

Winning the Information War in HAITI

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OPERATION *Uphold Democracy* in Haiti showed there can be common ground and accommodation between the media and the military in covering America's Armed Forces deployment. In this operation, the media were assigned to units spearheading the planned invasion. This way, reporters, and thus, the American people, would see how their Armed Forces performed in action. Even after the invasion was called off, reporters in Haiti had unparalleled access to American troops. As one brigade commander said, "Letting reporters into my unit was the smartest thing I ever did." While operations in Haiti may not be the new paradigm for the media-military relationship, it certainly greatly improved it.

Commanders and staff officers must come to grips with one undeniable fact in military operations: Great numbers of media will cover US troop deployments anywhere in the world and in great detail. The images and words the media project are powerful, moving and immediate and can influence national policy. US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, states that "Dramatic visual presentations can rapidly influence public—and therefore political—opinion so that the political underpinnings of war and operations other than war [OOTW] may suddenly change with no prior indication to the commander in the field."¹

Military leaders should plan adequately for dealing with the media. The objective is to ensure military operations are put in the proper context for the American public and audiences around the world. Commanders or senior military officials can no longer get away with a "no comment" answer regarding American troop use in trouble spots worldwide. Ignoring the media does not make them go away—it just forces them to contact alternative sources for their stories.

Refusing to talk to the media also guarantees the military's perspective will not be heard. Thus, it is to

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the military's benefit to cooperate with the media because "We don't win unless CNN says we win."² This phrase, developed during the Haiti operation's planning stages, captures the realities of today's media environment.

The media's messages—especially television images—are so powerful that reporters must understand the military operational context and background in order for success on the battlefield or in OOTW to be properly understood by the public. Sometimes, television images may appear to contradict underlying facts. For example, the US Army Rangers won a highly publicized fire fight in Somalia, but that fact was lost among the casualty figures and other images that were broadcast.

While commanders must be concerned about operations security (OPSEC) when soldiers' lives are at risk, we must find a good balance between OPSEC and the public's right to know. One of many lessons Joint Task Force (JTF) 180 learned during *Uphold Democracy* was how to strike this balance.

Media Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB)

As with any military operation, knowing who the players are is fundamental to success. Therefore, understanding the media's training, background, capabilities and needs is necessary to smoothly incorporate them into military deployments and operations. In Haiti, a media IPB was conducted to



LTG Hugh Shelton, the JTF 180 commander, is interviewed by Dan Rather of CBS News soon after the arrival of US forces in Haiti.

Once the United States deploys forces overseas, the commander becomes the lightning rod for everything that happens. His notoriety can expand geometrically overnight, and he embodies the operation for the American public. Therefore, the media want access to his ideas, thoughts and explanations for what is happening in the area of operations. The commander must be prepared to meet the press and appear on live TV broadcasts. However, the commander can quickly become overexposed or spend an inordinate amount of time responding to the media. . . . A balance must be struck, but the reality is the commander must meet the press on a frequent, but controlled, basis.

provide a realistic, practical assessment of the media to commanders and key staff officers so they would know what to expect once US forces arrived.³ Once media needs, capabilities and realities were defined, it was much easier to plan for the inevitable coverage of the invasion and follow-on operations.

The IPB's net result was very beneficial. Specifically, IPB showed commanders and key staffers the realities they must face when the media cover US military deployments. The realities are:

- Media messages can change policy.
- Public affairs officers (PAOs) cannot "control" media messages or stories.
- The media will be everywhere looking for unique stories and angles.
- The media mistrust official statements or accounts. They want firsthand information.
- The media will know of any large-scale military movements and will speculate on destinations. This affects OPSEC.
- The media will resist management and escort. Perhaps most important, leaders must recognize

that PAOs cannot "control" the media. When an event occurs, senior military officials should expect the media to cover it quickly, if not live. The media have the technical sophistication to report live from anywhere in the world, with or without PAO support.

Additionally, the media's competitive nature drives its requirements. The media want:

- Daily authoritative briefings by operators and leaders. PAOs can handle other requests.
- Access, but will grudgingly accept media pools.
- The "GI's" perspective. This means they want to go on patrols, operations, flights and other missions.
- Constant fresh stories. Opportunities are here for leaders to tell their individual units' stories.

This need to produce a steady flow of unique and fresh stories typically results in a stream of requests to cover military units or events, preferably without a PAO escort. Commanders were reminded in Haiti that the background, or lack of one, each reporter had in military affairs could be important. For example, the media has:

- The technological advantage and will not need

military help to file stories. This again raises obvious OPSEC implications.

- Many reporters with no military experience. Simply stated, they will not understand what they are looking at. Lack of knowledge and inexperience could shade reports from the area of operations.

