

# Loosing the Blogs of War: The Advent of “Milblogging” in the post-9/11 U.S. Military

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## 1.1 Introduction

On 5 May 2007, in a videotaped message, the President of the United States addressed a group of active and retired U.S. military men and women, along with a number of family members, spouses, and friends of military men and women, thanking them for their unique contributions in the war on terrorism.<sup>1</sup> The men and women that he addressed were the attendees of the second annual Milblog Conference, held in Arlington, Virginia, just minutes from the nation’s capitol. Their unique contribution to the war on terrorism stemmed from their activities in cyberspace, namely, their activities as military bloggers, or “milbloggers,” as they have come to be known. President Bush was not alone in his praise of milbloggers. One conference participant read an email sent to him by General David Petraeus, commanding general of U.S. forces in Iraq, praising the activity of milbloggers.<sup>2</sup> Several Senators, including Democratic Senator and outspoken war critic

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<sup>1</sup> The video can be found at Sean Dustman, “The Milblog Conference,” Doc in the Box (May 5, 2007), <http://docinthebox.blogspot.com/2007/05/milblog-conference.html>, accessed on 7/30/2007.

<sup>2</sup> Blackfive sited the letter here: Blackfive, “The 2007 Milblog Conference-Flash Report,” Blackfive (May 7, 2007), [http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/the\\_2007\\_milblo.html](http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/the_2007_milblo.html), accessed on 7/6/2007.. It read, in part, “...I wanted to offer my thanks to you for what you’ve done and also to thank, via you, the bloggers who have worked to provide accurate descriptions of the situation on the ground here in Iraq and elsewhere. Milbloggers have become increasingly important, of course, given the enormous growth in individuals who get their news online in the virtual world instead of through newspapers and television. So please extend my appreciation to them for performing this task -- and, of course, for doing it in ways that does not violate legitimate operational security guidelines. Best from Baghdad --General Dave Petraeus”

Ted Kennedy also sent letters of support.<sup>3</sup> To many, their words appeared to be the latest salvo in an ongoing struggle between the Army and milbloggers over the publication in April of revised Army OPSEC (Operations Security) regulations which, in part, seemed to more strictly limit the ability of soldiers to blog, send emails, or post to public forums on the Internet.

This paper will draw from the literature on the notion of “rhetorical situation” to examine milblogger justifications of their online activities in the face of the new Army regulations in particular, as well as recent DoD attempts to limit access to online social networking sites more generally. In so doing, it will place milblogging within a broader historical and intellectual context by examining the ways that milblogger articulations of the value of milblogging have reflected larger patterns of thought within the U.S. defense establishment regarding the meaning of the Information Age and new media technologies for military affairs. It will demonstrate that as the two “sides” in the controversy have worked through this uncharted territory, milbloggers have responded by deploying a rhetoric of information warfare that is well-known within the military. Such rhetoric, viewed through the lens of rhetorical situation, yields valuable insights into milblogger motivations. It also provides an on-the-ground view of the uneven and often contested manner in which the U.S. military has understood the meaning of the Information Age and new media technologies for military affairs. Finally, an examination of this particular controversy demonstrates the continuing usefulness of the notion of rhetorical situation, providing justification for attempts at a postmodern re-construction/re-interpretation of the concept.

## **1.2 The Rhetorical Situation**

This paper adopts the notion of rhetorical situation as first articulated by Lloyd Bitzer (1968), and subsequently re-constructed and re-interpreted by a number of other scholars over the last forty years, as a framework for analyzing the current Army-milblogger controversy. As such, I adopt Bitzer’s definition of rhetoric as action, as opposed to the colloquial understanding of rhetoric as mere verbal decoration, trickery, or hollow,

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<sup>3</sup> Blackfive provided copies of both letters in the same post. See Ibid.

meaningless speech. Bitzer explains that “a work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change.”<sup>4</sup> Bitzer describes that “something beyond itself” as “a situation of a certain kind”--i.e. a “rhetorical situation.”<sup>5</sup>

In Bitzer’s initial formulation, a rhetorical situation is composed of three basic elements beyond the “speaker” or “rhetor”: 1) the “exigence,” 2) the “audience,” and 3) the “constraints.” Bitzer defines an “exigence” as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be.” He further specifies a particular class of exigence, the “rhetorical exigence.” He explains that “not all [exigences] are rhetorical exigences” because not all exigences can be modified: “An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical.” He lists “death, winter, and some natural disasters” as non-rhetorical exigences because no amount of rhetorical discourse, nor any other mode of human action, can change their inevitability. Thus, “An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

The second element of a rhetorical situation is the “audience”. Bitzer insists that because rhetoric aims to produce change through affecting the thoughts, decisions, and actions of humans, “rhetoric always requires an audience--even in those cases when a person engages himself or ideal mind as audience.”<sup>7</sup> Again, Bitzer qualifies his definition, distinguishing any “audience” in general, what he calls “a body of mere hearers or readers,” from a “rhetorical audience”. He writes, “A rhetorical audience

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<sup>4</sup> Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 1, no. 1. (1968), 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, both the speaker and the audience will be subject to a number of “constraints,” the third element in the rhetorical situation. Bitzer explains that “constraints” are “made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence. Standard sources of constraint include beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives, and the like; and when the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by situation but provides additional important constraints.”<sup>9</sup> In short, certain aspects of the situation will limit what the speaker can say. Likewise, certain aspects of the situation will also limit the possible decisions and actions of the audience. The speaker will seek to use the given constraints to his or her advantage, attempting to channel the thought processes of the audience in a particular way and to constrain the realm of possible decisions and actions that could be taken by the audience such that those decisions or actions available to the audience would bring about the change to the exigence that the speaker seeks.

