thus, it will be counterproductive to US goals and the tenets of democracy.

Cultural Context: Equality vs Individual Liberty

The idea embraced in the West which is a foundation of democracy is that of individual liberty. This cherished belief is espoused in the US Declaration of Independence and is taught to American schoolchildren and new citizens alike that: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹² This is not an exclusively American truth. There is nothing inherently American or Western about freedom or liberty. President Bush eloquently stated that “we confirm our love of freedom, the freedom for people to speak their minds, the freedom for people to worship as they so choose. Free thought, free expression, that’s what we believe. But we also understand that freedom is not America’s gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to each man and woman in this world.”¹³

The mere fact that open, democratic Islamic nations (Turkey) have been the exception rather than the norm does not prove that democracy is incompatible with Muslims or Arabs. The absence of democracy merely proves that it has been repressed. To imply that the Iraqi people are incapable or undeserving of liberty and democracy simply because they’ve never had it is patently false. It will take time and effort to erase the cultural conditioning of decades of oppression, but it is possible for democracy to flourish in Iraq.

The post-World War I opening up of Arab nations to Western ideals and institutions has been faced with conflict between traditional Islamists and progressive Muslims:

Nor was the experiment of the new generation with democracy a happy one...To the old school, democracy failed to command the respect or allegiance of the people in the same way as Allah's law had done in the past. The activist character of democratic politics appeared too vulgar and too worldly in the eyes of pious Muslims, who have habitually revered the awe-inspiring traditional institutions. Further, democracy as practiced in the West seemed to emphasize liberty, not equality. But to peoples who for centuries have been accustomed to authoritarian regimes, liberty could not possibly be as much appreciated as equality, since it permitted the enrichment of the few at the expense of exploited masses.¹⁴

Although the people of Iraq may be culturally conditioned to value equality over liberty, this mindset was driven by the dominance of authoritarian regimes. This is a thing of the past:

Iraq, only last year, was under the control of a dictator who threatened the civilized world, who used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. He tormented and tortured the people of Iraq. Because we acted, Iraq today is a free and sovereign nation. And because we acted, the dictator, the brutal tyrant is sitting in a prison cell, and he will receive the justice he denied so many for so long.¹⁵

As the 2005 resoundingly successful national elections in Iraq have shown, the Iraqi people treasure individual freedom greatly. Given the chance, individual freedom will become more valued than equality in Iraqi society.

An abundance of independent media sources will be an excellent tool which can be used to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. In Arab society, religious leaders play a monumental role in influencing the hearts and minds of the people. The relationship of church and state must be understood to be able to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. Moderate Islamic clerics must be engaged by the USG and

military commanders. Their messages must be communicated to the Iraqi people as often as possible. The radical Islamic fundamentalists must not be allowed to exert undue pressure on the government and cause destabilization in the fledgling democracy of Iraq.

Cultural Context: Relationship of Church and State

Religious leaders in Arab societies exert much more influence on the hearts and minds of the people than in the US. In the US religious leaders play a vital role in opinion making, but exert no official influence on US policy. Traditionally, Islam and the State have been inseparable in Arab culture. Turkey has had success in separating church and state. The USG must attempt to convince the new Iraqi government that, like Turkey, separation of church and state is possible in an Islamic country. Even if it proves impractical to influence US-style separation of church and state, moderate Islamic clerics must be engaged and promoted through media outlets to temper radical Islamic influences.

Religious leaders have traditionally played a key role in the formation of individual opinions in Arab societies:

For centuries Islam provided for the believers a way of life, the validity and perfection of which no pious Muslim ever questioned. As a divine system, Islam set up the principle that authority belongs to Allah; but the caliph, though enthroned by the people to enforce Allah's law, was not constitutionally responsible to the electorate. However, the caliph and his subjects were both bound by the divine law, the violation of which would make them equally liable to punishment. Such a theory of the state, placing ultimate responsibility in Allah, is not inherently democratic.¹⁶

This traditional theory of government in Middle Eastern society gives more authority and influence to religious leaders than in Western society. "Because they purport and are believed to have a monopoly on truth, their voice is the voice of blind fanaticism. In the

much-filtered atmosphere of the Near East that voice carries far and wide, drowning out other tones.”¹⁷

In the West, fanatic zealots who attempt to use religion to validate their extremist views are often widely dismissed. For example, in August 2005 when Pat Robertson called for the assassination of Hugo Chavez, the President of Venezuela, US “State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said that Robertson has the right of any private citizen to say whatever he wants, but added that the broadcaster’s remarks ‘do not represent the views of the United States.’”¹⁸ Although Pat Robertson is an influential religious leader (the Christian Coalition, which he is the former leader of, boasts over 2 million members)¹⁹, he has absolutely no direct influence on the policies of the USG.

