

**STRATEGY  
RESEARCH  
PROJECT**

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**STRATEGIC LEADERS: IT'S TIME TO MEET THE PRESS**

**BY**

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSEPH G. CURTIN**  
United States Army

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LTC JOSEPH G. CURTIN  
U.S. Army

Dr. Douglas V. Johnson  
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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## ABSTRACT

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Strategic military leaders today must be thoroughly competent in their professional communication skills. More importantly, how strategic leaders interface with the media can have significant impact on military operations, programs, and policies. In this blossoming information age, understanding the media and how to effectively tell the military story is a strategic leader imperative. Moreover, the changing face of warfare to include peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and terrorism drive the need for strategic leaders to keep the American public informed. This research examines the media environment, challenges, and prospects for improving strategic leader relations with the press.

Drawing on current literature to include journal articles, reports, surveys, and related books, this research examines historical implications, trends, media dynamics, and diverse strategic leader views on the subject.

My overarching goal is to offer present and future strategic leaders sound arguments of why the culture of grappling with the media must change. More importantly, as the Army, and our military in general, undergoes transformation, the opportunity for re-engaging the media has never been better. One thing is for certain: the media will always have a powerful impact on the military and public opinion.



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## **STRATEGIC LEADERS: IT IS TIME TO MEET THE PRESS**

In June, 1999, Chief of Staff of the Army, General Eric Shinseki, released the Army's intent statement on Transformation. The intent statement clearly spells out the vision -- "A Warfighting Army...Persuasive in Peace, Invincible in War."<sup>1</sup> Along with this vision are the objectives the Army must achieve to meet the transformed end state 20 plus years ahead. These simple words represent a truly extraordinary responsibility for future strategic leaders.

Essentially, future strategic leaders must effectively and efficiently develop the means to bring this vision for transformation to fruition. In addition, this bold and complex transformation process impacts every facet of the Army including organizations, training, leader development and doctrine, to name just a few. The success or failure of transformation rests on several key pillars; however, none is more important than successfully communicating this process to our soldiers, civilians, and the American people.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR ARMY TRANSFORMATION**

First, strategic leaders must understand the impact future communication challenges have when telling the transformation story. As we progress through the information age, technology will continue to shape our world and how messages are sent and received by the public -- both internal and external to the Army. The most significant challenge will be competing with the awesome volume and rapidity at which information is produced and transmitted.

Clearly, conventional methods for releasing information on transformation such as press releases must change. The future communication environment mandates strategic leaders and public affairs officers anticipate developing media technologies and methods for keeping the public informed. For example, senior public affairs officers should understand the basics of how commercial digitization, cellular technology, and microwave will offer new avenues for engaging the public on a macro scale. In fact, a recent defense report advocates this point in that "technological advances today are driven primarily by the civilian marketplace, and tomorrow's military will have to become more adept at integrating civilian technologies into military...systems."<sup>2</sup>

Simply put, strategic leaders and their public affairs professionals must find unconventional ways to get messages across to various audiences. For example, the ability to effectively reach key audiences -- the American public, Congress, military members -- will require tailored messages, feedback mechanisms, and frequent updating of communication methodologies. In other words, future strategic leaders must remain absolutely flexible,

creative, and knowledgeable about whom they serve and wish to influence. Otherwise, the transformation message could be lost.

This leads to another challenge posed by John Kotter in his book, *Leading Change*, in what he describes as “under communicating.” Kotter defines under communicating as the result of a weak information program or when leaders “inadvertently send inconsistent messages.” The end result, Kotter says, is “a stalled transformation.”<sup>3</sup>

From an internal standpoint, strategic leaders must be effective in how they drive change through policy, procedure and regulation. The *Strategic Leadership Primer*, for example, discusses the implications future leaders will face as changes are communicated downward within organizations. The key point is that strategic leader messages will be thoroughly analyzed, and perhaps, interpreted differently at the various levels within a command.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, public affairs officers and other key staffers should carefully review and provide feedback to strategic leaders to insure intended messages are received and understood. Again, the consequences for miscommunication could steer organizations into the wrong direction.<sup>5</sup>

Conversely, strategic leaders will spend a great deal of their time communicating with external audiences. External audiences will include members of Congress, non-military government organizations, diplomats, and even ranking national political leaders. There is no doubt that ample opportunities will present themselves for strategic leaders to speak publicly, testify before government committees, attend high-level meetings, and participate in media interviews. These are all venues that will enable them to tell the Army Transformation story and communicate for the Army as an institution.

Media interviews, for example, truly require good communication skills and practice. This is where public affairs officers can greatly assist strategic leaders. Every future strategic leader should attend some form of training in how to handle interviews. The goal, of course, is for strategic leaders to demonstrate competency and convincingly communicate the Army's position. Ultimately, strategic leaders will be on point to inform the American public about its Army and garnering continued support for its readiness. Subsequently, national media journalists, from organizations such as CNN, *The Washington Post*, or *Time Magazine*, will confront strategic leaders on a wide-range of transformation related issues such as readiness. Therefore, engaging the national media more frequently provides strategic leaders great opportunities to strengthen the Army and will be unlike any previous duty ever held at lower echelons.

Finally, strategic public affairs planning must be integral to the Army's Transformation process. Our future strategic leaders will rely on public affairs professionals to help chart the

way. It is interesting to note that the Army's Transformation Campaign Plan cites only a two line paragraph charging the Chief of Public Affairs with developing a communications plan for both internal and external audiences.<sup>6</sup> Arguably, this concise bit of guidance is perhaps the centerpiece of the entire campaign plan. There can be no doubt that telling the Army Transformation story accurately, persuasively, and continually will be absolutely crucial to achieving General Shinseki's vision 20 years from now. The bottom line: public affairs planning provides strategic leaders optimal communication goals, objectives, themes and methods to meet the information needs of both internal and external audiences.