Since Bitzer’s original articulation of the concept of the rhetorical situation, a number of other scholars have worked to re-interpret and reconstruct the concept in light of the growing postmodernist sensibilities within the humanities and social sciences. A number of scholars initially took issue with Bitzer’s explanation of the impacts of both situation and exigence upon the formation of rhetorical discourse. Richard E. Vatz was first to criticize Bitzer for taking a naïve realist view of the nature of rhetorical situations. Contra Bitzer, Vatz took an extreme relativist position by arguing that “No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it.”<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, he contended that facts and meaning are arbitrary and subjective: “The very choice of what facts or events are relevant is a matter of pure arbitration... To the audience, events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction... Therefore, meaning is not discovered in situations, but

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>10</sup> Richard E. Vatz, “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6, no. 3. (1973), 154.

created by rhetors.”<sup>11</sup> Arthur B. Miller took a more moderate view than Vatz. He did argue that Bitzer’s view of the role of exigence was too deterministic, that in fact, there exists much more flexibility among speaker and audience where the interpretation of the exigence is involved, and that the constraints imposed by the exigence are not so strict as Bitzer would lead us to believe. Likewise, and similar to Vatz, Miller argued that “within the limits specified by each exigence, the *ultimate* or *perceived* nature of the exigence depends upon the constraints of *the perceiver*. Thus, the ultimate character of an exigence is a conclusion in the mind of its perceiver.”<sup>12</sup> However, Miller did not take the same, extreme relativist view as Vatz because he still admitted the existence of the situation and the exigence, noting that while the exigence might not determine the speaker’s response, it nonetheless “specifies the limits of the topic of communication and simultaneously provides opportunities within those limits for adapting to hearers.”<sup>13</sup>

The best resolution of the conflict over whether situations and exigences are real or “merely” constructs comes in the work of David M. Hunsaker and Craig R. Smith. The two recognized both “the generating power of a rhetorical exigence,” as well as “the ability of a communicator to manipulate perception of that exigence,” to say nothing of “the variety of audience perceptions of exigence and communicator, and the capacity of an auditor to perceive selectively,” issues that were not initially raised by Bitzer, Vatz, or Miller.<sup>14</sup> Basically, to the question, “Are exigences real or constructs?” Hunsaker and Smith answer with a resounding “Yes--both!” Hunsaker and Smith also expand upon the notion of a rhetorical exigence by adding the notion of the “issue.” They define an “issue” as “the articulation of a perceived choice of belief or action.”<sup>15</sup> This perceived choice of belief or action is a product of the rhetorical exigence: “A rhetorical exigence creates potential issues for rhetorical discourse... [T]he exigence...is *the ground from*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur B. Miller, “Rhetorical Exigence,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 5, no. 2. (1972), 111-112.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>14</sup> David M. Hunsaker and Craig R. Smith, “The Nature of Issues: A Constructive Approach To Situational Rhetoric,” *Western Speech Communication* 40, no. 3. (1976), 145.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 144.

*which potential issues arise.*”<sup>16</sup> Thus, by adding the concept of the “issue” they point to the fact that rhetorical exigences do not just lead to any kind of discourse, but rather, they often lead to discourse which is focused upon the perceived need for change, for choices to be made about our beliefs and actions. The rhetorical exigence both allows or encourages the emergence of some issues, while simultaneously disallowing or discouraging others. Thus, the articulation of “issues,” like the articulation of the exigence itself, is also subject to a myriad of constraints.

Next, Barbara A. Biesecker addressed the relationship between speaker and audience in her attempt to rethink the concept of rhetorical situation through Derrida’s thematic of *differánce*. She criticizes Bitzer’s initial formulation for taking an essentialist view of the identities of speakers and audiences, arguing that in Bitzer’s formulation speakers and audiences enter a rhetorical situation with their identities already fixed such that the process of discourse, while it may exert influence over thought, decision, and action, does not ultimately affect the identities of the participants.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, she argues that identities are never entirely stable, that they are always in a process of flux, in a state of becoming rather than in a state of being. Thus, she asserts that “the rhetorical event may be seen as an incident that produces and reproduces the identities of subjects and constructs and reconstructs linkages between them” and that “the rhetorical situation [is] an event that makes possible the production of identities and social relations.”<sup>18</sup> That is, participants in the rhetorical situation do not merely show up with their identities fully formed. Their identities were always already in a state of flux and the process of rhetorical discourse helps to further shape their identities and their relations to one another.

Finally, a number of scholars have worked to refine the idea of “constraints.” While Bitzer acknowledged that situations might recur, leading to the recurrence of particular forms of response,<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Jamieson points to the fact that particular forms of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>17</sup> Barbara A. Biesecker, “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from Within the Thematic of Differance,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 22, no. 2. (1989), 110-111.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>19</sup> Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation.”, 13.

response, what she calls “rhetorical forms” or “genres,” tend to recur even if the situations that initially spawned them do not. That is, old rhetorical forms will often be used to respond to new situations; new situations do not always produce new, unique responses.<sup>20</sup> What’s more, these genres can actually work as constraints upon both the speaker and the audience, shaping their perceptions and responses. This is particularly true in the case of large institutions where the “Establishment and maintenance of definable institutional forms of rhetoric serve to define the institution itself... A genre perpetuates a distinguishable institutional rhetoric by creating expectations which any future institutional spokesmen feel obliged to fulfill rather than frustrate.”<sup>21</sup> Combined with Biesecker’s insights, this means that speakers and audiences are not only mutually constructing their own identities through the process of rhetorical discourse; but rather, they are also helping to construct the identity of the organizations to which they belong, to which their own personal identities are intimately bound.

Marry Garret and Xiaosui Xiao went one step further, pointing out that such discourse traditions can also affect the way that speakers and audiences initially perceive situations and exigences. In their case study which looked at the Chinese response to the Opium Wars, they noted that “the very question of whether and how an exigency would be perceived, as well as the way in which responses were constructed, depended in large part on the discourse tradition... [T]he discourse tradition is both a source and a limiting horizon for the rhetor and for the audience of the rhetorical situation.”<sup>22</sup> By way of the constraining effects that it can have upon the participants’ initial perceptions of situations and exigences, a discourse tradition does not merely recur as a result of the recurrence of a situation to which it corresponds; but rather, “a discourse tradition produces the conditions for its own continuity, recirculation, and reproduction.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, “Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6, no. 3. (1973), 163.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 165

<sup>22</sup> Mary Garret and Xiaosui Xiao, “The Rhetorical Situation Revisited,” *RSQ: Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 23, no. 2. (1993), 37-38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

### 1.3 A Battle of Exigences and Issues

The current Army-Milblogger controversy began on 2 May 2007 with a series of posts on the Wired Magazine defense news blog site, “Danger Room,” which exclaimed “New Army Rules Could Kill G.I. Blogs (Maybe E-mail, Too)” and “Army Squeezes Soldier Blogs, Maybe to Death.”<sup>24</sup> The news was immediately picked up and widely circulated and commented upon by milbloggers. On the same day, Blackfive, one of the most prominent milblogs, in a blog post titled, “The END of Military Blogging,” proclaimed that “the new OPSEC regulations...will end military blogging as we know it. Yes, that’s right--the end of soldier blogging from the war zones.”<sup>25</sup>