- Become used to US forces fighting and winning quickly with minimal casualties. Anything less may be reported as failure.

Commanders should be aware that US forces are victims of previous successes in that the media, and the American public, now expect US forces to win quickly and decisively regardless of the situation. With the media's penchant for instant analysis, anything accomplished less quickly than expected, or with significant casualties, could be considered a failure.

Commanders were told that many reporters covering the Haiti operation would have no military experience themselves. Therefore, commanders and staff officers had the opportunity and obligation to explain to reporters how the military operates so the reporters could put images and events into proper context.

Finally, as part of the media IPB, key military audiences were shown a list of events that would probably trigger media coverage. While not intended to be all-encompassing, the list sensitized military officials to subjects that, in the opinion of public affairs (PA) planners, would receive scrutiny if they occurred. Media interest areas might include:

- Excessive civilian casualties or property damage.
- Fratricide and rules of engagement (ROE) issues.
- Military and civilian conflicts, such as looting, murder, rape or treatment of prisoners.
- Appearance of a lack of operational control.
- Civilians blaming US forces for lack of food, fuel, water or medical care.
- Civil-military disagreements.
- US casualty figures—projected and actual.

The Idea For Inclusion


While the media IPB was useful, what made the Haiti operation unique was the concept of merging the media into operational units *before* the invasion began. This action's genesis was based on the 1992 Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 5122.5, Enclosure 3, *Statement of DOD Principles for News Coverage of DOD Operations*. The nine principles, depicted in the figure, define the parameters for media coverage of US troop deployments and were followed by the JTF in all phases of the operation.⁴

Commanders and staff officers must understand the media can cover events as they unfold and should plan accordingly. . . . As FM 100-5 states, "The importance of understanding the immediacy of the impact of raw television coverage is not so commanders can control it, but so they can anticipate adjustments to their operations and plans."

During planning, it became clear that the DOD's intent was to ensure as open coverage as possible. It was evident to PA planners and the JTF commander

Principles of Information for News Media Covering DOD Operations

1. Open and independent reporting will be the principal means of covering US military operations.
2. Pools are not to serve as the standard means for covering US military operations. Pools may sometimes provide the only feasible means of early access to a military operation. Pools should be as large as possible and disbanded at the earliest opportunity—within 24 to 30 hours when possible. The arrival of early access pools will not cancel the principle of independent coverage for journalists already in the area.
3. Even under conditions of open coverage, pools may be appropriate for special events, such as those at extremely remote locations or where space is limited.
4. Journalists in a combat zone will be required to abide by a clear set of military security ground rules that protect US forces and their operations. Violations of the ground rules can result in the suspension of credentials and expulsion from the combat zone of the journalist involved. News organizations will make their best efforts to assign experienced journalists to combat operations and to make them familiar with US military operations.
5. Journalists will be provided access to all major military units. Special operations restrictions may limit access in some cases.
6. Military PAOs should act as liaisons but should not interfere with the reporting process.
7. Under conditions of open coverage, field commanders should be instructed to permit journalists to ride on military vehicles and aircraft whenever feasible. The military will be responsible for the transportation of pools.
8. Consistent with its capabilities, the military will supply PAOs with facilities to enable timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and will make facilities available whenever possible for filing independent coverage. In some cases when government facilities are unavailable, journalists will, as always, file by any other means available. The military will not ban communications systems operated by news organizations, but electromagnetic operational security in battlefield situations may require limited restrictions on the use of such systems.
9. These principles will apply as well to the operation of the standing DOD National Media Pool System.



Military leaders should also know the media can be trusted if the military's explanation of events is valid and makes sense. The proof? Of all the reporters briefed on the operational plan prior to the start of Uphold Democracy, there were no leaks. None. Reporters understood the ground rules and knew that a story released ahead of time could endanger US forces. Conversely, the media came away from this deployment with a new appreciation for the US military's quality and professionalism. Many reporters were impressed with Operation Uphold Democracy's complexity and the detailed knowledge troops had of the plan.

that what was missing from America's recent military operations were reporters who would participate in and cover the final planning and initial assault by US troops.

Because this had been a point of contention between the military and the media in Grenada and Panama, JTF 180 recommended to the US Atlantic Command (USACOM) and DOD that the DOD media pool be allowed to accompany the assault troops into action. The pool is a small group of reporters who are on call to accompany deploying US forces.⁵ The stories from pool reporters are shared with other media to provide the most complete account possible of US troop actions to American and worldwide audiences. The request's approval meant reporters would accompany the 82d Airborne Division on the planned parachute assault and the seaborne and heliborne Marine forces aboard the headquarters command and control (C²) ship USS *Mount Whitney*. Media would also have space on the Air Force C² aircraft scheduled to fly above the battlefield.

