

Thoughts on the “New Media”

Compiled by Dave Dilege

Last weekend I sent out the following “RFI” to a number of bloggers I know:

[Andrew Exum’s post](#) / review of Tom Ricks’ *The Gamble* several weeks ago at Abu Muqawama got me thinking (once again) about the impact of the “new media” on issues concerning national security, military doctrine and concept development, as well as lessons learned. As one part of this new media I’m not sure I fully grasp our influence – though I am often told we are, quote – “making a difference”. Here is the excerpt from the AM post that got me thinking about this.

“**The New Media:** Ricks cited a discussion on *Small Wars Journal* once and also cited some things on *PlatoonLeader.org* but never considered the way in which the new media has revolutionized the lessons learned process in the U.S. military. (Forget Abu Muqawama, though, because this lowly blog started around the same time as the surge.) Instead of just feeding information to the Center for Army Lessons Learned and waiting for lessons to be disseminated, junior officers are now debating what works and what doesn't on closed internet fora -- such as *PlatoonLeader* and *CompanyCommand* -- and open fora, such as the discussion threads on *Small Wars Journal*. The effect of the new media on the junior officers fighting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was left curiously unexplored by Ricks, now a famous blogger himself.”

I’d like to get your thoughts on this - nothing elaborate – maybe a paragraph or two on the core issues concerning the new media and its impact on the military. I’d then like to post the responses I get as one post on *SWJ*.

Appreciate the consideration.

What follows are the replies I received through yesterday. Some stuck to the one-two requested paragraphs, some sent more. Rather than attempt to “over edit” and get some uniformity I opted to go with this initial batch of thoughts on this issue.

All good stuff that hopefully energizes a discourse on the impact of new media and its influence on military doctrine, concept development, training, education, and lessons learned. Without further ado (and in alphabetical order) here is Spencer Ackerman, Tom Barnett, Janine Davidson, Andrew Exum, Grim, Judah Grunstein, Dave Kilcullen, Raymond Pritchett, Mark Safranski, Herschel Smith, Starbuck, Michael Tanji, and Michael Yon.

Spencer Ackerman – [Attackerman](#)

I can't speak to the new media's impact on the formal lessons-learned process without old-fashioned reporting -- and this is a good idea for a story -- but the level of interaction with soldiers and officers that comes with working in an online format is quite remarkable. Nearly five years ago, I wrote a story from Washington about problems with training the Iraqi army. I wouldn't have been able to do the piece if a sergeant based in Balad hadn't been reading my Iraq blog at my then-organization's website and emailed me to discuss his experiences. The piece was published shortly after the twin Fallujah/Sadr uprisings in March-April 2004, right when the Iraqi army famously melted away on first contact. Over time, the type of interaction with Iraq and Afghanistan veterans has changed somewhat -- most often now, people want to push back against something I've written or compare it to their unit's experience, whereas earlier it was more of a recitation of what they went through --but a common thread has been an attempt to place their unit's experiences in a larger context. This, I find, is particularly true of junior officers who are thinking in terms of their next deployment.

As AM writes, the impact of fora like SWJ and private military listservs is basically the creation of an informal lessons-learned process, where people are comfortable tying strategic questions to tactical decision-making. I would argue that the nature of the format encourages those linkages. When you're writing to a group of respected peers, you tend to want to make bigger points or raise bigger questions, and that leads you to try to think a proposition through to its logical conclusions -- even at the risk of overgeneralization -- rather than simply chronicling experiences. People's comfort levels with opinion and invective have clearly changed, and my read is that there's an understanding that harsher language is intended to be provocative rather than disrespectful, which is all to the good for testing a proposition. The comment thread on a recent US Naval Institute Blog post hinted at a generational divide: an admiral derided the tone of the blogosphere, but most readers -- presumably junior officers -- praised the opportunity to rethink basic assumptions in public. Come to think of it, I wonder how someone who works at CALL and reads SWJ all day compares the formal lessons-learned process to this informal one.