In the US, as stated in the Declaration of Independence: “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”²⁰ Government, in the US is the ultimate expression of individual freedom. Ultimate power is derived from the people, themselves. It is not derived from the inherent authority of a monarch or religious leader. This idea of individual freedom is the key ingredient in being able to use the media to shape public opinion and make the government accountable to the people.

Although the governmental philosophy which gives undue authority to religious leaders is predominant in the Middle East, Turkey has been able to implement a more Western-style government in which individual citizens feel freer to form their own opinions. It should be noted, though, that Ataturk used authoritative methods to bring about Turkey’s separation of church and state: “Turkey shares with the Fertile Crescent the inherited features of the concept of state... Turkey’s return to a progressive course

dates back to her separation of church from state under the determined leadership of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk...The reforms of Ataturk, however, were carried out, as was inevitable in the circumstances, by authoritarian methods.”²¹

It is not advisable that authoritative means be used to ensure the separation of church and state in Iraq’s new government. The USG must exert its persuasive influence on the new Iraqi national leaders to form a government which ensures a secular state, but if unsuccessful, moderate clerics must be engaged and promoted through media outlets to counter the vitriolic influence of radical Islamic voices.

The fact that Iraq has traditionally allowed religious freedom is an important aspect in being able to defeat the poisonous ideas of the violent Islamic extremists who are instigating the insurgency in Iraq. Even before OIF, Iraq was a multiethnic society which respected the rights of minorities to have religious freedom: “Modern Iraq is a secular heterogeneous society consisting of many ethnic groups, including, among others, Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians, Armenians, and Jews, with the majority being Arabs...Islam is the predominant religion in Iraq, but religious freedom is granted to all citizens and protected by law.”²² Thankfully, not all the religious leaders in Iraq promote hateful violence against the US and the West. Contrary to what many Americans believe, not all Muslim religious leaders are radical Islamists:

The Association of Muslim Clerics is emerging as a moderate political voice for Iraq’s Sunni Muslims. It is opposed to the US occupation but helped to broker the shaky cease-fire in Fallujah. It has also condemned the taking of foreign hostages in Iraq and has been helping to mediate their release...This institution basically contains a number of people who are famous as Sunni ulama (religious scholars)-the imams of Abu Hanifa Mosque and Abd Al-Kadr Gailani Mosque. So those people were known before, but nobody knows them as a part of a political movement or political structure. So, the institution, because it contains the names of these famous people, has become very influential.²³

The new Iraqi government is a democracy in which the religious leaders do not exercise a lawful right to govern. Yet, they are still influential in the shaping of public opinion. They must not be shunned. If these moderate religious leaders are not engaged with respect, they will exert their influence in opposition to US goals by promoting sympathy for the insurgency. The USG and military commanders must continue to build relationships with these moderate leaders to further peace and stability in the new, democratic Iraq.

Though it is important to capitalize on the amount of influence religious leaders have on influencing public opinions in Iraq, the USG and military commanders must not make the mistake of assuming all Muslims are alike. The people of the Middle East have a lot in common, but the noncombatant Iraqi people must not be treated like the radical Islamists with respect to media campaigns to win their hearts and minds.

Cultural Context: All Iraqis are not Alike

The people of Iraq share a common history and identify greatly with Islam. In short a lot of Iraqi's have a lot in common, but not all are alike. Some Iraqis are, unfortunately, influenced by the radical Islamists who are promoting the insurgency. To treat the noncombatant (non-insurgent) Iraqis the same as the insurgents by targeting them with deceptive media campaigns and psychological operations shows a lack of trust in the noncombatant Iraqi people. Without trust, the Iraqi people will never be amenable to America's messages. The USG and military commanders must not make the mistake of thinking all Iraqis are alike.

