

**U.S. Department of Defense**

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Council on Foreign Relations*As Prepared For Delivery By Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Harold Pratt House, New York, Friday, February 17, 2006*

Good afternoon. I am pleased to be back.

Mr. Chenault, I thank you, and my thanks to the members of the Council for playing a valuable role, over many years, in encouraging a full exchange of ideas about our country and the world.

We meet today in the sixth year in which our nation has been engaged in what promises to be a long struggle against an enemy that in many ways is unlike any our country has ever faced. And in this war, some of the most critical battles may not be in the mountains of Afghanistan or the streets of Iraq, but in newsrooms -- in places like New York, London, Cairo, and elsewhere.

Consider this statement:

"More than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. . . we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of [Muslims]."

The speaker was not some modern-day image consultant in a public relations firm in New York City. It was Osama bin Laden's chief lieutenant Ayman al-Zawahiri.

I mention this because I want to talk today about something that at first might seem obvious -- but it isn't. Our enemies have skillfully adapted to fighting wars in today's media age, but for the most part we -- our country -- has not -- whether our government, the media or our society generally.

Consider that the violent extremist have established "media relations committees" -- and have proven to be highly successful at manipulating opinion elites. They plan and design their headline-grabbing attacks using every means of communications to intimidate and break the collective will of free people.

They know that communications transcend borders -- and that a single news story, handled skillfully, can be as damaging to our cause and as helpful to theirs, as any other method of military attack. And they are doing it.

They are able to act quickly with relatively few people, and with modest resources compared to the vast -- and expensive -- bureaucracies of western governments.

Our federal government is only beginning to adapt our operations for the 21st Century. For the most part, the U.S. Government still functions as a "five and dime" store in an E-Bay world.

Today we are engaged in the first war in history -- unconventional and irregular as it is -- in an era of:

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- E-mail;
- Blogs;
- Blackberries;
- Instant messaging;
- Digital cameras;
- A global Internet with no inhibitions;
- Cell phones;
- Hand held video cameras;
- Talk radio;
- 24 hours news broadcasts; and
- Satellite television.

I have just returned from Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. In Tunis, the largest newspaper has a circulation of roughly 50,000 -- in a country of 10 million people. But even in the poorest neighborhoods, you can see satellite dishes on nearly every balcony or rooftop.

A few years ago in Iraq, under Saddam Hussein, an Iraqi could have his tongue cut out if he was found in possession of a satellite dish or used the Internet without government approval. Today, satellite dishes are ubiquitous in that country as well.

Regrettably, many of the news channels being watched through these dishes are extremely hostile to the West.

The growing number of media outlets in many parts of the world still have relatively immature standards and practices that too often serve to inflame and distort -- rather than to explain and inform. And while al-Qaeda and extremist movements have utilized this forum for many years, and have successfully further poisoned the Muslim public's view of the West, we have barely even begun to compete in reaching their audiences.

In this environment the old adage that: "A lie can be half way around the world before the truth has its boots on" becomes doubly true with today's technologies.

We saw this with the false allegations of the desecration of a Koran last year. Once it was published in a weekly news magazine, it was posted on websites, sent in e-mails, and repeated on satellite television and radio stations for days, before the facts could be discovered.

And, in those first days, the false story incited anti-American riots in Pakistan and elsewhere, and human beings were killed in the ensuing riots.

Once aware of the story, the U.S. Military, appropriately, and of necessity, took the time needed to ensure that it had the facts before responding -- having to conduct interviews and pore through countless documents, investigations and log books. It was finally determined that the charge was false.

But in the meantime the lives had been lost and great damage had been done.

What complicates the ability to respond quickly is that, unlike our enemies, which propagate lies with impunity -- with no penalty whatsoever -- our government does not have the luxury of relying on other sources for information -- anonymous or otherwise. Our government has to be *the* source. And we tell the truth.

These new realities have placed unprecedented challenges on members of the press as well. Today's correspondents are under constant pressure in a hyper competitive media environment to produce exclusives and breaking stories. Daily or weekly deadlines have turned into updates by the hour or even the minute -- to feed a constant news crawl that now appears on most cable channels. And the fact is that the federal government -- at the speed at which it operates -- doesn't always make their job easier.

The standard U.S. government public affairs operation was designed primarily to respond to individual requests for information. It tends to be reactive, rather than proactive -- and it still operates for the most part on an eight hour, five-days-a-week basis, while world events, and our enemies, are operating 24-7, across every time zone. That is an unacceptably dangerous deficiency.

Government is, however, beginning to adapt.

In Iraq, for example, the U.S. military command, working closely with the Iraqi government and the United States Embassy, has sought non-traditional means to provide accurate information to the Iraqi people in the face of the aggressive campaign of disinformation.

Yet this has been portrayed as inappropriate -- for example, the allegations of "buying news" in Iraq. The resulting explosion of critical press stories then causes everything -- all activity, all initiative -- to stop.

Even worse, it leads to a "chilling effect" for those who are asked to serve in the military public affairs field.

The conclusion is drawn that there is no tolerance for innovation, much less any human error that could conceivably be seized upon by a press that seems to demand perfection from the government, but does not apply the same standard to the enemy or even sometimes to themselves.