Journalist and author, Richard Halloran, recommends strategic leaders also adopt the following attributes in dealing with the press:<sup>7</sup>

- Quit bellyaching about the media. Vietnam attitudes about the press are counterproductive in this day and age of new strategic challenges. Army Transformation mandates strategic leaders be out-front explaining this comprehensive move toward the future.
- Never lie. Remember, journalists will talk to other sources to confirm responses to media queries. Likewise, Army Transformation is a complex undertaking and there are many questions that cannot be answered; therefore, do not speculate, but explain the need for the Army to change to meet future security obligations. The American public will respect your candor in this regard.
- Stay in your lane. Speak to what you know about Army Transformation and reinforce themes and messages from the Chief of Staff of the Army.
- React to negative news stories that fail to report the facts accurately. The public deserves balanced reporting. Strategic leaders owe it the public to set the record straight when Army Transformation subjects are reported wrong.
- Educate the media. Army Transformation requires constant interaction with the press to explain the process. Additionally, strategic leaders should invite journalists to attend lectures at the Army War College and Command and General Staff College that address Army Transformation.

Frank Aukofer and retired Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence, in their joint report on military-media relations make the following key recommendations:<sup>8</sup>

- During future conflicts or crises, assign a general officer to coordinate military/news activities in combat areas. This will be absolutely essential as the Army transforms to the Objective Force. In particular, information operations will

necessitate strategic leader involvement to ensure media affairs are properly addressed.

- The Secretary of Defense should insure that Professional Military Education programs adequately prepare future leaders in press relations. Start educating officers about the role of the media in basic courses through War College. Again, this is a key element to successfully transforming the Army.
- The Defense Department should adopt a policy of "Security at the Source" for journalists embedded in military units. Censorship policies are no longer effective. A transformed military must shed Cold-War experiences in this regard. Information technology has already made such practices obsolete.

Nonetheless, the first responsibility of present and future strategic leaders is to improve relations with the media. This research will next examine the historical challenges, the changing media environment, and offer recommendations toward that end.

## **THE PRESENT CHALLENGE**

We're living in an age of multiple, 24-hour news networks all competing for scoops, and that's led to much less respect in the media for protecting operational information. So this is a new kind of war, and it offered new challenges, and I'm not sure either the press or the Pentagon are yet up to that challenge.<sup>9</sup>

—Ken Bacon, former Pentagon spokesman

Ken Bacon made this comment soon after the start of the Kosovo air campaign in early spring of 2000. He was defending the reason why then Secretary of Defense William Cohen and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry Shelton, made the decision to restrict the release of information to the press in the early stages of the action. Once again, the on-set of war presented U.S military strategists with an old challenge: how to handle the media?

The question was perhaps answered by General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, when he invoked a "gag order" on his subordinate commanders and staffs not to inform the press of any operational details of the initial air campaign.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, as the international press corps watched combatant air craft depart from outside various NATO air bases, the anticipated cries of journalists over press restrictions wound their way to the Pentagon.

Despite the lessons learned from one military operation to the next since Vietnam, the military-media relationship continues to sour. James Kitfield, noted Government Executive

reporter, sums it best when he wrote, "Time and time again the two professions have been thrown together during national emergencies, only to find themselves separated by a deep cultural chasm of distrust and mutual misunderstanding."<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, the challenge for today's strategic leaders in dealing with the media is further complicated by the impact of technology. In particular, the instant capability of reporters to file news reports from anywhere and at anytime puts constant pressure on strategic leaders to react in some manner. Retired Marine General Anthony C. Zinni made note of this prior to departing as Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Central Command, in July of 2000. He stated, "...Technology has changed things. The media are on the battlefield; the media are in your headquarters; the media are everywhere."<sup>12</sup> More importantly, however, is that General Zinni voiced concern over the poor relationship between strategic leaders and the press. "The relationship has bottomed out. It has begun to heal a little, but a lot more has to be done. We need to rebuild a sense of mutual trust."<sup>13</sup>

To rebuild a sense of mutual trust between the military and the media in this dynamic information age is the challenge strategic leaders must undertake. There is no question that strategic leaders today must be thoroughly competent in their professional communication skills.

More importantly, how strategic leaders interface with the media can have significant impact on military operations, programs, and policies. Simply put – as General John Keane, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, said recently, understanding the media and how to effectively tell the military story is a strategic leader imperative.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the changing face of warfare to include peace keeping, peace enforcement, and terrorism drive the need for strategic leaders to keep the American public informed. This research examines historical aspects of the problem, current challenges and recommendations for improving strategic leader relations with the press.

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **THE CIVIL WAR**

The roots of the modern military-media conflict are traced to the Civil War. Along with greatly improved printing presses, telegraph lines and photography, the news from the front lines reached the public faster than ever before. Interestingly, the term "real-time" reporting would become a threat to both strategic and operational commanders throughout the war.<sup>15</sup> Censorship, expulsion from the ranks, and threat of court martial were tools employed by disgruntled commanders frustrated with the press corps. Moreover, the Associated Press, which

was founded during the Civil War, quickly made use of hundreds of reporters from various newspapers to get the news from the frontlines.<sup>16</sup> This arrangement, however, was not universally appreciated in either the Union or Confederate camps.

