

The Military and the Media

Read the following text and write a short summary.

News

American Forces Press Service

Odierno Shares Views on Military's Relationship With Media

By David Vergun
Army News Service

WASHINGTON, Oct. 22, 2012 – The biggest challenge in the relationship between the military and the media is working together in an uncertain environment in an age of instant communication, the Army's chief of staff said here Oct. 19.

Gen. Ray Odierno shared his views on military-media relations in remarks and a question-and-answer session with about 60 journalists attending the 10th annual Military Reporters and Editors Conference.

"As we move forward, and as I look at what's going on around the world, the ability to communicate instantaneously is only going to get faster and faster and faster, and the ability to report is going to get faster and faster and faster," he said. "And, the pressure requirements on you and as well as me to understand the environment on what's going on is going to become more important as well. You have to get the story in quickly to be able to publish what you think you're seeing."

In this fast-paced environment, Odierno said, it is inevitable that first reports out will be wrong about 50 percent of the time, due to a variety of circumstances. He said it is up to the military to follow up on those first reports by getting the most accurate information back out to the reporters as the facts become known and available.

"This requires a good interchange, strong relationships and trust to do that," he added. In his experience, the general said, that bond of trust does exist.

"A large majority of [media] people I've associated with over my 36 years in the Army have been very professional," Odierno said. "I don't ever remember a time when that trust was broken, and I think that's important. And, I really, really do appreciate that, and that's the kind of relationship we want to continue as we move forward."

Trust works both ways, he added. The military must provide reporters with all the correct facts they need for their stories in a timely manner, he said, and must rely on reporters, in turn, to maintain operational security.

"Off-the-record sessions were some of the best sessions I've had with reporters," he said. "It gave me the opportunity to discuss what's on my mind, and they discovered and discussed things with me that I didn't know that enabled me to do my job better."

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PROJEKT JE SPOLUFINANCOVÁN EVROPSKÝM SOCIÁLNÍM FONDEM A STÁTNÍM ROZPOČTEM ČESKÉ REPUBLIKY.

Odierno said the Army must continue to reach out to the media.

“We’re going to engage and outreach with you and have a relationship with you here, overseas, during training events, no matter where it is, during tough problems and good problems,” he said. “We’re going to build a relationship and work together to get you the right facts so your stories are reported accurate, important and cutting-edge.”

The Army’s relationship with the media has evolved in positive ways, Odierno said, as it now works more closely with reporters and is evolving away from the embedded approach, in which reporters cover warfare with a specific unit. “I think sometimes the media feels trapped,” he explained, “because the military says when and where they go and don’t go.”

The media are moving around more and building networks, he added, but safety and security considerations sometimes will require reporters to embed with units.

Odierno said he has genuine positive feelings for the media.

“As corps commander in Iraq and then Multinational Force Iraq commander, I was impressed with the heroism [of the media] as I watched many people operate, putting their own personal safety at risk, to deliver news to people back in the United States. I learned to respect that,” the general said.

The chief of staff admitted that his own efforts to report the news have been less than successful. He said he’s had a Facebook page since he served in Iraq, but that his audience is mostly internal. He has had more success reaching an audience outside the Army, he said, with the recent launch of his Twitter account, @GenRayOdierno.

The question-and-answer session touched on a variety of topics, including the new U.S. defense strategy that focuses on the Asia-Pacific region. Odierno said the Army is establishing programs of multilateral engagements throughout that region, including training exercises and humanitarian missions. It is crucial to build more transparency with China, he added, and he held out the possibility that some multinational exercises could include China. He also touched on the Army’s professionalism.

“We have a battle-hardened, battle-tested leader capability that will give us an advantage as we look and adjust to the future,” he said, adding that the Army will need these leaders as it adjusts to a more complex world environment.

“What we ask our captains and our lieutenant colonels today is a lot harder than what I had to do when I was a captain or lieutenant colonel, because the world is more complex and difficult, and the challenges they’re going to face are more difficult,” he said. “They’re adaptive leaders who mix the science and art of war together to come up with the right solutions at the right time.”

Read the text on embedded reporters and make as many questions as possible.

Embedded Reporters

The embedded system used during the war in Iraq was, in many ways, more successful than the press pools used in the past. This type of system “embedded” members of the press with units of the military. Being embedded is defined as “living, eating, moving in combat with the unit that [the journalist is] attached to” (Department of Defense [DoD] News Transcript, 2003, p. 2). The embedded press system allowed reporters to “have free access to military personnel at all levels; report general information about troop strength, casualties, and

captured enemy forces; report information and location of military targets and objectives previously under attack; and report names and hometowns of service members with their consent". Due to the nature of the embedded system, it cost the news outlets around \$100 million to take part in the embed program. More than 2,200 reporters and camera crews covered the Iraq War. About 1,400 of those reporters were unilateral (non-embedded). There were more than 600 US and foreign journalists embedded during the beginning of the war.

