REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 17-05-2003	2. REPORT TYPE FINAL	3. DATES COVERED (From - To)

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Achieving Operational Deception in the Age of CNN	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
Jeffrey L. Baker	5e. TASK NUMBER
Paper Advisor (if Any):	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207	

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.

14. ABSTRACT

Because operational deception relies heavily on secrecy to achieve objectives, intuitively it would seem that deception plans cannot succeed in the presence of the news media. Quite the opposite is true. Not only can it exist under the watchful "eyes" of the media, but in some cases it requires the presence of the press to be successful.

The news media affects the different deception methodologies in various ways. Use of visual *display* deception, such as decoys, requires almost complete control of the area of implementation with respect to reporters because it is vulnerable to direct observation. Non-visual *display* techniques, however, such as simulated radio traffic, electronic emitters, and thermal signature generators, will likely withstand the direct scrutiny of journalists.

Ruses tend to be fairly secure, as the commander controls exactly what misleading information is exposed to the adversary's intelligence collection systems. *Demonstration* practices in factor space, like *feints*, are more at risk in the presence of reporters as they are designed to mislead the enemy as to the physical location of a future military event, i.e., they are susceptible to the visible observation of journalists. *Demonstration* activities conducted in factor time, those actions designed to deceive the adversary as to the timing of a military event, are relatively secure, absent the disclosure of the commander's true intent.

Although the commander must avoid misleading the news media in a manner that would influence US leadership or the American public, it has become acceptable practice to allow the news media to come to false conclusions about operational plans and intentions that deceive the enemy leadership. In such instances, the press becomes an almost indispensable part of operational deception.

15. SUBJECT TERMS
operational; deception; news; media; cnn; correspondent; journalist; reporter; display; demonstration; feint; decoy; ruse; deceipt

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED		20	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI

<u>**Achieving Operational Deception in the Age of CNN**</u>

By

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Defense Intelligence Agency

A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

16 May 2003

Abstract

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Table of Contents

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ACHIEVING OPERATIONAL DECEPTION IN THE AGE OF CNN

"While all deception requires secrecy, all secrecy is not meant to deceive."
Sissela Bok, *Secrets*.

Introduction

Few professionals make the American military officer more uncomfortable than does the news reporter. Some believe that the press may uncover indiscretions, others feel that military members may be unjustly discredited without opportunity for rebuttal, but most firmly believe that the news media is a direct threat to the security of their operations.

A foundation principal of military operations that drives combatant commanders is to achieve surprise during combat. When facing a competent adversary, surprise can only be achieved through either stringent operational security (OPSEC), i.e., denying the enemy the ability to observe friendly activities, or through deception. Therefore, both OPSEC and deception should be integral parts of all operational planning.

The presence of the press in the battlespace presents somewhat of a risk to military operations, as it has the potential to relay events in near-real time to the far reaches of the globe, including to the headquarters of the opposing military. Since operational deception relies heavily on secrecy to accomplish its objectives, intuitively one would expect that deception plans cannot succeed under the watchful "eyes" of the news media. Quite the contrary, however, is true; not only can deception operations thrive in the presence of news reporters, but in some cases these operations actually require that the news media broadcast their activities.

News Media and the Military

In 1807, *The Times* newspaper of London, England, dispatched one of its writers, Henry Crabb Robinson, to Germany where he was to cover Napoleon's military operations

along the Elbe River.[i] With that dispatch combat journalism was born. Almost at once, other newspapers recognized the potential profits from such reporting, and sent their own journalists to cover the war.

Military disdain for the press was almost immediate. Before the end of Napoleon's campaigns, Sir Arthur Wellesley, the British Army's commander in Spain, complained to his Secretary for War that news reports describing the disposition of his own troops were reaching the enemy leadership before they reached him.[ii] Even worse, during the Spanish Civil War of 1835-1837, Charles Lewis Guneison of the British *Morning Post* faced execution as a spy due to the accuracy of his reporting in his newspaper.[iii] Almost as if to corroborate the officers' fears, Tsar Nicholas I of Russia claimed to have used *The Times* as a source of intelligence regarding British forces during the Crimean War in the mid-1800's.[iv]

There is little evidence , however, that, prior to the advent of electronic communication, news reporters in any way compromised military operations. In fact, articles describing the horrendous conditions of combat helped create the Red Cross and improve support from the home-front for deployed troops. Some in the media claim that war coverage provides the citizens of free, democratic nations with the information they need to formulate their informed consent for the military action.[v]

In today's world of instant, global communications, there is a risk that reporters may disclose, inadvertently or deliberately, military operational plans and intentions. Many American military leaders recall with irritation the circus-like atmosphere that surrounded the US Marine Corps entry into Somalia in 1993. Scores of television camera crews lit up the night-time beach near Mogadishu as the Marines made an amphibious landing.   People in the United States and around the world could watch the event unfolding in near real-time.

