

# Fourth Generation Warfare and the US Military's Social Media Strategy

## Promoting the Academic Conversation

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**F**ormer US secretary of defense Robert Gates cautioned that “the black-and-white distinction between conventional war and irregular war is becoming less relevant in the real world. . . . Possessing the ability to annihilate other militaries is no guarantee we can achieve our strategic goals—a point driven home especially in Iraq.”<sup>1</sup> During the twentieth century, the US military was structured to confront a peer competitor and—maximizing its advantages in intelligence, maneuver, and firepower—destroy the military basis of any threat to national security. In the war on terror, traditional thinking about what constitutes a battlefield as well as an outmoded calculus regarding the metrics of victory complicates the realization of US grand strategy. Access to and control of information alter the battle terrain. Conventional war on traditional battlefields—such as armored warfare, airpower, robotics, privatized forces, space, biological warfare, and counterinsurgency—has received much scholastic attention.<sup>2</sup> With the notable exception of James Der Derian’s exploration of the military-industrial-media-entertainment network, one finds few studies of military operations in the information environment, other than mass-mediated efforts of public affairs.<sup>3</sup> This article, therefore, seeks to draw scholastic atten-

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tion to these matters by connecting the military's social media strategy to theoretical perspectives on war strategy.

The Department of Defense (DOD) wishes to rapidly improve its effectiveness in the mediasphere because victory depends upon the holistic information environment. Gen Peter Chiarelli observes that “the commander who prevails in the information war is almost certain to win the war itself.”<sup>4</sup> The information battlespace of the war on terror is two dimensional: a global space where the world judges US actions and a domestic space where democratic citizens must remain convinced that action is necessary. In the twenty-first century, technology, demographics, and socio-political transitions alter the character of warfare in a manner akin to the changes wrought by the French Revolution. Contemporary military commanders must incorporate the effects of this transformation into planning for future operations. In the self-help arena of global politics, state survival is substantially predicated upon military preparedness to fight and win the next war. Barry Posen points out that the military's doctrine—theories that address how that organization performs its mission—may prove detrimental to state security if it “fails to respond to changes in political circumstances, adversary capabilities, or available military technology,” lacking innovations sufficient for the radical environment of international politics.<sup>5</sup>

The organization of military power through doctrine represents one element of grand strategy, the means by which states employ all of the instruments of national power to condition the international environment and realize specific national security objectives—the foremost of which is survival in the anarchic realm of world politics. States that fail to successfully integrate military doctrine with the wider ambitions of grand strategy probably will not attain security.<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of World War Two, for example, the United States successfully crafted the grand strategy of containment, which provided generations of policy makers an enduring template to guide American statecraft. The formulation and implementation of American grand strategy are complicated by the demands of the Constitution, which consciously divides war powers, and the *United States Code*, which directs the legal authority of the DOD in title 10 and the powers of the State Department in title 22. The structure of the federal government and American political culture have necessarily conditioned the evolution of US strategic communications policy as an element of grand strategy.

During crises, nations tighten the flow of information and deploy techniques that are in some way propagandist. Early in US history, such measures were temporary, but by the mid-twentieth century, the US government had developed ongoing measures of public diplomacy and public affairs—programs intended to influence the opinions of leaders and populations abroad and those designed to foster understanding of state policies domestically.<sup>7</sup> In 1965 the phrase *public diplomacy* arose as a euphemism for *propaganda*, though *strategic communication* now enjoys more common usage as an essential element in waging war, particularly the type of irregular war in which the United States now finds itself.<sup>8</sup> The media have long been central to studying American crises because, as journalist Marvin Kalb asked in a postmortem on news and foreign policy in Operation Desert Storm, “From whom, if not from the press, are the American people to get the information on which to base an intelligent decision on the worthiness of a particular war, or the soundness of their government’s strategies and policies, or the actual conditions on and above the fields of combat?”<sup>9</sup> Fifteen years later, the answer—and the focus of this article—is the Internet. Battles take place not only on land, at sea, and in the air but also within the minds of adversaries and the hearts of allies.

