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# Behind TV Analysts, Pentagon's Hidden Hand

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**A PENTAGON CAMPAIGN** Retired officers have been used to shape terrorism coverage from inside the TV and radio networks.

By [DAVID BARSTOW](#)  
Published: April 20, 2008

In the summer of 2005, the Bush administration confronted a fresh wave of criticism over [Guantánamo Bay](#). The detention center had just been branded “the gulag of our times” by [Amnesty International](#), there were new allegations of abuse

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from [United Nations](#) human rights experts and calls were mounting for its closure.

### Multimedia



### How the Pentagon Spread Its Message

Audio, video and documents that show how the military's talking points were disseminated.

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Dining with Donald H. Rumsfeld, second from left, during his final week as

The administration's communications experts responded swiftly. Early one Friday morning, they put a group of retired military officers on one of the jets normally used by Vice President [Dick Cheney](#) and flew them to Cuba for a carefully orchestrated tour of Guantánamo.

To the public, these men are members of a familiar fraternity, presented tens of thousands of times on television and radio as "military analysts" whose long service has equipped them to give authoritative and unfettered judgments about the most pressing issues of the post-Sept. 11 world.

Hidden behind that appearance of objectivity, though, is a Pentagon information apparatus that has used those analysts in a campaign to generate favorable news coverage of the administration's wartime performance, an examination by The New York Times has found.

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secretary of defense were the retired officers Donald W. Shepperd, left, Thomas G. McInerney and Steven J. Greer, right.

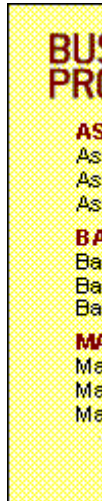
The effort, which began with the buildup to the [Iraq](#) war and continues to this day, has sought to exploit ideological and military allegiances, and also a powerful

financial dynamic: Most of the analysts have ties to military contractors vested in the very war policies they are asked to assess on air.

Those business relationships are hardly ever disclosed to the viewers, and sometimes not even to the networks themselves. But collectively, the men on the plane and several dozen other military analysts represent more than 150 military contractors either as lobbyists, senior executives, board members or consultants. The companies include defense heavyweights, but also scores of smaller companies, all part of a vast assemblage of contractors scrambling for hundreds of billions in military business generated by the administration's war on terror. It is a furious competition, one in which inside information and easy access to senior officials are highly prized.

Records and interviews show how the Bush administration has used its control over access and information in an effort to transform the analysts into a kind of media Trojan horse — an instrument intended to shape terrorism coverage from inside the major TV and radio networks.

Analysts have been wooed in hundreds of private briefings with senior military leaders, including officials with significant influence over contracting and budget matters, records show. They have been taken on tours of Iraq and given access to



classified intelligence. They have been briefed by officials from the White House, State Department and Justice Department, including Mr. Cheney, [Alberto R. Gonzales](#) and [Stephen J. Hadley](#).

In turn, members of this group have echoed administration talking points, sometimes even when they suspected the information was false or inflated. Some analysts acknowledge they suppressed doubts because they feared jeopardizing their access.

A few expressed regret for participating in what they regarded as an effort to dupe the American public with propaganda dressed as independent military analysis.

“It was them saying, ‘We need to stick our hands up your back and move your mouth for you,’” Robert S. Bevelacqua, a retired Green Beret and former Fox News analyst, said.

Kenneth Allard, a former NBC military analyst who has taught information warfare at the National Defense University, said the campaign amounted to a sophisticated information operation. “This was a coherent, active policy,” he said.

As conditions in Iraq deteriorated, Mr. Allard recalled, he saw a yawning gap between what analysts were told in private briefings and what subsequent inquiries and books later revealed.

“Night and day,” Mr. Allard said, “I felt we’d been hosed.”

The Pentagon defended its relationship with military analysts,

saying they had been given only factual information about the war. "The intent and purpose of this is nothing other than an earnest attempt to inform the American people," Bryan Whitman, a Pentagon spokesman, said.

It was, Mr. Whitman added, "a bit incredible" to think retired military officers could be "wound up" and turned into "puppets of the Defense Department."

Many analysts strongly denied that they had either been co-opted or had allowed outside business interests to affect their on-air comments, and some have used their platforms to criticize the conduct of the war. Several, like Jeffrey D. McCausland, a CBS military analyst and defense industry lobbyist, said they kept their networks informed of their outside work and recused themselves from coverage that touched on business interests.

"I'm not here representing the administration," Dr. McCausland said.

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