In one instance, the media may have compromised US Government attempts to rescue the hostages of hijacked TWA flight 847, when they tipped off the terrorists to American plans by announcing on the air that the US was dispatching a Delta Force team to the Mediterranean to attempt a rescue. The terrorists forced the aircraft pilot, Captain Testrake, to warn the US Government, through the media cameras, not to attempt a rescue, because, as he stated at gunpoint, "I think we'd all be dead men if they did, because we are continuously surrounded by many, many guards."[vi]

Opponents of war correspondents have pointed to these events as counter-arguments to the presence of reporters in the field. Those who object to having journalists in combat are correct that the press does pose a risk of compromise to operational secrets, but the American public, in general, demands news media representation in hostile areas where US forces are operating. Past attempts by the US Defense Department to ban or squelch the news media in combat zones have had dire consequences. Therefore, not only must military leaders accept the media in combat, but they must also recognize the threat journalists pose to security and plan appropriately, especially with respect to deception.

Deception:

According to US Defense Department doctrine, military deception is defined as being "those actions executed to deliberately mislead adversary military decision makers as to friendly military capabilities, intentions, and operations, thereby causing the adversary to take specific actions (or inactions) that will contribute to the accomplishment of the friendly mission."[vii] Operational deception requires that some friendly information must be zealously guarded, while other information is intentionally revealed to the enemy decision-makers to cause them to act in a manner favorable to friendly forces.

To design effective operational deception, planners must determine the desired end-state and identify the form of deception that will best assist in achieving this end state. Planners must then decide which information should be protected and which should be revealed to propagate the deception, and select the means to transmit this information to the enemy. Throughout this process, the planners should weigh the impact of the news media on their operation, and ensure, as a minimum, that the press does not compromise their deception plans and intentions.

There are four general categories of operational deception: *feints, demonstrations, displays,* and *ruses*. A *display* is "a static portrayal of an activity, force, or equipment intended to deceive the adversary's visual observation."[viii] The *feint* is "an offensive action involving contact with the adversary conducted for the purpose of deceiving the adversary as to the location and/or time of the actual main offensive action."[ix] A *demonstration* is "a show of force in an area where a decision is not sought, made to deceive an adversary. It is similar to a feint but no actual contact with the adversary is intended."[x] More difficult to define, a *ruse* is "a trick of war designed to deceive the adversary, usually involving the deliberate exposure of false information to the adversary's intelligence collection systems."[xi]

Analysis:

Each of these forms of deception is affected in varying degrees by the existence of the news media in the area. Some can thrive in the presence of the press, while others cannot tolerate even casual observation by a field journalist.

Demonstration in Factor Time: At 1400 hours, October 6th, 1973, Egyptian and Syrian military forces launched a coordinated, two-front attack on Israel that caught the

Israeli Defense Force (IDF) almost completely by surprise. In the north, Syrian jet fighters unexpectedly strafed and bombed dismounted Israeli tank soldiers on the Golan Heights.[xii] In the south, Israeli soldiers manning the Bar-Lev fortified defense line along the east bank of the Suez Canal were unprepared for a barrage of Egyptian artillery that rained on them. A multitude of Egyptian rubber rafts streamed across the canal carrying infantry troops. High-pressure water cannons obliterated Israeli sand fortifications. The latest Soviet-made floating bridges quickly linked across the canal, bringing the remainder of the Egyptian forces.[xiii]

Within three hours, the Egyptians captured the Bar-Lev line and gained control of the Suez Canal.[xiv] Despite the Egyptians' rapid victory, on October 15th the IDF launched a counteroffensive which pierced Egypt's line of defense. The Israelis succeeded in crossing the Suez Canal and managed to surround some Egyptian units. At that point, the US, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations were able to negotiate a peace settlement, with both sides of the conflict claiming victory.[xv]

Although the Egyptians' military victory was questionable, their deception operation was a smashing success. IDF troops were completely caught off guard; military units were not sufficiently on alert, and the Bar-Lev defensive line was manned at only half-strength.[xvi] From the beginning, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and General Ahmed Ismail, Egyptian Minister of Defense, planned this deception operation as a form of *demonstration* that played on Israel's strength in intelligence, although instead of deceiving the enemy as to the *place* of the attack, it sought to mislead the Israelis as to the *time* the attack would occur.

