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MILBLOGGING AS A STRATEGY FOR WINNING THE 21ST CENTURY INFORMATION WAR

by

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New media is quickly becoming the first and only source many go for information in todays technologically advanced world. Military bloggers (milbloggers) make up a small part of that new media but could be an important piece to keeping up with our enemies when it comes to the informational aspects of war. There are two camps when it comes to milbloggers, one side feels they are dangerous to operations security (OPSEC) and not capable of spreading the proper strategic message and the other side which feels milbloggers could have numerous benefits to military operations. Both sides have a great argument and this paper will find that neither is wrong in their assumptions. This paper examines the issue of milblogging and will weigh the arguments to identify solutions that could result in benefits to operations with mitigated risk to OPSEC. This paper analyzes current military doctrine on the subject and weighs that against what experienced senior military leaders think of the topic. The paper finds that milblogging fits within the doctrinal definitions of joint publications dealing with information operations (IO). It also fits the doctrinal definitions of a potential risk to security contained in publications on the subject. The conclusions reached find that the benefits of allowing individual members to communicate directly with the public far outweigh the potential security risks involved. Proper training and education could mitigate these risks down to an acceptable level in which the benefits could be experienced without the fear of the enemy gathering useful information for use against US forces.

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Table of Contents

Preface

This paper discusses the issue of allowing members of the military to blog openly without censorship or fear of punishment from superiors. Military blogs or milblogs are just one aspect of new media that is shaping our world today. I wanted to look at the brief history of milblogs and how they might be used by military planners as a beneficial tool in today's operations. I also wanted to understand the potential pitfalls of allowing individual members of the military to openly discuss anything they wish as a representative of the US government. The hope was to give recommendations for a way to use this new media more effectively by mitigating risk through training and education. The end result being changed attitudes towards milblogging by senior leaders who may not have fully developed an appreciation for the potential benefits this current technology could have on our operations.

There is an abundant amount of information available on milblogs. Almost all is a click away on the internet. The milblogging community is tight and does a great job of sharing any news article or DoD doctrinal change with one another. The value to this type of information is not only its availability but that I could get a feel for the general acceptance or in some cases dislike for the information presented. Most of the information I came across was in favor of less restriction on milbloggers but I did find the occasional counter to the argument, in some cases coming from milbloggers themselves. There is some but not much concrete evidence proving the effects of milbloggers therefore a majority of the findings are more based on theory than fact.

Abstract

New media is quickly becoming the first and only source many go for information in today's technologically advanced world. Military bloggers (milbloggers) make up a small part of that new media but could be an important piece to keeping up with our enemies when it comes to the informational aspects of war. There are two camps when it comes to milbloggers, one side feels they are dangerous to operations security (OPSEC) and not capable of spreading the proper strategic message and the other side which feels milbloggers could have numerous benefits to military operations. Both sides have a great argument and this paper will find that neither is wrong in their assumptions. This paper examines the issue of milblogging and will weigh the arguments to identify solutions that could result in benefits to operations with mitigated risk to OPSEC.

This paper analyzes current military doctrine on the subject and weighs that against what experienced senior military leaders think of the topic. The paper finds that milblogging fits within the doctrinal definitions of joint publications dealing with information operations (IO). It also fits the doctrinal definitions of a potential risk to security contained in publications on the subject. The conclusions reached find that the benefits of allowing individual members to communicate directly with the public far outweigh the potential security risks involved. Proper training and education could mitigate these risks down to an acceptable level in which the benefits could be experienced without the fear of the enemy gathering useful information for use against US forces.

Introduction

New media is here to stay and is a big part of the lives of millions of people on a daily basis. This new 21st Century technology allows virtually anyone to have immediate access to an audience of millions around the world and remain somewhat anonymous.[1] Milblogging is part of this new media and may have the potential to assist the United States in its troubled public relations with its citizens as well as people around the world. There are two camps on the subject, one that believes milblogging a serious threat to OPSEC and the other that views blogs as a tool that can be used to the military's advantage.[2] Both sides have merit, however there can be a solution which uses the blogs to the advantage of the military while remaining safe for troops, giving no useful information to an enemy that could be used against friendly forces. If used properly, milblogging could be the key to winning the information war in the 21st Century.

