

U.S. AFRICOM

**Press Conference II with General David Rodriguez,
Commander of US Africa Command**

*Transcript by
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MS. : OK. I think we're ready to get started. This session is for the public affairs officers with General Rodriguez, and we're very pleased that he could take the time out of his schedule to do this. So do you have a few comments you'd like to start with, sir?

GENERAL DAVID RODRIGUEZ: OK, well, thank you.

Well, my public affairs office wanted me to tell you what it meant or what I think makes a good public affairs officer and what is the relationship of the commander and the public affairs officer in the public affairs shop. And so I'm going to try to do that. And then at the end we'll take questions.

But I think for the public affairs personnel who are part of an organization, I think it's really important to be a trusted partner and an adviser and have a strong relationship with the commander. The public affairs officer over time has to think like the commander and has to understand what the commanders think. Now, for Tom Davis (sp), that's pretty hard because sometimes I don't know what I'm thinking. But that relationship's usually important. And as I said, you got to be in each other's head, and you got to understand each other, and that relationship is usually important.

But that's only one part of the relationships that the public affairs officer and leadership has. The other – the other part is with all the media and all the partners who work with the media as well as with all the other public affairs officers that touch your organization. So if you look at it as a – big network and really where your circle of influence is, I mean, it's huge. And those relationships that you build with those people outside of your organization is probably more important than anything else that you do.

I think that those relationships have to be built ahead of time, not in a crisis. So those relationships have to be cultivated, they have to be built, and I think that's really where the energy that you have is expended, on outside your organization, not inside your organization. So that's why I think it's important to spend a lot of time and energy to do that. And as I said, those two-way professional relationships can't be built in the middle of a crisis. So I think that that's a constant effort.

I think that, we have to understand the second- and third-order effects and think through the entire messaging effort. And again, what we want to be is we want to be first, and we want to be factual, and we want to be true. And then – because it's a constant struggle. And everything the military does is a public affairs issue, it's a information operation, everything we do. So I think you have to look at it that way.

I think that the public affairs officer has to be really attuned to what is going on in the command, what the priorities are of the command, and that the message that goes out has to continue to be consistent and reinforce everything the commander's doing. I laugh all the time about how we can do this to – the three ways we can do this. The enemy that we work with makes up a story, and it puts that story out, and then it says, all you people, make that story come true. We do just the opposite. We do something, and then after we do it, we say, what are we going to say about it? What we should be doing is do both of that together all the way through,

and I think that's the best way to do it – because, like I said, everything we do is an information operation, everything we do is looked at by the public, everything we do has an impact on what we're trying to accomplish as a mission. So I think that that's very, very important.

Of course, the public affairs officers actively get the story to the media. And this ability to communicate and build those relationships and that ability to get that message out very, very quickly is, again, a huge effort that takes a tremendous amount of initiative, and there is no rest for the PAO because it's a constant 24-hour cycle. At about 11:00 o'clock – for us, in Europe, 11:00 in the day is usually important for us, especially in the United States, because that time is about 5:00 in the morning in the United States of America, and if the answers are not back there then, you're going to be reactive. So I love it every day, you know, when they come to me and say, sir, this afternoon we're going to brief on what we're going to tell to the press. I'm, like, it's already too late, OK, because if it's not done by 11:00 every morning, it's not going to get done, then we're going to be in a reactive mode, OK? And then if I asked my partners in D.C., they'll probably tell you, that's probably a little bit too late because we have to have enough to get the information out to everybody because everything we do is in a time continuum.

And that new cycle is 24 hours a day, and it's going fast. We were laughing when we took the picture with the cameras and everything. The camera was the slowest operating piece of equipment we had there because as soon as they took that picture of all of us with that iPad – it was in Minneapolis, Minnesota – because it's instantaneous, OK? So I think we have to understand that the environment that we're working with, that it's 24 hours a day, and it's moving at the speed of light everywhere and anywhere it goes, OK? So the cameraman had to take his little cart out and transfer it to computer before he could get it where everybody else was on a computer and it was gone so that thing's already out all over the world.

I think we have to understand that to keep things in context as part of the story. And I'll just tell you that we do thousands of things every single day in AFRICOM, OK? And if there is one bad thing that goes on or one small thing that's not right, it can dominate 99 percent of the stories, OK? So you got – to put that in context. So I – for example, for us, as you can imagine, U.S. direct action, OK, is an example of that. So in the past year we have done four direct action operations, OK? Four. That has taken about 80 percent of the news stories, OK? And it's about .2 percent of the activities that we've done, OK? So that's – in the context of things, that's what we've got to work with. So we got to understand that that's the way it's going to continue to be.

