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## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN MODERN CONFLICTS : AFGANISTAN

*Strategic communication is an essential aspect in managing modern armed conflict. Through the analysis of the war in Afghanistan (2001-2011), this study aims to investigate if we are faced with a radical transformation of previous approaches or a change in the culture of its operations. The change made by the General Stanley McChrystal, upon taking control of the supreme command of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) operations, in June 2009, represents a development that had already been initiated by general Petraeus in Iraq. The tactics adopted before by France in Algeria in turn inspired these. In November 2010, NATO included this new method of dealing with peace operations as a new Strategic Concept, as part of its Comprehensive Approach. To conclude, this paper discusses the various definitions of strategic communication and proposes a revised definition of this concept*

*Strategic communication, StratCom, Afghanistan, media, conflicts, Comprehensive Approach, Peace operations, insurgency.*

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN MODERN CONFLICTS: AFGANISTAN

### 1. New wars and communication

The first time that the concept new wars appeared was during the Gulf War of 1991. The novelty of that conflict brought about technological and electronic advances that United States launched like: guided bombs, targeting of objectives via GPS, etc. At any rate these are technological advances. Then there was much talk of propaganda and use of information to achieve military objectives. What is certain is that this is far from being in itself a novelty.

Since the existence of war, information and propaganda are essential elements of its development. Four hundred years before our era, Sun Tzu stated, “war is the art of fooling”.<sup>1</sup> Cesar magnified his victories in the *Gallic Wars*. Verdi’s opera “*Don Carlo*” based on the poem of Schiller did more for the image and the black legend of Spain’s Philip II than all the subsequent studies on Cesar. In the First World War, propaganda is already part and parcel of a systematic activity.<sup>2</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, the theoretician of war antonomasia, with his posthumous work created a school among all high command, which would play lead roles of the two world wars. He stated in his great treatise that “a large part of the information that is received in a war is contradictory, an even larger part of which is false and by far the largest portion is subject to considerable uncertainty.”<sup>3</sup> War has evolved into an all-encompassing dynamism, almost uncontrollable, based on the last consequences on the military genius of their leaders. Hence the importance given to the training of the military high commands, in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.

What was the Gulf War the first one? The evolution of the concept until today does not seem to have been that way. Mary Kaldor establishes the concept of new wars as a by-product of internal conflicts in the Balkans and Africa. She warned changes in the following: the motivations, these are transformed from ideology to that of seeking

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1 SUNZI. *El arte de la guerra* (3ª edición). Madrid: Trotta, 2003, p. 108.

2 PIZARROSO QUINTERO, A. *Nuevas guerras, vieja propaganda (de Vietnam a Irak)*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2005, p. 31.

3 CLAUSEWITZ, C. *De la guerra* (unabridged version). Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2005, p. 69

power or enrichment. These groups in question, are no longer States, but are determined by race, religion or territory; as well as the dynamics, which becomes global, thanks to its media projection <sup>4</sup>

Michael Ignatieff in his book on the war of Kosovo released eight years later, claims, similarly that the war in 1991 was in fact “the last of the old wars”:

*It mobilized a huge ground force and the vast logistical support necessary to sustain it. Also it was fought for the classical reason to revert, a clear example of, territorial aggression on a member State of the United Nations* <sup>5</sup>

The new wars have limited the geographical scope of its operations and theater; however, its psychological scope has now a global range, which is developing at an increasing speed. The Normandy invasion or any other Second World War operation, would come to the knowledge of the US public in the just two or three days after its occurrence. When New York on Fifth Avenue was celebrating the invasion with clenched fists, advancing Allied troops in the north of France already knew several days before that the soldiers where in a strong position and were organizing the recovery of the terrain that was in the possession of the Nazi army.

After the Gulf War, two factors altered the scenario, which would affect progress in these new conflicts: the birth of other global satellite channels as well as Internet expansion. Technological advances in telecommunications and its dissemination throughout the world would begin to profoundly change the rules of international relations. On the one hand, it had facilitated the transfer of science, technology, information and ideas from the center to the periphery of power. Furthermore, it facilitated the emergence of a new type of influence, culture, and the so-called soft power. A concept that Joseph Nye had started in 1990, after the end of the Cold War, today it has grown in intensity as the years passed by. Traditional channels of diplomacy gave way to information and communication resources widely available to NGO players. For the first time it faced 30,000 NGOs against 200 states, international organizations and large multinational corporations. The state, as such, stopped having a monopoly on information.

Global communication policy was redefined in terms different from those we had known so far. The emergence of an alternative model of power, soft power or the ability to attract and co-opt versus hard power to coercion or use force (military) and or give money as a means of persuasion (economic dependence), rethought the name of the game<sup>6</sup>

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4 KALDOR, M. *Las nuevas guerras. Violencia organizada en la era global*. Barcelona: Tusquets, 2001, pp. 15-28.

5 IGNATIEFF, M. *Guerra virtual. Más allá de Kosovo*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2003, p. 12.

6 NYE Jr., J. S. *La paradoja del poder norteamericano*. Madrid: Taurus, 2002, pp. 63-69.

Information technology had transformed the nature of military power, weapons systems and laser-based information processing. Satellites and data processing had established the power of information and deterrence via nuclear power, thus replacing the previous era. Televisions global reach as CNN, BBC World, Al-Jazeera or Star TV had incorporated a policy of portraying images and public diplomacy to what it was before mere power politics and secret diplomacy. The combination of the action of NGOs and interactive technologies, through Internet, was leading to a global civil society wherein pressure groups such as Amnesty International or Greenpeace, acted as new participants in international relations.

Al Jazeera began to play a unifying role on people. The Arab society, world wide, was discontent. Al Jazeera through its emissions got first hand information. Logically, the intifada of 2000 was followed in real time, much like what happened with CNN in the Gulf War. Since then, we can speak of a certain “Al Jazeera effect.”

*Once they began to have a critical mass of audience, the satellite news channels influenced politics. The news of an event like the 2000 Intifada able to reach the Arab audience, without having to go before the perception of western views or governmental censorship. As the Israelis warned that the political climate was fast deteriorating in countries around them.<sup>7</sup>*

A good example was the reactions to the cartoons of Mohammed published in a Danish newspaper in 2006. The Muslim religion prohibits physical representation of the prophet, in general, any iconic representation of him. The news was broadcasted on *Al Jazeera*, and the reaction had a global reach. Naturally, Internet also helped to spread the news. The protests went as far as Indonesia, Malaysia, Palestinian territories and Iraq. In Syria, Danish and Norwegian embassies were burned. All in all, some 24 people died in these riots worldwide.<sup>8</sup>

The outlook was changing, and with it, the nature of conflict. Was it because of the use of the information? No, because it was used in ancient times. The key is that it could be virtually available to everyone in real time. Its multiple of platforms, transmitting messages, conditioned the use of gray area or explicit propaganda. Were the new technologies actually found in the field of battle? In a way, yes, because they began to forge a kind of “virtual war”, the first example was the Kosovo intervention. The Arcady of “war without any casualties”, where the infantry was forgotten altogether, makes these new concepts be considered as surgical operations. Almost all ground operations, if I maybe allowed using the parallelism, were developed in the newsroom, the front pages of newspapers and television worldwide. In this area the first truly global bombing took place on September 11, 2001. After the attacks, the philosopher André Glucksmann wrote:

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<sup>7</sup> SEIB, P. *The Al Jazeera Effect. How the New Global Media Are Reshaping the World Politics*, Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, 2008, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> SEIB, P. *op. cit.*, p. 5.

*A 'total' war is no longer a war between states. It no longer seeks the defeat of an army or to paralyze the decision-making body of the opponent. Its aims overshadow these objectives, which are ultimately limited. The scope beyond the State, its objective is the city itself. Beyond the military apparatus, the objective is the whole population.<sup>9</sup>*

The retired British General Rupert Smith wrote a book on the changing nature of conflict. He delved deeply into the reflection made by Glucksmann. Smith participated in the 1991 Gulf War, and had been NATO's Vice Commander of DSACEUR (Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe) during the Kosovo campaign in 1999. In 1995, he commanded the UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) in Bosnia in 1995, the year of the Srebrenica massacre, although such an offense took him by surprise while enjoying his vacation.

Smith speaks freely about a new type of conflict. He believes that we are moving from an "industrial type war" to another of a totally different tint. This new wave began when the atomic bombs were released on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and has extended until the end of the Cold War. The two world wars are also considered "industrial type wars".

*In this new paradigm, there are contrasting priorities amongst different sectors of the population. The strategic objective is to win the hearts and minds of the people. The battle is fought to capture the will of its people, rather than to destroy enemy forces.<sup>10</sup>*

This new type of warfare is characterized by the following trends: Firstly, the goals that are fought mostly correspond to actions of individuals or societies, not so much by States. Secondly, different social groups fight against one another, a situation amplified by the media. Thanks to the press, it is fought in each home as well as on the streets as well as on the battlefield itself. Thirdly, conflicts tend to be eternal. There is no time limit; it extends in a parallel fashion to that of the resolution process. More so when it has been obtained militarily, for it has to be maintained until a final agreement is reached. The battle to preserve its strength, using the minimum cost necessary to achieve the end desired, as well as avoiding unnecessary risks.

