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REPORTERS OR CHEERLEADERS: EMBEDDED VERSUS UNILATERAL REPORTING DURING TASK FORCE ORION

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JCSP 39

Master of Defence Studies

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PCEMI 39

Maîtrise en études de la défense

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
JCSP 39 – PCEMI 39
2012 – 2013

MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES – MAÎTRISE EN ÉTUDES DE LA DÉFENSE

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Word Count: 19 169

Compte de mots: 19 169

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ABSTRACT

The debate over embedded versus unilateral conflict reporting remains a heated one normally focused on the issue of objectivity, with many critics of embedded journalism arguing that it is simply impossible to maintain objectivity when your life is entrusted to the military. This thesis argues that both embedded and unilateral journalists – while providing different views of conflict – are essential to the provision of a comprehensive and factual view of a conflict to the public they serve. Despite concerns over media management by the military, what is equally concerning is the narrow perspectives offered by embedded or unilateral reporting individually. Evidence for this argument is based on a study of embedded and unilateral reporters' experiences and coverage of Task Force ORION in Afghanistan from February to August 2006. The Canadian Forces embedding program proved successful through its education of the news media and Canadian citizens regarding military operations in Afghanistan and equally reminded the military about the criticality of the media within a healthy democracy. The embedding program succeeded as a result of its tolerance for periods of unilateral reporting by journalists who chose to embed, allowing for the perspectives of Afghan civilians, the Taliban, governmental officials and non-governmental organizations to be heard by the Canadian public. Together, embedded and unilateral journalists in Afghanistan during Task Force ORION were able to create a much more comprehensive and balanced picture of a complicated war.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Canadian journalists and Government of Canada senior public servants for their participation in my thesis research – your extensive field experience, both in Afghanistan during Task Force ORION and across the globe, lend a legitimacy and credibility that I simply could not have achieved alone. Your fearlessness under fire in more conflicts than I have known and dedication to telling stories of war worlds away to Canadians is truly inspiring. To Dr. Steve Lukits, your encouragement, patience and understanding were instrumental to this achievement. Your enthusiasm for my research made me push ever forward. To my parents, thank you for your encouragement from afar. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my son, Hadrian Connell Dunlop. Hadrian, at eight years old, you have supported your mommy at "Army College" for nearly ten months so that I could learn to "make better plans;" you are my hero, and for your unfailing support I am eternally grateful and humbled.

*Objectivity and honesty are **not** the same thing, though, and it is entirely possible to write with honesty about the very personal and distorting experiences of war.*[1]

- Sebastian Junger, *War*

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1. From Vietnam to Iraq: The Evolution of the Modern War Correspondent

"You're either with us or against us." An irrefutable warning to the international community as the United States prepared for its 2003 invasion of Iraq, former President George W. Bush's words may also have served as a warning to the news media. The irreconcilable "Jekyll and Hyde" of the war correspondent – the battle between patriotism and journalistic objectivity – has never been more pointed. This is not surprising considering that the news media was blamed by the United States military and many politicians for the loss of the Vietnam War. Characterized by unfettered media accreditation, free access to operations, leadership, tactical units and local nationals, and the ability to get any story, Vietnam war reporting was revolutionary. Independent and eager to stimulate public debate, over two thousand reporters moved freely around the battlefield interviewing everyone they could as opposed to taking the Pentagon's press briefings as gospel.[2] As Michael Herr, *Esquire* magazine's Vietnam war correspondent, stated:

> All kinds of people have held them [Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) accreditation cards] at one time or another: […] second-string literary figures who wrote about how they hated the war […] syndicated eminences who houseguested with Westmoreland or Bunker […] a lot of hacks who wrote down every word that the generals and officials told them to write […] the press corps was as diffuse and faceless as any regiment in the war.[3]

Independent and critical reporting in Vietnam was further complicated by the disillusionment of American military command regarding operational and tactical successes; "Vietnam moments"

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[1] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 26.

[2] **"**Press Freedom vs Military Censorship," last accessed 24 March 2013, http://www.crfforum.org/topics/?topicid=3&catid=3&view=document&id=48.

[3] Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1978), 220-222.

as Sebastian Junger called them in *War*. These moments were those "in which you weren't so much getting misled as getting asked to participate in a kind of collective wishful thinking."[4] The military lost credibility as a result of its provision of a false, yet desperately emphasized, picture of war successes versus a dire combat reality. Walter Cronkite, the renowned anchor of the *CBS Evening News*, travelled to Vietnam in 1968. Moving away from the basic tenants of objective reporting, "Cronkite concluded his reports on the Tet offensive with a personal commentary in which he voiced his strong belief that the war would end in stalemate."[5] Combine this commentary with the fact that censorship was limited to non-existent in Vietnam and you have a perfect storm for anti-war protests and the undermining of national foreign policy. From Cronkite's perspective, the war correspondent's coverage of a conflict is absolutely critical, but only when there is a system in place to ensure operational security is maintained; in his opinion, this is where the American military failed in Vietnam.[6]

Extreme censorship of the media during military operations ensued as a result of the Vietnam experience. During the Falklands War of 1982, "all the significant news, good or bad, was announced or leaked from London"[7] rather than reported consistently by correspondents in the region. The reports that did in fact make it out "were censored, delayed, occasionally lost, and at best sent back by the swiftest carrier-turtle the Royal Navy could find,"[8] with some reporters prefacing their bulletins with the statement that they were being censored. Despite

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[4] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 132.

[5] "Reporting American at War," last accessed 24 March 2013, http://www.pbs.org/weta/reportingamericaatwar/reporters/cronkite/.

[6] From "Reporting America at War: An Oral History." *Compiled by Michelle Ferrari, with commentary by James Tobin, published by Hyperion, 2003. Copyright ©, 2003 Goodhue Pictures.*

[7] Julian Barnes, "The worst reported war since the Crimean" (guardian.co.uk at 12.50 GMT on Monday, 25 February 2002), 6.

[8] *Ibid*., 6.

media being fully dominated by televised imagery, the Falklands War saw no British pictures for 54 of the 74 days the conflict lasted.[9]

The invasion of Grenada on October 25, 1983, was given no advance warning until President Ronald Reagan's televised press conference stating that "the United States had no choice but to act strongly and decisively to oppose a brutal gang of leftist thugs who had violently taken over the island on March 12, 1983."[10] Four hundred reporters flocked to the island of Barbados, but were denied transport to Grenada by the American military. Two days after the invasion, on October 27, fifteen reporters were granted access to the island but were prevented from filing stories due to alleged "air traffic." Nearly five days passed during which only military-produced clips were available for broadcasting to the public, with an end to press restrictions only granted on October 29.[11]

Military restrictions continued into the 2001 Gulf War when American-dominated press pools were created so reporters could have access to military units via an escort officer; independent journalists were required to rely upon press pool dispatches from Dhahran or Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, their access to the battlefield denied by American military forces.[12] Critiques of the press pool system were that military escorts were bullying or speaking for soldiers and that dispatches were often out-dated by release due to an extensive and laborious military vetting process. While some independent or unilateral reporters managed to sneak into the desert and file stories via cell phones, many were arrested or held for questioning and sent back to Dhahran by the military. In a Roper public opinion poll after the 2001 Gulf War, 68% of

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[9] Julian Barnes, "The worst reported war since the Crimean" (guardian.co.uk at 12.50 GMT on Monday, 25 February 2002), 6.

[10] David A. Frenznick, "The First Amendment on the Battlefield: A Constitutional Analysis of Press Access to Military Operations in Grenada, Panama and the Persian Gulf" (First appeared at 23 Pac.L.J. 315(1992)), 2-3.

[11] *Ibid.*, 3.

those polled believed military control of the news was about right, 17% wanted more control and 13% wanted less control.[13] Interestingly, it is very likely that most polled had little understanding of what military control of the media entailed and how it did or did not affect the perspectives they got of the war.

Adamant to ensure national policy was not undermined, the George W. Bush administration expended inordinate amounts of time and energy on a media strategy to "make certain that the public was convinced of the need to invade Iraq"[14] in 2003. The result was the embedded journalism strategy, with embedded journalists existing as those attached to a military unit involved in an armed conflict. Under this new strategy, media coverage saw networks, in the words of the director-general of the BBC, "wrapped […] in the American flag and substitut[ing] patriotism for impartiality."[15] The "general impression held by non-American journalists was that the media in the United States had been intimidated by the U.S administration into softening its normally critical and analytical attitude."[16] Initial coverage of the military push across the Kuwaiti border into Iraq was a ground-breaking 24/7 show of American "shock and awe" that appeared comprehensive, with embedded journalists supplementing big picture network coverage with minute-to-minute battlefield updates. However, subsequent coverage tended towards a very patriotic painting of American operations in Iraq, with larger contextual

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[12] "Press Freedom vs Military Censorship," last accessed 24 march 2013, http://www.crfforum.org/topics/?topicid=3&catid=3&view=document&id=48.

[13] *Ibid*.

[14] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xi.

[15] Greg Dyke, *Independent*[London], 25 April 2003' quoted in Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xi.

[16] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xii.

independent reporting from a local, national, international or enemy perspective virtually non-existent.[17]

During Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, neither an exclusively embedded or unilateral approach to reporting worked. For the purposes of this thesis, a unilateral reporter is one who refuses to be embedded. Embedded reporting provides a fascinating boots on the ground view of a battlefield that resonates with the public, safe passage to locations oftentimes inaccessible to civilians, and an opportunity to see first-hand the government's instrument of war execute its will. However, it misses the big picture context that is the unilateral reporter's advantage; the capacity to place a conflict within a local, regional and international context. It is for this reason that both embedded and unilateral reporting must work towards a common objective – to report the facts to the public and to make critical insights into those facts.

1.2. The Debate over Embedded versus Unilateral Conflict Reporting

Today, the debate over embedded versus unilateral conflict reporting remains a heated one normally focused on the issue of objectivity, with many critics of embedded journalism arguing that it is simply impossible to maintain objectivity when your life is entrusted to the military. Objectivity is not just an issue unique to the embedded journalist, but a daily issue for journalists across the board. This thesis will argue that both embedded and unilateral journalists – while providing different views of conflict – are critical to the provision of a comprehensive and factual view of a conflict to the public they serve. A single approach results in a limited view of a given conflict, with the ground truth or the regional or international context compromised. This thesis will further investigate the military desire for media control – in particular how the

[17] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq* (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xiii.

Canadian Forces attempts to influence media coverage – and how journalists navigate the dangerous relationship between themselves and the military.

Following in the footsteps of the United States, the Canadian Forces instituted a Media Embed Program (MEP) in February 2007, following the commencement of Operation ATHENA in Afghanistan in February 2006. While the American military embedded program has been accused of serving as a tool of the operational commander to win the information campaign both on the home front and with the enemy, the Canadian Forces implemented its program to facilitate in-depth reporting of operations in Afghanistan.[18] Notably less restrictive than embed programs of other NATO nations because reporters are permitted to occasionally relinquish their embed status to conduct unilateral reporting, the Canadian Forces' program aimed for an open and transparent dialogue between the media and the military, a relationship boasting a long tradition of mistrust.

From a research methodology perspective, this thesis will use the experiences of embedded journalists, unilateral journalists, military historians, Department of National Defence public servants and commanders during Task Force ORION from February to August 2006 to support the argument that both styles of reporting, the embedded and the unilateral, are essential to informing the public's understanding of the Canadian Forces' mandate, challenges and successes when deployed on operations. Task Force ORION was selected given its significance as Canada's first combat mission since Korea, this translating into a reporting challenge from the perspectives of the Government of Canada, the Canadian Forces and the media. The journalists, historians, public servants and commanders were selected as a result of their direct participation in Task Force ORION's operations in Afghanistan, extensive experience in their respective

[18] Department of National Defence, 1350-1 (CEFCOM PA) OP ATHENA – MEDIA EMBED PROGRAM (MEP) INSTRUCTIONS, February 2007.

fields, and their willingness to share their opinions based upon personal experiences in the Afghanistan theatre of operation. In terms of targeted mainstream media, this thesis focused on print media primarily from National outlets. While this thesis exists primarily as a theoretical overview of the debate over embedded versus unilateral war reporting bolstered by primary source interviewing, this study could be expanded significantly to include a deeper study of print versus broadcast reporting methodologies and the impact of social media on both the news media and the military.

In terms of line of approach, Chapter 2 sets the stage as an overview of the embedded versus unilateral war reporting debate from the American perspective using Operation IRAQI FREEDOM as the case study while Chapter 3 provides a historical overview of Canadian war reporting, as well as an introduction to the Operation ATHENA Military Embedding Program. Chapter 4 exists as the substance of this thesis, providing an in-depth study of the enemy Task Force ORION was to encounter on the battlefields of Afghanistan, preparations made at the operational and strategic levels of government and the military from a communications perspective, the complexities of war reporting in Afghanistan as part of Task Force ORION – most notably during the Battle of Panjawai – and, finally, what followed Task Force ORION from the perspective of news coverage of Canadian military operations in the region. Finally, Chapter 5 serves as a record of key lessons learned from Task Force ORION war reporting, recommendations falling out of these lessons learned for further initiatives between the Government of Canada, the news media and the military in the coverage of Canadian military operations abroad, and potential for further study.

CHAPTER 2 – EMBEDDED VERSUS UNILATERAL CONFLICT REPORTING FROM THE OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) PERSPECTIVE

We certainly did not want to be in bed with the military, but we certainly wanted to be there [Iraq].[19]
- Marjorie Miller, editor of the Los Angeles *Times*

2.1. Background

While contemporary American and Canadian military embedding programs do impose limitations on media access to the battlefield, giving way to significant concerns about governmental spin doctors rallying pro-war sentiment, they do "allow for an abundance of intimate coverage, increases the transparency of governmental discretion, and promotes clear standards for military accountability."[20] From the office of the American Secretary of Defense's perspective, the military embedding program implemented in the spring of 2003 prior to the invasion of Iraq was a complement to a variety of media coverage opportunities; opportunities that ranged from reporting from the Pentagon, international capitals, media centers and combined information press centers (CPICs) and national media pools.[21] More importantly, from the American military perspective following the 2003 Iraq invasion, their media management program[22] was "heralded […] as the dawn of a new age of cooperation between the military and the media, a win-win measure that would give news outlets unprecedented access and counter enemy misinformation with true accounts of American military action."[23] While critics may object with assertions that these accounts of American military operations are subjective, the Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs (then Victoria Clarke) was quite clear that the

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[19] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship" *Stanford Journal of International Relations, (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 21.

[20] Elana J. Zeide, 2005, "In Bed with the Military: First Amendment Implications of Embedded Journalism" (*New York University Law Review* 80 (4)), 1309.

[21] United States Department of Defense, "ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Bureau Chiefs" last accessed 14 January 2003, http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2003/t0115.

[22] Elana J. Zeide, 2005, "In Bed with the Military: First Amendment Implications of Embedded Journalism" (*New York University Law Review* 80 (4)), 1309.

[23] *NewNight with Aaron Brown* (CNN television broadcast 31 December 2003) interview with Victoria Clarke, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs responsible for the creation of the contemporary American embed program.

overarching intent of the embedding program was to "have as widespread and fair and balanced coverage as possible."[24] Junger's perspective of reporting on the war in Afghanistan was even more stringent, noting that "Vietnam was *our* paradigm[…]*our* template for how not to get hoodwinked by the U.S. military, and it exerted such a powerful influence that anything short of implacable cynicism sometimes felt like a sellout."[25] Rather than leveraging their status and assignments to tactical units to report on frontline soldiers, humanitarian aid workers, *and* locals affected by the insurgency, embedded journalists tended towards "painting a picture of a country engulfed in war" rather than a balanced narrative in a country that was, for all intents and purposes, relatively stable.[26] Fear of appearing to be pro-military propaganda machines drove many journalists to report even more critically on military operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan than they may otherwise have. For all of its inherent flaws, however, the American embed program did facilitate unprecedented battlefield access and protection to journalists, leaving media with a difficult decision – embrace the American embed program, its constraints and its possible distortion of the ground truth or risk not being in Iraq at all. Unfortunately for large media networks, the bottom-line in a competitive capitalistic society dominates all decisions: the war had to be covered. As the epigraph to this chapter suggests, *not* being in Iraq was simply not an option.