Information is a commodity receptive to weaponization, and the information environment has become vital to the success of military operations: “The information domain—primarily the internet—is now key terrain to be seized” in the domination of economic and diplomatic influence.<sup>10</sup> Consequently the United States has formally incorporated what Kenneth Payne calls “communication war” into doctrine.<sup>11</sup> This shift in strategic thought is apparent in doctrinal statements such as the US Army’s Field Manual 3.0, *Operations*, 2008, which outlines the concept of “full spectrum operations.”<sup>12</sup> The latter aims to advance thinking beyond orthodox “force on force” operations toward victory in the battle of ideas central to the tasks of nation building and the war on terror. Though not the sole driver of doctrinal innovation, technology is vital. In 1939–40 German innovations in doctrine for mechanized warfare shook the world. In the twenty-first century, the efforts of states to understand and exploit the military capabilities of the World Wide Web will prove instrumental to global security. This reality became apparent with the experiences of the Israel Defense Forces in the Hezbollah conflict of 2006, in which Hezbollah masterfully conducted an

information campaign that leveraged new media capabilities against a much stronger opponent, creating a “perception of failure” for the IDF with consequences that eclipsed the actual outcome of combat operations.<sup>13</sup>

The remainder of this article examines new social media—Web 2.0—in modern statecraft and outlines the opportunities and challenges presented by the requirement that the United States formally incorporate social media networks as a pillar of strategic communications strategy. Discussion begins with the (changing) nature of warfare from one of competing strength, to competing weaponry, to competing information, before explaining the DOD’s development of social media strategy and policy since 2007. The article then offers examples of communication issues and successes for the military before concluding with reflections about the Clausewitzian implications for US diplomacy and warcraft.

### The Transformation of War

Destruction of enemy forces provides no guarantee of military success. In the Vietnam War, American forces demolished the Vietcong as an effective opponent after the 1968 Tet offensive and defeated the North Vietnamese Army in the 1972 Eastertide offensive. The US military never experienced defeat on the battlefields of Southeast Asia, but, as a senior North Vietnamese officer wryly observed at the Paris peace talks, that fact, ultimately, was irrelevant.<sup>14</sup> Such an incongruous outcome would hardly have surprised Carl von Clausewitz, the foremost theoretician of modern war, who noted, “When whole communities go to war—whole peoples and especially *civilized* peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the occasion is always due to some political object. War, therefore, is an act of policy” (emphasis in original).<sup>15</sup> Thus, policy determines the character of war, but he also cautions that “as a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone.”<sup>16</sup> These elements correspond to the populace of a country, its army and commander, and the government; the Clausewitzian trinity provides the foundation of military operations.

The blind natural force of primordial violence that Clausewitz describes is conspicuously resident in the population, where it comprises part of what he calls the “moral forces” now recognizable as public opinion.<sup>17</sup> The moral elements are among the most vital in wartime: “One might say that the physical seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade.”<sup>18</sup> In the twenty-first century, Clausewitz claims nearly universal acknowledgement as the foremost theoretician of modern warfare. A participant in the Napoleonic wars, he witnessed the apogee of a phase of Western warfare based upon the musket and massed line and column formations of infantry. These tactics reflected the demands of technology and the realities of contemporary society. If Clausewitz was exacting in characterizing the enduring features of war, he was also acutely conscious of the dynamic character of warfare. He recognized social, economic, and political conditions as variables contributing to the distinct structure and character of military institutions. Clausewitz further recognized the evolution of military institutions, observing that “every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions. . . . It follows that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities.”<sup>19</sup>

The social, economic, and political transformations associated with globalization are reshaping warfare for a new age—the fourth generation of warfare. Just as the printing press proved essential to the French Revolution and its wars, so does the new mediascape present a new dimension of the topology of global power: “The information revolution is not just changing the way people fight, it is altering the way people think and what they decide to fight *for*” (emphasis in original).<sup>20</sup> The record of the invasion of Iraq in 2003 helps to partially illuminate the dimensions of this new zone of contest. Salam Pax, the pseudonymous Iraqi “Baghdad blogger,” developed a readership of millions through daily online observations, and the global media quoted him extensively. In his postmortem of the US Marine Corps’s battle for Fallujah in April–May 2004, Col Ralph Peters, a *New York Post* columnist, observed that the Marines were not defeated in the physical realm by the insurgency but in the information realm—stopped by fear of poor public opinion in “already hostile populations.”<sup>21</sup>