Tom Barnett – [Thomas P.M. Barnett](#)

My sense is that what we're seeing are non-mainstream media venues increasingly serving as the center of gravity for new thinking *and* new consensus in all sorts of fields. The MSM finds this disturbing, considering itself to be the final arbiter of such things when it comes to issues of interest to the public, and so routinely seeks to sell a sense a hierarchy by which unconventional venues are natural feeders to conventional ones, almost like entrepreneurial firms go to market with their new products via big firms. But ideas are more viral, obviously, and so the assumption that they need the institutional blessing of established actors is more suspect. When you're talking about a hierarchical institution like the military, assumptions of feeder-versus-fed are even harder to trump, and yet operational experience throughout this long war has consistently triggered new conventions (no surprise in itself given the length of conflict).

What's different is the breakdown of the Cold War wall between the realm of military and civilian, meaning we see military learning and discovering outside their accepted range of norms, in subject matters for which there is no natural hierarchy within military thinking. In the

vernacular of William Easterly, development expert, we now see a struggle between converted (by experience) "searchers" who find their answers on the ground and "planners" who still prefer it from on high. Among the Green (as opposed to the Blue), the searchers are achieving the upper hand and, to no great surprise, are exploiting media that circumvent the usual codification processes preferred by planners.

Janine Davidson – [Small Wars Journal](#)

Like a retired four star once told me, "soldiers only eat when they are hungry, and then they eat everything in sight."

Military learning - from the western frontier to now - has always been enabled by what Keith Bickel calls "informal doctrine." These sources become critical when formal doctrine is off base or lags behind new techniques and threats. During the Banana Wars, the USMC devoured the *Marine Corps Gazette*, where that era's thought leaders and vets were publishing their experience and insight from their tours in the Caribbean. These articles eventually framed the *Small Wars Manual*.

Today this dialogue and debate is taking place in print and "new" media. For our community *Small Wars Journal* and Abu Muquama provide the key fora. These are not just places to pontificate (though we do that too) but rather sites where serious thought leadership and learning is taking place. And yes, the hosts of these sites are making an enormous difference.

Meanwhile, "new media" is playing a role in the educational realm, where deeper, more theoretical thinking needs to be institutionalized and internalized. LTG Caldwell, the CAC commander and the MNF-I spokesman in Iraq, has made it a requirement for CGSC students to blog. Given his experience in Iraq, he feels strongly that the next generation of military leaders needs to be comfortable in this space.

Finally, the Consortium for Complex Operations, which I helped launch nearly a year ago leveraged a firewalled portal where a robust community of practice - civilian and military, government, non-gov, and academics - can share ideas and event information, including curricula and actual courses. The premise of the CCO was that the best way to enhance unity of effort in the "comprehensive approach" (where, by definition, there is no core unity of command) is to start with education and training. If educators, practitioners, trainers, and thought leaders work together to develop theoretical frameworks, doctrine, and curricula -- and if they actively debate all of this - then the next generation will have similar operating frameworks, even as they have different skill sets and organizational cultures, when they find themselves working together in the field.

We had some difficulty convincing traditional government bureaucrats and leaders that this dialogue can and should be had in the open. The fear was that by debating our lessons learned, doctrine and theories, we would expose our weaknesses to "the enemy." We argued that 'the enemy' probably already knew our weaknesses, and that we needed this new media-enhanced dialogue to identify and correct them ourselves in real time, with as many of "us" on the problem as possible. We pointed out that industry, like Sun Microsystems, had begun to use open media

to enhance their product - vs. industrial-age models where the corporate secrets and formulas were kept under lock and key. The counter-intuitive theory was that in the open race for ideas, the more open (and potentially vulnerable) you are, the faster you will adapt and the bigger edge you will have over the competition.

The CCO has recently moved to NDU, under the direction of Hans Binnendijk, where this more open dialogue can be strengthened under the "dot-edu" environment. In this way the best minds in and out of government can work on these deeper intellectual puzzles together as we all try to stay ahead of the competition.

