DEFINING THE MEDIA BATTLESPACE

by

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We must learn to employ aggressive IO. We cannot leave this domain for the enemy; we must fight him on this battlefield and defeat him there just as we've proven we can on conventional battlefields.

LTG Thomas F. Metz Former Commander, Multi-National Corps-Iraq¹

The past half century of warfare has seen a military revolution, the telecommunications revolution. This revolution has fundamentally reshaped warfare and society in dramatic ways. The US military embraced this revolution and successfully reshaped itself by embarking on a revolution in military affairs, becoming networked and computerized. By doing so, it temporarily gained an asymmetric advantage over every other military in the world. But it has been caught completely unprepared for a second revolution in military affairs, the media-enabled insurgency, and now finds itself at an asymmetric disadvantage to its enemy in Iraq.

While the US military created its revolution in military affairs primarily by developing new technology, the enemy in Iraq has created a revolution by using existing technology and crafting new tactics and doctrine for exploiting it. The answer to countering this new revolution in military affairs will not be a new technology but new US tactics and doctrine to neutralize it. The US military must visualize warfare in a different way and learn to master the new media battlespace in which the enemy is fighting.

THE RESPONSE TO REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

The telecommunications revolution is a military revolution. It has "recast society and state as well as military organizations." Information technology has had a huge economic impact, steadily increasing the productivity of the industrialized world for the

past quarter century. This revolution has also brought increased interconnectivity. The world is a smaller place. Since World War II, the world has gone from FM radio and telegraph to communications satellites, global multi-media corporations, and the Internet. Globalization has created a "world community" and given a global voice to those in the most remote regions of the world. Totalitarian regimes struggle to keep information out, while media organizations with global reach try to spread their products to every corner of the globe.

The telecommunications revolution has had a major impact on military organizations. Today's military professional is most familiar with the revolution in military affairs now described as "network-centric warfare." The Department of Defense's Office of Force Transformation gives the following answer to the question, "What is network-centric warfare?"

Network-centric warfare is an emerging theory of war in the Information Age. It is also a concept that, at the highest level, constitutes the military's response to the Information Age. The term network-centric warfare broadly describes the combination of strategies, emerging tactics, techniques, and procedures, and organizations that a fully or even a partially networked force can employ to create a decisive warfighting advantage.³

The "governing principles" of this new "theory of war" are enumerated below:

- Fight first for *information superiority*
- Access to information: shared awareness
- Speed of command and decision making
- Self-synchronization
- *Dispersed forces*: non-contiguous operations
- Demassification
- Deep sensor reach
- Alter initial conditions at higher rates of change
- *Compressed operations* and levels of war⁴

In essence, network-centric warfare is doing more with less, substituting increased situational awareness, "information superiority," for massed fire power.

One could argue that, rather than a revolution in military affairs (RMA), this is simply an increased realization of the progress that began with the advent of combined arms warfare. In other words, this is nothing new, but rather doing old things better. The advocate of network-centric warfare would, in response, point to the initial invasion of Iraq in Operation Iraqi Freedom. A coalition of around 150,000 subdued an Army at least three times its size in only twenty-one days with only 3 percent of its casualties. The numbers in the first Gulf War were nearly as dramatic. This is revolutionary, at least in degree. Small, agile, lethal forces, interconnected and synchronized over vast distances, wreak havoc on more conventional, Soviet-era formations that lack this telecommunications capability.

While this RMA began primarily as a technological revolution, it also developed a strong, doctrinal component. As the US military became ever more digitized, it began to realize the growing importance of information in maintaining an asymmetric advantage in situational awareness and agility. Militarizing the emerging concept of "cyberspace" in the mid-1990s, the military began to describe the battlefield two "environments," the physical and the information environment. The US Army's FM 100-6, *Information Operations*, was among the first official publications to express this concept. Figure 1 shows this information environment and what the US military sought to do with it in 1996.

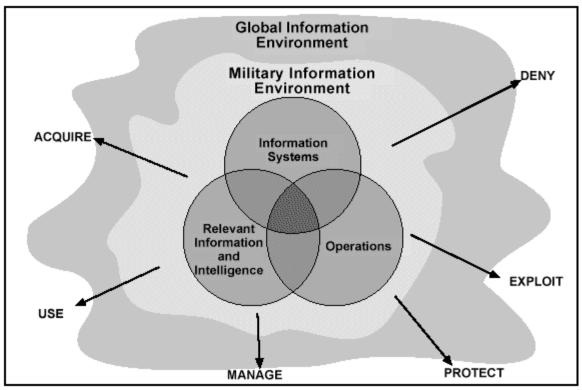


Figure 1: The Information environment of the 1990s Source: U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters Department of the Army, FM 100-6, *Information Operations* (Washington DC, 27 August 1996), 2-9.

