



## **The new public diplomacy and Afghanistan**

An edited and expanded version of a talk given at the Strategic Communications, Public Diplomacy and Afghanistan Seminar, hosted by the Advanced Research and Assessment Group (ARAG) at the UK Defence Academy, 4 June 2008

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## Introduction

Let me start by thanking ARAG's [Steve Tatham](#) for his kind invitation to speak today at the Defence Academy. I have admired Steve's work since seeing him present with [Dave Sloggett](#) at the Foreign Office. For those of you who have not read Steve's book – [Losing Arab Hearts and Minds](#) – I strongly recommend it.

In his work, Steve advances a number of core arguments. These include the need for Western governments to recognise that:

- Their ability to operate effectively in the global information environment is now of over-riding, and possibly paramount, importance.
- The operating challenges they face in this environment are huge – given that it is simultaneously interconnected but highly differentiated, composed of localised and distinctive clusters.

Like Steve, I believe our starting point has to be an honest assessment of how far governments are from being able to exert influence in a way that advances their long-term goals. In fact, at present, if we look at our most pressing international challenges, we repeatedly see governments act in ways that push solutions ever further from reach.

## What's going wrong?

I believe there are three key interlocking problems:

- A lack of *understanding*. While there are individuals and teams within governments who are conducting pioneering work in areas such as influence operations, strategic communications, and public diplomacy, this has yet to go mainstream and become a new approach. Governments lack a robust theory of influence – and it shows.
- A lack of *interoperability*. Without a common understanding, language, and concepts, it is impossible for different organisations to work together – a pressing problem in a world where problems are generally be solved by coalitions of state and non-state actors.
- A lack of understanding and interoperability translates into persistent strategic and tactical failings. Because there is no over-arching strategy, short-term actions inevitably undercut longer-term objectives and interests. Seamless challenges, meanwhile, are artificially divided by sector or geography. And even when there is a clear and agreed strategy, our toolbox for achieving change is outmoded, under-resourced, and poorly implemented. As an earlier speaker put it, “we all know it's not working.”

The starting point for change is to:

- Accept that influence is now core currency for all arms of international relations – foreign policy, development assistance, and military operations.
- Build a common language and joint concepts across these disciplines – not just at a national level, but internationally, in order to allow the effective operation of multinational, multi-sectoral coalitions and networks.

However, the barriers to change are sizeable, while the knowledge to surmount them is fragmented across sectors and disciplines. The first battle for ‘hearts and minds’ therefore needs to be won in our own organisations – within governments, between governments, and between governments and a range of non-governmental organisations.

### **On the agenda**

Part of the answer, I believe, lies in work being done by those developing a new agenda for public diplomacy.

In my talk today, I plan to:

- Outline the new public diplomacy agenda and how it differs from what came before.
- Talk briefly about the goals that we can expect the new public diplomacy to deliver, and outline a typology of strategies for achieving them.
- Reflect on the implications for Afghanistan – looking at the strategic communications and influencing agenda from the point of view of audiences inside and outside the country.

This talk is based on:

- My work for the Foreign Office, British Council and Department for International Development, where I have been one of many voices advocating a more systematic approach to influence and communication.
- Research conducted for Demos, where I run a [programme](#) on the new public diplomacy, with Alex Evans who is visiting fellow at New York University’s Center on International Co-operation.

Our research is summarised in a chapter that Alex and I have contributed to a book edited by [Jim Murphy](#), Minister of State at the FCO. This will be published by the Foreign Office in the next month or so. Our Demos pamphlet will be published in the autumn.

I should, of course, emphasize that I am not an Afghanistan expert, though I have been working on public diplomacy in countries including Pakistan, Nigeria and Jordan. Steve has asked me here today to talk about the wider picture – hopefully this will provide useful input for the rest of the seminar’s discussions.

### **The new public diplomacy**

So what do we mean by ‘the new public diplomacy’?

