
The New Communication: Leveraging Community Relations to Transition from Wars Amongst the People to Peace Amongst the People

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Throughout human history, community social networks have been the foundation upon which societies and states have been built. Social networks, such as ethnic and religious communities, are horizontally structured and have historically been subordinated to the logic and efficiency of vertically structured hierarchical organizations such as governments. Local communities had little ability to use mass communication to influence governments. Communications technology, ranging from conventional media to the Internet and mobile phones, has changed this scenario. The flexibility, scalability, and survivability of social networks¹ has enabled communities “not just to communicate, but also gain position, to out-communicate.”² Such communities and their social networks have

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been transformed into media entities themselves, turning mass communications into a two-way conversation between governments and their citizens. As stakeholders in this current communications environment, aware and mobilized communities now demand information in real-time.³ Communications with local communities, from villages to urban neighborhoods,

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are increasingly important in modern warfare because the people of diverse communities have become conflict's center of gravity, or main objective. For the insurgent, the people are the main objective for sustenance, cover and concealment, or sanctuary. For the counterinsurgent, the people are the main objective as they must be won over if they are to be persuaded to deny the enemy sanctuary. Since World War II, there has also been an increased frequency of population-centric wars

that Rupert Smith calls "wars amongst the people," such as civil wars and insurgencies waged within civilian populations, in order to lure a conventional army into a heavy-handed response that will cause civilian casualties.⁴ Community social networks are the entry point for counterinsurgent forces to mobilize the people against the insurgent. The most effective community networks for mobilization against an insurgency are networks of civic engagement whose members share a mutual interest in the betterment of their communities. This shared interest within a community is a trait that Robert Putnam refers to as social capital.⁵ In Muslim societies, networks of civic engagement that derive from mosques, madrassas, and prayer groups have the social capital to protect and improve their communities, though they are not always used that way. The U.S. military's goal should be to connect networks of civic engagement to mobilize against, isolate, and out-communicate terrorist and insurgent networks. U.S. military public affairs must therefore adopt a more holistic public diplomacy approach by leveraging community relations to bridge the gap between mass media and community social networks, which are now empowered with modern communications technology. Through community relations, public affairs personnel can connect social networks to mobilize against threats to their communities and create peace amongst the people, transforming community relations into a partnership-building activity, better termed community network relations.

In this paper, I will first describe how social networks make up societies and how such networks are the entry point to the people, primarily with the aid of the observations of Manuel Castells and Robert Putnam. I will use their network theories to understand communications networks in Muslim societies, with a specific focus on Afghanistan, examining how the country has rebuilt its civil society since the fall of the Taliban through digitally empowered social networks ranging from mosques and tribes, to emerging youth, media and women's community organizations. This emerging civil society was made possible with the help of the international community, mostly NATO countries, who are arguably now fighting a new 'Great Game' with Pakistan and Iran for the influence of the Afghan people. To examine how globalization and modern communications technologies have re-ordered the relationships between states and social networks, I will continue to utilize the findings of Manuel Castells, in addition to Philip Seib. Through this process, I will make the recommendation that community relations, rather than just media relations, should form the spearhead of modern military communications efforts to facilitate conversation with the people, as part of a holistic communications strategy of public diplomacy. I will then briefly describe some public diplomacy activities that can be applied in such a communications strategy, drawing from definitions provided by public diplomacy historian Nicholas Cull. Before moving into networks, however, I will first examine why the people represent the priority of communications efforts in modern warfare.

WARS AMONGST THE PEOPLE

Max Boot writes, "Since World War II, insurgency and terrorism have become the dominant forms of conflict—a trend likely to continue into the foreseeable future."⁶ According to Boot, conflicts fought by violent non-state actors resulted in more than 90 percent of wartime deaths in the 1990s.⁷ This trend is likely to continue for the United States given its conventional military and nuclear strength. As Hammes writes, our enemies have, therefore, "decided to exploit our weaknesses in irregular warfare."⁸ In these irregular wars amongst the people, the guerilla "needs the people in their collective form to sustain himself."⁹ In other words, the guerilla uses the population for cover, concealment, and sustenance. The effort to counter the modern guerilla is a battle for "hearts and minds."¹⁰ The people are the center of gravity, and the battle for the loyalty of the population must be the main effort.¹¹ For this reason, community relations must be the primary means not just in the communications strategy, but embedded in the campaign strategy.

Rupert Smith argues that “In order to understand operations amongst the people, and to capture their will, we must first understand ‘the people.’”¹² How do we access and engage “the people as a collective entity,” as Smith describes them? “They are an entity but not a monolithic block,” he explains.¹³ We must start with social networks as an entry point to first understand and then engage the people.