In addition to access to the fighting units, the media pool members were thoroughly briefed. They re-

ceived detailed plans from USACOM; from the JTF commander at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; and from representatives of the individual units they would cover. The image of a pool reporter typing a story on his laptop computer in front of a large "classified" map of Port-au-Prince filled with unit designations and objectives, while soldiers from the 82d Airborne Division, accepting the reporter's presence, went about their business distributing ammunition and finishing their final preparations for battle, is a powerful argument in support of the media inclusion policy.

As events turned out, the forcible entry portion of Operation *Uphold Democracy* was not executed due to the *Carter-Cedras Accord*. Nonetheless, the idea of media inclusion was validated at all levels, starting with the JTF and ending at DOD. Merging the media into tactical units gave them a front-line seat as the remaining phases of the operation unfolded.

Adjusting to the Carter-Cedras Accord

As Operation *Uphold Democracy* evolved, some valuable lessons were learned. Many actions that took place were anticipated before the operation

began, because of thorough media IPB. Since the original tactical plan was phased, there was very little trouble adjusting to the operation's rhythm once the active combat phase was skipped. JTF 180 started active PA operations in Haiti just as if the combat phase was completed and the next phase started. In OOTW, however, where situations are often vague, the challenges to leaders and PAOs were many and varied. The following lessons learned were validated by JTF 180's experiences with the media in Haiti and may be beneficial in future operations.

Pre-deployment media training is critical. Pre-deployment training was included in the pre-invasion period to expose soldiers most likely to meet the media to proven interview techniques. This training gave the soldiers the information they needed so they would not be intimidated or uncomfortable once the television camera's "red light" went on. The intent was to prepare these leaders so they could concentrate on providing accurate, timely information to the American public without feeling intimidated or nervous.

PA operations must be synchronized. Since Operation Uphold Democracy was an interagency operation, it was important that words and deeds be thoroughly coordinated among all agencies. Military leaders must understand the ambassador is in charge of the overall OOTW effort. The military is the iron fist supporting the policy. In Haiti, the JTF commander met frequently with the ambassador to implement the National Command Authority's policy. Correspondingly, the military and ambassador's spokesmen coordinated their statements before delivering them to the media.

Operations are covered in real time. Commanders and staff officers must understand the media can cover events as they unfold and should plan accordingly. Often, CNN provides raw information even before it gets to a commander through operational channels. Interestingly, the JTF 180 leadership watched CNN from the USS *Mount Whitney* as events happened. As FM 100-5 states, "The importance of understanding the immediacy of the impact of raw television coverage is not so commanders can control it, but so they can anticipate adjustments to their operations and plans."⁶

Commanders must be aware that influential individuals and groups will be watching and that responses to events and statements must be generated quickly. Thus, commanders and PAOs must anticipate, prepare for and respond very quickly to breaking events or they run the risk of not getting their messages out to counter or explain what was

shown or written. It is the PA equivalent of losing the high ground.

Aggressively counter inaccurate information. Countering inaccurate information with statements from subject matter experts (SMEs) was a valuable lesson learned. As part of planning for expected

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problems, SMEs should be identified and prepared to meet the media. Because of the media's competitive nature and the fact that events can be taken out of context, it is imperative that the military's SMEs respond quickly to media questions or reports. If this does not happen, incorrect perceptions could be the ones that American and other important audiences accept as truth. That is why it is important to accurately respond to the media within 24 hours, if not sooner.

Two examples from Haiti highlight this point. When reporters asked questions about the apparent contradiction in the ROE for US troops, the JTF's staff judge advocate held a news conference within 24 hours. Similarly, when violence erupted after the 30 September 1994 demonstration in Port-au-Prince, the JTF commander held a news conference to give his assessment of the situation. These issues ceased to be headlines because they were not allowed to fester. As a result, prompt, accurate information was provided honestly to reporters by military experts.

Meeting the press. Once the United States deploys forces overseas, the commander becomes the lightning rod for everything that happens. His notoriety can expand geometrically overnight, and he embodies the operation for the American public. Therefore, the media want access to his ideas, thoughts and explanations for what is happening in the area of operations. The commander must be prepared to meet the press and appear on live TV broadcasts. However, the commander can quickly become overexposed or spend an inordinate amount



CNN Reporter Christiane Amanpour talks with officers of the JTF 180 staff aboard the USS Mount Whitney in October 1994.

