



# Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

## Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan beyond the 2014 Transition:

*Lessons from the United States and the Netherlands*

*Jorrit Kamminga*

N<sup>o</sup>  
126

*Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*



**Clingendael**

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan  
beyond the 2014 Transition:

*Lessons from the United States and the Netherlands*

*Jorrit Kamminga*

*For Jack Masey who both inspired this paper and helped to write it*

*Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'

The Hague

June 2013

ISSN 1569-2981



## **Discussion Papers in Diplomacy**

Editors: *Ingrid d'Hooghe & Ellen Huijgh*,

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'

Managing Editor: *Jan Melissen*,

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' and Antwerp University,  
Belgium

## **Editorial Board**

*Cecilia Albin*, Uppsala University

*Geoff Berridge*, University of Leicester

*Donna Lee*, Birmingham University

*Evan H. Potter*, University of Ottawa

*Biljana Scott*, Oxford University

## **Copyright Notice**

© Jorrit Kamminga, No 126 June 2013

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy, or transmission of this publication, or part thereof in excess of one paragraph (other than as a PDF file at the discretion of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael') may be made without the written permission of the authors.

# Contents

- Abstract ..... 1
- Introduction..... 3
  
- 1. US Experience with Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan ..... 5
  - 1.1 Early Steps: US Exhibitions in Afghanistan during the Cold War..... 5
  - 1.2. Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ..... 7
  - 1.3 Current US Public Diplomacy Practices in Afghanistan ..... 8
  - 1.4. Public Diplomacy as an Instrument of Counter-insurgency and Counter-terrorism.....10
  
- 2. The Dutch Experience with Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan .....13
  - 2.1. The Dutch Approach .....13
  - 2.2 Supporting Universal Values .....15
  
- 3. Comparing the Dutch and American Approaches .....17
  
- 4. Public Security in Afghanistan after 2014: A Changing Environment .....19
  - 4.1. From Counter-insurgency to Support for Transformation .....19
  - 4.2. Towards Digital Diplomacy in the Internet and Social Media Era .....20
  - 4.3. Afghan Youths’ Growing Interest in Western Culture .....21
  
- Conclusions .....23
- Recommendations .....25



## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

The end of the security transition process in Afghanistan in 2014 marks the need to rethink foreign public diplomacy efforts in the country. As Afghanistan is entering its 'transformational decade', there is a unique opportunity to disconnect public diplomacy from the military–security paradigm that has dominated international relations with Afghanistan since 2001. With a much more limited foreign military presence on the ground, public diplomacy can be considerably more than a strategy to win hearts and minds. Comparing the experiences of the United States and the Netherlands, the more sizeable American 'model' of public diplomacy can be considered a more defensive mechanism of foreign policy, linked to the military and counter-insurgency activities in Afghanistan, and to the broader ideological objective of being part of the debate on the relationship between 'Islam and the West'.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the Dutch 'model' shows a limited public security effort that incorporates cultural activities and training as an extension of foreign policy. This model is less ideological and is not directly connected to the military conflict in Afghanistan. It is a more indirect form of supporting foreign policy objectives. What is needed beyond 2014 is an approach that is disconnected from the current military framework, that departs from the more modest and non-military Dutch model, but that includes the broader political and especially financial commitment of the American model.

- 
- 1 The author is especially indebted to Jack Masey and Beverly Payeff-Masey for their comments and for providing access to their archives. Jack Masey served with the United States Information Agency (USIA) from 1951 to 1979, for many years as Director of Design for numerous major exhibitions mounted by the United States during the Cold War. He was directly involved in the organization of the *Jeshyn International Fair* of 1956. This Discussion Paper in Diplomacy is based on several discussions between Mr Masey and the author, and on earlier collaboration that led to a Dutch publication: Jorrit Kamminga, 'Een eeuw lang zigzagbewegingen rond moderniteit in Afghanistan', *Internationale Spectator* (November 2011), pp. 588–592, available online at [http://www.internationalespectator.nl/2011/20111100\\_is\\_art\\_kamminga.pdf](http://www.internationalespectator.nl/2011/20111100_is_art_kamminga.pdf) (last accessed on 31 March 2013). Furthermore, the author would like to thank Jan Waltmans from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, JoãoVasco Rodrigues, First Secretary at the Netherlands Embassy in Kabul, and Ehsan Turabaz, President of the Netherlands–Afghanistan Business Council, for their comments and suggestions.
  - 2 At least from a rhetorical standpoint, this relationship is increasingly perceived in terms of objectives aimed at fostering mutual understanding, shaping common interests, and dialogue, for example with regard to the American policy in the Middle East and North Africa region. However, many factors, such as the death of Osama bin Laden, the Arab Spring revolutions, the United States' policy towards Israel and the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have an impact on this relationship that is hard to predict.

**About the Author**

Jorrit Kamminga is a Visiting Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' and a Ph.D. candidate in Political Science at the University of Valencia in Spain. He has been conducting field research in Afghanistan since 2005 and is currently working in the cities of Kabul and Kandahar.

## Introduction

With the completion of the security transition<sup>3</sup> in Afghanistan (2011–2014), the international community, led by the United States, will lose most of its military footprint in the country.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, this moment will structurally change international engagement with Afghanistan. As the international community gets closer to the end of the security transition process, the dominant military paradigm of the past twelve years will be replaced by a civilian-led international effort that continues to support long-term peace, stability and development. This demands new thinking about how to shape civilian power and increase both its scope and impact to fill part of the operational vacuum that will be left by the withdrawal of military troops from Afghanistan.

In rebalancing the international community's foreign policy towards civilian power, important lessons can be drawn from past and current experiences with public diplomacy in Afghanistan. Civilian power is understood here as the combination of development cooperation and public diplomacy efforts. These are among the most important tools that the international community can use in Afghanistan to influence its course towards stability and development in a positive way. The term development cooperation is used here in its broadest meaning, including *inter alia* efforts at institution building, strengthening the rule of law, boosting education and the protection of human rights – all objectives that will remain important during the transformational decade.

The concept of public diplomacy is equally understood here as a communication process about ideas, values and norms that runs from a country to a foreign audience (in this case the Afghan people or Afghan government) and vice versa. Public diplomacy is especially about using the instrument of dialogue to influence public opinion abroad in view of certain policies, ideas or visions, including the promotion of values such as democracy, human rights, or participation in civil society. Despite the importance of the continuation of development cooperation after 2014, this paper focuses exclusively on public diplomacy efforts, including activities that fall under the term cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy focuses particularly on cultural assets to support foreign policy and increase understanding between countries. It is about initiatives that foster cultural exchanges, for example in the areas of sports, literature, music, or science. Throughout

---

3 The security transition is the process in which responsibility for Afghanistan's security and stability is gradually handed over to the Afghan government and its security forces.