On the Northern side, for example, General Sherman was considered the “most notorious press-hater.”<sup>17</sup> He referred to journalists as “dirty newspaper scribblers who have the impudence of Satan.”<sup>18</sup> This charge was noted by historians who recount that General Sherman blamed the press for the North’s defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run because two major newspapers printed the order of battle.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, he believed that battlefield reporters caused more harm than good and threatened to punish any reporter that again printed news about Union troop movements and operations. Likewise, General Robert E. Lee often voiced concern to his staff that newspapers in the South printed stories that could be easily used by the enemy.<sup>20</sup>

The civil war brought to light the inherent friction between the military and the media. Senior Civil War commanders, in particular, set the tone for generations to follow in by their divergent views of warfare as compared to those in the press. The problem simply centered on this notion: “Soldiers wanted to avoid disclosure of sensitive information and objected to criticism of their performance. Journalists wanted unrestricted access to military information and the ability to use it whenever they saw fit.”<sup>21</sup>

## WORLD WAR I

As the U.S. prepared to enter World War I, President Woodrow Wilson was keenly aware of how the European press was employed as a propaganda machine in the respective warring nations. The challenge for President Wilson was to maintain national will in a war that had already produced millions of battlefield casualties. Therefore, the president reasoned that the press would surely play a vital role supporting government objectives in prosecuting the war in Europe. Noted historian, William Hammond, wrote that the U.S. propaganda machine would operate under the so-called Creel Committee, so named after journalist George Creel.<sup>22</sup> The Creel Committee ultimately maintained offices throughout the allied and neutral countries at the height of the war. Hammond wrote, “It issued a daily newspaper, operated a press service that fed information to the news media...and enlisted a corps of 75,000 public speakers reaching into every part of the [United States].”<sup>23</sup>

To further control the press, Congress enacted The Espionage Act on June 15, 1917. It was one of the most restrictive measures taken in our Nation’s history to restrict freedom of speech and of the press. The Act essentially prohibited the publication of any information that

could aid the enemy. Additionally, The Sedition Act was later enacted in 1918 to justify the censorship activities already well under way.<sup>24</sup>

"The Sedition Act forbade any criticism of the conduct or actions of the United States government or its military forces, including disparaging remarks about the flag, military uniforms, similar badges or symbols..."<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, journalists desiring to cover the war from at the frontlines were placed under strict military control. In fact, General John J. Pershing published General Order Number 36 on September 12, 1917 that detailed the procedures for correspondents to follow while in theater.<sup>26</sup> Hammond wrote of the order:

"American newsmen who wished to report the war had to be accredited by a lengthy process that included a personal appearance before the Secretary of War, an oath to write the truth, and submission of a \$10,000 bond to insure their proper conduct in the field. In France, they submitted their writing to military censors who operated under the intelligence directorate the arm of the Army most certain to protect even the least significant military secrets."<sup>27</sup>

General Pershing, although a noted strategist and field soldier, disregarded the press for the most part. He routinely delegated press matters to his staff and often distanced himself from forming any professional relationship with the press corps. By sharp contrast, Army Chief of Staff, General Peyton C. March, instituted weekly reviews with the press corps in the spring of 1918.

In his book, *The Hilt of the Sword*, author Edward M. Coffman wrote that General March provided detailed briefings about the war and answered questions in a "sharp and precise" manner, which greatly impressed the reporters. In fact, the Saturday morning reviews were considered a major step in easing Army restrictions on news.<sup>28</sup>

Nonetheless, Hammond would note that the censorship procedures and enormous propaganda programs simply forced the press to comply. In the end, Hammond reports that the public affairs strategy for World War I failed. It failed because the military did not balance security with the public's right to know. It was a hard lesson learned and the military sought to make improvements in its public affairs program during the inter-war years.<sup>29</sup>

## WORLD WAR II

In contrast, World War II strategic leaders approached the handling of the press differently. For example, General George C. Marshall and General Dwight D. Eisenhower established strong professional relationships with leading members of the press corps. They understood the need to keep the American public, as well as, the soldier informed as much as

possible. In fact, General Marshall would conduct on-the-record press briefings on a regular basis during the later years of the war to sustain support for troops and for the senior commanders in the field.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, General Eisenhower made public affairs a command priority. He even "instructed his censors never to cut personal criticisms of me or of any of my actions from press dispatches." In turn, he earned the utmost respect and admiration from the press corps for his sincerity and honesty.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, General Douglas MacArthur, in the Pacific Theater, and Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, enforced censorship measures to the letter. Although General MacArthur established a few professional relationships with the press, he kept the majority at bay. He would "routinely require each correspondent's copy to go through multiple censorship review...and pressured journalists to produce stories that burnished the image of the troops and their supreme commander."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Admiral King directed that only positive news be released to balance any negative reports that the Navy was holding about combat losses. It ultimately took widespread complaints from the press to the War Department to force the Navy to release news faster.<sup>33</sup>

By and large World War II represented a benchmark in military-media relations. It was a total war and the press worked hand-in-hand with the military to promote a common front. Journalists such as Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, and Ernie Pyle fought along side with the GIs and earned the utmost respect from citizens and soldiers alike. Despite the strict control and censorship measures, the military and the media found a way to work together to serve the interests of Americans and the values for which the Nation was built; however, the Vietnam conflict would change all that.

## THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

Hammond's book, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War*, provides the reader with ample reasons for the significant downfall in military – media relations, particularly following the Tet Offensive in 1968. Ironically, General William C. Westmoreland favored a policy of voluntary media guidelines versus press censorship in the war's initial stages. He reasoned that a system of voluntary guidelines "respected the willingness of reporters to avoid releasing information of value to the enemy."<sup>34</sup> Hammond wrote that General Westmoreland went even further to accommodate the needs of the press:

"Westmoreland supplemented his voluntary guidelines with a program that attempted to keep the press informed by providing regular background briefings for selected correspondents, 24-hour consultation services by knowledgeable public affairs officers, daily press briefings,

transportation into the field for newsmen who wanted to see the war up close, and a system of press camps throughout Vietnam to supply reporters in the field with at least rudimentary amenities.<sup>35</sup>

But the flawed strategy of the war would eventually strain the military – media relationship to unprecedented levels. Following the 1968 Tet Offensive, the military's daily press briefings known as the "Five O'clock Follies" went far to build great distrust of military and government officials by the media. Simply put: what the military was telling the press didn't match what they were seeing on the battlefield. The pressure exuded by the Johnson and Nixon administrations upon the military to control the flow of information from Vietnam only made matters worse. Deception, lies, and withholding of information by the military eventually proved disastrous.