The situation to which the milbloggers were responding had been in existence for two weeks prior to its identification by Wired and subsequent articulation as an existential threat to milblogging. On 19 April 2007, the Army itself had announced on its website that Army Regulation 530-1: “Operations Security” (OPSEC) had been “updated” as of 17 April 2007, including changes to language pertaining to soldiers’ abilities to post to blogs and other public forums on the Internet. The regulation reads, in part,

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<sup>24</sup> Noah Shactman, “Army Squeezes Soldier Blogs, Maybe to Death,” Danger Room (May 2, 2007), [http://www.wired.com/politics/onlinerights/news/2007/05/army\\_bloggers](http://www.wired.com/politics/onlinerights/news/2007/05/army_bloggers), accessed on 7/18/2007 and Noah Shactman, “New Army Rules Could Kill G.I. Blogs (Maybe E-mail, Too),” Danger Room (May 2, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/new\\_army\\_rules\\_.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/new_army_rules_.html), accessed on 7/18/2007. Over the next several days, Danger Room ran a number of related stories. See David Axe, “Clarifying the Blog Rule Clarification (Updated),” Danger Room (May 4, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/clarifying\\_the\\_.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/clarifying_the_.html), accessed on 7/18/2007; David Axe, “Army’s Blog Rebuttal,” Danger Room (May 3, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/armys\\_blog\\_rebu.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/armys_blog_rebu.html), accessed on 7/6/2007; Noah Shactman, “Army to Bloggers: We Won’t Bust You. Promise,” Danger Room (May 3, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/army\\_to\\_blogger.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/army_to_blogger.html), accessed on 7/18/2007; Noah Shactman, “Pentagon Whispers; Milbloggers Zip Their Lips,” Danger Room (May 8, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/pentagon\\_whsipe.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/pentagon_whsipe.html), accessed on 7/18/2007; and Noah Shactman, “Army’s Info-Cop Speaks,” Danger Room (May 2, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/the\\_army\\_has\\_is.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/the_army_has_is.html), accessed on 7/18/2007.

<sup>25</sup> Blackfive, “The END of Military Blogging,” Blackfive (May 2, 2007), [http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/new\\_opsec\\_regul.html](http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/new_opsec_regul.html), accessed on 6/11/2007.

All Department of the Army (DA) personnel (active component, reserve component to include U.S. Army Reserve, Army National Guard, and DA civilians), and DOD contractors will—

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c. Prevent disclosure of critical and sensitive information in any public domain to include but not limited to the World Wide Web, open source publications, and the media.

...

g. Consult with their immediate supervisor and their OPSEC Officer for an OPSEC review prior to publishing or posting information in a public forum.

(1) This includes, but is not limited to letters, resumes, articles for publication, electronic mail (e-mail), Web site postings, web log (blog) postings, discussion in Internet information forums, discussion in Internet message boards or other forms of dissemination or documentation.<sup>26</sup>

Just weeks later, the Department of Defense added fuel to the fire once again by banning access from military computers to popular online social networking sites like YouTube and MySpace, citing both bandwidth and OPSEC concerns.<sup>27</sup>

For its part, the Army was responding to the unprecedented advent of real-time, globally broadcast, individual soldier communications from the battlefield. Of course, soldier communication from the battlefield is not new; throughout history it has been common for soldiers in combat to keep diaries and to send letters home to their loved ones. Since September 11, 2001, however, we have seen the advent of milblogging as a

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<sup>26</sup> *Army Regulation 530-1: Operations Security (OPSEC)* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2007), 4.

<sup>27</sup> See Blackfive, "Military Ban on YouTube and MySpace," Blackfive (May 15, 2007), [http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/military\\_ban\\_on.html](http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/military_ban_on.html), accessed on 6/11/2007; Noah Shactman, "Military Hypes, Bans YouTube (Updated)," Danger Room (May 15, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/iraqslogger\\_one.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/iraqslogger_one.html), accessed on 7/18/2007; Leo Shane III and T. D. Flack, "DOD blocking YouTube, others," *Stars and Stripes*, May 13, 2007; and Sharon Weinberger, "No More YouTube, MySpace for U.S. Troops," Danger Room (May 13, 2007), [http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/no\\_youtube\\_mysp.html](http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/05/no_youtube_mysp.html), accessed on 7/18/2007.

new medium of soldier communication. Beginning with U.S. operations in Afghanistan in November 2001, a number of U.S. military personnel began to create blogs as personal journals and as a means of communicating with friends and family back home. With the onset of U.S. operations in Iraq in 2003, the number of milblogs increased dramatically and has continued to increase ever since. Today there are thousands of milblogs written by military personnel and their families.<sup>28</sup> While they continue to serve as tools of personal memory and communication, many have morphed into popular and influential sites devoted to news, opinion, and discussion of military affairs and the war on terrorism. One prominent milblogger argues that, in general, milblogs provide more “uncensored, unmediated, intimate, [and] immediate” information about the war and the military than either the MSM (milblogger slang for “mainstream media”) or the government.<sup>29</sup>

It is the supposedly uncensored, unmediated, intimate, and immediate characteristics of milblogs that the Army has seen as an exigence--“an imperfection marked by urgency,” “a defect,” “a thing which is other than it should be.” For the Army, the exigence seems to demand choices regarding beliefs and actions where operations security is concerned--i.e. the exigence of milblogging is articulated as an OPSEC issue. Major Ray Ceralde, author of the AR 530-1 revisions, specifically identified blogs as potential sources of potentially valuable “open-source information” which could be used by U.S. adversaries: “The Internet, personal Web sites, blogs (Web logs)--those are examples of where our adversaries are looking for open-source information about us. Open-source information isn’t classified and may look like nothing more than innocuous bits of information, a piece here, a piece there, like pieces of a puzzle. But when you put enough of the pieces together you begin to realize the bigger picture and that something could be going on.”<sup>30</sup> But the Army response indicates that milblogging is not just any exigence, but a rhetorical exigence, one that is perceived as amenable to positive modification through discourse via the use of rhetoric (i.e. regulations) which has the

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<sup>28</sup> For example, the milblogging portal site, Milblogging.com, listed 1,766 milblogs in its directory as of July 30, 2007. See <http://milblogging.com>.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew Currier Burden, *The Blog of War: Front-Line Dispatches from Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 5.

power to change the thought, decision, and action of an audience (i.e. soldiers generally, milbloggers specifically), making audience members agents of change. The Army news release of 19 April 2007 explained that “Regulation changes [the rhetorical response] also address how technology, specifically the Internet [the general situation from which the exigence of milblogging emerges], has changed the face of OPSEC [the issue] since the last major revision to the regulations in 1995.”<sup>30</sup>

For their part, it is clear that milbloggers have not perceived the same exigences and issues within the current situation. While they have frequently noted and discussed the unique OPSEC challenges that their activities pose, they have not seen milblogging as only or even primarily an OPSEC issue, and certainly not as “a thing which is other than it should be.” Rather, for milbloggers, the Army’s response has become the rhetorical exigence. It is an exigence which seems to call into question Army beliefs and actions where the proper conduct of war in the Information Age is concerned. So, for milbloggers, the exigence is not their own activities, but rather, the Army’s response to their activities. The exigence is not an issue of OPSEC, but rather, an issue of information warfare.

