

EMBARGOED FOR TIME OF DELIVERY

Remarks by Tom Curley
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I never took a course in journalism or at Kansas. As a result, I needed a lot of help, and I got it from many graduates of this school. They made me look good at critical moments in my career and very important moments in American journalism during the last four decades. I am grateful to them and all of you. The White school is as good as we've got.

I am incredibly honored to be, as a tabloid might say, linked to William Allen White and this award. The sage of Emporia represented all that is good about the heartland. He rejected bigotry, fought for justice, demanded the truth and fearlessly defended fairness.

It's easy to imagine White's wit and insight fitting in with today's journalism. He was an editorial writer, commentator and part-time politician. But it's impossible to imagine which cable news network would take a conservative, populist supporter of the Progressive Party.

And that means we need William Allen White, and those who aspire to be him, more than ever. We need journalists ready to go to jail to defend freedom of speech. We need writers not afraid to take on unpopular causes and willing to ask the tough questions to help the rest of us discover a truth.

There is no doubt that White would have been angered by the last eight years. The right to access information and the ability to know the source of that information were diminished.

Now that a new administration has taken office and appears committed to breaking with the past, I would like to talk to you today about the challenges facing news organizations while reporting on America's involvement in armed conflicts and the growing challenge of distinguishing fact from propaganda.

I also call on the military to sit down with journalists and work out issues around battlefield access. In my lifetime, I've seen the popularity of two presidents collapse in part over opposition to the management of wars but in larger part over a failure

to come clean about battlefield realities. Americans understand hardship and setbacks. They expect honest answers about what's happening to their sons and daughters.

In a world where information is power, information is now considered a weapon, something that governments seek to monopolize. Since the 9/11 attacks, the White House and the Department of Defense have made major changes to well established policies.

The military dramatically has expanded its information operations to influence both U.S. and foreign publics.

Civilian policymakers and soldiers alike have cracked down on independent reporting from the battlefield. Generals have proclaimed that information dominance is as important, if not more so, than defeating the enemy with tanks and bullets.

In 1967, the AP looked into how much money the government was spending on public information and public relations. We found it totaled about 400 million dollars a year. At the time, that was more than the amount spent on Congress and the federal judiciary. It was more than double the combined budgets of the two wire services, all three television networks and the ten largest newspapers.

In financial terms, reporting on the government has always been a David versus Goliath proposition.

Budgets back then were simpler to analyze and easier to obtain. For the past year, AP has been looking into the defense department's spending on public affairs, psychological operations and strategic communication. It has not been easy. Many of the budgets are classified and the Freedom of Information Act requests move at a snail's pace.

But AP reported yesterday that the Pentagon is spending at least 4.8 billion dollars a year on influence operations. More than 27,000 defense department personnel are engaged in public affairs and media activities. These operations range from the very traditional activities of sending recruiters to high schools, advertising the importance of the armed forces on television, to producing thousands of print news stories and hundreds of television spots for distribution inside the United States.

And the budget also includes secret operations abroad to influence public opinion in favor of U.S. military endeavors. Their methods include planting news stories in foreign media, setting up fake web sites and even sending text messages to scare the bejesus out of people who oppose Pentagon policies.

There is a precedent for this behavior. In the late 1960's the Defense Department launched similar efforts.

One project was called Operation Understanding. The military would invite civic leaders to go on junkets with the hope they would return home and parrot the Pentagon line. The military called it community relations.

Operation Understanding continues today, though it no longer goes by that name. The Pentagon maintains 34 community outreach groups, each representing opinion leaders from a different segment of the population. When they aim to influence those communities, they call in the opinion leaders and try to convince them to support the Pentagon's policies.

The former military officers who served as experts for the television news networks made up just one of these lists and were named the retired military analyst outreach group.

When the details of Operation Understanding reached Congress in 1968, one lawmaker, Senator William Fulbright, dug a little deeper. He was so disgusted by what he found that he wrote a book in 1970 called the Pentagon Propaganda Machine.

