

PRESS RELEASE

30th June 2009

Strategic Communications must be incorporated into policy at an early stage, agree the delegates and speakers at Albany's International Conference

Speaking at the recent conference 'Strategic Communications in Countries Emerging from Violent Conflict' organised by communications specialists Albany Associates, General Sir Michael Jackson, Alastair Campbell, Edward Mortimer and Jamie Shea all agreed that effective pro-active management of information within stabilisation efforts and peace-building operations is crucial to strategic thinking within the communications context. Moreover, the most important factor in strategic communications is the ability for different stakeholders to form a coherent and coordinated strategy and that organisations should never tire of repeating the key messages.

This very successful two-day conference, co-hosted by Post Conflict People, sponsored by Bell Pottinger and supported by Portland, provided a forum to share experiences from the field and academic knowledge to formalize thinking and consider models for implementation of strategic communications. It brought together over 120 communications experts from a range of backgrounds, including senior delegates from the UK and US Governments, the EU, NATO, MoD, the United Nations and other International organisations, NGO's, Academia, Media and the Private Sector. The discussions centered around how strategic communications can be incorporated into policy at an early stage, and how to win the critical battle for 'hearts and minds' using effective and targeted communications techniques.

The conference was kicked off with a compelling presentation by Nik Gowing of the Reuters Institute, with observations of the impact of new communications technology on both Media organisations and governments. "This is the tyranny of real time and the tyranny of time line." Nik articulated that the speed of information transfer shortens the news timeline from hours to minutes, and that the breadth of information transfer challenges the hegemony of major institutions of power.

Former NATO Spokesman Jamie Shea said: "In the past we haven't been too good at strategic communications, but we have to improve and we can do that by sharing best practice so we can get it right in the future. Conferences like this help us do that".

Alastair Campbell, former press secretary to Tony Blair, said: "Although vitally important, the concept of strategic communications is still chronically misunderstood to the detriment of government departments and trans-governmental organisations", before adding that "rather than being a force for manipulation, strategic communication is an essential process which gives the policy makers the space they need to get from A to B."

Simon Haselock, Director Albany Associates said: "This Conference has proven the need that we have to get our message right and we have to think about what we're saying, in many respects strategic communication is about communicating on one hand and listening on the other."

Andy Bearpark, Director Post Conflict People stated in the closing remarks, "that strategy and tactics were vital, but that they would only succeed if they were properly resourced - a message he directed firmly at programme managers."

Further information at info@albanyassociates.com and imagery of the event can be viewed at Albany's Flickr account: <http://bit.ly/3C1VX>.