One of the greatest challenges the US has faced in the current wars has been the public perception of what is actually going on in theater. The US is fighting a media savvy enemy who has used traditional and new media to create a belief by many that they are winning the war against the US. Their information operation campaigns have been so successful that they continue to recruit in large numbers, maintain financing from multiple sources and have in some circles gained sympathy for their cause. While the US is winning on the battlefield, they are greatly suffering defeat in the information war and the war for public opinion among its own population. The enemy has mastered the art of getting their story and their message out to the public before the US. In addition, due to the military's outdated policies with regards to media interaction, Commanders find themselves unable to communicate their story in a timely manner. One way to improve this is to allow the individual troops to tell their story through a blog. This is a great way to respond to inaccurate or biased coverage of military issues by the mainstream

media.[3] However there needs to be acceptance among leaders in this realm. Take the good with the bad and let the troops tell their story. Vetted, censored or micromanaged writings of troops could backfire and appear as propaganda to the audience. Military leaders need to train their troops on the proper ways to communicate effectively and allow their people to write without fear of punishment for not always agreeing with the party line.

Once these blogs are out there for public consumption they will need to be used to their maximum effectiveness. When and how is the best way to incorporate these writings into an Information Operations (IO) plan? What are the desired effects of using them? What are the potential pitfalls from allowing uncensored remarks to go out to the public representing the military as a whole? These are the types of questions that will be addressed to ensure this new media is being used properly. LTG William Caldwell, USA, is one of the biggest backers of using new media in the military to support operations. He suggests the military is due for a change in attitudes and organizational culture, and proper training and education will squash OPSEC violations before they happen and improve the message the military sends to the masses.[4] His opponents don't feel the dangers can be overcome and the individual Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine have no place in communicating with the public. Both sides will be examined to determine the best way to incorporate milblogging to ensure the benefits outweigh the risks involved in harnessing this new technology.

Milblogging – The History

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines blog as: "short for weblog, a website that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer."[5] Since the beginning of the internet, private citizens have been using blogs to write their opinion about any topic with which they feel some passion towards, posting their ramblings for

anyone to see. Blogs are a global phenomenon that has hit the mainstream.[6] They are influential and are used by the media, politicians, marketing executives and anyone who has a need to gauge public opinion on various issues.[7] According to Tecnorati.com a website designed to track the blogosphere keeping stats of just about anything having to do with blogs, over 7.4 million blogs posts were created in the last 120 days of 2008 alone.[8] The number of people that read these posts is estimated to be over 346 million worldwide.[9]

So why is this important and relevant to military operations? Most forget that the military is just one of the instruments of power used by politicians to achieve a strategic end state. Information is another, but while the U.S. is the best in the world at using its military power it is one of the worst in distributing a clear message to its people or the world on its political intentions. World public opinion has mostly swung against the U.S. in its Global War on Terror as the war has moved into its eighth year. Could a medium that reaches nearly 350 million worldwide be the key to winning the public over in the GWOT? Maybe, it certainly couldn't hurt the cause.

Milblogs, which are blogs written by members or veterans of the armed forces came about with the commencement of the GWOT and became more mainstream during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Most describe daily life in the military written as a diary, some however are more opinionated, criticizing or applauding leaders in regards to the war. With a large number of people not trusting mainstream news sources, i.e. primetime network news, FOX or CNN and taking on a skeptical view of official press releases from DoD brass, milblogs became a source of information for the casual reader. These writings spread like wildfires over the net. Readers not associated with the military could get a sense of what the U.S. was trying to do and the successes or failures achieved in operations. They were written by those involved in the

operation, living in the war zone and giving a firsthand account of the situation on the ground. Most of the blogs were pro-military, pro-war and posted mostly of success. There were a few that were critical of decision makers and criticized the political and military leaders for their intentions in the war. Some in the DoD saw both types of blogs as a threat to the official message being represented and attempted to shut down all blogs written by military members. Some milbloggers followed DoD guidelines while others ignored them and continued to release their writings with the threat of disciplinary action if they were caught.

GWOT and the Milblog

The beginnings of the milblog can be directly attributed to the start of the Global War on Terror. After 9/11 and the eventual invasion by US troops into Afghanistan, milblogs began to pop up all over the web giving firsthand accounts of life in the war. The beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom only served to increase the number of blogs dedicated to depicting life on the ground as a member of the US military in a war zone. Milblogs really began to attract attention because of the way the war was being portrayed in the mainstream media. Milbloggers felt they had to blog to get the story correct because more often than not traditional media was getting the story wrong. The US national media became a place for partisan bickering, pushing a political agenda and had little to do with the well being of those in harm's way or mission success.[10] Milbloggers were successful in getting the message out, their first-person accounts first got the attention of their own, then the American public, which led to the traditional media, whose members discounted milbloggers credibility and treated them as a curiosity. However, milbloggers soon would prove that traditional media did not have a monopoly on capturing the stories of the war and began keeping the traditional media in check by exposing any untruths or

slants reported by the media. Once they had the attention of the traditional media, the DoD and white house soon began to notice milbloggers and their success in transmitting their message.[11]