In sum, in the government sphere, we have just begun to crack this code. Forward-thinking leaders like General Petraeus and LTG Caldwell, who are not afraid to jump into this space and compete, have weighed the tradeoffs and decided that the power is greater than the risk.

Andrew Exum – [Abu Muqawama](#)

The biggest role I have seen the new media play is in the way it has revolutionized the lessons learned process. Once upon a time, platoon leaders would submit lessons learned to CALL or the war colleges and wait for the vertical structures to process those lessons. Today, by contrast, tactical leaders trade and debate TTPs on PlatoonLeader or *Small Wars Journal*. That's the good news. The bad news is that the enemy's lessons learned process is also now horizontal and powered by the internet. What effect this all has on insurgent and terror groups is as fascinating a question as how this will affect our own military institutions.

Grim – [Blackfive](#)

The New Media deserves partial credit for the success of the Surge in three areas.

- 1) It provided the only counterbalance to the old media in 2004, buying the military time to internalize the lessons it was already starting to learn in Iraq. The US Army in particular changes slowly and only with the constant application of pain. If 2004 had gone the other way, Iraq would have been lost. The worst years were still to come in 2004, but it was the purchase of those extra four years that allowed the COIN doctrine time to develop and formalize, and make its march through the learning institutions of the Army and Marines.
- 2) It nurtured the community of people who were actively trying to find a way to win the war. This is the point that the AM website was making, but it bears the weight of a broader context. If the websites he names provided a place for an academic debate among military officers, other sites provided a way to broaden the lessons to the American community.

Our HTT leader is a member of Vets for Freedom -- a New Media enterprise as much as any blog. The Long War Journal provided reporting that explained how COIN concepts applied to day to day events. At BlackFive, we did several different things, but one of them was to break down the high-level academic concepts and try to make them bite-sized and understandable to junior officers, NCOs, military families and supporters. A host of milblogs provided a live-from-the-ground viewpoint, particularly before military censors cut back on it. This evidence-

and-argument function went from the heights of serious scholarship all the way across the range to soldiers and Marines who were just talking about what they were seeing, what was working and wasn't, and what they thought they'd like to try. The Mudville Gazette, first among equals, provided continuity and visibility across the milblog portion of the New Media. Finally, a few serious anti-war sites provided insightful criticism that was useful in reforming bad practices.

A lot of this went on inside the formal learning institutions as well, as you would expect. The New Media provided the War College for the informal learning institutions.

3) In addition to nurturing the concept, it also nurtured the morale of such people. As you know, the morale is to the physical &c. Having won the time to try to win, it allowed us to build a community -- worldwide, from here in Iraq to Afghanistan to back home. We fought intensely with each other over ideas, but supported each other just as strongly in other ways. That's no small reason why it all came together.

Judah Grunstein – [World Politics Review](#)

I started blogging two years ago, just as the Surge was being rolled out. My initial posts amounted to little more than snarky opposition to the Surge, in particular, and the Iraq War, in general. But they reflect the ways in which current, retrospective discussion of the Surge sometimes focuses on how supporters got the tactics right, while ignoring the domestic political context for opposition to it. American citizens were essentially being asked to trust a discredited president and military command with a risky, strategic escalation of a war that a broad majority wanted to see ended, despite being unsure of how to do so.

After quickly discovering the limits of snark as a meaningful form of criticism, I embarked on a personal “lessons learned” process, devouring the Army War College SSI’s monographs and U.S. Army doctrinal field manuals, and making new media military sites such as Danger Room, Defense Tech, Iraq Slogger, Small Wars Journal, Armchair Generalist, and later Andru Exawama a part of my daily reading.

As my writing became more informed and my criticism of the Surge more pointed, a funny thing happened. One day I noticed traffic coming my way from Small Wars Journal. A quick visit to the SWJ site revealed the unimaginable: There I was on the blogroll. Of course, I shouldn’t have been surprised, because what I had already discovered—namely, that the military, too, was involved in a soul-searching effort to figure out where it had gone wrong and to correct course—reassured me that informed criticism was not only far from disloyal, it was essential.

