

# Sixteen Years of Media Simulation Excellence

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The evolution of the information environment has had considerable implications for NATO's operational- and strategic-level commanders. With the advancement of online and social media, it has become even more relevant for commanders to reach outside their comfort zones and look up from the map into the information space. NATO's adversaries have embraced media as a weapon system, and NATO understands the importance of leveraging this critical tool in its arsenal.

As with any weapon system, training prior to deployment is essential. With this in mind, the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) established its own organic media simulation capability in August 2006. With an initial focus on simulating television news during the exercise execution phase, the section has evolved to deliver a full-scale media and information environment during the JWC's operational-level exercises, beginning in the planning phase and continuing throughout the exercise lifecycle.

The JWC's exercise media and information environment includes television news, online news and social media simulation. For television news, World News Today (WNT) is the flagship programme, replicating international news outlets such as CNN International or BBC World. For the Centre's more complex exercises, the team also produces adversarial products, replicating the effects of outlets that appear credible, but deliver state-controlled messages. Online news includes content from local, national, regional, and international perspectives, including adversarial content, all delivered digitally via NewsWeb, the JWC's news aggregate website. Social media effects are delivered via Chatter, the JWC's simulated social networking platform.

**RIGHT, CLOCKWISE**

A simulated press conference during Exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2016; a road-to-crisis newscast displayed at the JWC auditorium; the author, Laura Loflin DuBois during Exercise STEADFAST JUPITER 2021; the live TV studio

"Battles will be fought on land, in the air and at sea. But, the next war will be won in the information battlespace"

**General Philip Breedlove (Retired)**

Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) from May 2013 to May 2016



In addition to delivering news media content, Chatter is also used by key exercise control (EXCON) stakeholders, such as the opposing forces (OPFOR), higher control (HICON), and Grey Cell role-players, to deliver effects to the training audience. These simulation platforms bring the exercise to life, but more importantly they provide the media consequences of operational decision-making. Separately, each of these platforms delivers specific effects, but cumulatively, they provide a realistic replication of the media lifecycle. This provides the training audience with an advance warning system in which they can effectively plan and prepare engagements to shape the narrative in support of their operational objectives.

Every battlefield operation has strategic communications implications — some to be exploited, and some to be mitigated. Engaging with the media to promote operational achievements and/or counter adversarial propaganda is essential to achieving operational success.

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In addition to providing raw news and social media content, the Media Simulation Cell works with key EXCON stakeholders to provide scripted sentiment analysis and public opinion polls to the training audience. These products help them to better understand the effectiveness of their strategic communications efforts and serve to complement the raw content found in news reports and social media posts. This robust package enables the training audience to conduct their staff-level processes, including analysis and assessment to feed boards and working groups, and ultimately stimulating the decision-making process.

The security environment in Europe shifted in 2014, after Russia invaded and annexed Crimea by executing a modernized form of hybrid warfare. While hybrid warfare was not new, the way in which adversaries leveraged social media to achieve operational objectives changed the battlefield. Whereas previously information effects were used to support operations on the ground, potential adversaries were now using operations on the ground to support their information objectives. With the adversary evolving, NATO's training also needed to evolve to include adversaries with modern and sophisticated information warfare capabilities. With that in mind, the JWC's Media Simulation team has focused on continuously improving to meet the evolving information environment. Recent introductions of strategic hashtags, the adversarial social media trolls, and "bot" activity have proven effective ways to introduce modern information challenges to our training audiences. This has resulted in a more realistic media and information simulation, and ultimately in better-trained NATO headquarters, ready to win on the ground, in the air, at sea, in cyberspace, and in the information battlespace.

The JWC's media simulation capability is unique across NATO. With six NATO civilian staff members and support from external staff such as the U.S. Navy Reservists, the team supports all of the JWC's operational- and strategic-level exercises and some of the NATO Headquarters' exercises in Brussels. In addition to delivering TV, online, and social media simulation, the team also provides one-on-one, on-camera media training to NATO commanders and senior staff. Since its inception, the JWC Media Simulation Team has supported more than 70 major exercises, mission rehearsals, and other training events from Norway to Afghanistan, and in dozens of countries in between. The Media Simulation Team helps to make NATO better. The team is part of the Public Affairs Office/Media Simulation Branch and supports real-world external and internal visual communications with videos and photos. ✦



**Laura Loflin DuBois** has been assigned to the JWC since 2006. She is currently a postgraduate research student completing a professional doctorate focused on improving NATO's ability to counter disinformation below the threshold of armed conflict.

#### BELOW

A real world interview with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the JWC in 2015