While there are no official stats on who is actually milblogging, mostly due to the fact that milbloggers remain anonymous out of the fear of punishment by their superiors, the majority appear to be enlisted troops mostly in their early to mid-twenties. The reason for this is the older generation grew up in a military that taught them to not to discuss their military lives outside the military. As one milblogger put it, "You don't see many blogs from colonels because who wants to hear about adventures from behind a desk?"[12] This however only lends to the credibility the public feels for milblogs. Senior leader's blogging, using official terms and toning their language down may appear as propaganda and not as ground truth. Younger troops on the front line portray a believable, truthful picture of what life is like in the trenches and gives a real credibility to the message they are sending.

The biggest success for milbloggers during the GWOT has been to put an American face to the war effort, not only for US citizens but those around the world who may have gained a slanted view of the average US military member through traditional media sources. While some biased traditional media outlets were politicizing the war and those involved often taking isolated incidents and attributing them to military members as a whole, the common milblogger was discussing how happy he was to have hot chow for breakfast or how much he missed his family waiting for him at home. The message of these simple writings has done a lot for the public perception of the average troop on the ground but they have also instilled a fear in some senior leaders who want to put a stop to milblogging all together. Some fear the information passed could be used by the enemy against US troops or operations and the security of the military members and the mission as a whole may be at stake. With this thought came the DoD

crackdown on milblogging. New policies were drafted and eventually uncensored blogs were no longer allowed by members of the US military, sparking a controversy over milblogging and their uses in current operations.

OPSEC vs. IO

There are two sides when it comes to milblogging. One side argues that milbloggers are dangerous to operations security (OPSEC) and our enemy will be able to determine troop movements, deployment schedules, base defenses or the effectiveness of their attacks because of what is written by the average military member in a blog. Their answer to this problem is to either censor bloggers requiring them to run all entries through a superior before posting or to ban blogging by troops all together.[13] The other side of the argument, lead by Lieutenant General Caldwell, views milblogs as a tool that if used correctly may be an advantage for the military. This side "views these intensely personal war stories as critical to the war effort, helping sustain the American public's stomach for a protracted fight."[14]

Operations security (OPSEC) is defined by DoD Directive 5205.02 as:

> A process of identifying critical information and subsequently analyzing friendly actions attendant to military operations and other activities to:
> (a) Identify those actions that can be observed by adversary intelligence systems.
> (b) Determine indicators that hostile intelligence systems might obtain that could be interpreted or pieced together to derive critical information in time to be useful to adversaries.
> (c) Select and execute measures that eliminate or reduce to an acceptable level the vulnerabilities of friendly actions to adversary exploitation.[15]

OPSEC is always of great concern to commanders in a combat zone. Seemingly innocent information passed home via e-mails or during phone conversations could be, in theory, pieced together to give an advantage to the enemy. Those who side against milblogging for the sake of OPSEC are only thinking of the safety of their troops and the secrecy of their mission. This side has a great argument of, "When it comes to American lives, why take a chance?" OPSEC is

nothing new to the current wars the US faces today. Throughout WWII the term "loose lips sink ships" was know by most Americans and silence equaled security. These arguments have real merit; OPSEC is one of the most important aspects of military life. It is true that if someone were to openly discuss when their unit was to move from one place to another, what route they were to take or what type of force protected their flanks, and an enemy were to receive this information the results could be devastating. All military members are instructed on the seriousness of openly discussing their mission on unsecure communication devices or to those not associated with their mission. It is only natural to think that milblogging a potential major problem when it comes to OPSEC for any individual unit or the military as a whole. Milblogging fits the definition above as a potential problem for OPSEC. It is done on a medium that can be monitored by hostile intelligence systems, the info contained in milblogs could contain critical information that may be pieced together to provide the enemy with useful information. The reaction to this has been mostly in line with section (c) of the definition which has been to eliminate the vulnerabilities of friendly actions to adversary exploitation or in this case, censor or not allow milblogs all together.