4 For an analysis of the possibilities for a continuation of foreign military activities in Afghanistan, see Jorrit Kamminga, 'Keeping Options Open: Why the Number of US Military Troops in Afghanistan beyond 2014 Matters', *Clingendael Policy Brief*, No. 18 (March 2013), available online at [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2013/20130300\\_policy\\_brief\\_no\\_18\\_kamminga\\_afghanistan\\_options.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2013/20130300_policy_brief_no_18_kamminga_afghanistan_options.pdf) (last accessed on 31 March 2013).



this paper, however, only the term public diplomacy will be used, unless specific reference is made to cultural diplomacy.

To analyse public diplomacy in Afghanistan, the past and present experiences of the United States and the Netherlands are used as case studies. The United States has been selected because of its long experience with public and cultural diplomacy in Afghanistan, going back to at least the early years of the Cold War. The Netherlands has been selected to contrast with the American case study, as its concerns a small country with a more limited budget and scope, and a different approach to public diplomacy in Afghanistan. The Netherlands, too, has in recent years contributed significantly to Afghanistan with both military and civilian efforts. Both the United States' and the Netherlands' public diplomacy approaches in Afghanistan represent two abstract models. Identification of these models is based on generalizations, as when looking at both countries' specific activities, there is much overlap and agreement on the purpose and instruments of public security. The distinction is not made to accentuate differences between the Dutch and American approaches, but rather with the aim to distil interesting elements from both cases that can be used in developing a public diplomacy strategy for Afghanistan beyond 2014.

This Discussion Paper in Diplomacy does not narrate the full experience of American and Dutch public diplomacy in Afghanistan. It just highlights some interesting experiences and policies to put the current situation in perspective and show what possibilities there are beyond 2014 to deploy civilian power in Afghanistan in a meaningful and effective way. It is important to note that – despite the shift from transition to transformation – the overall conditions have not really changed in Afghanistan. This means that a more civilian-led international approach to Afghanistan will largely have to deal with the same structural challenges that the international community has faced since 2001 – for example, widespread corruption and insecurity, the low priority of human rights protection, local and regional interests and power struggles, lack of real democratization, and the uncertain results of presidential elections and peace talks with the Taliban.<sup>5</sup> The consequence is that there are no silver-bullet solutions, quick fixes and shortcuts to progress, whether related to public diplomacy efforts directly or to the broader international development endeavours in Afghanistan.

The paper first addresses the American experience with public diplomacy in Afghanistan, both during the Cold War and in recent years. Subsequently the – more recent – Dutch approach and experiences with public diplomacy policies in Afghanistan are discussed. The third section compares the two approaches, highlighting three basic differences between the two models. An analysis of the changing context in Afghanistan, in which future public diplomacy efforts will take place, then follows. Finally, following the conclusion, some initial recommendations are given for future public diplomacy in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

---

5 In this article, the term Taliban refers to the loosely connected but often very diverse and decentralized groups of insurgents that are currently trying to destabilize Afghanistan. The author acknowledges that behind the abstract term 'Taliban', there is a very complex and rapidly changing reality.

## 1. US Experience with Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan

### 1.1 Early Steps: US Exhibitions in Afghanistan during the Cold War

The United States has a long history of cultural and political engagement with Afghanistan. In 1934 the United States officially recognized Afghanistan's independence and established an embassy in Kabul. In those early years, engagement was especially related to small-scale cooperation through American companies, development aid and the construction of infrastructure.<sup>6</sup> In tandem, a modest public diplomacy approach was initiated based on intercultural exchanges of students and teachers.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1930s, Afghan students already studied at American universities. Later, cultural diplomacy received a boost from a 1958 cultural exchange agreement, which was signed by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Afghan Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud.

As part of America's cultural diplomacy, the United States took part in international exhibitions in Afghanistan, such as the Jeshyn International Fairs, most notably the editions of 1956 and 1968.<sup>8</sup> Jack Masey, designer of the United States' Exhibition at the 1956 Jeshyn International Fair,<sup>9</sup> explains what the Americans hoped to achieve by participating in the fair:

*The US participation at the 1956 Jeshyn Fair was not necessarily about winning the hearts and minds of the Afghans. It was primarily about providing a counter-narrative to the involvement and influence of the Soviet Union in the region. At the very last moment, the US did decide to participate, especially with the idea in mind that – to quote Woody Allen – '80 percent of success is just showing up'.<sup>10</sup>*

A few months before the Jeshyn International Fair, the British government warned the US government that there was no Western participation to counter the huge Chinese,

---

6 At the time, the largest US-financed development project in Afghanistan was the Helmand Valley Irrigation Project, started in 1950 and carried out by the American construction company Morrison-Knudson.

7 For an overview of the US-Afghanistan relationship during this period, see the website of the cultural exhibition of 'In Small Things Remembered: The Early Years of US-Afghan Relations', online at <http://www.meridian.org/in-small-things-remembered/category/gallery/early-contacts> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

8 'In Small Things Remembered', pp. 58-87.

9 Masey commissioned the visionary engineer Buckminster Fuller to design the geodesic dome that was to house the exhibition.

10 Interview with Jack Masey in New York (8 April 2013).

Czech and Russian presence at the fair.<sup>11</sup> Prompted by the British and by its own Embassy in Kabul, the US government decided to participate and managed to come up with what officials in Kabul called the 'most dramatic structure' that the United States had ever displayed in the region.<sup>12</sup> According to US media at the time, the exhibition was not only impressive, but also an effective tool of propaganda.<sup>13</sup>

The US contribution to the 1956 fair was best known for the futuristic design of the geodesic dome erected by the American architect Buckminster Fuller.<sup>14</sup> Inside the American pavilion, the US government *inter alia* presented a mechanical cow and chicken that could talk (literally called 'Talking Cow' and 'Talking Chicken'<sup>15</sup>), the Singer sewing machine, a Lionel model train set, the 'Bouncing Ball Bearing', a fully equipped and working television studio, and the latest agricultural tools and tractors.<sup>16</sup> There were also weaving and spinning looms, power saws, and other Black & Decker and Stanley power tools on display. Afghans were filmed and could see themselves on huge television screens, and they were photographed using Polaroid cameras.

The Afghans visiting the Jeshyn fairs were amazed by the technology on display. Photos taken during the event show the flabbergasted Afghans staring in amazement at these almost otherworldly items. While the overriding message may have been related to countering Soviet Bloc influence, the United States' early experience of public diplomacy in Afghanistan also intended to show that Afghans could experience similar progress through science and technology if they aligned with the United States' Western values. The exhibitions, moreover, were not only one-directional; they 'brought Americans and Afghans together because of their shared appreciation for art, music, cinema, and history'.<sup>17</sup>

The Afghan Ambassador to the United States at that time, Mohammed Kabir Ludin, was one of the first Afghans who realized that progress through technology was a universal aspiration, a common objective. In a news bulletin of the US Embassy in Kabul, he is quoted when addressing the need to solve the 'inescapable problems of humanity' in a world that was becoming increasingly interdependent:

*It is only proper that, in keeping with the humanitarian spirit of America, you will use your scientific and technological advantage for the well-being, happiness and prosperity of mankind [...]. In the present-day world [...] the problems of humanity have acquired the characteristics of universality. No longer can the problems of one people, one nation, or one region be*

- 
- 11 At the time, US intelligence showed the huge volumes that the Soviet, Czech, Chinese and Polish governments were shipping to Afghanistan for their contributions to the Fair. The Air Intelligence Information Report (15 May 1956) is part of Jack Masey's archive.
  - 12 'Plastic Dome Covers US Exhibit at Kabul', New York Herald Tribune (5 August 1956).
  - 13 'Effective Propaganda', New York Herald Tribune, Paris Edition (5 September 1956).
  - 14 Jack Masey and Conway Lloyd Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations: US Exhibitions and their Role in the Cultural Cold War* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008), pp. 58–87.
  - 15 The cow and chicken were respectively explaining the process of producing milk and laying eggs.
  - 16 Masey and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, p. 61.
  - 17 'In Small Things Remembered', section on Cultural Diplomacy.