In the American culture, religious and ethnic diversity is recognized and celebrated, but ultimate identity is still American. Muslims, in large part, identify more with their religious group than their nation-state: “In the Western world, the basic unit of human organization is the nation...This is then subdivided in various ways, one of which is by religion. Muslims, however, tend to see not a nation subdivided into religious groups but a religion subdivided into nations.”²⁴

Bin Laden takes advantage of this sense of cultural unity of all Muslims. He seeks to be the caliphate (supreme religious leader) of a pan-Islamic state. Bin Laden draws on the deep felt resentment of Western influence in the Middle East and promises a return to the ‘good ole days’ when Arabia was free from the infidels:

In the early centuries of the Muslim era, the Islamic community was one state under one ruler. Even after that community split up into many states, the ideal of a single Islamic polity persisted...The prophet Muhammad lived and died in Arabia, as did his immediate successors, the caliphs, in the headship of the community...For Muslims, no piece of land once added to the realm of Islam can ever be finally renounced, but none compare in significance with Arabia and Iraq.²⁵

The USG and military commanders must counter bin Laden’s poisonous appeal to the Iraqi people for a return to the past. The Iraqi people must be reminded through media sources that bin Laden’s prescription for Iraq’s problems pales in comparison to the opportunity to enjoy freedom and liberty. These ideals are not incompatible with Islam. Turkey has shown that Islam and democracy can coexist. Bin Laden and the insurgents must be seen as a separate and distinct group from other Iraqis: “President Bush and other Western politicians have taken great pains to make it clear that the war in which we are engaged is a war against terrorism – not a war against Arabs, nor, more generally, against Muslims, who are urged to join us in this struggle against our common

enemy. Usama bin Laden's message is the opposite. For bin Laden and those who follow him, this is a religious war, a war for Islam against the infidels, and therefore, inevitably, against the United States, the greatest power in the world of the infidels."²⁶

The insurgents are a minority and must be isolated from the people whose hearts and minds the USG and coalition forces are trying to win over. Painting all the Iraqis, insurgent or not, with a broad brush is an unwise tactic that the USG is unfortunately using and should be stopped. Since the target of the following public relations campaign is the neutral Iraqi people, the USG should be honest with them and reveal the origin of the message. This will build trust. Deception is a tactic used against an enemy.

Noncombatant Iraqis are not the enemy:

A \$300 million Pentagon psychological warfare operation includes plans for placing pro-American messages in foreign media outlets without disclosing the US government as a source, one of the military officials in charge of the program says. Run by the psychological warfare experts at the US Special Operations Command, the media campaign is being designed to counter terrorist ideology and sway foreign audiences to support American policies. The military wants to fight against al-Qaeda through newspapers, websites, radio, television and 'novelty items' such as T-shirts and bumper stickers.²⁷

Admittedly, it is naïve to believe that the aforementioned psychological operations campaign will be readily welcomed if the US is openly revealed as the source of the message. However, in time, as an open and honest relationship is built with the people, the truth will be accepted.

To be deceptive and dishonest is a sign of disrespect in any culture. This behavior will produce resentment and push the Iraqi people into the waiting arms of the violent Islamic fundamentalist insurgents: "To most Muslims, the West appears content about the state of backwardness, obscurantism and darkness than currently prevails in Muslim

countries in the Middle East and elsewhere. And along comes bin Laden, who voices anger over the state of affairs in the world of Islam. People do not necessarily buy into his murderous philosophy of transnational terrorism, but they agree with his criticism of what is wrong with the world of Islam and why it remains backward.”²⁸

The hearts and minds of the current insurgents may not ever be won. However, the hearts and minds of the people who may sympathize with them can very well be won. The good deeds of the US backed up by open, honest dialogue will eventually prevail. Well-intentioned, yet, dishonest attempts to trick the people into liking the US will play into the hands of the ‘evildoers.’

Credibility is Key, No Matter Who the Messenger Is

Even though the Iraqi people may not yet trust the message of the US, the USG and military commander must continue to make honest attempts to communicate with the Iraqi people. The US must build an open, honest relationship with the Iraqis. This will take time and must be backed up by good deeds. Admittedly, the US has not always been consistent in its words and actions. However, with time and effort, the US will earn the credibility it needs to be able to use the various media outlets in a transparent manner to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people.