Fulbright said, "During the past several years, there have been too many instances of lack of candor and or outright misleading statements in dealing with the public. Too often we have been misled by the very apparatus that is supposed to keep us factually informed or, in the very strictest sense, honestly guided."

The parallels to today could not be more striking.

Under the Pentagon's new policies the military is encouraged to promote its point of view with more vigor than ever before. Commanders are now told to produce more propaganda to attempt to influence foreign opinion and to ignore the possibility that this weaponized information could end up influencing the American public.

The new military doctrines that encourage these influence operations all trace their origin to defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's obsession with controlling what the world knew and when it knew it.

In 2002, he tried to establish a new division at the Pentagon called the Office of Strategic Influence. The office was intended to combine traditional public affairs with psychological warfare and military posturing to promote U.S. policy at home and abroad.

But when this office became public, congressional and journalistic outrage forced him to shut it down. He did not give up on the office's goals. Rumsfeld said a few weeks later at a military gathering that while the office technically no longer

existed, the driving principles behind it would endure. Over the subsequent seven years, Rumsfeld's ideas have become Pentagon doctrine.

In 2003 he signed the Information Operations Roadmap. This document, which remained secret until 2006, declared that developing the skills necessary to fight information warfare was critical. The roadmap declared that all of the military services should make influence operations a priority on par with air, land, sea and space warfare.

The document said psychological operations had been neglected for too long and would be given top priority in military planning. And as for the laws against exposing the American people to propaganda, well, Rumsfeld declared that principle antiquated.

In the years since, every major defense department document, field manual and doctrinal principle have been revised to reflect the ideas set out in the roadmap. The instruction for commanders to establish information dominance appears over and over again. And we have begun to see these principles put to use.

In October the Pentagon combined all of the defense department's media operations into a new defense media activity based at Fort Meade, Maryland. The DMA creates not only internal newspapers, magazines, radio and television products for the military but also plans to double the number of media products made available to civilian newspapers and broadcasters in 2009.

The defense visual information center plans to boost the number of photos and minutes of video it distributes to civilian media outlets by 10% in 2009. They hope to have 25,000 users, downloading 1.7 million images this year.

Gauging the growth in psychological operations has proven more difficult because they are among the most protected secrets our military keeps.

We have learned over the years that the military has a secret task force in Baghdad that works on information operations, particularly psychological warfare.

We also know that nearly half of those involved are civilian contractors working for companies like the Rendon Group and the Lincoln Group, which specialize in secret media campaigns. We have determined that civilian contractors earn more than 50 million dollars a year on a single psychological warfare contract just for Iraq.

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates justified the Pentagon's information war when he gave the Landon Lecture at Kansas State University in November 2007.

He said, "We are miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies

and our goals. It is just plain embarrassing that al-Qaida is better at communicating its message on the Internet than America.”

But does America need to resort to Al-Qaida’s tactics? Should the U.S. government be running Web sites that appear to be independent news outlets? Should the military be planting stories in foreign newspapers? Should the United States be trying to influence public opinion through subterfuge, both here and abroad?

I hope Secretary Gates has learned that what America says means nothing if our government’s deeds contradict those words. Good public relations cannot make up for bad public policy.

While the Pentagon has stepped up its media production and public relations blitz, the military has expended even greater effort to deny access to those who would act as a watchdog on its activities.

At the most basic level, the Pentagon has over-classified information that was once readily available to the public. This makes it harder for journalists to penetrate the bureaucracy and report on what the military is doing.

Public affairs officers at the Pentagon no longer act as sources of information but as intelligence gatherers who report on what journalists are working on. When a P-A-O refuses to provide information, requests made under the freedom of information act go unanswered for years unless that news organization is willing to engage in costly litigation.

Meanwhile, the situation on the battlefield seems to have changed little in 160 years.

The organization I represent, The Associated Press, was born of war. Reporting on armed conflict was one of our first and remains one of our most fundamental missions.