The information environment became a facet of the battlespace where a military force had to achieve "dominance" in order to succeed. It consisted of the global information environment (GIE), "all individuals, organizations, or systems, most of which are outside the control of the military or National Command Authorities, that collect, process, and disseminate information to national and international audiences." The military information environment was a subset of the larger GIE. It was "the environment contained within the GIE, consisting of information systems (INFOSYS) and organizations--friendly and adversary, military and nonmilitary, that support, enable, or significantly influence a specific military operation." Information operations, as it

was originally conceived, was operations in the military information environment and happened through and across information systems.

To achieve information dominance, the military force had to achieve "information dominance" in the military information environment. This manual stated that there were three components to information operations: command and control warfare (C2W), civil affairs, and public affairs. C2W was further segmented into five "elements:" operational security (OPSEC), military deception (MILDEC), psychological operations (PSYOP), electronic warfare (EW), and physical destruction. From its inception (looking again to Figure 1) the focus of information operations was on keeping the US military's information safe and disrupting or exploiting the enemy's information.

Over time, the idea of information operations became joint doctrine. The concept of the information environment as a component of the battlespace remained, but it no longer made a distinction between a global and military information environment. Eventually, there was only one information environment, seen in Figure 2.

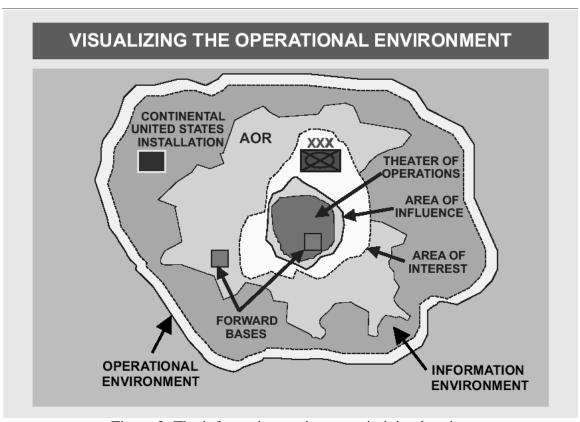


Figure 2: The information environment in joint doctrine Source: U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC, 17 September 2006), II-23.

This singular information environment stretched from the continental United States (CONUS) military bases to the theater of operations. But it no longer contained "all individuals, organizations, or systems, most of which are outside the control of the military or National Command Authorities." The information environment expressed in joint doctrine contained only "the aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information." ⁸

The rest of information operations doctrine became more focused on protecting friendly information and disrupting or exploiting enemy information as well. The five "elements" from C2W of 1996 were elevated to the five "core elements" of information

operations in joint doctrine (physical destruction was replaced by computer network operations or CNO).⁹ Civil affairs (called civil military operations or CMO in joint doctrine) and public affairs were relegated to "related activities."¹⁰

Information operations gave the US military the tools to reliably achieve information dominance on the conventional battlefield. Put another way, being networked, computerized, and able to "acquire, use, manage, protect, exploit, and deny" information in the information environment gave the US military an asymmetric advantage over any conventional military force in the world.

THE LIMITS OF A REVOLUTION

Enter the Global War on Terror. Within two short years, the US military was fighting two wars on two different battlefields, with no conventional army to be found. Both Afghanistan and Iraq had quickly transitioned from high-intensity conflict to grueling counterinsurgency. The same information operations doctrine that had facilitated lightning victories in two wars in the Persian Gulf, now seemed insufficient in a battle to influence foreign populations.

From the beginning of the insurgency in the Summer of 2003, the enemy in Iraq had no hope of defeating the US military on the battlefield. The casualties the enemy inflicts on the US military in Iraq, while tragic, are tactically insignificant. But the enemy's objective is not to defeat the US military by attrition. The enemy's objective is to use small, tactical attacks, amplified through the megaphone of the media, to erode US public support for the war. Henry Kissinger famously observed, at the height of the Vietnam War, that "the guerrilla wins if he doesn't lose." This is only half of the story in Iraq. It is true that, to win, the enemy needs to maintain sufficient support in his own

population to survive and avoid obliteration by the US military. But, to win (to force the withdrawal of the US military from Iraq) the enemy must also maintain the steady drumbeat of casualties and car bombs in the press that destroys the American public's support for the war.

