

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2009 from Post Conflict People. The latter half of 2008 was busy for PCP, with our first inaugural conference and networking dinners both held in November. The result of this was a document of 100 ideas for new approaches to stabilisation and reconstruction. PCP is now working on some of these ideas to ensure that they come to fruition in 2009. We are always looking for new partners in this, so please get in touch if you would like to contribute, or if you have a particular idea you would like to see followed up.



In 2009, in addition to working on specially commissioned projects, we intend to hold further conferences and networking dinners, in addition to launches of the network in Washington and Brussels. More details will follow on this later on in the year, but information on our first networking dinner can be found below.

We are also in the process of putting together a Post Conflict People Steering Committee to ensure that the network is able to realise some of the fantastic ideas that are coming out of the network. The committee will assist in shaping the policy agenda and direction of PCP over the next important phase of its development.

Post Conflict People is an independent association committed to reviving societies suffering from recent or on-going conflicts. For more information, visit our website at www.postconflictpeople.org If you would like to be included in the network, please send an email with a brief introduction to enquiries@postconflictpeople.org



Quarterly Networking Dinner: 25th March, 2009

Venue: Frontline Club, London

Speaker: Nik Gowing

Post Conflict People is pleased to announce 2009's first quarterly networking dinner. Following on from our very successful event in November 2008, we will be holding a series of discussion and networking events this year, the first of which will be an evening in the private room at the Frontline Club. We have space for 56 guests, and dinner shall be followed by a speech from Nik Gowing, award-winning journalist. This will be a fantastic opportunity to meet others in the PCP network, and to share insights and ideas. Further details will be sent to registered attendees.

To book your place, please complete the form attached separately and return to enquiries@postconflictpeople.org. The cost of a ticket is £55.

The Center For Global Development: Fragile States Project

Call For Papers

The Fragile States Initiative at the Center for Global Development is soliciting papers for a new project on donor strategies to mitigate weaknesses and build sustainable economies in fragile states. Please click [here](#) for more information.

The CGD is keen to have submissions from the Post Conflict People network. They are looking for practical insights and have extended the deadline for submission to February 16th. Submissions should include a few paragraphs detailing key ideas. For more information and for submission of paper topics, please contact Vijaya Ramachandran at vramachandran@cgdev.org

Project Announcement

Insight on Conflict – The Fundamental Rights Programme

The Fundamental Rights Programme, one of several initiatives run by the Widaloka Cultural Foundation, aims to improve relations between Sinhalese government officials and the local Tamil minority in Puttalam district. This highly sensitive project brings both sides together in workshops to raise awareness of the shared rights and responsibilities of Sri Lankan citizenship. Over time, participants are able to let go of their prejudices and develop relationships of mutual respect and understanding.

For more information please see www.insightonconflict.org/fundamental-rights-programme/2009/



A Joint Afghanistan Pakistan Action Group?

By Jason Burke

North of the Pakistani frontier city of Peshawar are two of the now infamous semi-autonomous tribal agencies: Mohmand and Bajaur. They are both currently the site of fierce fighting between Pakistani Army soldiers and local militants. Though few beyond regional specialists can point to them on a map, what happens there is of great importance.

The fighting in the two areas – which pits a relatively small Pakistani force of around 5,000 against an unknown number of militants – can be seen in various ways. It can be seen as the Pakistanis finally showing some kind of grit and commitment in the conflict formerly known as the ‘War on Terror’. It can be seen, as it is in headquarters in Rawalpindi, as a necessary but unpleasant job to restore government authority along Pakistan’s western frontier, all whilst pleasing Western allies who are the source of generous financial assistance both to the army and the government. It can even be seen as a local battle between two tribes in two valleys, which has taken on a much bigger dimension as a result of the regional context. This is certainly the view of those closest to the fighting, such as local political officials and parliamentarians, whose explanations of which branch of which sub-tribe are fighting might be esoteric in the extreme but are as useful in understanding the exact situation along the Pakistani-Afghan frontier as any more global, overarching analysis.