From 1970 until the onset of the Yom Kippur War, the Egyptians launched three major exercises in the Sinai area: in December 1971, in December 1972, and in May 1973. In each instance, Egypt deployed its forces forward under the ever-vigilant watch of Israeli

intelligence. Each time they varied their activities slightly.[xvii] After three repetitions of this

general scenario, the Israelis became conditioned to expect these exercises and anticipated

that they would end with the stand-down of Egyptian forces, short of war.

This conditioning resulted in a numbing of the Israel intelligence process. They

became accustomed to seeing Egyptian military maneuvers on the opposite side of the Suez

Canal. By conducting repeated maneuvers, the Egyptians converted abnormal activity into

normal activity for any observers, either news media or intelligence organizations.[xviii] Absent

the ability to break the secrecy of Sadat's intentions, neither the press nor the Israelis could

clearly anticipate the true nature of the offensive.

In this scenario, the Egyptian deception operation would likely have been unaffected

by the press. Like the Israeli intelligence services, the news media would have seen before

them just another Egyptian military exercise unfolding. News services tend to be even more

susceptible to the "Chicken Little" syndrome than are governments, i.e., they cannot often

report false alarms without losing credibility. Additionally, once the news audience has seen

one, or possibly two of these maneuvers, the exercises become old news and lose their ability

to hold the viewers' attention. Even if the media remained attentive to this, the fourth in a

series of major Egyptian maneuvers, there were initially no significant indicators to

distinguish this mobilization as anything different from the previous exercises.

Demonstration in Factor Space: *Demonstration* deception in factor space is not as

impervious to news reporters as *demonstration* in factor time. Following the Iraqi invasion

and occupation of Kuwait in 1990, the US and allied militaries almost immediately began

building up their forces at intermediate operational bases in the Middle East. In the months

leading up to Operation Desert Storm, the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) allowed

the press extensive access to the US Marine Corps and British Army exercises in the Persian Gulf, where coalition forces were conducting training in amphibious landings and fortification breaching, and the Navy performed mine clearing operations.[xix] To the news media, and anyone watching the news, these activities gave the impression that the US-led coalition forces intended to drive directly into Kuwait to rout the Iraqi occupiers.

Once the coalition air offensive destroyed most of Iraq's intelligence resources, USCENTCOM moved its main forces along the Iraq border to the west, where the real, primary thrust would take place.[xx] To control the information available to Saddam, coalition leaders continued to foster the image of an impending assault through Kuwait, while avoiding news coverage to the west, where the bulk of the offense forces were located.[xxi]

Saddam Hussein saw on television exactly what coalition forces wanted him to see, and he came to the obvious conclusion that the coalition would attack directly into Kuwait. As the land war neared, Saddam strengthened his forces in Kuwait in anticipation of the coalition assault. When ground operations finally began, Iraq had staged 42 divisions in the Kuwait area, almost all of which were deployed in a "defensive belt that spanned the entire southern and coastal borders of Kuwait."[xxii] USCENTCOM's main ground offensive in the west caught the Iraqi military leaders almost completely by surprise.

In this instance, not only was the news media accepted in the area of operation, but it was required for the deception operation to succeed. Because almost all of Saddam's intelligence assets were effectively neutralized at the beginning of the war, USCENTCOM needed the news programs to carry coalition deception information to the Iraqi leader.

Display: For American forces, decoy *displays* can be the most problematic form of deception with respect to the news media, but there may be circumstances where their use is

appropriate. During World War Two (WW-II), as the allied forces massed in southern England for their planned invasion of mainland Europe in 1944, they wanted to hide from the Germans the area along the English Channel where they would conduct their primary amphibious attack. Their invasion plans called for a landing at the French beaches of Normandy, but they wanted to project the appearance that Normandy would be a diversionary attack, while the main invasion force would attack further north, in the vicinity of Pas de Calais, France. The British and Americans developed an elaborate deception plan, Operation Fortitude South, which included a version of *display* that used physical decoys to project an image of a large concentration of allied forces where there was none.[xxiii]