For the US military to win in Iraq, it needs both the ability to influence the populace in the operational area and the ability to "defend" American public opinion from enemy influence. The US military has looked to information operations and the "related activity" of public affairs, to provide these capabilities. Consider this from the US Army's newly minted FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.

Information operations (IO) must be aggressively employed to accomplish the following:

- Favorably influence perceptions of [host nation] legitimacy and capabilities.
- Obtain local, regional, and international support for [counterinsurgency] operations.
- Publicize insurgent violence.
- Discredit insurgent propaganda and provide a more compelling alternative to the insurgent ideology and narrative. 12

Information operations, from its inception, was designed to protect the US military's information and attack that of an enemy military. To influence populations, its tools must be adapted to use with a civilian, non-combatant population. OPSEC and EW have no influence component at all. They are focused on protecting information and attacking or monitoring communications systems, respectively. MILDEC is designed to influence enemy *military* decision-makers, not civilian populations. History suggests that using deception against civilian populations eventually *negatively* influences the deceived populace. CNO has components that could be used to conduct "influence operations" on the Internet. However, because of First Amendment concerns and the world-wide nature

of the Internet, gaining permissions to use CNO in this way is very difficult. This renders CNO largely ineffective and much less agile than the average Internet-savvy insurgent. PSYOP is the only capability in the information operations arsenal that is easily adapted to use in influencing the Iraqi population.

But that immediately creates problems for integrating information operations with the "related activity" of public affairs. There is a significant body of laws in the United States that prevents PSYOP from being conducted on the populace of the United States. ¹³ As it is a primary mission for public affairs to *inform* the American public ¹⁴, significant doctrinal firewalls have been erected between PSYOP and PA. Since PSYOP is the only effective influencing element of IO, this creates significant impediments to IO-PA integration. LTG Metz, in the same article quoted at the beginning of this article, articulated this problem well, "We are not consistently achieving synergy and mass in our strategic communications (consisting of IO, public affairs, public diplomacy, and military diplomacy) from the strategic to the tactical level." The problem, as he sees it, is a doctrinal "firewall" between information operations and public affairs. ¹⁵

LTG Metz alludes to the solution the US military has settled on in Iraq.

"Strategic communication" is an Air Force concept which advocates "synchronized interagency effort supported by public diplomacy, public affairs, and military information operations."

As stated earlier, IO (or more specifically, PSYOP) can be adapted to influencing civilian populations. Public diplomacy and the related "military engagements" (military leaders interacting with civilian leaders in the operational area) have also been effective in creating desired effects in Iraq. But public affairs is not designed to be an influencing tool. The current generation of joint public affairs doctrine,

JP 3-61, *Public Affairs*, says this as plainly as it can be said: "propaganda has no place in DOD public affairs programs." In joint public affairs doctrine, the only mention of influence at all is in regards to influencing by publicizing the deterrent capacity of the US military. The manual identifies four "target audiences" for public affairs: the American public, international (world public opinion), internal (subordinate military units and their families), and adversary forces. Of adversary forces, it only says that counterpropaganda can demoralize enemy military forces. Public affairs is designed to inform, not influence, domestic and foreign populations.

Even with all of these limitations, the US military has been successful in influencing the population of Iraq. It will be decades before many of its successes are public, but one need only look at publicly-available polling data from Iraq to see how much perceptions have shifted. The PSYOP community has played a large part in this success.

By contrast, the US military has been utterly powerless to prevent the enemy from eroding the will of the American public to fight the war. Strategic communication offers no help at all in this regard. PSYOP cannot be used with the American public. Public affairs is, as mentioned earlier, designed to inform rather than influence. Public diplomacy and military engagements have no utility in addressing the problem (you can't negotiate diplomatically with your own country). It is not surprising that American public opinion has plummeted; the enemy is able to attack it with impunity. In a Pew Poll conducted the day after the statue of Saddam Hussein fell (10 April 2003), 74 percent of those polled felt that it was the "right decision" to use military force in Iraq, while only 19 percent said it was the "wrong decision." Nearly four years later, in

February of 2007, only 40 percent say it was the "right decision" while 54 percent, say it was the "wrong decision." ¹⁹

In short, the US military is at an asymmetric *disadvantage* to the enemy in Iraq in the battle to maintain the will of the American people to prosecute the war.