*considered the peculiar and special problem of a particular sector of the human race.*<sup>18</sup>

The US exhibitions were impressive, but lacked any display of norms and values related to, for example, democracy or human rights. As such, they relied more on displaying technological superiority than on showcasing political superiority, although the indirect message, of course, was that progress was only possible in a liberal, democratic society such as the United States. The 1956 experience was not a complete success, but in many ways it was a unique opportunity to evaluate what worked and did not work in terms of public diplomacy in Afghanistan. Masey concluded:

*We went into Kabul in 1956 with the intention of countering the Soviet narrative, and we came out of Kabul understanding that we needed to make significant changes to our own narrative. It's fair to say that the experience taught us that if we were to win hearts and minds in the future, we were going to have to learn how to upgrade the quality of our own efforts.*<sup>19</sup>

His conclusion also contains an important lesson for future public diplomacy in Afghanistan beyond 2014, namely that a renewed public diplomacy effort should start with a sober reflection on our own narrative and on how we try to assist Afghanistan during the next decade.

## 1.2. Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The Cold War was as much a conflict of cultures as it was a struggle for power and influence. In this context, the US engagement with Afghanistan since the 1950s can be seen as an attempt to spread Western ideas and culture to counter directly any kind of communist influence in Afghanistan. The end of the Cold War, however, meant that US spending on cultural diplomacy decreased substantially.<sup>20</sup> It also placed US public diplomacy in a new geopolitical framework, with different challenges and new conflicts abroad that needed to be addressed.

In current US foreign policy, public diplomacy continues to be part of civilian power, described by the US government as: 'the combined force of civilian personnel across all federal agencies advancing America's core interests in the world'.<sup>21</sup> As such, it includes

---

18 US Embassy to Afghanistan, American News Bulletin (2 August 1956), p. 2.

19 Interview with Jack Masey in New York (8 April 2013).

20 US Department of State, *Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy*, report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy (September 2005), p. 8. For example, between 1993 and 2001, US funding for educational and cultural exchange programmes decreased by more than 33 per cent. See 'Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating US Public Diplomacy', *Report of an Independent Task Force Sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations* (September 2003), p. 46.

21 US Department of State and USAID, 'Leading through Civilian Power', *The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review* (2010), p. 1, available online at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153108.pdf> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

the work of diplomats, but also of USAID and other (development) agencies working abroad. Civilian power is regarded as just as fundamental to US national security as military power.<sup>22</sup> In the context of Afghanistan, civilian power is presented by the Obama administration as the combined resources that are needed to build the peace that the military has secured.<sup>23</sup> However, while both policy instruments should in theory reinforce each other, it does not mean that they automatically receive the same kind of priority or funding.

In practice, civilian power and its public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan have been dwarfed by spending on the military and security. A tiny part of total non-military spending in Afghanistan, a total that was estimated in 2008 as approximately US\$ 7 million per day, it is quite irrelevant compared to a total US military spending of about US\$ 100 million per day for that same year.<sup>24</sup> Yet it is much more than many other countries can spend on public diplomacy in Afghanistan. In the (fiscal) years 2010 and 2011, the US Embassy in Kabul alone awarded 560 public diplomacy grants and cooperative agreements, with a total cost of approximately US\$ 148 million, with the aim of helping the Afghan government to communicate a common vision of progress and to urge the Afghan people to resist insurgent influence and reject violent extremism.<sup>25</sup> This makes the United States currently the largest investor in public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan, arguably overshadowing even the substantial efforts to increase influence in Afghanistan by India, Iran and Pakistan – countries in the region that have a much more direct interest in Afghanistan and that share a common background based on a combination of historic, cultural, linguistic, or ethnic ties.

### *1.3 Current US Public Diplomacy Practices in Afghanistan*

US public diplomacy in Afghanistan has a strong focus on training, communication and education. The United States continues to train Afghan diplomats, for example through the Young Diplomat Training Program that is jointly sponsored by the US Department of State and the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the USAID-funded Afghanistan Foreign Affairs Institutional Reform (FAIR) project; and the USAID Capacity Development Program. These efforts are connected to broader training and capacity initiatives that are directed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kabul, for example, in terms of policy, administration and language skills.

In 2010, the US State Department earmarked US\$ 113 million for civilian communication, including new mobile phone network towers, community media outlets,

---

22 US Department of State and USAID, 'Leading through Civilian Power', p. 6.

23 US Department of State and USAID, 'Leading through Civilian Power', pp. 5 and 6.

24 Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), *Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan* (Kabul: ACBAR, 2008), p. 7.

25 US Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Audit 12-13, 'Selected Public Diplomacy Awards Mostly Achieved Objectives, but Embassy Can Take Steps to Enhance Grant Management and Oversight'* (30 July 2012).

and supporting educational radio in Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> While this is partly a development endeavour (for example, mobile phones used to receive wages electronically and for other banking services), the support was also motivated by concerns about Taliban propaganda in areas where other information is hardly available.<sup>27</sup> It is thus partly an information offensive to counter the narrative of the Taliban insurgency.

On the educational front, the US Fulbright Exchange Program was restarted in 2003, allowing more than 300 Afghans to study in the United States during the past ten years. Administered by the US Embassy in Kabul, one of this scheme's objectives is to foster mutual understanding and empathy between the two cultures. Within the framework of education, there are many more US initiatives, both public and private, that offer collaborative platforms to foster dialogue and cultural exchange, such as the Global Citizens in Action programme that promotes intercultural learning and communication.<sup>28</sup>

As well as its development cooperation activities, USAID has played an important role in the United States' public diplomacy activities. Since 2001, USAID has been at the helm of supporting (access to) education, worked extensively on fostering women-led civil society organizations, trained more than 700 female journalists across Afghanistan, and supported both the access to and availability of independent media, including support for radio and television stations.<sup>29</sup> Since January 2002, the United States has also been supporting Radio Free Afghanistan, the Afghan branch of Radio Free Europe. The United States furthermore runs a cultural heritage mission, focusing on capacity building, training and efforts to preserve Afghanistan's cultural heritage sites. Concrete projects that have been supported include the preservation of the ancient Afghan city of Mes Aynak in Logar province and the restoration of the National Museum in Kabul.

