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From: Whitman, Bryan Mr OSD PA
Sent: Wednesday, August 26, 2009 6:24 PM
To: Smith, Gregory J USA RDML USN ISAF
Cc: Floyd, Price B Mr OSD PA; (b)(6) CAPT USN; Lapan, David COL OSD PA
Subject: Profiling Reporters

Greg,

I need your help. Since we last spoke on this issue, the story line is really getting out-of-hand. From 8,000 miles away, I'm finding it difficult to address the some of the specific allegations being made of PA operations in Afghanistan. I can and have been addressing the DoD media policy aspects, but I really need one of your guys to address the specific allegations coming out of this latest piece.

If we have some performance issues, I think we need to get them addressed quickly.

Thanks, Bryan

Wednesday, August 26, 2009

Files prove Pentagon is profiling reporters

Stars and Stripes
Mideast edition, Wednesday, August 27, 2009

WASHINGTON - Contrary to the insistence of Pentagon officials this week that they are not rating the work of reporters covering U.S. forces in Afghanistan, Stars and Stripes has obtained documents that prove that reporters' coverage is being graded as "positive," "neutral" or "negative."

Moreover, the documents - recent confidential profiles of the work of individual reporters prepared by a Pentagon contractor - indicate that the ratings are intended to help Pentagon image-makers manipulate the types of stories that reporters produce while they are embedded with U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

One reporter on the staff of one of America's pre-eminent newspapers is rated in a Pentagon report as "neutral to positive" in his coverage of the U.S. military. Any negative stories he writes "could possibly be neutralized" by feeding him mitigating quotes from military officials.

Another reporter, from a TV station, provides coverage from a "subjective

angle," according to his Pentagon profile. Steering him toward covering "the positive work of a successful operation" could "result in favorable coverage."

The new revelations of the Pentagon's attempts to shape war coverage come as senior Defense Department officials are acknowledging increasing concern over recent opinion polls showing declining popular American support for the Afghan war.

"The purpose of this memo is to provide an assessment of [a reporter from a major U.S. newspaper] . in order to gauge the expected sentiment of his work while on an embed mission in Afghanistan," reads the preamble to one of the reporter profiles prepared for the Pentagon by The Rendon Group, a controversial Washington-based public relations firm.

Stars and Stripes reported on Monday that the Pentagon was screening reporters embedding with U.S. forces to determine whether their past coverage had portrayed the military in a positive light. The story included denials by U.S. military officials that they were using the reporters' profiles to determine whether to approve embed requests.

In the wake of that story, officials of both the Defense Department and Rendon went further, denying that the rating system exists.

"They are not doing that [rating reporters], that's not been a practice for some time - actually since the creation of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan" in October 2008, Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman told reporters Monday. "I can tell you that the way in which the Department of Defense evaluates an article is its accuracy. It's a good article if it's accurate. It's a bad article if it's inaccurate. That's the only measurement that we use here at the Defense Department."

In a statement e-mailed to Stars and Stripes, Rear Adm. Greg Smith, director of communications for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, wrote: "To imply journalists embedded with our forces only serve to highlight positive aspects of our mission slights the professional journalists who regularly embed with our forces and report what they experience, both good and bad."

The Rendon Group declared in a statement that "the information and analysis we generate is developed , not by ranking of reporters."

But the Rendon profiles reviewed by Stars and Stripes prove otherwise. One of the profiles evaluates work published as recently as May, suggesting that the rating practice did not in fact cease last October as Whitman stated.

And the explicit suggestions contained in the Rendon profiles detailing how best to manipulate reporters' coverage during their embeds directly contradict the Pentagon's stated policies governing the embed process.

"These ground rules recognize the inherent right of the media to cover combat operations and are in no way intended to prevent release of

embarrassing, negative or derogatory information," reads the "News Media Ground Rules" issued by U.S. military officials for embedded reporters in Iraq.

Several professional journalists' groups as well as media ethicists criticized the Pentagon's attempts to rate and manipulate reporters. And at least one military official with knowledge of the profiling system has also begun to raise objections.

"It's troubling that the military is contracting a private PR firm, paid with U.S. taxpayer dollars, to profile individual reporters," said one servicemember who declined to be identified for fear of official retribution. "It shows utter contempt for the Constitution, which we in the service pledge our lives to defend."

Stars and Stripes' Charlie Reed, Kevin Baron and Leo Shane III contributed to this report.

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