Technology is sometimes regarded as a separate theory of military superiority, outweighing considerations of material resources, leadership,

maneuver, or valor.<sup>22</sup> Two decades ago, a group of military scholars sought to classify and analyze the forces reshaping warfare, specifying technology and ideas as the major catalysts compelling evolution in the relationship between warfare and society.<sup>23</sup> The contours of this “fourth generation warfare” are especially pertinent in any analysis of the ongoing evolution of politics and war. The fourth generation battlefield encompasses the entire enemy society, and—contrary to twentieth century experience—massed force may prove detrimental to victory. The object of military operations becomes collapsing the enemy internally rather than destroying him in combat. Legitimate targets will include popular support for the conflict, and “actions will occur concurrently throughout all participants’ depth, including their society as a cultural, not just a physical, entity.”<sup>24</sup> The rise of a network society implies networked insurgency, in which organizations exist in parts in the real world, in cyberspace, and in both dimensions. As insurgencies and terrorist organizations skillfully manipulate the media battlespace to their advantage, combatants will strive to weaponize information in order to “alter domestic and world opinion to the point where skillful use of psychological operations will sometimes preclude the commitment of combat forces. A major target will be the enemy population’s support of its government and the war,” making the media more lethal than armored divisions.<sup>25</sup>

### Development of the US Military’s Use of Social Media

The US military created the Internet with its Advanced Research Projects Agency network decades ago and ushered in the use of sophisticated communication for social control a century ago by using telephones and telegraphs to maintain a police state in the Philippines.<sup>26</sup> Only recently has the military begun to utilize the World Wide Web in its battle plans.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the growth of the Internet in the global mediascape chronologically coincided with the shrinkage of public diplomacy efforts through amendments to the US Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948, also known as the Smith-Mundt Act.<sup>28</sup> Internet-based social networking became a phenomenon between 2001 and 2004, with the development of *Wikipedia*, *Friendster*, and *Myspace*, but not until 2007 did the US military appear to seriously consider the full scope of Web 2.0 usage. At this time, the DOD’s Pentagon Channel posted YouTube videos, and the Army shared rudimentary content on Flickr, *del.icio.us*, and YouTube, including bloggers in an in-

creasing number of conference calls in Iraq and Afghanistan. Concurrently, however, a general derided Michael Yon, a popular military blogger; the Pentagon banned US military personnel worldwide from accessing YouTube; and the Army ordered Soldiers to stop posting blogs or sending personal e-mails without content clearance by a superior officer. Concerns about Soldiers' use of Web 2.0 ranged from bandwidth problems to threats to operational security.

In 2007 Secretary of Defense Gates lamented that America is “miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society. . . . Al Qaeda is better at communicating its message on the Internet than America.”<sup>29</sup> By the start of 2008, Lt Gen William B. Caldwell, currently the commander of US Army North (Fifth Army) and senior commander of Fort Sam Houston and Camp Bullis, began pleading with the armed services—thus countering Pentagon policy—to allow troops to access and contribute to social media. His plan called for encouragement, empowerment, education, and equipment. By allowing Soldiers to tell their stories, the military would improve its image, give subordinates more initiative, educate personnel on the consequences of their actions, and supply Soldiers with the technology to reach these goals.<sup>30</sup> By 2009 Army bases no longer blocked Twitter, Facebook, or Flickr.<sup>31</sup> Another year passed before the DOD announced a policy more tolerant of, if not entirely open to, troops' use of social media.<sup>32</sup> By 2010 the following events had occurred: the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Public Affairs, put a four-part social media strategy in place for Adm Mike Mullen's online and social media presences; the deputy secretary of defense distributed a memorandum about “responsible and effective use of internet-based capabilities”; the Online and Social Media Division of the Army produced a document on social media best practices that outlined tactics, techniques, and procedures; social media was included in initial military training; and the curriculum at the Command and General Staff College included “information engagement assignments.” By 2011 the US State Department had abandoned its “static” America.gov website in favor of developing interactive and proactive social media.<sup>33</sup>

### Battle of the Narrative Challenges

After 1945 US forces were configured to confront those of a peer competitor and swiftly destroy them in classic force-on-force engagements. To

fulfill this objective, the US military now possesses command of the global commons—sea, space, and air—the longtime “key military enabler of the U.S. global power position.”<sup>34</sup> Sea lines of communication and geosynchronous orbits lie beyond the sovereignty of individual states but remain vital to global access for communication and transportation. Airspace is controlled by the countries underneath, but only a few states can deny US warplanes access to their airspace above 15,000 feet. However impressive, this capability does not imply planetary control, and American power is not beyond challenge or damage. Indeed, a lack of clarity in its communication approach has hindered US success in recent years.