AP was created in 1846 during the Mexican-American war. AP dispatches were placed on boats to Mobile, Alabama, where express riders then carried them to the nearest telegraph station at Richmond, Virginia. The first report of the U.S. victory took five weeks to reach New York.

The AP’s reporting of the Civil War, though, would establish a pattern in the tumultuous relationship between the military and the media.

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton considered the press to be an obstacle to fighting the Civil War. At the very start he seized the telegraph system to give military messages priority and to censor AP’s stories. He then ordered his officers to draft daily war diaries for distribution to AP newspapers, offering an official, highly

skewed view of events. Stanton even ordered the execution of a New York Tribune reporter but was overruled by President Abraham Lincoln.

On the battlefield, reporters found outright hostility at many army headquarters. The army of the Potomac arrested AP agent Sid Deming and his messenger. General George Meade tied up a reporter and rode him out of town backwards on a mule.

Brigadier General William Tecumseh Sherman despised journalists, calling them spies, mongrels and infamous dogs. He said their reports aided the enemy, and he would not tolerate them. Sherman never allowed reporters within his lines, and those who approached his unit were driven off with threats to their lives.

When one reporter appealed to Sherman by saying the American people wanted to know the truth, Sherman replied: "We don't want the truth told about things here – that's what we don't want. Truth? No sir!"

The military also did not want the truth getting out from the Philippines in 1899. Correspondent Harold Martin complained that the censors in Manila during the insurrection were not concerned about military secrets, but wanted to make sure the American people did not stop supporting the war.

Among other things, they banned the use of the word ambush. The military finally stopped censoring the reports from the Philippines only after Martin and the AP took the case to General Arthur MacArthur.

The AP also stood up to unreasonable military censors in World War II. In 1945, Paris bureau chief Edward Kennedy reported the surrender of Germany the day it happened rather than waiting 24 hours for the official, politically orchestrated announcement.

The AP agreed to censorship only when it was intended to ensure military security. Kennedy said he saw no compelling reason to withhold the news of Germany's surrender, particularly because German radio already had announced it.

General Eisenhower had promised the Russians that he would wait to announce officially Germany's surrender. The military permanently withdrew Kennedy's accreditation, even though it admitted that there was no operational justification for delaying the story.

From an AP viewpoint, little has changed in the 21st century.

Commanding generals today still get angry at reports that reveal the realities of war, mistakes made on the battlefield or inform the public more quickly than they would like.

Last year a division commander told an AP reporter that the AP was aiding and abetting the enemy with its reporting. He said he did not want anyone from the AP embedded in his division.

On a recent visit to Baghdad, I met with a general officer who tried to convince me that AP's photographs from the battlefield – photographs that showed nothing more than the daily aftermath of war in Iraq – were hurting the U.S. war effort and helping Al-Qaida. Top commanders have told me that if the AP stood by its journalistic principles, the AP and I would be ruined.

U.S. officers regularly expel embedded reporters and detain photographers for hours, days – and sometimes for weeks and months. They are happy to have us around when the war is going in their favor, but they are equally quick to denounce us when we report on the darker days.

The embedded media program was supposed to change this dynamic. At the beginning of the war, journalists trained and embedded with the military. The ground rules fit on a single page of paper. During the invasion, not a single major problem was reported. At the end of 2003, the program was praised as a success and a model for future war reporting.

That era lasted only until the acronym IED became a part of America's lexicon.

During the worst days of the insurgency in Iraq, obtaining an embed in Anbar province was next to impossible. The public affairs officers would allow journalists only to embed with units that had good news stories to tell. The military expanded the ground rules from one page to four without consulting a single journalist. The rules have become so vague that a commander can now expel a journalist on a whim.

And the journalists have changed, too.

The evolution was the same as in Vietnam. The military was not achieving its goals, and the version of events supplied by military officers did not match what journalists were seeing on the ground. The media became less interested in the good news stories and more focused on the hard news of the day.