I think that the public affairs officers have a huge role in engagement opportunities for their commander and how we help him be the most effective communicator he can be, so – as well as not only for the commander but for all the senior leaders. And I said, no matter how hard we work, to keep the consistency of the message is very, very challenging, OK? And then for the communications challenges, you can say one or two words wrong, and then the message that goes out is totally different than what you meant to put out. So trying to coordinate that across senior leaders who are all in the public eye, who are all talking publicly, is a challenge, and I think that the public affairs officer has a huge role in that.

So I mentioned about the – when you put a public affairs plan together or you work together with the – the operators and everything, you got to work those pieces together. You

don't want to be in the after-the-fact mode because then we're reactive right away. So I think as we do operational planning or crisis action planning that the public affairs people have to be integrated right from the very start. And while they won't drive the plan, they can and will influence the plan based on our understanding of what is going on and what the perception could be. And again, with that trusting network and that relationship of both reporters, media as well as partners who are involved in the situation – so for example, anything – any single thing we do in Africa involves the country team and the public diplomacy and the public affairs officer of the embassies, every single thing. So all of them have to be involved, all of them have to understand what's going on, and all of them can be expected at any time in that 24-hour news cycle to contribute to the information that's out there in the public domain.

On that note, the coordination and the constant communication with all the partners, whether it'd be in interagency, whether it'd be in the media, whether it'd be in the country teams, whether it'd be with the local national press, it is – I tell people all the time, I said I don't think it's possible to over-communicate. You just have to continue to press that information out constantly. And it is usually important when you're talking about multinational activities because the bigger that network gets, the harder it is to get all that information out to everybody in that way. And I tell people all the time, the network and the strength of the network, which is, you know, those thousand points of lights throughout the area, is also the weakness of the network because one person with the wrong message can get anything messed up, OK? So that's what I think about the public affairs officers and their role – in the command. I think it's important for all of us to understand that, like I said, every single thing we do is an information operation. Everything we can, can have a positive or negative effect not only in the execution of the mission and the operation but in the public domain, in the press, in the radio, and most importantly, in the perception and the thoughts and the eyes of the people, who we're really here for in the long-term, OK?

Now, that's my spiel, and I'm ready to answer questions.

MODERATOR: Anyone have any question they'd like to kick off?

Paul (sp), you look like you have a question.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I knew it.

Q: I do have a question. Hello, General Rodriguez. I'm Paul Henshaw (sp), and I work with the Department of State, and I'm at Embassy Bamako. You mentioned the importance of coordinated messaging. I'm going to put you on the spot, and ask you, what was the last public messaging debate that reached your level when you had decide between DOD and Department of State what the public messaging was going to be?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: It's every day. (Laughter.) This week – yesterday – it can be as simple as the message of what we're doing, and I'll just show you a vignette from this week, OK, just to show you as an example – and I would just show you some of the challenges. We moved personnel to Sigonella, Italy to support the security of U.S. personnel and facilities in North Africa, OK?

Now, to coordinate that effort with all the partners is a huge challenge. So – first of all, you’re talking about – in the U.S., you’re talking about the Department of State, you’re talking about the Department of Defense, you’re talking about the – inside the Department of Defense, the United States Marine Corps, you’re talking about the Spanish government outside, you’re talking about the Italian government outside, and you’re talking about the countries of North Africa as well as the country teams in North Africa.

So to bring all them together to do the things that we need to do – the consistency of message, the timing of the message and the planning of that that has to get done at the same time – it’s a huge challenge. And like I said, it’s a big network out there, and if you don’t hit every part of it, somebody’s going to have a different idea, and then you have the challenge just, that you can imagine, for everybody to agree on what to say, because everybody has a different perspective.

So I think that a couple of things are important is – first of all, who is the decision maker, and if that’s the Department of State, which in most cases it is, although many times, it’s not the Department of State, it’s somebody above the Department of State – but you’ve got to figure out who that is first, and then get everybody involved in their role and their part of it and everything and then get somebody at the top who – whatever top that is to say, let’s go, we agree, and then get out. And to do that in a timely manner – it’s a challenge.