The US Army War College defines strategy conceptually as the relationship among ends, ways, and means, wherein the objectives must be developed first.<sup>35</sup> Military strategy for social media, however, often appears nonstrategic, a fact particularly emphasized in the first of five “key considerations” for such a strategy released by the Army Public Affairs Division: “Have one.”<sup>36</sup> Other key components of social media strategy included the advice that online presence was not an adequate goal and that needs should dictate the choice of the platform. As a partial response to the fact that the military put strategy second to engagement in its rush to catch up with social media, an article by Col Thomas Mayfield in the National Defense University’s journal *Joint Force Quarterly* recommends specific social media goals of increased situational awareness, provision of improved public information, and enhanced unity of effort—incorporated across the full spectrum of conflict.<sup>37</sup> It is not yet clear that the military is following its own advice. For example, the social media strategy of the Joint Chiefs of Staff concentrated on engagement of the audience, alignment of content with priorities, direction of online conversation, and expansion of the audience, seemingly selecting platforms by popularity rather than function and then adjusting content—and its stimuli—to fit.<sup>38</sup> Mayfield also notes that the military is struggling with the bottom-up structure inherent in, and required for, effective social media practices.<sup>39</sup>

Information technology is revolutionizing the structure of global power, wherein the effectiveness of a state’s deployment of information power determines the success of the state in influencing the world politic.<sup>40</sup> Information is now a weaponized commodity, and the mediasphere is a critical element of the operational milieu for armed forces.<sup>41</sup> The legacy



doctrines of the Cold War have little utility for the US armed forces; this is a learning environment that affords equal opportunity to all players, and this new cyber realm of global power is a hotly contested zone for American authority.<sup>42</sup> The influence of new media does not merely alter the power equation among states—after all, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 offered no return address; rather, it constitutes “a wholly new sort of global nervous system,” enabling new virtual social communities to thrive and expedite unfiltered communication internationally.<sup>43</sup>

This new dimension of global social power continually undergoes refinement and expansion; events from the opening of the new era can only partially illuminate the contours of the new terrain and the utility of information operations (IO) in modern conflict. In the 1990s, the Zapatistas organized an insurgency around a core strategy of IO, dominating the Mexican government in the information realm. In 1998 the Chiapas insurrection gained the support of the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), which exploited the mediascape to bolster the Zapatista movement. These tactical innovators were among the first to appreciate the mobilization capabilities of the new information environment. Typically, they would publicize an attack long before the actual event, and the EDT used “chat rooms, Internet advertisements and computer conferences” to publicize the insurrection.<sup>44</sup> The success of any operation was irrelevant—the overall objective was purely political. The Mexican government’s official recognition of the Zapatistas in 2001 and its support of a peaceful solution to the conflict confirmed the logic of the campaign. In the IO realm, the Zapatistas were true innovators, recognized by their peers as information warriors par excellence.<sup>45</sup>

The Iraq War demonstrated that US technology and equipment granted no decisive edge in information warfare against an innovative, opportunistic opponent. As General Caldwell observes, the new media eclipses convention while simultaneously encouraging its manipulation by unconventional adversaries. The advent of “digital multimodality,” a key enabler, allows “content produced in one form [to] be easily and rapidly edited and repackaged, then transmitted in real time across many different forms of media. The potential for engagement is staggering.”<sup>46</sup> In Iraq the web was a potent amplifier for insurgency, serving effectively as a conduit for tactical

knowledge, including construction and placement of improvised explosive devices, ambush techniques, and briefings on US maneuvers.

Al-Qaeda, however, also conducted a masterful strategic IO campaign on the web to promote Salafist jihad. The Internet allows unrestricted access, and for sympathizers these sites offer discussions from casual chat to sophisticated conversations about ideologies, strategies, and equipment, presented through all the multimedia, interactive formats available on the web. Such exchanges—whether abstract or practical, polemical or intellectual—are designed for organizational, persuasive, and educational purposes.<sup>47</sup> According to an article in *Parameters*, “A typical al Qaeda format is the ‘martyr video,’ often featuring a suicide bomber who appears to rise from the grave to lecture the survivors about the justice of his or her cause.”<sup>48</sup> Additional formats include morale-boosting video coverage of individuals like “Juba,” a Baghdad sniper claiming to have killed or wounded dozens of US troops. From the earliest stages of the war in Iraq, insurgent attacks were planned as media events. Through outlets like the As-Sahab media group, al-Qaeda consciously fashions attribution and authority, and skillful IO warriors such as Abu Maysara direct these media labs with great prowess.

