

AFGHANISTAN COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Purpose:

Maintain public support of our mission in Afghanistan by having concerted and consistent messaging on how our efforts are helping Afghans bring stability, build good governance, and reduce poverty in their country.

Storyline:

We are doing what is needed, because we are wanted, we are good at it, and we are supporting people who have a plan with real goals that we can measure success against.

Public environment

Recent media coverage has suggested an overall downward trend in public support for the deployment of Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. However, questions which provide the respondent with more information about the context of the mission finds majority still support for the mission. Polling conducted by DFAIT from May 12 – 15, 2006 suggested that when the mission is characterized as a “diplomatic, defense and development” as many as 7 in 10 Canadians are supportive. Canadians are also very supportive of the mission when Canadian values such as freedom, democracy and human rights are mentioned, as well as international organizations such as NATO and the UN. The weakest argument appears to be that a more stable Afghanistan will make Canada safer – only a slight majority of Canadians agree with that statement.

Communication Objectives:

- Demonstrate that Canada is exercising leadership in world affairs and making a difference.
- Communicate that, consistent with Canada’s traditional approach to international affairs, our participation is part of a multilateral effort (through the UN, NATO).
- Improve awareness, understanding and support for the full scope of our efforts (diplomatic, development, civilian police and military) in Afghanistan, and explain why the ultimate results outweigh the risks.
- Demonstrate how our involvement in Afghanistan is contributing to improvements in Afghanistan, is yielding concrete results and is consistent with traditional Canadian values of respect for human rights, rule of law and democratic development.
- Better define the Canadian military role within the broader context of Canada’s involvement in Afghanistan.

Strategic Considerations:

- The risks associated with our presence in Afghanistan, including the possibility of further casualties, makes promoting our mission to Canadians difficult. Just as progress on the ground can be difficult to achieve, we should expect few if any easy wins in communicating our challenges and achievements made to date.
- Positive results of development programming achieved through multilateral agencies cannot be directly attributed to Canada. There are few Canadian NGOs or Canadian staff in Afghanistan to tell the story and the security situation limits ability to engage the media as projects in areas that are remote and dangerous are hard to cover.

Key messages:

Canada is helping Afghanistan become a stable and self-sufficient state so that it will never again serve as terrorist haven, and threaten global and Canadian security.

Canada is unwavering in its commitment and is playing a leadership role in Afghanistan. Much progress has been made to date; but laying the ground work for democratic development takes time and requires sustained support.

Canada is helping to make Afghanistan safe for reconstruction. With our integrated approach consisting of diplomats, the CF, development workers and civilian police, Canada is helping the Afghan people bring stability to their country, strengthen governance and reduce poverty.

Measuring progress:

Five years ago, Afghanistan was ruled by the Taliban. There was no schooling for girls and schooling for boys was limited. Four in 10 men in villages were illiterate, as were nearly all women. Music was banned and there was no TV. There were no women working anywhere – women who had previously worked as lawyers, teachers, journalists, were confined to their homes and could only leave when heavily veiled and accompanied by a close male relative. Women could not be treated by male doctors, so childbirth mortality rates skyrocketed to become the worst in the world. The country was awash in guns, heavy artillery and landmines. Democracy simply didn't exist.

Thanks to Canada's involvement:

- almost 63,000 soldiers have been disarmed, 11 000 heavy weapons have been secured;
- a new constitution was adopted and parliament elected of which 25% are women;
- local enterprise is being built (157,000 clients, of which 78% are women, have received more than US \$12 million in small loans).
- 4.8 million Afghan children - one-third of them girls - are back in school.
- 12,000 villages have access to funding for water needs

Target audiences

- Canadian public, especially in regions where support is low (ie. Quebec)
- Afghan community in Canada (approx. 60,000 members)
- Canadian media, including Canadian community papers and ethnic media
- Academics, Development partners and Canadian NGOs, Military stakeholders
- Youth
- Parliamentarians

PROPOSED COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Main spokespeople:

- Advocacy led by the Prime Minister and Cabinet as lead spokespersons.
- Minister MacKay, Minister O'Connor and Minister Verner. Minister Verner as a Quebec Minister can help raise awareness in Quebec.
- Others: CDS Hillier, CIDA President Greenhill, DFAIT DM Harder; Ambassador Sproule on behalf of the Government of Canada
- Authorize departmental officials to speak to the media within clear guidelines and using pre-approved messages
- Speech modules to be developed for insert into public addresses by Ministers

Encourage Third party endorsements:

- by the Afghan-Canadian community
- Afghan Government representatives, including Afghan Ambassador to Canada
- Canadian NGOs and multinational agencies working in Afghanistan
- Quebec academics and think tank commentators
- UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), Chris Alexander

High Level visits

- outstanding invitation to President Karzai to visit Canada
- Personalities such as His Highness Aga Khan and Afghan leaders
- Following Minister MacKay's visit, seek opportunity for Minister Verner to travel to Afghanistan and visit development projects, with embedded media

Outreach:

In Canada

- Pursue 3D outreach to demonstrate integrated approach in Afghanistan. Target audiences to include parliamentarians, academics, defence experts, NGOs, media, community leaders, and the general public.
- Amb. Sproule speaking tour to Toronto and the Maritimes (Fall 2006).
- Encourage participation of Afghan Ambassador Samad where possible
- Presentations by redeployed members of the CF (especially the PRT)
- Incorporate messaging on Canada's role in Afghanistan into this year's Canadian Forces Parliamentary Program activities
- Engage key Canadians in UN

- Offer parliamentarians briefings, with CIDA, Afghan Ambassador, DFAIT.
- Country briefing for Canadian reporters in the DND embedding program.
- Create high profile conferences and round-table meetings
- Dedicated communication strategist at DFAIT

In Afghanistan

- Identify successful projects and encourage embedded media to visit them
- Assign Government of Canada public affairs officer to work in Kabul to assist in media outreach. (Rotational between CIDA and DFAIT)
- If security permits, arrange development-focussed tours for opinion leaders, decision makers
- CIDA to fund projects with Canadian NGOs that can illustrate Canadian role in development.

Products:

- Media Lines/Qs&As
- Powerpoint presentation for speaking tours
- OpEds by Ministers MacKay and Verner and possible RCMP Commissioner
- "Canadians Making a Difference: Afghanistan" brochure (10,000 copies produced and being distributed)
- 2-3 page pamphlet outlining Canada's integrated approach
- One-page whole of government backgrounder
- Development project list for public, media
- Continue use of Government of Canada website on Afghanistan, currently linked to PMO website, and add videos and interactive elements. The website has been linked by number of media outlets including CBC and CTV. The website is averaging 1000 hits a day.
- Displays and exhibits
- FAQs