Given the huge role of the US military in Afghanistan since 2001, it is logical that public diplomacy has been applied extensively to support military endeavours in Afghanistan. Civilian power in general has been used in what has become known as the 'comprehensive approach' – the embodiment of the idea that civilian and military instruments should complement each other to achieve military goals. Among the principle tools of this approach is Civil-Military Cooperation, or 'CIMIC', which responds to the reality in current conflicts that the military is often obliged to engage in non-military activities and to interact with the civilian environment.<sup>30</sup> However, the limitation of the comprehensive approach is that public diplomacy primarily exists within the framework of a security paradigm, and not as an independent force – in a similar way as the so-called

---

26 Indira A.R. Lakshmanan, 'Fighting the Taliban with Cellphones', *The New York Times* (23 March 2010).

27 Lakshmanan, 'Fighting the Taliban with Cellphones'.

28 For basic information about this programme, see the Global Citizens in Action factsheet at <http://gng.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/GCA-fact-sheet1.pdf?f22064> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

29 See a list of the main USAID contributions since 2001 at the official website of the US Embassy in Kabul: <http://kabul.usembassy.gov/usaidd50.html> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

30 Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence (CCOE), *CIMIC Field Handbook*, available online at <http://www.cimic-coe.org/download/cfh/CIMIC-Handbook.pdf> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

'hearts and minds'<sup>31</sup> strategy depends on the presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) deployed in Afghanistan form an integral part of the military mission within a security framework. The next section will examine the role of public diplomacy as an instrument of US military policy.

#### *1.4. Public Diplomacy as an Instrument of Counter-insurgency and Counter-terrorism*

While the Cold War has ended, the new political context may not be completely different for US public diplomacy. The 2003 Independent Task Force report gave the following prognostic:

*Like the Cold War, US efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq promise to be long, protracted, and in large part about winning hearts and minds to US political values – democracy, transparency, and the rule of law.<sup>32</sup>*

There is, however, a direct link between the US public diplomacy efforts and the security–military paradigm, because in the current conflict in Afghanistan, 'hearts and minds' campaigns are associated with the counter-insurgency tactics of the foreign military. They are about winning crucial support from the local communities where military operations take place. It is often seen as a zero-sum game in which an increase in support for the international forces and Afghan security forces means a decrease in support for the insurgent groups operating in the area, and vice versa. In such a limited perspective, 'hearts and minds' campaigns are often perceived as a mere tactical instrument that determines military success in the short term. It is basically about fighting Taliban propaganda with counter-propaganda to make sure that the locals choose the correct side in counter-insurgency operations.

The risk of this limited approach has become apparent since 2001: errors made by the international forces, especially the huge number of civilian casualties caused by the coalition forces,<sup>33</sup> have made it easier for the insurgency to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people, often with little effort on their own part. When referring to the narrative that the United States is trying to construct in Afghanistan, one should be

---

31 The 'hearts and minds' concept goes back to the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960), a guerrilla war in which British military forces started to provide medical and food aid to Malays and indigenous tribes to gain their support in the fight against the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA). The term was later used during the Vietnam War and has since become a complementary military strategy aimed at increasing support from the local population as a precondition for the sustainable success of a counter-insurgency campaign.

32 *Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating US Public Diplomacy*, report of an Independent Task Force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2003), pp. 22–23.

33 Since 2001, there have been many incidents in which NATO–ISAF air strikes have caused civilian casualties. At the time of writing, the latest incident took place in Kunar province on 6 April 2013, in which eleven Afghan children and a woman were killed.

aware that there are many counter-narratives, including an increasingly challenging one from the Taliban insurgency. The Taliban builds on the mistakes made by the international community and urges its fighters to avoid civilian casualties at all costs.<sup>34</sup> What is important here is that in the midst of the war of narratives, public diplomacy becomes an integral part of the conflict. It becomes an additional instrument, albeit of a predominantly indirect nature, of the US counter-insurgency strategy.

This approach has been criticized extensively. For example, Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated in 2009 that these public diplomacy activities lacked the credibility to influence the Afghans, especially because the United States had not invested enough in building trust and relationships with the Afghan people and delivering on promises.<sup>35</sup> The late Richard Holbrooke, at the time Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, acknowledged that the United States was using what he called the 'information war' against propaganda from the Taliban, drawing public diplomacy efforts further into the realm of counter-insurgency tactics.<sup>36</sup> Such criticism is in line with the 'relationship gap' that the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) identified in 2010 between NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the communities in southern Afghanistan that they were trying to protect.<sup>37</sup>

Perceptions about US public diplomacy in Afghanistan as a massive propaganda machine are also found among Afghans.<sup>38</sup> Good initiatives and good intentions have resulted in American support for cultural projects, Afghan media and the educational system, yet the United States' huge presence in Afghanistan in terms of its military, information and communication structures has often overshadowed the intrinsic value of public diplomacy as an intercultural endeavour. It may indeed have tilted public diplomacy more towards a form of foreign propaganda in the minds of many Afghans, making them wary about the real motives behind these public diplomacy policies.

It is precisely the end of most of the international (and US) military presence in Afghanistan in 2014 that can help disconnect public diplomacy from this security–military framework. However, this does not mean that the United States will stop considering public diplomacy as an important instrument in the debate about different ideologies, ideas and the conversation about 'the West and Islam'. The political context of the War

---

34 In 2009, the Taliban released a code-of-ethics handbook with 62 guidelines, including instructions not to target innocent people and not to recruit children. Since then, the Taliban has been engaged in what can be called a public diplomacy offensive to soften its image and to win over the Afghan population. See Lissa J. Rubin, 'Taliban Overhaul Image to Win Allies', *The New York Times* (20 January 2010).

35 Thom Shanker, 'Message to Muslim World Gets a Critique', *The New York Times* (27 August 2009).

36 Thom Shanker, 'US Plans a Mission Against Taliban's Propaganda', *The New York Times* (15 August 2009).

37 International Council on Security and Development (ICOS), *Afghanistan: The Relationship Gap* (July 2010), p. 2, available online at <http://www.icosgroup.net/2010/report/afghanistan-relationship-gap> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

38 Conversations of the author with more than 300 Afghans of the military-age male population (15–30) in the provinces of Herat, Balkh and Kabul during several months in 2011.



on Terror and its negative consequences are unique for the United States' public diplomacy model, as the US has a military presence, one way or another, in more than 60 countries.<sup>39</sup>

---

39 *Finding America's Voice*, p. 56.