Inflatable tanks and plywood aircraft were used somewhat to simulate forces inland, but the majority of decoys were in the British littorals around Kent and eastern Sussex. Inflatable landing craft, fabricated support vessels, and fake anti-aircraft positions gave the impression of an amphibious assault force destined for Pas de Calais. They even built a massive oil storage plant, "complete with storage tanks, pipelines, jetties (and) terminal control points."[xxiv] To add realism to these fictitious forces, the Allies fabricated radio traffic, and even assigned US General George Patton as the unit's commander.[xxv]

More recently, during Operation Desert Storm, US Marine Corps General Thomas Draude successfully employed *display* deception by creating a fictitious Marine force in Saudi Arabia, along the Kuwait border. His Seabees built wooden tanks and artillery pieces as decoys, and used loudspeakers to blast the sound of moving tanks to the Iraqi troops across the border in Kuwait.[xxvi] This form of *display* required that the decoys be far enough forward for the enemy to see them directly, as they were designed to fool the tactical-level intelligence assets, i.e., the ground soldiers who report events up their chain of command.

Decoys are probably the version of deception most vulnerable to news reporters. In general, they are designed to deceive the adversary's imagery intelligence collection assets, which normally observe from a great distance. They seldom will withstand scrutiny from a near-by ground observer. Even the most casual glance by an inexperienced journalist would reveal that a plywood mock-up of an airplane was spurious, leading to the obvious conclusion that the scenario was an operational deception. Consequently, in free, democratic societies, where press participation is encouraged in war, the use of visual *display* techniques by the operational commander may be a significant challenge.

Conversely, though, the joint commander may encounter decoys employed by an opponent if the adversary nation is more totalitarian in nature. During Operation Desert Storm, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein achieved a high degree of success in protecting SCUD missile assets, partly by employing fabricated SCUD launcher decoys.[xxvii] Saddam had little concern about reporters compromising these decoys, as he had complete control over the news media in his country.

Additionally, *display* methods that use non-visual techniques of deception are less susceptible to direct observation by reporters. During Operation Desert Storm, both the US XVIIIth Airborne Corps and VIIth Corps established "dummy" bases in Saudi Arabia near Kuwait. Although they did use some physical decoys, their deception relied heavily on fake radio traffic and the display of deceptive electronic and thermal signatures indicating that the main force was still situated near Kuwait.[xxviii] This type of electronic and thermal *display* is invisible to the eye, making it relatively undetectable by the press.

Feint: In the early morning hours of January 31st, 1968, as American GIs enjoyed a well-deserved ceasefire in South Vietnam for the Tet holiday, peace was shattered by a major

offensive conducted by the Communist Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units, in what became known as the Tet Offensive. These forces attacked 58 out of 245 major towns in South Vietnam, 36 out of 44 provincial capitals, and even laid siege to the US Embassy in Saigon.[xxix] The VC caught American and South Vietnamese forces almost totally by surprise.

Although the Communist forces achieved some operational success in their offensive, American and South Vietnamese forces quickly regained their balance and reversed the tide of this operation, killing 35,000 VC and NVA, wounding 60,000, and capturing 6,000 more before it was over.[xxx] This was a devastating operational defeat for the North Vietnamese, even though their deception plan was a major success.

The VC and NVA achieved their surprise through the use of *feints,* attacks designed to mislead the American and South Vietnamese forces as to where their major offensive would take place.[xxxi] That a major offensive was pending was becoming blatantly obvious to the US leadership, based on the growing number of intelligence indicators.

These intelligence indicators, however, pointed to two different variations of the pending communist offensive. One which implied a broad attack against the major population centers across all of South Vietnam, and another which pointed to a single, massive attack in the area of Khe Sanh, near the North Vietnam border. This latter scenario is the deception the North Vietnamese wanted the Americans to believe. In reality, Ho Chi Minh was preparing for a large-scale offensive across all of South Vietnam, anticipating that the disgruntled South Vietnamese population would rise up against the US and South Vietnam governments and support the North Vietnamese-led offensive.[xxxii]

To achieve their deception, in the latter half of 1967 the NVA and VC initiated a

series of orchestrated attacks along the Vietnamese demilitarized zone, near the US Marine Corps base at Khe Sanh, which gave the impression that the Communists were planning their major offensive against that one US installation. General William Westmoreland, Commander of US Military Advisory Command-Vietnam, believed their deception and even went so far as to caution that "attempts would be made elsewhere in South Vietnam to divert and disperse US strength away from the real attack …at Khe Sanh."[xxxiii]

The Vietnam War was reported, photographed and televised more than any other war in history. Yet, despite this intensive coverage, neither the US Government nor the news services caught on to the deception that was unfolding before their lenses. The reporters continued to cover each battle, photograph fire-fights, and identify body counts, but no one caught on to the nature of this deception. In general, combat reporters see only small portions of the battlespace, and usually cannot themselves piece together enough of the "big picture" to distinguish a *feint* from other forms of direct combat action.