A Washington Post book review of Hammond's work highlights the fact that the media did not lose the Vietnam war; rather, it was due to the loss of public support because of what Americans saw in the media about a flawed military and political strategy that costs 58,000 US casualties.<sup>36</sup>

By 1971, however, Hammond wrote, "the two sides were such angry antagonists that President Nixon would himself declare that Communist depredations notwithstanding, 'Our greatest enemy seems to be the press.'<sup>37</sup> Truly, such a statement by the Commander-in-Chief reflected the frustrations by his administration and the military leadership prosecuting the war. Ultimately, this harsh attitude toward the press would affect a future generation of strategic leaders.

## POST VIETNAM ERA

Georgetown University professor Loren B. Thompson wrote about the impact of Vietnam on the officer corps:

- Vietnam was a severe trauma for the US military, one from which it would not recover for many years. In search for explanations, many military officers concluded that frequently critical coverage of the war effort had been an important factor in bringing about the US defeat. By questioning government policies in Vietnam and highlighting the worst aspects of American involvement, it was argued, the media made it impossible to maintain public support for the war.<sup>38</sup>

Many media critics would often describe Thompson's assessment of military officers' viewpoint that the media lost the war as the "Vietnam Syndrome." Nonetheless, as the post-Vietnam era moved into the 1980s, the military-media relationship remained more divided than ever. For example, during Operation Urgent Fury in 1983, US forces planned and excluded the media from the first 48 hours of the invasion onto the island of Grenada. As expected, the

media establishment responded in a tumultuous outcry for better cooperation with the military in covering small-scale contingency operations. The result was the formation of the Sidle Commission, named after retired Major General Winant Sidle, who had also served as General Westmoreland's public affairs officer during Vietnam.

The Sidle Commission included senior military officers and retired journalists. The commission issued its report in August of 1984. Its major recommendation affirmed, "the U.S. media should cover U.S. military operations to the maximum degree possible consistent with mission security and the safety of US forces."<sup>39</sup> Other key recommendations from the Sidle Panel report included<sup>40</sup>:

- The creation of press pools to protect reporters from fast moving lethal environments with the ability to ensure in-depth coverage back home;
- Public Affairs planning should be conducted concurrently with operational planning;
- Press pools should accommodate the largest number of press possible and be temporary in nature;
- Voluntary compliance by the media to security guidelines, which should be as few as possible;
- The military should provide essential equipment to assist reporters covering the operation.

The press pool system during the 1980s went far to demonstrate that the military and media could work together; albeit, there were noted technical problems and several complaints about too much military supervision. More importantly, however, as pointed out by former Principal Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Mr. Fred Hoffman, "hundreds of newsmen and women demonstrated that they could be trusted to observe essential ground rules, including operational security."<sup>41</sup>

Despite the modest gains in military-media relations, the relationship faltered once again with the US invasion of Panama in 1989. The late deployment of the press pool and subsequent press pool miscues on the ground demonstrated that a sound solution in reporting military operations remained unfounded. For certain, the military's handling of the press during the Panama operation raised old concerns for strategic leaders in winning wars: How the media tells the story.

General Colin Powell, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reminded his service chiefs on the eve of the Panama invasion about the impact of the media on military operations: "Once you've got all the forces moving and everything's being taken care of by the commander,

turn your attention to television because you can win the battle or lose the war if you don't handle the story right."<sup>42</sup> Certainly, General Powell understood the effect the media had interpreting military actions and the impact messages could have on both the public and the politicians in describing operational success or failure. Unfortunately, disgruntled journalist who continued to complain in the news about the military's attempt to withhold public information often blurred the story about this successful military operation. Ultimately, General Powell would write to his four-star Commander-in-Chiefs that read in part: "Otherwise successful operations are not total successes unless the media aspects are properly handled."<sup>43</sup>

## THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

Such sound guidance was sorely tested just months later when Iraq invaded Kuwait kicking off the Persian Gulf War. As a large-scale military deployment ensued, so did a momentous number of journalists wishing to cover the largest combat operation since Vietnam. In a short few months, more than 1,600 journalists descended upon Saudi Arabia to cover the action. General Norman Schwarzkopf, intent on controlling all aspects of the operation, made certain that media coverage would also be controlled to prevent second guessing from Washington and to ease political challenges in building the needed international coalition forces.<sup>44</sup> This was accomplished through the establishment of a Combined Joint Information Bureau in a Dhahran hotel, which controlled all media relations activities in Saudi Arabia for the US and coalition forces.

Veteran reporter John J. Fialka, in his book, *Hotel Warriors*, articulates mistakes made by both the media and the military during Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.<sup>45</sup> Most significantly, Fialka notes that so many inexperienced journalists trying to cover a complex, highly-technical, and fast-paced war overwhelmed the US military. He points out that during the 1944 Normandy invasion only 27 reporters were slated to go ashore with the invasion forces while hundreds of others attended briefings back in London.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the military could only accommodate a pool of 100 reporters a day to visit units in the field. This was due in part to available transportation assets and the fact that many commanders did not want the media in their units for operational security reasons. Nonetheless, Fialka argued that the military simply failed to account for the needs of the media and chose to control them through bureaucratic nonsense and indifference. He pointed out that "the widening chasm between the American journalists and the military that was created during the Vietnam War remained largely unabridged."<sup>47</sup>

Conversely, then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Pete Williams, argued that the military implemented sound procedures for supporting with the press. For example, Mr. Williams defended the pooling system emphasizing that the program was fair, and that it enabled a reasonable number of journalists to cover the action, and provided the "American people with the accounting they deserved."<sup>48</sup> Polls taken during the war supported this argument. One Times-Mirror survey, for example, confirmed that three-quarters of the respondents did not feel the military was hiding information from the public and nearly 60 percent thought the military should exert even tighter controls.<sup>49</sup> Although such public support for the military was welcomed by strategic leaders, Fialka argued his case that the military lost a superb opportunity to tell perhaps one of the most positive stories since World War II.<sup>50</sup> The implication was clear: military leaders and the media still remained at divisive odds over military coverage.