## 2. The Dutch Experience with Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan

### 2.1. The Dutch Approach

Similar to the United States, the broader public diplomacy policy of the Netherlands takes the form of communicating and explaining Dutch national policies to a foreign audience. The image of the Netherlands abroad, however, is much less tied to its military policy at the international level than is the case for the United States. Ben Hurkmans describes how the Dutch public diplomacy policy evolved in the first decade of the twenty-first century, as a result of a series of domestic events related one way or another to immigration issues, the freedom of expression or the criticism of Islamic culture in the Netherlands and abroad.<sup>40</sup> Dutch public diplomacy activities in Muslim countries and elsewhere, however, are more than just defensive mechanisms that, for example, explain to Muslims in Afghanistan why Dutch politician Geert Wilders made an anti-Islam film ('Fitna', 2008).<sup>41</sup> They also seek to convey more general messages and include cultural diplomacy activities, as is illustrated by the public diplomacy definition used by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

*Public diplomacy means fostering understanding for Dutch views and standpoints by entering into dialogue with non-official contacts abroad who can influence decision-making in policy areas relevant to the Netherlands. More generally, public diplomacy aims to present a realistic and favourable image of the Netherlands abroad.*<sup>42</sup>

---

40 A series of extreme events triggered this evolution: the murder of populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002; the murder of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2005 after the release of his film about the suppression of women under Islam; and more recently the release of 'Fitna' in 2008, a short film that is critical of Islam, produced by the populist Dutch anti-Islam parliamentarian Geert Wilders. Yet there was a more general trend of stricter immigration policies, coupled with criticism about the lack of integration of immigrants in Dutch society. Ben Hurkmans, 'Still a World to be Won: An Outline of Today's Cultural Diplomacy in the Netherlands', ARI Paper 88/2008 (10 October 2008). Translated from Spanish.

41 Nevertheless, such incidents are of great concern to the Dutch government. For example, after the release of Wilders' film 'Fitna' in March 2008, the Dutch Embassies in Kabul and Islamabad were closed for a few days.

42 Nederlands Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken [Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs], *Handleiding Publieksdiplomatie*, COM (2010) (The Hague: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 2010), p.7.

Dutch public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan mainly lie in the realm of cultural diplomacy. The Dutch government organizes a broad range of cultural activities in or about Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> These mostly small-scale activities especially include the areas of cultural heritage, art, music and sports. For example, the Netherlands has supported the protection and promotion of Afghanistan's cultural heritage through projects such as the renovation of the Afghan National Museum in Kabul and the restoration of the historic bazaar of Tashqurghan in Balkh province. The Dutch Embassy in Kabul has also supported Afghan NGOs, exhibitions of young Afghan artists, and organized or supported cultural music, photographic or film events, sometimes in cooperation with the Afghan Ministry of Culture. One example is support by the Dutch Embassy in 2012 for the Sound Central Festival, a three-day alternative arts festival with young Afghan and international artists. The Dutch Embassy also organized a fund-raising event for 'Skateistan', Kabul's skateboarding centre, and has supported an Afghan youth soccer team.

Cultural linkages between the Netherlands and Afghanistan are furthermore highlighted through young Afghans living in the Netherlands or Dutch citizens working in Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> These cultural linkages and supported activities have been promoted through the Dutch Embassy's Facebook page since October 2011.<sup>45</sup> In Kabul, Dutch diplomats sometimes also contribute to, or write articles for, local Afghan newspapers, have conversations with local journalists, and organize meetings and debates with students, young Afghans, human rights activists and others. Another important Dutch public diplomacy activity aims at supporting the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs by training Afghan diplomats in the Netherlands. The training of (young) diplomats includes strengthening their diplomatic skills, work visits to international institutions, and deepening their knowledge of international politics and economics, development cooperation, and the politics of reform in Afghanistan and the region.

These public diplomacy activities are primarily intended to spread a positive message to both the Dutch and Afghan publics and to promote Dutch values and interests. Where possible and relevant, they inform the Afghan public about the importance that the Netherlands attaches to women's rights, good governance and supporting youth. They also give the Dutch Embassy in Kabul visibility, contribute to its local contact network, and draw attention to the broader role of the Netherlands in Afghanistan. As such, the activities can be seen as extensions of the Netherlands' overall policy towards Afghanistan, including economic diplomacy (linking Dutch and Afghan companies and markets), the Dutch police-training mission in Kunduz province, or the work in the Dutch government's general priority areas in Afghanistan: agriculture; rule of law; and good governance. The focus on economic diplomacy has increased in importance over the past few years and includes the creation of linkages between Dutch research institutions (such

---

43 In addition to online sources, these paragraphs are based especially on conversations with an official at the Dutch Embassy in Kabul (JoãoVasco Rodrigues, First Secretary of the Dutch Embassy in Kabul) and with Mr Ehsan Turabaz, President of the Netherlands-Afghanistan Business Council.

44 An interesting example is the success of the 'Dutch Afghan' artist Massoud Hassani, whose art work (the Mine Kafon Wind-Powered Deminer, 2001) is currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. This work of art also provides a telling story of how art can be combined with solutions to problems related to the past and current conflicts in Afghanistan.

45 See online at <http://www.facebook.com/nlembassykabul> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

as Wageningen University) and concrete development projects (such as building an agricultural research capacity and institutions in Afghanistan).

## 2.2 Supporting Universal Values

Despite the link with broader policies, the Netherlands does not seem to link directly public diplomacy efforts with the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Contrary to the United States, the Dutch are very careful when it comes to offering an alternative (or superior) cultural viewpoint to Afghans as part of a broader cultural narrative. Respect for Afghan culture seems to be more firmly established as a guiding principle than in the US case. While the Netherlands promotes freedom of expression, for example through supporting the activities of women, artists, musicians or Afghan youth, there is no intention for this to change directly the way that Afghans perceive these values *vis-à-vis* more conservative ideas on human rights. In other words, there is no direct link between Dutch policy in the field of public diplomacy and a 'Western' (hearts and minds) narrative that tries to compete with Afghan narratives, including those of the insurgent groups.

The Dutch Embassy in Kabul emphasizes that supporting culture means supporting both Dutch and Afghan culture, and any linkages between the two. Basing all activities on the principle of cultural sensitivity, the Embassy does not promote Western or Dutch values as superior (cultural) assets. It does, however, stress the importance of certain universal values (for example, women's rights and political participation), but these are promoted within the specific cultural framework of Afghanistan. In other words, while awareness exists that the Taliban and other conservative elements in Afghan society may have a different cultural and political vision, there is no direct attempt to present cultural diplomacy activities as a way to counter such visions.

The Dutch government has not yet decided whether to increase public diplomacy and cultural activities in Afghanistan after 2014. There does not seem to be a direct link with the decrease of the Dutch military's footprint in Afghanistan, as the Dutch PRT mission in Uruzgan ended in 2010, and the police-training activities in Kunduz are (at least officially) a civilian mission.<sup>46</sup> However, the future scope of public diplomacy activities may be partly influenced by possible future training missions, other civilian-military activities, and the size of the development aid budget for Afghanistan in the coming years. Those developments will also impact upon the size of the Dutch Embassy in Kabul.

---

46 In March 2013, the Dutch government effectively decided to end its police-training mission in Kunduz on 1 July 2013, one year earlier than originally planned.