THE MEDIA-ENABLED INSURGENCY: AN ENEMY RMA

Until World War I, battles were fought in two dimensions. Combat happened on the surface of the earth and the surface of the ocean. World War I brought the revolution in military affairs of unrestricted submarine warfare, which opened a third dimension in naval operations. The war also introduced indirect fire and aerial observation, which opened a third dimension in ground warfare. During the interwar period and through World War II, the scope of combat in this third dimension expanded to include strategic bombing and aerial combat over the land, and carrier-based aviation over the sea.²⁰

After the advent of the telecommunications revolution, network-centric warfare introduced yet another dimension, the "information environment," in which operations occurred to establish "information dominance." But now, with this new enemy revolution in military affairs, the media-enabled insurgency, a fifth dimension, a media dimension has emerged. The US military tries in vain to use its old tools, meant for the information environment, to fight in this new dimension. Currently, the enemy has complete freedom of maneuver in the media--"media superiority."

The modern battlefield has become so complicated that the dimensional construct is no longer adequate to express it. The human mind is designed to perceive in only three dimensions. A simpler construct is needed in order to visualize these new degrees of

freedom, before one can begin to talk about how to address this enemy RMA. The concept of interconnected battlespaces offers such a construct.

INTERCONNECTED BATTLESPACES

Figure 3 shows three interconnected battlespaces, the physical, information, and media battlespace.

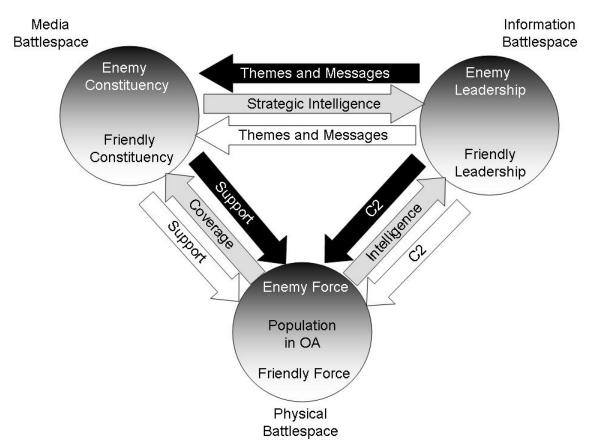


Figure 3: The interconnected battlespaces

The Physical Battlespace

The physical battlespace starts at the boundaries of the area of responsibility and converges inward on the operational area. It is the "real world" where opposing forces engage in combat. It is also the battlespace in which the populace in the operational area

lives. Regional bureaus and reporters are the physical projection of "the media" in the physical battlespace. Their products ("coverage" in Figure 3) leave the physical battlespace and enter the media battlespace. Network and communications architecture, radio equipment, tactical operation centers (TOCs), organizational leaders, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets are the physical manifestation of information systems in the physical battlespace. Collectively, they carry data about the physical battlespace ("intelligence" in Figure 3) into the information battlespace.

The Information Battlespace

The information battlespace is very much analogous to the "information environment" described earlier, in the review of information operations doctrine. It is the "ether" in which data about the physical battlespace gathers and is analyzed.

Organizational leaders operate in the information battlespace, consuming data about the physical battlespace, making decisions, and generating directions that are communicated to their forces in the physical battlespace ("C2" in Figure 3, above). Senior leaders in the information battlespace communicate to their constituent populations and the constituent populations of their enemies by generating themes and messages communicated in press conferences and press releases to the media ("themes and messages" in Figure 2).

Opposing leaders compete for information dominance via information operations, as it was originally conceived, in this battlespace.

The Media Battlespace

Figure 3 shows the interaction between the physical battlespace, the media battlespace, and friendly and enemy constituencies.