The best opportunity to influence the people of Iraq will come from American media sources even though the people of the Middle East tend not to value and trust foreign media sources. “Western media rarely cover the Middle East, with the exception of, for example, certain crisis periods and special aspects such as Muslim

fundamentalism. Although Western and international programs are often welcomed as alternative sources of information, there is also considerable skepticism regarding the quality of Western foreign reports and the image of Asians and Islam they depict.”²⁹

Although there is currently an inherent level of distrust toward Western media, the best road ahead for the USG and military commanders in winning Iraqi hearts and minds is to use American media sources such as Voice of America and Al Iraqiya, a US funded news organization to communicate with Iraqis:

When Arab-language TV station Al Jazeera broadcast anti-US messages in the past, there was little the coalition could do to reach the average Iraqi with an alternative view. Satellite dishes were sprouting by the thousands on rooftops. Yet, the Pentagon-financed news channel lacked serious programming and access to a satellite to carry its signal (none). Today, Iraqi Media Network (IMN) barely resembles the one-studio terrestrial station of six months ago. IMN’s TV channel, Al Iraqiya, garnered a satellite hookup two weeks ago, is about to open a third studio within a \$96 million operating budget, has a staff of Iraqi broadcasters and reporters, and goes live each day at 6:30 am for 18 hours of programming.³⁰

The message may not be immediately accepted and embraced, but, in time it will. If the US appears to be dishonest and manipulative with the Arab media sources, the US message will never be accepted. Remember, the historical use of the media in the Middle East has been as a mouthpiece for the government. Democracy is based on a free, unfettered press. The people need to be able to trust the messenger, or the message will not be believed. The mere appearance of impropriety can be fatal when battling to win hearts and minds.

When there is an impression that the process of using the media to transmit a message or idea is dishonest, its effectiveness is lost. It does not matter if the information is correct or the idea is noble and well intentioned. The following example of

manipulating the print media in Iraq by the US military is counterproductive to the goals of fostering an independent, credible Iraqi media:

‘The Baghdad Press Club was created last year by the US military as a way to promote progress amid the violence and chaos of Iraq,’ said Lt Col Barry Johnson, a military spokesman. The Army acknowledges funding the club and offering ‘reporter compensation,’ but insists officers did not demand favorable coverage. ‘Members are not required nor asked to write favorably,’ said Lt Col Robert Whetstone. ‘They are simply invited to report on events.’ He said the military exercised no editorial control over the coverage. The US military investigation...will look into whether there were efforts to place US-produced stories into the local press without identifying the US as the source. Paying reporters directly to write positive stories might also violate ethical guidelines. The administration has expressed concerns about the allegations. Even if reporting is true, “it’s got to be done in a way that reinforces a free media, not undermines it,’ National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley has said.³¹

Winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people is more about the appearance of a return to the dishonest and manipulative nature of the media under the Baath party. The USG and military commanders must stop this counterproductive media campaign.

Pro-US messages should be openly transmitted through US-owned or controlled media outlets. If they are carried by independent media outlets, the origin of the message should be proudly proclaimed. The USG has nothing to be ashamed of. Eventually, the noble work of the US and its honest dialogue will be accepted by ordinary Iraqis.

Unfortunately, the US has not always been consistent with its cherished ideals of liberty and freedom and its foreign policy and actions. Many Arab Muslims are frustrated with the political and economic disparities in the Middle East. Much of the blame is placed on the legacy of Western imperialism and the subsequent support of brutal dictators such as Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, as discussed below by Joyce Battle, a Middle East Analyst with the Washington Post:

The National Security Archive at George Washington University has published a series of declassified US documents detailing the US embrace of Saddam Hussein in the early 1980's. The collection of documents, published on the Web, include briefing materials, diplomatic reports of two Rumsfeld trips to Baghdad, reports on Iraqi chemical weapons use during the Reagan administration and presidential directives that ensure US access to the region's oil and military expansion.³²

In spite of any responsibility of Western governments for the problems in the Middle East or the apparent hypocrisy of American foreign policy, the global campaign of terror offered by bin Laden is not the best solution to fix the ills of Middle Eastern society.

Bin Laden is using the frustrations and fears of good, religious people and manipulating those fears for his own selfish advantage. In short, he has hi-jacked a religion for personal gain and cloaked himself in self-righteousness. In overthrowing the Hussein dictatorship and rebuilding Iraq, the US is making great progress toward building trust with the Iraqi people. The US must continue to give the Iraqi people an alternative to bin Laden's manipulative and destructive, self-serving ideology. In time, truth and liberty will prevail.