Whether "to alleviate tension or to gain political and militaristic control, the Pentagon decided to be proactive about setting up safe media relations for the war in Iraq."[27] From an American military perspective, embedded reporting not only facilitates in-depth coverage from

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[24] United States Department of Defense, "ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Bureau Chiefs," 14 January 2003, http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2003/t0115.

[25] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 133.

[26] *Ibid*., 133.

[27] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 21.

the battlefield but also openly works towards the influence of public opinion. As was noted in paragraph 2(A) of the Pentagon's Public Affairs Guidance (PAG) on Embedded Media During Possible Future Operations in February 2003, just a month prior to the invasion of Iraq:

> [m]edia coverage of any future operation will, to a large extent, shape public perception of the national security environment now and in the years ahead. This holds true for the US public, the public in allied countries who opinion can affect the durability of our coalition, and publics in countries where we conduct operations, whose perceptions of us can affect the cost and duration of our involvement.[28]

While both the media and the military claim to want to report the truth of a conflict – the good, the bad and the ugly – this results in a number of amplified challenges for the embedded reporter. As Junger notes in *War*, a book written after multiple trips into the Korengal Valley in eastern Afghanistan between June 2007 and June 2008 for *Vanity Fair* magazine, the tenants of pure journalism dictate that objectivity is impossible with those subjects a writer is close to; this argument would logically extend even more pointedly to the fact that objectivity would be impossible to achieve when writing about those you have been in combat with, when life and death are on the line. According to Junger, "[p]ure objectivity – difficult enough while covering a city council meeting – isn't remotely possible in a war; bonding with the men around you is the least of your problems."[29] However, Junger quickly follows this up with the statement that "[o]bjectivity and honesty are *not* the same thing, though, and it is entirely possible to write with honesty about the very personal and distorting experiences of war."[30]

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[28] Department of Defense, AIG 8777, PUBLIC AFFAIRS GUIDANCE (PAG) ON EMBEDDING MEDIA DURING POSSIBLE FUTURE OPERATIONS/DEPLOYMENTS IN THE U.S. CENTRAL COMMANDS (CENTOM) AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY (AOR), FM SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OASD-PA TO SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//CHAIRS, 101900Z FEB 03.

[29] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 26.

[30] *Ibid*.

2.2. The "Marine Grunt Truth"

Traditional journalism teeters on the brink of extinction, having evolved to become a dog-eat-dog business whereby stories are driven by investors, advertising and a desperate fight to survive the effects of social media and instantaneous information dissemination in the digital age of journalism.[31] The evolution of embedded reporting, while not a new concept given its roots in the Crimean War, is illustrative of the omnipresent tension between the military and the media. While operational security is essential during operations, the public's demand for information becomes even more pervasive during conflict. Hence, "[the government, the media, and the military] rely on each other for the propagation of war sentiment and both have the power to destroy each other's credibility with the […] public."[32] Add to this the inherent self-censorship sometimes practiced by the embedded reporter due to operational security requirements and their narrow perspective of the conflict, and the potential for distortion increases. To be clear, this is not censorship in the traditional sense; as Junger recalls:

> Once at a dinner party back home I was asked, with a kind of knowing wink, how much the military had "censored" my reporting. I answered that I'd never been censored at all, and that once I'd asked a public affairs officer to help me fact-check an article and he'd answered, 'Sure, but you can't actually show it to me – that would be illegal.'[33]

This self-censorship rather has more to do with a reporter's version of the truth rather than enforced censorship of a story. Gordon Dillow, an embedded war reporter with American Marines in Iraq, is frank about his lack of the objectivity so revered in journalism school:

> I didn't hide anything. For example, when some of my Marines fired up a civilian vehicle that was bearing down on them, killing three unarmed Iraqi men, I reported it – but I didn't lead my story with it, and I was careful to put it in the context of scared young men

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[31] Jean K. Chalaby, "Journalism in History: From the Public Press to the Digital Age," http://www.mcc.ruc.dk/aktuelt/2000/symp/chalaby-paper.html.

[32] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 21.

[33] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 133.

> trying to protect themselves […] all sweet-faced, all-American boys hardened by a war that wasn't of their making.[34]

As Dillow so poignantly states "the point wasn't that I wasn't reporting the truth; the point was that I was reporting the Marine grunt truth – which had also become my truth"[35] and, even more importantly, a truth that was appropriate for an American public unfamiliar with the brutalities and complexities of war in a world far removed from reality at home. Some critics would state that this flagrant admittance to a distorted truth opens the floodgates to irresponsible journalism, with many arguing that it is simply impossible to maintain objectivity when your life is entrusted to those you report on. However, the whole issue of objectivity is not just an issue unique to the embedded journalist, but a daily issue for all journalists.

2.3. "The Redder the Better" – Dying for a Great Story

Today's news media is a capital venture like any major business corporation, with the bottom-line ultimately dependent on getting the best stories first at any cost, even if that cost is ultimately a journalist's life. Despite the in-depth coverage of the battlefield afforded by the embedded reporter, journalists vehemently debate whether the perspective gained is worth the blood of fellow reporters. Many do not believe it is. Jane Arraf, *CNN*'s Senior Baghdad Correspondent and a unilateral reporter, stated during a panel on *The Al Franken Show* that "there [have] been more than 60 reporters killed [in Iraq]. Reporters don't have to go to Baghdad, take the risk of flying in, being hit by missiles as they are flying, go on that road to the green zone where they might be blown up. They can easily stay in Jordan […]."[36] Further building upon her perspective as a unilateral, Arraf also believes that if a reporter is to be sent to

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[34] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 22.

[35] *Ibid*., 23.

[36] "Special Iraq Panel," *The Al Franken Show*. Air America Radio. 24 June 2006, last accessed 27 January 2013, http://www.apfn.net/pogp/A002I060623-franken2.MP3.

a cover a conflict the unilateral is the better option. In her opinion, unilateral reporters "have the ability to speak Arabic with the Iraqi people and understand both the experience of the Iraqis and the plight of the American military."[37] Interestingly, her opinion is based on the assumption that all unilateral reporters speak Arabic and would have unfettered access to the battlefield regardless of the military's policy on the independent movement of unilateral reporters; a restrictive policy that required unilateral reporters to remain in Saudi Arabia for security reasons. Her opinion is also based on the assumption that these journalists understand the "plight of the American military" without the unique perspective the embedded reporter brings to the table in this regard. Contrary to Arraf's viewpoint is that of reporter Michael Fumento, who believes that risking one's life in the name of a good story is absolutely necessary. From his perspective, unilateral reporters filing stories from a hotel room do little to contribute to the war narrative, stating that "embeds die in Iraq, not members of the Baghdad Brigade [unilateral reporters]."[38] Fumento also "claimed a willingness to sacrifice his own life for a story by embedding himself in the most dangerous war zone."[39] In September of 2009, *The New York Times* journalist Stephen Farrell travelled to Kunduz in Afghanistan to investigate allegations of a September 4 NATO airstrike that killed upwards of ninety Afghans taking fuel from tankers that had been hijacked by the Taliban; this was a massive allegation against NATO, in particular the Germans who operated in Afghanistan's Regional Command North. During his efforts to get the story on September 9, Farrell and his interpreter, Sultan Munadi, were "captured by the Taliban…[with] their kidnappers open[ing] negotiations for Farrell;"[40] after four days of negotiations, the

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[37] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 24.

[38] Michael Fumento, "Covering Iraq: the Modern Way of War Correspondence," 2006, last accessed 8 October 2012, http://www.fumento.com/military/brigade.html.

[39] Michael Fumento, "The New Band of Brothers," last accessed 8 October 2012, http://www.fumento.com/military/ramadi.html.

[40] Jean Hood, *War Correspondent: Reporting under fire since 1850* (UK: Lyons Press, 2012), 200.

compound they were being held in was stormed by a combined Afghan National Army and British Special Air Service (SAS) force. Munadi was killed by machine gun fire, while Farrell survived. When asked if he believed the military had any obligation to rescue journalists, Farrell "offered an emphatic 'No,'"[41] indicative of his innate understanding of the dangers associated with conflict reporting.

2.4. Sleeping with the Enemy: A Soldier's View of the Military Embed

"You can't objectively cover both sides when I'm guarding your butt."
- A Military Opinion of Embedding Reporting

The debate between embedded versus unilateral reporting becomes even more heated when the discussion about the line between the embedded reporter and the soldier comes to the forefront. When an embedded reporter is assigned to a tactical unit with a mission to complete, is the expectation that the reporter be prepared to take or direct fire in support of that unit unrealistic? In accordance with American and Canadian embed programs and associated ground rules, the answer would be a resounding "no." However, "when it comes down to life and death, objectivity is not merely impossible; it is the last thing on anyone's mind."[42]

Militaries and the media around the world fight a long tradition of mistrust; not only do soldiers see embedded reporters as an additional person to protect on the battlefield, but a challenge to camaraderie and trust. As Gordon Dillow, an embedded reported in Iraq, noted:

> They had been warned about us, I found out later. Be careful what you say to them, the Marines of Alpha Company were told before we [the embeds] jointed them in early March…don't [complain] about the slow mail delivery, don't criticize the anti-war protests back home, don't discuss operational plans, and for God's sake, don't use ethnic slur words for Arabs. Better yet, don't talk to the reporters at all. They'll just stab you in the back.[43]

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[41] Jean Hood, *War Correspondent: Reporting under fire since 1850* (UK: Lyons Press, 2012), 201.
[42] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 25.
[43] Gordon Dillow, "Grunts and Pogues:The Embedded Life," *Columbia Journalism Review*, May 2003.

Paul Rieckhoff, an Iraq war veteran now retired and committed to the re-deployment of American troops home, contends there are issues with both embedded and unilateral reporting. From his perspective, embeds are "military 'jock sniffers'"[44] who have sacrificed objectivity for a good story while unilateral reporters have sacrificed battlefield accessibility and security for the regional or international context. Michael Fumento argues that the problem with unilateral reporters is that they rely upon the second or third-hand reports of other journalists on the ground to build up a picture. Given the dominance of bloggers and tweeters today able to transmit a breaking story faster and without editorial influence, the practice of leveraging second or third-hand reports of other journalists lends little credence or credibility to the unilateral journalist. On the other hand, Arraf believes that embedded reports "exhibit a 'false bravado' because they are attempting to credit themselves with a combat mission."[45] But have they *not* earned the right to this claim? *The Boston Herald*'s embedded reporter Jules Crittenden recounts his identification of Iraqi positions for engagement by his tactical unit, resulting in enemy engaged and killed.[46] *The Boston Globe*'s Scott Bernard Nelson, an embedded reporter with First Marine Division, "was the only one in his convoy who spotted an Iraqi sniper's position. [I] informed a gunner, who fired 100 rounds and killed the Fedayeen sniper."[47] While embedded reporters are deemed to be non-combatants deployed in an observer role only, does their participation in enabling military effects on the battlefield revoke their non-combatant status as an objective, independent witness in a democracy? Many reporters cringed at the overtly aggressive actions of Crittenden

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[44] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 26.

[45] *Ibid*.

[46] Dan Kennedy, "Embedded Reporting: Is objectivity an acceptable casualty of this kind of reporting?" Excerpt from 14 April 2003 Media Log (www.dankennedy.net), http://www.niewman.harvard.edu/reportsitemprint.aspx?id=101235.

[47] Nancy Bernhard, "Embedding Reporters on the Frontline: With regained public trust, watchdog reporting might be more welcomed for its role in protecting democracy," Summer 2003 Tweet, http://www.niewman.harvard.edu/reportsitemprint.aspx?id=101234.

and Nelson, adamant that the role of the reporter is to remain the neutral observer of modern warfare. From Nelson's perspective, while he had shared in operational risks and requirements and "come to identify with the Marines, [he] would like to believe his reporting was untainted since it appeared alongside unilateral *Globe* coverage from Qatar and the Pentagon."[48]

2.5. The Criticality of Democratic Debate

Democratic debate of modern conflicts is essential. Yet many critics question how journalists encourage this debate today; for some, "democracy is now defined as providing support for the troops rather than independently gathered information on their activities…[with embedded reporters] re-establish[ing] the humanity and patriotism of those in the profession;" for others, it is "bringing important criticism to public attention [to] the defense of freedom of information."[49] For the conflict reporter, it comes down to methodology; is freedom of information or of the press attained through patriotic and unquestioning support of military operations, or through the stimulation of engaging and healthy debate which, while a much more demanding course may in the end achieve the same end-state of pro-war sentiment the government desired in the first place.

As previously stated, for all of its inherent flaws, the American embed program initiated in advance of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM did facilitate unprecedented battlefield access and protection to journalists. However, this left the media with a difficult decision – establish a relationship with the military or risk not being in Iraq at all. As will be illustrated in the next chapter, the relationship between the media and the Canadian military, in particular with regard to the embed program, was critical to mission success, requiring unity of vision and effort by

[48] Nancy Bernhard, "Embedding Reporters on the Frontline: With regained public trust, watchdog reporting might be more welcomed for its role in protecting democracy," Summer 2003 Tweet, http://www.niewman.harvard.edu/reportsitemprint.aspx?id=101234

[49] *Ibid.*

senior leadership of the military, the government, and the Public Affairs branch to achieve mission objectives both at home and abroad and to influence the media.

CHAPTER 3 – CANADIAN CONFLICT REPORTING AND THE CANADIAN FORCES MILITARY EMBED PROGRAM (MEP)

3.1. Brief History of Canadian Conflict Reporting

The professional independent war correspondent – the neutral civilian non-combatant whose Blackberry is supposed to be mightier than the machine gun – does not come to exist until the Crimean War (1854-1856) in the form of William "Billy" Howard Russell of *The Times* of London, Edwin Lawrence Godkin of the *London Daily News* and G.L. Gruneisen of *The Morning Post.*[50] William Russell's coverage of the Crimean War is important in that it was the first purposeful use of a civilian reporter to capture the politics, the horrors and the military follies of a war for the citizens back home. Prior to his reporting efforts from the front, "British editors either stole war news from foreign newspapers or employed junior officers to send letters from the battlefront."[51] The latter practice was ineffective at best given that reports were sporadic, selective given that reporters were soldiers first, correspondents second, and possessed little to no understanding of what constituted news. Russell's success as an early embedded reporter can be traced to two very important facts. First, he was of the same social class as the officers, making messing and interactions with the chain of the command easy. More importantly, despite his equality with the officers, Russell's reporting was incredibly critical of British military operations. Hard-drinking commanders, horribly incompetent subordinate officers, and abysmal medical care and logistics meant that Russell was on the horns of a dilemma – report critically of British military failings or honour the age-old camaraderie of

[50] Phillip Knightley, "The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq" (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1-2.
[51] *Ibid*., 2.