When the GWOT began in 2001 there was no specific doctrine or military orders in place with regards to milblogging. Those who did it mostly did it to keep in touch with loved ones and never gave their unit leadership a second thought when it came to permission. However as bloggers picked up steam and became more mainstream, commanders were questioning whether or not they wanted just any Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine communicating a strategic message without any vetting process in place. Of bigger concern, was that the enemy was reading the milblogs and gaining valuable information to use against US forces. The reaction was to limit or ban milblogs. On 17 April 2007, the US Army released an update to its

regulations regarding OPSEC. The update of AR 530-1 states under chapter 2 "Responsibilities" paragraph g states:

> [All Department of Army Personnel will] Consult with their immediate supervisor and their OPSEC Officer for an OPSEC review prior to publishing or posting information in a public forum.
> (1) This includes, but is not limited to letters, resumes, articles for publication, electronic mail (e-mail), Web site postings, web log (blog) postings, discussions in Internet information forums, discussion in Internet message boards or other forms of dissemination or documentation.
> (2) Supervisors will advise personnel to ensure that sensitive and critical information is not to be disclosed. Each unit or organization's OPSEC Officer will advise supervisors on means to prevent the disclosure of sensitive and critical information.[16]

The language in the updated version is different in one major sense from the previous edition in that before Army personnel were asked to "consult with their immediate supervisor" before posting a document that "may contain sensitive and/or critical information in a public forum." Whereas the new version doesn't make a distinction of "sensitive and/or critical" and while it doesn't specifically read "all" it is quite clear that is what it means.[17] With the regulations written so tightly with no room for interpretation many commanders are opting to outlaw blogging all together rather than take the time necessary to play editor of all postings by their troops. [18] While the elimination of milblogs will no doubt result in a reduced chance for critical information being inadvertently passed to the enemy, the other side of milblogging will argue it will also result in a missed opportunity.

The pro-side of the discussion believes milblogging is a great tool for the US military to tell its story. Not the official version from the talking heads wearing the stars but by the individual on the ground which could come in many different forms. It could be the 19 year old recent high school grad who is walking daily security patrols in Iraq or a combat engineer building schools in Afghanistan, it could be an officer or an enlisted mother deployed away from her family for six months. There is no limit to who could be telling the story of their daily life in

a war zone to the world using the relatively new medium of the internet. There are many on the side of milblogging, all one has to do is Google "milblogging" and thousands of site matches appear mostly in support of less restrictions to milbloggers. An entire website, milblogging.com, is dedicated to the art of milblogging, with links to hundreds of milblogs and news releases discussing milblogging and current DoD policy regarding the topic.

LTG Caldwell has become the unofficial spokesman for milblogging and has become a blogger himself. On 1 January 2008, he posted an article on a blog site called "Small Wars Journal", titled, "Changing the Organizational Culture". In the article he suggests a change in attitudes of the US Army when it comes to the new media. He points out how "recent experiences in Iraq illustrate how important it is to address cultural change and also how very difficult it is to change culture."[19] He gives an example of how MNF-I "broke through the bureaucratic red-tape and was able to start posting on YouTube, MNF-I videos were among the top ten videos viewed on YouTube for weeks after their posting." He goes on to state that "Using YouTube – part of the new media – proved to be an extremely effective tool in countering an adaptive enemy."[20]

LTG Caldwell's argument for new media and milblogging as an effective tool is the basis for the argument to allow troops to publicly post their story. Gaining the support of the population is a key to either a successful insurgency or defeating an insurgency. The enemy the US fights today uses new media to reach out to local populations to tell their story and distort the story being promoted by the US. Allowing milblogging could help to counter this effort of our enemy. Milbloggers could dispute false or distorted postings by insurgents almost immediately. Even more important they could get the story out first. An example could be where insurgents try to influence public opinion of US involvement in Iraq by posting writings about US troops

destroying civilian homes in a specific town. Our troops on the ground in that specific town could post about their true mission, which is to restore security and rebuild infrastructure. Milbloggers could post stories of their successes and show pictures of schools opening, roads being improved and electricity being restored. Yes, military public affairs is capable of doing this but there is an added element of trust attached to a posting written by Corporal Smith, who is writing on behalf of himself then an official military press release written by a Major on behalf of the US Military. Milbloggers can get a story out immediately and dramatically reduce the effectiveness our enemy's videos or postings could have on the US population or the population we are trying to help.

The Information War and Our Enemy

Long before the September 11th attacks against the US, Al Qaeda was already participating in an information war. Leaders of this terrorist organization were using traditional media sources to get their story out to the public. Osama bin Laden had a filmmaker with him in Afghanistan when he was fighting the Soviets in the 1980's.[21] Al Qaeda established a media committee when the group was founded in the late 1980's and by no mistake had a spokesman named Abu Reuter.[22] It is clear that the leadership of our enemy understood the importance of getting out a strategic message from the beginning of their movement. This tactic of getting out their story on their terms has only transformed through the decades. The September 11th attacks were not just attacks against the "infidels" or an attack on western culture, it served a greater significance for our enemy, it made them legitimate. The attacks turned Al Qaeda from a terrorist group only known in certain circles outside of the Middle East into a global information power.[23] 9/11 was the event that gave their message credibility, served as a recruiting tool and an advertisement for monetary support for their cause. The non-kinetic effects of 9/11 may not

be as easily recognized but in the big picture may have been more important to our current situation then the physical damage the attacks caused.