In each new occasion, new uses for armaments and previous organizational models are found, adapting them to combat circumstances. The weapons used in the industrial age (tank divisions, artillery guns powerful, aerial dogfights, nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction in general heavy industry weapons military) have a relative importance in the war waged by people. Those confronted are not exclusively the State. The tendency is that conflicts end up having a multinational level. They

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<sup>9</sup> GLUCKSMANN, André. "El fantasma del nihilismo", *Claves de Razón Práctica*, nº 125, 2002, pp. 21-22.

<sup>10</sup> Expressed by Rupert Smith, during the presentation of his book given to the think tank Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs (New York, 24th of January 2007).

measure their varied forces, alliances of interests or non-state participants.

*This asymmetry intends to transfer the conflict from the battlefield, where the West has no rival, to Internet, the media, street demonstrations, the UN and other theaters of psychological and political struggle. To ensure your safety, the West must also show effectiveness and confidence in itself in all these fields, in the same way that there is shown in the battlefield.*<sup>11</sup>

According to Colom Piella we can conclude witnessing a military revolution “that is altering the relationship between war, state and society. This undermines the pillars of modern military paradigm and replaces them with a new military order”.<sup>12</sup> This military order is marked by the following characteristics:

1. The postmodern military paradigm will have as its defining elements: technology and knowledge
2. Technology will enable armies to know in real-time everything that is happening in the area of operations.
3. Military operations should have a broad domestic consensus, even though they are unstable.
4. Any military action must be considered legitimate and just.
5. The missions will take place in confusing and heterogeneous surroundings, wherein factors outside the military (legal, social, political or media) will condition and determine its resolution.
6. Conflicts should last the shortest possible time in order to prevent erosion of domestic support and to facilitate their justification.
7. Professional armies should perform military operations.
8. The conventional combat actions will be combined with unconventional or asymmetrical types.
9. In sensitive operations against unsymmetrical opponents, governments may also choose to use as an alternative private military contractors.
10. The enemy that does not find itself in this postmodern military paradigm should be guided by exploiting vulnerabilities: non-conventional or asymmetric forms. In that way they can weaken social support and end influencing the decisions of governments of advanced societies

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<sup>11</sup> METZ, S. “La guerre asymétrique et l’avenir d’Occident”, *Politique Etrangère*, nº 1, 2003, p. 39-40 en PIZARROSO QUINTERO, A. *Nuevas guerras, vieja propaganda (de Vietnam a Irak)*. Madrid: Cátedra, 2005, 38).

<sup>12</sup> COLOM PIELLA, G. *Entre Ares y Atenea: El debate sobre la revolución en asuntos militares*. Madrid: Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado-UNED, 2008, pp. 102-104.



All these features have their own counterpart in the field of communication. Each one of them is a characteristic feature of this new paradigm in the field of information warfare:

1. In the postmodern military paradigm, it is of vital importance the knowledge of the public or audience of military operations and its sociopolitical context. Unconventional warfare has shown it cannot be approached from a conventional prism, because there has been a change in the objective of the operations, substituting the enemy by the people, “to gain control of or its perception”.<sup>13</sup>
2. . The new technologies will enable information to flow in real-time across multiple platforms: whether they are traditional news media (television or radio) and new media platforms such as Internet publications as well as social networks.
3. That balance of domestic consensus is unstable. It is articulated through the media and the effects it has on the public, such as the agenda setting and its second level.<sup>14</sup>
4. . Military actions are decisions taken by governments, and should be viewed as legitimate. The executive power must seek legitimacy in order to take that political decision. In modern democracies, it is not enough to be lawful. It has to maintain legitimacy to exercise it. Governments, therefore, are faced with a “need to persuade” or “need to influence” so that political action can take place.

*The power to decide over a nation does not end with the decision per-se. It must also be accepted and abided by those who are affected (...) and as such the President has to inform its citizens, explain and provide arguments and reasons why this particular measure had to be adopted.*<sup>15</sup>

5. If these mediatic factors that affect public perceptions of military missions are able to condition its result, then they should be the subject of study and planning by those who define and design these missions. For its ultimate aim is to effectively achieve the military objectives sought. According to the Lund model<sup>16</sup>, communication accompanies the life cycle of the conflict: whether it stems off from the rising tension that is unleashed in the context of lasting peace, until

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13 ARTEAGA, F. “Terrorismo, contrainsurgencia y opinión pública”, en JORDÁN, J., POZO, P. y GUINDO, M.G. (coords.) *Terrorismo sin fronteras. Actores escenarios y respuestas en un mundo global*. Cizur Menor: Aranzadi Thomson Reuters, 2010, p. 218.

14 CANEL, M. J. *Comunicación Política. Una guía para su estudio y práctica*. 2ª edición. Madrid: Tecnos, 2006, pp. 201-207.

15 CANEL, M. J. *op. cit.* p. 105.

16 GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, J. I. *Crisis e instrumentos militares de gestión de crisis: adaptación tras la Guerra Fría*. Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2008. Tesis doctoral, p. 70.

its fatal escalation that leads to war. It ends with a ceasefire and an agreement to return to a stable situation.

6. To avoid erosion of domestic support of the military operations, the duration of the conflict plays a vital role, managing these expectations, the missions themselves, and the objectives sought after. These must be specific and measurable. The initial perception is important: “the presentation of these missions should avoid creating false expectation.”<sup>17</sup>
7. Professional armies make “professional” missions possible, limiting the influence of emotional elements on the public, unavoidable if the army was composed of drafted personnel.
8. Portions of actions that are unconventional or asymmetrical have to do with information (called You Tube Wars) and communication (cyber wars). Communication is also present in using “non-warlike” military power. This is characteristic of the new armies after the Cold War, “which includes both the threat of using force or partial use of threat, both of which are characteristic of crisis management”.<sup>18</sup>
9. The use of military contractors sometimes permits to deviate the focus of public attention away from the managing of sensitive operations against asymmetric opponents.
10. Asymmetry is sought after to avoid an open confrontation, total war. This would end in the annihilation of this type of opponent, which is distant from the postmodern military model. Thus, this new enemy is never pooled together or visible. It will remain fragmented and hidden in the new trenches: the population and news media.

## 2. A change from the “operational culture”: the comprehensive approach

When U.S. General Stanley McChrystal took over the supreme command of ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) operations in June 2009, the situation he found showed that the Taliban despite of defeats in the military terrain had extended its area of territorial influence and the scope of their actions. It seemed contradictory,

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17 ARTEAGA, F. “Terrorismo, contrainsurgencia y opinión pública”, en JORDÁN, J., POZO, P. y GUINDO, M.G. (coords.) *Terrorismo sin fronteras. Actores escenarios y respuestas en un mundo global*. Cizur Menor: Aranzadi Thomson Reuters, 2010, pp. 223.

18 GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, J. I. *Crisis e instrumentos militares de gestión de crisis: adaptación tras la Guerra Fría*. Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2008. Tesis doctoral, p. 355.



but in this era of asymmetric warfare, this situation was becoming quite common for the military in command of the operations. General David Petraeus a colleague of his had encountered a similar situation after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The insurgent forces had taken over the street and were fighting to influence the population who were suspicious of the Western troops who had remained there.

In two months, General McChrystal reviewed the situation he had and sent a report to his superiors, which, over time, would develop into a handbook on how to deal with a conflict of asymmetric nature. That document, which was entitled (Commander of International Security Assistance Force) COMISAF's Initial Assessment, it reviewed those features that redefined the confrontation with the Taliban insurgents.

*The Afghanistan conflict should be viewed as a diversity of interconnected insurgents. Each of which is a complex system with multiple participants and a wide range of interactions related to one another. (...) This perspective means that the system must be understood in a comprehensive fashion (...) this is not a cyclic and kinetic campaign based cyclic on combat operations. Rather it is an ongoing effort to help the Afghan government to win the support of the population, to counter the coercion and intimidation of the insurgents (...). There are five main groups of participants in this conflict: the population, the Afghan government, ISAF, the insurgents and external agents. It is important to start with an understanding of each of these groups, starting with the most important of them all: the Afghan people.<sup>19</sup>*

“The war amongst the people” of Rupert Smith brings to life the full meaning of these words. McChrystal recommended, in his report submitted to the Defense Secretary of the US in Afghanistan, that a change be imposed in the “operation culture”: a new concept of the conflict designed “to connect with people”:

I think we should interact more with the population and focus on the operations that bring stability, whilst we protect them from coercion, corruption and violence of the insurgents.<sup>20</sup>

It is no longer a question of beating the Taliban forces exclusively via military means, but that victory cannot be complete if it forgets about the support of the civilian population.

*Our strategy should not be focused on winning terrain or in destroying the insurgent forces: our objective should be the population. In the struggle to gain the support of the people, every action should support this effort (...) Winning their support requires a better understanding of their needs and options. Nevertheless, the difficulty in making progress lies in the dual threat of the insurgency resistance and a crisis of confidence in the Afghan government as well as in the international coalition.*

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19 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf's Initial Assessment*. 30th of August 2009, p. 2.3.

20 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf's Initial Assessment*. 30th of August 2009, p. 1.2.