A number of examples of milblogger responses to the updated Army regulations and the subsequent DoD ban on certain social networking sites will serve to illustrate the point.<sup>31</sup> In general, milbloggers have seen MSM coverage of the war in Iraq as overly

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<sup>30</sup> J. D. Leipold, “Army Releases New OPSEC Regulation,” ARMY.MIL/NEWS (April 19, 2007), <http://www.army.mil/-news/2007/04/19/2758-army-releases-new-opsec-regulation/>, accessed on 7/18/2007.

<sup>31</sup> To collect data on milblogger responses to the news of the revised Army regulations, I created a Google Custom Search Engine to search a sampling of milblogs (<http://www.google.com/coop/cse?cx=016044799310762944640%3Amvlady9k2zy>). Since trying to sample all milblogs (close to 2,000) would produce an overwhelming amount of data, I limited my search to the top 10 sites as ranked by milblogging.com (<http://www.milblogging.com/>), ringsurf.com (<http://www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=MiliBlogs:id=2:action=list>), and Truth Laid Bear (<http://truthlaidbear.com/communitypage.php?community=milblogs>), respectively. Interestingly, examining three top 10 lists yielded 27 milblogs, indicating that there is not much overlap between the lists. Next, I added the blogs of all of the participants of the 2007 Milblog Conference, plus the D-Ring blog, which is specifically devoted to issues of new media in the military. That brought the total number of

negative; they have seen Army and DoD attempts to counter such coverage as ineffective at best; and they have seen themselves as playing a key role in both countering negative media coverage and making up, to some degree, for Army and DoD incompetence in the battle for domestic hearts and minds.

One media report covering the 2007 Milblog Conference noted that "Many milbloggers, including some on active duty, expressed frustration with war coverage by 'the mainstream media.'" The report continued, quoting one of the conference's organizers as saying, "'The Bush administration and the DoD [Department of Defense] have not been very effective in the information war.'"<sup>32</sup> That conference organizer, identified only as "Andi C.," also made similar comments on her blog, "Andi's World." The day that Wired's "Danger Room" broke the story about the revised Army OPSEC regulations, Andi wrote, "Let's face it, we're not good at information warfare, to say the least. Information supplied by official Department of Defense channels is often viewed as pure propaganda and therefore discounted by many." She continued, "I question whether those who shape policy that applies to milbloggers fully understand the value and importance of milblogging, particularly combat blogging... I have been heartened by their [Department of Defense] efforts, albeit slow, to use blogs, new media and other forms of technology to engage the public, but stories like this one leave many feeling that we're taking one step forward and two steps back. It's a difficult balance and it's going to take some time to get it right."<sup>33</sup>

Several other prominent milbloggers made similar arguments over the next two days. After declaring the end of milblogging, Blackfive argued that "we are losing the Information War on all fronts. Fanatic-like adherence to OPSEC will do us little good if

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searched milblogs to 44. The search string used to query the selected milblogs was, "army (regulations OR restrictions OR ban) AND (milblogs OR milblogging OR blogging)."

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Michael Lawhorn, "'Milblogs' Present Iraq War from Military Point of View," *FOXNews.com*, May 24, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Andi, "Army Issues New OPSEC Guidelines," Andi's World (May 2, 2007), [http://andisworld.typepad.com/welcome\\_to\\_andis\\_world/2007/05/army\\_issues\\_new.html](http://andisworld.typepad.com/welcome_to_andis_world/2007/05/army_issues_new.html), accessed on 6/11/2007.

we lose the few honest voices that tell the truth about The Long War.”<sup>34</sup> A post on the “OPFOR” site read, “There is no word in any of the world’s languages that can effectively capture the pure stupidity of this decision. Political fights need political warriors. And make no mistake, this war is a political fight. It’s like stripping the Army of tanks before they’re supposed to invade Germany.”<sup>35</sup> Finally, the site “Q and O” asserted that “In a war where it is critical that the voices of those actually engaged in the fight be heard and positive information find its way into the main stream, the Army’s announced policy yesterday was both draconian and poorly thought out.”<sup>36</sup> The blogger “Laughing Wolf” of the blog “Blackfive” extended the criticism, explaining that “several people who have been working on a modest proposal for trying to make some substantive changes to the information front” identify the current problem as

1. Military PAO [Public Affairs Office] activities are based on an (early) industrial-age model, with some slight modifications that come from experience in WWII.
2. Many in leadership and rear-echelon positions are not comfortable with Web 0.5, much less Web 2.0--a condition that applies to industry as well as government.
3. The combination of these two factors, along with several others, means that current information activities are neither effective, efficient, or acceptable.”<sup>37</sup>

The subsequent DoD announcement that access to social networking sites like YouTube and MySpace would be blocked on all Department computers elicited a similar response from the military blogosphere. The “D-Ring” blog, which is devoted entirely to issues of new media in the military, called social networking sites like YouTube and MySpace “a guaranteed benefit to the DoD’s information battle.” D-Ring continued,

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<sup>34</sup> Blackfive, “The END of Military Blogging.”

<sup>35</sup> John, “Aw, Hell,” OPFOR (May 2, 2007), [http://op-for.com/2007/05/aw\\_hell.html](http://op-for.com/2007/05/aw_hell.html), accessed on 6/11/2007.

<sup>36</sup> McQ, “Army Backs Down on Milblogs,” The QandO Blog (May 3, 2007), <http://www.qando.net/details.aspx?Entry=5917>, accessed on 6/11/2007.

