

Remarks to the National Editorial Writer's Convention
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When Miriam approached us and asked if I would be interested in addressing you here today I got really excited. I am inexperienced when it comes to this media stuff, but as you know from that flattering introduction, I got a taste of it while serving as the spokesman for MNF – I, and now I am beginning to understand the tremendous role the media plays in our democratic society.

There is one guy in this world who really understands the true role and importance of the media on the modern battlefield. When people ask me, "Who do you study and listen to in order to figure out this media stuff?" Clausewitz???... No! Schwartzkopf??? No, not him either... I tell them Ayman al-Zawahiri...

As you all know, in 2005 Zawahiri in a letter to Zarqawi wrote, "More than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media." He gets it! Unfortunately, many of us in the military still don't.

In my last assignment, I learned a lot about the Military/ Media Relationship. Some would say I was scarred by the "experience." Therefore, I speak from a somewhat experienced perspective. I also learned that the most challenging duties in Iraq at times are in the press room in Baghdad.

Because of that assignment, I am... a vastly different General today than I was before I held that job. The experience taught me that we as a military **MUST** be more interactive with the media... In fact, we must seek them out.

We should have always done this, but in today's current operating environment, it is even more essential. The enemy we face knows they cannot defeat us on the battlefield. The enemy is also smart. They know their history... and ours. Zawahiri invoked the memory of Vietnam and our awkward extrication from that conflict stating, "The aftermath of the collapse of American power in Vietnam — and how they ran and left their agents — is noteworthy..." They feel, and rightfully so, that the center of gravity for this war is the will of the American people.

We have all heard the quote "the pen is mightier than the sword." Also, Napoleon once said "Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets." There is no era in history when these statements are more accurate than right now. Therefore, it is essential that we in the military foster a relationship of... understanding and... cooperation with the media. It has taken us a long time to recognize this and, I will admit, that many in the military still

don't get it. I think the major reason it is so hard to "bridge the gap" between the military and the media is the differences in our cultures. This is ironic, because I think we have much more in common than it might appear.

If we look at the key elements of organizational culture, and then apply those elements to both the military and the media we can better understand each other. A strong military/ media relationship is a win/ win for everyone concerned... everyone except our adversaries, like Al Qaeda. It benefits the military by allowing us to share our story and to inform our Nation and the world of our actions... even when the information may not portray us in a positive light. It benefits the media by providing them with, accurate and comprehensive information in a complete context. Finally, and most importantly, it benefits the American people by giving them a true picture and feeling of what is actually happening in the world, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan, so they are an informed public.

The first step to greater cooperation is to understand the concept of organizational culture. I won't elaborate too much on this because... frankly, it's a little confusing to me. I am a simple Soldier. I don't claim to be an expert on this stuff, but the concepts are intuitive and useful. If you know anything about Edgar Schein's work on Organizational Culture Theory, this will be a review, and I apologize, but I want us all to approach this from the same foundational principles. Organizational Culture as defined by Edgar Schein has three key elements; ... (1) a set of assumptions (2) values derived from those assumptions and (3) artifacts which are the visible markers and activities that give substance to the culture's values. An important thing to note is that artifacts are the easiest to change, assumptions are the hardest. Additionally, a culture's assumptions are the hardest to identify because they may not be readily apparent to the members. These assumptions may have been developed a long time ago and perpetuated through the assimilation process. Therefore, assumptions are the most important aspect of culture to examine because in order to effect culture change, we have to identify and change the assumptions.

Let's search each organization for these underlying sometimes transparent assumptions...

I will start with the military because after thirty one years of service, it is what I know best.

We in the military, over the decades, have made some poor assumptions about our relationship with the media; assumptions that we MUST reevaluate. We recognize the need to change... we see where we need to change... BUT our challenge lies in implementing those changes... To change our culture, we MUST change our assumptions.

First, we in the military, have a tendency to focus on battlefield effects... the outcome of our combat operations. For the most part, we have made the

assumption that (1) the media is not much more than an annoyance on the battlefield.

Secondly, we have (2) fostered a climate in our culture of avoidance of the media at all costs. Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt articulated this point well in the 2005 military/ media relationship conference sponsored by the McCormick/Tribune Foundation when he said "... The Army I grew up in, when hearing of a reporter anywhere within a square mile of your position usually caused you to find a reason to be somewhere else." Because, what good could possibly come from a media interview? If it goes bad, careers are tarnished. If you think about it... this is really quite ironic. Here we have a bunch of guys running around the battlefield with weapons, loaded for bear, fearless in the face of the enemy and they cower in the corner at the first sign of a reporter with pen and pad, or digital recorder in hand.

These two assumptions that; (1) the media are annoying on the battlefield and (2) the media should be avoided, compounded together lead to a large disparaging perspective on access. In a Gallup poll conducted for the McCormick Conference, 72 percent of military personnel felt the media had enough access to military officials while 83 percent of the media respondents disagreed... Imagine that... two different perspectives!?! This difference in perspectives is very harmful to our mutual relationship and here is why...

First, regardless of whether we engage the media or not, they are going to report the story. We are doing ourselves, our organization and the American people a grave disservice if we don't share our story. The other frustrating thing is that when we fail to engage the media, and a story comes out that seems negative, we complain about the bias in the media. How can we expect the media to report comprehensive and complete information, if we don't engage them? One reporter at the McCormick Conference put it well when she said... "I have to be on the air every hour. If I don't have the information to tell people what's going on, I'm going to go to another place where they will tell me what's going on."