*To win their support, we must protect the Afghan people from both threats. Many, rightly, described the conflict in Afghanistan as a war of ideas. However, that is informative context “based on facts”, where perceptions stem from the actions, depending on how we interact with people and how rapidly things improve. The key of the change lies in changing the perceptions of underlying truths.<sup>21</sup>*

Such a change in the culture of how to confront operations initiated by Petraeus in Iraq, were also inspired by the tactics adopted by France in Algeria. This requires an approach to introduce elements more in line with strategic communication than with military strategy organizations. Moreover, it can be said that McChrystal opened the door in this report to a change that had started to alter the Operations Doctrine: Integral or *Comprehensive Approach*.

This approach is the result of an international debate resulting from different experiences in operations and maintaining peace in several Western countries.

*The global approach is the generation and application of security services, governance and development, know-how, structures and resources over time and place in collaboration with recipient nations, allied governments and institutions, whether they be governmental or not.<sup>22</sup>*

As seen from Mary Kaldor, conflicts that arose after the end of the Cold War nourished a new way of being viewed. Since then has been a need to incorporate a new approach, much richer and dynamic, which is able to adapt itself to new circumstances, to those of traditional military operations.

*The experience gained in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan have proven that the isolated application of any national and international power element whether it be military, development aid or economic sanctions, to name a few examples, just ends up in failure. Juxtaposing different instruments has not fared much better either on different scenarios without adequate preliminary coordination beforehand. Some countries such as Canada and Norway have tried to combine what is called the “three D” (Diplomacy, Development and Defense) to provide a coherent national action in crisis resolution. Nevertheless the complexity of many scenarios has overwhelmed these three dimensions.<sup>23</sup>*

Canada created START (**S**tabilization and **R**econstruction **T**ask **F**orce), an organization that integrated various ministries to deal strategically with crisis prevention. They respond to material and humanitarian disasters, and its reconstruction. Since

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21 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf's Initial Assessment*. 30th of August 2009, pp. 1.1 y 1.2.

22 LINDLEY-FRENCH, J. *Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach*. Atlantic Council, Issue Brief, 2010, p. 1.

23 PAREJA RODRÍGUEZ, I. y COLOM PIELLA, G. *El Enfoque Integral (Comprehensive Approach) a la gestión de crisis internacionales*. Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 115/2008, p. 2.

late 2007, the UK launched a similar tool: the Stabilization Unit. This was a logical consequence of its predecessor, the PCRU (**P**ost **C**onflict **R**econstruction **U**nit) created in 2004, which reflected the application of the concept of Comprehensive Approach to its National Security Strategy. The same initiatives are found in France, Norway, Sweden and Finland. The United States created in 2004 the Office of S/CRS (**S**ervices/**C**oordinator for **R**econstruction and **S**tabilization), which developed into the NSPD-44 (**N**ational **S**ecurity **P**residential **D**irective-**44**) on December 2005.

This effort to integrate these new concepts was also adapted in international organizations that are with the added difficulty to get several countries to get to a consensus on different interests on the field of operations. Based on the Brahimi Report, the UN had been reviewing its model Peacekeeping Operations. Parallel to the 2005 Summit talks of Integrated Missions began, based on the creation of strategic plans that would unify all the different aspects, military and nonmilitary relating to their missions.

*The term “integrated mission” is defined as an instrument with which the UN seeks to help countries in the transition from a war situation to that of lasting peace. Likewise to manage a similarly complex situation that requires a response from the entire UN system via inclusion of various participants and approaches within the political-strategic framework of crisis management.<sup>24</sup>*

## 2.1 The UN experience

The UN adopted in June 2006, the so-called IMPP (**I**ntegrated **M**ission **P**lanning **P**rocess), in order to facilitate this type of integrated planning for Peacekeeping Operations. The idea was based in developing a system whose perspective included the strategic objectives of the missions that would reach people responsible for the planning, the political agenda and as well as the authorities.

In 2008, within the DPKO (**D**epartment of **P**eace **K**eeping **O**perations) reformation strategy called “Peace Operations 2010” a document was released that serves as a compendium of the best operation practices in nearly 60 peacekeeping operations maintained by the UN had since its founding in 1948. A Peace Operations Doctrine was developed, known as the Capstone Doctrine<sup>25</sup>, which emerged as a strategic and tactical orientation of the Blue Berets peacekeepers. This replaced the 1995 document General Guidelines on UN Peacekeeping and includes as a fundamental innovation within the establishment of a four element approach to peace operations to be

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24 EIDE, E. B.; KASPERSEN, A. T.; KENT, R.; VON HIPPEL, K. *Report on Integrated Missions: Practical Perspectives and Recommendations*. Independent Study for the Expanded United Nations Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs Core Group, 2005, p. 14.

25 NACIONES UNIDAS, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Principles and Guidelines*. Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations, 2008, p. 8.

successful: the question of local approval, the viability of the mandate, the Council support Security and the political climate at regional and international levels.

In Chapter 9 of the Capstone Doctrine, maintaining mission support is one of the key elements for success, with special reference to the field of communication.<sup>26</sup>

“Effectively public information is a political and operational necessity”. The UN doctrine is forceful when it comes to communication within their missions. Its objectives should be continued cooperation between the parties in the peace process, manage the expectations and gain the support of the local population as well as to ensure broad international support, especially amongst the military and police forces of the participating countries (TCCs / PCCs) (Troop Contributing Countries / Police Contributing Countries) and the major donors of the mission.

*A well-designed communications strategy that is skillfully implemented increases security in the peace process. It forges trust between the conflicting parties and generates support for national reconciliation. It establishes the mission as a reliable source of information and help against the negative effects of hostile media, irresponsible and directed from afar. If the parameters of UN activity are clearly posed and well explained to the locals and other target audiences, fear and misunderstanding will be minimized, corrected, and the impact of those who want to harm the peace process through rumors and slander will be minimized. In addition, public information of the activities of the mission should be conducted towards establishing an environment that promotes the development of free and independent media, and adherence to the highest standards of journalistic ethics.<sup>27</sup>*

Capstone Doctrine further states that the Chief communication Officer should be involved in decision making at the highest level within the mission.

## 2.2 The NATO experience

NATO began its Comprehensive Approach in 2004, through the study of a Danish initiative to achieve the nature of the Copenhagen summit the following year. In the Alliance’s process of change, this concept is emerging after the incorporation of the doctrine EBAO (Effects-Based Approach to Operations), whose purpose is to provide “a way of comprehensive thinking, coherent and coordinated that enable those that are in command and organizes to look beyond the military means being employed, by including the description of the effects and increased interaction with the other

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26 Epígrafe “Communications and Outreach” de NACIONES UNIDAS, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Principles and Guidelines*. Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations, 2008, p.82-84.

27 NACIONES UNIDAS, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Principles and Guidelines*. Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, United Nations, 2008, p. 83.

participants.<sup>28</sup>

Since the Bucharest summit in April 2008, NATO has been studying an action plan for the development and implementation of the Comprehensive Approach. This is conceived as a long-term task that must be constantly revised. It identifies five areas that need improvement in order for it to be successfully applied:

1. The planning and control of operations. The challenge is to improve cooperation between all parties involved in the operations, like the strategic approach and the objectives shared before the operation launch. It is claimed that the effects on the population, the reconstruction tasks and development should be incorporated in the military plan.

2. Lessons learned, training and maneuvers. The Comprehensive Approach will be essential in the training and maneuvers. These must involve joint exercises of both military and civilian personnel. Share experiences and lessons learned from the operations that they have developed together.

3. Promoting cooperation with external participants. Establish a climate of mutual trust between all the organizations and actors involved in the operation should be a key objective for the mission's effectiveness.

4. Public messages and public diplomacy. We fully quote for the sake of your interest the following:

*The effectiveness of the Comprehensive Approach must be complemented with a coherent strategy and solid public messages. Information campaigns NATO's Information campaigns should be substantiated by systematic and updated information, it should document the progress of the operation in the most relevant areas. It is important to ensure that the information strategy of the main participants should complement rather than contradict, through direct contact between those responsible of public information.<sup>29</sup>*

This is still a recurrent aspect in the official NATO documents; at least since the Comprehensive Political Guidance was published on November 29, 2006.<sup>30</sup> Although it is a matter addressed in the CIMIC (**C**ivil-**M**ilitary **C**ooperation) doctrine, it acquires a new relevance by placing the emphasis on the Comprehensive Approach. There is a substantial difference between CIMIC and Comprehensive Approach. CIMIC is a

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28 NATO EBAO Handbook en JAKOBSEN, P. V. *NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations. A Work in Slow Progress*. Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report, 2008, p. 19.

29 NATO: *A comprehensive Approach*. Public Information on the Alliance concerning this concept on his web page: <http://bit.ly/GmH8o> (last accessed 17th of July 2010).

30 JAKOBSEN, P. V. *NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations. A Work in Slow Progress*. Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report, 2008, p. 13.



strictly military operation (planning and military command), in which a -secondary-part of its operation serves in seeking good relations with the civil society in the field of military action. In a Comprehensive Approach operation, the military component, as described above, is only one part of the whole in its planning and direction than that of purely being military and covers the whole spectrum of political, diplomatic, economic, and social nature, etc.

5. Stabilization and reconstruction. NATO needs to improve its stabilization and reconstruction capabilities across an entire conflict. This requires a better on-site coordination with other international organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Jakobsen, one of the leading experts on Comprehensive Approach within that organization, states that cultural and operational change is still in its infancy, and there is still a long way for its application to reach the desired efficiency.