British officers. Tenacious to the end, Russell maintained his criticality, with his editor circulating those letters not published in *The Times* amongst the Cabinet; a move that eventually resulted in the change of British government.[52] Some British commanders refused to support embedded reporters as a result of this innate tension between the military and the media. Russell, however, remained stoic and continued his endeavours as a battlefield correspondent, "trying to report the over-all scene, to give a contemporary observer's account of how a battle was lost or won."[53] His criticism increased as the Russian winter set in 1855, with Russell noting that "[t]his army has melted away almost to a drop of miserable, washed-out, worn-out spiritless wretches, who muster out of 55, 000 just 11, 000 now fit to shoulder a musket, but certainly not fit to do duty against the enemy. This army is to all intents and purposes, with the exception of a very few regiments, used up, destroyed and ruined […]."[54] In fact, Russell's critique of Lord Raglan's plan after a failed allied attack on Sevastopol resulted in the new commander-in-chief, Sir William Codrington, seeking support for some manner of media control. As a result, "Codrington issued a general order on February 25, 1856, that must rank as the origin of military censorship,"[55] the spirit of which prevails today under the caveat of operational security. Today, reporters who breach operational security are immediately ejected out of a theatre of operations. Unfortunately, operational security became equivalent to a gag order, with "censorship accepted as necessary and just, and it became the dominating feature of the reporting of the First World War, crushing correspondents into virtual silence."[56] Unfortunately for Russell, he fell into several traps of the embedded journalist. First, he focussed his critiques of the British campaign

[52] Phillip Knightley, "The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq" (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 6.
[53] *Ibid*., 8.
[54] *Ibid*., 11.
[55] *Ibid*., 15.
[56] *Ibid*.

on personalities like Lord Raglan rather than on the root cause of a military suffering after years of underfunding and lack of support by the government. Second, Russell "considered himself part of the military establishment. The one thing he never doubted or criticized was the institution of war itself."[57] Obviously Russell's situation speaks to issues with balanced coverage of complex operations. However, what Russell did according to colleague and fellow correspondent Godkin, was write "correspondence from the field [that] really became a power before which generals began to quail…[this leading] to a real awakening of the official mind. It brought home to the War Office the fact that the public had something to say about the conduct of wars […]."[58]

The Canadian conflict reporter, under the British initially, has a long history wrought with challenges. The First World War saw the banning of reporters from the battlefield by the British, with battlefield patrons like New Brunswick's Lord Beaverbrook used by commanders to promote military operations.[59] It could be said that the relationship between the media and the military did not exist in that the military much preferred to have patrons "glorify the often less-than-glorious goings-on at the front;"[60] propaganda or war "cheerleading" rather than journalism reigned. The year 1917 saw the creation of the Canadian Press out of a government grant program to support war reporting; to be clear, this again was a far cry from traditional journalism, with reports manifesting themselves in the form of relays from war offices that

[57] Phillip Knightley, "The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq" (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 16.

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] Derek Stoffel, "The Military and the Media in Canada: A Relationship from Tension to Trust," in *From the Outside Looking In: Media and Defence Analyst Perspectives on Canadian Military Leadership*, edited by Colonel Bernd Horn, 19-40 (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 20.

[60] *Ibid*., 21.

resulted in a "tainted, but glorious, view of what the men of the [Canadian Expeditionary Force] were doing abroad."[61]

The Second World War saw an emerging generation of embedded reporters operating under different rules than those known by today's journalists; these early embeds were constrained in their reporting not only by the field commanders they were assigned to from an operational security perspective, but by technology that failed to support the rapid transmission of news stories via wire services.[62] This was certainly not the 24-hours per day streaming news media and blog-dominated world that journalism has become. With issues of operational security resulting in heavy censorship, stories of the war did get to the home front; however, conflict reporting at this time did not equate to a professional drive for fairness, balance or objectivity by reporters but rather a propaganda machine[63] that can be likened to the international journalistic perception of the United States' embed program supporting Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003.[64]

The Somalia mission in 1992 devolved into a scandalous military cover-up that resulted in the conduct of an extensive inquiry. While Defence Minister Art Eggleton vehemently opposed allegations of a cover-up during the conduct of the inquiry, the horrific home videos, violence of the atrocities committed, and an obviously weakened military leadership resulted in massive damage being done to the reputation of the Canadian Forces. One of the recommendations of the Somalia inquiry was to "ensure that public affairs policy and practices

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[61] *Ibid.*

[62] Derek Stoffel, "The Military and the Media in Canada: A Relationship from Tension to Trust," in *From the Outside Looking In: Media and Defence Analyst Perspectives on Canadian Military Leadership*, edited by Colonel Bernd Horn, 19-40 (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 23-24.

[63] *Ibid*.

[64] Note: The "general impression held by non-American journalists was that the media in the United States had been intimidated by the U.S. administration into softening its normally critical and analytical attitude." Phillip Knightley, "The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq" (London, England: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), xii.

reflect the principles of openness, responsiveness, transparency and accountability."[65] The solution was devised by Larry Gordon, hired by the Chief of Defence Staff, Vice-Admiral Larry Murray, to serve as the Chief of Public Affairs and overhaul a fledgling Public Affairs branch in the wake of scandal. From Gordon's perspective, Somalia was an inevitable manifestation of a societal institution that "was out of sync with Canadian values and expectation and that the institution, the Canadian Forces, not comprehending the extent of the problem, initially pursued damage control as opposed to change and reform. It was the worst possible strategy at the worst possible time and the Forces suffered the consequences."[66] Determined to succeed at this mission impossible, Gordon initiated change: senior military leaders were convinced that by doing the right things public support would naturally follow, the peacekeeping mythology of the Canadian military was reconciled with reality, transparency and openness with the national media prevailed, and internal military communications were drastically improved. Under Gordon's focused and deliberate efforts, the Canadian Forces was re-launched to the public and a new Public Affairs Policy was implemented March 1, 1998; its hallmark is that the Canadian Forces is "the only Canadian federal agency with written authorization for its employees, uniformed as well as civilians, to talk to the media about what they do"[67] and is one of the most open Western military powers with its media. The center of gravity of this new policy was openness and, under careful direction, the Canadian Forces re-connected with Canadians at every opportunity, whether battling natural disasters or peacekeeping abroad. Public relations became a critical line of operation at a time when the military's fate lay in the hands of a critical Cabinet, public

[65] Department of National Defence, "Dishonoured Legacy: The Lessons of the Somalia Affair, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia" (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1997), Section 39.3.

[66] Larry Gordon, "Let Canadians Decide," In *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, edited by Bernd Horn and Stephen J. Harris (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanvell Publishing Limited, 2001), 374.

confidence in its military was at an all-time low, and the national media pursued "conflict and controversy"[68] within the military as opposed to reporting on the institution with balance and a commitment to public debate. The key was a commitment by senior military leadership to "reform and a communications approach based on change rather than public relations,"[69] an approach fully endorsed by Gordon as the best possible way ahead for the military. By December 1998, a mere ten months after the release of the new Public Affairs Policy, public polls indicated a complete turn-around in public opinion regarding the Canadian Forces – transparency, openness and proactivity appeared to soothe a caustic national media and reassure Canadians that their military was a credible, ethical, and professional force that could be trusted to carry out its assigned tasks with duty and honor.[70] In an almost ironic twist of fate during the Kosovo bombing campaign of 1999, "a new battle [was] to be fought: to keep up with the news environment that had changed so much, so quickly, particularly after *CNN* started broadcasting twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week."[71] Canadian General Officers were faced with a new reality of daily press conferences; "for a military that only six years earlier had been accused of a cover-up following the Somalia affair, this new openness towards the press was little short of revolutionary."[72] Fast forward to the 2006 combat deployment into Afghanistan, an extremely challenging mission whereby success was not only measured by the attainment of combat

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[67] Nigel Hannaford, "The Military and the Media in Canada since 1992," *Security and Defense Studies Review* (Volume 1, Winter 2001), 199.

[68] Larry Gordon, "Let Canadians Decide," In *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, edited by Bernd Horn and Stephen J. Harris (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanvell Publishing Limited, 2001), 376.

[69] *Ibid*., 375.

[70] Nigel Hannaford, "The Military and the Media in Canada since 1992," *Security and Defense Studies Review* (Volume 1, Winter 2001), 211.

[71] Derek Stoffel, "The Military and the Media in Canada: A Relationship from Tension to Trust," in *From the Outside Looking In: Media and Defence Analyst Perspectives on Canadian Military Leadership*, edited by Colonel Bernd Horn, 19-40 (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 29.

[72] Derek Stoffel, "The Military and the Media in Canada: A Relationship from Tension to Trust," in *From the Outside Looking In: Media and Defence Analyst Perspectives on Canadian Military Leadership*, edited by Colonel Bernd Horn, 19-40 (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 29.

objectives or the securing of villages, but by the public opinion of Afghans and Canadians alike in the opinion of some senior military commanders; the relationship between the media and the military was critical to mission success.

3.2. Operation ATHENA Military Embedding Program (MEP)

The Canadian Forces instituted its embedding program in February 2007 to facilitate the reporting of operations in Afghanistan commencing with Task Force ORION. According to the Canadian Forces, "media embedding is the process of attaching an accredited journalist who has agreed to be assigned […] to accompany a CF formation or unit during an operation for an extended period of time."[73] At the time of Operation ATHENA, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Rick Hillier, through Commander Canadian Expeditionary Force Command (CEFCOM)[74] served as the authority to embed journalists with Canadian Forces units and formations in Afghanistan. Once accreditation was confirmed, the CEFCOM Public Affairs branch was responsible for coordinating the embedding program both at the media network and journalist levels. Commander Joint Task Force Afghanistan, Brigadier-General David Fraser at the time, was ultimately responsible for the conduct of the embedding program in theatre, with advice and oversight of the program provided by his deployed Public Affairs Officers.

Support from the Canadian Forces was only provided while a journalist remained embedded with Joint Task Force-Afghanistan; when a journalist left their assigned tactical unit, even for brief periods, to cover non-Government of Canada related news, they temporarily lost their embedded status. During these periods, Canadian Forces provision of security and support ceased, leaving media outlets and their journalists responsible to provide necessary transport,

[73] Department of National Defence, 1350-1 (CEFCOM PA) OP ATHENA – MEDIA EMBED PROGRAM (MEP) INSTRUCTIONS, February 2007, 1.

[74] Note: Comd CEFCOM has been superseded by Comd CJOC with the establishment of the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC).

interpreters, and security. The Canadian Forces' embedding program was unique in that it permitted embeds to conduct unilateral reporting despite security threats, albeit at their own peril. The CEFCOM Directives for International Operations Series 13000 Section 5 indicate that embedded reporters who choose to abandon the safety of their assigned tactical units to work unilaterally increase their potential for kidnapping based upon their knowledge of coalition operations, tactics and equipment as well as their leverage as a hostage. As previously stated, during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in 2003, only embedded journalists were permitted inside the Area of Operations. Unilateral journalists were relegated to reporting through third-party sources via the internet or phone from Saudi Arabia due to issues of security and military control of media on the battlefield. The Canadian Forces' program addressed this issue of unilateral reporters external to Afghanistan interviewing embedded reporters noting that "a few weeks in Kandahar does not make them a subject matter expert"[75] and, more importantly, fails to address the big picture conflict. The Operation ATHENA embedding program had an ultimate goal of "providing the Canadian Public with as much accurate information as possible about Government of Canada efforts,"[76] attempting to facilitate both embedded and unilateral coverage of a complicated, dangerous and difficult mission. From a commander's perspective, it was critical to communicate effectively in the Afghan theatre of operations to the Afghan people and governmental officials at all levels, the public at home in Canada, and internationally the complexity of operations in support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The Operation ATHENA embedded program enabled Joint Task Force-Afghanistan to accommodate up to a maximum of sixteen embedded journalists at any given time. Vacancies for

[75] Department of National Defence, 1350-1 (CEFCOM PA) OP ATHENA – MEDIA EMBED PROGRAM (MEP) INSTRUCTIONS, February 2007, 3.

[76] Department of National Defence, 1350-1 (CEFCOM PA) OP ATHENA – MEDIA EMBED PROGRAM (MEP) INSTRUCTIONS, February 2007, 2.

embeds with tactical units from platoon to brigade level were assigned in the following order of precedence: national media, regional and international media to, finally, freelance and non-Canadian regional media. Embed deployment durations, normally set before arrival in theatre between CEFCOM Public Affairs and media outlets, ranged between four and six weeks, depending on where the reporter fell on the prioritization list.

3.3. The Ground Rules for Embedded Journalists

Given the historical tension between militaries and the media, it is not surprising that ground rules were established as part of the Operation ATHENA embedding program. Journalists and critics alike would likely agree that ground rules are needed to protect the media. Given the precedence set during the invasion of Grenada, the Falklands war, the 1991 Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, this contention is not far off the mark. The Canadian Forces was very clear that ground rules were not developed with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Affairs to stifle balanced, objective reporting; rather, the embedding program was created to protect sensitive information and increase transparency through the recognition of "the media's right to unclassified information;"[77] it was "in no way intended to prevent the release of derogatory, embarrassing, negative or non-complimentary information."[78] For journalists Murray Brewster and Christie Blatchford, who embedded under the Operation ATHENA embedding program, the importance of the maintenance of operational security was clearly understood and the underpinning ground rules of the program, and subsequently the CEFCOM Directives for International Operations 13000 series, were respected: threat levels and specific force protection levels, the number, location and relocation of Canadian forces and allied units, Special

[77] Department of National Defence, CDIO 13000 Series – Section 5 – *The CF Media Embedding Program* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1 September 2010), 3.

[78] Department of National Defence, CDIO 13000 Series – Section 5 – *The CF Media Embedding Program* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1 September 2010), 3.

Operations Forces personnel, weapon capabilities and limitation, future operations and rules of engagement were never reported on. To have done so, in accordance with the embed agreement, would have resulted in the revocation of accreditation and immediate removal from the theatre of operations. In fact, the seriousness of operational security violations was so keenly understood by the media as a whole that it was in fact the outlets themselves that were responsible for the removal of offending reporters. While the protection of operational security remains at the forefront of all military embed programs, the Canadian program was not implemented as a censorship tool for critical media coverage given that no official article review process existed. The program was created in an attempt to offer a unique boots on the ground vantage point of the conflict in Afghanistan – that of the perspective of the soldier, Canadian and Afghan alike, and the complexities inherent in a whole of government or comprehensive campaign.[79] While Public Affairs Officers were required to review potentially sensitive information prior to its release to the media to ensure no violations of operational security, reporting was not otherwise restricted, censored or altered. This all said, the Canadian military embedding program was invaluable to the communication of Task Force ORION's successes and challenges within the Afghan theatre of operations, back home in Canada, and internationally, particularly since this was the Canada's first combat deployment since Korea. While there were numerous unilateral journalists reporting on the conflict in Afghanistan who were focused on issues from development and governance to humanitarian aid and medical support delivery to controversial interviews with the Taliban, the

[79] A Whole of Government or comprehensive approach to operations requires that "a force employ diplomatic, defence, developmental, and commercial resources, aligned with those of numerous other agencies, coordinated through an integrated campaign plan, and then applied in areas of operations as needed. As such, the approach would entail traditional and non-traditional military activities being carried out collaboratively…[resulting in] greater mission effectiveness." Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie, Mr. Peter Gizewski, and Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Rostek, "Developing a Comprehensive Approach to Canadian Forces Operations," last accessed 24 March 2013, http://www.journal.dnd.ca/Vo9/no1/04-leslie-eng.asp.

embedded reporters were equally critical to the provision of a comprehensive and factual view of the Afghan conflict to the Canadian government to the public they serve. The embedded journalists – who will be focused on in the next chapter – presented a picture of a professional, compassionate and tenacious Canadian military serving its country's foreign policies, undefined as that foreign policy may be, with honor and uncompromising ethics. A single approach to conflict reporting results in a limited view of conflict. However, together, embedded and unilateral journalists in Afghanistan during Task Force ORION (February to August 2006) were able to create a much more comprehensive and balanced picture of a complicated war against a determined insurgency desperate to break coalition cohesion and deter the international community from deploying soldiers into the broken region.

CHAPTER 4 – TASK FORCE ORION AND THE BATTLE FOR AFGHANISTAN

> *We have no shortage of fighters. In fact, we have so many of them that it is difficult to accommodate and arm and equip them. Some of them have been waiting a year or more for their turn to be sent to the battlefield.*[80]
>
> — Mullah Dadullah, Taliban commander of south and southeastern Afghanistan, December 2005 in advance of spring 2006 campaign

4.1. Waning Public Will: A Tenuous Centre of Gravity

The counterinsurgency fight in Afghanistan has been, and continues to be, complicated; a dangerous "dance with the *dushman*"[81] and a campaign to establish security and trust between the Afghan people, their government, and their security forces. During intense combat operations in Afghanistan from February to mid-August 2006, the battle against a reinvigorated Taliban became the Canadian Task Force ORION's mission. As Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope, Battle Group Commander of Task Force ORION, reflected: "[a]t stake, every day and in every action, was the confidence of the people [of Afghanistan, Canada and the international community]. Our

[80] "Taliban: 500 Suicide Bombers Ready to Attack," ABC News, 18 September 2006, accessed 5 April 2013, http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2006/09/taliban_500_sui/.