The US military, however, has a history of inadequately utilizing information and communication technology. For example, its excessive use of overly complex and largely meaningless PowerPoint presentations is infamous, and even the reputedly web-savvy Obama administration has received only middling appraisal of its online communiqués.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, US IO strategy and structure in Iraq were limited.<sup>50</sup> In 2003 the Pentagon awarded an \$82 million no-bid contract to Science Applications International Corporation to establish the Iraqi Media Network; by the time the network printed its first newspaper, 20–30 independent newspapers had already appeared.<sup>51</sup> In the realm of new social media, antiquated organization and regulations confounded the US effort. In 2007 two civilian DOD employees proposed a YouTube channel for the coalition forces in Iraq. From its inception, channel MNF-1 was plagued by an orthodox mind-set and outmoded restrictions.<sup>52</sup> For all intents and purposes, the overall strategic communication effort following the invasion proceeded from the notion that the truth will tell its own story and invariably triumph over its opponents.

So far, much military use of Web 2.0 appears best suited for domestic communication and public relations. Common application of social media

by the US forces involves contrived discussions about eye-catching pictures of military equipment or service members' favorite military moments, allowing the military to unobtrusively control and/or direct communication in its ranks and in a resource-limited news environment. The "battle of the narrative," as it is called in the *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*, involves the establishment of favorable reasons for and potential outcomes of a conflict so that opposing narratives become irrelevant, not only in-theater but also domestically.<sup>53</sup> Social networking makes it easier for warriors to keep in touch with loved ones, therefore helping to maintain both military and civilian morale as well as further serving military needs of recruitment, retention, and troop support. The military has a significant interest in preserving interpersonal civil-military ties for all its members: "Recruitment, morale, and retention of military personnel are affected by family members' attitudes toward the military life-style."<sup>54</sup> Soldiers' morale and outlook positively correlate to their assessment of their families' ability to adjust to the military lifestyle, to their perception of the available support for their families, and to satisfactory communication with their families.<sup>55</sup> Survival of the military depends on the commitment of its members, ensured by emotional and material compensation as well as through normative pressures directly on the service members and indirectly on the members' families—with whom the military competes for loyalty.<sup>56</sup>

Web 2.0 fosters a community for estranged family members and offers an outlet for Soldiers experiencing trauma.<sup>57</sup> The military branches' Facebook pages promote solidarity—for example, the written cheer "Hooah!" appears as a common response to posts by the Army. Official Facebook pages serve as controlled outlets for both celebrating and griping, as posts to Twitter and Facebook link up Soldiers with the *DoDLive* blogs that ask for thoughts and feelings about various military practices and services. Military wives and mothers frequently add comments, allowing them to form a support network with each other while simulating closeness with their distant service members. "Milblogging" has been called therapeutic and is thought to boost the war effort by increasing camaraderie, efficiency, and communication. Lighthearted "video postcards" on YouTube, such as a viral video of Soldiers in drag re-creating Lady Gaga's *Telephone* music

video, are celebrated by the military for their stress-relieving and morale-building qualities.<sup>58</sup>

The new social media are also generating a shift in the formation and maintenance of communities; people are changing allegiance from nations to causes; and social networking sites create virtual communities larger than many countries.<sup>59</sup> In the traditional security dilemma, self-help in an anarchic system facilitates the state's quest for survival.<sup>60</sup> Philip Cerny, however, theorizes a "new security dilemma" in which people's first loyalties are to religion, sect, or ethnicity; allegiance to the modern state, therefore, becomes an unproductive means of security.<sup>61</sup> As Thomas Hobbes recognized, sovereignty ultimately depends upon the willingness of individuals to sacrifice their lives for the survival of the state.<sup>62</sup> In the era of Napoleonic wars analyzed by Clausewitz, France leveraged aspects of improvements in mass communication to forge a military of revolutionary size and potential. The concept of citizenship was essential to the motivation and success of the *levée en masse* and the French Army.<sup>63</sup> Frank Webster, however, argues that "the public are no longer mobilized to fight wars as combatants, they are mobilized as spectators of war—and the character of this mobilization is of utmost consequence."<sup>64</sup> In recent years, however, even spectatorship is flagging, adding to the military's challenge of informing and wooing the American people.<sup>65</sup>