*The institutionalization level of the CA (Comprehensive Approach) within the Alliance is still in its first stage. At the strategic level, the concepts of CA, its doctrine and procedures have not been formally adopted. Even though the institutionalization process will benefit from the principles of CA in the Doctrines of CIMIC and PSA (Peace corps Public Service Announcements), a number of CA initiatives undertaken by ACT (Allied Command Transformation) and the NATO School course on PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Teams), will still take a long time. NATO has made great progress in terms of CA in Afghanistan, but the degree of institutionalization is still low. The ISAF Headquarters still has little influence on the 26 PRTs. Neither the use of consultants in the development of the Command team of ISAF nor the practice of involving civilian as participants in the ISAF planning process has it been institutionalized. Finally, the added value of the NATO SCR (Senior Civilian Representative) is still not clear.<sup>31</sup>*

Julian Lindley-French, a member of the board of experts of the Atlantic Council, published a paper in June 2010. She believes that this concept is vital to the future operations of the organization. The “hybrid” way, of dealing with conflict confrontations wherein the military is inevitably mixed with civilians, challenges the viability of the operations.

*If the Strategic Concept is not written with at least the comprehension of the fundamental elements that makes an operation effective in this hybrid method of handling conflicts, then the Alliance could survive as a political organization but its effective power and credibility could diminish to the point where its operational role of dissuasion could disappear altogether.<sup>32</sup>*

Thus a paradoxical situation can be reached, to the point of reaching its military

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<sup>31</sup> JAKOBSEN, P. V. *NATO's Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations. A Work in Slow Progress*. Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report, 2008, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> LINDLEY-FRENCH, J. *Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach*. Atlantic Council, Issue Brief, 2010, p. 2.



targets and yet failing in its civilian objective. Those key issues needed once the international troops are no longer present, such as public order, confidence of the locals in their institutions, or establishing basic public services. In fact, this is main aspect that the enemies exploit in new conflicts: maintaining peacekeeping operations, which takes place in a hostile environment and makes the people suspicious and mistrusting. Nothing ever changes, the day they leave, everything returns to the previous situation.

According to Lindley-French adapting the Comprehensive Approach to NATO's new Strategic Concept means, adopting a an "holistic" approach which is transverse and interrelated to all the operational aspects. In this sense, it emphasizes influence as a critical factor that must be taken into account.

*One must understand the critical role of Influence. Influencing is the core concept to organize these hybrid operations and achieve a successful implementation of the Comprehensive approach. The other elements such as (campaign planning, targeting policy and strategic communication) are part of a holistic approach to generating influence in the site itself as well as at home.<sup>33</sup>*

Within the NATO structure, Lindley-French proposed to create a Comprehensive Approach Command, under the command of SACEUR, to penetrate the strategic tactical units HRF (L) [High Readiness Forces (Land)]. It as proposed that the integration of civil and military affairs be present in the planning as well as to have the necessary resources. Perhaps this is the origin of the difficulty in creating this figure, since the CA (Comprehensive Approach) command is usually civilian and not military, as in civil-military operations in crisis management applied to the European Union. The operational part of NATO's is eminently military, even though the maximum level of agreements and decision are political s as well as multinational ones.

The European Union is revising the usefulness of the Comprehensive Approach as an agency to Coordinate Crisis Management that has at its disposition civilian and military resources. The integration of all of this will be in line with what other multi-lateral organizations are reforming within their framework. It will facilitate achieving what the European Security Strategy has established.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the new NATO Strategic Concept was approved at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010. This summit definitely established the Comprehensive Approach as a way to address international crisis management through the coordination and effective combination of all its political, civil and military resources. In March 2012, NATO

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<sup>33</sup> LINDLEY-FRENCH, J. *Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach*. Atlantic Council, Issue Brief, 2010, 2.

<sup>34</sup> PAREJA RODRÍGUEZ, I. y COLOM PIELLA, G. *El Enfoque Integral (Comprehensive Approach) a la gestión de crisis internacionales*. Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 115/2008, p. 6.

approved a list of tasks to implement the Comprehensive Approach Action Plan.

Likewise, in 2011 the Atlantic Council agreed to declassify the document that provides policy guidelines to improve the way it manages the stabilization and reconstruction missions. Among the lessons learned, those referring to the sphere of communication stand out. The paper discovers that consistent management of public messaging is a critical element in the future success of the operations carried out within the premises of Comprehensive Approach.<sup>35</sup>

### 3. The strategic communication (StratCom) in the war of Afghanistan

#### 3.1. Analysis of the evolution of the war in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's history was of great concern to President Bush's advisers, in the first days after the September 11th attacks. The British and were entrapped in this country in the nineteenth century and the Soviets in the twentieth. Would the same thing happen to America?

In effect, Afghanistan presented a number of disturbing characteristics. It had been in a prevailing climate of civil war since 1973. Hence one could not expect a country seeking to recover lost status by the entry of the Taliban, who had opened its doors to Al-Qaida. On the contrary, that utopia could well be the monarchy of Mohammed Zahir Shah, a period of unusual stability from 1933 to 1973. Before the coming of the Taliban there was a civil war there. Also there was a lot of evidence that would make a person think that when NATO closed its mission in Afghanistan, the country would be at risk of returning to the previous situation of conflict.

In addition to that, Afghanistan has no colonial tradition. No empire ever colonized it. Its recent experience is three wars with the United Kingdom and the Soviet occupation. A fratricidal struggle within the country was opened between the warlords with the departure of the USSR, in 1989. Many of these warlords had their first contacts with members of the CIA teams when the US began its attacks. These internal fights make the Afghan identity a vague concept. The feeling of belonging comes from the tribe one belongs to or to the language spoken.<sup>36</sup> So it is not unusual to find that the struggle between Pashtun from the south and Tajik and Uzbek from the north. This fight is maintained since the end of the Soviet occupation. Within the ethnic Pashtun,

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35 NATO. *NATO political guidance on ways to improve its involvement in stabilisation and reconstruction*, 2011.

36 BAQUÉS, J. *¿Quo Vadis Afganistán?* Madrid: Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado-UNED, 2010.

the two dominant families drag a confrontation that dates back to the sixteenth century. At the time of the invasion, some supported the mullah Omar, and others, the deposed king. This complex division is a barrier to NATO missions. “The infrastructure cannot create a single nation by itself. Today, Bosnia has all the roads and schools needed, however their ethnic groups are as divided as ever”.<sup>37</sup>

The Taliban were unable to conquer all the country from the year 1996 till the year 2000. Ten or fifteen percent of the territory was not in their control. Therefore the regime had coexisted with a small civil war in the northern territories. The US was not going to have an easy task getting into a country so used to war. Before the incident of the attacks on the 11th of September, The US played two cards: one side arming the opposition and the other allowing the Pakistani intelligence services to support the Taliban.

No wonder that the Bush administration would bear in mind what happened in Vietnam. In fact, three weeks after the bombing began, the press began to question the progress and expectations of the said operation. Newsweek first spoke of quagmire (predicament) fatal word that was used during the Vietnam War to describe a hopeless situation. One week later, The New York Times published an analysis of the situation in which you could read: “Could Afghanistan become another Vietnam?”<sup>38</sup> It maybe that part of the precaution stems from this, as well as the Bush administration’s strong desire to shelve the Afghanistan situation. But, “as proved by Vietnam, the imperial power can not compete with people who have nothing to lose.”<sup>39</sup>

One of the main problems that President Bush ran into was that he had at his disposal was military resource that were too conventional for the type of war facing him. The first thing that was discarded was a response similar to the one given by Clinton, where he used as a deterrent attacks via cruise missiles

When Al-Qaida attempted in 1998 against U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, an order was given to launch 66 cruise missiles into the training camps of Bin Laden in Afghanistan. The missiles did not hit anything, for the terrorists had managed to flee in advance. So when Bush asked Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, what the military could do immediately, the reply was simply: “Effectively, very little.”<sup>40</sup>

This distrust of the military component that they had at their disposal came from the earliest days of the administration. In fact Rumsfeld had begun an attempt to

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37 IGNATIEFF, M. *El nuevo imperio americano. La reconstrucción nacional en Bosnia, Kosovo y Afganistán*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2003, p. 91.

38 WOODWARD, B. *Bush en guerra*. Barcelona: Península, 2003, p.304.

39 IGNATIEFF M. *El nuevo imperio americano. La reconstrucción nacional en Bosnia, Kosovo y Afganistán*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2003, p. 105.

40 WOODWARD, B. *Bush en guerra*. Barcelona: Península, 2003, p. 64.

adapt to the needs of military as well as to the strategic environment of the moment.<sup>41</sup> Then came the of the September 11 attacks and there was no time for many deliverances. We had to make change on the fly on the terrain of the events. It was in this way that the government dealt with adapting its complex American war machine to the environment of these new wars.

Speed was one of the needs to handle this situation. From the very beginning, Washington policy makers pressure the military, due to the fact that this new kind of war demands that they “move quickly”. When General Franks, commander of CENTCOM (Central Command) U.S. Army, communicated to Rumsfeld that a guaranteed intervention to shift of forces to Afghanistan would take months, he said: “Well you do not have months”.<sup>42</sup> Planning was still doing in the same way as in the 1991 Gulf War, when it had taken the concentration of troops five months and a half before the first bombing.