NETWORKS AND SOCIETIES

Manuel Castells calls networks “the backbone of societies.”¹⁴ Community social networks are also self-regulating entities with no centralized control. Within communities, such networks create norms that explain rules of acceptable behavior. One example is the tribal honor code of *Pasthunwali* in Afghanistan, which provides a commonly agreed upon set of rules. Leaderless social networks, however, have historically been subordinated to the logic and efficiency of highly centralized command-and-control organizations, such as governments.¹⁵ Until the arrival of the Internet, mass communication was also limited to a handful of media entities, such as television networks, that were run by either large corporations or governments themselves. The people had little say on content. Governments and other centralized organizations were therefore able to maintain a monopoly on communication.¹⁶ Modern communications technology, however, has changed the relationships between people and their governments. Community social networks have been empowered by access to communication on a scale that has enabled ordinary people to out-communicate conventional media. With the arrival of globalization, communications technology has brought out the true strength of community social networks, primarily their “flexibility, scalability and survivability.”¹⁷

According to Castells, a network is an interconnected series of nodes. A node can be a person or group of people. The important or more influential nodes are called centers. In Muslim societies, mosques, madrassas, and prayer groups are examples of such centers. Centers assert importance by “absorbing relevant information and processing it more efficiently.”¹⁸ “In social life,” Castells points out, networks are themselves communicative structures that are the result of human interaction across time and space.¹⁹ Networks are particularly resilient because they have no centralized command and control and can therefore withstand attacks by quickly re-configuring themselves.²⁰ Once digitized through the Internet, such horizontal networks become autonomous and able to lead themselves, allowing “individual actors to build their autonomy with likeminded people in the

networks of their choice.”²¹ People in such networks also “choose the terms of their co-evolution,” and form into mass social movements led by not one person, but by everyone in the network.²²

Social networks, aided by modern communications technology, have no national boundaries. Castells refers to such transnational societies as the “network society”—a localized community that is also a global society.²³ The global network society can also re-shape itself to jettison inefficiencies within its network, such as narrow-minded streams of thought that limit the amount of information a network is dependent upon consuming. In other words, in order for a modern network to grow and thrive, it is dependent upon a free-flow of information to enhance knowledge. If someone or something limits the network’s ability to acquire more information, the network simply reconfigures itself, in order to isolate the source that seeks to limit its information intake and exchange.²⁴ Jihadist thought, for example, is one such inefficiency because it limits the amount of information that a network can process by subscribing to singular ideas. Anyone that seeks another interpretation is shunned. Such limiting thought is counterproductive to the community because it shuts down the ability of its members to acquire answers to its questions in an attempt to gain more knowledge. Such limitations, in the digital age, can push others to reconfigure their networks to isolate the inefficient ones. If a community has a shared agreement on what actions contribute to its improvement, then the community possesses a starting point to mobilize against the presence of something or someone that runs counter to the community’s interest.

Robert Putnam states that a community’s shared norms of reciprocity form what he calls networks of civic engagement. Reciprocity is an exchange that can be in the form of goods or actions, but can also be based on an exchange of trust. “I help you out now,” Putnam explains, “in the expectation that you will help me out in the future.”²⁵ Networks of civic engagement include sports teams, charities, and Rotary Clubs, which share ‘horizontal interaction,’ or interaction among equal peers. Dense networks in a community are also more likely to work together for their members’ mutual benefit.²⁶ Such mutual cooperation is facilitated by what Putnam calls social capital, the bind that compels people in a community to work together in coordinated action to improve society.²⁷ When social capital creates norms and networks based on pluralism and mutual trust, such networks can combine to build civil society institutions.

Social capital, generated by networks of civic engagement, improves local communities, society as a whole, and ultimately the state.²⁸ Networks of civic engagement and civil society organizations provide a healthy check

and balance for governments and comprise the foundation of democratic states.²⁹ Such a society is also more likely to mobilize against a threat to public safety such as that posed by an insurgency. Mobilization occurs when leaders emerge from the population to commit themselves against the insurgency, such as entering the new government or providing information about insurgent activities.³⁰ However, in countries in which civic engagement and social capital are lacking, the possibility for such mobilization is low. The possibility for coercion and extortion of such communities under the influence of an insurgent group is high. Some examples of at-risk societies include former communist countries that had low civic engagement even before communism. Other examples include societies that have been destroyed by civil war such as Somalia, Libya, Syria, or any failed state in which the government cannot provide security. In such cases several armed groups fill the void until the strongest seizes power and imposes order through violence.