Consider for a moment the vast quantity of column inches and hours of television devoted to the allegations of unauthorized detainee mistreatment at Abu Ghraib. Compare that to the volume of coverage and condemnation associated with things like, for example, the discovery of Saddam Hussein's mass graves -- which were filled with literally hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqis.

That is the reality of the world in which we must operate, and in which our forces fight.

A number of changes are under consideration:

First, government at all levels will need to make communications planning a central component of every aspect of this struggle.

Despite best efforts, for example, it took many months to put in place an effective communications operation in post major conflict Afghanistan and in Iraq.

In some cases, military public affairs officials have had little communications training and little, if any, grounding in the importance of timing, rapid response, and the realities of digital and broadcast media. We have become somewhat more adept in these areas, but progress is slow. And, importantly, public affairs posts have not proven career enhancing for the military. We must get a great deal better at:

- Engaging experts from both within and outside of government to help to communicate;
- Rapidly deploying the best military communications capabilities to new theaters of operation; and
- Developing and executing multifaceted media campaigns -- print, radio, television and Internet.

Let there be no doubt -- the longer it takes to put a strategic communications framework into place, the more we can be certain that the vacuum will be filled by the enemy and by news informers, that most assuredly will not paint an accurate picture of what is actually taking place.

There are some signs of modest progress. Within the past year and a half, the U.S. military's Joint Forces Command has developed rapidly deployable military communications teams, that are organized and focused on specific geographic areas of the world.

Soon after the devastating earthquake in Pakistan, one of these newly constituted teams deployed with

our sizable military forces into the disaster area.

Operating in conjunction with other federal agencies and the U.S. Embassy, they worked directly with the U.S. commander of our humanitarian relief effort, to help focus the attention of the media on the U.S. government's truly extraordinary commitment to help the Pakistani people.

Public opinion surveys taken by private groups in Pakistan, before and after the earthquake, suggest that public attitudes in that country regarding the United States changed dramatically because of this new awareness by the Pakistani public. Indeed, it was not long before the new favorite toy in Pakistan was a small replica of a Chinook helicopter, because of the many lives our helicopters saved, and the mountains of relief supplies they delivered.

Second, government public affairs and public diplomacy efforts must reorient staffing, schedules and culture to engage the full range of media that are having such an impact today.

Our U.S. Central Command, for example, has launched an online communications effort that includes electronic news updates and a links campaign, that has resulted in several hundred blogs receiving and publishing CENTCOM content.

The U.S. government will have to develop the institutional capability to *anticipate* and act within the same news cycle. That will require instituting 24-hour press operation centers, elevating Internet operations and other channels of communications to the equal status of traditional 20th Century press relations. It will result in much less reliance on the traditional print press, just as the publics of the U.S. and the world are relying less on newspapers as their principal source of information.

And it will require attracting more experts in these areas from the private sector to government service.

This also will likely mean embracing new institutions to engage people across the world. During the Cold War, institutions such as the U.S. Information Agency and Radio Free Europe proved to be valuable instruments for the United States of America.

We need to consider the possibility of new organizations and programs that can serve a similarly valuable role in the War on Terror in this new century.

What, for example, should a U.S. Information Agency, or a Radio Free Europe for the 21st Century look like? These are tough questions.

And I suggest that some humility is in order, because there is no guide book -- no roadmap -- to tell our hard working folks what to do to meet these new challenges.

Secretary of State Rice's proposal to support the democratic aspirations of the Iranian people through expanded broadcasting, the Internet and student exchanges is a good start, and deserves support. But because it is new, and different, it is receiving opposition in the Congress.

For the past minutes, I have been commenting on the challenges our country -- not just our government -- faces in fighting a war in this new media age. And while the enemy is increasingly skillful at manipulating the media and using the tools of communications to their advantage, it should be noted that we have an advantage as well: and that is, quite simply, that truth is on our side -- and that ultimately, truth wins out.

I believe with every bone in my body that free people, exposed to sufficient information, will, over time, find their way to right decisions.

Throughout the world, advances in technology are forcing a massive information flow that dictatorships and extremists ultimately will not be able to control. Blogs are rapidly appearing even in countries where the press is still government-controlled.

Pro-democracy forces are communicating and organizing by e-mail, pagers and blackberries.

Today, in Iraq, an energetic media has emerged from the rubble of Saddam's police state, with nearly 300 newspapers, over 90 radio stations and more than 40 television stations. Iraqis are now accessing the Web in their homes, as well as in Internet cafes that have sprung up in towns and cities across their country.

We are fighting a battle where the survival of our free way of life is at stake. And the center of gravity of that struggle is not just on the battlefield. It is a test of wills and it will be won or lost with our public and the publics of free nations across the globe. We will need to do all we can to attract supporters to our efforts, to correct the lies being told which so damage our country, and shatter the appeal of the enemy.

In the early years of the Cold War -- another "long twilight struggle" -- President Eisenhower made a perceptive observation -- despite the differences between this war and the Cold War -- that has resonance even today.

He said:

"We face a hostile ideology -- global in scope. . . ruthless in purpose, and insidious in method. . . to meet it successfully [we must] . . . carry forward steadily, surely, and without complaint the burdens of a prolonged and complex struggle -- with liberty the stake."

For nearly 50 years we did just that. We will need to show the same perseverance in the long struggle we face today.

Thank you. I'd be happy to respond to some questions on this or other subjects relating to the Department of Defense.



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