Nevertheless, Dave and Bill’s informal invitation to participate in that ongoing dialogue had a curious impact me. By validating my right, as a civilian, to have a say in the military’s “lessons learned” process, it forced me to take responsibility not just for pointing my finger at the problems, but for helping to find the solutions.

When later, as a freelancer doing a series on France’s defense White Paper, I discovered Gen. Vincent Desportes’ recently published book on the future of warfare, I was struck by its resemblance to the U.S. Army’s emerging COIN-centric, stability ops doctrine. My first thought

was that the book, published only in French, should be available to the SWJ community. Dave and Bill agreed, and a book review of “The Likely War” accompanied by an interview with Gen. Desportes appeared two months later in the Small Wars Journal.

There’s no way to be sure, but I am nonetheless convinced that the kind of civilian-military dialogue epitomized by my involvement with SWJ—and, more generally, facilitated by the new media sites mentioned above—in part explains why the Iraq War has not been accompanied by the same sort of mutual recriminations and distrust between civilian war critics and the military that arose during the Vietnam War. If the Iraq War and the Surge have proven divisive, those divisions have remained political, as compared to the cultural divisions witnessed forty years ago.

Gen. Omar Bradley’s well-known aphorism has it that amateurs study tactics, while professionals study logistics. I would add to it that strategists study politics, because political realities, both in-theater and domestically, determine any war’s objectives and the likelihood of achieving them. If there is one yet-to-be-determined outcome of the Surge, of course, it is the ultimate success of its political objectives in Iraq. But it has already achieved its domestic political objective, which was to convince the American public that handing the dice back to a chastened military command for one last crap shoot would rescue the outcome of the Iraq War. New media contributed to the Surge’s domestic success, and any strategic progress it might ultimately achieve in Iraq, by helping the military to learn from its past mistakes, but as importantly, by including the civilian community—from which the military draws both its lifeblood and legitimacy—in the process.

David Kilcullen – [Small Wars Journal](#)

I haven't yet read Tom Ricks' book but, from my perspective, new media were important during the surge in three main ways.

First, in re-orienting the force to counterinsurgency we made extensive use of tactical blogs, informal email networks and sites like [companycommand.com](#) and [platoonleader.org](#), as well as the MNF-I and MNC-I web presence (both within the FOUO firewall and outside it). We used these fora to discuss and refine tactics and approaches, share views on the developing operation and exchange information on what worked and what didn't. In my combat-advising sessions with units I would always gather people's email addresses and create little email networks for follow-up discussion, so that in between visits we could stay in touch and exchange info. This included an informal network of NCOs and officers at every level, and over time we were able to link up different units with similar problems and facilitate their exchange of information so that they could help each other figure things out. We always kept the chain of command in the loop (on the CC line, mainly). This system allowed individual units to react rapidly as things developed on the ground. It also provided the chain of command with a near real-time understanding of conditions and problems at company and platoon level, which helped the BCT commanders frame their operations better. Some commanders were initially uneasy about this, but we found that the ability to reorient the whole force very quickly on new tactics, or to alert people rapidly to new enemy techniques or developments with the population, ultimately

enhanced the effectiveness of commanders, and they rapidly bought into it when it began to show results.

Second, we made extensive use of sites like YouTube in the information battle. This required special approval due to the limitations imposed by the Smith-Mundt Act, but MNF-I (including under General Casey in 2006) worked diligently with force lawyers and DoD to gain approval, and then launched the MNF-I Youtube channel in 2007. This focused on showing the enemy as they really were -- brutal, incompetent, anti-Islamic thugs who abused the population -- and on showing them in a ridiculous or unheroic light (not real hard!). This reversed a situation which had existed, wherein the enemy were all over us on the blogs and networking sites, but we had failed to hit back effectively.

