

AIR WAR COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

MILITARY AND THE MEDIA:  
A COMPARISON BETWEEN  
KOSOVO AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM

by

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## ***Abstract***

*Public opinion wins war.*

—Gen Dwight D. Eisenhower

In the spirit of the old adage, “the pen is mightier than the sword,” the portion of information operations that focuses on public affairs operations is explored and assessed as to its effectiveness in helping to win wars. This paper explores the following questions: How effectively has the military conducted public affairs operations when dealing with the media? Has the military improved its dealings with the media in recent conflicts? Given the importance of information and public opinion in helping to win wars, how can the military improve its dealings with the media? Using Joint Publication 1’s nine principles of war as an analytic framework, an assessment is made as to how effectively the military dealt with the media in Operation Allied Force (OAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). This paper posits that by increasing emphasis on media training, elevating the importance of the public affairs career field and adopting a proactive approach, the military can improve its use of the media to effectively execute the information campaign, which is critical to ensure overall success of the military operation.

## ***Biography***

The author, Lieutenant Colonel Theresa Giorlando, USAF, is currently a student at Air War College (AWC), Maxwell AFB AL. Her education history includes earning a Bachelors of Science Degree in Computer Science at Wright State University and a Masters Degree in Computer Science Management at Creighton University. She completed Air Command and Staff College in residence as a distinguished graduate in 1998. Lt Col Giorlando started her Air Force career at Offutt AFB as a software specialist at HQ, AF Global Weather Central and HQ, Strategic Air Command. She later transitioned to communications and served in both the Pacific and European theaters. Her most recent assignments include 31<sup>st</sup> Communications Squadron Commander at Aviano AB during Operation Allied Force followed by a tour on the Joint Staff in the J6 directorate prior to attending AWC. Lt Col Giorlando has a projected assignment to Headquarters, Air Staff, Installation Logistics Communications Directorate. E-mail: [Theresa.giorlando@pentagon.af.mil](mailto:Theresa.giorlando@pentagon.af.mil). Phone: (703) 588-1451, DSN 425-1451.

## Introduction

Military success is usually measured in terms of combat operations effectiveness, such as percentage of enemy force destroyed or disabled. However, other non-kinetic aspects of combat are just as important for winning wars. Information operations' influence on public opinion is one such non-kinetic aspect supporting combat success. In the spirit of the old adage, "the pen is mightier than the sword," the portion of information operations that focuses on public affairs operations is explored and assessed as to its effectiveness in helping to win wars. According to Joint Doctrine, "Employment of information operations (IO) is essential to achieving the objectives of the joint force commander (JFC)."<sup>1</sup> "Information operations involve actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems."<sup>2</sup> Even though the public affairs office is part of information operations in that they "expedite the flow of accurate and timely information to internal and external audiences," they "will not be used as a military deception capability or to provide disinformation to either internal or external audiences."<sup>3</sup> This paper explores the following questions: How effectively has the military conducted public affairs operations when dealing with the media? Has the military improved its dealings with the media in recent conflicts? Given the importance of information and public opinion in helping to win wars, how can the military improve its dealings with the media? This paper posits that by increasing emphasis on media training, elevating the importance of the public affairs career field and adopting a

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Pub 3-13, Joint Doctrine for Information Operations, 9 October 1998, vii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

proactive approach, the military can improve its use of the media to effectively execute the information campaign.

Improving dealings with the media is a challenge, given the cultural differences between the military and the media. As James Kitfield noted, there is a “cultural gap” and “mistrust” between the media and the military attributable to their unique cultures. Although each is actively involved in protecting the fundamental freedoms of our country, the military tends to be conservative and respectful of authority while the media tends to be liberal and questions authority.<sup>4</sup> However, due to the significant influence of public opinion in determining the US involvement in a conflict, and the high degree of influence the media has on public opinion, the military and the media must work together. Effective and mutually beneficial communications are imperative to overcome the disparate natures of the military and the media. Even when common values are shared, effective communication is difficult. The military needs to continually strive towards improving the effective use of the media. Public opinion does indeed win wars.

Using Joint Publication 1’s nine principles of war<sup>5</sup> as an analytic framework, an assessment is made as to how effectively the military dealt with the media in Operation Allied Force (OAF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Within the context of this analysis, public affairs operations are limited to the military’s interaction with the media. “Media” refers primarily to US-owned television and newspaper press organizations. However, international news services are addressed on an individual basis.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., II-6.

<sup>4</sup> Kitfield, James, “Lesson from Kosovo,” *Media Studies Journal* 15, no. 1(Summer 2001): 36.

## Objective

“The purpose of the objective is to direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive and attainable objective.”<sup>6</sup> This first principle of war is the most difficult to analyze in relation to the media. For public affairs operations, achieving the objective equates to clearly stating the intent of the military operation and cultivating public support toward achieving those ends. In Kosovo’s OAF, the objective was clearly defined and articulated by key military leadership. For the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the objective is not as clear because the leadership is not as certain about the specific conflict parameters.