### 3. Comparing the Dutch and American Approaches

Comparing the two models leads to three basic differences being identified. The first is the degree of cultural sensitivity. There is an important difference in the way that both countries use culture as part of public diplomacy efforts abroad. Within the American model, there is the expressed intention to use culture to build a narrative to be used in interactions with the Afghan people, aimed at achieving foreign policy objectives. For the United States, culture is primarily a foreign policy instrument rather than an asset with an intrinsic value. In the Dutch model, however, it is the other way around: cultural exchanges are primarily valued as positive assets in themselves, and only secondarily as instruments of foreign policy. Stressing the cultural sensitivity of the Dutch approach, however, does not mean that the United States lacks respect for Afghan culture; it is a matter of degree. The US government writes in the 2010 *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*: 'we do not seek to impose our values on other countries by force, but we do believe that certain values are universal'.<sup>47</sup>

A second difference between the two models relates to the important role of public diplomacy as part of the American political discourse. The American model links public diplomacy efforts abroad (for example, through deploying cultural assets) to the ideological dialogue between the West and Islam. This is partly the result of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, which have created the unique political context in which the United States is conducting its counter-terrorism operations abroad. The problem is not so much that public diplomacy becomes part of an ideological dialogue, but that this relationship takes place in a predominantly negative context: the war against insurgents or terrorists, which to a large extent relies on military means and military operations in foreign countries.

When comparing the two models, the larger military involvement of the United States abroad compared to the Netherlands is significant. As a result, US public diplomacy is almost automatically tied to its foreign military mission (either indirectly as a support strategy or directly through 'hearts and minds' counter-insurgency operations on the ground). For the Netherlands, the situation is very different, and the direct relationship between public diplomacy and the conflict has only been temporal in Afghanistan, first during the Dutch PRT activities in Baghlan (2004–2006), and subsequently in Uruzgan (2006–2010), when CIMIC and 'hearts and minds' projects were important components of the Dutch 3D approach (which combined defence, diplomacy and development). Under the Dutch model, however, the broader counter-insurgency and 'hearts and minds' strategy did not change the more independent nature of the Dutch Embassy in Kabul's public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan.

A third difference between the models relates to the previous difference but is specific to the US military operations in Afghanistan. These large-scale operations around

---

47 US Department of State and USAID, 'Leading through Civilian Power', p. 10.

Afghanistan have resulted in the United States using public diplomacy as a defensive mechanism. As military action has produced more negative perceptions and grievances among the Afghan people, the logic of using public diplomacy as damage control seems to have been reinforced. Although US military operations in Afghanistan have often required a strong accompanying narrative, experts argue that it might be better not to construct a narrative that competes with the ideology of the Taliban or al Qaeda, but instead to rely on the strength of transparent debate about various values and the plurality of different international narratives.<sup>48</sup> The United States' large military footprint in Afghanistan has so far resulted in predominantly using the former type of narrative.

The Obama administration is currently negotiating with Afghanistan's President Karzai about extending American military troops' presence in Afghanistan beyond 2014. If such a residual military force means that the United States will continue to use its soldiers for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan, it may mean that American public diplomacy cannot fully detach itself from the military framework.

In general, the United States acknowledges the widespread hostility towards it and its policies, especially in the Middle East.<sup>49</sup> This hostility, which has been fuelled particularly by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also by the United States' stance on the Israeli-Palestinian issues, explains why the American public diplomacy strategy is centred more on changing perceptions and being part of the debate about the 'relationship between Islam and the West'.<sup>50</sup> Afghans with whom the author has spoken during recent years indicate that the United States' image is not always positive, and that the US support role in Afghanistan is often perceived as being related to broader interests in terms of power, economic gain and influence.

In contrast, the Netherlands has had a much lower profile in Iraq and Afghanistan, even while in charge of an important military mission in Uruzgan province between 2006 and 2010. In general, there is no widespread hostility abroad against Dutch people or Dutch assets, which means that public diplomacy is much less a defensive mechanism and more an independent vehicle for intercultural dialogue and exchange. When Afghans know something about the Netherlands, for example through relatives who live there or elsewhere in Europe, the image is generally positive. In the Afghans' perception, this positive image is rarely clouded by thoughts of possible hidden agendas or power considerations that the Netherlands may attach to its support role and presence in Afghanistan. That puts the Netherlands in a good starting position for bringing out the best in its public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the limited (human) resources and budget, whether in Kabul or at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, has left the Netherlands with a relatively small portfolio of public diplomacy activities, and sometimes limits the possibilities for achieving maximum impact.

---

48 See Aban Webb, 'Public Diplomacy: Meeting New Challenges', in *Public Diplomacy: Meeting New Challenges*, 902nd Wilton Park Conference, report of Wilton Park Conference held from 6–8 October 2008, Wilton Park, Steyning, UK, paragraph 13 on p. 6.

49 US Department of State, *Cultural Diplomacy*, p. 3.

50 US Department of State, *Cultural Diplomacy*, p. 3.

## 4. Public Security in Afghanistan after 2014: A Changing Environment

### 4.1. From Counter-insurgency to Support for Transformation

As mentioned above, the 2014 deadline for security transition offers the international community, and in particular the United States, a clear window of opportunity for starting to deploy civilian power outside the military framework that has dominated foreign policy in Afghanistan since 2001, and for public diplomacy to become a more independent force for good.

Military operational mistakes, incidents and collateral damage since 2001 have created a 'relationship gap' between the international community and the Afghan people, not only creating hostility towards foreign forces, but leading to a negative environment in which Taliban propaganda could flourish and the objectives of the international mission became even harder to achieve.<sup>51</sup> To bridge this gap, ICOS argued that the international community should win the narrative against Taliban propaganda, by effectively demonstrating that the Afghan people have a better future by aligning themselves with the international community.<sup>52</sup>

To improve the situation, the United States, and the international community in general, would need a communication strategy that goes beyond the 'hearts and minds' strategy implemented so far, and that entails a long-term commitment to public diplomacy within a non-military, civilian approach that is connected to the international community's objectives under the transformational decade: peace; stability; and development in Afghanistan. This would require shifting the US model closer to the Dutch model of public diplomacy, which currently has no links to counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism in Afghanistan and is supported by political and financial commitments to Afghanistan. For example, the Dutch Embassy in Kabul has an annual budget of only around EUR 5,000 (roughly US\$ 6,400) to support public diplomacy projects.

As the international support in Afghanistan loses most of its linkages with the ISAF framework of military stabilization and counter-insurgency, public diplomacy should similarly *transition* to become an integral part of supporting long-term political stability, economic and cultural development. Disconnecting from the military–security framework provides a great opportunity for public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan, especially as past efforts have been less successful because of the gap between expectations and the

---

51 International Council on Security and Development (ICOS), *Afghanistan*, p. 4.

52 International Council on Security and Development (ICOS), *Afghanistan*.



delivery of progress in Afghanistan, often directly caused by the troublesome security situation. However, whether public diplomacy can fully disconnect from the military–security framework depends to a large extent on how the continuation of some foreign counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations will play out in Afghanistan and the region beyond 2014, and on the success of peace negotiations, which could pave the way for a more stable security environment in which public diplomacy activities can be more effective.