Well, first it’s worth first distinguishing it from old-style public diplomacy, which was:

- Seen as a tool for massaging a country’s image and strengthening its brand.
- Essentially a bilateral pursuit – the UK was in competition with other countries to project its image onto target audiences.
- Not core business – public diplomats have typically sat at the end of the production line, far from the centre where policy is made and implemented.

The pressure to shift from this paradigm has come from many directions. Foreign policy is now dominated by global issues – climate change and other scarcity issues; the instability of global systems; terrorism; failing states, and so on.

Meanwhile, we live in a world where there are growing numbers of people, connected to one another in growing numbers of ways. The result is that:

- The world faces an expanding number of problems that are hard to describe and where no single agency, government or area of expertise has the whole picture.
- Solutions cannot simply be plucked off the shelf and implemented. They must be co-created by coalitions within and between governments, and between governments and a panoply of non-governmental groups.

By definition, then, if governments are to deal effectively with the key foreign policy challenges of our age, they must engage in a new form of public diplomacy – one that combines the creation of knowledge (both factual and narrative) with an ability to mobilise networks to achieve concrete change.

### **Goals for a new public diplomacy**

So what can we expect the new public diplomacy to achieve?

[Alex Evans](#) and I have identified three different types of *goal* that help clarify the public diplomacy mission – and the ambition that is needed to execute this mission effectively.

- First, public diplomacy is about building *shared awareness* – a common understanding of an issue around which a coalition can coalesce.

- Shared awareness should then lead to a *shared platform*. The new public diplomacy is usually – and perhaps invariably – a multilateral pursuit. The challenge is to use a compelling vision, or palette of solutions, to gather a transnational network together and motivate it to campaign for change.
- The end point in the process lies in institutionalizing this network's beliefs, thinking and structures into a framework for managing a particular problem. We think of this as a *shared operating system* for managing a risk.

These goals force governments to look at the big picture and develop ambitious and over-arching programmes. The aim is not to achieve incremental change, but rather to create the context that allows for change to happen, construct the alliances needed to deliver it, and use these alliances to implement a full-term solution.

### Public diplomacy strategies

It is helpful to think of four distinct ways in which these goals can be achieved. Together, they form a typology of generic influencing strategies.

- First, there are *engagement* strategies which are public diplomacy's bread and butter. For most international challenges, we are either far from knowing how to implement a solution, unable to agree on which solution to implement, or simply unable to summon up sufficient political will for change. Public diplomats must therefore find multiple ways to initiate, feed and broaden a conversation – and sustain it until a tipping point is reached that will allow for a set of actions to be taken.
- *Shaping* strategies are less open and consensual. They are used when a broad range of actors are engaged in an issue, but the conversation is stuck at some point short of resolution. Then, the aim of public diplomacy is to focus the conversation and drive it towards a consensus that can support action. By reframing the debate, the public diplomat aims to deliver progress towards a desired set of policy outcomes.
- The third type of strategy – *disruptive* strategies – are employed when a government wants to confront an existing consensus and create a more favourable battleground. This takes considerable effort and a willingness to attack or marginalize opposing interests. Disruption demands discipline and tolerance for risk. It is not easy to force a change in the rules of the game, especially from a position in the middle of play.
- Finally, we reach *destructive* strategies, which are deployed against declared adversaries. They are used only when further debate is not seen as an option, and the aim of public diplomacy at this point is to deny an opponent space, sow dissent, and encourage defection from his ranks. This is public diplomacy as propaganda or psyops. Deceptive tactics can be used to confuse and undermine

the adversary. Alternatively, in some cases public diplomacy in this context takes the form of ignoring, belittling or marginalizing; a refusal to accept a group's legitimacy.

That then is a brief description of the strategic framework that we are developing for public diplomacy. It has two components:

- Goals – which force us to start from a clear understanding of the type of change we need to achieve.
- The strategies themselves – which clarify that public diplomacy is a very different *type* of activity, depending on the ends at which it is directed.

Let me now move on to draw out some implications from this model for Afghanistan.