<sup>37</sup> Laughing\_Wolf, “Milblogging, Revamping, and a New Approach,” Blackfive (May 3, 2007), [http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/milblogging\\_rev.html](http://www.blackfive.net/main/2007/05/milblogging_rev.html), accessed on 6/12/2007.

“Beyond this connectivity providing a morale boost for troops, it also has significant benefit in helping to tell the military story. Yes, PAOs will have access to these sites. And yes, service members can use them (if they can get to a computer where they can access them.) But the value of these blocked sites—and all of Web 2.0—is for grassroots users to come together organically and share their experience. By restricting access to YouTube and MySpace, the military is also restricting the ability of any service member to help engage in the ‘hearts and minds’ war.”<sup>38</sup>

Not surprisingly, milbloggers are more optimistic about their own abilities to deliver the victories in “the information war” that more traditional military public affairs activities have failed to provide. Andi C. argued that “boots on the ground are good at information warfare and their honest, first-hand accounts are priceless and important in many ways, especially in a historical sense”<sup>39</sup> and that the Army and DoD “could learn a thing or two from milbloggers.”<sup>40</sup> Many of the attendees at the 2007 Milblog Conference agreed. The aforementioned media report quoted one blogger from the “OPFOR” site as saying, “‘The mainstream media’s real issue is one of reporting and analyzing in the context of some sort of bigger picture... That’s where the bloggers come in. It’s really more about balance.’ Conference panelists said they saw milblogging as a way for ordinary people to provide that balance. ‘Technology is allowing ordinary people who are experts to get their message out much more efficiently.’”<sup>41</sup>

As an alternative to the current regulations, Blackfive argued that the Army should “allow for unit bloggers, and restrict bloggers with the same rules as the military gives embed reporters (with UCMJ [Uniform Code of Military Justice] exceptions). Maybe, then, we can start winning some battles on the information front.”<sup>42</sup> OPFOR agreed, advocating that “the military of the future [should] embrace bloggers more closely and

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<sup>38</sup> “DoD defends decision to block MySpace, YouTube,” The D-Ring (May 18, 2007), <http://dring.wordpress.com/2007/05/18/dod-defends-decision-to-block-myspace-youtube/>, accessed on 7/18/2007.

<sup>39</sup> Andi, “Army Issues New OPSEC Guidelines.”

<sup>40</sup> Lawhorn, “‘Milblogs’ Present Iraq War from Military Point of View.”

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Blackfive, “The END of Military Blogging.”

make its content accessible over a wide variety of platforms. ‘I would like to see a unit blogger,’ he explained, ‘some sort of central Web site where we get to see the combined blogs of each brigade combat team...that can go out over podcasts, the Internet, etc.’<sup>43</sup>

Again, it was Laughing Wolf of Blackfive who had the most far-reaching vision of future changes. After identifying the problem with the current policy, he argued

4. Blogs and Milblogs have shown some of what can be accomplished using more modern technology and models, as well as an innovative mindset.

5. Blogs and Milblogs, for all they have accomplished, are not the answer; but, rather an early prototype of one part of larger information effort and new model of information operations.

6. This new model will change information operations on a fundamental level, in much the same way that combat arms has been reshaped over the last two hundred years.<sup>44</sup>

He was careful, however, not to be misunderstood by his readers as advocating a technological fix. He wrote, “As such, it is not a technology issue but, rather, a fundamental change in the social and psychological framework (dynamics) of society.”<sup>45</sup>

That is, the current exigence is an issue of information warfare requiring choices where our beliefs about and conduct of information-age warfare are concerned.

#### **1.4 Information Warfare as Discourse Tradition**

Milblogger responses during the recent controversy have been constrained by both their prior responses to similar situations, as well as broader discourse traditions within the U.S. defense community. First, in line with Bitzer’s observation that some responses recur because the situations that fostered them recur, one should note that the current controversy does not mark the first time that milbloggers have taken up the issue of OPSEC and/or restrictions upon blogging. Likewise, their responses this time around have been practically identical to prior responses. For example, much of the current

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<sup>43</sup> Lawhorn, “‘Milblogs’ Present Iraq War from Military Point of View.”

<sup>44</sup> Laughing\_Wolf, “Milblogging, Revamping, and a New Approach.”

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

criticism leveled by milbloggers against the military's handling of the "information war" has been leveled in the past. In October 2006, for example, a post on the "Andi's World" site titled "The Future of Milblogs" read, in part, "Rules on what can and can't be publicly posted are absolutely necessary. However, it seems that some segments of the military have shot themselves in the foot by going overboard. As a result, many first-hand accounts of the situation on the ground are stifled, and the public has to rely on often-slanted and sometimes-bogus media coverage."<sup>46</sup> In that same month, in a different post, Andi pointed out that "Some milbloggers, including myself, have often complained about the flat-footed nature of the DoD when it comes to information dissemination and fighting back against the mainstream media. Others believe the DoD has a hostility towards, or misunderstanding of milblogs. One very influential milblogger has told me repeatedly, 'they just don't get it.'<sup>47</sup>

Next, the view that milblogs offer a solution to the current problem, or at least point in the direction of a solution, has been articulated before. In the "Future of Milblogs" post cited above, Andi went on to say, "In my opinion, milbogs have been far more effective in countering the mainstream media than the Department of Defense, and I'm not sure why the DoD has yet to realize their value and embrace their effectiveness... As I mentioned here, I'm hopeful that the DoD is coming around to the idea that milblogs are useful, and have a place in this information war."<sup>48</sup> As early as December of 2005 a post on the site, "Porphrogenitus," claimed that "Milbloggers, in my non-humble opinion, have done more for the war effort and more to correct misleading reports than the entire Army Public Affairs Branch has (note: this is not a slam on them, but praise for the MilBlog community). The Army should be encouraging troops to give \*more\* information on their first-hand impressions and how things are going, not less. 'Winning

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<sup>46</sup> Andi, "The Future of MilBlogs," Andi's World (October 16, 2006), [http://andisworld.typepad.com/welcome\\_to\\_andis\\_world/2006/10/the\\_future\\_of\\_m.html](http://andisworld.typepad.com/welcome_to_andis_world/2006/10/the_future_of_m.html), accessed on 6/11/2007.

<sup>47</sup> Andi, "This and That," Andi's World (October 13, 2007), [http://andisworld.typepad.com/welcome\\_to\\_andis\\_world/2006/10/this\\_and\\_that.html](http://andisworld.typepad.com/welcome_to_andis_world/2006/10/this_and_that.html), accessed on 6/11/2007.