[81] *Dushman* is "enemy" in Pashtu.

military efforts to find, fix, and finish (physically and morally) Taliban groups, were all aimed at increasing local confidence and the more strategic 'public will' at home."[82] In a 2006 Gallop poll, 46% of Americans thoughts things were going poorly for American forces deployed in Afghanistan;[83] this is significant given that 2006 saw approximately 20,400 American forces in Afghanistan, a massive increase from a mere 5,200 in 2002. A 47-nation June 2007 global public opinion poll conducted by Pew Global Attitudes Project identified considerable opposition to American and NATO operations in Afghanistan, with only four out of forty-seven nations – the United States (50%), Israel (59%), Ghana (50%), and Kenya (60%) – indicating a majority who supported continued combat operations in Afghanistan.[84] From a Canadian perspective, a November 2006 CBC Environics public issues poll indicated 59% of Canadians believed that the Canadian Forces should withdraw from operations in Afghanistan before 2009 and 58% thought the Canadian mission in Afghanistan would not be successful. Many Canadians were unsure as to why their nation had deployed soldiers to Afghanistan, with 22% believing it was to support American foreign policy and George W. Bush, 24% citing peacekeeping, and 18% indicating humanitarian aid work.[85] According to the CBC, "by 2006, more Canadians opposed their government's military mission in Afghanistan than supported it."[86] As the Taliban resolve grew, the will of the international community – Canada included – appeared weakened as the magnitude of effort required to achieve success at nation-building became apparent. This was

[82] LCol Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-Insurgency Fight in Afghanistan* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 144.

[83] International Public Opinion Poll on the War in Afghanistan, Pakistan Defence, last accessed 24 February 2013, www.defence.pk/forums/pakistans-war/29203-international-public-opinion-war-afghanistan.html.

[84] *Ibid*.

[85] CBC-Environics Public Issues Poll – Afghanistan, last accessed 24 February 2013, www.cbc.ca/news/background/afghanistan/afghanistan-survey2006.html.

[86] "Canada's military mission in Afghanistan: Training role to replace combat mission in 2011," dated 10 February 2009, last accessed 2 March 2013, www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2009/02/10/f-afghanistan.html.

just the perfect storm hoped for by Mullah Dadullah as he prepared to lead the Taliban in battle in Kandahar province.

4.2 Mullah Dadullah: Orchestrating a Taliban Resurgence, Nov-Dec 2005

Afghanistan exists as a land with a deeply troubled past and has suffered many great military campaigns, from those led by Alexander the Great to the Soviet invasion to al Qaeda's base of operations. After the Taliban's abandonment of Kandahar – their "spiritual heartland" – in December 2001 to the Northern Alliance, 2006 saw the resurgence of the Taliban and al-Qaeda to "mount their most ambitious assault on the people of Afghanistan"[87] under the dynamic leadership of the infamous Mullah Dadullah. Dadullah was a one-legged legend amongst the Taliban, known for his escape from the Northern Alliance commander General Dostum in 2001, vehement opposition of coalition soldiers who backed the Hamid Karzai government instituted March 1, 2006, bold leadership from the front with his Taliban fighters, and ruthless tactics.[88] Dadullah also keenly understood the power of the media, and "was the first major Taliban leader to give interviews to foreign journalists, including a number of appearances on al Jazeera television in which he boasted openly about Taliban successes against the foreign troops in southern Afghanistan."[89] Following his experiences with Canadian soldiers in Kabul in 2003, Dadullah concluded that while Canadians were excellent soldiers, the Canadian government was weak-willed and unwilling – like many other allied nations – to commit to "a long fight."[90] Dadullah believed that this political unwillingness to commit to a long fight – an unwillingness that permeated Western news media, coupled with an aversion to casualties and the fact that the

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[87] Sean M. Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2011), ix.

[88] Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 36-37.

[89] *Ibid*., 37.

[90] *Ibid*., 40.

spring of 2006 would see Canadians as the only non-American forces in Kandahar province, was a huge vulnerability upon which to focus all Taliban efforts. His intent was to isolate the city of Kandahar, with an increased campaign of suicide bombings and roadside improvised explosive devices beginning in the spring and hitting a "crescendo of violence towards August 19 – the Afghan national Independence Day."[91] From his perspective, these unpredictable attacks throughout the province would keep Canadian, American, and Afghan security forces engaged in operations in multiple locations, breaking cohesion, balance and concentration of force. When he felt coalition forces in Kandahar province were sufficiently pre-occupied and disjointed, Dadullah would order "Taliban fighters [to] pour into Kandahar and seize one or more government buildings – chosen more for their symbolic than their military value – and raise the [Taliban] flag."[92] And while the Taliban could not hope to hold any ground in Kandahar City for long, the media savvy Dadullah was confident that "all that mattered […] was ensuring that international television cameras were there to record the event"[93] to ensure those nations contributing soldiers to combat operations in Afghanistan would think twice about committing their sons and daughters to a hopeless cause. Dadullah was certain that if an already battle-weary Canadian public was subjected to further combat casualties and "images of the white Taliban flag flying over […] the heavily fortified compound of the provincial governor in Kandahar City…[Canadian citizens] would clamor even more loudly for Ottawa to pull out their troops and the politicians would have to comply."[94]

[91] Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 42.

[92] *Ibid*.

[93] *Ibid*., 43.

4.3. The Government, Task Force ORION, and the Media: Preparing for War

With the government seemingly determined to shift the Canadian Forces from its Pearsonian peacekeeping mythology to a force capable of holding its own amongst NATO partners, Task Force ORION was committed to the battle in Afghanistan following an announcement by then Prime Minister Paul Martin on May 17, 2005, that he would send upwards of 1,250 Canadian soldiers to the war-torn country. With some American Afghanistan-based commanders hesitant to transfer an extremely volatile Kandahar province to a non-American force[95], and Taliban forces under Mullah Dadullah planning their bloodiest campaign to date against the soon to be arriving Canadian soldiers, the Canadian Forces faced its most difficult mission in decades. Task Force ORION was comprised of a Battle Group of approximately 1,200 soldiers and a Provincial Reconstruction Team of approximately 350 personnel,[96] and fell under the command of Regional Command (South) Combined Task Force AEGIS – a "Canadian-led multinational brigade headquarters that was responsible for five battalion-sized task forces"[97] from Romania, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Given that Kandahar province is said to exist as the spiritual heartland of the

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[94] *Ibid*., 41.

[95] Note: According to Wattie, "there was a tendency among the upper echelons of the American military to view NATO troops – including Canadians – with a patronizing and even faintly suspicious eye…[allegedly needing to] get out and kill more of them Taliban." Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 52.

[96] The Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) consisted of Canadian Forces soldiers, and personnel from the Directorate of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Correctional Services Canada (CSC), and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The "KPRT emerged out of the National Solidarity Program (NSP), a program created to encourage local grassroots governments with a common purpose and vision. The RCMP was tasked to force project training cadres to assist in the capacity-building of the Afghan police while CIDA worked to foster an agricultural rebirth in Kandahar to stimulate economic growth and independence of the Afghan population." Major Krista Dunlop, "'War is War": Let Military Conventional Might Prevail," Decisive Manoeuvre Paper, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON: Joint Command and Staff College, January 2013.

[97] Sean M. Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2011), x. Note: Regional Command (South) Combined Task Force AEGIS was comprised of approximately 8,000 soldiers, to include the Canadian contribution.

Taliban, the Canadian Battle Group's assumption of responsibility for the province was only the beginning of almost a decade of challenges in Afghanistan.

Senior Canadian governmental officials and military leadership, from the very beginning, were certain of the deployment challenges associated with Task Force ORION and the importance Public Affairs support and the media would play with regard to shaping public expectations regarding the mission, its challenges, and the inevitability of casualties. Although the Canadian Forces would say that it "began 'embedding' reporters in the mid-1990s, the more structured program began in February 2002 in Kandahar, with subsequent revisions as various lessons were learned about accommodating reporters on military operations."[98] The deployment in February 2006 would capitalize further on these lessons learned to ensure the public remained informed not only of combat operations, but sustainment and equipment issues, developmental projects and the mentorship of Afghan security forces. While there has been a military Public Affairs presence deployed in support of the majority of Canadian missions, the planning process was to be much more extensive for Task Force ORION given the complexity of the mission and the level of Public Affairs support required.

There had been Public Affairs support deployed to Kabul in 2005 as part of the Strategic Advisory Team-Afghanistan, an integrated team consisting of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) aimed at building the capacity of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan under the construct of the Whole of Government approach. It was determined by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Affairs office, however, that Public Affairs support in Kandahar province needed to be different from that in Kabul. This critical distinction was

immediately recognized by Tom Ring, Assistant Deputy Minister for Public Affairs from 2004-2006. While he had only been in the job for a year and boasted no previous knowledge of the Public Affairs world or the dynamics of media relations, Ring implicitly understood that "the Public Affairs organization was competent, professional and effective, but that it needed to be operationalized."[99] To expand on the operationalization of the Public Affairs branch both in the planning and execution of Task Force ORION and today, operationalization implies that the branch possesses the ability to "recruit, train and employ PAOs and imagery technicians to senior-level HQs often on short-notice, in an environment that was that demanding including an enemy engaged in an active disinformation campaign."[100] While the Army has a proven and well-established training system designed to prepare its soldiers and officers for mission across the spectrum of operations, the Public Affairs branch did not. According to Brett Boudreau, Public Affairs personnel are generally deployed as individual augmentees supporting operational missions and were deployed with Task Force ORION without "the tools required to fight the kind of information fight [faced in] the lead up to and during significant combat operations."[101] However, some foresight was exercised and

> investments were made to enhance the 'Combat Camera' capability, improve stakeholder relations, build on the embedded media approach in theatre, deploy the right personnel to the right coalition [headquarters], and to sustain that ability pretty much indefinitely.[102]

In the fall of 2005, just months before the deployment of Task Force ORION into theatre, Ring made an unprecedented move as Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Affairs. He personally

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[98] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 7.

[99] Tom Ring, Conflict Reporting, *interview* with the author, Ottawa, ON, 18 January 2013. Note: For the purposes of this thesis and in accordance with the Oxford English dictionary, the term *operationalize* means to put into operation or use.

[100] Brett Boudreau, *email* correspondence, 2 April 2013.

[101] *Ibid*.

[102] *Ibid*.

canvassed all the leading war correspondents and met with the heads of all Canadian news agencies to speak about the military embed program; more importantly, he wished to discuss the fact that this was not just another mission. During one of the first of many round-table plenary sessions in July 2005, Ring was reinforced by the Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier's comment that the Taliban were "detestable murderers and scumbags" targeting his soldiers.[103] Knowing this comment would instantaneously be the first of countless news media headlines about military operations in Afghanistan, Ring felt it was imperative to determine how the media wanted to cover the war, what support they required to do so and how the media and the military could work together to inform the public about the hazards of the mission.[104] Periodic meetings and contact with senior media editors helped shape media efforts, ensuring the needs of news media were addressed in a timely fashion without sacrificing military operational security. A solid relationship with the news media by the military required buy-in from all major players; Ring was empowered to be as proactive as possible to ensure that the media messages from the tactical to the strategic levels of the military were enabled and indicative of unity of effort. From General Hillier's perspective, "they [the media] used us [the Canadian Forces] to sell their newspapers, television or radio programs, and we felt no qualms about using them to enable us to get our messages out."[105] Ring's freedom of action and proactivity was enabled through the strong relationship between the Chief of Defence Staff and the Minister of National Defence – who ultimately issued direction to Ring – as well as the superbly unfettered relationship between Ring and General Hillier. According to General Hillier, Ring "was superb at laying out a way to tell the Canadian public that there were folks out there trying to kill us and here is what we must

[103] General Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2009), 330.

[104] Ring *interview*.

do about it."[106] This collaborative approach was crucial to the first six to twelve months of media coverage of Canadian operations in Kandahar; coverage that was, in Ring's opinion as a civilian, "strident, consistently critical and outstanding."[107]

Canadian operations in Afghanistan enabled a revolutionary change in media/military relations; the skills and training across the Canadian Forces – from the soldier to the Public Affairs branch to the Commander – required for this revolution were set in place well before Kandahar and Task Force ORION. What changed in the fall of 2005 prior to the deployment of the Task Force was the willingness of the senior leadership and the government to say "make it so;"[108] meaning political and military leadership were fully supportive of the military embedding program and the proactivity of the Canadian Forces in forging a relationship with the media. The Pentagon's Victoria Clarke, Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs leading up to and during the execution of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, expressed similar sentiments years earlier during a January 14, 2003, meeting with American news Bureau Chiefs, stating that:

> one of the reasons we're getting some really good things done is because the senior leadership – Secretary Rumsfeld, General Franks, Chairman Myers […] have been actively engaged in [the embedding] process…[t]hey are very involved in making sure that everybody on our side of the fence understands the intent, understands what the mission is [with regard to embedding], and that's been a distinct difference from the past. I can say that pretty safely you have never had senior leadership at the Pentagon so involved in this process.[109]

From Ring's perspective, he did not create the conditions for this revolution in Canadian media/military relations; rather, he regards himself as the enabler "riding the wave" who helped

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[105] General Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First: Bullets, Bureaucrats and the Politics of War* (Toronto, ON: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2009), 330.

[106] *Ibid*., 329.

[107] Ring *interview.*

[108] *Ibid*.

[109] United States Department of Defense, "ASD PA Clarke Meeting with Bureau Chiefs," 14 January 2003, http://www.defenselink.mil/cgi-bin/dlprint.cgi?http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2003/t0115.

forge a close working relationship, tenuous as it may have been, between the military and the media.

Ring also contends that crucial to the success of media coverage of Task Force ORION operations was the Public Affairs organization and its operators both at home and in Afghanistan. Given the strategic pause[110] prior to Canada's deployment to Afghanistan in 2006, significant investments had been made in the Public Affairs branch to allow Public Affairs Officers and Commanders both in the field and at National Defence Headquarters to communicate effectively about Canadian Forces operations in support of the Government of Canada. This was a direct result of increasing the ability of both the Public Affairs branch and field force individual and collective media training, Public Affairs support, and the establishment of a Combat Camera[111] capability. Public Affairs proactivity can be said to have resulted in a number of strategic communications successes, whereby strategic communications is defined as those that are "completely consistent with a corporation's mission, vision, and values […]."[112] One such success can be found in Don Cherry's championing of the Canadian Forces. After an Improvised Explosive Device strike resulted in the death of Senior Foreign Affairs officer Glyn Berry and the wounding of Master Corporal Franklin, Corporal Bailey and Private Salikin in January 2006, Cherry did an unscripted, unprompted piece on *Hockey Night in Canada* about the incident, his feelings about the mission and the sacrifices made, and the tremendous respect he had for those who serve their country, military or civilian. At the time, full Public Affairs support was deployed; Ring called Kandahar Air Field to have Combat Camera film some thanks

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[110] Note: A *strategic pause* denotes an obvious lack of commitment to an international military operation with a view to re-organization, reconstitution forces, re-equipping and/or training.

[111] Note: For the purposes of this thesis, *Combat Camera* will be defined as the visual documentation of air, sea, and land military actions in combat and combat support, and in related peacetime training activities.

[112] Financial Times Lexicon, last accessed 24 March 2013, http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=strategic-communication.

from deployed soldiers for Cherry and co-host Ron McLean for the story and support. Ring subsequently sent this footage to McLean and they aired the full two and a half minute segment the following Saturday on *Hockey Night in Canada*; the relationship between the military and *Hockey Night in Canada*, an iconic Canadian televised tradition, was cemented forever through media relations and the leveraging of genuine sentiment and capabilities.