As the war began our enemies were able to manipulate the traditional media into telling their story. Their message is to reestablish the caliphate, resulting in a worldwide Muslim utopia for all. Our enemy's leadership understands the appeal of the utopia to their audience.[24] This is step one in an insurgency, have a message that appeals to the people. Our enemy has the message but also has an advantage over the US in that they can easily take advantage of the US message and manipulate to a way that it is used against us. As the war continues Al Qaeda remains a strategic information power in the world but little else.[25] As former CENTCOM Commanding General John Abizaid once stated, "Al Qaeda has yet to win a military engagement with US forces at or above the platoon level."[26] So one can only conclude that if our enemy cannot match us on the battlefield they must be winning in the political arena. Their understanding of strategic communication and how to get their message out has sustained them in this war for the past eight years.

Our enemies use a similar message to target the population of the areas where military operations are happening, the populations they hope to recruit new members from as well as the US and western countries population in an attempt to turn the masses against their political leaders. Their success has been significant. First using the traditional media but more so using new media outlets to reach their intended audiences. The real superstar of new media for our enemy was Abu Musab Zarqawi, who was the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq before he was killed by US forces in the summer of 2006. He revolutionized the use of the internet and quickly proved its value in an information war. Zarqawi created an information wing among his group in Iraq and almost completely dedicated its way of message distribution to the internet. Beginning with

the decapitation video of Nicholas Berg, Zarqawi used this disturbing video to make a name for himself. This video posting was downloaded millions of times freezing servers all over the world. It was the start of the "internet jihad". This video served its purpose, by spreading fear throughout the western world while showing victory to those supporting the blossoming insurgency in Iraq. Zarqawi built on the success of his execution video and moved on to more sophisticated operations. "He immortalizes his suicide bombers online, with video clips of the destruction they wreak and web biographies that attest to their religious zeal. He taunts the US military with an online news service of his exploits, releasing tactical details of operations multiple times a day. He publishes a monthly Internet magazine, *Thuwat al-Sinam* (literally "The Camel's Hump"), that offers religious justifications for jihad and military advice on how to conduct it."[27] In perhaps its best use of the new media Al Qaeda began producing propaganda films to be published on the Internet. One of the first and most successful was released in 2004 called "The Winds of Victory". It depicts footage of American bombing raids on Baghdad at night. The screen is dark except for the orange glow of from the explosions of the bombs. The words "Freedom" and "Democracy" written in Arabic appear on the bottom of the video. The next scene shows mutilated Iraqi children, and photos from Abu Ghraib prison.[28] Zarqawi set the pace for how our enemy would use the new media to its advantage, get the story out quickly, direct it at their intended audience, encourage others to join, justify their actions and demonize the actions of their enemy. This seemingly obvious technique was the basis for how a relatively small group of individuals has been able to keep the largest and most powerful country tied up in a war for over eight years.

The US has had a hard time countering this type of information campaign waged by its enemies. US military has been traditionally slow in responding to propaganda videos or

distortions of their mission by the enemy mostly due to the policies when it comes to dealing with the media. Military sources are traditionally slow to respond as there are many levels to the vetting process of information to be released to the public. By the time the official message gets out the enemy's initial postings have already had their impact on the population and the US's response goes mostly unheard. This is where milblogging could greatly assist the US in its countering of enemy propaganda.

Our enemy is trying to portray US military forces as undisciplined killers, not interested in helping the populations of Iraq and Afghanistan but with the intention of occupying the lands in order to rape the land of its natural resources for their own use. They portray western culture as full of sin and unholy. Milbloggers for the most part portray almost the complete opposite. Most milbloggers show the side of the military not seen on the standard news channels. They write of support for their mission, heroes on operations, and hope for a better Iraq or Afghanistan and their desire to help change these countries for the better. These blogs send a strong message to those reading them, and directly counter the propaganda distributed by our enemies.

Milbloggers telling their story from the viewpoint of the individual on the ground, could also counter enemy propaganda by going to internet discussion groups and discussing their experiences with those directly impacted by the enemy postings. Having these types of discussions could go a long way with eventually winning public support for the mission at hand. Since insurgencies typically take many years to defeat, appeasing the public's doubts about the operations is extremely important to ensure a successful outcome. Milblogging isn't the final solution to defeating our enemy in the Information War but used in combination with other Information Operations pillars could help. Time is needed to see the results and truly determine

if its effects are successful in countering the enemy's propaganda efforts or just creating a security nightmare for commanders.