<sup>48</sup> Andi, "The Future of MilBlogs."

the War' begins at home--we're not going to be defeated here [meaning in Iraq], but may have to pull out because of people's impressions at home, which in my opinion seem to be shaped by misleading reports of what the overall picture here is."<sup>49</sup>

So, responses to the recent controversy are not entirely unique; they consist of a number of core arguments that have been made before, in response to similar situations where fears of tightened, official restrictions on blogging were raised within the milblogger community. However, viewed in a broader historical context, we see that milblogger perceptions of and responses to the recent controversy were not only constrained by the similarity of the situations, but also by an "information warfare" discourse tradition that long preceded the advent of milblogging. There are a number of instances where the "information warfare" assumptions that underlie the milblogger response come to the surface. These include statements that identify the increased importance of the non-physical, political, narrative, or informational aspects of the current war, or war in general. For example, Andi from "Andi's World" was quoted as saying, "We're not only fighting a physical war, we're fighting an information war as well."<sup>50</sup> OPFOR argued that "Political fights need political warriors."<sup>51</sup> Finally, a post from "Q and O" asserted that we are "In a war where it is critical that the voices of those actually engaged in the fight be heard and positive information find its way into the main stream..."<sup>52</sup> These are just a number of instances where such assumptions are made explicit. However, one can see them just under the surface in most of the responses that have been cited above. These assumptions have been conditioned by a great deal of prior discussion within the military about the meaning of the Information Age for the conduct of warfare, a far-reaching discussion, begun even before the end of the Cold War, that I will call the "information warfare discourse tradition."

As far back as the 1980s, members of the U.S. defense community were beginning to think about what the developments in computer, information processing, and

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<sup>49</sup> "One Complaint," Porphyrogenitus (December 18, 2005), [http://www.porphyrogenitus.net/archives/week\\_2005\\_12\\_18.html](http://www.porphyrogenitus.net/archives/week_2005_12_18.html), accessed on 6/12/2007.

<sup>50</sup> Lawhorn, "Milblogs' Present Iraq War from Military Point of View."

<sup>51</sup> John, "Aw, Hell."

<sup>52</sup> McQ, "Army Backs Down on Milblogs."

communications technologies would mean for the future of conflict. Since that time, a number of theories of Information Age warfare have been developed, including “fourth generation warfare” (4GW), “asymmetric warfare,” “neocortical warfare,” “SOFTWARE,” “noosphere politics,” “netwar,” and others. All refer to potential adversaries who would employ creative combinations of both new and old technology and organizational forms to exploit U.S. weaknesses. They all refer to forms of war particularly suited to conflict in the Information Age. They all emphasize the increasing importance of the non-physical, political, narrative, or informational aspects of warfare in the Information Age. For those who have argued in favor of such theories, the September 11 attacks and subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq seem to have provided overwhelming evidence that a major shift has occurred in the nature of global conflict.

The term “fourth generation warfare” first appeared in an article in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in 1989, even before the end of the Cold War, and was largely the product of a group of military thinkers who were an outgrowth of the Military Reform Movement of the late 1970s and 1980s. The authors of the article predicted several characteristics of future conflict, many of which now seem almost prophetic. For our purposes it is most important to note that they envisioned a form of war which emphasized “collapsing the enemy internally rather than physically destroying him.” In this form of warfare, the target becomes a civilian population’s support for the war effort, as well as that population’s cultural landmarks, values, etc. They believed that the global media would play a crucial role in such “psychological operations.” They wrote,

Psychological operations may become the dominant operational and strategic weapon in the form of media/information intervention...Fourth generation adversaries will be adept at manipulating the media to alter domestic and world opinion to the point where skillful use of psychological operations will sometimes preclude the commitment of combat forces. A major target will be the enemy population’s support of its government and the war. Television news may become a more powerful operational weapon than armored divisions.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> William S. Lind, Col. Keith Nightengale, Capt. John F. Schmitt, Col. Joseph W. Sutton and Col. Gary I. Wilson, “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, no. October. (1989).

In 1996, U.S. Air Force Colonel Charles J. Dunlap, Jr. published an article, “Sometimes the Dragon Wins: A Perspective on Information-Age Warfare,” which also made a number of propositions about the nature of future conflict. Like others before him, he argued that “The impact of information-age technology on the global media will be the most immediate and most powerful influence on information-age warfare.” In addition to public opinion impacts, he argued that global media could become the “poor man’s intelligence service,” a point which would seem to favor the Army’s position in the current controversy. He also predicted, however, that information-age warfare may become even more bloody than older forms of conflict as adversaries of the U.S. seek to crush its will to fight by using the global media infrastructure to disseminate images of purposeful brutality against civilian populations, a point which would seem to favor the milbloggers. One could think, for example, of the spate of televised beheadings from Iraq to see that Dunlap’s prediction was not without merit.<sup>54</sup>

The following year, in a RAND report devoted to “preparing for conflict in the Information Age,” Richard Szafranski introduced the notion of “neocortical warfare,” which was based on the tenet that to influence the will of one’s opponent is the basic goal of conflict and that, therefore, *all means* capable of influencing the will, not just the use of force, should be employed. He explained that “Neocortical warfare is warfare that strives to control or shape the behavior of enemy organisms, but without destroying the organisms. It does this by influencing, even to the point of regulating, the consciousness, perceptions and will of the adversary’s leadership: the enemy’s neocortical system.” He encouraged his readers to “accept that adversaries will wage—are waging even as you read this—neocortical warfare against us.”<sup>55</sup> As such, he recommended that “we should devote the weight of effort and more resources to the deliberate and continual pursuit of nonviolent influence over the adversary. The object is to understand the enemy well enough to condition or determine the choices the adversary makes.”<sup>56</sup> Grant Hammond,

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<sup>54</sup> Charles J. Dunlap Jr, “Sometimes the Dragon Wins: A Perspective on Info-Age Warfare,” *Phil Taylor’s WebSite* (1996), available from <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/papers/vp01.cfm?outfit=pmt&folder=66&paper=1924>.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Szafranski, “Neocortical Warfare? The Acme of Skill,” in *In Athena’s Camp: Preparing for Conflict in the Information Age*, ed. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997), 404.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 408

a professor at the Air Force's Air War College summed up this sentiment well: "The game is chess, not checkers: it involves maneuver, positioning, timing, and consequences several moves ahead. One wins by convincing an adversary to concede, not by destroying him through taking his pieces from the board."<sup>57</sup>