While it is inevitable that the media/military relationship pendulum will swing between extremes over time, what is important is that Public Affairs capacity to effectively communicate and coordinate with the media will remain, be this through training or operational deployments. The real question is whether or not Public Affairs remain proactive and leveraged by commanders and the government. Canadian Major-General (retired) Lewis MacKenzie implies in his article, "The Media as a Tool of the Military Commander," that *tool* could very easily be replaced by the word *weapon*, indicative of the immense power wielded by the operational commander when he or she effectively leverages the media. When asked by *CNN*'s Christiane Amanpour about a Bosnian ceasefire during operations in the former Yugoslavia,[113] General MacKenzie – frustrated by the United Nations Security Council's unresponsiveness to routine communications – infamously replied "'Cease fire? I don't think the term exists in their vocabulary in this country!'"[114] In his opinion, a politically-correct, politically-vague standard response "would not have made it out of the *CNN* editing suite…[while] the attractive sound bite was repeated ad nauseam on just about every news broadcast around the world over the next

[113] Note: *Ceasefire* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a temporary suspension in fighting; a truce.

[114] Major-General (ret'd) Lewis MacKenzie, "The Media as a Tool of the Military Commander," In *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, edited by Bernd Horn and Stephen J. Harris, 399-408 (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanvell Publishing Limited, 2001), 400.

twenty-four hours,"[115] highlighting the power media communications can be to the operational commander. Despite the high casualties in 2006, with thirty-six soldiers and one diplomat killed in action, public support was incredibly high and steadfast once combat operations commenced, and can be directly attributable to the media/military relationship and the collaborative approach initiated by the Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Affairs. The success of the Canadian embedding program under extremely challenging field conditions had an immediate effect on the military mission and the informing of public opinion back home. While the official objective of military/media relations is not to shape public opinion of a conflict but rather to present the truth[116] to a nation's taxpayers, it would be naïve to deny that the garnering of public support is not a desired end-state. Public support drives government policy, decision-making, financial allocation, and force commitments to international military operations, and the news media is the only venue whereby the Canadian Forces can showcase its efforts to increase security, governance, and development in Afghanistan. During operations in Afghanistan, public support only wavered when the information pipeline closed. While "the CF was an active proponent of providing information about their activities including direct from soldiers in theatre,"[117] this was a one hundred and eighty degree about face from "[other governmental departments] who were constrained or allowed themselves to be constrained [when it came to communications about Canadian operations in Afghanistan], thus, the mission came to be viewed as a military-only activity."[118]

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[115] Major-General (ret'd) Lewis MacKenzie, "The Media as a Tool of the Military Commander," In *Generalship and the Art of the Admiral: Perspectives on Canadian Senior Military Leadership*, edited by Bernd Horn and Stephen J. Harris, 399-408 (St. Catharines, Ontario: Vanvell Publishing Limited, 2001), 400.

[116] Note: For the purposes of this thesis, *journalistic truth* will be defined as beginning with the assembling and verification of facts by professional journalists and ending with the production of balanced and reliable accounts of events for interpretation, criticism and debate within the public forum.

[117] Brett Boudreau, *email* correspondence, 2 April 2013.

[118] *Ibid*.

From Ring's perspective as the former Assistant Deputy Minister for Public Affairs, his greatest challenges leading up to the deployment of Task Force ORION were fully appreciating and trusting the experience of the Canadian Forces' Public Affairs organization to do their job with his intent and objectives at the forefront and understanding the imperative of the Canadian Forces responding to media queries, as mundane or inconsequential as they may appear on the surface. While the challenge of trusting the Public Affairs organization came down to gaining an appreciation for the power harnessed by a competent, proactive Public Affairs branch and exercising mission command, the second challenge of the military answering media queries was more of an institutional one. Senior governmental and military leaders needed to understand the impact "no comment" or "unavailable for comment" had on the national media's coverage of the Canadian Forces and the consequences ensuing from failing to comment. A classic example of this is illustrated in journalists' use of Scott Taylor, editor and publisher of *Esprit de Corps* magazine and former infantry soldier, as a "voice of tension in their stories;"[119] an opinionated military critic willing to comment on any military issue, Taylor exists as a go-to source for journalists because there is often no one in the military chain of command willing or able to comment.

4.4. Cracking the Codex on Military Operations

> *I want to tell journalists that if in the future they use wrong information from coalition forces or NATO we will target those journalists and media. We have the Islamic right to kill these journalists and media.*[120]
>
> -- A Taliban Commander quoted during an interview with the Associated Press

With the ominous words of a Taliban Commander echoing in the back of her mind, Semi Chellas wondered if her decision to cover the war in Afghanistan as an embedded reporter was a

[119] Derek Stoffel, "The Military and the Media in Canada: A Relationship from Tension to Trust," in *From the Outside Looking In: Media and Defence Analyst Perspectives on Canadian Military Leadership*, edited by Colonel Bernd Horn, 19-40 (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 32.

[120] Semi Chellas, "Good To Go," *Walrus Magazine*, February 2007 issue.

wise decision. Taking part in the four-day Journalist Familiarization Course at Canadian Forces Base Meaford, Ontario, Chellas and her colleagues were all preparing to deploy to Afghanistan to tell the story from the ground while integrated with front-line tactical Canadian Forces units. While pre-deployment training for journalists was not mandated by the Canadian Forces prior to their embedding with tactical units, the completion of such training lowers insurance costs associated with conflict reporting for news organizations; costs that can reach up to one thousand dollars per day per media member.[121] And while Major Peter Sullivan, the former Deputy Commanding Officer of the Land Force Central Area Training Centre in Meaford, welcomed the journalists by saying "the whole point of having you here is so you come home alive," Brigadier-General Guy Thibault, former Commander Land Force Central Area, stated frankly that "this is a very selfish program from my perspective, in the sense that we all need something from you."[122] While the military cannot hope to control information in this instantaneous digital age of journalism, it has acknowledged that the media is one of countless players in an operational theatre. Unlike the Americans, who tend to view the media as a tool to be manipulated by the successful operational commander, Canadian commanders like Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope see the media as critical to the maintenance of public support.[123] And here is where journalists find themselves on the horns of a dilemma – is the story they are telling as embedded reporters balanced, or has it been distorted into cheerleading? Critics of embedding, both American and Canadian, regard the military training of potential embedded reporters as an attempt to "indoctrinate the media."[124] Embedded journalists themselves are keenly aware of the dangers they face getting close to those they are reporting on because "becoming part of the story is not

[121] *Ibid*.
[122] *Ibid*.
[123] LCol Ian Hope, *Dancing with the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-Insurgency Fight in Afghanistan* (Kingston, ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2008), 144.

how journalists are trained to do their jobs."[125] The irony of the situation is that it is becoming increasingly dangerous to tell the story from a war zone any other way.

The majority of journalists who deployed to Afghanistan to cover Task Force ORION combat operations had little to no experience reporting on conflict; while war correspondents used to be the most seasoned reporters with extensive front-line and military expertise, the majority of contemporary conflict reporters have no familiarity with military training and terminology, let alone the ugly realities of war. Unlike Scott Taylor, a predominately unilateral reporter who is infamous for his 2004 kidnapping and release by Iraqi radical Islamist group Ansar al-Islam, who – due to his extensive connections after years of war reporting – was able to get letters of introduction to otherwise inaccessible high-ranking Afghan governmental officials and insurgent leaders like General Dostum (Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Afghan National Army) and Amrullah Saleh (head of the Afghan National Directorate of Security) from Aydemir Erman, the budding 22-year old journalist will not.[126] They simply do not have the credibility, legitimacy, or political savvy. Additionally, military operations are difficult to report on; as Hobson notes, "the jargon, the force structure, the equipment, and the tactics all take time and effort to learn and become comfortable with;"[127] as a result, it is much easier for the inexperienced field reporter, some of whom are normally relegated to covering the health beat or local city hall meetings, to "cover the familiar – the human interest story (casualties, separation from family, living conditions, etc.) or the political angle (government duplicity or dithering, ministerial mismanagement) – than it is to cover the unfamiliar, such as military capabilities,

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[124] Semi Chellas, "Good To Go," *Walrus Magazine*, February 2007 issue.
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] Scott Taylor, Conflict Reporting, interview with the author, Toronto, ON, 16 December 2012.
[127] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 16.

changing tactics and sustainability."[128] Chris Wattie, an embedded reporter with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and unilateral reporter with the *National Post* during Task Force ORION, stated in an interview with Sharon Hobson that "generally, news outlets are not sending their most experienced military reporters to cover this because it's an on-going, long, drawn-out [war], and they're rotating people in and out."[129] From Wattie's perspective, embedding opportunities in Afghanistan, at least with CanWest Global Communications, became the equivalent of door-prizes rather than the assignment given to the most experienced and astute of reporters. Matthew Fisher is a veteran *Postmedia News* war correspondent with forty years of field work in conflicts ranging from the Mozambique Revolution and East Timor to the 2003 war in Iraq. He is the only reporter to have covered the Canadian Forces' deployments to Afghanistan in 2002 in Kandahar, 2003-2005 at Camp Julian in Kabul, and November 2005 until the end of combat operations in Kandahar province in July 2011. In his opinion, a "small army of reporters [from Ottawa] rushed to get their tickets punched as war correspondents,"[130] resulting in news media coverage that was politically-focused and Ottawa-centric. From his perspective, "journalists were much more interested in 'gotcha' political journalism and much less interested in the war and Canada's part in it […]. They saw the war as another Ottawa story, which was very different from the war reporting by British, French and American journalists who [went] to Afghanistan."[131] This was, evidently, a uniquely Canadian phenomenon from a journalistic perspective. According to Captain Doug

[128] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 16.

[129] *Ibid.,* 14.

[130] Matthew Fisher, Conflict Reporting, *interview* via email with the author, 3 March 2013.

[131] *Ibid*.

MacNair, a Public Affairs Officer CEFCOM[132] during Task Force ORION, once combat operations commenced in February 2006 and casualties increased as of March 2006, reporters under the embedding program started declining opportunities to go outside the wire with tactical units as an inadvertent bureau-like mentality at Kandahar Airfield (KAF) emerged.[133] Many reported indicated that their desks wanted them at KAF in the event of a ramp ceremony;[134] this was substantiated in that KAF was "where the wounded are brought back, where the dead are returned to, where briefings happen, that's where a clear picture of what happened developed."[135] KAF was also the hub from which there was 24/7 access to media workspaces, phones, and internet connections for reporters. However, so-called "death watch"[136] is not the intent of embedded or unilateral reporting; or at least it should not be if a balanced and informed picture of conflict is the ultimate aim of news media. From Wattie's perspective, this was an issue in early 2006 that was exacerbated by the experience of some of the reporters sent into Afghanistan; young reporters simply did not know how to play the war correspondent game. Instead of stating that they would remain at KAF while deploying on operations with a front-line unit for a compelling story on a joint operation with Afghan security forces or the completion of a developmental project, many perpetuated the "death watch" perception simply out of a lack of experience to call the shots with their respective desks. Inexperienced journalists tended towards

[132] Note: CEFCOM has been superseded by CJOC with the establishment of the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC).

[133] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 14.

[134] From author's personal experience: A ramp ceremony is a ceremony conducted within a theatre of operations whereby the remains of a soldier or civilian killed in action are loaded onto an aircraft for transport back to Canada in the presence of all Canadians not deployed on operations outside of the Kandahar Airfield.

[135] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 13.

[136] Author's personal experience: "Death watch" was a phenomenon reported by some journalists and military officials alike whereby reporters – embedded and unilateral alike – avoided reporting opportunities outside the wire to remain on Kandahar Airfield in the event of a combat-related death.

falling into line with desk staffs back in Canada, "most of whom [according to Captain MacNair] have either never been to Afghanistan or have not been there recently, or have no meaningful understanding of what's really going on there"[137] and what constitutes a compelling, interesting story for the Canadian public. Murray Brewster, a veteran Canadian defence correspondent with the Canadian Press with over 29 years of field experience and an embedded reporter during Task Force ORION, believes that the lack of experience reporting on military operations and navigating war was pervasive. However, from his perspective, "the vast majority boldly rose to the occasion and learned quickly how to pick and choose when to risk their lives for the story as a journalist."[138]

4.5. Canadian Embedded versus Unilateral Reporting

During Task Force ORION, embedded reporters worked, lived and moved with Canadian Forces both at KAF and outside the wire[139] with front-line tactical units constantly operating under combat conditions. The uniquely close relationships forged under the most challenging of field combat conditions have been, and continue to be, criticized based on issues of compromised objectivity and balance. While some would argue that "the media appeared to be exchanging access to events [the battlefield] for a degree of control over who was interviewed and what was written or produced,"[140] the proximity of reporters to operations on the ground was only achievable through the Canadian Forces military embed program. Veteran *Postmedia News* war

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[137] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 14.

[138] Murray Brewster, Conflict Reporting, *interview* with the author via phone, 21 January 2013.

[139] Note: The phrase *outside the wire* refers to operations conducted outside of the relative safety and defences of KAF and/or Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) in a theatre of operation. Troops and reporters operating outside the wire were at a significantly greater risk of attack by enemy insurgents.

[140] Caroline Clark, "Wide angles and narrow views: the Iraq conflict in embed and other war zone reports," *Evaluation and Stance in War News: A Linguistic Analysis of American, British and Italian Television News Reporting of the 2003 Iraqi War*, Edited by Louann Haarman and Linda Lombardo (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009, 97-115), 97.

correspondent Matthew Fisher has worked as an embedded reporter with French, British, Canadian, and American forces in Afghanistan and with French, Australian, and Canadian military forces during other conflicts. In his experience, "Canada was by far the most welcoming, taking journalists from all countries and giving them access to the battlefield."[141] In fact, Canada's embedding program worked so well the Americans in NATO wanted to shut it down.[142] Given that Canada did not impose embed time limits as stringently as other NATO nations, journalists got savvy and began to understand what right looked and sounded like and this served as a point of contention with some American and British commanders in Regional Command South.[143] As of April 2007, a year after the Canadian Forces were committed to intense combat operations in the volatile Kandahar Province, fifteen of sixteen available embed positions were filled in southern Afghanistan, with reporters representing Global, CBC, CTV, CP, CanWest, the *Star*, and *The Globe and Mail*.[144] Mitch Potter, a *Star* reporter who embedded with the Canadian Forces in September 2006, regards the military embed program as invaluable to the public because "it's important we know how Canadian dollars are being spent, and how the Canadian effort is being managed on the ground."[145] Interestingly, Potter also demonstrates a keen sense of reality, always balancing his embedded coverage with unilateral coverage, noting that "journalists who only report from the base severely limit their ability to tell the larger story."[146] These unilateral journalists worked independently outside the wire, integrated into the Kandahar media pool and reported from locations external to Afghanistan. While American reporters were not permitted to remain at Kandahar Airfield as unilateral reporters once their

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[141] Fisher *interview*.
[142] *Ibid*.
[143] Fisher *interview*.
[144] Lisa Paul, "Embedding for Safety? The vicious cycle that keeps journalists unsafe in war zones," 20 April 2007, *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Summer 2008.
[145] *Ibid*.
[146] *Ibid*.

embedded deployment was complete, the Canadian embed policy was extremely flexible, permitting reporters to move seamlessly between embed and unilateral worlds. While risks of kidnapping and targeting by insurgents increase dramatically for unilateral reporters, reporter Graeme Smith of *The Globe and Mail* routinely leveraged the Canadian Forces' flexible embedding program to meet with the Taliban during periods of unilateral status. While an extremely dangerous practice, Smith claims that his unilateral reporting was "how [he found] the best information."[147] Freelance journalist Adnan Khan believes that "embedding is one of the reasons war reporting is becoming increasingly difficult [because] journalists are no longer viewed as independent, [but rather] the 'tools of the occupiers' or worse, spies."[148] In Potter's experience, "the likelihood that you're going to get an honest answer from an Afghan is much less likely if you're standing beside a soldier;" from Potter's perspective, the Afghans were afraid of soldiers and were less likely to tell their story to the embedded reporter. Conversely, Chris Wattie, a former *National Post* embedded and unilateral journalist during Task Force ORION, recalled that in his experience, Afghans did speak freely with soldiers and appeared – more often than not – more than happy to talk with them. In fact, he recalled quite vividly an intense conversation between an Afghan man and an infantry sergeant about the number of rose varieties that could be grown successfully in Afghanistan, a shocking contrast to war, death and talk of enemy insurgents. With regard to the argument that embedded reporters fail to get a balanced story because the Afghans do not want to speak to them due to their proximity to soldiers, what critics have not addressed is the shift towards Afghan-led operations, a critical component to increasing the capacity of Afghan National Security Forces to conduct security and military operations effectively and credibly after international forces transition control back into

[147] *Ibid.*

the hands of the Afghan government.[149] While Coalition Forces support security and military operations, they are not in the lead – Afghan security forces are in the lead, with Coalition Forces supporting in a mentorship role. While this is dependent on the trust the population has in its security forces – in this case, the Afghan National Army is trusted to a much higher degree than the Afghan National Police or Border Police – it is a viable deduction. Thus, the increasingly Afghan face on patrols and operations should change the dynamic between security forces and the local population; thus, an Afghan lead on operations *should* enable an embedded reporter to connect more easily with the local population. Interpreters, an essential component to Coalition Force and Afghan combined operations, are part of the force and readily available to support the interpretive requirements of embedded journalists. Thus, local Afghan stories should become increasingly accessible to embedded journalists as the credibility and trust of the Afghan National Security Forces by the people grows. Wattie also believes that speaking with Afghans did not necessarily always achieve a more balanced story either. In his experience, Afghans often told reporters what they believed they wanted to hear.[150] For example, in an interview with a district Afghan National Police chief following a car bombing in the vicinity of Canadian troops, the district chief informed Wattie that he was confident that the car bomb was aimed at Canadian troops specifically. However, in an interview with a competitor paper the very next day, his comment was the exact opposite. Each reporter had his own slant to his questioning of the district chief, and this slant was integrated into the chief's answer to the reporter. What news desks back in Canada needed to understand is that unilateral reporters in places like Afghanistan

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[148] Lisa Paul, "Embedding for Safety? The vicious cycle that keeps journalists unsafe in war zones," 20 April 2007, *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Summer 2008.