Afghanistan is another such society whose civic traditions and social capital were abused and destroyed—first by the Soviets and then by the Taliban. However, the current communications environment has enabled the growth not only of social networks, but also of “transnational NGOs and

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social movements that assert the rights of a new, global civil society.”³¹ Global networks can find valuable additions anywhere and incorporate them into their network, “while bypassing and excluding those territories, activities, and people that have little or no value for the assigned tasks of a network.”³²

A global civil society can enable and re-build networks of civic engagement in war-torn societies with weak social capital to out-manuever and isolate threats to their communities. As General Stanley McChrystal states, “It takes a network to defeat a network.”³³

Muslim societies have possessed particularly strong networks throughout history,³⁴ which has prompted al-Qaeda to use these networks for cover, concealment, movement, recruiting, and funding to wage a truly global insurgency. In the absence of vigorous civil societies, Muslim communities can also sustain the only form of social capital that can mobilize a community to protect itself against a threat to its security. Muslim communities in Afghanistan attempted to do this in the absence of government after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union

and in the presence of a weak government that has little access to communities outside the capital. Muslim community social networks, however, also contain uniquely Muslim nodes or centers of communication. This unique communications landscape goes beyond television, print media, radio, and the Internet, and begins with traditional centers of mosques, madrassas, *ulama* councils, and prayer groups.

MOSQUE AND PRAYER

Online Muslim social networks mirror those in real life. Gary Bunt states, “The Internet enables the facilitation of the dimensions of the sacred for those who do not have access to traditional resources or who seek an alternative perspective.”³⁵ A Muslim in Yemen who may seek a more moderate form of Islam can connect and pray with a Muslim in Cairo or California to create a distinct community, or more precisely, a distinct network. The same, however, is true of extremist Muslims seeking to connect with each other, as al-Qaeda has proven. Mosques and prayer groups are communities that have historically extended around the world in both beneficial and destructive forms of social capital. The Internet amplifies these networks for better or worse.

Mosques are often co-located with madrassas. Some madrassas also exist at the university level and hold authority, legitimacy, and credibility throughout the Muslim world. Robert Heffner states, “Islamic schools are not merely institutions for training young believers. They are the forges from which will flow the ideas and actors for the Muslim world’s future.”³⁶ Heffner explains that early madrassas evolved from schools that taught Quran recitation under the Caliphs Umar and Uthman, and then grew into centers of advanced religious scholarship three centuries later.³⁷ The later madrassas in South Asian Sufi and Shia communities grew into “educational charitable complexes” where mosques and madrassas were combined with hospitals, convents, public baths, and astronomical observatories. Math and philosophy were often taught as well.³⁸ These networks of civic engagement were the historical precedent to a Muslim civil society.

In contrast, Pakistan’s General Zia Ul-Haq used the madrassa network in Pakistan’s tribal areas to radicalize Muslims into the Saudi Arabian Wahhabi strain of Islam to wage jihad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Peter Tomsen states that Zia created an “ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence)-managed religious military complex along the Pakistan Frontier.”³⁹ Pakistan’s ISI, a clandestine intelligence service, created militant guerilla groups throughout South Asia, largely deriving from the time of the Afghan-Soviet war. Under

Zia, the ISI administered a Saudi- and CIA-funded network of madrassas and military training facilities staffed by Pakistani military officers. Pakistani Islamist political parties proliferated Wahhabi madrassas to foster the recruitment of jihadists. According to Tomsen, by 1988, Pakistan had 2,891 madrassas in operation and 1,800 more that were affiliated with Islamist parties such as Jamaat or Jamiat-e-Islami splinter groups. In comparison, the moderate Sufi and Shi'a madrassas respectively numbered only 717 and forty-seven.⁴⁰ These more tolerant forms of Islam were out-funded, out-communicated, and out-networked.

ULAMA AS LEGITIMIZERS OF POLICY

In addition to the madrassas and mosques, Muslim religious leaders themselves play an important role in communications in Muslim societies. *Ulama* Councils are groups of religious scholars who pass rulings on actions in society in accordance with Islam. They have, therefore, formed the historical foundation for norms of reciprocity. Muslim nation-states have historically used Muslim religious leaders and scholars as legitimizing agents of the state. In Egypt, for example the *Ulama* Council of Al-Azhar University was used to legitimize Arab nationalism under Gamal Abdel Nasser, to de-legitimize socialism under Sadat, and later to counter Islamist radicals under Hosni Mubarak.⁴¹ Some of the *ulama* in Egypt, however, also have relationships with Islamists and have helped foster a parallel Islamic sector at the grassroots level. This parallel sector helps Islamists elude the government and supports Islamist recruiting.⁴² Since the Egyptian revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood has attempted to designate Al-Azhar as a formal government institution.⁴³