During OAF, the US and NATO leadership used media press conferences to clearly state their objectives. Within minutes of the first night of air strikes, President Clinton announced the NATO and national objectives of the air strikes: “to demonstrate the seriousness of NATO’s opposition to aggression, [to deter Slobadan Milosevic from] continuing and escalating his attacks on helpless civilians, [and] to damage Serbia’s capacity to wage war against Kosovo by seriously diminishing its military capabilities.”<sup>7</sup> The morning after the first air strikes, both NATO Secretary Solana and Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Clark, addressed the media at a press conference specifically to clarify the military objectives. General Clark stated, “The military mission is to attack Yugoslav military and security forces and associated facilities with sufficient effect to degrade its capability to continue repression of the

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<sup>5</sup> In Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, 14 November 2000, B-1, principles of war are: objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise and simplicity.

<sup>6</sup> Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States*, 14 November 2000, B-1.



civilian population and to deter further military actions against its own people. We are going to systematically attack, disrupt, degrade, devastate, and ultimately destroy those forces and their facilities and support, unless President Milosevic complies with the demands of the international community.”<sup>8</sup> The senior political and military leaders’ public announcements were very effective in clearly communicating the objectives and their determination to achieve those objectives.

For the War on Terrorism, President George Bush was the most dominant force in using the media to specify the overall objective of the United States’ response to the 11 September terrorist attacks. President Bush’s speech that night focused on reassuring the American people and deterring the terrorists. “None of us will forget this day. Yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in the world.”<sup>9</sup> He stressed that the US would “go after terrorists and those that harbor them.”<sup>10</sup> At the joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001, President Bush proclaimed “Our grief has turned to anger and anger to resolution... we will direct every resource at our command...every weapon of war...to the defeat of the global terror network.”<sup>11</sup>

Although an actual objective was not clear, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Henry Shelton, addressed the press on 11 September 2001 to express their outrage and resolve. Secretary Rumsfeld emphasized, “The Pentagon is functioning,” and characterized the attack as a, “vicious, well coordinated,

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<sup>7</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO’s Air War for Kosovo A Strategic and Operational Assessment* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2001), 19.

<sup>8</sup> General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2001), 203.

<sup>9</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002, 108.

massive attack against the United States of America.”<sup>12</sup> General Shelton referred to the attack as, “An outrageous act of barbaric terrorism carried out by fanatics.” Emphasizing military readiness, he stated, “Make no mistake about it, your armed forces are ready.”<sup>13</sup> The senior US leadership showed strong unity, but since the timing was still within the first hours after the attack, there was not a clear communication of the military objective. At first DOD skillfully used the media to show solidarity and reassure the public of US strength. But, later on, the White House redirected objectives, causing confusion among press and the public about the target – Osama Bin Laden and/or the Taliban – and the measure of success.

As the administration was wrestling with how to attack terrorism, confusion was growing within the media and the public. The administration’s message emphasized that the GWOT would be a protracted battle. The President, Secretary Rumsfeld and the new CJCS, General Richard Meyers, continually emphasized the anticipated long duration of the GWOT. General Meyers noted, “This is going to be a very, very long campaign. It may take till next spring. It may take till next summer. It may take longer than that in Afghanistan.”<sup>14</sup> The military’s inability to clearly state the objective is attributed to the administration’s uncertainty on how to prosecute this very different type of war.<sup>15</sup>

In the Kosovo conflict, the military did a much better job of communicating the objective. They could tie the conflict to one individual, Milosevic, who could be found and neutralized. In the GWOT, the President did an outstanding job conveying the message of the

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<sup>12</sup> Sgt 1<sup>st</sup> Class Kathleen Rhem, USA. “DOD Holds Press Briefing in Pentagon.” *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 11 September 2001. On line. Internet, 2 December 2002. Available from [http://www.defenselink.mil/new/Sep2001/n09112001\\_200109115.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/new/Sep2001/n09112001_200109115.html).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “US Bombs Taliban’s Forces on Front Lines Near Kabul; Powell Sees Rebel Advance.” *The New York Times*, 22 October 2001, sec. A, pg. 1, col. 6.

US determination to combat terrorism worldwide. However, terrorists are not traditional state actors, making it difficult to convey objectives for a specific target in a specific location. Finding, capturing or killing Osama Bin Laden proved to be too difficult, so the objective was changed to focus on broader targets: the Taliban and al Qaeda. Because the ethnic tribal culture in Afghanistan supported terrorists and the distributed cave terrain made it difficult to find those in hiding, a clear declaration of success was difficult. The administration did emphasize the achievement of taking the Afghanistan capital, Kabul, unseating the Taliban regime and establishing a new Afghanistan president as clearly achieved objectives. However, continuing military skirmishes and the inability to locate Bin Laden made it difficult for the public to accept the administration's declaration of success.

## **Offensive**

“The purpose of an offensive action is a) to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative; b) adopt the defensive only as a temporary expedient.”<sup>16</sup> To achieve the offensive in public affairs is to gain the true picture of combat operations and to be first in conveying that information to the public. The offensive is desirable in order to prevent being in a defensive posture of constantly having to explain false or incomplete information. The offensive was not achieved in either OAF or OEF due to limitations associated with combat operations.

