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From: Morrell, Geoff Mr OSD PA
Sent: Monday, August 24, 2009 8:11 PM
To: Whitman, Bryan Mr OSD PA
Subject: Re: Stars and Stripes: Journalists' recent work examined before embeds

Is this true?
I have never heard of this.

Geoff Morrell
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Pentagon Press Secretary

(b)(6)

From: Whitman, Bryan Mr OSD PA
To: 'jamiejmcintyre@gmail.com' ; Morrell, Geoff Mr OSD PA
Sent: Mon Aug 24 18:09:18 2009
Subject: Re: Stars and Stripes: Journalists' recent work examined before embeds

Sure. What's your #

From: Jamie McIntyre
To: Whitman, Bryan Mr OSD PA; Morrell, Geoff Mr OSD PA
Sent: Mon Aug 24 16:20:46 2009
Subject: Stars and Stripes: Journalists' recent work examined before embeds

Is this something either of you are commenting on?
I am writing about it for my new blog, "line of departure"
TheLineofDeparture.com

Journalists' recent work examined before embeds
By Charlie Reed <<mailto:reedc@pstripes.osd.mil>> , Stars and Stripes Mideast edition, Monday, August 24, 2009

As more journalists seek permission to accompany U.S. forces engaged in escalating military operations in Afghanistan, many of them could be screened by a controversial Washington-based public relations firm contracted by the Pentagon to determine whether their past coverage has portrayed the U.S. military in a positive light.

U.S. public affairs officials in Afghanistan acknowledged to Stars and Stripes that any reporter seeking to embed with U.S. forces is subject to a background profile by The Rendon Group, which gained notoriety in the run-up to the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq for its work helping to create the Iraqi National Congress. That opposition group, reportedly funded

by the CIA, furnished much of the false information about Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction used by the Bush administration to justify the invasion.

Rendon examines individual reporters' recent work and determines whether the coverage was "positive," "negative" or "neutral" compared to mission objectives, according to Rendon officials. It conducts similar analysis of general reporting trends about the war for the military and has been contracted for such work since 2005, according to the company.

"We have not denied access to anyone because of what may or may not come out of their biography," said Air Force Capt. Elizabeth Mathias, a public affairs officer with U.S. Forces Afghanistan in Kabul. "It's so we know with whom we're working."

U.S. Army officials in Iraq engaged in a similar vetting practice two months ago, when they barred a Stars and Stripes reporter <<http://www.stripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=63426>> from embedding with a unit of the 1st Cavalry Division because the reporter "refused to highlight" good news that military commanders wanted to emphasize.

Professional groups representing journalists are decrying the Pentagon's screening of reporters.

"That's the government doing things to put out the message they want to hear and that's not the way journalism is meant to work in this country," said Amy Mitchell, deputy director for Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

"The whole concept of doing profiles on reporters who are going to embed with the military is alarming," said Ron Martz, president of the Military Reporters and Editors association.

"It speaks to this whole issue of trying to shape the message and that's not something the military should be involved with," he said.

Mathias said the Rendon reports are generated only after a reporter has been assigned to cover a unit and are done on an ad hoc basis, typically for lesser-known journalists and those new to covering the war in Afghanistan.

The reports are useful for familiarizing commanders with topics the journalists could address and for facilitating coverage specific to a journalist's interests, she said.

Mathias also contended that the Pentagon has begun shifting away from the positive-negative-neutral scale and is now evaluating news coverage more for its accuracy.

"If it's accurate, that's a successful news story, whether good or bad," she said.

The recent merger of U.S. and NATO public affairs outfits in Kabul has resulted in a one-stop shop for media information and embed requests. It also gives more public affairs officers access to the background reports and other services provided by The Rendon Group.

The backgrounders are part of a wide scope of work Rendon does for the Defense Department under its current \$1.5 million "news analysis and media assessment" contract, according to military and company officials.

The work includes statistical analysis of reporting trends inside and outside of the country and coverage of specific topics such as counternarcotics operations. It also analyzes how effectively the military is communicating its message.

"This allows them to measure the strategic effect of U.S. and allied activities as reflected in the local and international media," according to an e-mailed statement from Rendon.

As of Friday, there were 60 media outlets — excluding Afghan media — on the ground with U.S. and NATO forces, a significant increase compared to just a few months ago, said Mathias.

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