In Iraq, growing violence brought growing dangers to journalists. Because all non-Arabs were subject to kidnapping and possible beheading, news organizations began to employ more local reporters. The story required wire services such as the AP to have a multimedia reporting team in every large Iraqi town.

Iraqi reporters faced no less danger than their western counterparts. Their only advantage was that they could blend in on the crowded streets. Fundamentalists denounced them for working for western companies, and U.S. troops did not trust them because of their nationality.

So the old tensions returned. Commanders are fearful for their careers under this new doctrine that emphasizes information warfare. When we protest the new restrictions and the harsh treatment, the Pentagon tells us that the First Amendment does not grant us access to the battlefield. Political appointees and uniformed officers alike insist they have total authority in a war zone.

These excuses are as old as warfare itself. War is messy. War must be ruthless. The enemy will use the information against us. We cannot risk losing on the home front.

Civilians cannot handle the truth. We have to win hearts and minds. Information is a weapon.

These are all the same excuses Sherman used during the Civil War, and echoed by countless officers since then.

While this rejection of our First Amendment rights may seem like a bold move by our military, the proposition is not quite as shocking when you consider the context of the last eight years. The Bush administration asserted that in times of war the power of the president cannot be checked either by the legislature or the courts.

And especially not by the fourth estate.

The Bush administration stripped hundreds of men and women of their most basic human rights. Dozens of journalists, including eight working for the AP, have been imprisoned without charge for weeks, and in one case, for two years. The illegal and punitive detention of AP photographer Bilal Hussein is only the most egregious example.

The United States military stripped him of the right to habeas corpus, the right to freedom of expression, freedom of association and the right to due process. And when the military was forced finally to produce the evidence against him in a court of law, an Iraqi judicial panel found it without merit.

This is how you improve the standing of America around the world, by taking the universal human rights we enjoy as Americans and ensuring them for everyone. We need to walk the walk through our deeds, not just talk the talk through some covert PR campaign.

Predictably, relations between the media and the military have improved as the fighting in Iraq has subsided. The UN resolution that the military used to detain journalists in Iraq has expired.

A new administration is governing. In its first hours in office, it rolled back many of the abuses that became institutionalized over the previous eight years. But as journalists we need to realize that the good times are when we prepare for the bad. With the new focus on Afghanistan, the Pentagon faces more tough times, and we know from experience that when the going gets tough, the military gets tough on journalists.

So now is the time to renegotiate the rules of engagement between the military and the media. Now is the time to insist that the First Amendment does apply to the battlefield. Now is the time to resist the propaganda the Pentagon produces and live up to our obligation to question authority and thereby protect our democracy. Now is the time for the media to sit down with the military and determine a workable set of ground rules that serve the American people.

We must remember that no government, no administration, is going to give us our rights if we are not ready to stand up and fight for them. As well intentioned as President Obama may be, as journalists we have a duty to keep watch over the new administration and make sure that promises are kept, rights respected and that policies from the past do not continue to impinge on our responsibility to inform the American electorate.

And we must do this despite the fact that our industry faces its most challenging times in 150 years. But as our industry shrinks, the government is trying to fill the void. If journalists do not succeed, if we do not find our way financially, American democracy is at risk if the government becomes the main provider of information.

I have spoken only about the Department of Defense. But every government agency is on a full-court press to dominate the public discourse. We are the only force out there to keep the government in check and to hold it accountable.

William Allen White, a small town newspaper editor, was not afraid to take a long, hard look at his home state and offer a clear and compelling critique. He stood up to the most powerful men in the world and demanded accountability on the editorial page of not the New York Times, but the Emporia Gazette. And he was not afraid to go to jail to defend his First Amendment rights.

In a nod to White's common-sense approach, I ask every one of us to come up with one journalistic act that we can do in White's spirit -- be it an investigative story, a compelling editorial or simply speaking truth to power. And if we do that, Americans will reward us, and the spirit of William Allen White will spread across this land with a new generation of journalists.

Thank you.