So like I said, I think that it’s impossible to over-communicate. It’s impossible to stay ahead of the thing and to be proactive all the time, and every one of them in that network are all well-meaning people and want to do the right thing, but we just can’t get out as far out and in front of it in advance that we want to, and we can’t get everybody to agree – (inaudible) – we want to. Sometimes, you can’t even get them to agree on who’s going to be the person in charge that says yea or nay.

So I think– that’s just a small vignette of the examples of what we all have to fight through and work through to get ahead of, but I’ll ask you the same question. What have you seen from the Department of Defense that frustrates or challenges your job? Because for you – you’re at a country team, right? Is that what you do? Yeah, so you’re sitting there and everything, and the last thing you want is DOD to say something stupid that makes your job harder, right? I mean – and we do it all the time, unfortunately. (Chuckles.) I mean, not all the time, but we do it too often, OK?

I accuse my public affairs officer of intentionally doing it to me, so, you know, I think he wants to make me a high-stressed individual, but, you have the best situational understanding, because you live there every day in the country and everything. And to provide that situational understanding back to Washington, D.C. in your case or, you know, Stuttgart is a challenge, because everybody – we read what – we’re in the news, and we’re – we’re the, you know – we think we all know what’s going on and everything, and nobody knows it like the people on the ground. It’s always the same way. So what’s your frustrations, or what’s some of the things that you’ve seen in – I won’t ask you in the last week, because hopefully it’s longer than a week away for the last time that it got messed up, but what are your thoughts?

Q: Actually, we work very closely with our defense attaché, so during my time at the embassy, we have not really had any problems. There was an incident about two years ago involving the deaths of three Department of Defense representatives.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: That's right, yep.

Q: And that's the last time I can remember of where there was really a great debate about what to say publicly.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. And then we had challenges – and I wasn't here then and everything, but, like I said – I've been, involved in plenty of situations like that and everything, and you had, you know, people from both Department of State – the country team – DOD, AFRICOM and everything trying to coordinate messages and everything – and like I said, unless all that is all tight from the beginning, we're going to be in a reactive mode or a corrective action mode, and then we just can't catch up. So – but as you said, one of the critical things is the great relationship you have with the DAT, and then that opens up into the DAT network and then into your network and everything else that has to be strong, so that's my thought. So I'm glad you don't have that many complaints about DOD.

And like I said, nobody wants to be a problem in this situation, and everybody's trying to do the right thing. It's just that they have different ways to do it, and sometimes they don't communicate things. But like I said, the hardest part is just getting everybody in that network informed, and it's hard. Sometimes you don't even know where that network is. OK? Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much, General. I'm Captain Bramar (ph) from Sierra Leone. Sir, if I got it right, you said everything you do as public affairs officers is information operations. Public affairs, of course, is (more ?) about accurate information. Unlike public affairs, information officials is linked to deception, propaganda and other aspects. As public affairs officers, where do we draw the line between public affairs activity and information officials?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, I probably used the word improperly and stuff when I said "information operation." I mean, it's a – it's a – everything we do is a public issue, and everybody can see it, and everybody will understand it and everybody will share that information. The information operations, in our doctrinal terms, covers everything. I don't think you have any role in that information operations thing.

I mean, you do, but it's only doing what your job, which is public affairs, which is presenting the facts to the public and moving information that is factual and true to everybody and anybody you can to ensure that what we're doing is understood by the public, what we're doing is accurately portrayed to the public, and like I said, all you want to do is get the truth out first, with everything you're doing, OK? So that was my poor communications with using information operations as something besides just the activity that's going on is a public activity, and it's going to be perceived as exactly what you're doing and what you're trying to accomplish, OK? Thank you.

Yes.

Q: General, thank you for taking the time to do this today. We all really appreciate it. You touched on this a little bit in your last answer, but just to put a point on it – could you talk a little bit, from the commander’s perspective, about the need for transparency in operations and just in general?

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, now that’s a great question, because the – I think that – first of all, that transparency is hugely important and what we should be doing all the time. The question of when and how is a different answer, OK, and I think we should be as transparent as we can, and the time that you stop being transparent is the time when transparency will threaten peoples’ lives, safety or the mission itself, OK.

So we don’t tell people, for example, what we’re doing ahead of time. We don’t tell people what we’re doing until the people who are doing it are out of danger. So I think the operational security of people and mission is where you draw the line. And that’s a very, very tough line and tough decision to make in many cases, and quite frankly, different levels of command don’t always agree where that line is.