Winning Hearts and Minds in the US

Cultural Context: Statistics and the American People

In order to retain the sometimes fickle support of the American people for OIF, the USG needs to do a better job of publicizing statistics which show progress toward successful completion of OIF. Secretary Rumsfeld has agrees:

Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us? Does the US need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The US is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' cost of millions.³³

In order for the American people to make an informed decision about whether OIF is a worthwhile effort to spend the US treasury and the lives of US servicemen and women on, they need information to base that decision on. To make the decision, the American people need statistics.

The American public is in love with statistics. Americans have moved beyond merely being obsessive spectators and participants of sports such as football and baseball. An entire industry has evolved called fantasy sports in which participants “each draft or acquire via auction a team of real-life players and then score points based on those players’ statistical performance on the field...Fantasy sports in general have grown into an industry that generates an estimated \$100 million in annual revenue and involves about 30 million Americans, according to a Harris Interactive poll.”³⁴ It is nearly impossible to watch a news or sports program without being inundated with the on-screen

crawlers adding more information on different stories or stock quotes to the story already being televised.

If the USG provides a metric which defines success or progress toward a successful conclusion of OIF, public support for the effort will not wane. The USG needs to create such a metric and ask the news media sources (CNN, MSNBC, FOX, networks, newspapers, radio networks, etc.) to update the American people on the progress being made toward a peaceful and stable Iraq. The metric would be similar to the current terror threat level published by the Department of Homeland Security.

The media must not be made a scapegoat for 'not showing the good stuff.' Rather, the media must be used as a tool by the political leadership in the US to get the positive message out. Military leaders want to do everything possible to ensure they have the resources needed to complete a mission. In the case of OIF, time is an invaluable resource. Time to complete the mission will come as a result of US political leaders having the political will to allow the US military to complete the mission in Iraq. This political resolve is a direct result of the will of the American people. It is reasonable to assume that military leaders will naturally seek to positively influence the will of the American people by positively promoting the war through the media effort to them. This is a temptation that military leaders must avoid.

Military Role in Winning US Hearts and Minds

The traditional role of the military is to win the wars of the US. It has traditionally been the role of the US political leadership to win the hearts and minds of the American people with respect to the support of wars. The Vietnam War is an

exception to this American tradition in which the military leadership became the primary promoter of the war to the American people through the media. The credibility of the military suffered greatly because of its politicization. Military leaders must not make the same mistake in OIF.

Providing quick, accurate information to USG officials and members of the press is the role of the military commander. The role of the political leaders is to use the media to promote the war effort for the American people. Military officers should honor the time-tested bedrock of American democracy of civilian control of the military and conduct themselves in an apolitical manner.

Politics must be left to the politicians on the homefront. The military commander ought to exercise restraint and follow the admonition of President Lincoln to General Hooker and concentrate on winning wars. The military leadership holds the power to decide on its own whom they feel the civilian leadership should be. This is commonly known as a military coup and is an especially dangerous dilemma which President Lincoln recognized during the Civil War when he appointed Gen Hooker as the commander of the Army of the Potomac:

I have heard, in such a way as to believe it, of your recently saying that both the Army and the Government needed a Dictator. Of course it was not for this, but in spite of it, that I have given you the command. Only those generals who gain successes, can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship.”³⁵

President Lincoln makes it clear that the realm of the military officer is military success. The realm of the political leadership, to include the commander in chief, is to handle the political aspects of war.

Though it does not seem realistic that today's military elite are motivated to enact a political coup, military officers must remain ever vigilant against it. The more likely danger for the military is a loss of credibility. It does not matter if it is true that the military elite are 'in bed' with the politicians. If it *appears* to a citizen that the military is actively fighting (in the battlespace of ideas through the media) to protect the political fortunes of civilian leaders, then, it is true to that citizen. That heart and mind has been lost, then.

The Vietnam War experience shows the danger of the military commanders actively promoting the efficacy of that conflict. The Administration and the military commanders went beyond spin. They actually told lies to the press corps on a daily basis.