From the point of view of communication and perception, they did not have the necessary time. Suddenly, the military action was not so important in itself, measuring the effectiveness of its outcome. What was important is that it must be perceived as forceful and restorative for the American people and sufficiently dissuasive for the Taliban not to harbor Al-Qaida terrorists anymore.

They also had to clearly demonstrate to Afghan people that their government is presently allied with terrorists. That is passing the new center of gravity from the operational scenarios to the terrain of perceptions. “If prior military campaigns were supported by information based operations, they are now strategic communication campaigns accompanied by military operations”.<sup>43</sup> In those days, Bush became a wartime president and somehow he was conditioned by the fact that publicly that he was considered a “light weight”, which would neglect details and was not fully occupied with government affairs. He faced politically with an acid test of his leadership. On the other hand, “Bush realized that he would not be able to respond with an equivalent spectacular event. Much of his war and retaliation would be invisible, and would develop over a long period of time”.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of the plan would come from the CIA, which had resources in the zone. From Thursday the 13th of September, President Bush had considered as definitive a

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41 COLOM PIELLA, G. *Entre Ares y Atenea: El debate sobre la revolución en asuntos militares*. Madrid: Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado-UNED, 2008.

42 WOODWARD, B. *Bush en guerra*. Barcelona: Península, 2003, p. 64.

43 ARTEAGA, F. “Terrorismo, contrainsurgencia y opinión pública”, en JORDÁN, J., POZO, P. y GUINDO, M.G. (coords.) *Terrorismo sin fronteras. Actores escenarios y respuestas en un mundo global*. Cizur Menor: Aranzadi Thomson Reuters, 2010, p. 213.

44 WOODWARD, B. *Bush en guerra*. Barcelona: Península, 2003, p. 118.

plan as presented by George Tenet the CIA director; .It consisted on the combined action of intelligence teams with members of the Special Army Forces. It was the fastest run plan presented to him those days. Besides, it included in its planning specific recommendations on strategic communication. The CIA antenna in Islamabad (Pakistan), moments before the first attacks, sent a field assessment including recommendations on the strategy of the message that should be used to persuade the Afghan resistance against the Taliban.

The first idea was that the war should be transformed into a clash between Afghans. These were two factions one constituted Initially by units of the Northern Alliance warlords, and the other by “foreign” Sunni Arabs of Al-Qaida, that Mullah Omar had permitted entry into the country, betraying the Afghan people. The second message is a reminder that the CIA had supported the resistance movement when the Soviets were expelled in the late eighties. The third message claimed that the U.S. had no claims on the Afghan territory or would install permanent bases there. The idea was to create an environment hostile to the Taliban and Al-Qaida, and ensure that Americans did not come to stay.

In the chain of events that have occurred between 2001 and 2011 some interesting conclusions can be drawn about the difficulty to combine words and deeds, strategy and strategic communication.<sup>45</sup>

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45 This analysis was made based on chronology of the major events of the war in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2011. Of all the sources that were consulted for this study, none had a complete chronology of the conflict that contained enough information for the purposes of this research, which requires an analysis of the most complete and transversal events. For this purpose, the author prepared a chronology, the whose original can be found in the paper presented at the University Institute “Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado”, that includes the following levels of information:

- The milestones of the military campaign.
- The most important diplomats and politicians events.
- The most significant attacks worldwide of al-Qaida and of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The communiqués released by Osama bin Laden until his capture.

All these data were collected through the following sources accessible via internet: The White House, CNN, Al Jazeera, Reuters, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Council on Foreign Relations, BBC, Time, Frontline (Public Broadcasting System, PBS), The New York Times, The Washington Post and CBS. Also the following monographs and publications were consulted:

- BLANCHARD, C. M. *Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology*. Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, Washington, D.C., 9th of July 2007.  
FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE REPORT. *Compilation of Osama Bin Ladin Statements 1994 - January 2004*: <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/ubl-fbis.pdf> (consulted the 29th of July 2012).
- GIRARDET, E. *Killing the Cranes. A Reporter's Journey Through Three Decades of War in Afghanistan*. White River Junction, Chelsea Green, 2011
- JONES, S. G. *In the Graveyard of Empires. America's war in Afghanistan*. New York, Norton,

Even when Kandahar was occupied, military logic prevailed and the result was optimal employing a little more than a month to control the country by the warlord's militias, with minimal deployment composed of the CIA and Special Army Forces. Even so, it was found that the land phase was the most expensive to execute, with little time preparation time. Also, aerial bombing over fixed targets had the risk of leaving the military without any initiative in the operation pursued. They were very risky, because there was always the possibility that the bombs could fall in the wrong places and cause dreaded collateral damage. "There was the need to reduce the bombing has returned the predominance to the ground forces rather than to air activity actions that causes more damage to self-image and civilian casualties than those of the insurgency".<sup>46</sup> Three weeks after the first bombings, Vice President Richard Cheney raised the need to achieve a military objective when the U.S. seemed bogged down in meaningless air activities: "We want to create a sensation that victory is inevitable, in order for people to move to our side". On the 31st of October, with the strategy stuck in the bombings and the press talking about Vietnam, President Bush opened the meeting of the National Security Council that morning with this statement: "We are losing the public relations war. They do not appreciate what we are doing in Afghanistan".<sup>47</sup>

With the military and occupation of the main towns of the country, it seemed that the mission could be considered as have been carried out. In fact, once Karzai was sworn in as the interim president and ISAF began their mission in the zone as of January 2002, military operations are reduced to specific missions in the south and east of the country against Taliban who have taken refuge in the mountains, where the Al-Qaida leader, Osama Bin Laden was hunted down without any success.

The problem of the interests of the coalition began when the Taliban stronghold and Al-Qaida that had remained hidden in the country during those months begin to reorganize. This happen relatively soon, in the summer of 2002, with a first attack aimed at leaving the government without a leader. Karzai survived an assassination attempt on September 2002. All throughout that whole second half of the year, the attacks become more and more continuous.

It is no coincidence that when the insurgents began to come out of hiding and to reorganized. Then the first unfortunate incident starts to undermine the credibility of

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2009

- LAWRENCE, B (ed.) *Messages to the World: the Statements of Osama Bin Laden*. New York, Verso, 2005
- WOODWARD, B. *Bush en guerra*. Barcelona, Península, 2003

46 ARTEAGA, F. "Terrorismo, contrainsurgencia y opinión pública", en JORDÁN, J., POZO, P. y GUINDO, M.G. (coords.) *Terrorismo sin fronteras. Actores escenarios y respuestas en un mundo global*. Cizur Menor: Aranzadi Thomson Reuters, 2010, p. 219.

47 WOODWARD, B. *Bush en guerra*. Barcelona: Península, 2003, p. 293.



the U.S. forces against the Afghan people. In August 2002, the public became aware of the killing of Taliban prisoners at Sheberghan.

During late 2002 and throughout the year 2003, the focus turns to Iraq. The U.S. government then terminates the military phase in Afghanistan and opens a new phase of “stabilization and reconstruction” that receives the backing and the approval of the Afghan constitution in January 2004. In all that time, Afghanistan seemed to be on the right road. It finds itself with the problem, of the Iraqi postwar which begins to give the U.S. administration headaches.

Things start to go wrong in 2005; the U.S. incurred its greatest amount of casualties since the operations began in 2001. The attacks of the insurgents continued to rise and this undermined the credibility of the Americans once again for one could perceive mutual mistrust between the Afghan president Karzai and U.S. forces. The Afghan President was concerned about allegations of ill treatment and torture inflicted by American soldiers. The United States on the other hand was bothered by Karzai’s lack of progress in the confrontation with the Afghan Security Force.

In 2006 the situation worsens alarmingly. The U.S. military contingent continues to lose its credibility. In May that year the loudest mass protests occurred in the center of Kabul by the way the situation was being handled in the postwar. Afghans protested on how slow it was to receive aid and as well as how slow the improvement in services was being implemented. They also protest against the arrogance of the American soldiers. Nor is it a coincidence that shortly after in July, five multiply suicide attacks and IEDs (**I**mprovised **E**xplosive **D**evice)s blasts had doubled. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August the most serious attack was produced against a NATO convoy, killing 21 civilians.

The delicate situation had an impact on NATO members; within the heart of the organization there was some division on the aim of the mission and what countries were in a position to do achieve its aim. The caveats became more monolithic and in November the Afghan government announced that by 2008 it should be ready to assume its security tasks. It is the first time it imposed a deadline on itself. For the Afghan people it is a sign that the international troops do not intend to stay. The members of the coalition are assuring their respective publics that their troops will leave Afghanistan and that they will be returning home. The insurgents take note of the announcement and they assume that actually the condition of the Afghan forces to take over their security in 2008 is in its worst possible moment to meet this objective. So much so that this year will be considered the most violent one since 2001, despite the fact that the Bush administration increased its number of troops in 2007. In addition to this on August, a new aerial error was produced by United States. This consolidated the anti-American sentiment of the Afghan population.

