

**Annex 6:
"Jaw-Jaw not War-War"**

Workshop in Dubai, 20th - 21st March 2008

“Jaw-Jaw not War-War”

Workshop in Dubai, 20th - 21st March 2008

Summary of discussions

Twenty-four participants (email addresses attached, Annexe 1) were invited to review the research that MSS and partners are undertaking as part of a DfID funded initiative to support conflict transformation in southern Afghanistan. Regrettably, four Afghan passport holders could not attend because of visa difficulties.

The object, James Fennell of DfID explained, was not to eliminate conflict, it was to isolate popular support from the current conflict. To do this, more people need to participate in the political process and have a voice in challenging violent rhetoric. The government needs to accept public criticism and to deliver on agreements made with its people.

Communication plays a key role in promoting dialogue and giving people voice, and the Media Support Solutions (MSS) research is aimed at understanding better how people process and use information. This work includes mapping media channels accessed by people in the south of the country, and surveying the media consumers on how they use different media ranging from radio and TV to mobile phones and the internet. It also examines how public opinion is influenced in the south of the country, as well as in the Federally Administered Territories of NWFP and Baluchistan in neighbouring Pakistan, and amongst the Pashtun diaspora in Dubai. Dr Akbar and Leo Metcalf of MSS and Masood Karokhail of the Tribal Liaison office (TLO) gave brief overviews of the research undertaken. Draft reports were distributed, (apart from the TLO work) whose initial findings indicate that:

- Tribal leaders' role is diminishing in the provinces of Kandahar, Helmand and Zabul in favour of the younger insurgency commanders and the younger pro-insurgency mullahs.
- There is considerable intimidation resulting in fear of the insurgents rather than enthusiastic support for the insurgency.
- A key message of this research is that young men are a key target audience for a future communications initiative.

The Dubai meeting considered how this research could best be implemented in Afghanistan given the current conflict. Although there are clear lessons for the way in which ISAF communicates - and indeed conducts the war - the brief was not to recommend changes, but to lead “by example” - through developing communications initiatives which might influence the military at a later date. The meeting considered how communications could be improved by ISAF and the GoA, and how the insurgents' own propaganda could best be countered. There was broad consensus on the following issues:

- Know your audience and communicate in a way they understand in a culturally and religiously appropriate way
- “de-brand” the Taleban, refer to them in more neutral terminology so that they are not demonised; this will help with the process of bringing moderate Taleban into the peace process, which is being increasingly supported.

"Jaw-Jaw not War-War"

- Be more equal – allowing all sides media airtime
- Communication must have substantive basis in reality - it needs to resonate with the daily experiences of the target populations
- Communication needs to be backed by action from GoA and/ or ISAF
- Rapid media response to correct/dampen false rumour
- Don't boost unrealistic expectations with promises of short-term handouts
- Need to hire and train provincial government spokesmen (a medium term plan)
- Media need to be careful about use of the term "Taleban"; many groups are included under this umbrella
- Allow people to express dissent as an alternative to violence; this could be difficult in the run up to an election
- Giving people constructive choices - not telling them how much help the international community is giving
- Don't limit the target audience to Pashtuns.
- Communication is two way, and can be done through actions - building a road is communication, we don't need to shout about it
- danger of being lectured by the media because of a patronising attitude by broadcasters - trying to "educate" locals with academic language. Local, colloquial language is very important to local communities
- Accessibility of ISAF spokespersons with Pashto language skills 24/7; have longer term communications staff - create a relationship of trust
- Educate government on use of open media, and support media to promote dialogue between GoA and the Afghan public
- More training of ANA / ANP - communicate intensively using Afghan faces (less emphasis on foreigners - more on local solutions to counter the Taleban propaganda).
- GoA freedom of action in dealing with the "Taleban" is constrained by its parliamentary opposition, their need to keep the Northern Alliance etc onside

A TLO case study from Afghanistan on communications issues surrounding the building a road linking Paktia to Khost pointed up some key problems:

- lack of central GoA government visibility on the ground
- lack of understanding by the GoA and the international community about changed nature of local tribal structures

- dangers of PRTs and UNAMA becoming involved with local conflict resolution, language issues, they risk becoming a target of one or other side in the dispute

This case study has resonance with the broader conflict in the South, in particular the lack of knowledge in Kabul of local conflict resolution mechanisms, which is not helped by lack of interest and understanding by the Afghan media; many senior officials in Kabul are "ignorant of their own country", according to one participant. This results in few people understanding the complexity of the conflict and the fact that the "Taliban" are only one part of the problem.

A difficulty is the traditional weakness of the Afghan state, with the most durable structures being the most local - those of the extended family. One way forward is for the state to strengthen its authority through an alliance with non-state institutions.

In the light of all this, participants were asked finally to come up with a series of workable communications initiatives to enhance peace-building at the national/ international, regional and local level. After applying a "barriers and facilitators" test to identify what activities are "do-able" the groups then prioritised the most workable of these ideas. They are summarised in the attached table (Annexe 2).

The workshop ended with James Fennell explaining DfID's thinking about how the communications strategy could be rolled out in the context of other activities. It would be complementary to the work of the Independent Department of Local Government (IDLG) and its District Shura initiative; strengthening Afghan civil society is also a priority. The activities would consist of two "dialogue" initiatives to provide ongoing research and analysis, as well as capacity building and support to local peace-building initiatives. Communications would dovetail with these initiatives in Afghanistan, and would focus also on the Pashtun diaspora in Baluchistan, and also possibly in the UAE. Challenges include achieving "buy-in" from the GoA and the international community, and effective coordination at the regional and local levels.

Gordon Adam
Media Support Solutions
April 1st 2008