Finally, we adopted a policy of explaining the surge to the public via new media (including, for example, my own posts on *Small Wars Journal*, the MNF-I online newsletter, the MNF-Iraq.com site, and commanders' updates) because we felt that the issues were more complex than some people thought, and because many of the fiercest critics of the effort were basing their criticisms on misunderstandings of what was happening or of what we were trying to do. This was a "public education" offensive rather than a "spin" attempt. Also, some of the most extreme and non-factual criticisms emanated from online communities, so we felt this was an important community to engage. From my own perspective, I think the shift in our approach away from "Let me convince you that everything is going well" to "Let me try and explain what we're trying to do" served us well.

I should also say that some of this (eg the Youtube channel) was started before General Petraeus's time and began to bear fruit as we arrived. He didn't invent the approach, but he did sanction it and create a climate that promoted rapid understanding and communication -- including via new media. He and his subordinate commanders actively promoted organizational learning. I think that was a very important part of it, especially in an environment when the enemy was capable of extremely rapid adaptation. For example, once in central Baghdad in June 07 we were fighting alongside a local group that had taken up arms against al Qaida. Our local commander agreed with them, during a lull in the fighting at about 10pm one night, that they would wear orange markers during the following morning's battle so that we could identify them. The engagement began again at first light, and within a couple of hours all the AQ guys had identical orange markers to the ones our local allies were wearing. In that kind of environment, where the enemy could change tack on the fly, we had to adapt or die. New media was a key element of that (though by no means the whole story).

Bottom Line -- new media was very important in the surge, probably in ways that we don't yet fully understand, and this is an area that would definitely repay further study. If anyone needs a topic for a Masters or NPS/CGSC thesis, this is potentially a good one!

Raymond Pritchett – [Information Dissemination](#)

The influence of new media in Iraq is difficult to measure, and I don't blame Tom Ricks for avoiding attempting to quantify the impact new media had in the national security discussion related to the surge. The impact of new media Andrew Exum is suggesting took place was at

both the strategic and tactical levels among the junior and mid-level officer corps, citing websites such as PlatoonLeader, CompanyCommand, and the Small Wars Journal. I would suggest that the horizontal connections from new media are also taking place at the political level, and that influence is easier to describe.

Andrew Exum is discussing informal networks that were driven by necessity and utilized by those comfortable with the tools, and because comfort with the tools was a requirement, that in and of itself describes how new media is emerging as part of a generation gap in the services. Were there enough participants in these informal networks to have a significant impact at the tactical and operational level of the surge? I don't know. Has there been enough participation among the high level officer corps to suggest the strategic level has been influenced by new media, or are those internal battles being fought absent the influence of new media? Again, it is hard to tell.

Where new media seems to have had the largest impact relating to the surge is in the political space, both for and against the policy itself. New media allowed several 'authority' opinions to develop as analysts of the activity, and give balance to a political debate often conducted in confusion regarding what exactly the surge represented besides an increase in troop numbers. It was new media that explained the additional tactical changes at the operational level, and in that regards gave weight to the political discussion to both those who approved and disapproved of the policy. It is not wrong to suggest it is these contributions by new media that led to the Gates relieving Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley and Secretary Michael W. Wynne from their jobs, because it was new media that was the primary driver of external pressure on the Air Force to adjust their priorities towards the wars we were in, a war the Air Force was not seen as influencing effectively towards the national interest.

New media has contributed immensely to helping Americans understand the conditions on the ground in Iraq even now after the surge, and new media represents the primary source for most Americans looking to understand the context for setting expectations for the next phases of our operations in both theaters of war. Again, these are measurable influences at the political level.

It will be several years before we truly understand the influence of new media on the national security debate at the strategic and tactical level the last few years. We will ultimately know based on how many of those junior and mid-level officers who engaged in new media become tomorrow's service leaders, and how that experience shapes their view regarding the value of horizontal connectivity. It is easy for today's Generals and Admirals to suggest new media is quote - "making a difference" - but I suspect very few of those same Generals or Admirals could quantify how or why new media is having a direct positive influence on their job today. That isn't because a positive influence doesn't exist, rather because fewer high level officers are consistently engaged in new media, so they primarily recognize new media's influences when their job is impacted in a negative way.