General Clark observed that a disadvantage of not having a ground presence in Kosovo was that the enemy had more direct access and control of events on the ground. As a result, the Serbs were able to portray NATO strikes as targeting civilians and to wear away public

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<sup>15</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-1.

support.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Jamie Shea, NATO spokesman, noted, “He who controls the ground, controls the media war, even though he who controls the air, controls the military strategy for winning.”<sup>18</sup> Because Milosevic controlled the pictures of what was seen on the ground in Kosovo, he could emphasize NATO’s mistakes and hide the images of the atrocities, mass graves, and burning houses he was responsible for.<sup>19</sup> Of the 23,000 bombs dropped by NATO, 30 were misdirected. But, due to the enemy’s control of the ground picture and the public’s natural reaction of shock, “the 99.9% success story was ignored for the 0.1% failure.”<sup>20</sup> Given the accuracy of NATO weapons, the public unrealistically expected zero mistakes. General Clark’s comments about negative press eroding public opinion illustrate the importance of positively influencing public opinion through the media. He stated that after the accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, “the weight of public opinion was doing to us what the Serb air defense system had failed to do: limit our strikes.”<sup>21</sup>

In OEF, DOD’s approach in engaging with the media also lost the offensive. The priority of operational security for special operations forces outweighed the need for public disclosure and initially resulted in criticism from the media and accusations of the military of being too restrictive with information involving the war in Afghanistan. According to Neil Hickey, “Journalists have been denied access to American troops in the field of Afghanistan to a greater

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<sup>17</sup> General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2001), 444.

<sup>18</sup> Jamie Shea, “The Kosovo Crisis and the Media: Reflections of a NATO Spokesman,” address to the Summer Forum on Kosovo, London, 15 July 1999, cited in *Air War College Department of Leadership and Ethics Book I* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University, 2003), 285.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>21</sup> General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2001), 419.

degree than in any previous war involving US military forces.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Michael Gordon observed, “The media’s access to American military operations is far more limited than in any recent conflict.”<sup>23</sup> And Jim Rutenberg referred to the “severe information drought at the Pentagon.”<sup>24</sup> The media complained about not being allowed on the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, from which special operations commandos departed for the initial attacks on Afghanistan. Additionally, journalists were prohibited from going to Oman where Special Forces and Army Ranger forces were based.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, journalists objected to not having access to forces on Diego Garcia or to the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division operating out of Uzbekistan.<sup>26</sup> In some cases, the restriction of media members at these locations was driven by host nation sensitivities. In other cases, operational security was the concern. Either way, restricting media representatives lost the information offensive. However, given the higher priorities of operational security and adherence to coalition countries’ limitations, losing the offensive was a justified sacrifice.

To counter initial media criticisms, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Victoria Clarke, showed DOD was responsive to media concerns and provided opportunities for the media to be embedded with forces as soon as it was operationally feasible. However, the initial delay and restrictiveness still left a negative impression with the press. Clarke’s efforts were admirable, and the press gave her high marks. Her comments in *USA Today* were

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<sup>22</sup> Neil Hickey, “Access Denied: Pentagon’s War Reporting Rules are Toughest Ever,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 5 (Jan/Feb 2002): 26-31.

<sup>23</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “Military Is Putting Heavier Limits on Reporters’ Access,” *The New York Times*, 21 October 2001, sec. 1B, pg. 3, col. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Rutenberg, “A Nation Challenged: The News Media; Noting Shortcomings, Pentagon Says It Will Remove Some Obstacles to Covering War,” *The New York Times*, 10 December 2001, sec. B, pg. 6, col. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “Military Is Putting Heavier Limits on Reporters’ Access.” *The New York Times*, 21 October 2001, sec. 1B, pg. 3, col. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Neil Hickey, “Access Denied: Pentagon’s War Reporting Rules are Toughest Ever,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 5 (Jan/Feb 2002): 26-31.

particularly effective. “Thirty-nine reporters from 26 outlets covered the opening round of Operation Enduring Freedom aboard four US Navy vessels. Far from denying access or restricting coverage, the department has embedded nearly 500 reporters into units, including Special Forces.”<sup>27</sup>

Both military campaigns lost the advantage of the offensive by not having media representatives relay first-hand, objective stories from enemy territory at the start. Due to their unique natures, one air-based and the other ground-based special operations, both campaigns were at a disadvantage to gain the offensive with the media. The air campaign in OAF resulted in limited ground presence, which limited the military’s ability to gain the media offensive in Kosovo. For Afghanistan, the conflict’s special operations nature and resulting emphasis on security limited the military’s ability to get their message out first. However, DOD has taken advantage of the broader GWOT campaign and is working to overcome the initial lack of a media offensive in Afghanistan.

## **Mass**

“The purpose of mass is to concentrate the effects of combat power at the place and time to achieve decisive results.”<sup>28</sup> Applying mass to public affairs operations means providing as much information as possible to the media in order to emphasize the military message and discount the enemy’s disinformation efforts. In Kosovo’s OAF and the GWOT, the military achieved mass, but in slightly different ways.

The most effective media-applied principle of war during Kosovo’s OAF was mass.

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<sup>27</sup> Victoria Clarke, “Military Supports Media,” *USA Today*, 28 February 2002, 14a.

<sup>28</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-1.

Jamie Shea stated, “The one thing we did well in the Kosovo crisis was to occupy the media space.”<sup>29</sup> He was referring to the daily broadcast schedule of a Ministry of Defense brief in London in the morning, followed by the NATO daily press conferences, followed by the Pentagon, State Department and White House briefs.<sup>30</sup> P.J. Crowley, assisting with the NATO briefings in Brussels observed, “Between our three daily briefings, we were able to command 18 hours of the 24-hour news day. The media dwelt more on our information than they did on Belgrade’s.”<sup>31</sup> By monopolizing television time, the military effectively applied mass.