In Afghanistan, President Karzai established an *Ulama* Council in 2002 in an effort to gain religious legitimacy. The council has 3,000 members, all on the government's payroll, throughout the country. Similar to Al-Azhar University's *ulama*, Afghanistan's council publicly backs Karzai's decisions in exchange for direct access to the palace. But when at home in the provinces, council members often preach against Karzai's government and its western allies.⁴⁴ Modern communications technology, however, has enabled ordinary Muslims to challenge traditional religious institutions like *ulama* councils. The Internet

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has facilitated the creation of cyber-*ulama* who do not possess formal religious credentials, but gain a following online where they offer alternative religious interpretations.⁴⁵ Modern communications technology is therefore helping to create alternative and moderate interpretations of Islam. Horizontal networks are now able to challenge vertical networks like *ulama* councils.

CONVENTIONAL MEDIA LANDSCAPES WITHIN AFGHANISTAN

In the Muslim world, satellite television began the process of re-structuring the relationship between communities and nation-states. Satellite television allowed transnational ethnic networks such as the Kurds and religious communities, such as the global *ummah* (community), to create their own voices and virtual states.⁴⁶ By 2008, according to Philip Seib, the growth of new media in the Middle East had skyrocketed from a handful of stations to 450 privately owned satellite channels, ending state media's dominance in the region, which began with the creation of Al Jazeera in 1996. State media had previously been the only form of news, but was mistrusted by most of its viewers.⁴⁷ The increasing frequency with which international powers use their own satellite television outlets to influence international affairs is what Seib refers to as "The Al Jazeera Effect." In Afghanistan's case, international powers fund indigenous satellite television stations. "The media are no longer just the media," writes Seib.

They have a larger popular base than ever before and, as a result, have unprecedented impact on international politics. The media can be tools of conflict and instruments of peace; they can make traditional borders irrelevant and unify peoples scattered across the globe. This phenomenon—the Al Jazeera effect—is reshaping the world.⁴⁸

Afghanistan's media landscape is growing at an even faster rate than those across the Middle East. Some 150 satellite television stations have been created since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.⁴⁹ Such connectivity has attracted an array of international actors seeking to shape or capture the country's post-war government through media influence. Iran is one such actor seeking to gain access to Afghanistan's population through the shared ethnic and linguistic ties that connect Iranian and Afghan social networks. One example of this is satellite television's ability to reach specific Afghan Shi'a demographics, such as the Hazara ethnic group by offering Shi'a religious programming.⁵⁰ According to the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) former Anti-Corruption Task Force Commander, Major General H.R. McMaster:

Many of the media platforms that operate in Afghanistan—television, radio, print media—are either wholly captured and run, or owned by hostile organizations or entities . . . The Iranian government has about 20 television stations operating in Western Afghanistan.⁵¹

Iran has used similar tactics in Iraq since 2003, where it infiltrated Qods Force, a Special Forces unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Badr Corps, and intelligence operatives to secure influence over the new Iraqi government.⁵² The Badr Corps, an armed wing of the Shiite Supreme Council of Iraq (SCIRI) militia prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, was later reported to have been involved in sectarian killings both inside and outside the Iraqi security forces. The Badr Corps was formed and trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guard during the Iran-Iraq war.⁵³

According to Emma Sky, Iran's most significant impact in Iraq came from using its influence with the Maliki government to prevent the signing of a Status of Forces Agreement with the United States. The absence of a Status of Forces Agreement ultimately prompted the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq.⁵⁴ Iran hopes to wield its influence in the Afghan government and the media to achieve the same aim in Afghanistan.⁵⁵

In Afghanistan, each political party has its own media outlet. Many outlets are funded by international donors that range from Western countries to regional neighbors such as Iran and Pakistan.⁵⁶ This is evident in many Afghan media outlets' use of the theme of opposition to Afghanistan's signing a Strategic Partnership Agreement with the United States.⁵⁷ Amie Ferris-Rotman refers to this jockeying of international players for position within Afghanistan's media landscape as "Afghanistan's New Great Game."⁵⁸

The Al Jazeera Effect in Afghanistan, or the Afghanistan Effect, is still in its infancy, but is taking hold quickly. Soon the country will have a fiber-optic ring connecting every province to 3G Internet. Afghanistan's media growth has already entered its next chapter with the emergence of social media. Coupled with conventional media, the Internet can empower young Afghan voices, which now comprise over 50 percent of the population and who are capable of defending their country from extremism with an "Afghan Spring."⁵⁹ The rapid expansion of the communications technologies of the Internet, satellite television, and mobile phones has made control by a group like the Taliban much more difficult. Should a repressive government take hold, it will be nearly impossible to control a digitally empowered population. As Seib points out, "Governments can jail bloggers and knock some satellite stations off the air, but the flood of information and the intellectual freedom it fosters, is relentless."⁶⁰