So – but when I get back to that relationship and that work that you do as a trusted member of a team, I think that’s where that has to be solved. But it is hugely important and a big challenge because, when you have a situation where, you know, transparency is important, but that transparency will decrease the effectiveness of our operations, how do you handle that? So I think that what’s most important is, first of all, the right decisionmaker ought to make that decision, and that right decisionmaker’s not the PAO person who wants to be transparent, you know. And that’s what I think is important.

I’ve worked at many levels of the military and DOD, and what was the biggest frustrating point to me is right person doesn’t make those decisions all the time. But I think that’s where the transparency piece is a challenge, when you get to operational security. For everything else, you know, we just have to be transparent.

We all have to – you know, I mean, things don’t always go perfect; I know that’s hard to believe. And we have to be able to say that and we have to be able to work through that, and that’s very hard sometimes because there’s a lot of pressure to be able – you know, applied by lots of people to say everything’s perfect and stuff. And I’ve been checking pretty close, I’m not sure we’ve got a lot of perfect things that happen out there nor perfect people. So we’ve got to figure out how to be transparent in a – in a respectful and a nice way to help get the story across, OK? Thank you. Yes, sir.

Q: General, this is Teddy Rouge (sp) from Uganda. And you touched on the speed of information earlier, and I wanted to get your thoughts on the difficulty of managing your information hierarchy within the DOD vis-a-vis the ability for new media to move information faster than you can get ahead of it.

For example, earlier this month, General Wamala from Uganda had to get on Twitter to counter the spread of the rumor that Kony had been shot, and he was dead. And, you know, I – two years ago, I got him on Twitter. And what is, from your perspective, your thoughts on using such media to basically leapfrog your hierarchy in order to catch up to the flow of information.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Great, great question. And I think we have to really improve our capabilities of speeding the story and the truth to everybody. And I think that the entire development, growth of the social networks and the ability to put information out that we have got to continue to work to improve our capacity to understand it and to figure out how to do it.

I was on my little Blackberry trying to explain to everybody that Kony wasn't shot too, and it wasn't nearly as fast as what the general was doing down there in Uganda – and I think that, you know, as we look forward, one of the challenges we have as a bureaucracy and an institution is changing as fast as the times are changing, and they – and those times are changing fast.

Like I said, when that guy took that picture, that could have been anything in the world just like that. So we've got to understand that and we've got to figure out how to operate in that kind of environment, and I think we've still got a lot of work to do to understand that. You know, the social media and the speed with which information moves – like I said, you've just got to understand everything you do is in the public eye instantaneously, and it's a different world.

And then the ability to put out false things and spread it across the world instantaneous is right there. You know, I mean, I think back to the Orson Welles and his – “The War of the Worlds” and everything, anybody can do that instantaneously right now. They can do that –and put my name on it. (Chuckles.) So I think we've got to continue to both educate ourselves and educate the public that all those type of things can happen, and you've got to – figure out how to operate in that type of environment, and I think we can improve on that.

OK, thank you.

Q: Oui. Je vous disais bonjour, mon général. Je suis le Colonel Abou Thiam.

Mon général, je suis le Colonel Abou Thiam. Je viens du Sénégal, et je suis le directeur de l'information et des relations publiques des armées.

Mon général, c'est pas une question, c'est un peu le – ce que nous avons dit hier à Mr. Colbeun (ph) en terme de renforcement des capacités. Aujourd'hui, comme vous l'avez dit, nous sommes en phase avec ce que vous avez dit parce que impérativement, les armées ont le devoir de s'exprimer, d'abord pour elles-mêmes, ensuite pour le public et enfin pour les partenaires que vous êtes.

De ce point de vue, vous-même avez mentionné qu'aujourd'hui, les conditions malheureusement socioéconomiques très difficiles sont quand même un terrain fertile pour le développement des activités terroristes ou en fait contre-nature. Il serait donc souhaitable que nous vous adressions respectueusement une demande de soutien, soutien dans le cas de la formation, qui est déjà en fait déclenchée avec ce symposium, mais aussi soutien en termes de moyens parce que nos états n'ont pas les moyens de leurs ambitions dès lors qu'il y a des problèmes socioéconomiques, disais-je, en fait qui sont là, pour nous acheter des caméras, pour nous acheter des matériels d'impression, pour nous acheter et cetera et cetera. Donc de ce point de vue, il serait souhaitable en fait qu'un appui absolument conséquent vienne un peu de

l'USAFRICOM, notre partenaire, soit dans le cadre de – en fait de l'exécution de notre mission, pour quand semble vous et nous, ou nous et vous, venions à – au – à vaincre les défis de l'heure. Je vous remercie, mon général.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah, that's a great question. But I think all these things, just like we're doing now, are about helping to develop and grow that capacity and grow those networks that are required to be able to do that.