#### KOSOVO AIR CAMPAIGN

But in the lessons learned during the 2000 Kosovo air campaign, General Clark recounts important conclusions about the media in his book *Waging Modern War*.<sup>51</sup> First, Western military leaders must be prepared to deal with the media as part of the overall strategic environment. He emphasizes the media will be a battlefield fixture and will greatly impact public opinion about strategic goals and objectives. Second, strategic leaders should not shut out the press. He learned soon after the air campaign began that such attempts were fruitless. General Clark argues that engaging the media frequently is important to shaping public opinion and correcting inaccuracies in news stories. Third, the enemy will use the media to negatively influence public opinion against Western objectives. He cites the tactics of Slobodan Milosevic in attempting to portray the air campaign as an attack solely against civilians.

General Clark's guidance to future strategic leaders is this:

Attention to the media will be a must for any future campaign. For small, limited-duration special operations, secrecy is still possible if it is carefully planned. But for sustained operations, public support will be essential. This, in turn, can only be gained by accepting the restraints if public opinion and sensibilities of future operations, just as our nations and our Alliance did in Operation Allied Force.<sup>52</sup>

#### WAR ON TERRORISM

As of this writing, the war on terrorism has only just begun. The shocking terrorist attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 was graphically captured on television and reported instantly around the world. Presently, U.S. troops are

deployed in Afghanistan while U.S. airpower continues to smash the Taliban forces. The Media is on the battlefield and arguably now part of it.

But one thing is for certain: President George W. Bush has emphatically stated that the public will see certain aspects of military operations while others aspects will not be seen via the media.<sup>53</sup> The necessity to protect information is foremost as Al-Qaida terrorist monitor every news account for intelligence information.

More importantly, Department of Defense public affairs guidance clearly and concisely lays the ground rules for service members in talking with the press; likewise, to provide for operational security, there are no embedded media covering special operations missions presently.<sup>54</sup> In the meantime, DoD is supporting pools of reporters aboard aircraft carriers and granting access to deployed Marines in Afghanistan. Additionally, public support for military action remains extremely high. The media, in turn, is receiving daily press briefing by the Secretary of Defense on the status of operations. Concurrently, General Tommy Franks, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Central Command, also talks frequently with the media about his command's role in this campaign. Truly, there is every indication that the military –media relationship will take a powerful step forward so that each profession can work together for the benefit of all Americans. We shall see. Table 1 provides a summary of the trends.<sup>55</sup>:

<b>Military-Media Variable</b>	<b>Pre-Vietnam</b>	<b>Post-Vietnam</b>	<b>Operations Other Than War</b>
<b>Attitude of military toward press</b>	Friendly	Hostile	Apprehensive
<b>Attitude of press toward military</b>	Friendly	Skeptical	Distant
<b>Access to military</b>	Part of unit	Pools	Intermittent
<b>Military control of media</b>	High	Medium	Low
<b>Focus on non -military entities, eg NGOs, inter DoD, and contract civilians</b>	Low	Medium	High
<b>Media perception of military relationship</b>	Incorporated	Manipulated	Courted
<b>Media reliance on for military comms tech</b>	Totally	Partially	Independent
<b>When the story ends</b>	Shooting stops	Troops go home	Media go home

Source: Charles C. Moskos reprinted with permission

TABLE 1 TRENDS IN MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONS

These historical insights provide only limited perspectives on the controversial relationship between the military and the media. This research will next examine these two professions from a cultural standpoint. The goal is to highlight both differences and similarities in which strategic leaders can assimilate to improve their relations with the press.

## **CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES**

The historic and often strained relationship between strategic leaders and the media points to inherent cultural differences between their profession and that of journalism. First, it is important to cite that the tension between the two professions naturally exists given the democratic principles in which the United States was founded. The First Amendment provides for freedom of the press, particularly, in performing its monitoring role over government. The military, on the other hand, closely guards its information and activities to provide for the security of the nation. History has clearly proven the search for common ground between the two professions has yet to be discovered. Second, as retired Marine Corps Lieutenant General Bernard E. Trainor, writes, the very skeptical and intrusive nature of the press compounds the friction between the two professions:

...a free press – one of the great virtues and elemental constituents of a democracy – is an institution wherein concentration of power is viewed as a danger. The press is a watchdog over institutions of power, be they military, political, economic, or social. Its job is to inform the people about the doings of their institutions. By its very nature, the press is skeptical and intrusive. As a result there will always be a divergence of interests between the media and the military. They are both essential to the well-being of our nation is beyond question, but the problem of minimizing the natural friction between the two is a daunting one.<sup>56</sup>

General Trainor added that the differences between the military and the media are also seen in the character of its people. He noted that military personnel tend to be team players and very organized while journalists are generally independent and disorganized. Furthermore, military members tend to trust others on face value, are obedient, and disciplined, while journalists are just the opposite in every respect.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Washington Post defense correspondent, Tom Ricks, wrote that unlike the military, the press are not self-regulated and lack any firm code of professional standards.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, the military is a hierarchal institution built on strict rules of conformity. In contrast, the media are loosely divided into various sub-groups (print, broadcast, and radio) where competition is keen and profits drive decisions.