Milblogging as a Non-Kinetic Strategy

Incorporating the individual blogs from all service members into an Information Operations campaign is not easy task. It may not be feasible to consider, but that is not a reason to eliminate it from consideration in the overall campaign plan. According to JP 3-13, Information Operations, "the information environment is where humans and automated systems observe, orient, decide, and act upon information, and is therefore the principal environment of decision making."[29] Milblogs are key to this as they are influential and consist of information that causes decisions to be made. Keeping in mind the target audience of the milblog is in most cases not your enemy but those uninformed about your operations that you are attempting to persuade to become a supporter or to maintain as a neutral player. "The information environment is made up of three interrelated dimensions: physical, informational, and cognitive".[30] Milblogs are part of the cognitive dimension as can be derived from the definition out of JP 3-13:

> The cognitive dimension encompasses the mind of the decision maker and the target audience (TA). This is the dimension in which people think, perceive, visualize, and decide. It is the most important of the three dimensions. This dimension is also affected by a commander's orders, training, and other personal motivations. Battles and campaigns can be lost in the cognitive dimension. Factors such as leadership, morale, unit cohesion, emotion, state of mind, level of training, experience, situational awareness, as well as public opinion, perceptions, media, public information, and rumors influence this dimension.
>
> b. **Advancements in technology have enabled information to be collected, processed, stored, disseminated, displayed, and protected outside the cognitive process in quantities and at speeds that were previously incomprehensible.** While technology makes great quantities of information available to audiences worldwide, perception-affecting factors provide the context which individuals use to translate data into information and knowledge.[31]

While the authors of JP 3-13 may not have had milblogs in mind when developing this doctrine one can certainly make a case that milblogs fit into the cognitive dimension of the information environment and therefore merit the effort to investigate further their potential benefits to information operations planning within the overall campaign plan. Milblogs could be split into two separate groups both of which could be beneficial to overall military success. The first group would be command sponsored blogs and the second being individual blogs penned by individual Soldiers, Sailors, Airman and Marines. The second group may or may not be linked with the command sponsored writings.

The first group, command sponsored milblogs would be placed on the websites of each unit deployed in support of OIF or the GWOT. They would all be linked on one common page located on the combatant command's official website. This one single theater blog page could contain the overall strategic message from each commander. Beginning with the 4-star general in charge, each commander would state a message concerning their unit and the overall strategic message intended for the public. In the interest of OPSEC only the senior 4-star general will be identified by name as this is no secret to the world, all other commanders would go by an online alias to protect identity. The messages posted should be discussing the positive side of military operations in the combat zone. They should post stories, videos, and pictures of daily life and successes achieved on the battlefield. This can also be a forum where commanders could address propaganda campaigns by presenting evidence contrary to any falsehoods spread by the enemy. In addition a section for feedback should be included. This is an area in which individuals could ask specific questions to military leaders on the ground. Select, pertinent questions could be answered by any member of the unit ensuring the public has accurate information about what is happening on the ground in the war zone. This gives the public a way

of directly communicating with troops on the ground and gives them a forum to show their support, give thanks or ask for clarification to what they are doing. This use of command sponsored forums would be in line with JP 3-13's intended use of strategic communication:

> DOD efforts must be part of a government-wide approach to develop and implement a more robust strategic communication capability. DOD must also support and participate in USG strategic communication activities to understand, inform, and influence relevant foreign audiences to include: DOD's transition to and from hostilities, security, military forward presence, and stability operations. This is primarily accomplished through its PA, DSPD, and IO capabilities.[32]

However in this case the audience wouldn't necessarily be only foreign it would also and most likely more often than not focus on a domestic audience. These blogs would not be used for any propaganda, be untruthful in any way or be meant to conduct psychological operations on US citizens. They would simply be a way for the US military to communicate with those curious about what was actually happening on the ground directly without a buffer.

The second milblog group would be the kind that most exist today. They are penned by the individual Solider, Sailor, Airman or Marine and discuss a wide range of topics not necessarily focused on military operations or with a specific command sponsored message. This in no way lessens the effectiveness in these writings as a useful tool in an IO campaign. These messages still provide ground truth and carry credibility as they are not sponsored by any authority within the military or the US government. These blogs could be linked to the unit home page or they could be independent. They only need to be truthful and mindful of OPSEC for the protection of troops and the mission.