[149] Note: Based upon the author's experiences working at the ISAF Joint Command HQ from October 2009 to June 2010. The author worked as part of the Corps HQ's Plans and Projects department, under which fell the coordination, direction and oversight of initiatives to build the capacity of all Afghan National Security Forces.

[150] Chris Wattie, Conflict Reporting, *interview* with the author, Toronto, ON, 21 February 2013.

are at the mercy of their fixers[151] and translators, for good or for bad, and that a Canadian news desk in Ottawa or Toronto does not understand the extremely frustrating and difficult situation on the ground in a country like Afghanistan. War correspondent Matthew Fisher agrees, believing that while embedded reporters only provide a narrow slice of the war, so do the unilateral reporters. However, from his perspective unilateral reporters tended to be limited to regions uncontrolled by the enemy and more prone to dramatization that could not be fact-checked by colleagues while at least embedded reporting had the double-check of those present on military operations. Echoing Wattie's comments, Fisher also highlights the unilateral reporter's reliance on fixers who "were far too often liars and sympathetic to the enemy, or simply incapable of providing objective interviews or of understanding how journalists objectively create information."[152] However, he readily admits there is no way around the employment of fixers by unilateral reporters. The key is understanding that fixers are almost always overpaid by Afghan standards and "prone to telling reporters what they thought they wanted to hear."[153] Ultimately, in Fisher's estimation, "from the various slices of the war a partial picture of the conflict emerged…[however], getting a full picture was impossible because the Taliban [tended towards] kill[ing] and kidnap[ing] journalists who got too close to them."[154]

The earliest war correspondents were less inhibited, facing fewer frustrations in comparison with those of modern times. As Harold Evans states, "[t]hey had access, by definition. They were their own censors. They had no worry that their messages and histories would inadvertently cost lives because communication was so slow and restricted. They could take their time in reporting; they had no competition and their eyewitness accounts were

[151] Note: For the purposes of this thesis and according to The Free Dictionary, a *fixer* is "a person who uses influence or makes arrangements for another, especially by improper or unlawful means."
[152] Fisher *interview*.
[153] *Ibid*.

idiosyncratic.[155] And while war correspondents like Russell in the Crimea did face their own challenges in reporting on conflict, the challenges today have increased significantly. Technological advancements since the Gulf War of 1991 resulted in the instantaneous streaming of military "shock and awe" – *militainment*[156] -- in particular during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The advent of the embedded reporter is regarded by some to be the military and the government's attempt "to manage the information eventually reaching the public"[157] with the ultimate end-state of rallying pro-war sentiment. Others like Victoria Clarke, former Assistant Secretary of Defense Public Affairs, insist that embedding was implemented with a view to establishing a relationship of balance and transparency between the military, the media, and the public. Taking this one step further, Rosemary Poole argues that "the media and the military have teamed up to create a Hollywood-esque dramatization of the warfare, transforming reports on combat from a relay of unbiased facts to a red carpet media event"[158] more recognizable as militainment than information. Chris Wattie, a former *National Post* journalist who reported both as an embedded and unilateral journalist during Task Force ORION, has mixed feelings about military embedding programs. Embedding allows the military story to be told, he says, and "the actual, on the ground experience of the troops is such a compelling story and a story that doesn't get told as well or as often as it should, especially in Canada."[159] And while certain that the relationships he forged with the soldiers he embedded with *did* affect his stories, Wattie believes

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[154] *Ibid*.

[155] Harold Evans, "Reporting in the Time of Conflict," *Newseum*, last accessed 24 March 2013, http://www.newseum.org/warstories/essay/index.htm.

[156] James Poniewozik, That's Militainment! Time Magazine, 4 March 2002, last accessed 6 March 2013, www.wordspy.com/words/militainment.asp.

[157] S. Aday, S. Livingston and S. Hebert (2005), "Embedding the truth: A cross-cultural analysis of objectivity and television coverage of the Iraq war" (*Press/Politics*, 10(1), 3-21), 7.

[158] Kylie Tuosto, "The 'Grunt Truth' of Embedded Journalism: The New Media/Military Relationship," *Stanford Journal of International Relations (Fall/Winter 2008)*, 27.

[159] Rosemary Poole, "Embedded in Afghanistan," *UBC School of Journalism Thunderbird Media Review*, 2003.

that he would still report on negative aspects. In his mind, it is justifiable, given the shared risk and hardship, that sympathy develops out of knowledge of what soldiers do on operations; however, he is quick to highlight that embedded reporters are constantly aware that glowing reports will be suspect both from editors and the public.[160] Matthew Fisher also agrees that embedding gets a reporter close to his or her subjects, but – to echo Sebastian Junger's comment that "pure objectivity – difficult enough while covering a city council meeting – isn't remotely possible in a war"[161] – that this closeness is "an occupational hazard that is not confined to a war zone."[162] Beat reporters for sports or the police are equally prone to establishing closeness to a subject that is traditionally frowned upon by journalistic convention. Echoing the sentiments of Fisher, Wattie also sees the embed program as being too narrow, giving the public the "corporal's-eye view of the battlefield"[163] as opposed to the big picture. Interestingly, however, is Wattie's viewpoint that at least the embed program was a point from which to conduct unilateral reporting that most importantly encompassed "people that were almost certainly Taliban supporters."[164] Unilateral reporting should not demand Taliban interviewing and embedding should not imply pro-military propaganda – rather, both should be striving for a balanced and compelling story, regardless of whether the subject is the Canadian Forces, non-governmental organizations, the Afghan people or insurgent groups. As Murray Brewster notes, "it's not only the military that may not always be straight with the press;"[165] scepticism is a must for both embedded and unilateral reporters dealing with the military, insurgent groups, and local

[160] Wattie *interview*.
[161] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 26.
[162] Fisher *interview*.
[163] Wattie *interview.*
[164] *Ibid*.
[165] Brewster *interview.*

nationals, and fosters an extremely frustrating environment for those reporters trying to achieve a balanced story.

4.6. The Battle for Panjwai

> *They are saying that they have killed 200 Taliban but they did not kill even 10 Taliban. They are just destroying civilian homes and agricultural land. They are using the media to do propaganda against the Taliban.*[166]
>
> — Mullah Dadullah, Taliban commander of south and southeastern Afghanistan, commenting on the opening stages of Operation MEDUSA

The Battle of Panjwai was the largest operation in Afghanistan since 2002 and was intended to break-up or defeat insurgents who had gathered southwest of Kandahar city in the district of Panjwai[167] under command of Mullah Dadullah. From a Canadian perspective, this was the first battle fought by the Canadian Forces since the Korean War nearly fifty years prior; for the Taliban, their campaign against the Canadians had a definite goal: "a high-profile attack or series of attacks on Kandahar City that would drive a wedge between the United States and other NATO nations operating in Afghanistan."[168] Characterized by "small villages and complex defensive terrain, intractable hostility and endless roadside bombs,"[169] Panjwai existed as a center of gravity for the Taliban, without which the capture and control of Kandahar City was unachievable. From May 16 to August 3, 2006, operations led by Lieutenant-Colonel Hope raged on, operations that were hoped to be a decisive victory for Coalition Forces by some senior military officials.

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[166] "Operation MEDUSA," Military History Canada, *Duty & Valour*, last accessed 1 April 2013, http://dutyandvalour.com/wiki/Operation_MEDUSA.

[167] "Coalition commanders say strengthened troops will hit Taliban hard this summer,"*Canadian Press*, 4 June 2006, last accessed 1 April 2013, http://ehis.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=4&sid=20b9224c-d575-46eb-99ed-014ca6f6587e%40sessionmgr115&hid=105&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=n5h&AN=MYO300828701006.

[168] Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 15.

[169] Adam Day, "Operation Medusa: The Battle For Panjwai", *Legion Magazine*, September 1, 2007, accessed 8 March 2013, www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2007/09/operation-medusa-the-battle-for-panjwai.

Despite the fact that this battle was a first for the Canadian Forces since Korea and a culminating operation for the Taliban in their self-proclaimed spiritual heartland, Chris Wattie notes in his book, *Contact Charlie*, that "the Battle of Panjwai went largely unrecognized, despite the presence of literally dozens of embedded journalists in Kandahar, several of whom were present at some of the firefights that made up the battle."[170] Interestingly, the first articles that appear to be speaking to the Battle of Panjwai emerged on May 17 and 18, 2006 immediately following the combat death of Captain Nichola Goddard, an artillery officer serving as a Forward Observer with Task Force ORION. In a May 18 article by Geoffrey York, a veteran war correspondent who has covered war zones in Sudan, Iraq, Somalia and the Palestine Territories for the *Globe and Mail*, he writes that Goddard "was embarking on one of the most arduous battles of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan […] a crucial fight to break the Taliban's grip on a strategic district at the western entrance to Kandahar city. [It was] an intense firefight with up to 200 Taliban insurgents […] where hundreds of Canadian soldiers were supporting Afghan security forces."[171] This is one of the first indications to intensifying combat operations in southern Afghanistan, coming from a journalist who, while initially skeptical of his decision to embed with the Canadian Forces for four weeks, discovered that the experience "was a more complicated picture than I had expected."[172] Initially thinking that embedding in Afghanistan would only reap limited gains in telling the stories of soldiers, York came to realize quickly that when the Canadian Forces were at the center of large operations in southern Afghanistan, "you need to be embedded if you want to write the best possible story […]. It

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[170] Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 15.

[171] Geoffrey York, "26-year-old officer becomes first Canadian woman yet to die in combat," *Globe and Mail*, May 18, 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060517.wsoldier0517/APStory.

[172] Jim Sheppard, "Reporters on 'Embedded Journalists," *Globe and Mail*, 8 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060607.wliveembeds0608/APStory.

would be very difficult for an outsider to anticipate a news story, to travel to the military base in time […] and then have access to the right people to do the best possible story."[173] However, York was quick to point out that while he doesn't see a viable alternative to the military embed program in Afghanistan or in future conflicts, both embedded and unilateral reporting are required for balanced coverage. In his mind, primarily unilateral reporters like Graeme Smith were vital to comprehensive coverage of Afghanistan to ensure that the stories of Afghan civilians, aid workers, and the enemy were equally told to the Canadian public and the international community.[174] While York, known for his sombre portraits of progress in Afghanistan, painted a surprisingly optimistic picture of the Battle of Panjwai, John Cotter, an embedded reporter for the Canadian Press, critically notes in his June 12, 2006, article "Canadian, Afghan forces clash with Taliban," that "one week after coalition commanders claimed victory in a battle with Taliban in this [Pashmul] area, Canadian troops were again hunting insurgents just outside of Kandahar."[175] Despite being embedded and likely overwhelmed by the acts of heroism, valor, and tenacity of soldiers every day while trying to deter Taliban insurgent operations, Cotter points out what Task Force ORION was quickly learning – that the Taliban were not going to give up Panjwai without a ruthless fight given it was the foothold required to gain entry into Kandahar City.

Snappily responding to fellow columnist Lawrence Martin's comment that the news media were at risk for being taken from a ride in Afghanistan by both the military and the Canadian government, Christie Blatchford – a journalist since 1972 – stated "I'd take an army

[173] *Ibid*.
[174] *Ibid*.
[175] John Cotter, "Canadian, Afghan forces clash with Taliban," *Globe and Mail*, June 12, 2006.

corps over the press corps in Ottawa any day."[176] A familiar by-line to Canadians throughout Canada's deployment in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2012, but most notably in 2006 during the Battle of Panjwai, Blatchford is most famous for her book, *Fifteen Days*, a narrative of fifteen days during the Battle of Panjwai that struck a chord with Blatchford during her military embedded reporting. While most journalists who have embedded with any military admit that there is a camaraderie that evolves out of shared danger, fear, success, tragedy, and happiness, they all contend that they believe their journalistic standards prevail despite the fog of war and, as Smith so clearly articulates, "I'm not risking my life every day to serve anybody's war machine. I am trying, in tiny increments, to serve the public."[177] In the Taliban's eyes, journalists – whether embedded or unilateral; to the Taliban it would be of no consequence which type of reporting a journalist was engaged in – are legitimate targets. For Blatchford, her time as an embedded reporter during Task Force ORION's deployment was a challenging and dangerous one, but one that resulted in some remarkable stories of Canadian Forces' operations in Afghanistan against a determined Taliban:

> It seemed every turn in the giant mud-walled maze held a sweet surprise – here, two ancient black tea-brewing kettles on a ledge allowing a glimpse of a simple life quickly abandoned; there, giant sunflowers grinning from behind a mud wall; everywhere clusters of small green grapes hanging from leafy vines…It was the trickster Afghanistan at its winsome best, making the world seen benign and enchanting…Not two hours later, Cpl. Boneca was being frantically carried out on a black rubber sheet through those same grape fields by his mates.[178]

At the height of the Battle of Panjwai, on July 10 and 11, 2006, Blatchford wrote a series of articles, most notably and controversially her *Globe and Mail* article entitled "Canadian

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[176] Jim Sheppard, "Reporters on 'Embedded Journalists," *Globe and Mail*, 8 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060607.wliveembeds0608/APStory.

[177] *Ibid*.

[178] Christie Blatchford, "Canadian soldier dies in Afghan battle: Soldiers engaged in lethal two-day game of cat and mouse with Taliban fighters," *Globe and Mail*, 10 July 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060710.AFGHANBLATCHFORD/APStory.

soldier dies in Afghan battle: Soldiers engaged in lethal two-day game of cat and mouse with Taliban fighters," after being embedded with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. Her reporting sparked strong debate with *Globe and Mail* readers regarding embedded journalism and the very heart of the matter, the Canadian mission in Afghanistan as a whole. Her first-person account of a dangerous Battle Group operation, carried out by Task Force ORION and the combat engineers and soldiers of the 205th Corps of the Afghan National Army and their American trainers, captured the scene brilliantly. Her story captured the frantic chaos of the battlefield, the "fairness and respect for [the] rules of engagement"[179] exercised by Canadian soldiers, the multiple, determined assaults launched by the Canadians and Afghan National Army soldiers on Taliban firing strongholds, and the quiet reverence for those killed, Afghan and coalition alike. Not afraid to leverage the English language to capture a moment with accuracy, Blatchford was condemned by many readers following her use of Corporal Mooney's word "shitshow" to describe the very battle he himself was wounded in action fighting. Her frank response? "War is about death, blood, good and evil, all the big things. It's also loud and scary, and sometimes nothing captures that better than good old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon profanity."[180] Blatchford's gritty first-hand accounts are beautifully written prose depicting the brutal realities of war, "regular Joe" nature of the Canadian Forces soldier, and the complexities of a society far removed from that of the average Canadian. Accused of having abandoned objectivity for cheerleading and ignoring all sides of the conflict during her time as an embedded reporter in Afghanistan, Blatchford stated that "I'm not about to seek comment from 'Taliban spokesmen' any more than I would have from Hitler's. And my

[179] *Ibid*.