From a political perspective, military leaders and the media elite remain at opposite ends of a continuum. Respected media scholar and author and director of the Center for Media and

Public Affairs in Washington, D.C., S. Robert Lichter, found that the media and military are on opposite sides of virtually every ideological divide you can name.<sup>59</sup> He wrote: "Surveys and opinion polls reveal that the elite media have become more liberal and the military relatively more conservative since the 1970s."<sup>60</sup> This perhaps explains an often-heard complaint from the military ranks about a perceived liberal bias in media reporting on military affairs.

But nationally syndicated columnist, George F. Will, pointed out in a recent interview that the cultural gap between the military and the media, or even society, is not bad. Mr. Will acknowledged that the military has higher standards than journalists because the military is a more "exacting profession and the stakes are higher: they are life, death and freedom."<sup>61</sup> His recommendation is that the journalism community acknowledges those difference and work to cultivate them to broaden a better understanding between the two cultures.

Similarly, Lieutenant General Trainor encouraged strategic leaders to recognize important similarities among journalists and themselves. "Both are idealistic, bright, totally dedicated to their profession, and technically proficient. They work long hours willingly under arduous conditions and crave recognition..."<sup>62</sup> It is through this kind of learning that strategic leaders can work to build a better understanding about the roles, functions, and challenges journalists face in covering the complexities of the military. As one senior Army public affairs officer wrote:

The key to success in this relationship is understanding the other side and being willing to endure a few frustrations and setbacks along the way. Equally important is the realization that the natural tensions between media and the military will always exist. The best approach is to educate each other, as much as possible, on the peculiarities of the other's culture.<sup>63</sup>

Even more important are the conclusions presented by the 2000 Cantigny Military-Media Conference Series on highlighting core commonalities. In particular was that the military and the media both seemed concerned over the lack of public interest in national issues, such as national security and military affairs.<sup>64</sup>

In addition, one conference leader noted for the record that the military and the media also shared these common values:

- Both are driven by higher values than personal gain
- The welfare of the nation matters
- Values such as truth, security, and national defense are important
- Both serve a vital national mission
- In serving the nation, both institutions must cooperate<sup>65</sup>

Conversely, reporter James Kitfield, is not so optimistic that the cultural gap is closing. He cautions that both professions must now find ways to better interrelate. He cautions that the challenges of this new century will place ever-increasing pressures on both institutions to work together. If both institutions allow the cultural gap to further widen – through widespread mistrust, disrespect and disdain for one another – then the military and the media may perhaps ultimately fail the American people and weaken our nation as a whole.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, however, despite these contrasting viewpoints, American public opinion has strongly favored the military over the media.

## OPINION SURVEYS

This research has found that major national opinion poll organizations, predominately Harris and Gallup, have tracked American public opinion towards the military and the media since the 1970s. And despite the often-tenuous relationship between the military and the media during this time period, the public has consistently placed its trust, confidence and respect with the military. In fact, survey polls have placed the military at or near the top among large public and private institutions for the past three decades while the media has hovered in the lower third of the spectrum.

### Confidence in Institutions

Great Deal or Quite a Lot

Organizations	June 2001	June 2000	1970s
The military	66%	64	56
The church or organized religion	60%	56	66
The police	57%	54	
The U.S. Supreme Court	50%	47	46
The presidency	48%	42	
Banks	44%	46	
The medical system	40%	40	
The public schools	38%	37	55
Faith-based charitable organizations	37%		
Newspapers	36%	37	
Television news	34%	36	
The electric power utilities	28%		
Big business	28%	29	31
Organized labor	26%	25	36
Congress	26%	24	39
Health maintenance organizations HMOs	15%	16	

Source: Gallup Inc. reprinted with permission

TABLE 2 GALLUP POLL SURVEY

Additionally, a major Harvard University study completed recently found that confidence in the military remained particularly strong among children of the baby boomer generation. Its

authors wrote that “this is surprising given that support, trust, and confidence in nearly every public and private institution has dropped over the last thirty years.”<sup>67</sup> More specifically, the military went from fifth on the Harris Poll in 1971 to number one throughout the 1990s.<sup>68</sup> This was a 16 percent increase for the military. Interestingly, the television news remained unchanged in their center ranking among 14 public and private institutions inspiring a great deal of confidence.

Similarly, a major Gallup Poll taken this year among Americans places the military at the very top of 16 public and private institutions in which they placed a great deal of confidence.<sup>69</sup> In contrast, television news and newspapers ranked in the bottom third of that same list. See Table 2.

More interesting, another Gallup survey taken among Americans who identified themselves as either Democrat or Republican, placed greatest confidence in the military. Again, newspapers and television news ranked in the bottom third. This was the first time Gallup noted that the military rated higher than church groups or religious organizations.<sup>70</sup> See Figure 1.