The United States tried to utilize Afghan government spokesmen to gain the support of the Afghan people against the Taliban. Instead, however, the Karzai government used the Afghan government media and its control over information to create an anti-NATO and anti-U.S. message. The intent appears to be to turn the Afghan people against ISAF rather than the Taliban. Karzai, however, miscalculated the perceptive power of the Afghan people and the power its networks of civic engagement could wield with the aid of modern communications technology. "One source of the misconception about my country is the Afghan government's combative relationship with the international community," writes the head of the Moby Group, which owns Afghanistan's Tolo network, Saad Mohseni.⁶¹ "Most people in Afghanistan remain strongly supportive of international engagement and widely approve of the presence of troops from other countries."⁶² The change in tone of the Afghan government should prompt a re-assessment of communication efforts on the part of the international community. Rather than relying solely on the Karzai government to communicate to its people, the international community should adapt its strategy to understand, engage, and mobilize the Afghan people against the Taliban and its affiliates through a variety of mediums.

During John Kerry's visit to Kabul in March of 2013, shortly after his appointment as Secretary of State, a large section of the Afghan public unleashed a backlash against Karzai in the Afghan media. According to Saad Mohseni,

Whether they were members of the intelligentsia, whether they were media people, whether they were academics, 95 percent of the talking heads on television every night were condemning what the president was saying. They didn't agree with [Karzai].⁶³

This demonstrates how mass media can create enough awareness to mobilize the population against entities that seek to curtail their freedom. However, Karzai's tilt away from the United States and the west has another reason. According to *TIME* magazine's Tony Karon, Karzai changed his tone toward Washington and the west when the 2014 withdrawal timeline was announced. By cozying up to Iran, Pakistan, and China, as well as internal opposition like the Taliban, Karzai is not only trying to survive politically after the withdrawal, but also personally. In addition, to influence Afghan Taliban elements to lay down their arms and become part of the new Afghanistan, a combative image with the United States is advantageous for the Karzai government to demonstrate its sovereignty, rather than be seen as a U.S. puppet.⁶⁴

As weak states and new democracies supported by the United States continue to battle insurgencies, they will likely become muted or hostile to the United States, in an effort to demonstrate their sovereignty. Some form of power sharing with reconciling insurgent groups is inevitable. We should be working to prevent total control by a group such as the Taliban,

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and instead help create an environment in which no single group dominates.⁶⁵

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In Afghanistan, the United States funds some of the largest and most popular television outlets, such as Saad Mohseni's Tolo television network, which includes Dari and Pashto news broadcasts, as well as Afghan television

drama and comedy shows.⁶⁶ In addition to conventional media, social media websites accessible on 3G and 4G networks will empower Afghanistan's emerging civil society more than ever before. Seib states that such media can act as "an information equalizer in telling its story, managing logistics, and accomplishing many small communications tasks that must happen in concert if the uprising is to succeed."⁶⁷

An example of modern communications technology's ability to empower citizens and security forces to defend themselves occurred in Afghanistan on April 15, 2012, when a Taliban group staged multiple attacks in Kabul's diplomatic area known as the Green Zone. The attacks were an attempt to achieve a 'Tet offensive' propaganda effect by appearing much more successful and widespread than they actually were. Ministry of Interior spokesman Sediq Sediqqi, however, used Twitter and Facebook to quickly clarify that the actual damage caused was minimal and provide information about the swift response of Afghan Security Forces. Afghan and international Kabul-based media, as well as NGOs and ordinary Afghan citizens, quickly joined the conversation to share information. Collectively, the information exchange refuted the Taliban's attempted narrative of a massive, overwhelming attack.⁶⁸ The incident highlighted social media's ability to rapidly connect and mobilize populations against

insurgents in ways similar to Paul Revere alerting the Minutemen of the landing of British troops in Charleston Harbor. As Seib points out, "They share the goal of alerting their colleagues to a crucial impending event ... No horse needed."⁶⁹

According to Mohseni's Moby Media group, the April 15 attack was a turning point for the Afghan people. Because of the performance of Afghan security forces, public confidence shifted in favor of the Afghan government, a shift so significant it prompted the Moby Group to launch a television docu-drama series that traces the stories of twelve Afghan Security Force personnel during the days that led up to the attack. This is yet another example of what David Galula identifies as a population mobilized against the insurgent, but also an indicator that the counterinsurgent is winning.⁷⁰

