



ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

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PUBLIC AFFAIRS

19 December 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Post Grenada Public Affairs

I am aware of Teddy White's latest proposal suggesting Walter Cronkite as the leader of a panel to study military media relations. I have a strong professional bias against Walter Cronkite performing that function. It stems from his visit to North Vietnam while our airmen were still prisoners of war. Cronkite not only prostituted himself to North Vietnam propagandists but he eroded the dignity of our men being held captive. The visit of the celebrated commentator and his cameras put our men in a difficult position. Their responses and reactions to his questions could not reveal the disgust they felt for their cruel captors for fear of reprisal. While Cronkite's actions do not equal those of Jane Fonda's, I despise anyone who seeks fame at the expense of a helpless prisoner of war. I, therefore, don't feel that his views as a war correspondent should be respected.

Let me put Teddy's suggestion in context with other things we are doing or should be doing. First, the Sidle panel is finally getting organized. As you recall, I initially protested the Chairman initiating the study since public affairs policy is clearly an OSD/civilian function. I conceded the study to the JCS after I realized that we at the policy level should not be tied solely to Sidle's recommendations. We have to maintain more flexibility. Sidle may or may not be able to bring in a meaningful study since the press may not be able to solve its own differences (print vs. electronic) before they can deal with military vs. media. He will submit his work to the Chairman who will make recommendations to you. The security of the mission and the safety of our troops will be preserved since the Chairman will never make a recommendation that jeopardizes either. The civilian leadership will still maintain policy oversight.

We cannot limit ourselves to Sidle's work nor should we wait months for it to be completed. If you were to order another military operation tomorrow, we would be no better off with the press than we were in Grenada. We lack the plans and policies for dealing with the press during a crisis. When we have a military exercise to test our contingency plans, public affairs is limited to publicity for the exercise and does not enter into the exercise play. As a result, commanders have no experience dealing with the press during a crisis.

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With the help of the Services, I have assembled a nine-man group to address this problem and assemble a crisis press plan. I hope to present a plan to you and the Chairman in two weeks.

As a matter of policy, you and the President should never accept a JCS contingency plan unless it contains a workable public affairs annex. The work my staff is doing will give the JCS and unified commanders a number of plans from which they can draw. Unless we deal with the public affairs problems from the beginning, we stand the risk of winning the battles but losing the wars.

We are also not very good at articulating military/media problems. The military accuses the press of a variety of indiscretions but has done a poor job of documenting them. I have written the commandants of each of our war colleges and service schools asking that students take on military media topics as semester projects. I am also exploring the need for additional public affairs training for our commanders and future leaders.

Finally, I suggest a compromise to Teddy White's recommendation. With your approval, I would like to organize an LBH-type function for Teddy White's list of former war correspondents and current media bosses. The numbers may dictate the need for two separate functions. Instead of an intelligence briefing, we should present a briefing on the concerns of military commanders of preserving the security of his mission and protecting his forces. The briefing can be illustrated with actual and hypothetical examples of breaches of security that have/could endanger an operation. Afterward, we move to the dinner table for discussion. The Chairman and as many of the Chiefs as possible should attend. I recommend that we host the function immediately after the first of the year. The dialogue will be useful to both the military and the media and will illustrate that you and the national leadership are not excluding the press from all future operations.

In the meantime, the Administration and the military should temper their remarks about the press. We have nothing to apologize for in Grenada, but we should also not appear as braggarts. Admiral Metcalf's remarks about the military hating the press and George Shultz's remarks are not solving a serious problem, they are adding to it. Our challenge is

to find a responsible compromise between a complete blackout and a dangerous free-for-all.

Provide a written response to White's recommendation:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Plan and organize an LBH function for military/media leaders:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

*Michael I. Buch*