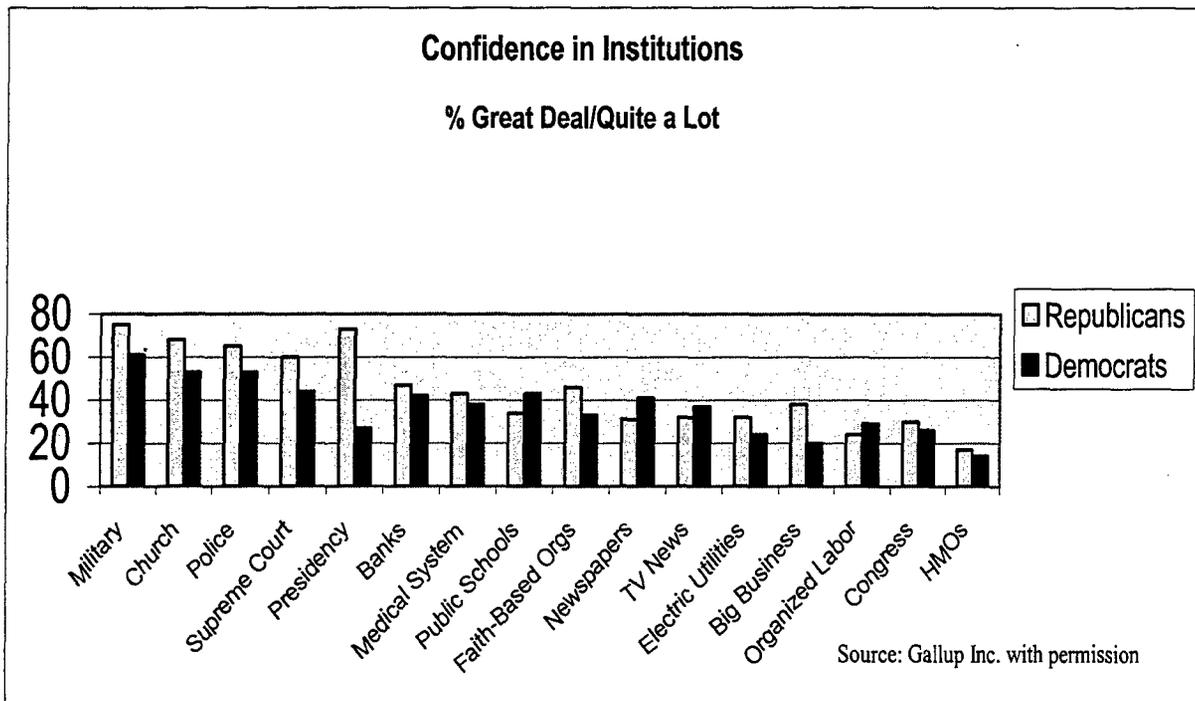


FIGURE 1 GALLUP POLL

It does not end there. In the wake of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, an American Demographics survey found that “the most valued worker” tied at second place with

policemen were soldiers at 74 percent. Firefighters rated just five percentage points higher. Journalists were not listed.<sup>71</sup>

Present and future strategic leaders should not ignore the implications of such powerful public support for the military. First, sustaining public support for the military will require strategic leaders to frequently communicate to the public via the media. As strategic leaders are ultimately accountable to the American public, it behooves them to make public communications a priority. Next, despite the good times and the bad, the American public has continually entrusted its faith in the military to do the right thing. The military certainly retains the moral high ground; therefore, strategic leaders can ill afford to ignore the press. This research will now address future public affairs implications for strategic leaders.

### **TYRANNY OF REAL-TIME NEWS**

Technological advances in the information age combined with globalization of the media will greatly impact strategic leaders across the spectrum of conflict. From a technological standpoint, satellite and digital capabilities now offer the media the ability to reach audiences around the globe instantaneously. For example, we now live in an environment where “more than 120 communications satellites beam television to an audience of 1.2 billion people, and CNN international reaches 209 countries.”<sup>72</sup>

In addition, network experts predict there will be almost 700 million people using the internet by 2005.<sup>73</sup> One could argue that along with traditional means of getting the news – print, radio, and television – there are truly no bounds to acquiring breaking news from any point on the globe. Moreover, the impact of technology now makes reporting of military affairs more prominent than ever before. Simply put, strategic leaders can see live news television images from the most remote geographic locations with the understanding that adversaries, world leaders, and average citizens are viewing the same story. A writer for the Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies in Great Britain summarized the impact of media technologies on military affairs best when he wrote:

The information age and the resultant array of new technologies have enabled the media to access the battlefield in a way that had previously been technologically impossible. The consequences of a reporter equipped with an ultra lightweight camera, able to transmit live to a news network anywhere in the world, simply cannot be understated and has brought the media to the dawn of what Nik Gowing has coined, “the tyranny of real time news.” This is a most important development for the media, since it significantly diminishes the military’s ability to limit or censor its output and has thus shifted the balance of influence between the media and the military firmly in favor of the media. Portable satellite dishes mean that reports can now be sent immediately,

independently, and uncensored. The umbilical chord of reliance on the [military] has been cut.<sup>74</sup>

The tyranny of real time news places incredible pressure on strategic leaders to appropriately react to complex military situations. At every turn, the world is truly watching, judging and, in some cases, responding to words and images seen on television. The British military lessons learned from Kosovo, for example, point to the need for military leaders to shape the battlefield through pro-active media opportunities rather than reactive ones.<sup>75</sup>

### **IMPACT OF MEDIA GLOBALIZATION**

In the past decade or so, CNN truly set the standard for reporting timely world events; however, CNN is no longer the only international 24-hour news program in town. There is now competition from other international media consortiums from Great Britain, Latin America, Germany, and Qatar. For example, the al Jazeera all-news network is providing a different, and perhaps, biased perspective of current events in the Middle East. In fact, a recent Washington Post article clearly stated that al-Jazeera consistently takes a hostile stance toward U.S. policy in the region.<sup>76</sup>

And although al Jazeera is home-based in Doha, Qatar, the Arab world audience now seeks its news from this alternative source rather than CNN. In fact, during the 1990's, 70 percent of the world's viewing audience watched CNN; today, only about 30 percent get their news from CNN.<sup>77</sup>

As one former and prominent foreign affairs correspondent told the Army War College class recently, with satellite technology and globalization of the media, military strategists will now have to confront media organizations who represent diverse audiences, have diverse sponsors, pay no loyalty to any one nation, and have interest in other world events beside the United States.<sup>78</sup> More importantly, this speaker emphasized, based on his experience, that media images can change foreign policy overnight. However, he acknowledged that the effect of media attention on specific issues is often limited; therefore, strategic leaders cannot ignore the impact certain images and news events will play on decision-making and world affairs at large.<sup>79</sup>