These two assumptions; annoyance and avoidance also create a perception that we might be hiding something. Our relationship will never be one of open and honest communication if we do not build trust and rapport.

Another deeply ingrained assumption is (3) that we should only report the facts and the implications of those facts on our forces. We do not typically infer in our reporting what the implications of those facts are in a larger context. We have been taught that it is someone else's responsibility higher in the chain to interpret those facts in a bigger context. Unfortunately, we carry that over to our interviews with the media. The problem with this is the audience expects and needs someone to "paint the picture"... if you will... to address the "so what?" What does it mean that we captured 10 insurgents and 20 weapons caches in an area? We are not typically comfortable putting it into context or addressing the "so what" implications of our actions on the local community and our enemy. However, if we don't then the media will not have all the essential components to make a comprehensive report. Again, we see the news reports and start wringing our hands and lamenting when we really should be blaming ourselves.

Finally, we tend to make the assumption that (4) during wartime, for security reasons, we need to place limits on media access. Another poll question from the conference found that military official's views on access decline from peacetime to wartime from a high of 78 percent believing the media should have maximum access during peacetime to a low of 12 percent during planning and only 33 percent during conflict. So basically, what we are saying is that when our story needs to be told the most and when it is most beneficial for the media to tell it because of newsworthiness we have a tendency to want to limit their access.

It is not enough for us to simply identify the problems; we must begin to do something about them. That is why I am so excited to be commanding the Combined Arms Center where I have oversight and responsibility for the education, development of doctrine and collective training for our Army. I really feel that this position affords me an opportunity to affect changes in regard to the challenges I have discussed here.

So... what am I doing about it? How can I help to change these four assumptions?

When I was spokesman for MNF-I, I began to realize that it was taking too long to declassify information in a timely manner to get it out to the media. In order to alleviate this problem, I had two Military Intelligence Officers assigned to my staff to quickly sift through and declassify material for me so that we could get pertinent information out to the media in a timely manner. I learned that timeliness is important to maintaining the newsworthiness of a story. As far as I know, that procedure remains in effect in Iraq today.

At the Combined Arms Center I have begun to formulate concepts and implement policies.

First, I am disseminating ideas that we have codified into what I call the four "Be's" of dealing with the media from my experiences in Iraq. I tell all the students and my subordinates, every chance I get, that you have to...

- **BE** Honest
- **BE** Open
- **Be Relevant – tell the "so what?"**
- **BE** Ready

Second, we have begun to implement a media training plan. This plan includes classroom instruction and practical engagement in our officer basic and advanced courses.

We in the military believe deeply in the concept of leadership by example. To that end, I am actively engaging the media several times a week. I have also directed my staff and subordinate commanders, Chiefs of SEVENTEEN centers and schools across the country to do the same.

At Fort Leavenworth, I have also directed all of the approximately 1200 Majors attending the Command and General Staff College to engage in REAL media interviews from print to video to blogging.

We still have a lot of work to do and it will be a long process... culture change always is, but I believe that we are taking the first steps to building a bridge across that cultural gap.

I would like to say that all of the issues are on the military side and once we fix them, life will be great. However, I think there are some things that could be done by the media as well.

The media holds a strong aversion to any interaction that may reduce objectivity. Increasingly, members of the media are including the practice of embedded media in this category... in a recent Gallup Poll done for the McCormick Conference, 40 percent of media respondents believed that embedding caused reporters to lose objectivity. I feel this thinking is essentially flawed. Overwhelmingly, the American public, surprisingly even more than the military, want to know how their loved ones are performing in Iraq and other dangerous places. How can the media effectively communicate that story if they aren't side by side feeling what the Soldiers feel and seeing what they see and, most importantly of all, asking them to tell their stories in their own words? How can the media tell the whole story?

Another issue, which is an unfortunate byproduct of the dangerous security situation in Iraq, is the increasingly common practice of reporting from the capital and the use of stringers. We understand the reasoning behind these practices. News agencies are spending huge amounts of money to cover the war and the security situation is dangerous. We understand this causes the media to pull their reporters back to where the resources are... to where they can get their reports out quickly and at a reduced cost. In some cases this has caused reporters to lose part of their perspective.

Additionally, the use of stringers, is a challenge for all of us. The foreign stringers may have personal biases and may not subscribe to the strict journalistic code of ethics that our media adhere to. Also, we, as military folks MUST scrutinize stringers more than we do you. This makes it even more imperative that we seek the media out and provide complete and comprehensive information.

The final issue from our perspective is that some media and editors have an enduring assumption that it must "bleed to lead." I understand that the issue may be one of newsworthiness and we in the military MUST do a better job of making the pertinent news stories newsworthy enough to be published.

To do this we must ensure that the media get the soldier's and military leader's perspectives and the ordinary Iraqi citizen. We need to provide them with the whole story.

In closing, I have outlined today some differences I see in our cultures... differences that create misunderstandings and reduce cooperation between the media and the military. However, we have a lot in common. We both exist to serve the people of this great Nation. We both have a strong moral and ethical code and many shared values. We both come from organizations that have played a pivotal role in shaping history and, most importantly, we both are critical components in this war and essential to the survival of our great Nation.

Therefore, it is imperative that we both constantly work to strengthen our relationship. We need... to bridge the cultural gap together...

With that, I am open to your ideas and suggestions. I welcome and look forward to any input you might provide as to how I can help OUR Army communicate better. Thank you, it has truly been an honor to be here.