[180] Jim Sheppard, Christie Blatchford on Canada's Mission in Afghanistan," *Globe and Mail*, 11 July 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060710.wlivekandahar0711/APStory.

dispatches, whatever else, aren't toeing a party line. I'm not covering this from the safety of the base at KAF. For the most part, I'm out in the field, with soldiers, in combat if they are, and trying to describe what it's like."[181] Again, as Matthew Fisher stated, "from the various slices of the war a partial picture of the conflict emerge;"[182] embedded journalists provided one slice of the war in Afghanistan while unilateral reporters provided another. The *truth* of the matter likely lies in the combination of these two reporters.

When it comes down to the notion of objective reporting, Blatchford – a columnist whose self-admitted job is to have an opinion and state it unless she is engaged in straight-up reporting – does not believe in "so-called 'objective reporting' – period. [She] think[s] the far better thing to strive for is fairness."[183] Graeme Smith is quick to concur, stating that:

> [m]y job as a reporter is to burrow myself as deeply as possible inside the lives of my subjects, glean every possible scrap of information from them, and write about what I've learned with compassion, strict fairness, and a hard eye for the reality of the situation. Frankly, I am a little mystified about the fuss over embedding, because this process – getting close to someone, then stepping back and writing from a more objective viewpoint – is exactly the same methodology that journalists use with many other subjects. The only difference, I'd argue, is that fewer journalists succeed with doing their jobs properly in a war zone. But you have to cut them some slack. It's a war zone, after all, so reporting is a little more difficult.[184]

In his June 23, 2006, article "An oasis of relative calm in a sea of violence: Quick funding, tactical targeting of U.S. projects reaping rewards,"[185] Smith sees himself as he does on most days in Afghanistan – embedded not only with the military but, more often than not, with the Afghan population. With this article written at the height of the Battle of Panjwai, Smith travelled as a unilateral reporter embedded in Afghan society to Qalat to report on the successes

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[181] *Ibid*.
[182] *Ibid*.
[183] Jim Sheppard, "Reporters on 'Embedded Journalists," *Globe and Mail*, 8 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060607.wliveembeds0608/APStory.
[184] *Ibid*.

experienced in Zabul province within southern Afghanistan. Interviewing Afghans from carpet weavers to the city mayor to the governor – Del Bar Jan Arman – all agree that Zabul, a former Taliban stronghold, has made significant progress, most particularly due to United States funding to provincial projects. Of note, Smith reported that one of the most important things the Canadians needed to learn was the need to "deliver civic improvements quickly."[186] The American Commander's Emergency Relief Program (CERP) was reported to have delivered $18 to $19 million from 2004 to 2006 to the Zabul region, a program that both the Canadians and British lacked given that it permits the commander on the ground to "directly fund whatever projects they choose, often very quickly."[187] While not a perfect program, it gets results and quickly, which gains the confidence of the Afghan people. However, this all said, Smith also reported on why the Canadians have not taken this route in Afghanistan, noting that the military had decided to use Canada's Confidence in Government model, letting the provincial governor decide which districts receive assistance. District leaders were brought into the process by asking them to draft their lists of the neediest villages, and the villagers were then given a voice to decide by consensus what project their village most needed. As Smith reported, "The PRT could [have gone] around this whole process [like CERP]…Instead of consulting, we could [have built] things immediately. But that's charity, instead of supporting institutions."[188] While both approaches have advantages and disadvantages, Smith diligently reported both sides through both civilian and military sources, providing an extremely balanced and fair look at the

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[185] Graeme Smith, "An oasis of relative calm in a sea of violence: Quick funding, tactical targeting of U.S. projects reaping rewards," *Globe and Mail*, 23 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060623.AFGHAN23/APStory.

[186] *Ibid*.

[187] Graeme Smith, "An oasis of relative calm in a sea of violence: Quick funding, tactical targeting of U.S. projects reaping rewards," *Globe and Mail*, 23 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060623.AFGHAN23/APStory.

challenges associated with re-building Afghanistan. In an April 28, 2006, article written by Graeme Smith from Sangisar at the start of the Battle of Panjwai, Smith reported on the allegations by Afghan National Police and from the Maywand District headquarters that Canadian soldiers "stay[ed] on the fringes [of a battle] while the poorly equipped Afghans endured several hours of running battle," resulting in nine Afghan casualties. Smith not only reported on Afghan allegations, but also Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry's response to these allegations and Taliban intercepted transmissions about the battle. Smith did not take sides: in fact, Major Nick Grimshaw, Company Commander Bravo Company, was reported as admitting to "poor coordination with the Canadians and Americans"[189] and apologizing for the loss of the Afghan National Police officers. From Blatchford's perspective, her role as a journalist is to be honest; during Task Force ORION and the Battle of Panjwai, that meant writing stories as she saw them first-hand in the language of the soldiers she saw live and die on a remote desert battlefield far from the armchair critics back in Canada. Whether unilateral or embedded, it is a reasonable assumption that all journalists would share Blatchford's sentiments – they strive for honesty and fairness in the stories they produce with the ultimate aim of creating at least a partial picture of a complex, foreign conflict for the Canadian public. While the term "embedding" tends to invoke images of war-time propaganda machines, the notion of journalists mindlessly taking anyone's word as gospel is wrong. As Geoffrey York commented,

> [e]veryone ties to control the message. But journalists [embedded or unilateral] learn to resist those pressures, and we have many ways at getting the truth without being manipulated […]; it's just wrong to think we are serving the military machine. Believe

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[188] Graeme Smith, "An oasis of relative calm in a sea of violence: Quick funding, tactical targeting of U.S. projects reaping rewards," *Globe and Mail*, 23 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060623.AFGHAN23/APStory.

[189] Graeme Smith, "Canadians take flak over Afghan gun battle," Globe and Mail, 28 April 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060428.AFGHAN28/APStory.

> me, a lot of military people are unhappy with some of our stories, and they certainly don't think we are blindly serving their interests. I spent a lot of time outside the military base with Afghan civilians, and being embedded does not prevent that.[190]

4.7. Beyond the Battle of Panjwai and Task Force ORION

August 3, 2006, saw the draw-down of Task Force ORION operations in the Battle of Panjwai in the Arghandab Wadi following a vicious fight at the infamous White Schoolhouse, a fight that resulted in the deaths of four Canadian soldiers over the course of three hours. On August 4, 2006, Task Force ORION commander Lieutenant-Colonel Hope "repeated his concerns that the Taliban were massing for an attack on Kandahar within the next two weeks and suggested that Task Force ORION be kept in Afghanistan for an extra month to help the new battle group that was already arriving in KAF deal with the threat;"[191] while this was not an option for the Combined Task Force AEGIS commander, Canadian Brigadier-General Fraser, Hope was frank when he stated that a battle group was simply insufficient for the impending fight. Brigadier-General Fraser had already directed the planning of Operation MEDUSA, a massive operation designed to "quell insurgent activity in Panjwai" in October 2006; however, he "wondered if that might be too late."[192] As Fraser read the historic books, *The Bear Went Over the Mountain* and *The Other Side of the Mountain*, volumes speaking to the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, he realized the magnitude of what his Battle Group Commander had told him: while the possibility of the Taliban holding Kandahar City for long in the face of a coalition counter-attack was slim and next to non-existent, the image of a Taliban white flag flying over the spiritual heartland of Afghanistan would be a victory that could shatter coalition

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[190] Jim Sheppard, "Reporters on 'Embedded Journalists," *Globe and Mail*, 8 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060607.wliveembeds0608/APStory.

[191] Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 285.

[192] *Ibid*., 285.

cohesion and international support of operations in the war-torn country while bolstering the Taliban's power among the local population.

On September 3, 2006, the soldiers of the newly arrived Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) Battle Group, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel Omar Lavoie, stormed the White Schoolhouse and clustered buildings as "one of the opening moves of Brigadier-General Fraser's Operation MEDUSA, a large sweep through almost the entire Panjwai involving more than 1,400 coalition and Afghan soldiers."[193] Four Canadians were killed this day, with another week of coalition operations required to clear the area of Taliban insurgents. But, "by September 14, Operation MEDUSA was declared over and NATO commanders were claiming it a major success, with more than 1,000 Taliban killed."[194] As for Mullah Dadullah, the military might of Task Force ORION operations had put a significant damper on his plans, forcing him to call off his Independence Day attacks on Kandahar City. After further attempts to re-group throughout the RCR battle group's deployment subsequent to Task Force ORION operations, Mullah Dadullah was killed in a special forces' raid in Helmand Province. From Chris Wattie's perspective, Dadullah's media savvy may have been his ultimate downfall:

> Dadullah gave a videotaped interview in Quetta one day before his compound was surrounded by helicopter-borne commandos, and he was tracked by coalition forces as he crossed the Pakistan border into Afghanistan shortly after finishing the interview. Because of Dadullah's legendary status and reputation for cheating death, Kandahar Governor Assadullah Khalid had his body retrieved from Helmand and put on display for reporters.[195]

As the war in Afghanistan waged on after Task Force ORION, the number of restrictions placed on the press by the military increased. While the intent of denying the Taliban battle damage assessment was keenly understood by reporters in the region, many found the

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[193] Chris Wattie, *Contact Charlie: The Canadian Army, The Taliban and the Battle that Saved Afghanistan* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 289.

[194] *Ibid*., 290.

restrictions increasingly frustrating. For example, the blanket ban on reporting the wounded in action as of December 2009 was regarded by many reporters as an attempt to sanitize the war. From the military's perspective, this restriction fully supported its requirement to deny battle damage assessment to the insurgents. From the media's perspective, however, this restriction reduced the suffering and sacrifice of soldiers and their families to an annual statistic. While Troops in Contact (TICs), regardless of location, were to be briefed to journalists, this practice appeared to be side-tracked where wounded were incurred. During the 2008 period, Murray Brewster was not permitted to report an exact location of a firefight resulting in a death – a firefight in Zangabad was only permitted to be reported as a firefight in the district of Panjwai; speculation over reasons include the fact that coalition leadership didn't wish to draw international attention to the fact that ground that had been re-taken multiple times by Coalition Forces continued to be lost to the Taliban. When Brewster contacted his fixer to contact his 1-800-Taliban source to confirm where the firefight occurred, the source revealed Zangabad. He further divulged that the Taliban had killed ten Canadians, destroyed four military vehicles and cost the Canadian taxpayers $428, 000.[196] By not reporting on the exact location of the firefight, the Canadians may have lost an opportunity to counter enemy misinformation. However, the battle of restriction worked both ways; when the military attempted to censor the publishing of pictures of Canadian soldiers with Taliban prisoners, journalists "refused to be censored. 'We rejected the military's attempts to supress the photos, we consulted our lawyers, we studied the Geneva Conventions, and we published the photos within a few hours. This illustrates that the

[195] *Ibid*., 291.
[196] Brewster *interview*.

military does not have full control of journalists,"[197] an important hallmark of the Task Force ORION deployment as a whole.

From Noah Richler's perspective, "when it came to narrating Canadian soldiers' participation […] in the war in Afghanistan […] nothing less than full praise of the military cause in the most heroic of terms was acceptable."[198] However, as previously stated, Junger's perspective of reporting on the war in Afghanistan was even more stringent, noting that "Vietnam was *our* paradigm…*our* template for how not to get hoodwinked by the U.S. military [in Afghanistan], and it exerted such a powerful influence that anything short of implacable cynicism sometimes felt like a sellout;"[199] meaning that journalists, for the most part, made a conscious effort to be critical of operations, both military and governmental-led, in Afghanistan for fear of accusations of sympathizing with a governmental tool of war. Richler, through literary research, concluded that distorted narratives needed to exist to "support […] governments that deliver troops into battle…an acceptance of mortal threats to soldiers…[and a] general agreement that the grief and loss by soldiers' families and by the larger community of Canada would not be experienced in vain;"[200] that we, as a Canadian society, needed the news media to "convince ourselves that [the] fight was right."[201] But the narration of a story of *right* is not the news media's job, nor is this narration the job of the military; the explanation of why a military is committed to a conflict boils down to the government's responsibility to articulate through the media to the Canadian public why forces will be deployed into a theatre of operation and how

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[197] Jim Sheppard, "Reporters on 'Embedded Journalists," *Globe and Mail*, 8 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060607.wliveembeds0608/APStory.

[198] Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2012), 224.

[199] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 133.

[200] Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2012), 224.

[201] Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2012), 42.

that deployment will further Canadian foreign policy in the eyes of Canadians and the international community.

CHAPTER 5 – THE CANADIAN FORCES, MILITARY EMBEDDING AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS INTO THE FUTURE

5.1. Media "Management"

Murray Brewster, a long-time journalist with the *Canadian Press*, has worked over fifteen months in Afghanistan between 2006 and 2011 as both an embedded and unilateral reporter. From his perspective, journalists' professional obligations include "informing the public, pointing out right and wrong, providing balanced and fair coverage even when those you are reporting on fail to be balanced and fair with the press, and – most importantly – afflict the comfortable with intellectual honesty."[202] Brewster's thoughts echo those of Derek Stoffel, who states that "[i]n media it is the news organization that decides what stories to cover, based on its assessment of the public's interest and on the organization's role in society. It is not up to PR/PA staff officers to determine what is a story or not. Their role is to get their organization's message out. Part of their role is also to help facilitate the journalist's access to officials and information within the organization."[203] As a journalist, Brewster believes in the utility of military embed programs, especially when commanders implicitly understood the media not as a propaganda tool but rather as independent witness on behalf of a democratic Canadian society.

He finds attempts by the military to manage the media distasteful despite its demands for honesty and balance in coverage of its operations. In his opinion, the military must stop trying to strategize and manage the media and focus its Public Affairs efforts on the facilitation of access to information to embedded and unilateral journalists alike rather than on pitching blatantly self-

[202] Murray Brewster *interview.*

serving stories. Brewster believes "this whole idea of positive and negative stories simply doesn't exist; a journalist sees stories as compelling, interesting or boring,"[204] and military Public Affairs Officers should concentrate on facilitating the reporting of compelling and interesting stories by both embedded and unilateral journalists. For the Canadian public to take five to seven minutes out of their day to read or watch a news story, it has to be worth their time. And as Brewster so frankly put it, "five thousand people having transited through Kandahar Airfield in a year is not a story; it is a statistic and simply not compelling or interesting enough to qualify as a news story."[205] However, the story of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in the Battle of Panjwai – with characters like Corporals Boneca and Mooney, Sergeant Tower, Captain Nichola Goddard, and Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope – or the stories of Afghan widow work initiatives making daypacks and tourniquets for the Afghan National Army brainstormed by Canadian soldiers attract unilateral and embedded journalists' attentions. The interest is in *Canada* and *Canadians* in Afghanistan.

5.2. The Canadian Forces: In Need of a Narrative and a Voice

When the Canadian Forces prepared for "its largest and most dangerous mission since the Korean War"[206] in the summer and fall of 2005, the military "had a story to tell, the capacity and the knowledge on how to tell it, and a spokesman [General Hillier] who was committed to reversing the leadership debacle of a decade earlier"[207] in Somalia. Despite these triumphs and General Hillier's retirement in 2006, public support of Canada's contributions to operations in Afghanistan were at an all-time low only three years later in 2008. According to a CBC-

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[203] Derek Stoffel, "The Military and the Media in Canada: A Relationship from Tension to Trust," in *From the Outside Looking In: Media and Defence Analyst Perspectives on Canadian Military Leadership*, edited by Colonel Bernd Horn, 19-40 (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005): 31.