### **Support for the Afghan mission**

First, it is clear that international support for the mission has declined substantially, a trend [accepted](#) by General Sir John McColl, NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe when he spoke to the Netherlands Atlantic Association last month. According to [Sean Kay](#), [speaking](#) last year:

“Public opinion in both Canada and the Netherlands, and in fact throughout the NATO countries, has turned sour on the war in Afghanistan. Even in the United States, there was a poll out this summer that showed that 42 percent of the American public wanted to get out of Afghanistan as soon as possible. So public support for this engagement, especially the combat side of it, is dropping.”

There are two reasons for this. The first – the decision to invade Iraq – I'd like to put to one side. Instead, I think it's worth focusing on the problem of the credibility of the mission, which saw a familiar pattern of a rush to hail success, followed by a series of setbacks, and the resulting need for a reassessment and fresh start.

In 2004, President Bush [promised](#) that Afghanistan would never again “be abandoned to terrorists and killers.” The “world and the United States” would stand with Afghanistan as “partners in their quest for peace and prosperity and stability and democracy.”

Reviewing progress in the country, he hailed the destruction of the Taliban, with the US-led coalition having little more to do than to “hunt down the remnants and holdouts.” The “free world” had achieved its “first victory on the war on terror”. Standing beside President Karzai, he promised that “together we will maintain the peace, secure Afghanistan's borders and deny terrorists any foothold in that country.”

However, the US President's declaration of ‘mission accomplished’ was as premature as [the one](#) in Iraq. In 2005, there was a [sudden outbreak](#) of suicide

bombings, with seventeen attacks in that year and 123 in the next. According to [Atiq Sarwari and Robert Crews](#):

“In 2004 and especially 2005, a wide range of grievances against the Kabul government and its international backers mobilized a growing number of Afghans in the provinces...In 2005 alone, fighting claimed some fifteen hundred Afghan lives. For American troops, Afghanistan was more dangerous than Iraq...For aid workers and civilians, Afghanistan was more hazardous than comparable postwar environments in Liberia, Angola and elsewhere.”

A peaceful and secure Afghanistan suddenly seemed far away.

### **State-building in crisis**

These setbacks were not simply security ones. In 2004, President Bush hailed Afghanistan's rapid social, economic and human development, focusing in particular on areas like education and women's rights. In the first half of 2006, however:

“Militants launched some two hundred attacks on schools in twenty-seven provinces, killing forty-one people – including students – attached to them. Reports of the burning of girls' schools – and even the stoning of alleged adulterers – have also emerged from territories never under Taliban rule.”

Moreover, there is a pervasive sense that the international community arrived in Afghanistan with little idea of how to build a stronger state, a sentiment captured by Ashraf Ghani, the country's Finance Minister from 2002 to 2004, in a [book on state-building](#) written with Clare Lockhart.

“We have reached the limits to the use of force, and neither a war of necessity in Afghanistan nor a war of choice in Iraq has yet succeeded,” they write. “From Sudan and Somalia to Nepal, East Timor and Kosovo, the expenditure of tens of billions of dollars over half a century has resulted only in disenchantment and mutual recrimination without many significant breakthroughs in wealth creation.”

Ghani and Lockhart are part of a chorus of voices that underlines the critical importance of state-building, while at the same time questioning whether our current investment and methodologies are up to the task. Paddy Ashdown [was highly critical](#) in an article he wrote for the Guardian in the middle of last year:

“On civilian reconstruction, the situation is worse still. There is no effective coordination. Individual nations' obsession with their own bilateral plans produce duplication, waste and confusion...”

We are putting 1/25th the amount of soldiers and 1/50th the amount of aid per head of population into Afghanistan than we put into Bosnia and Kosovo. That is less in terms of resources than has ever been put into a successful post-conflict stabilisation and reconstruction effort.”