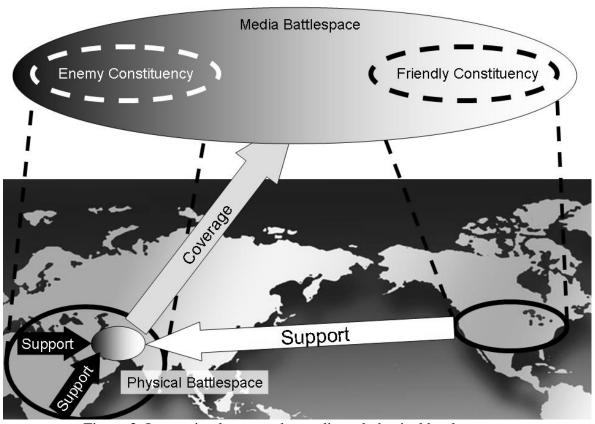


Figure 3: Interaction between the media and physical battlespace

The media battlespace is the global, interconnected, telecommunications architecture of the modern world. It is the collective result of the Internet, satellite television, and all of the other means that provide world-wide news, entertainment, and communication. It is Fox News. It is Al-Jazeera. It is the Associated Press. It is John Stewart's *The Daily Show*. It is the Website, *The Onion*. It is every way that human beings in the information age are informed about events in their world. The media battlespace is occupied, virtually, by everyone that is "plugged in" to it. The individual members of the friendly and enemy force are in the media battlespace. The population in the physical battlespace is in the media battlespace. And the constituent populations of

each force (the people outside the physical battlespace that provide, moral, monetary, and logistical support and personnel to each force) are also present in the media battlespace. Friendly and enemy forces and their constituent populations struggle against each other in the media battlespace. This conflict is called "media warfare."

Information reported in the media battlespace by media outlets (news networks, broadcast news, etc.) leaves the media battlespace and enters the information battlespace ("strategic intelligence" in Figure 3). Legitimacy and moral support is generated by friendly and enemy constituencies and is directed at friendly and enemy forces in the physical battlespace ("support" in Figure 3). Actual support, in the form of money, logistics, and personnel moves from the friendly and enemy constituency to the friendly and enemy force physically (entering the physical battlespace from areas of the world outside the physical battlespace-"support" in Figure 4). However, the level of support (moral and actual) that each force receives from its constituency is directly proportional to the opinion of each constituency about the activities of its representative force. This is the purpose of "media warfare," to erode the public opinion of the constituency for the actions of its representative force in order to reduce the support the force receives.

The mechanism by which this loss of support damages a force is very much dependent on its nature. For Western militaries like the US military, lowered support means reduced numbers of soldiers in the combat zone, less money to do reconstruction and support the host nation, and, eventually, if support becomes low enough, their removal from the physical battlespace. For an insurgent force like the enemy in Iraq, reduced support means reduced money to spend conducting attacks, reduced numbers of foreign fighters ("jihadis") joining their cause, and less support in weaponry from foreign

governments. If support for the insurgency drops low enough and support is low enough among the population in the physical battlespace, the insurgency will be defeated because it will not have the means to continue the war nor the means to hide in the populace ("like a fish in water," as Mao Tse Tung put it²¹). Thus, insurgency is less vulnerable to damage from media war because, to defeat it, you must influence both the insurgent's constituency in the media battlespace and the populace in the physical battlespace in order to defeat him.

Volumes have been written on the character and nature of the media and cyberspace. This article focuses on the operational and strategic implications of the media battlespace, not its societal impacts. Four characteristics of the media battlespace have direct military implications: its egalitarianism, its tribalism, its seamlessness, and its anarchy.

Egalitarianism

In the media battlespace, all voices are equal. The price of admission to the media battlespace is the cost of a satellite dish, the cost of a cable connection, or the cost to access the Internet in an Internet café. Once a person pays that entrance fee, his voice is equal to that of everyone else in the media battlespace. Voices gain "media superiority" by their appeal. The media battlespace is the ultimate expression of confirmation bias. Citizens in this battlespace want to be challenged, but only within the limits of their preconceived notions.

To effectively influence within the media battlespace, a military force must craft its message to appeal to the target audience, because a member of that target audience can vote with his remote or mouse. An effective message proceeds from the target's

preconceived notions, and moves (influences) the target's perceptions gradually in the desired direction.

Tribalism

Groups gravitate together in the media battlespace based on their preconceived notions. Some of those notions are a result of culture (or as Samuel Huntington would call it, "civilization". But others are a result of circumstance, education, interests, experience, or any of a nearly infinite number of other factors. These "tribes" can also be created spontaneously by a sudden and popular idea, what Thomas Friedman calls the "electronic herd." Tribes gather around certain television programs, satellite networks, or Websites that cater to their common interests or ideas. Each tribe in the media battlespace is segmented and fractured into tiny sub-tribes over and over again. This fragmentation sometimes renders groups so small that they occupy only tiny corners of the media battlespace. A single person can belong to multiple tribes. The result is a mosaic so complex that it is impossible to map. The structure is so complex and amorphous that it becomes easier to find holders of ideas than it does to find the individuals themselves.