#### *4.2. Towards Digital Diplomacy in the Internet and Social Media Era*

International fairs may nowadays have become outdated communication instruments for reaching a global audience.<sup>53</sup> The media landscape of the twenty-first century is very different than during the Cold War period. New media, especially internet-based media such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr and YouTube, offer far-reaching possibilities to communicate with other people, both for individuals and governments. The power of these media became clear in the uprisings across the Arab world known as the ‘Arab Spring’, where they have become an essential tool for civil society groups to voice their grievances, concerns and opinions, and to demand social change. These same tools will slowly give rise to a new form of *digital* diplomacy, which will not replace but will complement the more traditional forms of diplomacy.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the growing importance of the internet,<sup>55</sup> Afghanistan still has a long way to go before fully reaping the benefits of online media. A USAID-sponsored report in 2010 found that internet users are roughly divided in two groups: youth, especially university students who connect several times a week and mostly from internet cafés; and adults who work in organizations with an internet connection.<sup>56</sup> Among the main challenges identified in the report were the low percentage of households connected to the internet (only 1.5 per cent of the total) and the much lower rate of use among women, connected to the problem that internet use still mostly takes place in internet cafés that are often considered inappropriate for women to attend.<sup>57</sup>

Facebook and YouTube are popular in Afghanistan,<sup>58</sup> but they do not, of course, provide the only way to connect to the world. Radio and television are still much more important

---

53 Masey and Morgan, *Cold War Confrontations*, p. 412.

54 For an interesting article on digital diplomacy, see Martin Austermuhle, ‘Tweet This: Embassies Embrace Digital Diplomacy’, *The Washington Diplomat* (April 2013), pp. 8–10.

55 At the end of 2011, Afghanistan had 1.2 million internet users, an estimated 4.2 per cent of the Afghan population.

56 Altai Consulting and USAID, *Afghan Media in 2010: Synthesis Report* (October 2010), p. 108.

57 Altai Consulting and USAID, *Afghan Media in 2010*, pp. 102–103.

58 A thorough analysis of Facebook pages conducted at the end of 2011 reveals that there are hundreds of pages where Afghans share news and opinions in English, Dari and Pashtu. Many active Facebook group pages cover areas of culture (for example, poetry and literature), politics (including political parties, historic and present leaders of Afghanistan), news and sports.

communication technologies, especially in rural areas, together with the rapidly increasing use of mobile phones. A survey conducted in 2010 by the Asia Foundation found that radio is still the most accessible media for Afghans, reaching both rural areas (82 per cent) and urban areas (79 per cent).<sup>59</sup>

Whether using new or more traditional media, Afghans are increasingly connected to the world. Interestingly, as part of their counter-narrative, the Taliban insurgency even seems to incorporate the new social media in its public relations efforts. For example, a Twitter user under the name of Abdulqahar Balkhi,<sup>60</sup> who has more than 6,200 followers, is sending pro-Taliban and anti-Western tweets in English around the world.<sup>61</sup> The Taliban is also said to use the @alemarahweb Twitter account in their 'information warfare'. With far fewer boots on the ground after 2014, 'hearts and minds' can no longer be won by foreign soldiers. Part of the battle for the hearts and minds of the Afghan people could thus be won (or lost) in cyberspace. This provides an additional reason why a broader, non-military public diplomacy approach is needed, which increasingly incorporates social media as a new way to reach foreign audiences and to spread its narrative(s).

#### *4.3. Afghan Youths' Growing Interest in Western Culture*

Interviews conducted by the author in Afghanistan show that the situation of youths in Afghanistan's urban centres is rapidly changing.<sup>62</sup> A new Facebook generation exists that can be approached and tapped into by the international community through public diplomacy.<sup>63</sup> American and Western culture is growing in popularity in Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> Many Afghans watch Hollywood blockbusters such as 'Gladiator' and 'Titanic', and television series such as '24' are immensely popular. Cars in the main urban centres often have large stickers with a television series' logo on it, sometimes next to stickers of

---

59 Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul: Asia Foundation, 2010), p. 147, available online at <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistanin2010survey.pdf> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

60 It is not important whether Abdulqahar Balkhi really exists or whether he is a Taliban representative, sympathizer or fraud. What matters is that his online presence has been picked up by other (foreign) media and as such is 'part of the debate'.

61 See online at <http://twitter.com/#!/ABalkhi> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

62 See also Jorrit Kamminga, 'From Security Transition to Civilian Power: Supporting Afghan Youth after 2014', *Clingendael Policy Brief*, No. 8 (June 2012), available online at [http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2012/20120600\\_clingendael\\_policy\\_8.pdf](http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/2012/20120600_clingendael_policy_8.pdf) (last accessed on 31 March 2013); and Tim Luccaro, 'Providing Space for Positive Youth Engagement', *Peace Brief 133* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 11 September 2012). Progress is slower in conservative cities such as Jalalabad and Kandahar City and in the countryside. In addition, young men currently benefit far more than young women, for example in their ability to use new media, participate in courses or workshops, and when it comes to access to the job market.

63 See also Alexandra Zavis, 'Afghanistan's New Generation: Modern, Ambitious ... Naive?', *Los Angeles Times* (24 January 2013).

64 This observation is based on the experience of the author on the ground in Afghanistan.

Tajik hero Ahmad Shah Masoud, the Lion of the Panjshir Valley – a direct manifestation of old meets new in Afghanistan. There is even an Afghan version of the popular comedy series 'The Office', called 'The Ministry', on Tolo TV.<sup>65</sup>

Hollywood, however, is competing with Bollywood, as Indian movies and music are popular, as well as Iranian movies. When it comes to sports, cricket and soccer seem easily to defeat traditional American sports in popularity, perhaps with the exception of basketball. Many young kids in Afghanistan's major cities know the stars from the Spanish football *liga*, and the Afghan national cricket team has become a national pride in recent years, especially since winning its first Intercontinental Cup in 2010. Considering the target audience of public diplomacy, reaching out to Afghanistan's new generation is crucial.

With about 70 per cent of Afghans aged less than 25, Afghanistan is experiencing a significant youth bulge.<sup>66</sup> If the current high birth rate continues, in 2025 roughly half of a total population of 52 million Afghans (currently around 33 million) will be younger than 20.<sup>67</sup> The youth bulge represents both an opportunity and a risk. On the one hand, it means that a huge group of young Afghans has been born since 2001 with no recollection of the civil war or subsequent Taliban rule. In that sense, they could be less sensitive to the dynamics of ethnic and local power politics in Afghanistan. On the other hand, the youth bulge also means that every year around half a million young men reach military age and can decide to pick up a weapon.<sup>68</sup> Ironically, this demographic trend seems to increase the importance of public diplomacy, in the sense of offering a positive (counter-)narrative to prevent these young men from being recruited by insurgent or terrorist groups.

The focus on Afghanistan's youth is highly compatible with new ways of reaching out to them. Given the new opportunities that are provided by information and communication technologies, such a new approach will also demand a thorough assessment of how best to incorporate social media in public diplomacy in years to come. However, digital diplomacy should not replace classic forms of public diplomacy. For example, many of the young Afghans who participated in the author's field research during recent years dream of entering the Fulbright Exchange Program administered by the US Embassy in Kabul. More traditional forms of public diplomacy, especially related to education and the communication of Western ideas, are also still reaching a key audience in Afghanistan: the young Afghans who will determine Afghanistan's future course.

