

Executive Summary

- Canadians "invaded" Afghanistan;
- Canadians are acting unilaterally or under the direction of the U.S. forces;
- Canadians are uninvited and unwelcome in Afghanistan;
- Canadians are fighting a rising tide of civilian resentment. They are engaged in combat with Afghan civilians as well as with the insurgency movement; and
- Canadians are aggressors in the current conflict;

Articulating a more tangible benefit for Canadians that connects with Canadians' sense of identity of themselves in the international arena;

Countering an increasing trend toward insularity and an inward-looking focus. This is a particularly worrisome public opinion force particularly in an era which calls for increased global sensitivity and multilateral cooperation as the economic power base shifts in favour of the Sino-Asian continent;

Taking ownership of the issue and demonstrating a sense of responsibility toward the Afghan people to overcome the perception that a war in this "remote" part of the world is "not our issue";

Shifting perceptions of the Canadian military and redefining the role of peacekeepers;

Outlining the full scope of Canada's involvement, establishing and reinforcing the intersection between and importance of diplomacy, development and security activities;

Battling the current overlay of public cynicism which permeates perceptions of many government initiatives and general mistrust of the media. Combined, these phenomena make it extremely difficult to engage an open and receptive public audience; and

Demonstrating tangible progress.

C. The Broad Communications Approach

There is a need to communicate in a balanced fashion, employing a tone that is:

Optimistic – reflective of the progress to date;

Hopeful – underscoring that Canadians will continue to support the desire of the Afghan for an improved quality of life; and

Cautious – honest about the risks involved and the commitment to see the mission through.

Participants tended to question all of the facts and information put in front of them. This reflects the increasingly sceptical public mindset especially with respect to communications from the Government of Canada which they tend to view as painting a very one-sided picture of events. Examples of the successes and the failures as well as an honest assessment of the ongoing