As ever, the devil is in the detail. It is also the case that all the participants view the conflict differently. The American forces lining the Afghan side of the frontier have one perspective – particularly of their Pakistani counterparts. The Afghan Army battalions deployed to seal the border have their own standpoint too. For many Pakistani officers, the enemy is not the militants themselves, who are seen as brothers led astray, but the Indian agents who, they are convinced, are financing the insurgents within Pakistan. Finding a way through this maze of subjectivity, without losing sight of one’s own preconceptions and bias, may be essential but is far from easy. This question of perspective is however key. In repeated visits to British troops deployed in Helmand, I have been struck by the huge gap in perception between the vision in the UK of what our soldiers are doing and are capable of doing, and the reality. This was most evident last December when the town of Musa Qala was retaken. Musa Qala, in the context of Helmand or even of southern Afghanistan, is relatively important. But nationally, let alone regionally, it is not. Musa Qala in itself is the equivalent of a small town in Wales – say Llangollen – not a major strategic objective. Similarly, if the British press is to be believed, if the troops in Helmand get it right, Afghanistan will be saved. Sadly, the British troops are one bit of a hugely complex provincial picture, a smaller bit of what is happening in south and east Afghanistan, a much smaller bit of what is going on in the nation as a whole and, inevitably, an infinitely tiny element in regional terms.



For, as all participants in November’s PCP London conference were clearly aware, working at the regional level is critical to getting Afghanistan back on the right track. In dozens of discussions in Kabul this summer, this was the theme that kept returning; the message was hammered home repeatedly. If the overall framework is not in place, whatever happens within it is irrelevant. Looking around the region, it is difficult to see potential rather than problems. Tehran is carefully employing both hard power – minutely calibrated support to Taliban elements in the southwest of Afghanistan – and soft power – huge commercial and cultural influence in and around Herat. This is to ensure that they have a stake and a say in what happens along their frontier if not in Kabul.

Pakistan’s role is more complicated. The important role the outlying areas of Pakistan’s tribal territory play for the Taliban and key insurgent leaders such as Jalaluddin Haqqani (or his son), and to a lesser extent Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is well known. Western intelligence analysts now speak of a complex Pakistani agenda which involves manipulating certain elements within the insurgents so as



to be well-positioned for the aftermath of what is seen as an inevitable departure by Western troops. Islamabad – or rather Rawalpindi, the army headquarters - is convinced that Pakistan's best interests lie in fighting heavy Indian influence in Afghanistan. Senior officers speak with absolute certainty of the 14 or 22 or even 28 'consulates' that New Delhi has supposedly established around Afghanistan's borders.

Simultaneously, the Pakistani security establishment is happy to co-operate in catching, capturing or killing 'international' militants on their territory and to take action, when it suits them, against Pakistani militants such as those in Bajaur and Mohmand, who in turn they see as being manipulated by New Delhi. Few who have studied the region will be unaware of the Pakistani's deep, if unjustified, fear of Indian military action on the Eastern frontier and how that fear is used to legitimise not just the position of the Army within the country but the projection of power beyond its borders.

Until now a fully regional approach to stabilising Afghanistan has been prevented by the poor relations between those who should necessarily participate. With a new administration in the White House including figures who have in-depth knowledge of South Asia, and a leader who has spoken of, under certain circumstances, speaking to Iran, it is possible to foresee a variety of diplomatic initiatives potentially leading to the creation of some kind of Joint Afghanistan Pakistan Action Group. This means that a genuine regional strategy is now perhaps at least possible. The good news is that, in terms of meddling by neighbours and regional disharmony, things are better now than they were in the 1990s.

Jason Burke is Chief Foreign Correspondent at The Observer and has written extensively on Islamic militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Strategic Communications: The *Real* Battle for 'Hearts and Minds'

By Jem Thomas

A common thread throughout the recent PCP conference, 'New Approaches to Stabilisation', was the importance of strategic communications. The expressed sentiment that 'we all know it's not working' mirrored similar comments made at another conference three months earlier, 'The New Public Diplomacy and Afghanistan', held at the UK's Defence Academy. Such attitudes often spark ideas on how to make communications contribute more to foreign policy objectives, but all too often these approaches suggest changes at the tactical level, without recourse to the core of the problem; that of understanding at the strategic level.

Over the last two decades, the corporate world has recognised the rapid evolution of the information environment. As a result, public relations (as opposed to pure marketing and advertising) has made an upward transition into the boardroom; it has become part of the dominant coalition. In other words, the corporate world has come to understand the nature and importance of strategic communications, harnessing its power at the core of business and having communications contribute directly to corporate objectives. This paradigm shift has not ameliorated all ills, but communications is no longer an afterthought, no longer a 'bolt on' at the end of the policy process. It has gone mainstream.

In the area of foreign policy, notably crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction, this culture shift is moving at a glacial pace. Currently, in the higher echelons of foreign ministries, defence departments and development agencies, communications remains a bolt-on, despite the sterling work of many working on information operations, public affairs and public diplomacy.