In 2007 there were 56 suicide attacks in Pakistan, in comparison to the six that occurred the previous year. The Taliban concentrated their actions in the south to such an extent that Admiral William Fallon, the commander of U.S. Central

Command, said that during the months of November and December's level of violence in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan had been reduced by 40 percent. The Tailbone offensive coincides with the discredited Karzai as ruler of the Afghan people. This caused a crisis in the manner and the objectives of the NATO's mission. The coalition members did not reach an agreement on their priorities. Some of them maintained a long list of warnings about participating in military operations against the Taliban in the south. Two European governments had fallen in 2007. This was largely due to the opposition of its population to its involvement in Afghanistan: in February, the Italian Parliament lost its trust on Romano Prodi on his continuing to defend the mission of two thousand Italian soldiers in Herat; in September, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, was forced to resign due to differences with his government's coalition partner. They opposed Japan having to assist in the providing NATO's vessels guarding the transportation sea routes that Al-Qaida usually used.<sup>48</sup>

For the newly elected President Obama in 2008, Afghanistan was to be his primary test. In 2009 the number of troops was increased, a new strategy was also approved. This included deadlines and extends the range to Pakistan as part of the Afghan problem (Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy). President Obama replaces the Central Command commander and in his stead places General McChrystal. In August 2011 McChrystal elaborates a report that highlights the need for a radical change of strategy, which passes through proper strategic communication.

One can sense that McChrystal did not very well agree with the announcement made by President Obama setting a date of departure from Afghanistan, scheduled for 2014, although its first troops began to withdraw in July 2011.<sup>49</sup> In his report, he said:

*This is an important-and possibly decisive-period of this war. The Afghans are frustrated and tired after eight years without any evidence of the progress they had predicted. Their patience is understandably short for Afghanistan and for our countries as well. Time is of an essence, we must act now to reverse the negative trend and demonstrate that we are making progress.*<sup>50</sup>

Such as what happened at the end of 2006, its internal dissent generated a sense of weakness among Afghans as well as the insurgents. In his region report, Michael Ignatieff felt that "American's reputation of its power is faltering."<sup>51</sup>

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48 RASHID, A. *Descent into chaos: the US and the failure of nation building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2008.

49 SPILLIUS, A. "Afghanistan: Barack Obama sets date of July 2011 to begin withdrawal", *The Daily Telegraph*, 2nd of December 2009.

50 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf's Initial Assessment*. 30th of August 2009, p. 1.4.

51 IGNATIEFF, M. *El nuevo imperio americano. La reconstrucción nacional en Bosnia, Kosovo y Afganistán*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2003, p. 79.

### 3.2. Afghan's insurgency strategy

The Need for a Comprehensive Approach is largely caused by the asymmetric characteristic of its threat. Unable to directly confront in the military field, the enemy chooses to seek other areas that either wise would become an unavoidable military victory at the end.

The threats that were detected in Afghanistan by General McChrystal reside in the intangible realm of credibility. "The first threat is the existence of insurgent groups organized with the determination of expulsing the international forces, to separate the Afghan people from the government, and get the support of the population." The second "is the crisis of the public confidence that arises from the weakness of Afghanistan government's institutions, impunity of its corrupt officials, a widespread feeling of political dissatisfaction and the loss of economic opportunities maintained over time."

The mistakes done by the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) (like civilian deaths, for example, such as is reflected in the previous section) only served to worsen the discredit lived by the Afghans in this new situation. This served to increment the numbers of the insurgent groups.

*The insurgents were waging a "silent war" which consisted of fear, intimidation and persuasion throughout the whole year. They did not limit themselves to do so only during the "fighting season" where the weather was good to get control of the population. These efforts make it possible, in many places to have a "shadow government". The Taliban were seeking to control the population as well as to displace the national government and its traditional power structure. The insurgent military operations attract more attention than the silent war but their effort was only used as a baking. Violent attacks are designed to undermine a government, to demonstrate its inability to provide security, promote recruitment and financing efforts. They are also designed to get to provoke the reaction of ISAF in order to get to alienate the population even more. Finally they were used to weaken the public and political backing the ISAF missions in coalition capitals.<sup>52</sup>*

The most prominent insurgent groups were the QST (Quetta Shura Taliban), the HQN (Haqqani Network), and the HIG (Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin). Even though they do not have a coordinated command structure, each one of them has a strategy. Their shared objective is to, "control the Afghan population and to break the determination of the coalition". The objective of managing perceptions is as decisive as their military results. Observe that the two objectives can be achieved without firing a single shot.

The QST (Quetta Shura Taliban) has a structure parallel to that of the legitimate

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52 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf's Initial Assessment*. 30th of August 2009, p. 2.5 y 2.6.

Afghan government. It has governors in all the provinces. It promises order and security in contrast to corrupt officials, international forces and criminals. It substitutes them when the population is unhappy. It maintains the Islamic law, Sharia that judges as its fundamental law appears. They present themselves as the protector of the Afghan and Muslim identity against foreign invasion. Altogether it “provides the essential elements of government, nation and a religious nature.”

*The major insurgent groups surpass the Afghan government and the ISAF in operations that deal with information. These operations also work in order to relate to their cultural and religious nature. They have carefully analyzed their audience and target products. They use their Pashtun identity, physical proximity to the people, spreading violent intimidation and solid instant messages with which the ISAF and the Afghan government are incapable to compete against. They achieve their advantage by projecting the inevitability of their victory, which is a key source of their strength.<sup>53</sup>*

The insurgents get their narratives through various different sources. Tens of thousands of videotapes and DVDs have been produced by Omat Productions y Manbaul-Jihad, the Taliban audiovisuals, and placed into circulation for just a few pennies in Pakistan and Afghanistan bazaars. The Al-Qaida producer, Al-Sahab Media Foundation, released 89 messages in 2007, at the rate of one message every three days, doubling those issued in the previous year.<sup>54</sup> Each and every audience receives the appropriate account in the most suitable storage medium, depending on a centralized communication strategy. The objective is to convey to these audiences that foreign forces “cannot cope with them, will end up losing control and will eventually leave”. It is always an emotional message, which seeks to draw out the frustration that the people are undergoing, “their humiliations, the xenophobia against them, denouncing corruption that exists, the immorality and lack of power of the local authorities and magnifying the civilian casualties “. <sup>55</sup>

To Mark Laity, Director of Strategic Communications at NATO SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe), the insurgent forces have it easier to communicate because they have a strongly negative message, easier to explain, and which has a more immediate impact. “For them, information is their main effort, whilst for us it is a support task.” They know that a successful information campaign is inherent to their success. They have one message that is the same for everyone. That has virtually been unchanged over the years. NATO on the other hand is an organization comprising of

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53 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf's Initial Assessment*. 30th of August , p. 2.7.

54 RASHID, A. *Descent into chaos: the US and the failure of nation building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2008, p. 398.

55 ARTEAGA, F. “Terrorismo, contrainsurgencia y opinión pública”, en JORDÁN, J., POZO, P. y GUINDO, M.G. (coords.) *Terrorismo sin fronteras. Actores escenarios y respuestas en un mundo global*. Cizur Menor: Aranzadi Thomson Reuters, 2010, p. 216.

48 nations that suffers job rotations every six months. “Every nation has its communication priorities, so our message is much vaguer”.<sup>56</sup>

### 3.3. The Strategic communication (StratCom) of McChrystal and Petraeus

General McChrystal dedicates in his report on Afghanistan August 2009, a complete appendix on strategic communication as a fundamental part of the operational planning. In total, six pages that breakdown a specific strategy to win “the important battle of perception.”

*Strategic communication (StratCom) provides a vital contribution to the joint effort, and more specifically, to the center of gravity of the operations: its continued support to the Afghan people (...) The main effort consists in maintaining and strengthening the positive perception of the Afghan population on its government institutions and the constructive role played by ISAF as well as the international community.*<sup>57</sup>

Alongside the Comprehensive Approach, strategic communication was incorporated as part of the new NATO Strategic Concept adopted in 2010. Working for an “Effective Strategic Communication” it has been incorporated as an approach of the Alliance, just as Lindley-French had ventured before the Lisbon summit:

*NATO needs a public diplomatic effort in support of its strategic communication that goes beyond the structures and is adequately connected with all its planning and command processes. Strategic communication effectively explains why the actions are necessary. An effective policy of targeting should always be able to justify such actions, in terms of its mission and public opinion. A wide enquiry of the policy with key civilian partners, a broader understanding of what it supposes the objective of strategic communication to be over (friends and enemies) and a communication strategy that places all its actions on a broad context helps to synchronize efforts amongst its partners.*<sup>58</sup>

The objectives laid out by McChrystal on strategic communication in Afghanistan were:

- To discredit and diminish the insurgents ability and those of their extremist allies in influencing the attitudes and behavior of the Afghan people.
- To assist the Government and the people in developing a sense of ownership and responsibility to counter the violent extremism and improve its security,

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<sup>56</sup> LAITY, M. “Power of Information”. Interviewed conducted by *Three Swords*, Joint Warfare Centre, OTAN, Autumn/Winter of 2011, nº 21.

<sup>57</sup> NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf’s Initial Assessment*. 30th of August , p. D.1 y D.2.

<sup>58</sup> LINDLEY-FRENCH, J. *Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach*. Atlantic Council, Issue Brief, 2010, p. 4.



stability and development.

- Increase communication effectiveness of the government and international forces toward the Afghan nation as well as the international public opinion.
- Increase its democratic and political decision of its society, to counteract violent extremism and to protect the center of gravity of the operations: the support of the Afghan people.
- Improve the coordination of StratCom with the HHQs (**H**igher **H**ead **Q**uarters) and through them, with the TCN (**T**roops **C**ontributing **N**ations) in order to sustain the strategic center of gravity of the SACEUR that is maintaining the cohesion of the Alliance.
- Build the capacity and confidence of the Afghan security forces as a strength needed for the good of the country.
- Maintain and build up public and international support of ISAF's objectives and policies in Afghanistan.