In the context of a conflict situation, the power to alter an opponent's decisions through the targeted use of images and messages has variously been called "information warfare," "perception management," "psychological operations," and even "SOFTWARE," which Chuck deCaro has defined as "the hostile use of global television to shape another nations will by changing its vision of reality."<sup>58</sup> The notion of SOFTWARE resonates with RAND analysts John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt's concept of "noosphere politics." In 1999, they argued that "The world is turning anew into a highly charged battleground of ideas; it is not just a world in which material resources are the objects of protracted, often violent competition. In this emerging world, the key to success will likely lie in managing informational capabilities and resources skillfully—i.e., strategically."<sup>59</sup> They asserted that in such an environment "'soft power' is taking precedence over traditional, material 'hard power.'" The information-based, soft power paradigm that they advocated emphasized "the primacy of ideas, values, norms, laws, and ethics." They were critical of U.S. policy at that time, arguing that the U.S. had yet to adapt to the new environment and that a paradigm shift was necessary to deal with the challenges of the Information Age.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Arquilla and Ronfeldt published an article in *First Monday* titled "Networks, Netwars, and the Fight for the Future," which explained the attacks in terms of their ongoing efforts to theorize information-age conflict. They argued that, at the narrative level, groups like al-Qa'ida rely on "The right story [that] can thus help keep people connected in a network whose

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<sup>57</sup> Grant T. Hammond, "Paradoxes of War," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, no. Spring. (1994)

<sup>58</sup> Chuck deCaro, "Operationalizing SOFTWARE," in *Cyberwar 2.0: Myths, Mysteries, and Reality*, ed. Alan D. Campen and Douglas H. Dearth (Fairfax, VA: AFCEA International Press, 1998), 199.

<sup>59</sup> John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *The Emergence of Noopolitik: Towards an American Information Strategy* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1999), 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x.

looseness makes it difficult to prevent defection.” They concluded, therefore, that public diplomacy is more important than ever, reminding the reader that “Military campaigns also depend on whose story wins.”<sup>61</sup>

The summary above is but a cursory look at but a few of the most influential of the countless articles in military professional journals and trade publications, contractor and think tank reports, and thesis papers written by U.S. officers that have made many of the same observations and recommendations. Of course, most milbloggers are not directly referencing these works, but it is clear that milblogger responses are infused with what Richard Doyle might call the “rhetorical software” of information warfare which has been developed in a discourse tradition stretching back almost 20 years. The fact that milbloggers are typically *not* making explicit reference to these or other works is an indication of the high “transaction value” that such ideas have in the current marketplace of military ideas. Doyle writes, “Indeed, the contagion of the unthought suggests that the influence of rhetorical software rises as it is ‘forgotten’, ignored, or, what amounts to the same thing, assumed.”<sup>62</sup> Even if official policy is not always in line with such ideas, such ideas have nonetheless become commonplace, easily recognizable, and accepted to a degree that allows milbloggers to invoke them in response to the Army and DoD’s recent actions without the need for explicit references.

### **1.5 The Milblogger Response: A Rhetorical-Situational Analysis**

The case of the recent Army-milblogger controversy and the notion of rhetorical situation can inform one another in a number of valuable ways. The Army-milblogger controversy provides justification for efforts made towards a postmodern re-interpretation and reconstruction of Bitzer’s original model, demonstrating the continued usefulness of the concept. Likewise, examining the controversy in terms of rhetorical situation sheds light upon milblogger strategies and motivations.

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<sup>61</sup> David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, “Networks, Netwars, and the Fight for the Future,” *First Monday* 6, no. 10 (2001), available from [http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6\\_10/ronfeldt/](http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue6_10/ronfeldt/).

<sup>62</sup> Richard Doyle, *On Beyond Living: Rhetorical Transformations of the Life Sciences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 10.

Consistent with the criticisms and extensions made by Vatz, Miller, and Hunsaker and Smith, the Army-milblogger controversy is a situation in which speakers and audiences do not always agree on what the exigence is or what the issues are that are raised by the exigence. In this case, the two parties see different exigences. The Army sees milblogging itself as an exigence and an OPSEC issue. Thus its regulations are themselves a rhetorical response (with milbloggers as audience). However, for milbloggers, the Army regulations themselves are the exigence. In this case, the exigence is created by one of the parties in the rhetorical situation; it is not merely external to the participants in the situation. The Army perceives (or in Vatz's terms creates) an exigence for which new regulations on milblogs are the response which seeks to bring about a change to the exigence by altering the actions of the audience. But, soon enough, the milbloggers respond to the Army regulations as an exigence; milbloggers become the speaker(s) and the Army (as well as other milbloggers, the media, the "public," etc.) become the audience.

Next, the differences in the ways that the Army and milbloggers have perceived and articulated the exigence indicate that none of these perceptions or articulations were inevitable. There was a choice of issues for milbloggers to pursue once faced with the exigence of Army regulations. The exigence could have been articulated primarily as a civil liberties/free speech issue (the track taken by the Electronic Frontier Foundation in a lawsuit filed on behalf of milbloggers in 2006).<sup>63</sup> It could have been articulated primarily as an OPSEC issue (the Army's own position). Instead, milbloggers articulated the exigence as an information warfare issue. The milblogger choice of issues sheds important light upon their self-perceptions and motivations. By articulating this exigence in terms of information warfare, they have cast it as a professional, technical issue, indicating that they still see themselves as within the military fold; their audience is other military professionals. One would suspect that articulating the exigence as an issue of civil liberties/free speech, for example, would have more impact upon the general public

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<sup>63</sup> "Surveillance of Soldier's Blogs Sparks EFF Lawsuit," Electronic Frontier Foundation (January 31, 2007), [http://www.eff.org/news/archives/2007\\_01.php#005103](http://www.eff.org/news/archives/2007_01.php#005103), accessed on 2/8/2007. For one milblogger reaction to the EFF lawsuit, see Cpl\_M, "The EFF and MilBlogs," A Soldier's Perspective (February 6, 2007), <http://www.soldiersperspective.us/2007/02/06/the-eff-and-milblogs/>, accessed on 2/8/2007.

and a media that milbloggers themselves see as anti-military, a media always on the lookout for dissenting voices from within. Indeed, the media has often portrayed the issue in David/Goliath, insider/outsider, authority/dissenter terms. But a look at milblogger responses indicates that they have cast the exigence in a much different way, as an issue and in terms that seem to simultaneously undercut the Army's position, as well as the possibility of their occupying the position of oppressed outsiders. Lest the Army claim that milbloggers are rebels who have gone "off reservation," so to speak, the milbloggers can respond by showing that far from casting themselves as outsiders, they have tried to cast themselves as the consummate insiders, seemingly more concerned with U.S. victory and more knowledgeable about information warfare than the Army itself.