In the case of the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese used *feints* to depict two potential courses of action; one which focused on the area near Khe Sanh, and the other (true) course of action which targeted all the major population centers across South Vietnam. Even with all of the news and intelligence resources available to him, General Westmoreland, himself, could not distinguish the true intentions of the North Vietnamese.

Ruse: The impact of the news media on *ruses* is totally dependent on the form of *ruse* employed, but when combined with good OPSEC, this style of deception is generally unaffected by the presence of reporters. Because a *ruse* is the deliberate exposure of information to an adversary's intelligence collection system, the employer of this deception can control exactly how this information is revealed.

During WW-II, the Allied forces wanted to deceive the German military leadership into believing that the British and American forces would invade Greece and Sardinia, instead of at their intended objective, Sicily. To accomplish this task, the Allies obtained a male corpse, dressed him in a British uniform, planted phony war plans on him, and dropped him into the sea where they knew he would wash ashore in Spain.[xxxiv] Because Spain was an undeclared ally of Germany, the British and Americans knew that Spanish security services would pass the discovered documents to German intelligence.

This deception operation would have been impervious to the presence of the media, with the exception of the unlikely possibility that the Spanish press may have discovered the body first and openly published the documents' contents. By using *ruses*, the deception planners "hold all the cards." They can pick and choose the information they wish revealed to the enemy and the adversary's intelligence systems that will collect the information. This selectivity gives the planners the ability to avoid the press, or decide if they can benefit by exposure of the information to the news media.

Solutions:

Military operational commanders will have to accept as a "given" that the press will be with them during combat. Attempts to exclude the news media from operations altogether may result in being forced to accept reporters under circumstances even less desirable. Consequently, the deception planners should prepare their plans with the news media calculated into their equation from the beginning.

OPSEC: One of the most critical requirements for success in employing operational deception is secrecy. Although the news media is normally good-intentioned when reporting the news, often their broadcasts serve as a form of intelligence collector for the enemy.

Consequently, for deception planning purposes some forms of news reporting may be considered as an element of the adversary's intelligence collection capability. Although the US military may completely destroy enemy intelligence collection assets, friendly forces will have to accept the presence of journalists.

In all cases, implementation of operational deception must include stringent protection of the commander's true intentions. Effective OPSEC in operational deception requires that the commander withhold his deceptive plans and intentions not only from the media and the enemy's intelligence collectors, but also from most of his own forces. While preparing for the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was able to protect his operational intentions from the intrusive Israeli intelligence services by limiting knowledge of his plans to just a handful of Egyptian and Syrian leaders. Up until the latter stages of preparation for the invasion, only 14 top Egyptian and Syrian officials knew of the intended offensive. On the morning of the invasion, Egyptian junior military officers believed they were embarking on just another military exercise.[xxxv]

The degree to which a commander can control his area of operation will also impact on the news services' ability to collect news. During Operation Fortitude South in WW-II, Winston Churchill was able to effectively bar the press from the area where decoys were employed. "All service leave, travel to Ireland and the airmail service to Lisbon were suspended and the coasts declared prohibited to a depth of ten miles."[xxxvi] Modern operational commanders would not likely have such total control.

Even though news services do pose a risk of comprise to military operations, there are limitations to the intrusiveness of the media. Due to the need for journalists to be responsive to newspaper, radio, and television ratings, the press can be somewhat myopic in its

coverage. Despite the plethora of retired US military flag officers discussing military strategy on news talk shows, the media seldom conducts any semblance of real, intelligence-style analysis of the battlespace. Consequently, the press may record many individual combat scenes, but absent the "big picture," it often does not recognize deception operations even while filming them on camera. The Vietnam War was the most televised war in history, yet despite this pervasive presence of the press, neither the US Government nor any news service was able to predict the true nature of the Tet Offensive.

Method of Deception: There is no "cookie-cutter" solution to analyzing deception methodology with respect to the news media. The accommodation of the press in deception plans is totally dependent on each situation. In circumstances where there is a high concentration of "free-floating" news reporters in the area, *display* methods, such as the use of decoys to deceive the enemy may be ill advised. However, if most or all news assets in the area are imbedded reporters and are subject to censoring by the US military, then *display* techniques may be warranted.