In the GWOT, DOD did a tremendous job of applying mass within the media framework. Within 24 hours of a paratroop mission to Khandahar, Afghanistan, the military was showing and distributing combat camera footage of the event.<sup>32</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld and General Meyers held daily briefings. Victoria Clarke held daily morning meetings with media bureau chiefs.<sup>33</sup> She enumerated the mass of media opportunities DOD provided:

Since September 11, 2001 the department has responded to more than 42,000 media inquiries, hosted more than 5,000 media visits to military facilities, given more than 1,500 interviews and conducted more than 225 press briefings.... Journalists have accompanied deployed troops more than 1,400 times.... Secretary Rumsfeld has participated in more than 100 press briefings.<sup>34</sup>

The DOD had learned the value of using mass in dealing with the media. Both conflicts show a tremendous volume of information being provided to the media by the military. In

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<sup>29</sup> Major Gary Pounder, “Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War Against Serbia,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Major Gary Pounder, “Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War Against Serbia,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000, 67.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Felicity Barringer, “Reporters Want More Access, But Are Careful to Ask Nicely,” *The New York Times*, 22 October 2001, sec. B, pg. 3, col. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Neil Hickey, “Access Denied: Pentagon’s War Reporting Rules are Toughest Ever,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 5 (Jan/Feb 2002): 26-31.

<sup>34</sup> Victoria Clarke, “Striking a Balance: Government’s Needs Versus Those of the Media,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 41, no. 3(Sep/Oct 2002): 72-74.

Kosovo, reporters complained about being overloaded with what the military wanted to show them. In OEF, the media complained about being fed information by the military vice being allowed to directly observe the operation. CNN's Jamie McIntyre stated, "While I have the greatest respect for General Meyers, I am still uncomfortable with the fact that the entire version [of paratroop mission into Khandahar] is based on what they told us and the selective video."<sup>35</sup> In this instance, if the media had been able to get to Khandahar, they could have observed first hand, but they were not able to arrange transportation in time. Though tension always exists in balancing military needs with media desires, the military has been highly successful in recognizing the use of the media and applying mass within public affairs in order to portray the military perspective.

### **Economy of Force**

"The purpose of economy of force is to allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts; [it] includes limited attacks, defense, delays, deception; to achieve mass elsewhere."<sup>36</sup> Economy of force is achieved with the media by efficiently focusing the effort of information distribution to them. In both conflicts, economy of force was initially applied successfully.

Economy of force had inconsistent results during Kosovo's OAF. Initially, the decision to restrict media briefings to NATO headquarters and the Pentagon worked in favor of economy of force. Wing commanders, component commanders, and joint task force commanders were

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<sup>35</sup> Felicity Barringer, "Reporters Want More Access, But Are Careful to Ask Nicely," *The New York Times*, 22 October 2001, sec. B, pg. 3, col. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-1.



not allowed to speak with the press.<sup>37</sup> Operational and tactical commanders were free to focus on the mission of executing the war. Unfortunately, the first time there was an air strike mistake, the tactical commander level was overwhelmed with answering what happened and why questions from politicians and the media. For example, when the JFC directed the 31<sup>st</sup> Air Expeditionary Wing Commander, Brigadier General Leaf, to brief at the NATO daily press conference the air strike mistake that involved hitting two civilian convoys near Djakovica, Leaf spent an inordinate amount of time on this issue, taking him away from his primary mission of executing the war.

During the GWOT, the military initially applied media economy of force by limiting their spokespersons. Most interviews and press conferences were held at the Pentagon. Secretary Rumsfeld and Ms Clarke were the primary spokespersons for GWOT. Although the Combatant Commander addressed the press occasionally, as Neil Hickey noted, “General Tommy Franks has been relatively invisible.”<sup>38</sup> Though security constraints surrounding special operations limited interaction with the press at the operational level, DOD compensated by applying maximum media engagement at the strategic level, with daily press conferences. This facilitated maximum combat focus at the operational and tactical level. However, as the conflict progressed and the media expressed concern over excessive restriction of military activity, DOD took a different approach. In order not to flood the field, but to provide media/military information closer to the field operations, DOD established public information offices in Bagram

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<sup>37</sup> Major Gary Pounder, “Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War Against Serbia,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000, 67.

<sup>38</sup> Neil Hickey, “Access Denied: Pentagon’s War Reporting Rules are Toughest Ever,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 5 (Jan/Feb 2002): 26-31.

and Mazar-I-Sharif.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, a Coalition Information Service Center was established in Islamabad, Pakistan. These information centers facilitated media and military interaction among Western press agencies and better representation of coalition efforts by the Arab media. According to General John Hawkins III, senior military official at the Islamabad Coalition Information Service, “more interaction between the Arab and Islamic press with coalition activities and individuals [is resulting in] reporting by [the] Muslim-oriented media... to become more factual and even more friendly.”<sup>40</sup>

For both conflicts, the military consistently applied economy of force by limiting who would be the official spokesperson to the press. This enabled military leaders at the tactical and operational level to focus on mission execution. The strategic-level leaders were the predominant interface with the media and provided a credible military authority to present the military’s message. When the media complained about limited access, the military improved their media interaction by establishing key media centers affording the media a central location to confer with military representatives closer to the combat regions. These centers were an excellent balance to address the needs of the media and the combatants.