LTC Tim Vane, US Army

It is in the military's best interest to assist the media, because there are many good stories that can be told. Therefore, commanders and PAOs must plan a media event each day to gain and maintain the initiative. These events cannot be manipulative, misleading or contrived. Media events must be real, enlightening and accurate. Credibility is too fragile an asset to waste on an unworthy or disingenuous news story. Exposing units, individuals and events to media coverage can benefit everyone.

of time responding to the media. Conversely, not spending enough time with the media can create the perception of an aloof commander who is uncaring and out of touch with ground operations. A balance must be struck, but the reality is the commander must meet the press on a frequent, but controlled, basis.

Maintaining the initiative. The media constantly needs news. They must file stories and will do it with or without the military's help. It is in the military's best interest to assist the media, because there are many good stories that can be told. Therefore, commanders and PAOs must plan a media event each day to gain and maintain the initiative. These events cannot be manipulative, misleading or contrived. Media events must be real, enlightening and accurate. Credibility is too fragile an asset to waste on an unworthy or disingenuous news story. Exposing units, individuals and events to media coverage can benefit everyone.

In Haiti, JTF 180 brought in a variety of specialized unit commanders to talk about what their units were doing to help Haiti's legitimate government "get back on its feet." Engineers, military police and corps support command leaders, among others, pro-

vided interesting and valuable media information.

Focusing on people. All the services do a magnificent job and the American public should know it. Soldiers will invariably do the right thing. Therefore, providing media access to them cements the bond between the society they come from and the military they support. Soldiers are ingenious and intelligent and their professionalism is obvious to everyone who comes in contact with them. At the beginning of the Haiti operation, the brigade commander mentioned earlier said he wanted no reporters covering his unit. He had several bad experiences with reporters and wanted nothing to do with them.

Eventually, he let one reporter into his unit. By the end of the first week in Haiti, he had four staying with his unit. By the end of the second week, he had eight. When asked why he changed his mind, the commander said that having reporters stay with his unit resulted in his soldiers' stories being told accurately and with understanding. He also said he came to understand reporters and developed a much better appreciation for what they do. He said that if reporters share the same hardships as soldiers, they deserve to be treated with respect and given access.

A New Paradigm?

Do the experiences of JTF 180 in Haiti mean a new Golden Age is at hand for the relationship between the media and the military? Arguably not. There will always be healthy tension between the military's right to operations security and the media's right to ask questions and report stories. But there can be a middle ground, and to a large degree, *Uphold Democracy* provided a look at what that middle ground might be.

The military showed that by understanding past problems and through careful planning, they can meet the media's needs. As demonstrated in recent years, the media are a fact of life and will be part of any future battlefield deployment.

Military leaders should also know the media can be trusted if the military's explanation of events is valid and makes sense. The proof? Of all the reporters briefed on the operational plan *prior* to the start of *Uphold Democracy*, there were no leaks. None. Reporters understood the ground rules and knew that a story released ahead of time could endanger US forces. Conversely, the media came away from this deployment with a new appreciation for the US military's quality and professionalism. Many reporters were impressed with Operation *Uphold Democracy's* complexity and the detailed knowledge troops had of the plan.

Reporters also were exposed to a military that could think rapidly on its feet and act as a unit with little confusion. How many military organizations

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could call off an invasion while literally in mid-air, change plans and have a force with a new mission on the ground in less than 24 hours? Haiti is not a new paradigm for the media-military relationship. Each military operation is unique, and the conditions in Haiti may never exist again. To blindly apply the lessons learned from this operation is probably a recipe for trouble, if not disaster. If any paradigm emerges from *Uphold Democracy*, it is the same one that has always existed: Plan with great care and precision, study the lessons learned from previous operations, keep those that apply, discard the rest and do not take anything for granted.

However, when it comes to future US force deployments, commanders and key staff officers can count on one thing: The media will be there every step of the way. **MR**

NOTES

1. US Army Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office [GPO], 14 June 1993), 1-3.
2. "Winning the Information War" (Fort Bragg, NC: XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg Public Affairs Office briefing to the corps commander and key staff officers, 3 August 1994).
3. *Ibid.* and "Fighting the Information War" (Fort Bragg, NC: XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg Public Affairs Office briefing, Corps Commanders Conference, 8 September 1994). These two briefings served as the basis for media intelligence preparation of the battlefield for XVIII Airborne Corps commanders and key staff officers. Two division com-

- manders and most separate brigade commanders scheduled to participate in the invasion and/or the follow-on mission in Haiti attended.
4. Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 5122.5, Enclosure 3, *Statement of DOD Principles for News Media Coverage of DOD Operations*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense [Public Affairs], 21 May 1992).
5. "Eligibility Criteria for News Media Membership in the DOD National Media Pool," *Federal Register* (Washington, DC: GPO, Volume 57, Number 184, 22 September 1994), 43645-43647.
6. FM 100-5, 3-7.

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