

NATO Public Information Course

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"Interacting with media around the world"

What do you expect from a Public Information Course? Learning how to deal with media and maybe some magic formula for releasing a perfect interview.

Well the course run by the NATO School at Oberammergau, Germany, provided a flavor of all of this, but basically a better understanding of the media role in military affairs.

The two week course was divided between didactic sessions and practical exercises that covered various topics including working with Arab nations, the relationship between media and terrorism, the internet relevancy and interview technique. First of all it was presented how NATO does business during operations and exercises, what is the relationship with Information Operations and Psychological Operations and how difficult it may become. Lecturers were renowned public affairs practitioners with international experience in real operations at tactical, operational and strategic level such as Mr Mark Laity, Special Advisor on Strategic Communication to SACEUR that stressed the growing impact of Media in Military Mission or ISAF Chief PIO covering the challenges of the Afghanistan operation. The students had the opportunity to hear real experience and real feedback, mistakes and lessons learned and to analyze and compare them to their own PI policy approach and cultural background.

The course is offered three times a year and the November course was attended by twenty-six students from 19 countries including NATO members as well as Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries such as Finland,



A spokesman holding a press conference during an exercise



Sweden, Macedonia, Croatia, Armenia and Austria and the Mediterranean Dialogue program represented by Israel and Morocco. A very special

forum where all the students presented their own organization, how they approach PI policy and media management; for example how Israeli Army promote itself or how simple is the relationship between Media and institutions in Nordic countries, and the different approach of eastern Europe NATO members compared to western ones.

But the course was just not briefings and lectures as we had the chance to pay a visit to a very important German broadcasting corporation - the Bayerischer Rundfunk - in Munich and having an "hard talk" with the director of foreign policy department and some senior reporters on how they see the military and how they believe we should behave with media in an operation: discussing "operational security vs transparency", "accuracy of information vs time constraints". This visit was a significant step in our info process because only if we have a better knowledge of the media needs, their working process, constraints and pressure we, as PIOs, may find

The Journalists

What do military people think about them?	What do they think about us?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The info they disclose may jeopardize the success and the security of our troops • Not always supportive • Know little about military 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretive • Bureaucracy • Disciplined • Incline



This is not an exercise...



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a better way to work together. Understanding what makes news, the different type of media and the info environment will teach us what kind of PI structure will cope better with media requirements. In this respect the knowledge of the environment we could work is vital to our performance and the lecture we received on working in Arab countries was extremely useful and provided the students real practical advices and rules.

How do we effectively verify the quality of the information we release? Only if we check what media print or broadcast, so only when we are able to conduct **Media analysis**. What is Media analysis? There are different points of view but the most simple is "the screening, analyzing and monitoring of the Media landscape identifying issues and the media trend". This activity requires dedicated and specialized staff able to research open sources in order to "enable our superiors to assess how activities, policies and messages are getting across to the public opinion, through media perception, so that they can take remedial action if deemed necessary." This activity may become routine in peace time but is fundamental during an operation as each single event or action could become strategically relevant. So we need a structure capable of working in different scenarios and environments with some basic requirements: handle the journalists, conduct press conferences, monitor the media and plan future lines; this means a **Press Information Center (PIC)**. Thanks to the experience gained in the operations in the Balkans in the last 10 years, NATO has clearly defined what a basic PIC structure should be and the tasks and responsibilities of its cells. Mr Franco VELTRI, Deputy Chief PIO of the Joint Force Command Naples, in charge of the Balkans operations, provided us a close look at PIC structures, manning and functions adopted by NATO in the operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, FYROM and Albania. The clearest and most exhaustive definition I can remember was "a facility where information can easily reach the media".



Familiarizing with the camera

The second part of the course was dedicated to individual training and the organization and conduct of a Press Conference; the training was run by Major Marc Theriault, Canadian Army Public Affairs Officer, who talked about how to communicate successfully with the public and described the problems related to the release of information and its legal implications; while Lt Robert Gould, US Air Force Reserve PAO and Manager Corporate Communications of a big company talked about some basic rules on how to communicate successfully to the public. We undertook TV training session as well as radio, print and non verbal communication; this part of the course was very much appreciated by everybody and gave us the chance to challenge ourselves in front of a camera, but also to have some fun and to smile for some terrific performances. Finally everything was put into practice in two days exercise organizing, setting up and conducting Press conferences.

Everybody was able to take away something new, such as a better understanding of the media, how NATO PI works or the new PI vision of the Austrian Army, but for sure what was clear in our minds was that media play a crucial role in everything we do and we always have to take this into consideration.



PIO Course attendees



Press conference in progress during an exercise