This lamentable position is largely due to a lack of understanding. Many still see communications through an industrial warfare lens, harking back to a pre-information age viewpoint, when



communications entailed either getting the spokesperson in front of a camera or conducting a solid bit of psychological operations (Psyops) or propaganda against an enemy. As mission critical as many see communications, through its ability to explain, justify, persuade, influence, understand and inform, and its capacity to win 'hearts and minds' or 'capture the will of the people', contemporary guiding philosophies and methodologies espoused by senior planners are often outmoded. As General Rupert Smith states, 'capturing the will of the people is a very clear and basic concept, yet one that is either misunderstood or ignored by political and military establishments around the world'¹.

When considering the poor performance of communications many examples of failings spring to mind, from the fields of Afghanistan to the mountains of Kosovo to the streets of the DRC. In the asymmetric warfare of Afghanistan, with regard to the information battleground, it is the modern 'Western' force that is the weaker, while the Taliban possesses the superior communication 'firepower'. It is little wonder that there are calls for interventions to be treated as entire information campaigns in this new type of conflict. And that also requires a deeper understanding of the role of strategic communications, both during and after conflict.

Of course, there have been successes. The EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina (EUPM) has successfully used modern media tactics to discourage crime. In 2001 a popular soap opera on BBC's Pashtun service was instrumental in the success of a massive UNICEF inoculation campaign in Afghanistan, dealing with seven million children in just three weeks. The success of the 'Kimberley Process' is in no small part due to highly successful lobbying by development NGOs. Psyops were seen as a major factor in the rapid collapse of the Iraqi military in 2003. In 2000, the UK's use of force, posture and profile certainly persuaded the RUF to stay away from Freetown, Sierra Leone. And Oxfam, Save the Children and *Médecins sans Frontières* (and many others) can all point to successful campaigns to educate populations in war-ravaged countries. Although these successes tend to be the exceptions and mostly of tactical significance, the list does serve to illustrate the wide spectrum of and complex environment in which communications now feature.

In light of this new operating environment, a full review of the use of communications in war, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction is long overdue. As all communication professionals know, effective communications strategies are holistic, multi-spectral, multi-layered, internal and external, with multiple audiences and agencies, both domestic and foreign – in short, **strategic**. Strategic communications is an all pervasive concept: distillation of one's own *raison d'être*; direct contribution to strategic guidance; internal communication; dialogical conversations; public diplomacy; boundary-spanning; social psychology; issue management; behavioural dynamics; stakeholder engagement; lobbying; narrative construction and publics analysis. The need to understand this concept at the highest level is becoming more crucial in the increasingly complex environments of foreign policy crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. With this understanding will come the enablers, at all levels, that will allow comprehensive and effective strategic communications. It will go mainstream.

Yes, we need more resources. Yes, we need more coordination. Yes, we need better-trained people. But let's not fool ourselves into thinking that merely calling for these will bring about change. Equally, let's not be so naive as to think that by merely getting more resources, coordination and people that we will suddenly have sorted out the strategic communications malaise. The solutions lie deeper, in a sound and concrete understanding of what strategic communications is and what it can deliver. If strategic communications is to contribute fully to the objectives of crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction, it firstly needs to be communicated to, and fully understood by, those who can bring about the paradigm shift. Attitudes and understanding are changing slowly but the most critical battle for 'hearts and minds' will not be

¹ SMITH, R. *The Utility of Force*, Penguin, 2005



fought in the fields of Afghanistan, the mountains of Kosovo or the streets of the DRC, but in the corridors of power of foreign ministries, defence departments and development agencies.

Jem Thomas is Director of CB3 Communications.

CB3 Communications (www.cb3communications.co.uk) is a specialist communications consultancy dealing in strategic communications, public diplomacy and crisis management.

Iraqi Elections: Time for a Different Sort of Support

By Iain King

There's something really rather brilliant about the way candidates for the current Governorate elections in Iraq are enthused. As polling day, 31st January, approached, they were refreshingly eager to win their seat in one of the eighteen provincial councils, forums which will debate things like rubbish collection, road maintenance and local clinics. When was the last time you met people genuinely fired up about a local council election in your country?

The effervescence is sincere: some 440 seats are up for grabs across the whole of Iraq, contested by no fewer than 14,000 named individuals. Many of these brim over with passion when they explain to you their views on how local farmers are getting a raw deal, or how local schools have not been repaired as promised, or how the local community is missing out on its due share of oil wealth.