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<sup>39</sup> Jim Rutenberg, “A Nation Challenged: The News Media; Noting Shortcomings, Pentagon Says It Will Remove Some Obstacles to Covering War,” *The New York Times*, 10 December 2001, sec. B, pg. 6, col. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Randy Pullen, “Media Official is ROA Life Member,” *The Officer* 78, no. 4 (May 2002): 13-14.

## Maneuver

“The purpose of maneuver is to place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power.... Movement of forces in relation to the enemy to secure or retain positional advantage.”<sup>41</sup> Maneuver is achieved in public affairs by diversifying the location and method of engaging the media. For OEF, maneuver was successfully achieved, while for OAF it was not.

Maneuver was ineffective in OAF. Because there were no allied ground forces in Kosovo, the US media did not have the opportunity to accompany fielded forces for a truer perspective of the conflict. Additionally, flexibility for the media was lost by not having a variety of combat units engaged in the conflict. Even though media representatives were allowed into Serbia, they were limited to only what Milosevic wanted them to see. As a result, battlefield information was distributed predominantly one way – through NATO and Pentagon press conferences. Although the press conferences effectively applied the principle of mass, they sacrificed the flexibility of maneuver to the Serb’s press message.

Due to the security restrictions placed on the operations in OEF, the US military initially did not effectively apply maneuver using the media. By initially limiting US media coverage of US military operations, DOD ceded maneuver to the opposition’s view of events. This view dominated press coverage with images from within Afghanistan. At first, due to Taliban control of the Afghanistan media, Al Jazeera was the only operational television network in Kabul. During this initial monopoly of television coverage in Afghanistan, the US was losing the information war. In the first few weeks, influenced by the Taliban government, media pictures

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<sup>41</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-1.

mostly of “Afghan civilians in bloody bandages,” and wounded Afghan children supposedly caused by American bombing dominated the images coming out of Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> To overcome negative coverage, and regain maneuver space, senior US officials gave interviews on the Al Jazeera network. National Security Advisor Rice, Secretary of State Powell and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld all appeared on Al Jazeera to emphasize that the war was not against Islam.<sup>43</sup>

In both campaigns, due to limited access to the engagement area, the military had difficulty applying maneuver effectively to gain the media advantage in the information war. Even though media coverage was massive and garnered positive response from the US public, the US will always be limited in its ability to influence the media coverage from within foreign territory. In an attempt to use media maneuver, the US dropped leaflets in both Kosovo and Afghanistan to relay the message of being “here to help.” Dropping food in Afghanistan helped to bring a positive message to Afghanistan’s people. Moreover, by allowing reporters on the first humanitarian drop flights, the military ensured its message got out and achieved limited media maneuver space.<sup>44</sup>

### **Unity of Command**

“The purpose of unity of command is to ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander for every objective.”<sup>45</sup> Unity of effort and hence command within public affairs means to maintain a single consistent message about from the military and communicate it to the

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<sup>42</sup> Susan Sachs, “US Appears to Be Losing Public Relations War So Far,” *The New York Times*, sec. 1B, pg. 8, co. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> William E. Lee, “Security Review and the First Amendment,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*: 25, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 743-763.

<sup>45</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-2.

press. Both OAF and OEF relayed to the media message inconsistencies that on the whole reduced unity of command.

For Kosovo, the initial decision of how information was going to be released to the media upheld the unity of command principle. According to General Clark, the Pentagon and other NATO nations “agreed that NATO would be responsible for the key press conferences and information releases.”<sup>46</sup> However, the single united-voice message that the military wanted to convey was inconsistently achieved due to variations in the information being relayed. An accidental allied air strike illustrates how unity of command was compromised. General Clark had initially blamed the attack on the Serbs, while Pentagon spokesman Ken Bacon stated only military vehicles had been hit.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, because OAF was a NATO operation, all 19 countries had to agree on everything; by default, a multitude of players were going to be involved. With different players at different levels speaking on the same specific event, unity of command was damaged.

With some minor exceptions, unity of command was achieved in OEF. By emphasizing the need for security, the US maintained a single constant message from a few authorized spokesmen. The President and Secretary Rumsfeld heralded the US message of destroying terrorism. General Meyers, Ms. Clarke and General Franks were the primary spokespersons for military actions. However, a few incidents in dealing with the media showed a break from the desired unity of command principle. The first concerned the press being kept from covering the rescue and recovery efforts of American troops injured in a fratricide incident in Khandahar.

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<sup>46</sup> General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2001), 186.

<sup>47</sup> Major Gary Pounder, “Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War Against Serbia,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000, 71.

The local Marine commander restricted the reporters to a warehouse and refused them the opportunity to interview doctors or wounded. Victoria Clarke quickly apologized and re-emphasized to field commanders, through the chain of command, that it was important to give the press access.<sup>48</sup> Although the Secretary of Defense was advocating “maximum coverage, minimum hassle,”<sup>49</sup> his orders were not always being followed in the field. The second media incident was the Army’s publicly accusing the Air Force of failing to provide close air support during Operation ANACONDA.<sup>50</sup> Military departments public squabbling obscures a single consistent message, undermines unity of effort and impedes the unity of command principle.