The result of this has been:

- A loss of confidence in the West's ability to intervene militarily in weak or failing states – this loss of confidence is in my opinion both understandable and predictable. Western publics are right to have their doubts.
- The related realisation that the real problems come not in the conflict phase of one of the new wars, but in reconstruction as the West attempts to contribute to building effective, accountable and legitimate states.
- The understanding that this problem is especially pervasive in post-conflict zones and, most of all, in the wake of those conflicts where Western armies can be portrayed as an 'occupying force'.
- A resulting unwillingness to accept the sheer amount of time need to complete a mission of this kind successfully – and its cost in lives and resources.

As a result, there are real doubts about our ability to stick to the task in Afghanistan and, even if we stick to it, to accomplish it. These doubts risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Brigadier Ed Butler [put it](#):

“The Taliban know that domestic Western support for this war could well go the same way as Iraq. Five years to them is nothing, never mind the thirty years some people are talking about. That's what will lose this campaign in the end.”

### **Applying principles from the New Public Diplomacy**

NATO is of course aware of the problem posed to it by this loss of confidence – but it tends to treat the problem as one that it can 'communicate away'.

In a recent publication, it [celebrates](#) the fifth anniversary of its presence in Afghanistan:

“Set against the devastating effect of decades of conflict, these five years have witnessed substantial progress in all spheres of Afghan life – from a reasonably stable security situation in most of the country to a massive increase in the number of health clinics and children in schools.”

Stefanie Babst, its Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, meanwhile, has [underlined](#) NATO's determination to communicate why its operation is “still very, very important... to communicate this to our national publics and particularly to our parliamentarians and national decision makers.” The emphasis is on persuading audiences, often sceptical ones, “what a difference ISAF has, in fact, made.”

However, given the record of past failures, it doesn't seem enough to project a 'success narrative' onto a public that have plentiful reasons to be sceptical of ISAF

claims. Nor is this a problem that can be tackled country-by-country, when the defining characteristic of conflict in the modern world is that our battles are asymmetric ones and must be fought in coalition with other states.

The challenge, then, is not to project simplistic messages but to:

- Engage audiences – especially opinion formers – in a substantive and open-ended debate about how Western countries can help stabilise and strengthen failing states.
- Animate this conversation across multiple centres, ensuring that it is not driven solely from NATO headquarters, but reaches across networks and achieves a self-sustaining momentum.
- Use it to develop a consensus about NATO's ongoing role, and the role of other international alliances, creating the interoperability that will enable nations to work together to tackle shared problems.

### Lessons from COIN

There is plenty of material for this conversation, which provides an opportunity to take the new counterinsurgency thinking out to a wider audience, while extending it beyond its current limitations.

As John Nagl has admitted in his preface to the US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency field manual ([first released](#) in 2006, but [published](#) by the University of Chicago Press in 2007):

“The sad fact is that when an insurgency began in Iraq in the late summer of 2003, the [American] Army was unprepared to fight it...It was...unprepared for an enemy who understood that it could not hope to defeat the US Army on a conventional battlefield, and who therefore chose to wage war against America from the shadows.”

Similar lessons have been, and are being, learned in Afghanistan where an increasingly broad view of the application of power is being taken. In the words of the US field manual, this is a conflict where success for either insurgent or counter-insurgent rests on getting “the people to accept its governance or authority as legitimate.”

Unfortunately, this has been an asymmetric conflict, but with the asymmetry favouring the insurgent, and not the governing authority. We are only ever aware of those insurgencies that gain traction and have sufficient skill to bring together political, diplomatic, informational, military and economic tools into an effective challenge to authority. This evolutionary dynamic is often under-appreciated. Indeed, successful interdiction of ‘weak’ challenges can merely increase the selection pressure that allows a vigorous and dynamic threat to emerge.

In response, therefore, a counter-insurgency operation must find a way of enabling citizens to take charge of their own affairs, while encouraging them to accept their government's rule. The end point, in other words, is a new social contract between citizen and government. This is a tough task and requires a quite different approach and skill set if it is to succeed.

