

NATO's public face: Jamie Shea

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The following caption appeared in April under a photograph in the *Washington Post*: “NATO spokesman Jamie Shea expressed regret over civilian losses from the bomb attack that hit a convoy in southeastern Kosovo.”

“Regret”? The photo doesn't appear to show a man expressing regret. Shea looks rather pleased, as though the value of his ten thousand shares of XYZ.com had increased by 5 percent or a rival had disgraced himself. In general, NATO's public representative seems to take immoderate pleasure in describing scenes of violence and death.

Does Shea's prominence as NATO's spokesman say anything about the war and those social layers supporting it?

Each day the most powerful armed forces in the world are bombarding a defenseless smaller nation. Thousands of bombs and missiles are laying waste to industry, power facilities and transportation. Civilians die and the entire region is plunged into abject misery. In other words, the great powers are once more pursuing their predatory aims. And this barbarism is carried out in the name of “human rights” and “democracy.” We are witnessing, more than witnessing, a new round of “murderous humanitarianism.”

Upon whom will it fall to represent this festival of violence and hypocrisy in the public arena? Let us try to imagine the social and psychological type. First of all, he would have to be devoid of principles, a willing and eager tool of authority. A product of a reactionary time; let's say, a social climber. Someone who decided to throw his lot in with the establishment years ago and has had no qualms about it since.

Once having taken the side of authority, he discovered there was something intoxicating about it. He enjoyed the sight of weaponry. In the presence of generals and admirals his personality blossomed. He felt powerful associated with power, less like an accountant or a dental assistant. Had there been slights at some point in the past? He might take definite delight in inflicting pain, and even find that difficult to hide in public. A perpetual smirk, for example, might give him away.

Shea seems the embodiment of the NATO operation, its fitting public face. He announces with relish the day's toll of destruction; he denies indignantly that the most recent

bombs have struck civilian targets ... until the next day, when he admits that they have; he then “regrets” the latest deaths, which, however, are understandable and unavoidable considering the nature of the conflict, and so forth.

Who is Shea? I assumed that he was some sort of low-level public relations man. Not so. He is a Senior Official on NATO's International Staff and considered something of an “academic heavyweight” in those circles. He was born in south London in 1953 of humble origins, attended Sussex University, where he earned a First in History and French, and Oxford, where he collected a doctorate. The title of his thesis? “*European Intellectuals and the Great War 1914-1918.*”

Having gone to work at NATO in 1980, by November 1988 Shea had risen to the post of Assistant to the Secretary General for Special Projects. The position involved speechwriting, the ghostwriting of articles, press releases and official communiqués. He became “Deputy Head and Senior Planning Officer, Policy Planning Unit and Multilateral Affairs Section of the Political Directorate” in 1991. He was named Spokesman of NATO and Deputy Director of Information and Press in July 1993, the jobs he currently holds.

Shea has served under three NATO secretaries-general. According to CNN, “He was at the late Manfred Woerner's side when the NATO secretary-general gave the go-ahead for air strikes in Bosnia.” He was also spokesman for Willy Claes, the Belgian social-democrat and NATO secretary-general, who had to resign after being implicated in a corruption scandal.

Specializing in security matters and international politics, Shea has a career as well as an academic. He has taught at the Université Libre de Bruxelles [Free University of Brussels] and lectured to French military officers on international relations and NATO affairs at the University of Lille. He is an Associate Professor of International Relations, American University, Washington, DC; he has served as the director of its Brussels Overseas Study Program. He has been an Adjunct Associate Professor at Michigan State University's James Madison College for a decade and directed its Summer School in Brussels. He is co-

authoring a forthcoming book, *NATO in the 1990s*, with Professor Michael Schechter of MSU.

In reply to my communication, James Madison College's acting dean Dr. Norman Graham informed me that since 1989 Shea "has taught a course in our 'International Relations in Brussels' summer program on 'European Security Challenges.' He is a very popular and engaging instructor, particularly given his strong academic background in European history and his direct observation of the evolution of post-Cold War security challenges and the response of European and Atlantic institutions."

In wedding a career in the academic world to one in the military/intelligence establishment Shea has only taken a not uncommon path a step or two farther. To paraphrase Trotsky, not every university lecturer is a Jamie Shea, but there is a little Jamie Shea in a great many university lecturers: the deference to power, the fascination with the military, the vicarious thrill derived from war and violence.

Such individuals are in particularly abundant supply at this moment in history. In his glibness and lightmindedness, in his dishonesty and effortless dissembling, Shea is a genuine representative, along with Clinton and Blair, of the generation and social layer that form a significant percentage of the political elite in the NATO countries.

Shea's relatively distinguished academic career also suggests something about the current level of so-called intellectual life. Despite his credentials, he reveals himself a banal and, in the profound sense, ignorant individual at every turn. (Under Scholarly works, his NATO biography lists: *NATO and Public Opinion*, 1987, 1988 and 1989 Surveys.) With Shea two distinct tones alternate, one sadistic and bullying, the other hypocritical and sanctimonious, sometimes within a single public appearance.

For example, in an interview with Australian television in early April, Shea first took pleasure in the bombing: "We are now operating 24 hours a day and we hope, of course, that we can put a stop to this in a few days. But if it has to go on for several more weeks, then we're perfectly happy to do that ..."

Later in the same interview he declared piously: "We are not going to use the same methods as Milosevic. We could use far more severe methods than we're using at the moment. But we have said all along that our quarrel is not with the people of Yugoslavia. In fact, they have suffered also severely from the misrule of Milosevic over the past decade. Our quarrel is simply with the government there and naturally we want to avoid civilian casualties and that's why our targeting has been very selective indeed, trying to avoid to the extent we can, any harm or damage to civilian lives and property. So yes, we are exercising restraint, because we are democracies and because we believe in a certain civilised

code of conduct." All this with a straight face.

The bullying emerges again. At a press conference April 17, Shea told reporters that NATO had "had another successful day over Kosovo.... These are the kinds of losses that clearly are going to knock the stuffing out of the Yugoslav forces inside Kosovo ..."

In the same press conference Shea chose to play Tartuffe, the hypocrite: "Public opinion obviously is uneasy whenever there is an incidence in which NATO is responsible for harm to civilians. Let's face it, we are the people in this operation who are there to save lives, to help, that's why we got involved in the first place, that's where there's been this enormous mobilisation not for strategic purposes, not for sort of classical interests but for humanitarian purposes. This is perhaps one of the very few genuine humanitarian conflicts in modern times so of course it's embarrassing for us if harm is inflicted on civilians."

Sometimes at NATO briefings he goes too far even for the congealed servility that passes itself off as a press corps. Katherine Butler in the April 10 edition of the *Independent* reports about one such occasion: "Spontaneous laughter rippled through the room as journalists listened to Nato's daily press briefing. They had just heard Jamie Shea, the Nato spokesman, say that the bombing of Yugoslavia brought nothing but relief to Kosovo's oppressed Albanians. One woman, he told them, on hearing Nato jet engines overhead, said she thought it was 'the sound of angels.'

"Mr. Shea stopped in his tracks at the titters: 'Yes, that's right,' he said, 'The sound of angels.' Reading everyone's mind, Shea added: 'I could never have put it so eloquently.'"

Are we at the *WSWS* the only ones who find Shea particularly odious?



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