This raises the issue of the relationship between "speaker" and "audience." As Biesecker has argued, the rhetorical situation is an arena in which the participants' identities are mutually constructed. In this case, neither the identity of the milbloggers nor the military more generally are fixed prior to the rhetorical situation, making it difficult to talk about the two "sides" of the controversy, or about the "speaker(s)" and "audience(s)". Milbloggers are at once "inside" in the sense that they are part of the military (at least those milbloggers who are members of the military) and "outside" in the sense that they have set themselves against "the powers that be" (at least in this particular instance), and because many prominent milbloggers are not members of the military (e.g. retired military, family, spouses, etc.). Likewise, the information warfare discourse tradition is itself evidence of an ongoing debate within the military over what it means to conduct war in the Information Age, a debate about the military's past, present, and future identities. The dispute over Army regulation of milblogging is at once an internal feud over what an Information Age military should be, how it should understand and conduct war (i.e. the identity of the military as a whole), but also a struggle for the identity of the milblogger community.

Even beyond Biesecker's idea that speaker and audience mutually construct one another's identities (at least partially) during the process of discourse, this case demonstrates that the very categories of "speaker" and "audience" are problematic. The relationships and boundaries between "speaker" and "audience" are not clear or straight forward. The two interact in complex ways and the boundaries between the two are

blurred at best. The two are often not even singular entities; there can be multiple speakers and multiple audiences in one rhetorical situation. The positions of speaker and audience can change over time, with particular individuals or organizations occupying one position at one point and the other position at another point. Sometimes audiences speak to themselves. In the case of tightly knit communities or professional groups, for example, discourse can be more “horizontal” than “vertical,” with multiple speakers simultaneously talking across one another to address each other and/or other members of the same group. In such cases, the alternation between speaker and audience can be so great that the boundaries seem to disappear entirely. The multiplicity, simultaneity, and velocity of communications in the “blogosphere” seems to erase the categories of “speaker” and “audience” entirely, replacing them with one giant, electronic free-for-all. While the categories of “speaker” and “audience” can still be useful for a synchronic examination of a rhetorical situation, they risk becoming meaningless or even misleading when examining such situations diachronically.

The previous section demonstrated that, consistent with the insights of Jamieson, Garret and Xiao, new rhetorical situations do not necessarily lead to new responses. Rhetors can, and often do, respond to new situations by deploying traditional forms of discourse. Milblogger responses illustrate this phenomenon. Milblogger responses to Army regulations were not unique to that situation. Rather, they responded by deploying a rhetoric of information warfare that had developed and had been widely accepted within the defense establishment long before the advent of milblogging or Army attempts to regulate milblogging. In many ways, the rhetoric of information warfare that milbloggers have deployed precedes and supersedes Army regulations--i.e. the milbloggers assert a largely agreed-upon universal over a controversial particular. Or, in Kierkegaardian terms, it may be more correct to say that they assert a particular over a universal by making their particular an embodiment of a universal.<sup>64</sup> Where regulations or laws versus individual or group actions are concerned, the regulation/law is the universal and the individual/group actions are the particular--i.e. particular milblogger

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<sup>64</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954).

actions should be subject to more universal rules, laws, or regulations. However, in this case, the milbloggers are able to assert their particular actions above the universal regulations by appealing to a universal that is either higher to or equal to the regulations in question. Military regulations are not in place for their own sake, but rather are meant to promote a set of values that are prior to and higher than the regulations themselves. By aligning themselves with those higher, a priori values, the particular of milblogger action is transformed into the embodiment of a universal which supersedes the regulation. Milblogger responses then become seemingly more well-grounded in well-known, largely-accepted theories of Information Age warfare than the Army's own regulations, making the Army seem either uninformed, hypocritical, or both.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

This paper has used the notion of rhetorical situation to examine the recent Army-milblogger controversy, demonstrating the ways that each can inform our understanding of the other. The notion of rhetorical situation helps us to better identify and understand the exigences and issues that have motivated the actors in the recent controversy, as well as the way that the process of discourse is helping the actors to construct their identities. Conversely, an examination of the controversy provides numerous examples which justify efforts at a postmodern re-interpretation and re-construction of Bitzer's original model of the rhetorical situation.

But this paper provides but one perspective on one event in the history of milblogging. There is much work left to be done, and further examination of milblogging is in order, both by scholars of the military, as well as by scholars of new media and communication. For scholars of the military, a closer look at milblogging could provide valuable insight into recent civil-military relations, especially the relationship between the military and the media. Study of milblogging could shed light on the penetration of military theory and doctrine within the military population, as well as how soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines understand and internalize those theories and doctrines. The recent controversy, in particular, provides a window into the uneven acceptance and understanding of new media and information technologies within the military, providing an on-the-ground perspective into how the military is coping with the demands of the

Information Age. Additionally, efforts like those underway at Blackfive to collaboratively create analyses and policy recommendations indicate that milblogs could become important new sites of military knowledge production, in addition to more traditional sites such as professional journals, institutions of professional military education, think tanks, contractors, etc.

Finally, for scholars of new media and communication, milblogging provides an excellent case study of online community formation. There seems to have been no intent among early milbloggers to create such a community and certainly not to create a social or political movement, nor an online, volunteer public affairs or information operations corps. Yet, that has been the emergent effect nonetheless. To the degree that milbloggers are successful in their attempts to take on some of the duties of public affairs or information operations, or at least to bring about serious reform in those areas, milblogging could provide a great case study of what has been called volunteerism, “passionate labor,” or “crowd sourcing” on the Web.<sup>65</sup> In short, it should be clear that the advent of milblogging provides an incredibly rich field of inquiry for both those interested in military affairs, as well as those interested in new media and communication.

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<sup>65</sup> See Hector Postigo, “Emerging Sources of Labor on the Internet: The Case of America Online Volunteers,” *International Review of Social History*, no. 48. (2003) and Hector Postigo, “From Pong to Plante Quake: Post-Industrial Transitions from Leisure to Work,” *Information, Communication and Society* 6, no. 4. (2003).

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