For example, one study concluded that its not so much a particular world crisis that's newsworthy, but the fact that the American military may have to get involved to resolve the crisis.<sup>80</sup>

Next, strategic leaders must also understand the media industry is a big business venture; therefore audience satisfaction and profits are the top priority, while education and world events

rank second and third, respectively.<sup>81</sup> What this simply means is that certain inane news events, such as the Gary Condit/Chandra Levy issue, could draw immense audience interest while key world events, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, could draw little attention at all. In essence, the “entertainment” aspect of pleasing audiences is forcing major news organizations to change their business practices. Unfortunately, the result is that many news organizations are cutting experienced foreign correspondent positions abroad to save money. Likewise, “newspapers, too, are competing with television and the internet for a share of a public, who, in their view, wants to be entertained and has a short attention span.”<sup>82</sup>

Needless to say, modern journalism is undergoing rapid transition in the wake of evolving technology and globalization of the media. As journalism undergoes its own version of transformation, strategic leaders must stay engaged with the media. Foremost, the media need the military to interpret strategic policy to a world audience and the military need the media to tell their story in order to shape favorable opinion and enhance public support for military policy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Where do future strategic leaders go from here? One bit of guidance offered by the former Army Chief of Public Affairs, Major General John G. Meyer, was to remember, “The media are like alligators...we don’t have to like them, but we do have to feed them.” His point was that whenever strategic leaders engage the media, they must make sure the military position is heard and understood.<sup>83</sup> Another perspective is offered by Miles Hudson and John Stanier in their book, *War and the Media*. The authors argue that public affairs could be the most essential element in any future conflict; therefore, strategic leaders should try to better engage the media rather than antagonize it.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, they added that it’s best that military leaders view the media as potential allies rather than enemies. The reason being the press is simply everywhere and it is to the strategic leaders advantage to communicate frequently with the press to sustain public and political trust.<sup>85</sup>

For example, the U.S. Navy learned a bitter lesson in good media relations during a highly publicized submarine accident in February 2001.

The tragic collision between the submarine USS Greenville and the Japanese trawler Ehime Maru put senior Navy leaders to the test. But many journalists and military professional alike argued that the Navy failed to take the public affairs high ground in this incident. In fact, one former senior Naval officer wrote in his commentary to Naval Institute Proceedings that making the media the enemy was absolutely counterproductive.<sup>86</sup> The writer argued that stonewalling and misleading the media in this bad news story just made the matter worse. In

the end, the writer explained, the Navy failed to keep the American public informed and damaged the service's integrity with the media.<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps, then, one strong recommendation for future strategic leaders is to remember that being honest and forthright in dealing with the media is about character.

As Edgar F. Puryear, Jr. states in his book, *American Generalship*, "There is no better challenge to a military officer's character than in his dealings with the media."<sup>88</sup> Mr. Puryear argues history provides good examples of those generals or admirals who effectively dealt with the media through honesty and forthrightness. His point is that honestly dealing with the press demonstrates responsible and moral leadership attributes for strategic leaders; furthermore, he implies that the good media relations is the key to building strong public support for military programs and policies.

Similarly, General Montgomery Meigs, Commander, U.S. Army Europe, fully endorses strategic and operational leaders in engaging the media. General Meigs emphasizes the press interprets the role and function of the military to the public. As he states, "[Strategic leaders] must be able to convey to skeptical members of the Fourth Estate that they know their business and are speaking with honesty and competence."<sup>89</sup>

The reason General Meigs recommends this is because the technological sophistication of military operations and strategy requires a more personal approach by leaders to explain how the military functions to both our elected leaders and the American people; otherwise, political and public confidence in the military could falter.

Other key recommendations for strategic leaders to consider::

- The Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Maryland should design and implement a short-course for strategic leaders in media relations. This option could be made part of the new general officer orientation program.
- Strategic leaders should establish professional relationships with selected members of the media. They should meet on a regular basis to discuss current affairs or military transformation initiatives. Such relationships will go far in building bridges between the two diverse cultures the military and the media.
- The Department of Defense should reestablish a public affairs office in Chicago. This office was closed as part of the military draw down in the late 80s and early 90s. A public affairs office in Chicago can be an invaluable conduit for strategic leaders in reaching major media markets in the mid-West region. The military still maintains public affairs offices in New York City and Los Angeles.

- Strategic leaders should mentor appropriate officers on the importance of good media relations. This will take leadership from the top to change the culture in assuming a more proactive stance in public affairs. There is no doubt that future strategic leaders will have to be expert communicators as rapid technological changes continue to underscore the blossoming information age.
- Do not fear technology, but rather embrace it to better inform the American public about the vital role the military plays in supporting US national security objectives.

## **CONCLUSION**

Present and future strategic leaders must take the initiative to improve military and media relations. History has clearly demonstrated, particularly since World War II, the often-tenuous relationship has continued to sour through each decade. But in the information age, technology has changed the way the media covers the military. Instant communications and globalization of the media allows the press almost unrestricted access to military operations around the globe. Additionally, the media has become a powerful tool to sway both domestic and international opinion about strategic policy and military affairs. Fortunately, the military has enjoyed popular domestic public support in the last three decades, despite the poor relationship with the press. However, the military's ability to efficiently and effectively transform itself will require strategic leaders to master media relations techniques. The American public has a right to know what their military is doing and the American press has a constitutional right to report on military and government affairs. Soldiers and journalists alike tend to agree the two cultures will never be alike; however, the two professions can work together to build mutual respect and trust for one another. Truly, this is an imperative for successful transformation; therefore, Strategic leaders: It's time to meet the press.

WORD COUNT: 8,450

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<sup>4</sup> Roderick R. Magee II ed. Strategic Leadership Primer (Carlisle Barracks, Pa, US Army War College, 1998), v.

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