---

65 For a trailer with English subtitles, see online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KzQpRt7GYw> (last accessed on 31 March 2013).

66 A youth bulge occurs when at least 20 per cent of a country's population is between 15 and 24 years old, or at least 30 per cent consists of children in the 0–15 age cohort; see Gunnar Heinsohn, *Zonen grijpen de wereldmacht* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam Uitgevers, 2008), p. 23.

67 Heinsohn, *Zonen grijpen de wereldmacht*, p. 63.

68 Heinsohn, *Zonen grijpen de wereldmacht*, p. 14.

## **Conclusions**

Beyond 2014, there is a real need to rehabilitate public diplomacy in Afghanistan as a stand-alone asset of foreign policy outside of the military–security framework. As Afghanistan moves from transition to transformation, the framework conditions are ripe for such a shift. As shown above, this will partly mean a shift from the American to the Dutch approach, but with sufficient resources to strengthen these instruments of civilian power. The end of the security transition period will provide an important window of opportunity to disconnect public diplomacy from military efforts and to rehabilitate the concept within a policy that is based entirely on deploying civilian power. In addition to financial resources, it also requires political commitment to ensure that this positive form of civilian power can fill part of the vacuum left by foreign military, and to support the international community’s broader activities during the transformational decade (2015–2024).

Disconnecting public diplomacy from the military framework (2001–2014) is important, not only to transform the results of past civilian and military efforts into long-term peace, development and stability, but also to compensate for broken promises and mistakes made during the predominantly military engagement since 2001. Using the civilian power tool of public diplomacy, the international community needs to shape a positive image of (Western) norms and values that Afghans would like to be aligned with, but based on cultural sensitivity and without forcing changes upon Afghanistan. This will also mean that expectations should be managed properly. Part of the problem of international engagement with Afghanistan since 2001 has been that promises of progress were not (or could not be) kept and that foreign endeavours, for example in the fields of institution building and good governance, may not immediately be accepted or perceived as positive or desirable developments by the Afghan population.

Public diplomacy efforts need to go beyond merely deploying culture in Afghanistan to accompany development aid or military (training) missions, to serve the national interest, or to support the international community’s strategic security objectives. A genuinely two-directional approach is needed, in which the Afghan population is at least as important as the audience back home. The narrative of the public diplomacy discourse in Afghanistan should be about common values and common interests, and should convince Afghans why it is in their interest to protect these common grounds from potentially malignant influences found in Afghan society. In one sense, this means going back to the effective people-to-people public diplomacy that was part of the United States’ activities in Afghanistan during the Cold War: highlighting the importance of universal progress and development through science and technology.

In the coming years, the biggest challenges in Afghanistan may prove to be a serious decrease of political and financial commitment following the security transition process.

The United States has already announced cuts to civilian spending in Afghanistan, which may lead to personnel cuts across the board of 20 per cent.<sup>69</sup> The World Bank is expecting a general decline in civilian aid, partly because of shifting priorities and partly because of fiscal pressures and corresponding budget cuts in most donor countries.<sup>70</sup> If this also leads to less investment in public diplomacy, it may result in the tragic conclusion that public diplomacy efforts may have been better off remaining embedded within the security–military paradigm, thus reinforcing the American model discussed above. For example, embassies of countries that had substantial military or training missions in Afghanistan in recent years have generally seen their civilian budgets grow. More public diplomacy activities were thus possible while their military troops remained in Afghanistan. If the withdrawal of foreign military forces leads to a parallel withdrawal of civilian power<sup>71</sup> and funding, it could therefore turn public diplomacy efforts into symbolic empty shells.

---

69 Karen DeYoung, 'US Reducing Plans for Large Civilian Force in Post-2014 Afghanistan', *The Washington Post* (5 December 2012).

70 The World Bank, *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, May 2012), Vol. 1, Overview, p. iv.

71 For example, the British Embassy in Kabul will shrink from 120 staff to 70 staff in the run-up to the end of the transition; see Nick Hopkins, 'Departing British Find Reasons for Optimism in Afghanistan', *The Guardian* (31 March 2013).

## **Recommendations**

- 1) Disconnect public diplomacy as much as possible from the military–security framework. After 2014, a renewed public diplomacy effort should start by reassessing our narratives and examining how our cultural values can be effectively connected to an Afghan audience in a changing environment of international relations with Afghanistan. Moving away from the military–security paradigm also enables implementation of a positive public diplomacy approach that is not linked to (military) objectives of damage control or counter-narratives.
- 2) Carefully manage expectations by a) being transparent about how the international community attempts to help, b) being realistic about what can be achieved, changed and offered in Afghanistan through foreign assistance, and c) being honest and comprehensible about why it is important for Afghans to align with some of our values.
- 3) Ensure sufficient political and financial backing for public diplomacy efforts in Afghanistan beyond 2014.
- 4) Highlight common values and common interests in areas where culture overlaps, where cultural understanding can benefit both parties, and where the objectives of development and progress come together and can be mutually pursued.
- 5) Reach out to Afghan youth through investments in online and traditional media, both in terms of creating new content (for example, by looking at how social media, online games and interactive software can be effectively used as public diplomacy tools), but also in terms of transmission technology and the expansion of media networks throughout Afghanistan.
- 6) Consider young women and Afghan youth in more conservative cities and rural areas as the main target audiences of public diplomacy. Focusing on conservative cities (for example, Jalalabad and Kandahar City) and rural areas where modernization takes more time is challenging, but it is precisely in those areas where the added value of public diplomacy is highest.

# Public Diplomacy in Afghanistan beyond the 2014 Transition: *Lessons from the United States and the Netherlands*

The end of the security transition process in Afghanistan in 2014 marks the need to rethink foreign public diplomacy efforts in the country. As Afghanistan is entering its 'transformational decade', there is a unique opportunity to disconnect public diplomacy from the military–security paradigm that has dominated international relations with Afghanistan since 2001. With a much more limited foreign military presence on the ground, public diplomacy can be considerably more than a strategy to win hearts and minds. Comparing the experiences of the United States and the Netherlands, the more sizeable American 'model' of public diplomacy can be considered a more defensive mechanism of foreign policy, linked to the military and counter-insurgency activities in Afghanistan, and to the broader ideological objective of being part of the debate on the relationship between 'Islam and the West'. In contrast, the Dutch 'model' shows a limited public security effort that incorporates cultural activities and training as an extension of foreign policy. This model is less ideological and is not directly connected to the military conflict in Afghanistan. It is a more indirect form of supporting foreign policy objectives. What is needed beyond 2014 is an approach that is disconnected from the current military framework, that departs from the more modest and non-military Dutch model, but that includes the broader political and especially financial commitment of the American model.

About the author

**Jorrit Kamminga** is a visiting research fellow

Colophon

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' is an independent institute for research, training and public information on international affairs. It publishes the results of its own projects and the monthly *Internationale Spectator* and offers a broad range of courses and conferences covering a wide variety of international issues.



**Clingendael**

Netherlands Institute of International Relations