Nonetheless, the use of decoys must take into account the enemy's ability to see them. Visual decoys are generally intended to deceive aerial or space-based imaging platforms, not close, ground-based observation, such as that of news reporters. If friendly forces have effectively destroyed most of the adversary's intelligence collection capabilities, leaving them only with television news as their source of current intelligence, then decoys will likely fail in their purpose.

Conversely, if most or all of the adversary's intelligence collection assets have been destroyed, leaving the news media as their sole source of information, *feints* and *demonstration* techniques in factor space have a good chance of success. Prior to the

14

initiation of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the news media painted a clear picture of the allied buildup of forces near Kuwait, implying a frontal assault by the Allies through that country. Almost immediately after the war kicked off, virtually all of Saddam's intelligence assets were destroyed or otherwise neutralized, leaving him with little more than commercial news sources for his current intelligence. By giving the press free access to forces in the Gulf area, but limiting their access in the west where the primary offensive would take place, the Allies were able to foster the impression in Baghdad that the main attack would take place directly through Kuwait.

To accomplish such a mission, not only must the commander build his deception with the press in mind, but he may also need to orchestrate his offensive maneuvers to ensure the news media successfully carries the deception message to the intended audience. In the initial phases of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, after having destroyed most of Iraq's intelligence collection assets, US combatants intentionally avoided attacking Iraqi television stations to ensure that allied deception, displayed through the news media, could reach the Iraqi leadership.[xxxvii]

Repercussions: In assessing the news services' impact on deception operations, the planners must be aware of the potential repercussions associated with the media. The US military should never manipulate the press, nor give the impression of doing so. Deception operations that exploit or mislead the US media in a manner that would influence US leadership or the American public is expressly forbidden by DoD policy.[xxxviii] A gray area that seems to have gained acceptance, however, is that of allowing the media to come to false conclusions that will ultimately feed an adversary's misperception of US operational disposition or intent.

Following Operation Desert Storm, when the news media realized that they had inadvertently assisted the coalition deception operation by feeding deceptive news to the Iraqi leadership, there was some grumbling among the press corps that they had been "used" by the US Defense Department. Nonetheless, the dramatic success of the deception operation, which ultimately saved countless American lives, cooled serious criticism.[xxxix]

In addition to the potential for negative consequences to military operations, there is also the potential for damage to the news service, itself. News broadcasting companies live and die on their credibility and integrity in reporting, and if either is lost, it can have grim consequences for the service.

In the 1950's, the British Secret Intelligence Service established a covert Arab news and entertainment broadcast radio station under the cover name "Near East Arab Broadcast Company." Its programming was a hit with the Arabs, and was supposedly more popular than Cairo radio. At the beginning of the Suez Crisis in 1956, the British military took control of the station and openly identified the radio service as belonging to the British Government. The station lost its credibility and its audience, eventually closing its doors at the end of the Suez crisis.[xl] Although this was a propaganda operation, it reflects the dismal consequences of a media outlet losing credibility.

In 1968 the US and South Vietnam were the overwhelming victors in the Tet Offensive, but this major Communist attack gave the news media and the American people the impression that the US military had been lying about the progress of the war. This erosion of confidence in the US Defense Department, and the Government as a whole, led to the eventual withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam. This was not part of a deception operation, nor did it involve propaganda, but it highlights the potential pitfalls associated

with lying to the news media, or even the impression of doing so.

Conclusion:

Some military leaders may have security concerns about news media participation in hostile environments, but operational commanders must accept as a given that news reporters will accompany them during combat operations. This does not, however, preclude commanders from effectively employing deception in their operations. Not only can operational deception techniques succeed in the presence of the news media, but in some instances deception practices actually require that the media observe and report certain military activities.

The key to conducting successful deception operations is effective OPSEC. News reporters may unwittingly see, photograph, and report deception activities as they take place, but absent an understanding of the commander's true intentions, they often will not recognize the deception unfolding before them. Even though their video images, by themselves, may benefit the adversary commander, this risk can be minimized or eliminated by properly assessing the media's relationship with the task force, and planning the operational deception to either protect or expose specific friendly information that will project the desired image to the enemy.

The commander must, however, avoid misleading the news media in a manner that would influence US leadership or the American public, but it has become accepted practice to allow the news media to come to false conclusions about operational plans and intentions that ultimately deceive the enemy leadership. In such instances, the press becomes an almost indispensable part of operational deception. Ironically, this implies that, rather than a being a liability, the news media may actually be a force multiplier for the operational commander.

NOTES

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