Read the text to learn more about this topic.

Military-Media Relationship

THE world over, the media and the military have never had an easy relationship.

In Pakistan's case the issue is more than usually complicated. The military wants favourable coverage of the several military operations undertaken in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Fata, but reporters have difficulties dealing with their uniformed hosts.

Gen Pervez Kayani's visit to Swat some time ago highlights the issue. Local journalists were informed about the visit on May 22, and they rushed to Bari Kot where the army chief was inaugurating a bridge on the River Swat.

What followed, however, was irritating. Only 10 journalists were allowed to attend the high-profile event, which the rest found unacceptable. Eventually, journalists left the venue, leaving their cameramen to cover the event. The token strike continued for a couple of weeks until an ISPR official regretted the incident.

This was not the only incident of its kind. Other incidents have ended in violence. Last September, some army personnel allegedly thrashed a private television channel's reporter as a result of which he ended up in hospital with head injuries. This was followed by a three-month boycott by journalists, which ended after an army official visited the local press club to mend fences.

Traditional interventions such as these as may work, but the security forces have yet to learn how to handle journalists professionally and responsibly. As a Swat journalist told this writer with reference to one event, "Journalists were issued special passes only after repeated requests, and I felt quite embarrassed when a soldier at a check point threw away my pass and told me to go back."

By and large, militaries feel ill at ease when media personnel are around. During the Iraq war, the US military embedded journalists in tactical units; the experiment was considered a success.

In reality, however, the US military came out smelling of roses mainly because embedded journalists had compromised their professionalism. ABC Pentagon correspondent, John McWethy, told The Washington Post: "Riding around in a tank is a fun, but you don't know

... what's going on." Embedded journalists sacrificed journalism to reportage and thus the major stories of the Iraq invasion were the ones such journalists missed out. Wide knowledge about the absence of weapons of mass destruction may well have changed the course of the war had the journalists been free.

While the concept of embedded journalism is generally considered a black chapter in the history of the military-press relationship, it has firm foundations — though in a different vein — in Pakistan.

Over the last decade, the military establishment has linked accessibility to conflict zones with the issue of journalists' safety and, hence, assumed control of conflict-sensitive reporting. Selected groups of journalists are taken to the militancy-hit areas where they work in a controlled environment.

The country's media outlets took to the concept mainly because 'information' obtained this way was cost-effective and served the national security narrative. Journalists too have been ready to avail themselves of the offer. As one Peshawar-based journalist working for a large television channel put it: "Only a fool can afford to skip free chopper rides and the hot food offered on such trips to Fata or Swat."

Yet the issue, in and of itself, is dead serious. Military 'tour operators' who accompany journalists on such trips are sometimes so disciplined that they want journalists to deliver no less than 100 per cent. This can cast a pall over the entire exercise.

A correspondent for an international news network commented that "the operators follow journalists everywhere and don't hesitate to snub them if they're moving off the beaten track. I once violated the norm by publishing a balanced story, and since then I am not taken on any embedded assignments — the only available window to see Fata".

Last year, the ISPR took a group of journalists to South Waziristan to brief them about development projects undertaken in the conflict-hit areas. Unexpectedly, one of the district correspondents expressed doubt over such claims. This led the accompanying official to rush towards the reporter, saying: "You seem to be a friend of the terrorists."

The local media fraternity has developed its own vocabulary in this situation, repeatedly mentioning off-the-record sessions to make others realize the way the military and militants bar journalists from carry out their professional duties.

Free media access to the conflict zone is globally considered a threat to national security. This misperception has led militaries to cobble journalists and soldiers together but conflicting interests have always kept this relationship in a flux. "When their aims brought them into conflict," says media expert Michael Sweeney, "the press lost most of the battles because journalists, after all, carries notebooks, while soldiers carry guns."

In Pakistan, too, military officials confront the same problem, though at a less intense level. The more journalists show their readiness to compromise their independence, the more they are expected to retreat from professionalism. The end-product is always a bitter experience.

Given all this, the uneasy media-military relationship is not going to deliver despite growing ties between journalists and militaries everywhere. Historically, militaries have successfully

kept a lid on information. But things have changed now and thanks to technological advances time and space barriers have been breached.

In Pakistan, as elsewhere, this revolution has weakened the grip of the status-quo forces, which have been controlling the public's right to know. It is time for journalists to assert themselves and prevail over traditional power centres that want to maintain institutional supremacy by controlling the flow of information at the cost of civil liberties.

The writer teaches at Peshawar University.

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<http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a437519.pdf>