In a perceptive analysis of the impact of the new media on warfare, Audrey Kurth Cronin submits that as networked media alter the nature of human society, the means and ends of mass mobilization are transformed.<sup>66</sup> The well-publicized cases of the Iranian, Xinjiang, and London riots emphatically illustrate the organizational and persuasive utility, particularly at the grassroots level, of social media engagement.<sup>67</sup> Colonel Mayfield explains that "around the world, social media are becoming commonplace tools for political and social activism. If military leaders do not fully understand these tools, they may miss their significant impact on the nature of future conflicts. America's potential enemies are using these technologies now to enhance their efforts. The U.S. military can either engage in the social media environment seriously or cede this ground to the enemy."<sup>68</sup>

## Implications and Considerations

Forging an “arc of consent” remains vital to the prospects for victory. New social media deeply condition American commanders’ task of maintaining public animus toward an enemy. The military, comprising less than half of 1 percent of the population, often seems “a breed apart, a closed hierarchical organization resembling a monastic order.”<sup>69</sup> As a result, in full-spectrum operations, the military not only must gain dominance over the enemy but also educate the American public concerning the necessity of combat and the activities of the DOD in fulfilling American policy abroad. Additionally, it must recognize that “virtually every action, message, and decision of a force shapes the opinions of an indigenous population.”<sup>70</sup> Web 2.0 and the advent of communication war are also changing the means of carrying out conflict in world politics. IO is intensely political in character, and Clausewitz’s theories on war lose none of their validity in the twenty-first century. In fact, as Randall Collins’s dynamic theory of battle indicates, revolutions in military technology do not require new theories of warfare because technological advancements fall within the broader considerations of material resources, organizational morale, and maneuver.<sup>71</sup> Col William Darley postulates that “Clausewitz’s theory appears to specifically predict contests settled mainly by political rhetoric without violence.”<sup>72</sup> In the context of global politics of the twenty-first century, US policy makers confront the key task of effectively integrating Web 2.0 and beyond into military planning and doctrine and synchronizing IO doctrine with grand strategy. Web 2.0’s fostering of new forms of community and belonging is altering the character of warfare. Alternatives to the state are flourishing in this new realm while states struggle to respond and catch up to it. Web 2.0 dictates that states must change their traditional mode of operations concerning warfare, both on the front lines and on the home front. Clausewitz claimed that war was “the continuation of politics by different means.”<sup>73</sup> In the battle of the narrative, however, politics becomes another means of war.

In the coming century, war will endure as a fundamental, tragic element of statecraft, but the ongoing transformation of the mediascape is altering war and the causes for which people are willing to fight. Clausewitz understood that war alone does not provide a final settlement. In the twentieth century, the social forces inherent in the French Revolution achieved maturity, and France was humbled by these trends in Algeria and Vietnam. The

American experience in Southeast Asia offers further stark evidence that a war could be won militarily and lost politically. The enduring utility of Clausewitz is manifest here, and policy makers and commanders would dismiss these insights at their peril. The potential of the mediascape for changing the political outcome of armed conflict is plain: states and others confront a situation akin to the development of mechanized operations in the interwar era. For America in particular, the test is acute, as opponents have repeatedly witnessed the futility of attempting to challenge US forces on the conventional battlefield and savvy strategists will concentrate new energy to master the infosphere, where the US advantage remains indistinct.

The maturation of Web 2.0 has profound implications for military planning and operations. In traditional engagements, commanders concerned themselves with identifying the Clausewitzian “center of gravity” of hostile forces and directing appropriate force to that point to secure victory in decisive combat. After eliminating Iraq’s military, American commanders realized that the indigenous population represented the new operational center of gravity in defeating insurgency.<sup>74</sup> In a battle of the narrative, the insurgents swiftly exploited the new social media to depict coalition forces as brutal and incompetent. In this contest, a crucial struggle involved structuring operations to undermine the legitimacy of insurgent forces, convincing Iraqi citizens that the coalition would consistently deliver security and assistance.