But we probably don't focus on that as much as we probably should, thinking about building capacity in partner nations and everything else that we're trying to do because the public affairs piece is a huge part of it. We do have great, you know, symposiums like this. We have seminars. As far as equipment, I'm not sure how much we do that, but I'll have to check into that.

But I think, like you said, your role in what you're doing to support your military, your role in executing the duties and responsibilities of a military PO in the – in the military that serves in a democratic society is hugely important, and we'll take a look at that to make sure we're emphasizing and that it's a very balanced approach for what we're doing to help get that message out.

Thank you.

Q: Thank you very much, General, for your expositions. My name's Oluwa Fisson-Bankali (sp). I work with the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja.

General, I thought to flag the issue or to flag the issue of engagement across institutions and at the various levels of the institutions. The British have what you call the D-notice. What the D-notice does – it's that it matches persons across institutions at various levels to ensure that networks are permanently in place.

I would illustrate a little. The Nigerian government also shares this many years ago. What we tried to do is that between the military and the media, especially when operations are going to be on, you have the highest level of the military hierarchy engaging with the highest level of the media, at the level of the owners of the media, the publishers, the editor-in-chiefs, where it is safe, if you could say that, to share confidential information and you are guaranteed and assured of the fact that those information would not be used in any adverse way.

I am trying to find out if this is something that you would like to encourage or is something that you would like to support, to ensure that we have an opportunity for engagement at the highest level, on both sides of the institutions, the media institutions as well as the military institutions, because I think this would help a lot. Thank you, sir.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: Yeah. I think – that's hugely important, and I think that we should be doing that. And I think that as we do that, it really is about those trusting relationships that people have, and if all that's developed ahead of the crisis, I think we can do that effectively. If we don't have those trusting professional relationships, I think it would be very hard.

And for example, at AFRICOM is just a challenge to build those relationships with everybody, because it's such a big network. But where we have them and do that, I think that that's a great way to do it.

OK? Thank you.

Q: Merci, mon général. Lieutenant Yé (ph), directeur de la communication des relations publiques, la Gendarmerie Nationale du Burkina Faso. Mes devoirs, mon général.

J'ai deux petites questions. Dans un premier temps, à votre niveau de responsabilité, vous avez un grand commandement régional, beaucoup d'hommes sous vos ordres. A quel moment il vous arrive – lorsque des informations sont reliées dans la presse concernant votre commandement, concernant des agissements de vos hommes, à quel moment – puisque vous avez parlé de transparence et de toujours associer la presse, à quel moment vous dites à votre chargé de communication, c'est pas la peine de répondre? Ça c'est la première question.

Et la deuxième question: Nous sommes de plus en plus confrontés à la lutte contre le terrorisme violent dans nos états. Et quelle est la place selon vous de l'officier des affaires publiques dans la sensibilisation des populations quant aux attitudes à avoir face à cette montée du terrorisme et les – ce qu'il ne faut pas faire pour favoriser ce – cette montée du terrorisme? Merci.

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: OK. Thank you.

On the first piece, as far as transparency and when and not to answer questions, I think that the only time not to answer questions is when it has to do with operational security and threats to people who participating in the mission. And then when that is no longer the case, then I believe that we can be totally transparent. So it's all about safety and health, of the risk to the mission and risk to the personnel involved in the mission.

On the second part, on the fight against terrorism, I think that, there's – a two-way method to get at that, and the first, I think, we put a lot of energy and effort in it, and that is to illuminate to the people the negative things the terrorists are doing and the negative impact and influence they're having on the populations, because it's just like terrorism in Africa – the biggest negative impact of terrorism in Africa is against the African people and the populations themselves.

So I think that that's a huge part of it – the second part of it, I think, is to show the positive things that the militaries and the security forces and intelligence forces are doing for the population. So I think, you illuminate what they're doing wrong and you illuminate what the friendly forces are doing right – because at the end of the day what you're really doing is building up trust and confidence of the population in the government and the security forces. And when they have that confidence that the government and the security forces have their interests at heart, I think that over time we'll solve this problem because, like you said, the real problem of terrorism is one of government – governance and opportunity and things like that.

OK? Thank you.

Q: (Off mic.)