Feeding the journalists' and publics apparently insatiable appetite for statistics, the military cooked up endless data revealing the 'body count', the 'kill ratio', the areas 'pacified'...Moreover, the 'facts' (for what they were worth) were sometimes distorted so as to bolster the optimistic account of the war's progress which official military briefers unerringly presented to the press corps at the daily briefings known as the 'Five O'clock Follies'...But in constantly proclaiming that the statistics revealed how well the war was progressing-with light visible at the end of the tunnel-they eventually fell into a trap of their own making. The trap took the form of a 'credibility gap.'³⁶

Military leaders must not be too closely allied with the political fortunes of political leaders or political parties. When the credibility of the political leader is destroyed, so is the military leadership's credibility. The American people can replace political leaders whose reputation is destroyed. The reputation for the armed forces is much harder to repair. A Pew Research Center poll taken in 2002, before the beginning of OIF, shows that military leaders are rated the highest for honesty by the Americans polled:

Military leaders are rated highest, as they were in 1995. Today, 70% of Americans give military leaders a high rating for honesty and ethical standards, up from 63%. Religious leaders rate second on the current list (55% say they have high standards)...Journalists get a relatively strong rating for honesty (44%), higher than either public officials (34%) and corporate heads (24%).³⁷

The credibility of the military is too precious to be squandered by being dishonest or appearing to be an advocate for a politician or party.

The US military must maintain its vigilance in remaining apolitical. Even though the confidence rating have fell from 62% in 2003 to 47% in 2006 (coinciding with a drop in White House confidence), the 2006 Harris Poll on Confidence in Institutions still shows that the US military is the most trusted institution in America.³⁸

The US military also holds more destructive power than any other military in human history. Jesus Christ makes the point perfectly with his reflection on power and responsibility: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”³⁹

Conclusion

The media (newspapers, magazines, television programs, radio broadcasts) is a vehicle full of promise which must be used by the USG and military commanders to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. Once the hearts and minds are won, their actions will follow, drying up support for the insurgency and ensuring the success of OIF. The use of the media to win the support of the Iraqi people must be done with an appreciation for the cultural context in which it is used.

Traditionally, the media in the Middle East has been used as a mouthpiece for the government; repressive regimes, for the most part. OIF has destroyed this paradigm in Iraq. There is an unprecedented explosion of the available means of exchanging free thought and individual expression. This freedom is the bedrock of democracy and must be fostered by the USG and the military commander to ensure the success of OIF, and ultimately the future of democracy in Iraq.

In general, equality has been valued higher than individual liberty in Middle Eastern culture. This condition is because of the repressive regimes and abject poverty which have existed for centuries. The USG and military commanders must continue to encourage fundamental changes to Iraqi society such as land reform and the separation of church and state. Land reform will serve to distribute wealth more fairly and give the general populace more of a stake in the success of Iraqi democracy. Separation of church and state will prevent undue influence on the political process by religious leaders, some of whom are violent fanatics.

The USG and military commanders must never forget that the most important factor to be considered when using the media to communicate is that without credibility,

it is impossible to win the heart and mind of any person. Psychological operations and media programs which seek to spread 'good news' while hiding the fact that the US is the source of the message must be avoided. First, the US has nothing to be ashamed of. Second, even though the messages and ideals of the US may not be immediately embraced by the Iraqi people, the appearance of dishonesty could be fatal to establishing a trusting relationship.

Bin Laden and his followers are preying on the frustrations of the Iraqi people in order to gain control of the Middle East and all its treasures (human, military, and natural resources.) He is perverting a great religion by using violence against innocent civilians and cloaking himself in religious self-righteousness. He uses the US as the perfect destructive, lying boogeyman in this endeavor. The USG must not play into his plans. The USG and military commanders must be totally honest and open in communications with the Iraqi people. The good, noble work being done in Iraq will win out over the poisonous, self-serving ideals being pedaled by bin Laden.

The USG must also exploit the media to win the hearts and minds of the American population. With respect to the US citizenry, though, the military should not play a role in actively cheerleading the war. This is the job of the political leadership, to include the Commander-in-Chief. The military is a tool of national power. It is improper for the military to self-promote and advertise our services to the American people.

Recommendations

- The USG and military leadership should use its influence on the new Iraqi government to discourage censorship, foster an open exchange of ideas, and promote the separation of church and state.
- The US should foster relationships with moderate clerics and promote their messages in the Iraqi media to win the hearts and minds of the people of Iraq.
- The USG and military leadership must build US credibility in Iraq by distinguishing between terrorist and noncombatants in media campaigns, and openly promote pro-US messages without deception.
- USG needs to do a better job of publicizing statistics to the American people through the media which show progress toward successful completion of OIF.
- Military officers should honor the time-tested bedrock of American democracy of civilian control of the military and conduct themselves in an apolitical manner.

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