### **New directions for COIN**

Let us look briefly at some of the many sources that have informed the new approach to counter-insurgency. In them we see:

- *An understanding that the role of the state is changing* and that this “crisis of legitimacy of the state” demands “not a military but a political, social and moral revolution” (quotes are from the unofficial field manual on 4<sup>th</sup> generation warfare produced by [William Lind](#) and his colleagues. The manual was first published in 2005 and is now in its [fourth edition](#).)
- *Renewed attention to the nature of complex adaptive systems*, attention that has led David Kilcullen to [his insight](#) that combating a threat that attempts to “allow disparate groups to function in an aggregated fashion across intercontinental distances” requires “a strategy of disaggregation (de-linking or dismantling) to prevent the dispersed and disparate elements of the jihad movement from functioning as a global system.”
- *A greater focus on culture and narrative*. As General Petraeus [has put it](#): “Knowledge of the cultural terrain can be as important as, and sometimes even more important than, the knowledge of the geographical terrain. This observation acknowledges that the people are, in many respects, the decisive terrain, and that we must study that terrain in the same way that we have always studied the geographical terrain.”

Many, however, believe that these insights have not been taken far enough into the mainstream. As Daniel Korsi [has argued](#) in his critique of what he dubs the ‘neo-COINs’, military power cannot defeat a localised insurgency on its own. More civilian input is desperately needed.

“Despite trying for three years,” he writes, “neither the US nor Britain has been able to recruit, train and deploy the necessary number of civilians required in places like Iraq and Afghanistan”

Broadening the COIN debate offers an opportunity to correct the current military bias – a bias that is understandable given the energy that military thinkers have put into exploring the causes of failure in Iraq and Afghanistan, but that will ultimately block the full realisation of the changes they have begun to describe.

The challenge is to:

- Build a discourse about state building, to include a clearer understanding of how states function, what they deliver and how institutions can be developed.
- Use this 'unified framework', in Ghani and Lockhart's phrase, to bring together all elements of the international community – development, political and military.
- Embed Afghanistan in a bigger regional picture – avoiding the tendency to see the country in isolation or, worse, allow countries contributing troops to focus only on those parts of the country where they have a troop presence.

### **The Afghan information environment**

At the same time, of course, we urgently need to build on the work of analysts like Steve Tatham and other colleagues in order to develop a greater understanding of how to exert influence within Afghanistan.

Let me make a couple of observations about the task.

First of all, it is important to constantly be aware of the danger of planning for a static communications environment. This is especially true of Afghanistan, where the isolation of the Taliban years has given way to rapid communications revolution.

Consider:

- The penetration of mobile phones – up from [zero to 10%](#) in just a few years – is clearly a big deal. The Taliban's ambivalent attitude to the mobile phone network is also notable. As Barney Rubin [puts it](#), "Today the Taliban can't seem to get off the mobile phone."
- The [explosion](#) of Afghan media – radio, print and, to a lesser extent, television and internet – which is largely [outside](#) government control, although non-state actors have often proved a [repressive force](#). The previously insular Taliban has become an increasingly sophisticated communicator, learning from Al Qaeda's media production arm, All-Sahab, as Steve Tatham has documented.
- The much-vaunted investment in road building which, if you believe [its cheerleaders](#), is increasing security, bringing economic development, and helping create a sense of national community. Like mobiles, I suspect a stronger road network is going to have good and bad consequences – after all, controlling the roads was a core part of the original Taliban's mythology.

Together, we can expect these developments to have a significant, and unpredictable, impact on Afghan society. This poses a significant challenge to the NATO coalition which has faced the following problems in Afghanistan:

- An inability to develop and implement an effective influencing agenda – a result of the low priority given to communication and a lack of investment in information operations.
- The fragmentation that results from NATO's loose coalition structure and that makes consistency incredibly difficult to achieve – a serious handicap when attempting to exert influence.
- Over-reliance on kinetic operations, which send out signals the opposite to those that are in NATO's long-term interests, increasing the sense of a country under occupation and awakening dangerous emotions in Afghan citizens, such as [humiliation and shame](#).