GEN. RODRIGUEZ: I made a bad mistake, then. One more question. This would be the last question, OK? Thank you.

Q: Thank you.

Merci, mon général. Je suis le Colonel – (inaudible). Je suis le directeur de l'information des relations publiques et des sports des forces armées nigériennes. J'ai eu l'honneur de travailler avec vous au moins deux fois quand vous étiez arrivé à Niamey et quand vous avez rencontré le chef d'état-major du Niger.

Je suis un officier d'infanterie. Je n'ai fait que ça toute ma carrière. C'est juste ces deux dernières années qu'on m'a posté à ce – à la direction là. Et je me rends compte que j'ai eu beaucoup plus de difficultés dans cet emploi que pendant mes 30 ans de carrière d'infanterie. Et la difficulté résulte au niveau de l'esprit d'initiative dont vous avez parlé tout à l'heure. Au niveau de l'information, on n'a pas d'esprit d'initiative. Et plusieurs fois j'ai eu l'occasion de me rendre compte que quand on a une information, on ne peut pas communiquer. Je me souviens les attentats d'Agadez. J'étais le directeur de la communication. Je reçois beaucoup d'appels de BBC, de Reuters, de RFI qui me demandent, qu'est qu'il se passe? Et j'ai l'information, mais je ne peux pas la délivrer de peur de me faire taper sur les doigts par mes chefs. Et plus le temps s'écoule, plus les civils, les journalistes, ils font – ils racontent du n'importe quoi. Ils font de la désinformation. Ils font de l'intoxication. Et après, il faut courir pour venir rattraper tout ce qu'ils ont dit de fou, et ça fait déjà un véritable chaos qui est indescriptible. Et c'est une des difficultés que j'ai eu à gérer et qui a fini par me faire pas détester le boulot, mais il y a – il y a énormément de contre-vérités, de – parfois de mensonges. Et il a des choses qui se passent, on nous dit de ne pas dire ça, et vous savez bien que, bon, c'est pas la vérité. Et je me rends compte, même chez vous, ça se passe, des gens qui viennent, qui parlent à la télé, qui –

MR. : Non, ça marche –

MR. : Oui, ça marche.

MR. : Yeah. Yeah. Mais attention.

Q: Ils veulent dire quelque chose, mais ils ont peur des chefs étoilés qui sont derrière qui leur imposent ce thème et qui compliquent un peu l'information. Je sais pas ce que vous pensez de ça. (Laughter.)

GEN. RODRIGUEZ:

I think that that's the challenge.

By the way, I'm the same way. I'm an infantryman. I don't understand this either. But I think the – it's really one of a challenge between proactivity and being proactive or reactive and being reactive. And I think that, you know, what our objective should be is to be first with the truth and to understand that that's got to be the objective, because if we're not first with the facts and the truth, we're going to be second with the truth. And it doesn't matter at that point, because the first one with a story, whether it's true or false, becomes the one who drives the whole cycle of information flow.

So when Kony was killed, that was the first part that the story got out. Now in that situation, nothing happened, so we couldn't be ahead of it.

But then you're reactive, and you got to be reactive and do everything you can, and it's a constant pursuit to change or get the right story out there. But then you're in a reactive mode, and it's too late.

So I think that the objective needs to be the first with the truth, and we've got to be able to do that. And the challenge that we have is that everybody wants to control the story, and if you want to control the story so it ends up becoming second, you're going to be in the reactive mode all the time.

So we've all got to understand in this information environment that we're in, with the speed of information, we have to be as open and as fast as we can with the truth, because the first one with the story, whether it's true or false, becomes the one information activity – where everybody is responding to. OK?

But going back on your 30 years of service, that wasn't in your training. It wasn't in the way you operated. And you thought, who cares about that stuff, because it's not important. And it really is, and now you're sitting on the other side, understanding how really important that is.

So I think that, we all live and learn, and because we all have to understand everything every single thing we do is in the public domain, for good reason, that we have to be first with the truth, and we have to be in the proactive mode as best as we possibly can. And sometimes that's trying to convince your boss that we're not going to be able to control the story, so – let's be proactive rather than reactive.

OK? Well, thank you very much. Thanks for what y'all do. What you do is hugely important to operations. It's hugely important to the effects that we're having. It's hugely important to the ability to accomplish a mission properly. And that race to get the information out and the truth out quickly relative to the speed with which we're operating in a 24-hour news cycle that is going as fast as the speed of light is a big challenge. So good luck to each and every one of you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

(END)