One of the most difficult questions is how to share life together with the Afghans on a daily basis without losing the necessary security measures needed inside a military base. Michael Ignatieff states that this approach to get close to the people distances itself from a colonialist perception of the troops:

*“Nation-building should not be an exercise in colonialism. However, the relationship between locals and foreigners is intrinsically a colonial one. The locals translate, clean and drive, whilst the foreigners are engaged in grandiose imperial planning.”<sup>59</sup>*

The fundamental problem is its security. The Insurgent Taliban know that the troops are after these goals through their efforts, so they counter with attacks in an attempt to make the soldiers go back to their military base. If they are able to keep the troops apart distanced from the people than much of what they want to achieve will not succeed.

*It is difficult to provide the Afghan people with more security if the forces that are supposedly there to protect them do not transmit the sense of security. Therefore it is therefore inevitable to some extent share those risks with the local population. To get closer to the civilian population increases the risks for coalition forces, without a shadow of doubt. A recent suicide attack on U.S. intelligence agents at the base of Khost shows the complexities that are being encountered in obtaining intelligence through closer contact with the local population, as well as the risks that can be incurred by the security forces in the fulfillment*

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59 IGNATIEFF, M. *El nuevo imperio americano. La reconstrucción nacional en Bosnia, Kosovo y Afganistán*. Barcelona: Paidós, 2003, p. 84.



*of this goal.*<sup>60</sup>

The objectives put forward by McChrystal brought about some operational recommendations, in order to achieve effective strategic communication:

1. Culture Change. Strategic communication “should not be a separate a course in its operations, but should be fully be an integrated part in the development of its politics, its planning processes as well as execution of its operations.” It should consist of “a credible dialogue, not a monologue” one-way street, where messages are to be transmitted to the population more effectively. Strategic communication must also be concerned with how these messages are to be received. “Receive, comprehend and change their behavior as a result of how these messages are received by its audience. It may be an effective way to obtain genuine trust and credibility.”

2. Winning the perception battle. The focus should be to get the Afghan government to be perceived as a credible institution: “our policies and actions should reflect this reality”, for example in the protection of its civilians.

3. It should build up on the Afghan communication capability so that their messages can be delivered throughout the region.

4. Increase the range of the messages. Either by facilitating the Afghans access to telecommunications as well as information via television and radio. Or through more traditional channels, such as local tribal leaders and that enjoy great credibility. In this sense, the perspective of the messages should be thought out from an Afghan point of view. Also the use of new media technology should be a priority.

5. Offensive IO (Information Operations). It’s all about building a capacity to neutralize the information and propaganda activities of the insurgents. It is a must that they act where the insurgents are more likely to make mistakes, for example indiscriminate violence and terror that cause civilian casualties, destroys infrastructure and development projects, as well as all behavior that clearly violates the Koran. One is the use of IEDs, wherein these explosive devices can cause substantial civilian casualties. In order to enhance these capacities, SratCom will have a direct contact with intelligence organizations.

6. An agile response to these incidents. They should be the “first to bring out the truth”.

7. StratCom capacity should be structured through the chain of command of ISAF. It includes resources provided by IOTF (Information Operation Task Force), IOATF (Information Operation Advisory Task Force), Media Monitoring, STRATCOM Information Fusion Network and CAPSTONE contracts. The StratCom capacities,

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60 ROCHA, F. y OTERO, J. *El factor cultural: una nueva estrategia impulsada por EEUU en Afganistán*. Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 22/2010, p. 2.

IO and PA (Public Affairs) must be integrated into a unified command under the framework of ISAF whether they are internal and/or external audiences.

8. Redirect the efforts of mass media. Using the 24/7 (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) strategy, the message should be directed to young people (70% of the Afghan population is 22 years) to move from a battle for “the minds and hearts” to one that provides “trust and confidence “.

9. Internal Communication. Each member of ISAF should be able to briefly explain what the mission in Afghanistan is all about and how it is being conducted. Every soldier should be able to expound on it.

On the 23rd of June came the changeover of General McChrystal as the head of the ISAF Command. The filtration of the August document, alongside with a statement to magazine Rolling Stone, precipitated his replacement by someone experienced, who had managed to implement a counterinsurgency strategy in Iraq that had begun to bear fruit. Almost one year after McChrystal’s document, General Petraeus refers to three points regarding communication in the first instructions he made to the ISAF personnel:<sup>61</sup>

1. “Be the first to give out the truth”. The general asks his men to avoid giving rumors, to combat the insurgents with accurate information. “Integrity is fundamental in this struggle.”
2. “Fight the information war with aggressiveness” The general orders that misinformation must be confronted. He also orders that all the actions of the insurgents be turn against them.
3. “Manage the prospects”. The general orders that no one should be over-confident. “Think about what has been done and what remains to be done.”

### 3.4. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs)

At the start of the operations, the PRTs (Provincial Reconstruct) were deployed in Afghanistan by the U.S. as a method of reconciling combat operations with the reconstruction and development efforts that were affecting the civilians. These combined teams of civilian and military had the mission to increase the legitimacy of the Kabul government, boost Afghan’s security system and facilitate the reconstruction process. In a manner similar to the Civil Affairs units as well as the CIMIC, the PRTs were working with Afghan civilians. The differences in approach soon became obvious. While the former had as its objective to provide the backing and support of the military mission, the latter pursued a more Comprehensive Approach.

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61 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf’s Counterinsurgency Guidance*. 1st of August 2010.

These teams are composed of military and civilian personnel, between 50 and 300 forces, a great majority of which are military (somewhere between 70 and 85 percent) and the rest political consultants and development experts. The belief of the credibility that the civilian population has of its authorities is critical to the success of the mission: “to assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in extending its authority in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in its area of operations, and to enable the reform of the security forces, SSR (Security Sector Reform), as well as the reconstruction efforts “. <sup>62</sup> NATO took over the command of all PRTs in 2006. Of these 12 implemented American PRTs that were evolving so that each had a shared civil-military command and in Iraq there are U.S. PRTs under civilian rule.

The Spanish PRT in Badghis is integrated by a contingency commanded by a Colonel, a Battalion that is used for strictly maneuvering military operations, a team responsible for training the new Afghan army and a diverse workforce for support purposes in areas such as: (air detachment, engineering, health, etc.). The military part CDS (Chief of the Defense Staff) deals with security, reintegrating the insurgents who surrender their arms as well as operation support to the population. Within these operations are included the IO (Information Operations) and liaison with local and Afghan authorities. Its main objective is “winning over the population” by demonstrable resources like: organizing assemblies, solving problems that affect the daily lives of the locals through surveys, they also regularly monitor the public support of the actions performed by the contingents.

For the high command, to maintain the support of the population has become the biggest challenge of the mission. The difficulties encountered are, in this order, the extreme weakness of the Afghan nation and the widespread corruption, which constantly threatens the credibility of a government that has the aspiration to gain control of the country within a reasonable period of time. <sup>63</sup>

#### 4. Towards a definition of strategic communication

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62 NATO ISAF PRT Handbook en JAKOBSEN, P. V. NATO's *Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations. A Work in Slow Progress*. Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report, 2008, p. 24.

63 SIERRA, M. “El Equipo de Reconstrucción Provincial de Bagdhis (Afganistán)”, conferencia impartida en la jornada, *La nueva estrategia en Afganistán: la importancia del factor cultural y de las relaciones con la población local*. Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz (CITpax), Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado, 2 de julio de 2010.

In the month after General McChrystal delivered his document<sup>64</sup> NATO approved the STRATCOM Policy<sup>65</sup>. This grouped public diplomacy, public military affairs, IO and psychological operations? The objective was to use the communication assets to inform the public, maintain public support of the missions, activities and objectives of that institution.

The definition of NATO's strategic communication is generic and it establishes the coordination between different interrelated departments working together as information and psychological operations. This only takes place within the theater of operations and are intended for the public of countries which are non-members and public affairs that is responsible for imparting public information to member countries.

*“The coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities – Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, Military Public Affairs, Information Operations and Psychological Operations, as appropriate –in support of the Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO’s aims”.*<sup>66</sup>

Strategic communication is not an easy concept to define. There is no consensus on what it consists of is really.<sup>67</sup> In the ten years that it is under study, the definitions are quite different; although you can detect some common elements that one can finally relate them. Christopher Paul, in his book *Strategic Communication*, has posted up to six officers and 14 definitions that could be considered “unofficial”. Christopher Paul, in his book *Strategic Communication*, has posted up to six official definitions and 14 definitions that can be considered “unofficial”.<sup>68</sup>

Below one can see some of the most significant definitions:

*“Is the promotion of national interests through efforts to inform, engage, and influence*

64 NATO ISAF COMMANDER, *Comisaf’s Initial Assessment*. 30th of August 2009.

65 For a detailed study of the concept of NATO's strategic communication, it is interested to consult these following references:

- NATO Strategic Communications Policy, MCM-0164-2009, 29 Sep 2009
- Military Concept for NATO Strategic Communications, MCM-0085-2010, 11 Aug 2010
- NATO Strategic Communications Capability Implementation Plan, 20 Apr 2011
- NATO ACO Strategic Communications directive, AD 95-2, 19 Nov 2009

66 PANIZZI, M. “The Development of NATO Strategic Communications: from Public Affairs to a broader Communications Policy”, in *Three Swords*, Joint Warfare Centre, OTAN, Autumn/Winter 2011, nº 21.

