

Oorlogscensuur moet nog strikter, vindt senator Blair

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Tony Blair, US-senator in Londen, en zijn baas Bush sluiten het net van de media-censuur. De oorlogspropaganda blijkt nog niet efficient genoeg.

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Media war goes to Pakistan

Pakistan gets Taleban accounts of bombs first

Downing Street is helping to set up a media centre in Pakistan in a drive to step up the coalition against terror's propaganda campaign.

The new front in the media war opens amid fears the coalition is losing that battle and follows UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's encounter with Arab hostility to the US-led bombing campaign during his tour of the Middle East.

Other "Coalition Information Centres" are being set up in London and Washington to counter what the prime minister's official spokesman called the Taleban's "untruths and lies".

The UK and US are thought to fear time differences are giving the Taleban a public relations head start, with their accounts of overnight bombing dominating the Pakistani news agenda.

Islamabad, the information's centre's new home, three-and-half hours ahead of London and eight-and-half hours ahead of New York.

Campbell's lead

Downing Street director of communications Alastair Campbell is reported to have agreed the final plans for the centre at a meeting last week with his US counterpart Karen Hughes.

Mr Campbell will control the London coalition centre, to be based in Whitehall, which will be staffed by civil servants as well as Nato and European Union officials.

The communications chief played a key role during the Kosovo campaign in sharpening up the Nato media operation amid claims and counter-claims over the accuracy of allied bombing.

Campbell will control the coalition's London centre

The prime minister's official spokesman - the post previously held by Mr Campbell - told reporters on Thursday dictatorships like the Taleban did not face the same scrutiny as democracies.

"It is important we communicate ... quickly and effectively and that our arguments are heard and understood around the world," he said.

Pooling ideas

The spokesman continued: "The idea is to ensure that we pool ideas, share experience, and that there is an interchange of people from the different governments."

He dismissed reports that Mr Campbell had joined the last leg of Mr Blair's tour of the Middle East because of bad press coverage for the prime minister in Syria.

Such an interpretation was "absolutely wrong", added the spokesman.

The government's concern about reporting on Islamic or Arab television stations was shown this week when Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell said the Independent Television Commission had been monitoring the output of Arabic channel al-Jazeera for signs of incitement to racial hatred.

Broadcast worries

Broadcasters were called to Downing Street to discuss their screening of al-Jazeera broadcasts of Osama Bin Laden and other al-Qaeda figures because of concerns their statements might contain coded messages.
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