### **The mismatch**

The result is a mismatch.

On the one hand, an increasingly demanding, pervasive and fluid information environment and a range of adversaries that are becoming more sophisticated communicators. On the other, a NATO alliance that will need to make huge strides if it is to catch up.

Within this environment, of course, the Taliban is rapidly transforming itself – with many observers preferring to dub the resultant organisation the 'neo-Taliban'. Unsurprisingly, this organisation is flatter and more loosely structured than before. [According](#) to Amin Tarzi:

“Unlike in the initial stages of the resistance, the international community and the Afghan government have come to appreciate the complexity of the insurgent groups and their networks of support. No longer it is just a resurrection of the Taliban regime. They recognize it as multidimensional and an uncoordinated or quasi-coordinated alliance of forces.”

The new organisation's structure uses an informal franchise model. According to [Shahid Afsar, Chris Samples, and Thomas Wood](#):

“A small militant group begins calling itself 'the local Taliban.' It gains some form of recognition from the central Taliban hierarchy in return for its support and cooperation. The new cell supports Taliban grand strategy, but retains local freedom of action. This modus operandi preserves tribal loyalties and territorial boundaries.”

The structure is complemented by cross-cutting 'departments' with functional specialisms in areas such as training, suicide operations, and, of course, media and communications.

Observers believe that the neo-Taliban is pursuing a plan for four broad phases:

- Mobilize religious opinion in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Build a clearer sense of grievance amongst Pashtuns.
- Hollow out the Afghan state, while increasing confidence in the Taliban as an alternative source of services and authority.
- Prepare for takeover once Western patience has been exhausted and the NATO coalition (or any successor) withdraws.

What is clear about these are about influence rather than force. Or more to the point, force is in the service of influence. As Afshar and colleagues put it, “The influence the Taliban exerts can also be seen in the recent rift between the US and its coalition partners over shared burdens in Afghanistan. With their patient tactics, the Taliban are testing the national wills of coalition states and the strength of the alliance as the mission in Afghanistan lengthens.”

### **Gaining and ceding control**

So how should Western countries respond? Without going into too much detail, let me offer three thoughts.

*First, the over-arching direction of all NATO action should be to extend the shadow of the future.* The phrase is taken from Robert Axelrod’s seminal work on the [evolution of cooperation](#) – and reflects a standard finding from game theory. Co-operative and consensual solutions are only possible when players have a long-term stake in the system in which they are involved.

As Axelrod puts it:

“What makes it possible for cooperation to emerge is the fact that players might meet again. This possibility means that the choices made today not only determine the outcome of this move, but can also influence the later choice of players. The future can therefore cast a shadow back upon the present and thereby affect the current situation.”

This means being prepared to fuel the debate within Afghanistan about the country’s long-term direction, while fostering as many forums – international, national and local – for developing plans to tackle the country’s challenges. Instead of trying to dampen down controversy, communicators should be prepared to steer into it. In a society that has sufficient stresses to support armed conflict, an authentic debate about the future will never be polite, neat, or uncontentious.

*Second, the international community needs to invest in shared resources that will help inform (and even regulate) this debate.* At present, considerable resources are

invested in research and especially in the collection of data and evidence. But this information tends to be held privately, leading to overlap, insufficient analysis, and the inability to track movement over time.

A greater dedication to an 'open source' ethos is therefore needed – pooling resources and investing them in more ambitious and longer-lasting attempts to understand Afghanistan at a time where the country is changing rapidly, and where there may be quite unexpected developments over the coming years.

Open source implies a loss of control – and this should be embraced. Indeed, my third point is that through its influencing work, *the international community should be deliberately attempting to cede control in order to gain control*. This means:

- Copying the example of modern social movements (including, of course, the neo-Taliban) that prosper because they lower barriers to entry, and build flatter and more inclusive networks. This ethos is of course deeply unsettling for hierarchical organisations.
- Attempting to move systematically to a position where the international community enables communication as much as it communicates directly itself. As Nicholas Lunt, the former ISAF spokesman, [has argued](#): “Should not the effort and energy that goes into building [indigenous] ‘kinetic’ capacity be matched by the effort directed at strategic communications capacity?”