Comparing the two conflicts, unity of command was partially but not totally achieved due to the number of military members interacting with the media. Although there were some mistakes in military operations, like bombing the wrong target in Kosovo, the military improved its interaction with the media in addressing mistakes. In OEF, the military was more forthcoming in acknowledging mistakes, resulting in a minimum of negative stories in the press. Second, the consistent use of senior leaders as messengers works. As the principal players, they have tremendous credibility. Their continual availability and interest shows the importance of the media and helps achieve media unity of command.

## **Surprise and Security**

“The purpose of security is to never permit the enemy to acquire unexpected

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<sup>48</sup> David E. Rosenbaum, “Access Limits were an Error, Pentagon Says,” *The New York Times*, 6 December 2001, sec. B, pg. 2, col. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Jim Rutenberg, “A Nation Challenged: The News Media; Noting Shortcomings, Pentagon Says It Will Remove Some Obstacles to Covering War,” *The New York Times*, 10 December 2001, sec. B, pg. 6, col. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Adam J. Hebert, “After Leaving USAF Out of Anaconda Planning, Army General Blasts Air Support,” *Air Force Magazine*, November 2002, 14.

advantage.”<sup>51</sup> “The purpose of surprise is to strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which it is unprepared.... Contributing factors include speed in decision making, information sharing, OPSEC, deception.”<sup>52</sup> Security includes withholding critical information from the enemy that may impede friendly military operations. By extension, this usually means withholding information from the media. As a result, surprise actions against the enemy can be achieved. In both OAF and OEF, security was maintained. However, security was a much more significant factor for OEF and therefore had more of an impact on military-media relations.

Surprise is closely related to security as it applies to engaging the media. In order to gain the advantage of surprise, information must be withheld from the enemy. Because the media can also be a conduit of unwanted information flow to the enemy, certain operational and security information must be withheld from the media. Another means to achieve surprise is deception. However, lying to the media is not an option. According to DOD public affairs directives and Air Force doctrine, the military needs to tell the truth when dealing with the media. The military is directed to provide “accurate and timely information”<sup>53</sup> in dealing with the public, the media, and Congress. The Air Force has emphasized, “tell the truth” by making it the first “fundamental of Information in Public Affairs Operations.”<sup>54</sup>

Security of information was successfully maintained in dealing with the media in the war in Kosovo. Several measures were taken to ensure operational security took priority over information dissemination. According to Ms. Clarke’s office, “Information shall be withheld

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<sup>51</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 5122.5, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs*, 27 September 2000, E-2 and Joint Pub 3-61, *Doctrine for Public Affairs in Joint Operations*, 14 May 1997, v.

<sup>54</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 2-54, *Public Affairs Operations*, 25 October 1999, 17.

when disclosure would adversely affect national security.”<sup>55</sup> For Kosovo, information on “attacks launched, targets chosen, and damage inflicted” was restricted.<sup>56</sup> “Pilot’s names are still widely unknown to the press.”<sup>57</sup> These measures were taken to ensure operational security. The downside to limiting information is media frustration and the potential damage to public support. The media’s frustrations can manifest itself into negative coverage of military operations. Also, the more “control the information at all cost”<sup>58</sup> prevailed, the more the media was unwilling to give the military the benefit of the doubt. Even though the military considered the May 22, 1999 bombing which literally shut down the Yugoslavia electric grid the turning point in the war, when the Pentagon briefed its results the press only put one line in the *New York Times*. The press, leery of obsessive information control by the military, treated the news of bombings as more military hype, and gave the story very little coverage, even though the Serbs were still without lights.<sup>59</sup>

Although implemented with mixed success, security of information was the most emphasized principle of war during OEF. The emphasis on security started at the top. President Bush threatened to withhold intelligence information from Congress after reading a Washington Post article that reported what intelligence officials had told a congressional committee during a classified briefing.<sup>60</sup> Secretary Rumsfeld also warned Pentagon personnel “against discussing military operations with the media, saying those who do so would be breaking federal criminal

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<sup>55</sup> Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 5122.5, *Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs*, 27 September 2000, E-2.

<sup>56</sup> Kitfield, James, “Lesson From Kosovo,” *Media Studies Journal* 15, no. 1(Summer 2001): 34.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>59</sup> Kitfield, James, “Lesson From Kosovo,” *Media Studies Journal* 15, no. 1(Summer 2001): 39.