These two groups could be incorporated into an IO plan much the same as the other core capabilities. Determining measures of performance (MOP's) could be as simple as determining the number blogs on the web with the associated strategic message intended for the public. Determining measures of effectiveness (MOE's) both qualitative and quantitative could be

simple as well. Quantitative MOE's could be simply the combined number of hits each milblog receives. This could identify approximately how effectively the message is getting out. With the ability to track IP addresses you could also determine the locations you message was being broadcast. This would help you determine your Qualitative MOE's. You could use public opinion polls to see if there is a difference in the populations where your message is being received verses populations where your message was not being read. These types of statistics would have to be kept over a long period of time to determine the actual success or failure of this plan as a whole. Determining accurate statistics will not be an exact science as JP 3-13 points out:

> It can be difficult to isolate variables and establish a direct cause and effect relationship, especially when assessing foreign public opinion or human behavior. Unforeseen factors lead to erroneous interpretations. For example, a traffic accident in a foreign country involving a US Service member and a local civilian may bias an audience against US policies irrespective of otherwise successful IO. Lack of leadership, equipment, weapons, or sustenance may have as great an influence on surrendering enemy soldiers as a PSYOP leaflet urging surrender. In contrast, a visit by a popular US official to a region may cause a positive spike in public opinion that cannot be credited to executed IO actions.[33]

Unintended effects cannot be avoided; however milblogs may have a way of lessening the impact of some of these effects. For example, the Abu Gharib prison scandal had a major impact on public opinion both foreign and domestic towards US troops serving in the region. The enemy was quick to capitalize on this and used it as a recruiting tool for their cause. In this instance milblogs alone could not correct the public's impression of US troops after this scandal but they could work to promote a more positive image of US service members as a whole.

Gaining the intended effects of milblogs will not be reached overnight. They will take time and in order for them to work the key is ensuring the troops have the proper tools at hand to

be successful in their milblogging mission. Training is the key, it is critical the DoD establish guidelines for the proper use of milblogging and how to incorporate it into military operations.

Training the Troops

LTG Caldwell discusses a multi-faceted approach with regard to successful milbloging operations. Encouraging, empowering, educating and equipping being the keys to success when it comes to the successful incorporation of milblogs into any military strategy. First, LTG Caldwell points out, "we need to encourage soldiers to tell/share their story".[34] Having those on the ground engaged with others around the world, telling their story could pay major dividends in world public opinion. As LTG Caldwell points out "when our Soldiers tell/share their stories, it has an overwhelmingly positive effect."[35]

The second approach is to empower subordinates. This means taking the inherent risk associated with allowing individuals to spread an uncensored message to the public. Current doctrine on OPSEC threatens to charge personnel under article 92 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) if a violation occurs.[36] Where this threat needs to stay in place for purposeful release of sensitive information, those with the best intentions should not be threatened with such drastic measures. LTG Caldwell states "Unfortunately, the culture is such that the first time a subordinate makes a mistake in dealing with the media and gets punished for it, it will be the last time anyone in that organization takes a risk and engages with the media."[37] This is a result of the zero defect mentality currently residing in our military. Troops need to be aware of the potential pitfalls of their writings but they should not fear their career should end if they write something that is not completely in line with what their commanders feel the message should be.

The way around these potential issues is through education. "If soldiers are better educated to deal with new media and its effects, they will feel more empowered and be encouraged to act."[38] This includes wholesale training programs on OPSEC, what type of information could be useful to the enemy, what are the effects of releasing that information and what are the effects of their writings or videos as it pertains to strategic communication. Ensuring troops keep their writings truthful is very important, education on the dangers of sending a false message is a must. All must realize they are now not only spokespersons for the US military but for the entire country as a whole. It is also pertinent that commanders take the time to explain the national strategic objectives for a campaign to all troops down to the junior member. All should be familiar with why the US military is involved in a particular country. Too often younger troops are victims of the very propaganda we are attempting to confront and do not have a clear picture of their purpose on the strategic level. Educating troops in this regard also assists in promoting a unified message both from official and unofficial information releases.

Finally, equipping troops with the means to spread their message is a key to success. LTG Caldwell suggests "equipping unit leaders with camcorders to document operations but also daily life." He goes on to discuss using footage shot by military units to not only refute what our enemies say but getting it out first as "the first images broadcast become reality to viewers".[39]

One more key to add to LTG Caldwell's ideas would be leadership by example. This means ensuring commanders are actively involved in blogging themselves. It also means they are connected to their troops. Recently a senior General in Iraq began blogging and holding online chats with his troops. This is an excellent example of leadership by example when it comes to new media. MG Michael Oates, USA is quick to point out that "Fundamentally what I

am doing is not new. What I'm doing is communicating with my soldiers. What's new is the medium in which were communicating."[40] There are some who think the General out of line for this type of direct communication with troops. What seems to be the concern is mostly the way he is communicating. MG Oates makes an outstanding point by pointing out this is not anything new. Commanders have always held open forums in which troops could ask questions and hear answers directly from the leadership without a buffer. The new media available today now makes this type of communication more effective and timely as commanders now sit down and respond to their troops more often than before.