## Conclusions

In conclusion, let me summarise the core argument that I have made for audiences outside and inside Afghanistan.

Outside Afghanistan:

- I have emphasized the need for a broad debate about how we can strengthen failing states and address the problems characteristic to conflict and post-conflict zones. The aim should be to create *shared awareness* about what can and cannot be accomplished in the face of state failure.
- This debate should clear the way for the development of a more effective *shared platform* – one that can bring together military, diplomatic and developmental actors, who can act in a concerted way to deliver change.
- Strategically, the dominant approach should be one of *engagement* – starting from an honest acknowledgement that we do not have the solutions and that real work is needed if they are to be created and implemented across a broad and disparate coalition.
- The communication agenda is therefore not about *shaping*, which implies that the answer already exists and needs to be promoted to 'external' audiences. As I

have argued, the first battle is for *our* hearts and minds, working for change within the organisations that we most directly influence and control.

- The end point would be a *shared operating system* across NATO and similar multinational alliances, ensuring that we respond more effectively to future Afghanistans.

Inside Afghanistan:

- I have argued that the role of the public diplomacy and influence operations is to *extend the shadow of the future*, by investing in the shared resources that will feed the debate about the future of the society. This requires a loss of control and an openness to criticism, not a one-sided attempt to present in a favourable light what Western countries are trying to achieve.
- Again, the emphasis is on building shared awareness and platforms – but with Western countries placed in a facilitative role. They should be constantly looking for other interlocutors to take a starring role.
- So, again, strategically, the emphasis is on *engagement* and enabling others to *shape* new options and approaches.
- This is not to denigrate other strategic approaches. Clearly, more disruptive (and even destructive) forms of communication will be needed in conflict zones, but we should be aware of their limits, and of the temptation they bring. In their own way, these approaches are more ‘kinetic’. They offer the consolation of being seen to be more vigorous, even when they offer little more than the illusion of greater control.

My perspective comes from developments in the field of public diplomacy – and especially as public diplomacy is being practiced in countries such as the UK and Canada. However, it has also been written from the assumption that similar developments are taking place within both military and development circles – and that there is potential for these three fields to coalesce around a ‘theory of influence’.

What we need is a new approach that shakes up the current verities about how we go about influencing others to change. This will require profound organisational changes. As Daryl Copeland, author of the forthcoming book *Guerrilla Diplomacy*, [has argued](#):

“Communication in its hard and soft forms is [now] seen as a key strategic asset that may determine the outcome of conflicts...The recognition that information is fungible...raises fundamental questions about the use of power in contemporary conflicts and the respective roles of defence ministries and foreign ministries, and, within foreign ministries, about the role of the political office in the field...”

The traditional division of labour between the military and the foreign ministry in managing the information space must now be rethought in an era in which most conflicts stem from cultural, religious and ethnic differences.”

To this I would add two things. First, the need to include a perspective from international development. And second, to recognise that convergence between diplomacy, development and the military is clearly needed, but if this convergence is happening, the process is piecemeal and happening far too slowly.

That’s why we need public diplomacy about public diplomacy, strategic communication about the role of strategic communications, and information operations to sew together a new consensus about what the deployment of influence can achieve.

### **Further reading**

- [Technology and public diplomacy](#) – Speech by David Steven to the University of Westminster Symposium on Transformational Public Diplomacy (30 April 2008).
- [Shooting the Rapids: multilateralism and global risks](#) - Paper by Alex Evans and David Steven, presented to heads of state at the Progressive Governance Summit (April 2008).
- [Evaluation and the new public diplomacy](#) – Talk given by David Steven at the Wilton Park conference: [The Future of Public Diplomacy](#) (March 2007)
- For ongoing discussion of the issues raised in this paper: [Global Dashboard](#)