According to retired Marine Corps General James Cartwright, wireless Internet access on cell phones may be "far more lasting than anything else that we're going to do in Afghanistan and far more influential."⁷¹ Though there is a perception that the Internet is unavailable to most Afghans, according to John Reed's sources, Afghanistan has 19 million subscribers and a 3G network coming online. The Afghan ministry of communications expects the 3G network to bring "mobile Internet" to roughly 85 percent of the country within five years.⁷²

COUNTERARGUMENT: MESSAGING VS. CONVERSATION

Some may argue that mass communication of U.S. government messages through strategic communications is the best method to gain public support. However, following the September 11 attacks, such strategies have not included two-way processing of information in the form of a conversation. Communication has instead consisted of one-way messaging. Under the 2004 Defense Department strategic communications definition, "the U.S. government is the prime mover and strategic communication is a one-way communication from the government to the target foreign audiences." By 2006, however, the U.S. Department of Defense recognized that communication could no longer be a one-way transmission. Audiences needed to be "understood" and then "engaged."⁷³ "The whole debate over strategic communications ignores the reality that we live increasingly in a participatory culture," said Chief of Navy Information, Rear Admiral John Kirby.⁷⁴ He added, "People aren't waiting to lap up our messages anymore ... They don't want access to information. They want access to conversation."⁷⁵ Good community relations provide that access.

By effectively leveraging community relations, public affairs organizations can do more than just engage in media relations and mass messaging. An innovative community relations effort can conduct listening, cultural and sports diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and advocacy through speaking engagements.⁷⁶ Listening activities can also provide information on the civil environment to plan and execute civic action projects ranging from medical and veterinary clinics to low-level engineering projects. Such activities reinforce communications efforts by demonstrating consistency in our actions and our words.

The reliance on messaging with strategic communications can be construed as propaganda, rather than providing content and context through conversation. Public Affairs cannot be separated from activities such as information operations, which also contain psychological operations.⁷⁷ Conversely, the insurgent has no responsibility and can lie, exaggerate, and cheat. The counterinsurgent must “inform and not ... fool,” for he can seldom cover up bad policy with propaganda.⁷⁸ The “at-risk” populations in wars amongst the people want conversation and are much savvier at gleaning the useful information within a message. Networked communication is also more participatory and is held as more credible than conventional media.⁷⁹

“Ours is a post-audience world,” says Rear Admiral Kirby, “where we can no more control the narrative than we can control the weather.”⁸⁰

We do, however, need to know who else is trying to shape or control the

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narrative. Rupert Smith points out that communication in wars amongst the people is like a stage in which there are multiple sets of players and producers, each of whom have their own script. “To a large extent the media is common to all parties in the theater, whether they are in confrontation, conflict or allied.”⁸¹ Today, communications technology has re-ordered the relationship between states and their people. The people themselves have the power to become media—each acting as a player

on the stage, with their own story to tell. However, these technologies are not a means unto themselves. As Seib points out, “Media do not make revolutions, people do.”⁸² It is therefore the people who must be mobilized against internal and external threats of one group to seize total control. The

starting point for such mobilization is to identify networks of civic engagement and form a trusted networks approach.⁸³

THE NEW COMMUNICATION: A TRUSTED NETWORKS APPROACH

To protect societies from internal and external subversion by radical violent actors, David Kilcullen suggests a model that was used to counter the communist infiltration of trade unions in Europe during the Cold War. This strategy called for private sector and community movements to build viable non-communist trade and community unions. The “trusted networks” approach, Kilcullen argues, should be coordinated with Muslim community leaders to build on common ground, strengthening relationships to counter radicals.⁸⁴ Community relations can play a central role in mobilizing such networks, by connecting them to other civic-minded networks and creating a viable alternative to radical groups.

The Department of Defense defines community relations as “the relationship between military and civilian communities.”⁸⁵ When applied internationally, the doctrine states that, “Interaction with overseas non-news media civilians in an operational area is handled by civil-military operations with public affairs support as required.”⁸⁶ Therefore, when applied overseas, community relations is used by war fighting commanders to meet mission objectives, but the name is changed to civil military operations (CMO). However, military public affairs practitioners are not specifically trained to conduct community relations in wars amongst the people.

