

Chapter 15

The Role of Mass Mediated Messages and Cultural Identity with Cross-Cultural Communication Failures Resulting from Flawed U.S. Military Policy in Iraq

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses mass media and cultural identity dynamics that impact U.S. military policy in the execution of the Iraq war and related cross-cultural communication issues that have evolved during the course of the war. I completed primary levels of Professional Military Education (PME), and this context has provided me with ample opportunity to become familiar with military doctrine, and, after the start of the Iraq war in 2003, observe how primary tenets of established military theory have been consistently ignored. At times it has almost been as if the U.S. invasion/liberation of Iraq has been executed as a case study for future students to review and learn how not to address such a challenge.

The inability to consider, let alone plan for, cross-cultural ramifications has been a central communication failure that has proven tremendously problematic. The mass media, via traditional channels and new communication technologies, have been keen to report on these matters which, in turn, have modified public understanding of the matters being reported. Mass media messages have been vital in creating, and impacting, this phenomenon. This phenomenon has been equally true among traditional media channels and the new communication technologies.

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INTRODUCTION

As the U.S. continues with military operations in Iraq the implications of shallow doctrine and subsequently vague mission objectives has been given thorough coverage in mass media. This reporting has, in turn, impacted U.S. execution of the war. Thus, mass media coverage conveys the story and has become part of the story it is reporting. The speed of reporting associated with the new communication technologies has made the new communication technologies especially relevant in this regard. Thus, there is a communicative nexus between mass media and war. This chapter will describe variables that compose and perpetuate that nexus.

BACKGROUND

On June 1, 2007 I retired from the U.S. Air Force at the rank of Colonel after 30 years service in the reserves and on active duty. My entire career was in the intelligence community, with the final 14 years spent as an Air Force attache in China. Prior to that I was assigned to Special Operations Command/Pacific. Given my civilian background in higher education I was involved with military educational opportunities. I graduated from Squadron Officers School, Air Command & Staff College, Air War College (these courses are commonly referred to as Professional Military Education) and completed many other specialized courses. In the closing years of my military career, after the start of the Iraq war in 2003 in particular, I had the opportunity to speak at Army War College, serve as an adjunct faculty member at Joint Special Operations University and assist with war games exercises at the Pentagon (as recently as March, 2007) and Air War College (as recently as May, 2007).

Since retiring from the military I have continued to serve via various civilian opportunities that have been made available to me. Such service

has included duty as: 1) Senior Research Fellow at Air University, 2) Senior Research Analyst at the Urban Warfare Analysis Center, 3) Political/Social Science Advisor at HQ SOCOM (Headquarters, Special Operations Command) and 4) Lecturer to MARSOAG (Marine Special Operations Advisor Group). At present I am the Lead Social Scientist at the Army Culture and Foreign Language Management Office.

This provided me with ample opportunity to become familiar with military doctrine and, after the start of the Iraq war in 2003, observe how primary tenets of established military theory were consistently ignored. At times it has almost been as if the U.S. invasion/liberation of Iraq was executed as a case study for future students to review and learn how not to address such a challenge. The inability to consider, let alone plan for, cross-cultural ramifications has been a central communication failure that has proven tremendously problematic. The mass media have been keen to report on these matters which, in turn, has modified public understanding of the matters being reported on.

I completed Air Command & Staff College in 1998 and Air War College in 2000. Air Command & Staff College (intermediate service school) completion is required for promotion from major to lieutenant colonel and Air War College (senior service school) is required for promotion from lieutenant colonel to colonel. Each branch of the military has these intermediate and senior service schools. Communication processes are consistently recognized as being primary concerns in these courses. My completion of both courses, being so close to September 11, 2001 and the March, 2003 start of the Iraq war, has allowed me to observe the U.S. military actions in relation to various areas of U.S. military theory. Some of this military theory conveyed inaccurate speculations but some of the speculations and assumptions have been incredibly accurate.

All works quoted in this report are from sources used in Professional Military Education

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