One female candidate in her mid-thirties was particularly impressive: she explained how, with a PhD and three children, she was both capable and keen to do a much better job than the incumbents, with whom she had little faith. Entirely new to politics, she could detail the problems facing the local community, elucidate why they hadn't been fixed yet with great conviction and set out what needed to be done. Another man was also compelling - a rather jolly figure with self-confidence as broad as his girth who introduced himself as 'the next Governor of Basra', a claim which he acknowledged, when pressed, was based only in its potential to be self-fulfilling. A third candidate was standing on a theological ticket, but sincere in his commitment to solving very earthly problems.

They had all come to a protected base in the safer Kurdish region of this turbulent country to be trained by practitioners of political campaigns in the West. We told them what we knew about how to mould a message and run a campaign, how to target voters, tackle antagonistic rivals and feed ambivalent local media. We offered them anecdotes from our own experiences, tales of vote seeking in Belfast and Baltimore, but it didn't really compare with their own stories - of intimidation, personal tragedy and desperate improvisations in the face of the most brutal challenges you could imagine.

Despite the surge and the much more benign security situation which has come to Iraq, the country is still dangerous. December 2008 was the quietest month in three years, but it still saw 316 Iraqis killed; official figures recorded 6772 deaths in the whole of last year. This is not the place to be knocking on doors, meeting strangers in crowded places and making overt declarations about any controversial viewpoints you may hold. Yet that is exactly what these people have been doing. They wear T-shirts broadcasting their affiliation, vie to display garish posters and enlist their children in handing out campaign literature. Apart from virulent text-messaging, election campaigning in Iraq is up-close and personal, partly because it has to be - email and YouTube broadcasts wouldn't gain traction here. Few candidates will actually get elected, and they don't seem to be motivated by opportunities for personal enrichment which may eventually arise, but they campaign anyway. Genuine public spirit is the only reasonable interpretation, and admiration is the only fair response - tinged with sympathy, perhaps, for candidates who are deluding themselves about their chances of getting elected or of delivering large-scale changes when they are in office.



The experiences of Iraq's provincial council candidates are not isolated – political hopefuls in most post-conflict and transitional have to scrape together whatever they can from family coffers and struggle against dispiriting odds, including, sometimes, violence. Yet most Western assistance strategies have tended to concentrate on election monitoring, often devoting up to 1% of a developing country's GDP not to direct aid, but to determine whether a the vote can be deemed free and fair. It may deter a certain sort of election malpractice, but when the whole campaigning process is riddled with flaws, the enthusiastic campaigners of Iraq and elsewhere deserve a more holistic view of democracy than the presence or absence of ballot-stuffing.

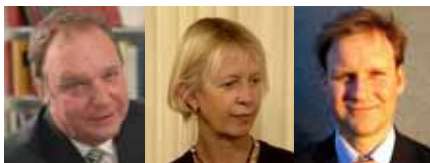
There is another serious argument for rebalancing how we spend our electoral assistance money, and that is the battle against corruption. Western governments spend billions each year in this effort, much of it directed towards post-conflict and transitional countries, like Iraq, where graft is endemic. Yet, however much is spent training civil servants, establishing codes of conduct and implanting good governance, the political class is, almost without exception, ignored. These are the people without secure employment and desperate for cash, for themselves and for their campaigns, who, when the system starts to work, will actually have most executive authority. Anybody who wants to buy a political decision or preferential treatment can see where the governance structure is most permeable to liquid assets.

Of course, refocusing governance assistance towards the political class – more training, on-going mentoring and perhaps a stipend for legitimate campaign expenditure – would be controversial. Some of the funds would go to candidates we dislike, politicians may develop some perverse incentives, and the election-monitoring industry would feel the pinch. But then, it depends on the sort of democracy we want to encourage in these places. A pristine electoral process is irrelevant when the only names on the ballot paper are crooks beholden to money-brokers, perhaps with criminal links, who have only their own interests at heart.

Fortunately, the stakes in these provincial governorate elections are sufficiently low for corruption to be absent from most minds. The candidates giving out stickers and shaking hands in the bazaars of Diyala, Dahuk and Dhi Qar are mostly motivated by the will to improve their local communities, perhaps enhanced by the buzz of the campaign and the glow of human interaction. Whatever you thought about the Iraq war, you can't help but wish them good luck, and recognise that they need all the luck they can muster.

Iain King is a Founder of Post Conflict People.

Friends and colleagues who want to subscribe to this newsletter should send an email to enquiries@postconflictpeople.org.



*Post Conflict People is coordinated by
Andy Bearpark (left), Penny Beels (middle) and Iain King (right)*

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