<sup>60</sup> “Wartime Secrecy,” *The New York Times*, 11 October 2001, sec A, pg. 24, col. 1.



law and should be in jail.”<sup>61</sup> Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz released a memo directing DOD members to “exercise great caution in discussing information related to DOD work, regardless of their duties.”<sup>62</sup> Victoria Clarke commented that Secretary Rumsfeld had put a stop to the extraordinary amount of information leaking that occurred prior to his arrival.<sup>63</sup> A primary reason for secrecy was to maintain the security of the Special Forces. “Their visibility would not only have done harm to their operational intent, it probably would have put their lives at risk.”<sup>64</sup> However, in later stages of the conflict, when Marine ground troops were introduced into the area, more media coverage was supported, to include embedding media members with troops. One of the most successful accomplishments of the military-media relations during OEF was the first-ever embedding of media with special operations forces.<sup>65</sup>

Operational security was achieved in both the war in Kosovo and the war in Afghanistan. In order to surprise the enemy, security must be enforced to control the dissemination of information the enemy can use against friendly forces. The more that friendly forces can surprise the enemy, the greater the chance of success. However, to gain that surprise, some information must be controlled or withheld. Naturally, withholding information causes tension with the media. As Ms. Clarke stated, “We should accept the fact that some healthy tension is a good thing. Providing for the common defense is in the Preamble to the Constitution, and the

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<sup>61</sup> Maud S. Beelman, “The Dangers of Disinformation in the War on Terrorism,” *Nieman Reports* 55, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 16-18.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Neil Hickey, “Access Denied: Pentagon’s War Reporting Rules are Toughest Ever,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 5 (Jan/Feb 2002): 26-31.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Martin B. Compton, Lt Col, USAF, CENTCOM, Chief of Media Relations, e-mail interview, 17 Jan 03.

rights of the press are in the First Amendment. Those two things are so important that it is probably valuable that there is this healthy tension.”<sup>66</sup>

## **Simplicity**

“The purpose of simplicity is to prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise order to ensure thorough understanding.”<sup>67</sup> For media relations, simplicity means keeping the message being relayed to the media as clear and understandable as possible. The military was more successful in achieving simplicity in OAF than OEF.

Simplicity in dealing with the media was implemented in OAF in the same way unity of command was—by restricting who the spokespersons would be. Wing commanders and component commanders were not allowed to speak with the press.<sup>68</sup> By limiting the spokesmen to NATO and Pentagon briefers, the military helped ensure a consistent message. The one time they deviated they presented three different versions of the truth for the same story and weakened their effectiveness. It is hard to predict what elements of information the media will take away from a briefing and how it may be portrayed. General Clark recounts a misunderstanding after a press conference during which he mentioned difficulty in getting specific information by not having ground troops. The comment was portrayed in the press as SACEUR undermining and criticizing US national policy makers, resulting in the Chairman telling General Clark “to get your f\_\_\_\_ face off the TV.”<sup>69</sup> General Clark’s philosophical ruminations about the event sum up the hazards and uncertainty in dealing with the media.

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<sup>66</sup> Neil Hickey, “Access Denied: Pentagon’s War Reporting Rules are Toughest Ever,” *Columbia Journalism Review* 40, no. 5 (Jan/Feb 2002): 26-31.

<sup>67</sup> Joint Pub 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, 14 November 2000, B-2.

“Dealing with the media can be like drinking from a poisoned chalice. However heady the wine, at some point you may get a fatal dose.”<sup>70</sup> The initial order that no one in the military chain talk to the press except General Clark was intended to convey a consistent message. However, limiting media direct access to troops tends to result in even more critical coverage from the media, especially when they believe information is being withheld.

The GWOT is a complex worldwide operation involving many unknown players, making clarity and simplicity difficult when communicating with the media. Even in the narrowly focused war in Afghanistan, simplicity was hard to achieve. The US leadership tried to communicate a decisive victory when the Taliban government, supporting the terrorist group al Qaeda, was targeted and eventually defeated and a new leader of the country, allied with the US, came into power. However, throughout Afghanistan there are still many conflicts ongoing among the local tribes. Additionally, the degree of al Qaeda’s decimation is unknown. The cave hunts to kill and capture al Qaeda members have been difficult. Even though al Qaeda may not be present in Afghanistan, they are credited for other terrorist attacks in Asia and Africa. Also, Bin Laden has never been found. Nonetheless, the US declared success in toppling the Taliban. All these competing factors merged to confuse the clear and simple message the US leadership tried to communicate to the media.

In comparing the two conflicts, an obvious conclusion is reached—war is never simple. The more limited the region involved in a conflict and the more limited the conflict’s duration, the simpler the conflict. On the other hand, a multiple-region war with an indefinite duration

#### Notes

<sup>68</sup> Major Gary Pounder, “Opportunity Lost: Public Affairs, Information Operations, and the Air War Against Serbia,” *Aerospace Power Journal*, Summer 2000, 67.

<sup>69</sup> General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2001), 273.

<sup>70</sup> General Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2001), 273.

makes things very complicated. The less simple, the more critical the need to ensure the military message to the media is clear. Given the GWOT's expected long duration, media simplicity will be even more important for public clarity to retain public support.

To overcome message complexity and achieve message simplicity the military focused on limiting the spokespersons in OAF and OEF. Yet in a large organization like the military, many people are involved and many views may be portrayed. Simplicity may never be a perfectly achievable goal. But the more it is strived for, the better chance of having one's message heard and understood. In the GWOT, President Bush's clear message of, "We are at war with terrorism and with those that harbor terrorists,"<sup>71</sup> is a clearly understood and powerfully simple message. In today's world of 24-hour news coverage and the media's focus on getting the news first, a simple message is critical. With television's 10-second sound bites, a simple clear message is what will be heard and understood.