As vital as the hostile forces’ center of gravity is to operations, “friendly” centers of gravity also exist, and for US policy makers and commanders, none are as fundamental as the domestic support of the American people. Public opinion is a key element of the decisions made by the elite, and the prestige and popularity of the military in its society are key components of military might and activity.<sup>75</sup> In the twenty-first century, the United States will obtain strategic goals only if it masters the capabilities of new social media in sustaining and fortifying Clausewitz’s enduring trinity. As operations in Iraq and Afghanistan move to closure for the United States, the DOD is incorporating the experience into the task of the complete development of IO as a war-fighting discipline, and the incessant development of the mediasphere implies that doctrine requires a nearly constant process of refinement. If America wishes to command the mediasphere as well as it commands the commons, then it must accord IO equal status with other

combat arms—fused within every operational domain rather than treated as distinct. According to the deputy commanding general of Training and Doctrine Command, “We must have the agility to use our technological advantage . . . so that as a main gun round moves downrange to destroy a sniper position, simultaneously the digital image of the sniper violating the rules of war, plus the necessary information to create the packaged product, can be transmitted.”<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

Clausewitz maintained that political considerations do not extend to the posting of sentries or the conduct of patrols, but it is becoming apparent that in the new terrain of the mediated battlespace, the distinctions between politics and war are blurring. In the twenty-first century, IO probably will become more relevant and commonplace, with some US operations consisting solely of information campaigns directed by a dedicated IO command and staff. In this new realm, the weaponization of Web 2.0 will become fully realized. Here, vital intelligence preparation of the battlefield will involve the labor of “digital natives” trained as “social media scouts” to reconnoiter the battlespace and the hostile force. Marketing campaigns and online polling will be essential to identifying key constituencies in the area of operations. The transformations needed to realize these capabilities are not limited to military doctrine but of necessity incorporate change throughout the US government in order to uphold the Constitution. In particular, we must re-examine the duties of the DOD and the State Department and update them to clearly delineate missions and responsibilities.

Furthermore, we may need to refurbish the Smith-Mundt Act, a legacy of the Cold War, to reflect the realities of the contemporary mediascape. The act was originally designed to allow and fund US governmental transnational communication through mediated and interpersonal educational, cultural, and technological exchanges.<sup>77</sup> Beginning in 1972, however, a series of amendments to the act questioned the appropriateness and cost of the US government’s providing international information services. These changes had the effect of slowly rendering Smith-Mundt impotent, creating a “prophylactic effect” under the assumption that American information activities are unclean and must be barred from entering the US public.<sup>78</sup> The separation of the foreign from the domestic prohibits true global engage-

ment and has made the US government dependent on private media, further contributing to the country's information/media monopoly in an era when news sources are reducing their coverage of foreign affairs. Within the new social media environment, the US government is discovering that it must relearn how to communicate directly with its audiences. Via current Web 2.0 platforms, however, it still depends on private media for its conduit and has allowed the format to direct not only information content but also some government actions. (See, for example, the Joint Chiefs of Staff strategy of 2010, which specifies the selection of Admiral Mullen's activities according to their appropriateness for social media broadcast.)<sup>79</sup>

Further expansion of warfare into the mediasphere represents a conceptual break with orthodox modes of conflict, but in vital respects there is continuity with the ancient logic of war. The contemporary international security order is fraught with uncertainty, but for the foreseeable future, the military power of the United States will clearly prove indispensable in the maintenance of that order. American command of the commons probably will encounter no serious challenges in the short term, but such doctrine and firepower in themselves likely will not assist in the realization of strategic goals. In this media-based contest, the task involves control of the master narrative, convincing skeptical and often hostile audiences that American power will not be restrained but used judiciously for the greater good—increasing the consequences of the military's interactions with industry and academe.

This inquiry has also highlighted the contemporary issues of irregular war in scholastic terms. Military officers, strategists, and instructors have produced most of the writings and studies on fourth generation warfare, the information environment, and the war on terror. As indicated previously, topics such as armored warfare, airpower, robotics, privatized forces, space, biological warfare, counterinsurgency, and domestic media usage—but not information and media-based campaigns—have received considerable academic attention. Those who study security policy and military strategy should attune to the significance of the military's social media strategy and usage for America in realizing strategic goals against recalcitrant peoples, regardless of power disparities. The challenge for the United States and its allies lies in achieving and maintaining competency, if not superiority, in the constantly evolving terrain of the mediasphere.



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