Current statistics show that our troops are doing an outstanding job of protecting sensitive information while blogging, even without a focused training program. In fact, a series of online audits suggest that official military websites published more OPSEC violations than did milblogs in the same time period. These audits were performed by the Army web risk assessment cell between January 2006 and January 2007 and found at least 1,813 violations of OPSEC policy on 878 official military websites. During the same period the cell uncovered only 28 breaches on 594 individual blogs monitored.[41] These numbers are in stark contrast then what those against milblogs claim. It also shows that with the proper training program in place and following LTG Caldwell's guidance to encourage, empower, education and equip, the potential for security violations could be mitigated to an acceptable level.

Summary and Conclusions

Milblogs are here to stay. The momentum of new media will not be slowed. Traditional media outlets are slowly becoming obsolete. Newspapers and magazines are now selling online subscriptions faster than traditional paper. Televised network and cable news is becoming less trusted by the population. More often than not the public is turning to online sources for its daily

dose of news. The DoD needs to pay attention to the changing information environment in which we live and become a part of it instead of resisting change. Milblogs are just one aspect of this new media phenomenon and cannot be ignored. Incorporating a strategy on the use of milblogs in planning operations could be a key to winning the 21st century information war.

Our enemy has been keen to the importance of strategic communication for decades now and has used technology to its advantage. They do not slow down their communication system by placing restrictions on messages or adding levels of bureaucracy to those releasing their messages. They plan their message in conjunction with their mission. That is why you see their videos or press releases quickly after the conclusion of their operations. As LTG Caldwell states "the first images broadcast become reality to viewers". This is why there is still a war today. Our enemy communicates effectively with all audiences, their potential recruits, their enemy and the support networks they rely on as well as the support network of their enemy, the US population. Their effectiveness creates new recruits and funding while it reduces the support for the US and its allies. Until we learn how to counter this, our enemy will be able to survive and continue to threaten US interests for many years. Changing our attitudes concerning new media and its potential uses in the GWOT is a step in the right direction. Learning from our enemy and then beating him at his own game is a critical requirement for victory.

The arguments that milblogging is a threat to OPSEC and may be taking unnecessary risk when it comes to operations is losing its steam. As the stats released by the Army's own web risk assessment show DoD sponsored sites pose more of a danger to OPSEC then do individual milblogs. It is time for those in this camp to realize the benefits of this strategic communication tool greatly outweigh the potential risks to OPSEC. We as a military cannot continue to be chasing our enemy with regards to using technology for public communication. We need to be

out in front, setting the pace and force our enemy to look for new ways to counter our strong message. It is clear the current way of doing business is not working; this can only be a step in the right direction.

Using LTG Caldwell's approach to encourage, empower, educate, and equip and add in leadership by example, milblogging could become a useful tool for commanders. These strategies will take time and commanders will have to take the good with the bad while establishing new guidelines for the uses of milblogging. Changing attitudes will need to come first and giving this strategy many years to prove itself will be important. Keeping up with technology and adapting to new media innovations will be more important. Giving the public, our enemy and those we are fighting for direct access to our troops is a positive and will greatly assist in breaking down the barriers between the public and the military.

The potential results of allowing milblogging could be improved public opinion of US forces around the world but more specifically in our own country. This improved US public opinion will be a key to allowing our politicians to support the long drawn out wars we are currently fighting. A more trusting and educated US public will in turn be more supportive. A more trusting and supportive world could minimize our enemy's capability to recruit new members to their cause. Of course these grand results are only theories for how milblogging and new media combined with an IO plan could impact the population. However failure to do anything new could only result in the continued struggles the US military faces today with regards to world public opinion. In order to overcome our current struggles we must change our attitudes and let go of our fears, the US military is full of high quality, professional people capable of great things. We trust them with million dollar equipment, we empower them to make battlefield decisions without having to ask permission, we place other troops in their

charge and they succeed at these important, difficult and critical tasks time and time again. These are the same individuals that make up the most capable military in the world today. So wouldn't it only make sense that we empower our Soldiers, Sailors, Airman, and Marines to be spokespersons for the US military and do so without fear?

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