Mark Safranski – [Zenpundit](#)

Andrew Exum was focusing on the effect of "new media" on the internal debate within the military but the underlying Web 2.0 phenomenon here that SWJ, Platoon.org, Abu Muqawama

and so on represent is more general and very powerful. What social media in a focused context (in this case military professionals, academics, defense intellectuals, war reporters) achieves are:

- a) Rapid network building without regard to geography or professional disciplinary "silo".
- b) A substantial increase in the velocity and net total of information exchanged ("lessons learned")
- c) An increased intensity of individual psychological engagement with the content through the "hook" of frequent social contact.
- d) An emergent "community" with a culture of collaboration that supercedes traditional, rigid, barriers or hierarchical channels.

The crossing of boundaries and information flow leads to synthesis and insight. The personal connection and community building permits mobilizing for action.

One key factor for the establishment of a "community" rather than just erratic contact is astute moderation. To hold together, a network requires "hubs" that are "attractive" and pulls in "nodes" to connect rather than pushing them away or excluding them. There also has to be, even in an open-source community, some policing of norms so that discussions can be enjoyable and productive rather than degenerating into irritating, personalized, flame wars. It can't be techno-anarchy. From the first, SWJ has almost always struck that critical balance of welcoming with reining in members who were getting carried away with themselves.

A great paper to read, if anyone wishes to understand the cognitive psychology behind "new media" and how it achieves an educational effect, I strongly recommend "[Minds of Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail and Learning 2.0](#)" by the eminent computer scientist, John Seely Brown and futurist Richard Adler. A second, far drier but still informative work would be the CSIS report "[Understanding International Collaborative Online Networks](#)".

Herschel Smith – [The Captain's Journal](#)

The affect of the new media appears to be still very much a mixed bag. Some branches of the Armed Forces seem to have embraced the openness of the new media and the unstructured nature of the almost instant communication, usually marked by an assemblage of facts coupled with analysis and disputation. Other branches have been slower to respond. Of course, within every branch and down to the unit level there are differences in how these matters are both viewed and handled. As a still relatively small and insignificant blog, the best that can be hoped for is to help facilitate communication between professionals, be a clearinghouse for useful information, and help to shape policy, strategy and public opinion by advocacy and analysis. Held to this standard, the failures of *The Captain's Journal* certainly outnumber the successes by a wide margin. But if one life is saved, one counterinsurgency expert is forced to think about something in a new light, a few more dollars are forthcoming for the proper equipping of the military, or one wounded warrior, parent or spouse is able to feel pride in what they have done

because of my work, they it will have been worth it. How would these goals be assessed with metrics? Frankly, it still isn't clear.

Starbuck – [Wings Over Iraq](#)

As a long-time blogger, I have to say that I never thought I'd see the day when blogs and web pages would actually be encouraged by the military, having heard a number of diatribes over the years against the debauchery that takes place on the Internet (which, of course, I take no part in). But this is "The New Media", which has spurred much of the new Counter-Insurgency Renaissance that has taken place in the military. The beginnings were modest. As the Global War on Terror kicked off, blogs, pictures and webpages came to the forefront of the news in light of a number of well-publicized security violations. Shortly thereafter, messages from the Army Chief of Staff came out warning service members to not post sensitive information on the Internet, followed by a new regulation which mandated a crackdown on blogs and other Internet sources that nearly made this form of communication illegal. But that's about as likely to succeed as outlawing the downloading of MP3s.

Many social psychologists have noted that, sitting behind a computer in the relative veil of anonymity, users will start to write and post a number of things that they wouldn't normally write about. As more and more service members found themselves confounded and frustrated by the progress in Iraq and Afghanistan, they began to voice their frustrations on the Internet, largely through blogs and other similar sites. Blogs began to link to one another on "blogrolls", linking together a growing counterinsurgency movement within the military. They offered a place where service men and women could post about the latest tactics, offering advice to one another, and even offering critique on American strategy and grand strategy. As an aviator, I liken these types of forums where soldiers exchange ideas to the old-fashioned O-Clubs, where aviators would discuss flying over a beer. Except in this case, it's soldiers discussing counterinsurgency, in many cases, from a tent in Iraq or Afghanistan.