## **Recommendations and Conclusions**

Although the military was not completely successful in dealing with the media during OAF and OEF, such noteworthy improvements as quickly acknowledging mistakes to the media, expanding media access and limiting spokespersons have been noted. However, more emphasis on training military and media personnel about each other is still needed, with the media "boot camps" that occurred prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom being a promising start.<sup>72</sup>

Media offensive was not achieved in either campaign, due to a lack of extensive ground

### Notes

<sup>71</sup> Bob Woodward, *Bush At War*, New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2002, 31.

<sup>72</sup> Kathleen T. Rhem, "Media Cover Media Learning to Cover War," *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 22 November 2002. On line. Internet, 2 December 2002. Available from [http://www.defenselink.mil/new/Nov2002/11222002\\_20021124.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/new/Nov2002/11222002_20021124.html)

forces and an emphasis on security and surprise, which limited information to the press. The military was very successful in achieving mass, economy of force, surprise and security with the media in both campaigns. Mass was achieved with continuous briefings and through embedding media. Economy of force was similarly implemented in both campaigns by limiting the official spokespersons to strategic-level leaders. As for security, even though the emphasis on security frustrated the media, once operational security was ensured, the DOD allowed extensive media coverage.

The remaining principles of objective, maneuver, unity of command and simplicity showed mixed results. Achieving the information objective was successful in OAF, but unsuccessful in OEF, primarily due to the confusion on how to execute a GWOT. Maneuver was ineffective in OAF, due to the limited ground force presence, but effective in OEF. Simplicity was achieved in OAF because the objectives were clear and the campaign was direct and short. In OEF, objectives were not at first clear, undermining simplicity. Unity of command was difficult to maintain in both operations. However OEF showed improvements by apologizing for mistakes early, rather than letting the mistake become the dominant message.

Training is the primary way that the military can learn from these conflicts and improve its relationship with the media. The new Joint Military Contingency Training for Media Course, being run by the Navy and Marines, is one example that all the services should incorporate. According the director of Marine Corps Public Affairs, the benefits of the training are, “To have journalists who are knowledgeable enough to write smartly about the military, get the ranks right, understand the tactics and the equipment and also have enough self-protection and field skills so that they won’t endanger themselves or endanger the mission or endanger the

Marines.”<sup>73</sup>

Professional military education (PME) is another area in which media training needs to be included. Currently Air Force officers are provided an opportunity to take an elective on military and the media at the intermediate service school (ISS) and senior service school (SSS) level. However, because the training opportunity is an elective, very few receive the training. In addition, the media-training curriculum is limited. The ISS course focuses on propaganda. The SSS focuses on media interview techniques. Additionally, there is no interview training at Squadron Officers School. This is just one service’s example of limited media training. All services need to robust their media training throughout PME. According to Central Command’s Chief of Media Relations, a key area the military needs to improve upon in dealing with the media is “Working with commanders and troops that media access is a good thing.”<sup>74</sup> In today’s world of immediate communication and widespread media coverage, media training is just as important as qualifying on a weapon system.

In addition to training, public affairs presence at the operational level of war should be increased by placing Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) at the operational level of war. One previous Joint Forces Air Combat Commander has recommended that PAOs be official billeted requirements in the Air Operations Centers (AOC). The AOCs are where the operational level of war happens for joint and coalition air forces. By having PAOs trained and involved at the operational level of war, they can be more proactive in up channeling the positive military

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<sup>73</sup> Kathleen T. Rhem, “Media Cover Media Learning to Cover War,” *American Forces Information Service News Articles*, 22 November 2002. On line. Internet, 2 December 2002. Available from [http://www.defenselink.mil/new/Nov2002/11222002\\_20021124.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/new/Nov2002/11222002_20021124.html)

<sup>74</sup> Martin B. Compton, Lt Col, USAF, CENTCOM, Chief of Media Relations, e-mail interview, 17 Jan 03.

message. And when necessary, the PAOs could address inevitable operational-level mistakes quickly.

When engaged in combat, the military tends to focus on kinetic results and effects, sometimes to the detriment of effective military-media relationship. The military needs to look at the effect the media has on waging war. The wrong message in the media can be as devastating as an enemy's bomb. Public opinion does win wars.

### **OIF Postscript**

Since the completion of this paper, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) commenced. OIF appears to be the most successful military/media operation, yet. Although a quick commentary is offered below, further study is needed. Most, if not all, principles of war were implemented successfully. The objective was clear and simplicity achieved in the name of the operation – Iraqi Freedom. Even though there was some confusion over the hunt for WMD, the quick pace of marching on Baghdad and unseating Saddam Hussein focused on the simple and clear objective of freeing Iraq. The offensive was achieved because the US had reporters in Baghdad and embedded with military units. They were able to present the coalition view in a timely manner combating Iraqi disinformation. The most striking example was when the Iraqi Information Minister kept stating there was no coalition marching on Baghdad, and the US showed troops a few miles from the city. Mass was very successful through massive embedding of reporters with forces combined with daily briefings. Economy of force was not the strongest principle applied, due to application of overwhelming mass, but success was not hampered. Maneuver was expertly achieved with embedded media reports during the march on Baghdad. Footage of firefights was very compelling. Unity of command was achieved through a consistent message relayed at all levels of command, from field commanders to Pentagon

briefers. The embedded media hampered surprise, but the effect of a massive swift force marching on the Baghdad was the higher priority achieved with media. Security was not sacrificed. Reporters' lives were tied to operational security so they were trustworthy in maintaining security.



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