67 POVEL, E. “Strategic Communications in NATO. A Work in Progress”, in *Three Swords*, Joint Warfare Centre, OTAN, Autumn/Winter 2011, nº 21.

68 PAUL, C. *Strategic communication: Origins, concepts, and current debates*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011, pp.185-191.

*foreign publics*".<sup>69</sup>

*"includes the coordination of statecraft, public affairs (PA), public diplomacy, military information operations, and other actions through which we engage and influence key global communities"*.<sup>70</sup>

*"enabling capability for our policy and planning decisions and actions; provide truthful information about those decisions or actions; communicate it in a timely and culturally sensible fashion; use messengers who are likely to be well received; measure the results of our efforts diligently (clearly our hardest challenge and greatest shortcoming); and adjust both message and method of delivery accordingly"*.<sup>71</sup>

*"Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power"*.<sup>72</sup>

*"coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling or engagement intended to inform, influence or persuade selected audiences in support of national objectives"*.<sup>73</sup>

*"orderly framework that integrates corporate communications resources as a long-term design, according to consistent objectives, that are adaptable and profitable for the endeavor"*.<sup>74</sup>

In the study of these definitions we find several concepts that are repeated and relate to one another. The following are terms that any definition of strategic communication should contain:

- I. Coordination. Strategic communication coordinates policies and/or communication activities that were previously dispersed. In some definitions, such as NATO's definition, it deals with elements that are different from one another (such as public affairs and information operations), and in others all those that

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69 LORD, K. "What Strategic Communication Is, Isn't, and Should Be". *Joint Force Quarterly* n° 56, 1st Quarter, January 2010.

70 JONES, J. B., KUEHL, D. T., BURGESS, D., ROCHTE, R. "Strategic Communication and the Combatant Commander". *Joint Force Quarterly* n° 55, 4th Quarter, October 2009.

71 STAVRIDIS, J. G. "Strategic Communication and National Security". *Joint Force Quarterly* n° 46, 3rd Quarter, July 2007.

72 DoD. *Strategic Communication. Joint Integrating Concept*. October 7, 2009.

73 PAUL, C. *Strategic communication: Origins, concepts, and current debates*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011, p. 3.

74 GARRIDO en CANEL, M. J. *Comunicación de las instituciones públicas*. Madrid: Tecnos, 2007, p. 78.



contemplate actions relating to communication or tools involved in a project.

2. Short and long term planning. Communication is strategic because it intends to achieve a particular outcome in a specified period of time. Therefore their actions are scheduled over time depending on the audience and social context. It is not always suitable to communicate a message at any given moment. Planning is essential and it must adapt to a given time frame or preparation of a military operation.
3. Objectives should be clear and measurable. This is particularly interesting in the realm of missions and military operations. In an environment where war is no longer declared nor concluded with an armistice, the operations should be considered as terminated when they have achieved their proposed objectives and whose actions were justifiable. Other type of objectives is more general, such as the security of a country.
4. Inform, influence and persuade. The three most important actions of a proactive strategic communication.
5. Global audiences. Only one of the definitions required that the audience of strategic communication should be of a foreign origin. The term global adjusts better to the definition. Since the two fundamental audiences -avant-garde and conservative- will have in turn others audiences that will broaden their range spectrum.
6. Accurate Information. This is the only term that is repeated only once. It is symptomatic that Admiral Stavridis, present Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, has included it in his definition. Credibility is the gem of strategic communication, as it was proven in the war of Afghanistan and it was made clear by General Petraeus, in the first command that he issued to his men. His loss seriously threatens the success of the missions. It is very hard to obtain and is extremely easy to lose.
7. Evaluation of the results. All strategic communication policy has to measure its results as well as to analyze what has transpired: if the results have been achieved, evaluate whether they have been completely acceptable, if they were not achieved, the causes of its failure and to take the necessary measures to avoid them happening again in the future.

## 5. Conclusions

1. These new wars are demanding greater amount of specific and strategic communication management. It is vital to have knowledge of the public or the audience of military operations and its sociopolitical context. One can follow its operations in real-time through multiple platforms. It is essential to count on the news media as a vehicle in order to articulate the necessary domestic consensus in decision-making. Strategic communication helps legitimize the move to exercise military operations or missions. To prevent the erosion of the domestic support of military operations, strategic communications will play a fundamental role in managing expectations concerning the duration of the conflict. Professional armies will allow a “professional” approach of the missions, limiting the emotional effects of a compulsory military service. Communication is also present in “non-warlike” use of military power, typically characteristic of the new armies after the Cold War. The use of military contractors sometimes takes the public spotlight off the managing of sensitive operations against asymmetric adversaries. In these new wars you will never see the enemy grouped together or even visible. They remain fragmented and hidden in the new war trenches: the population and new news media.

2. The complexity of its operations will increase. Multilateral organizations are involved in solving international crisis. In their attempt to do so, the result is often inefficiency and lacks coordination. This projects an image of ineffectiveness and causes widespread impatience. This projects an image of ineffectiveness and causes widespread impatience. In principle, the Integral Approach should be able to help rationalize this complexity.

3. Communication battles are always long term ones, “these hybrid operations invariably require demonstrable strategic patience on the part of the nations involved”.<sup>75</sup> To change the perception of things needs time. It can be established that Strategic Communication perhaps should be based on medium and long term objectives. However, in Afghanistan today, it can be clearly seen that the international community wants to withdraw as soon as it can. The strategy developed by General Stanley McChrystal required a lot more time than what was available to bring about to the Afghan people the desired changes of perception.

4. The war in Afghanistan demonstrates that the new armies must be founded on the basis of two things: the use of speed in its deployment and its ability to build credibility within the population via its actions. What began as a war to overthrow the Taliban, due to their hiding the person responsible for the September 11 attacks,

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75 LINDLEY-FRENCH, J. *Operationalizing the Comprehensive Approach*. Atlantic Council, Issue Brief, 2010, p. 4.

has been converted over the years in a costly operation of reconstruction and stabilization of the country. These new armies must have the flexibility to successfully allow them to face up and tackle both of these strategies with success.

5. Whilst al-Qaida has lost influence in Afghanistan, the Taliban have gained it, especially after the loss of their leader, Osama Bin Laden.

6. The mixed nature of the PRTs (**P**rovincial **R**econstruction **T**eams) is a determinant in preventing coordination, this is transmitted to the messages and communication to the public which is the objective of the mission, whether inside or outside the theater of operations. “The military component of the PRT can be constrained by national caveats, whilst these civilians are outside the chain of command of ISAF, reporting directly to their governments.”<sup>76</sup> The same applies to the nature of the mission, which is different for each nation participating: If for the United States it is a Counter Insurgency operation (COIN), to countries like Spain it is a peace mission. In either case, the military doctrine that should be employed is radically different.

7. The frequent rotation of the PRTs heads, which occurs every four or five months, end up as being an added difficulty because it often leads to the local authorities and tribal leaders having to get used to dealing with a total stranger. Therefore, confidence in the PRT does not progress much; it always remains stagnant in every new command.<sup>77</sup>

8. It is of importance to have its own public support. Most of the success of operations also lies in suitable communication with the public behind the scenes. In a recent study conducted in the United States and five of its most important allies (UK, France, Germany, Canada and Australia) showed that the main reason that the war in Afghanistan had lost support amongst the population of each participating country resided in a combination of events, the accumulation of casualties, and the growing perception that the field effort was failing<sup>78</sup>. Returning to the topic on rebel strategy, these are exactly their goals. Therefore it can be said that it is as important to seek the support of the Afghan people for the success of the operations as it is to neglect the moral and public support of ones own people.

9. NATO’s strategic concept of communication is here to stay. It can withstand evolutions and modifications, but it will remain faithful to the will and the ability to

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76 JAKOBSEN, P. V. *NATO’s Comprehensive Approach to Crisis Response Operations. A Work in Slow Progress*. Danish Institute for International Studies, DIIS Report, 2008, p. 24.

77 SIERRA, M. “El Equipo de Reconstrucción Provincial de Bagdhis (Afganistán)”, conferencia impartida en la jornada *La nueva estrategia en Afganistán: la importancia del factor cultural y de las relaciones con la población local*. Centro Internacional de Toledo para la Paz (CITpax), Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado, 2 de julio de 2010.

78 MILLER, Ch. A. *Endgame for the West in Afghanistan? Explaining the Decline in Support for the War in Afghanistan in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, France and Germany*. The Letort Papers, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010.

treat communication as a cross-sectional component of its operations.

10. Strategic communication should be an area of special training, especially in General Staff courses, military schools and academies, in order to have future officers assume with reasonable guarantees the leadership in the management of a communication campaign. Similarly, it is necessary to reinforce the training of soldiers to be better prepared when they deal with situations of extreme pressure or provocation.

11. Any definition of strategic communication must include the following terms: coordination, medium and long term planning, clear and measurable objectives, inform, influence and persuade global audiences, truthful information, and evaluation of the results.

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