The new media has also created forums where, again, behind the veil of anonymity that is a computer screen, privates can go so far as to challenge and critique many of the decisions of even generals—with these websites providing a safe and professional haven to voice these concerns. The military thrives on being a "bottom-up" learning organization, and as many of the junior leaders in the Army are Gen Y-ers, the first generation to grow up with computers in their household. Many generals have begun to capitalize on this phenomenon, with some generals and admirals going so far as to create their own Facebook pages in order to better link in with net-savvy soldiers. The new media has even created a few near-celebrities in the field of counter-insurgency and military policy. Names like Lt. Col. John Nagl and Lt. Col. Paul Yingling are now near-household names among many junior soldiers.

What began as an underground movement has now become mainstream and acceptable, at least in many quarters. General William Caldwell has now become a blogger, and encourages many of his students in professional military courses to do the same. While there is still a stigma attached with military blogs (they're often called "The Myspace" by the older crowd), and the number of bloggers and blog-readers is still relatively small, the users can still manage to find one another, even going so far as to meet Internet counterparts in real life.

Give it another ten years, and you might see regular battalion-level blogs.

Michael Tanji – [ThreatsWatch](#)

I was in Iraq when you had to mail your information back home and to colleagues on paper, so the impact on new media on the military is amazing to me on many levels. My first hand knowledge of said impact is non-existent, but I would like to think that I can apply the same observations and conclusions I've drawn from the impact new media (and the "intelization" of related technologies) has had on the intelligence business...

It is new media and related technologies that democratize and speed the learning of lessons. This is an important, if not THE most important aspect of survival in the military or intelligence business. Everyone learns the same skills and tradecraft starting out, but it's how you employ those skills (or acquire new ones they don't teach in any schoolhouse) that is the key to success. Sadly, in the normal course of events, the Corporal will never get to sound off on his lessons learned beyond the squad; online however his voice is amplified and his audience global. He gathers allies of all ranks, previously unknown, who can support his conclusions or learn and adapt them to their own situations. Not that he was ever illegitimate, but in this chorus his voice gains power and authority far beyond this quaint notion of station. In fact it may be the Corporal, unconcerned (perhaps unaware) that sounding off in such a fashion might bring about great grief to his career, who may be leading a revolution from the front, while those who follow a more traditional approach are left behind.

Replace "junior intelligence officer" with "Corporal" above and the explanation holds up for those in the intelligence community who are also trying to bring about meaningful change. In fact I would argue that it is in the intelligence business that new media (and its enabling technologies) both faces more fierce resistance and yet is needed even more desperately. Intelligence drives operations, and a smart, fast, learning military is of little use if it is caught unawares or sent off in the wrong direction. If the new media revolution that is taking its earliest steps in the SCIFs of this country does not keep pace, the relevance of the IC in an age of free and plentiful information, rapidly shared amongst the world's best minds, is increasingly in peril.

Michael Yon – [Online Magazine](#)

That fundamental changes are deriving from the "new media" seems apparent. It also seems that on the whole, those changes are very positive. Beyond the idea that a truer meritocracy among "journalists" blossomed, there are other less obvious benefits. For instance, if a million people read a certain newspaper article, by and large there previously was no vibrant way for large amounts of people to comment or ask further questions. Yes, there always has been some interactivity (letters to the editor, for instance), but nothing like we have today. Instead of a hierarchical "top down" media-world where the editors/journalists/advertisers more or less control the bulk of public information flow, we have readers who connect with one another who are sharing vital information about their specific worlds (such as occurs on SWJ), often on a real time basis. Large numbers of people with huge collective knowledge and experience can come together and actively exchange ideas. In the past, it was difficult for people to connect so easily.

New media has, by accident or design, been an incredible force for positive change.

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