[204] Murray Brewster *interview*.

[205] *Ibid*.

[206] Tom Ring, "Civil-Military Relations in Canada: A 'Cluster Theory' Explanation" (Master's thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 2009), 125.

Environics survey in September 2008, 34% of Canadians strongly disapproved of Canadian military action in Afghanistan and 22% somewhat disapproved, equalling 56% of the population, the highest disapproval since the commencement of operations in Afghanistan in 2002.[208] And while 65% of Canadians believed the mission wouldn't be successful,[209] "the levels of public support for the Canadian Forces in general and the now increasingly visible senior leadership grew to unprecedented levels."[210] This was due, in part, to the efforts expended by Tom Ring and General Hillier on fostering a relationship between the military and the news media. As was previously stated, the 2006 combat deployment into Afghanistan was an extremely challenging mission whereby success was not only measured by the attainment of combat objectives or the securing of villages, but – in the opinion of military commanders like Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hope – by the public opinion of Afghans and Canadians alike; and while Australian war correspondent John Pilger, renowned for his coverage of the Vietnam war, regards contemporary war reporting as cheerleading designed to "whip the home front crowds into patriotic compliance, if not fervor,"[211] others contend that the magnitude of today's war reporters can tell a balanced story despite the inherent challenges. As Graeme Smith stated in a live interview on military embedding in Afghanistan in June 2006, the reality of the situation is that whether the war in Afghanistan is reported by embedded or unilateral journalists, in concert with or distinct from military forces operating in a theatre of operations, it is "a dangerous and chaotic country…[and] the size of the reporting challenge often dwarfs our [journalists'] ability to give

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[207] *Ibid*., 125.

[208] "Public support for Afghan mission lowest ever: poll," CBC News, 5 September 2008, accessed 27 March 2013, http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2008/09/05/poll-afghan.html.

[209] *Ibid*.

[210] Tom Ring, "Civil-Military Relations in Canada: A 'Cluster Theory' Explanation" (Master's thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 2009), 125.

[211] Noah Richler, *What We Talk About When We Talk About War* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions, 2012), 192.

you [the public] a full accounting of the situation."[212] Neither the embedded nor the unilateral approach to conflict reporting alone can achieve a comprehensive story given issues with security on the ground and access to sources; so the embed and the unilateral reporters must complement each other's strengths and weaknesses to avoid pack journalism and pool resources as required to tell the Canadian public the stories they expect to hear. What is essential from the Canadian public, however, is an understanding that criticism by the press does not always equal balanced reporting; and the fact that criticism does not necessarily equal credible journalism is an important distinction for the average citizen to hoist aboard when reading news coverage of a conflict in a country completely foreign in language, culture and way of life.

5.3. The CF and Embedding – The Way Ahead

So where do the Canadian Forces and the news media need to go to capitalize upon the relationships forged during Task Force ORION and the remainder of Canadian military operations in Afghanistan? First, as previously stated and according to Sharon Hobson, "the jargon, the force structure, the equipment, and the tactics [of a military force] all take time and effort to learn;"[213] this said, it is far simpler for the inexperienced field reporter to "cover the familiar – the human interest story (casualties, separation from family, living conditions, etc.) or the political angle (government duplicity or dithering, ministerial mismanagement) – than it is to cover the unfamiliar, such as military capabilities, changing tactics and sustainability."[214] During the Battle of Panjwai and the operations leading up to it, the journalists reporting on Task Force ORION – whether embedded or unilateral – had to wrestle with concepts like cordon and

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[212] Jim Sheppard, "Reporters on 'Embedded Journalists," *Globe and Mail*, 8 June 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20060607.wliveembeds0608/APStory.

[213] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 16.

searches, counterinsurgency operations, defensive positions, flanking attacks, and information operations. Looking to the future, the Canadian Forces needs to continue to improve its ability to explain complex operations in simple, civilianized terms. This will ensure that journalists are reporting on operations accurately and simply enough to inform the Canadian public. To this end, the Canadian Forces *is* making head-way. The Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute and the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies started sponsoring a University of Calgary certificate course in military journalism in the spring of 2012. The competitive nine-day course, open to third and fourth-year journalism students across the country, boasts a "combination of media-military theory in a classroom setting in Calgary, coupled with field visits to Regular Force and Reserve units elsewhere in Alberta."[215] During Exercise WARRIOR RAM in April 2012 in Wainwright, Alberta – a 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group exercise run in concert with the Army's Combat Team Commander's Course – journalism students spent a number of days in the field watching combat team and battle group attacks, visiting headquarters, and touring the various units that comprise a brigade group. Prior to the conduct of a combat team attack, the mechanics and tactics of what they were about to witness was explained in detail; during a subsequent visit to the Brigade Headquarters, students were briefed by the Senior Duty Officer about the current operations and planning functions of the headquarters and response to tactical issues, and asked detailed and insightful questions about the conduct of military operations.[216] With another course planned for the spring of 2013, the impact

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[214] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 16.

[215] "Twelve Scholarships offered in nine-day military journalism course," Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, http://cmss.ucalgary.ca/news/twelve-scholarships-offered-nine-day-military-journalism-course.

[216] Note: Based on the author's personal experience as the Acting G9 (Artillery Commander/Advisor) during Exercise WARRIOR RAM 2012.

of facilitating the familiarization of student reporters with the extremely complex world of the military can only pay dividends to the Canadian Forces in terms of future reporting.

Second, the news media needs to re-consider how it reports on conflict. Afghanistan was not just about casualties, but that was often the focus of many news agencies. As was highlighted in Chapter 4, many reporters indicated that their desks wanted them at KAF in the event of a ramp ceremony;[217] KAF was "where the wounded [were] brought back, where the dead [were] returned to, where briefings happen[ed], that's where a clear picture of what happened developed."[218] However, as previously stated, "death watch" at KAF is not the intent of embedded or unilateral reporting. Journalists should not only focus on other subjects, including coalition casualties, but on local nationals – in this case, the Afghan people – reconstruction projects, humanitarian aid efforts, capacity-building initiatives, and non-governmental organization training programs. But, as *Globe and Mail* journalist Lawrence Martin wrote, "news is defined by the degree of novelty…[and] some day […] editors will decide that one soldier being struck down isn't such big news any more. It's war. It happens all the time;"[219] from the Canadian perspective, however, combat deaths were news to the complete exclusion of any gains made in Afghanistan on any given day. CTV journalist Lisa Laflamme indicates in an interview with Sharon Hobson that "she had numerous ideas for covering humanitarian aid and reconstruction stories 'but it's a question of whether the view is absorbing them.' She said polls show that such stories just do not seem to register with the Canadian public – there is always

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[217] From author's personal experience: A ramp ceremony is a ceremony conducted within a theatre of operations whereby the remains of a soldier or civilian killed in action are loaded onto an aircraft for transport back to Canada in the presence of all Canadians not deployed on operations outside of the Kandahar Airfield.

[218] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 13.

[219] Lawrence Martin, "Are we making too much of a few casualties?" *Globe and Mail*, 13 July 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060713.COMARTINI13/APStory.

more interest in stories about Canadian casualties."[220] So, it would appear that either the Canadian public is (a) inherently macabre or (b) disingenuous when it demands *balanced* news coverage of conflict. As Major Couture, a Public Affairs Officer operating out of KAF during Task Force ORION, stated, "a lot of media coverage was incident driven. It gives an impression that the whole place [was] falling apart, and it is total hell over there, and there [was] no progress being made. So the main focus was always the bloody stories, the sad stories, and the negative stories."[221] It is no wonder that Canadians were polled in 2008 at 65% believing that the Canadian Forces' mission in Afghanistan would not be unsuccessful.

Third, from Chris Wattie's perspective, the Canadian Forces needs to take full advantage of its embedding program. In his opinion, the Canadian Forces are the primary beneficiaries of the embedding program and should use the program to further meet its media messaging needs while respecting operational security restrictions. The friendly fire incident of March 28, 2006, killing Private Costall at Forward Operating Base Robinson is the perfect example of what *not* to do from a military perspective; during an initial media scrum, all the military was able to provide was a statement to the effect that Costall had died in Sangin defending his fellow soldiers. In Murray Brewster's opinion:

> Sangin was my first experience with how hopelessly and wilfully inarticulate the Canadian military could be…as an institution [it] seemed quite pleased to have a stranglehold on information and the movement of journalists. And then it would complain – sometimes in bitterly personal terms – about how it was portrayed. In the end…it was left to…a British colonel to explain to the Canadian media the circumstances surrounding the death of a Canadian soldier.[222]

[220] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 14.

[221] *Ibid*., 15.

Scott Taylor recounts an experience as a unilateral reporter travelling with a Senlis Council team into the volatile Panjwai district; as Taylor recalls, it was a

> public relations team's only dream: two Canadian army medics attending to an injured Afghan child as his father thanked them profusely […]. Once the treatment was complete, the beaming Afghan man happily wheeled his son [in a wheel-barrow] back to their village. Unfortunately for a Canadian military hard-pressed to win a hearts-and-minds campaign both in Kandahar and at home in Canada, this success story was not captured on film. Not because no one got the story out (I did), but because the military brass ordered me not to film the event. I was told not to film the Canadian soldiers administering first aid to an Afghan child.[223]

The reason cited for his denial was due to his un-embedded status at the time, despite the fact that he was reinstating his embedded status the same evening. The Canadian Forces can do and has done so much better in communicating to the Canadian public through the media. In a column by Christie Blatchford on July 21, 2006, she notes the Canadian Forces' in Kandahar were under no disillusionment that "the Canadian coalition mission in Afghanistan [was] going to be easy, bloodless, quick or even successful."[224] From United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan representatives to senior military commanders to civilians with non-governmental organizations, all acknowledged that major obstacles to progress included the Afghan economy's reliance on heroin – a drug "much of the West has deemed public enemy No. 1;" the mistakes made by the West in the creation of the Afghan government, a government still struggling with corruption today, and, most importantly, the fact that military might alone will not win the war in Afghanistan. Yet senior military commanders refused to let the odd stacked against them in terms of obstacles that dampen the resolve with which Task Force ORION battled Taliban insurgents while other soldiers worked on the governance and development lines of operation; as

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[222] Murray Brewster, *The Savage War: The Untold Battles of Afghanistan* (Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2011), 19.

[223] Scott Taylor, *Unembedded* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Publishers Inc., 2009), 334-335.

Blatchford wrote, tongue in cheek, "there are so many meetings with village elders that the poor elders barely get a day when there isn't someone in uniform turning up and begging for another *shura*.[225] Even Afghans, who can talk up a storm, must be damn near talked out, though their good manners and famous hospitality rarely see them turn anyone down."[226]

Ultimately, and most importantly, what will continue to be required for as long as the Canadian Forces are engaged in operations is the leadership, strategic vision and authority required to communicate to Canadians that a conflict is the right one, worth the price from the perspective of lives, limbs, and minds and that Canada is doing its part on the international stage.[227] To achieve this, what is required is unwavering senior governmental and military leadership commitment by the Minister of National Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff, overt, vocal political support of military operations, and Public Affairs strategic, operational and tactical engagements. More importantly, however, is the political and public opinion battlefields back home. As Brett Boudreau, former Public Affairs senior advisor during Task Force ORION, stated, "[w]hile the operators [military commanders] were focused on the battle, the [Vice Chief of Defence Staff], [Chief of Defence Staff] and other key players back in Canada were not just focused on the tactical battle – the enablers back home needed to garner public and governmental support that translated into Finance Minister monetary support to operations. This occurred before the 2006 deployment, setting the stage for success from the start."[228]

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[224] Christie Blatchford, "Sweat, blood and tears on Afghan soil, but after battle, Canadians push to rebuild," *Globe and Mail*, 21 July 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060721.BLATCHFORD21/APStory.

[225] Note: A *shura* is an Afghan meeting with village elders.

[226] Christie Blatchford, "Sweat, blood and tears on Afghan soil, but after battle, Canadians push to rebuild," *Globe and Mail*, 21 July 2006, accessed 10 November 2012, http://gold.globeinvestor.com/servlet/story/LAC.20060721.BLATCHFORD21/APStory.

[227] Ring *interview*.

[228] Brett Boudreau, Conflict Reporting, *interview* with the author, Ottawa, ON, 18 January 2013.

Finally, the Canadian Forces and media alike need to recognize reality – print media is nearing irrelevance with many segments of society, especially the young, and social media taking news media by storm. The military must monitor social media and target those that will give the biggest bang for the buck if it has a hope of reaching a predominately digital Canadian public. Conversely, war correspondents – embedded and unilateral alike – are struggling to survive "a mere century and a half after [they] 'officially' began."[229] The advent of iPhone-centric conflict reporting by "locally recruited correspondents ready to break a story and with sufficient knowledge to evaluate and interpret the raw information obtained on the streets"[230] has reduced some news coverage to street-level reporting with little to no contextualization, certainly not the journalism required of healthy democratic debate. In terms of targeted mainstream media, this thesis focused on print media primarily from national outlets. As was stated in Chapter 1, while this thesis exists primarily as a theoretical overview of the debate over embedded versus unilateral war reporting bolstered by primary source interviewing, this study could be expanded significantly to include a deeper study of print versus broadcast reporting methodologies and the impact of social media on both the news media and the military.

The purpose of this thesis is to argue that with respect to Task Force ORION specifically and war reporting in general both embedded and unilateral journalists – while providing different views of conflict – are critical to the provision of a comprehensive and factual view of a conflict to the public they serve. A single approach results in a limited view of a given conflict, with the ground truth or the local, regional, or international context compromised. Despite concerns over media management by the military, what is equally concerning is the narrow perspectives offered by embedded or unilateral reporting individually. As reporter Matthew Fisher noted, while

[229] Jean Hood, *War Correspondent: Reporting under fire since 1850*, (UK: Lyons Press, 2012): 212.
[230] *Ibid*., 213.

embedded reporters only provide a narrow slice of the war, equally so did the unilateral reporters in Afghanistan. The Canadian Forces embedding program proved to be a huge success, at least from the perspective of supporting the troops but perhaps not the mission, in particular in comparison with the programs of other NATO nations. As a result of its flexibility and transparency, it "educat[ed] both the media and the public in arcane military matters and provid[ed] the military with insights into the journalistic profession and its place in democracy."[231] It was also successful as a result of its tolerance for periods of unilateral reporting by journalists who chose to embed, allowing for the perspectives of Afghan civilians, the Taliban, governmental officials and non-governmental organizations to be heard by the Canadian public. Together, embedded and unilateral journalists in Afghanistan during Task Force ORION were able to create a much more comprehensive and balanced picture of a complicated war against a determined insurgency desperate to break coalition cohesion and deter the international community from deploying soldiers into the broken region. However, as Brewster stated, "despite boatloads of newspaper ink and thousands of hours of airtime, our collective appreciation of what the country [Afghanistan] has been through remains painfully shallow and fleeting."[232] Whether embedded or unilateral, journalists – in the insightful words of Manilay, Brewster's fixer in Kabul in the spring of 2006 – "this is not Canada. Afghanistan is a broken place after thirty years of war, but there are many parts where people have not changed in centuries. They do not believe in the same things you do and do not see things as you do." Perhaps that is part of our issue as westerners, whether as politicians, soldiers, reporters, or citizens – that we do not believe that the stories being told by journalists is the true story

[231] Sharon Hobson, "The Information Gap: Why the Canadian Public Doesn't Know More About Its Military," Prepared for the Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute (Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 18.

because, like the Iraq war reporter Gordon Dillow reflected, it is so far removed from our notions of reality, a western reality. Or perhaps this truly does relate back to the debate of whether war correspondents are reporters or cheerleaders of military might. This thesis contends they are reporters – embedded and unilateral alike – as, in the words of Junger, "objectivity and honesty are *not* the same thing, though, and it is entirely possible to write with honesty about the very personal and distorting experiences of war."[233] Whether the public accepts this reality is another story completely.

[232] Murray Brewster, *The Savage War: The Untold Battles of Afghanistan* (Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada, Ltd., 2011), x.

[233] Sebastian Junger, *War* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2010), 26.

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