If public affairs personnel were able to engage the various networks within communities through the lens of their own language and culture, the public affairs organization and the commander could reach a much larger audience. I define this engagement as community network relations. While television and radio may have been the primary means of providing information to the people in the past, communications technology has transformed networks of civic engagement into media themselves. The Arab Spring and the 2009 Iranian uprising demonstrated that the Internet can enable individuals involved in transnational mass social movements to become citizen journalists when

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international journalists cannot access certain locations.⁸⁷ The modern military public affairs officer (PAO) can therefore act as a switch to connect such networks through community relations, transforming the traditional public affairs function into a holistic public diplomacy oriented activity, better termed community network relations. The first step in this New Communication is “listening.”

In public diplomacy, “listening” is defined by Nicholas Cull as “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by collecting and collating data about publics and their opinions overseas and using that data to redirect its policy or its wider public diplomacy approach accordingly.”⁸⁸ Listening is the foundation of public diplomacy, according to Philip Seib, and, “the best way to learn about the public with which you are trying to connect.”⁸⁹ Such engagement includes conversation in which we listen to people, rather than messaging them. Listening through conversation, Rear Admiral Kirby argues, “requires a certain humility that I worry we don’t always possess. It requires us to listen as well as to speak, to solicit as well as to inform, to be willing to admit of our own shortcomings and accept sometimes brutally frank feedback.”⁹⁰ Using listening techniques, community relations can also help bridge the knowledge gap by providing commanders with insight on the local communications environment. The personnel that make up such a community relations section should speak the local languages, have a detailed understanding of the local and regional culture, and be trained in key leader engagement, such as negotiation.

Listening should be the first step in an ongoing cycle that includes reciprocity, mobilization, and evaluation. The act of reciprocating would serve to address the people’s needs, either by implementing their recommendations into communication strategies or by delivering services that reinforce the message we are communicating. Such reciprocity ranges from building local infrastructure to playing in a sports match with the community. In addition, reciprocity, as a result of listening to a reporter’s feedback, may result in facilitating greater access for news reporting. Reciprocity generates social capital to mobilize the community into a partnership. Partnership and social capital are often generated by something as simple as playing football together.

Mobilization, particularly against an insurgent group, often comes after a community determines that the coalition or the government can provide security. One way to demonstrate that their government can take over security is for the people to see their security forces in action, as the Afghan public did during the April 15, 2012 Taliban offensive. Rather than shot-gunning photos and press releases over the airwaves, community

leaders should be invited to view their military in action. Military leaders should also engage the community to explain operations and provide content and context through conversation. In addition, if adjacent communities hear about or see the services the government and counterinsurgent forces provide, undecided communities can be encouraged to join the partnership against the insurgency, as they will also benefit from security and essential services such as medicine, education, and commerce. This is much more than an insurgent group can offer. This is mobilization. However, if undecided communities do not join in the partnership network, we need to learn why. We must evaluate to adjust our communications strategies.

Former Special Envoy to Afghanistan Ambassador Marc Grossman suggests that the State Department create a new personnel specialty he calls 'the expeditionary diplomat.' Such personnel would work in post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization projects, expanding their role to include much more direct contact with people in the countries in which they are deployed. These expeditionary personnel would also be involved in creating and supervising projects to provide essential services with the primary focus of working directly with the people.⁹¹ This is also a model that military PAOs can adopt in community relations activities. PAOs would be able to make their communication credible by backing up their words with deeds. Public Diplomacy tactics provide ways to execute community network relations strategies and reciprocate to the community, by addressing the real questions communities have, and in the case of humanitarian operations to better provide aid where it is needed. The appropriate tactic to use can be determined after conducting effective listening.

The core tactics of public diplomacy are advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting. Nicholas Cull defines advocacy as, "An international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy, idea or that actor's general interests in the minds of a foreign public."⁹² This activity often comes in the form of press conferences and speeches.

Cultural diplomacy is the action of "making a country's cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad."⁹³ This can be in the form of sports competitions with the host nation and organizations from the U.S. cultural diplomacy can also include museum exhibits and music concerts.⁹⁴ Such exchanges of music and sports increase social capital by forming common bonds between the U.S. and overseas audiences. This can decrease the desire for some to do Americans harm, by making American culture more attractive.

Exchange diplomacy is the action of "sending its citizens overseas

and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and/or acculturation.”⁹⁵ In the U.S. military, the Afghanistan Pakistan Hands Program is probably the closest to being an example of exchange diplomacy. Under this program, military officers learn Dari or Pashto, deploy to Afghanistan or Pakistan for a year, and then return to the United States for a year of either graduate study of the region or related work. More advanced language training and a second deployment to Afghanistan or Pakistan then follow.⁹⁶ The Department of Defense is currently reviewing replicating ‘Hands’ programs in other areas such as the Asia-Pacific region.⁹⁷

The final core tactic of public diplomacy is international broadcasting through “radio, television and internet to engage with foreign publics.”⁹⁸ This activity is at work in Afghanistan’s media landscape, in which several international actors seek to influence the environment by funding satellite television networks. The U.S. military and State Department are already involved in this new great game in Afghanistan and the Middle East, through funding or advising communities in the use of Internet and satellite networks. As an actor from outside the region, the United States lacks the access and aptitude to operate in the Muslim world possessed by regional powers such as Iran and Qatar. By working with community social networks, however, the United States can learn more about the local communications environment, and also differentiate itself from actors like Iran, who seek to control communications. We can instead use community relations to make communication a cooperative process with local societies.

