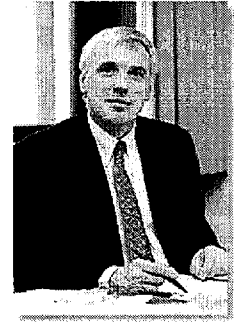




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Telling the truth in a crisis

Jamie Shea
Director of Information and Press, Nato
1110 Brussels, Belgium



Summary

My presentation will focus on communicating in a crisis. Drawing on my experience as NATO's Spokesman during the Kosovo air campaign and, more recently, the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, I will outline the pressures that the media place on organizations once they are in the media spotlight. I will discuss the importance of real time information, how to deal with mistakes and how to organize a media campaign in order to seize the initiative and put one's message across. What kind of organization do you need and how do you ensure that all the players are properly coordinated? What are the target audiences and how do you deal effectively with opponents seeking to discredit your handling of the crisis? My presentation will look at the respective merits of using TV, radio, newspapers and Internet as means of crisis communication. It will also highlight the increasing role of NGOs in setting the media agenda. In an environment dominated by PR executives and "spin doctors", the challenge is to combine truth and credibility with organization and professionalism while staying calm under pressure. How NATO attempted to meet this challenge in Kosovo, learning from the inevitable mistakes it made along the way, will be a lesson that applies to any organization caught - voluntarily or involuntarily - in a sudden crisis.