To effectively influence within the media battlespace, a military force must identify the tribes to which the target audience belongs, and go to the places where those tribes congregate. The only feasible tactic is to identify the targeted idea itself in the media battlespace and then try to influence the individuals that hold it.

Seamlessness

The media battlespace has no borders. As hard as dictatorial regimes try to keep the world out of their countries, they cannot participate in the world and insulate their people from the media. Only completely "unplugging" from the world (as is the case in North Korea) can isolate a populace from the media battlespace. The closest thing to a boundary in the media battlespace is language. English is omnipresent, but messages "pool" when delivered in more obscure languages and are less likely to "bleed over" into other languages.

Messages that resonate well with one group may offend others. If a friendly force is delivering a message in one language that's potentially damaging in another, an adversary will almost certainly translate the message and re-release it into the media battlespace. As translation software, such as the net-based *Babblefish*, becomes more sophisticated, the media battlespace will continue to become even more seamless. A military force waging war in the media battlespace should always assume that any action it takes in will be seen by everyone, not just the target audience.

Anarchy

Anarchy is not chaos. Anarchy is the absence of hierarchy, the absence of a central ruling authority. The media battlespace is anarchic. There is no central, ruling authority. There are plenty of rules and laws that apply to the media battlespace, but they do not apply *universally*. In China, Internet service providers block certain Websites and report navigations to them to the government.²⁴ The United States regulates the political balance of campaign coverage on television.²⁵ Al-Jazeera must "tread lightly" in criticizing Arab regimes, lest it create political problems for itself in its home country of Qatar.²⁶ These laws govern portions of the media battlespace, but there is no law that governs the *entire* media battlespace.

A military force should understand it is impossible to exert meaningful control over the media battlespace. Currently, no military force has the capability to make "media dominance" possible. A force can only hope to achieve "media superiority" over an adversary by more effectively persuading target audiences in the media battlespace.

A military force must, first and foremost, protect its own constituency from influence by its enemy.

SO WHAT?

Why is it so important to achieve "media superiority" in the media battlespace? The answer is simple: unless a person is present on the battlefield, all he knows about the war is what he sees in the media. People form opinions about policy matters based on their perceptions. Very few Americans can get on a plane to Baghdad. Relatively few people in the United States even know someone in the military, let alone in Iraq. The only way they have to form an opinion on the war in Iraq is to consume media products, analyze the information, and decide. How they decide directs collective public opinion about the war in Iraq and, as discussed earlier, how much support the US military receives to prosecute the war. If public support collapses completely, the US military will be forced to withdraw from Iraq.

Isn't this a matter of national strategy? Why is this a military problem? The answer to this question is also simple: the enemy is conducting media warfare *from the physical battlespace*, in the operational area. Only a military force can dominate the physical battlespace. The US military has an asymmetric advantage in the physical battlespace. It is the military that must confront and defeat this enemy RMA, using a combination of media warfare and its dominance in the physical battlespace. The US

military must understand the system that brings coverage out of the physical battlespace into the media battlespace, challenge the enemy for control of this system, and achieve superiority.

This enemy revolution in military affairs, the media-enabled insurgency, has created a new battlespace, the media battlespace. The US military tries in vain to use its old tools, meant for the information battlespace, to fight in this new arena. As a result, the enemy has complete freedom of maneuver in the media---"media superiority." The US military must engage in a "counterrevolution" in military affairs in order to develop the tactics, doctrine, organization, and technology to defeat this new enemy capability, or risk fading into irrelevance.

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⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, Center for Army Lessons Learned, *On Point: The US Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2004), 8-12.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters Department of the Army, FM 100-6, *Information Operations* (Washington DC, 27 August 1996), 1-2-4.

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¹⁰ Ibid., 2-21

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 ¹³ U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap*

¹³ U.S. Department of Defense, Headquarters Department of Defense, *Information Operations Roadmap* (Washington, DC, 3 October 2003), 26.

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¹⁵ Metz, 9.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of the Air Force, Headquarters Department of the Air Force, AFDD 2-5.3, *Public Affairs Operations* (Washington, DC, 24 June 2005), 17-18.

¹⁷ DoD, *Public Affairs*, I-3.

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