There has been a tendency by U.S. government public affairs programs in the past to separate domestic U.S. communication with international communications efforts. However, globalization and the Internet have blurred, if not eliminated, that dividing line.

line such that, as Cull notes, “not only is a message crafted for Kansas heard in Kandahar, but a message from Kandahar has circled the globe several

As Joseph Nye states, “To succeed in a networked world requires leaders to think in terms of attraction and co-option rather than command.”⁹⁹

The United States can be one such leader by applying a strategy of cooperative communication—the New Communication.

There has been a tendency by U.S. government public affairs programs in the past to separate domestic U.S. communication with international communications efforts. However, globalization and the Internet have blurred, if not eliminated, that dividing

times before Kansas is awake.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the holistic public diplomacy approach, spearheaded by community network relations, can also be applied domestically because local communities are now global communities.¹⁰¹

A ROADMAP TO DEVELOP THE NEW BREED OF COMMUNICATOR

With the increased frequency of wars amongst the people and the re-ordering of governments’ relationships with digitally empowered social networks, direct communication with the people has become a critical priority. Populations with much greater access to information also “want to be part of the process.”¹⁰² In order to provide such content and context, public affairs personnel need to engage communities at the local level. There must be an understanding of the people before they are engaged. In order to have a starting point, we must be able to identify networks with social capital and the switches that connect them. Inter-network communication is dependent upon connectors that Manuel Castells calls switches.¹⁰³ Switches, he says, are the new power holders that have “become the fundamental sources in shaping, guiding, and misguiding societies.”¹⁰⁴ By linking community networks together, we become switches ourselves to help societies defend themselves against threats to public safety such as terrorism, insurgency, and crime.

Police in Massachusetts, for example, implemented such an approach to fight gang activity in Springfield, according to a recent 60 Minutes report. In Springfield, Massachusetts, Michael Cutone, a State Trooper and Green Berets veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, used a counterinsurgency strategy of community engagement to protect the civilian population and curb gang activity. “We’re using the other 99 percent of the population that live there. Winning them over,” says Cutone. “They become our eyes and ears. . . floodgates have opened for criminal information that we can go after now.”¹⁰⁵

Though this is good policing, this is also good community relations aligned with law enforcement tactics to form an effective strategy. The end result is community mobilized into effective network to deny sanctuary to gangs.¹⁰⁶ Springfield’s community network approach is a domestic example of a community sharing information, through active conversation, with law enforcement. Afghanistan, on the other hand, is not only making similar efforts, but it is doing so digitally, using Facebook and Twitter as an incident reporting mechanism initiated by its Ministry of Interior as earlier discussed.

Domestically, understanding and engaging networks of civic

engagement can identify social capital, which is also a crucial element in responding to a crisis. During a disaster, such groups may prove critical in passing information to the affected population. Therefore, public affairs personnel will not only have to maintain the ability to communicate to the American people, but also do it more effectively through conversation—leveraging community organizations to share information.

Through public affairs personnel, community network relations provide an already existent means to support such efforts to effectively communicate in the modern communications environment that now exists at home and abroad. However, such personnel must possess the additional skill sets of language and cultural knowledge, as well as a clear methodology to help map the local communications environment, all of which can be provided through programs like the Afghanistan Pakistan Hands Program. To be effective communicators in the wars of tomorrow, public affairs personnel with such experience and training will be enabled to broaden the public affairs lane to civil-military operations. Communications organizations that connect directly with the people will therefore need long-range plans to build the right force based on human, rather than technological, capacity. Knowledge of community social networks is the entry point through which to mobilize the people. Such knowledge can be obtained through community network relations in which public affairs personnel connect multiple networks of civic engagement to transition from wars amongst the people into peace amongst the people. In a globally networked society, partnerships and social capital generated among local community networks is crucial to building global alliances. Such alliances will bridge the gap between our previous centralized communication approach and a new community network approach to create a holistic communications strategy for the modern age. This new, people-focused, cooperative communication is the New Communication the U.S. military must adopt.*f*

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