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# HUMANITARIAN SOLDIERS, COLONIALISED OTHERS AND INVISIBLE ENEMIES

VISUAL STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION  
NARRATIVES OF THE AFGHAN WAR



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## Summary

This paper examines the current *visual strategic communications* endeavour of the Afghanistan International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation, which is designed to influence public opinion within the participant coalition nations. The aim is to track down what kind of means, messages and narratives the Western strategic communications machinery typically uses, in order to more effectively convince and address the domestic publics of the desirability of the operation. I concentrate on analysing the communication and image building endeavour taking place in Internet and *new media* surroundings, and namely bite into *visual images* constructed for the communication. For material, I use the ISAF media Flickr photostream, which is a large and frequently updated set of online photographs presented by ISAF.

This paper seeks to analyse how the “image fight of the Afghan war” – the fight to win over the minds and perceptions of the Western population – is waged today. The aim is to go beyond the official justifications that are tailored to explain and legitimise the war in Afghanistan. On the top of opening up the intended messages of the images, I also seek to bring to the fore any unintended narratives embedded in the images. Analysing the strategic communication images reveals the realms of current Western world views: dominant discourses and ways of perceiving ourselves, the “others” and the world emerge. I seek to deconstruct and examine what the discursive messages and narratives embedded in the visual representations reveal about their presenter and audiences. Moreover, I examine what they tell us about the politics, values, morals and attitudes of their time, and of the world order they are presented within. Unravelling and deconstructing the visual narratives of today’s war will bring to light a clearer picture of the resources, messages and narratives used to address “us”, the Western viewers, in order to see the conflicts of today in certain ways.

The visual narratives embedded in the images create a picture of how “we Westerners” want to see ourselves: as moral agents and international actors. The strong Western moral agent – manifested in the figure of the *humanitarian soldier* prominent in the imagery –

demands and creates its counter picture: the weak and passive *local populations*. Thus, the images justifying the war create “orientalising” picturing of the local populations as the “others”. They also produce a colonialising positioning of the strong civilising West and the weak local populations, who are in need of help. By addressing some issues and leaving some features of the operation unmentioned, the strategic communication images also paint a picture of the aspects of war we are not willing to encounter – thus the current frames of seeing war come to light.

## 1. Introduction: Visually winning over the Western audiences

*“You may not be interested in war – but the war is interested in you”*  
Leon Trotsky<sup>1</sup>

Military operations of today have more to do with information and cognition of people than ever before. In the post 9/11 era wars are waged not only on the ground, in the air, in maritime surroundings or in space, but also in the evermore complex and frantic information environment. The role of information today is not only pivotal in mediating the events of war, but also in shaping how war is now *conceptualised, perceived, comprehended and felt* by large populations. Soon after the 9/11 attacks the Afghan war started, and in this international “war on terror” the information environment – e.g. media, communication and the perceptions, *hearts and minds of the people* – has served as one of the most important battlegrounds.<sup>2</sup>

In post 9/11 wars fought by the West and the international community,<sup>3</sup> rigorous imago formation is central. Carefully created, novel and widely approved, easily adoptable “war-brands”, which can be fitted to the expectations, mindsets, values, attitudes and visions of the audiences and their time, are vital in topical wars. The age of post-modern war can be seen as an epoch of intensifying strategic communication, marketing or branding of military operations, public diplomacy policies and public opinion control.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on communication strategies, strategic communication and winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the people has, in recent years, significantly ascended up the Western war agenda and become more important in war strategies.<sup>5</sup> In this competition the best stories win; the narratives that show and present war according to the expectations, emotions, mindsets and value systems of the audience are most likely to be successful. Thus we – the followers and media spectators – are the consumers of war, and the war is interested in us.<sup>6</sup>

The war over public perceptions is fought on many fronts and with a variety of weapons: different resources, such as new technologies, new media, cultural narratives and powerful

visual representations, are pivotal when it comes to persuading people to see the war in certain ways. The recent Western alliance's communications strategy with regards to the Afghan war has elevated the importance of new media, social media and interactive, real-time communication. Thus, the status and importance of visual images and messages in the use of strategic communication have also been stressed. The power and status of visual images in shaping perceptions of wars has been long recognised. However, visual representations have recently roused more concern and received strengthened attention from militaries. Over the past few years, more emphasis has been attributed to the use of visual materials when building up the image of Western military operations. Nowadays, instead of just talking about "combat-cam", the latest U.S. and NATO manuals for strategic communications talk about effective usage of "visual messages and narratives" and strategic usage of visual representations.<sup>7</sup>

The ever more complex war in Afghanistan is now dragging on for a 10<sup>th</sup> year, and is currently a joint war effort between the U.S. and more than forty countries fighting under the NATO *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF) operation, which is commanded by a U.S. General.<sup>8</sup> The United States and the international coalition have now been engaged in the Afghan war for longer than the Soviet Union fought in the country during 1970s and 1980s. Despite the long duration of the war, the insurgent opposition and attacks by the Taliban and other militant groups have increased, namely after 2007. During the last few years insurgents have again gained more power and visibility, and the number of casualties – civil as well as coalition and insurgent – has risen to an all time high. In early 2011 violence and instability are still escalating in Afghanistan – as well as in Pakistan – and the unease towards the operation is now higher than before, both among the coalition populations and Afghan civilians.<sup>9</sup>

The pressure to address, motivate and persuade the ever more critical and war-weary populations and policy makers of coalition countries, and the demand to make the populations see the war effort as a meaningful endeavour worth taking part in, has perpetually increased, as many coalition countries have already decided to withdraw their troops from the area. In many European countries especially, participation in the war effort and the



overall attitude towards the operation – its desirability and the prospects of winning the battle – have in recent years grown more negative.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, NATO Strategies on Afghanistan stress more involvement and more liability from NATO ally and partner states.<sup>11</sup> The effort to assure and convince the domestic front of necessity of the war is essential for the success of the operation. Thus, the prolonged and ever more complicated war on terrorism is still today, above all, a fight over ideas and information: a war that is fought over world views, images and perceptions.

The new kind of post 9/11 era war - the long, dragged out and complex Afghan operation, the war wary populations and resilient critique combined with the evermore frantic and demanding information environment, together with the acute need to convince the broad international community of the desirability of the expensive and burdensome operation - create an intriguing starting point for the study of the strategic communication endeavour of the Afghan war. Under scrutiny in this study are the visual strategic communications *images* produced and presented by ISAF in an internet surrounding. The multinational Afghan ISAF operation is mandated by the UN, and can be seen to represent a new kind of embodiment of the international community – the values, aspirations, practices and aims of the multinational community within world politics and presented in a new way.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, analysing and reading the ISAF imagery offers an insight into the topical strategic communication messages, as well as to the spirit bestowed on the military operations of today conducted by the international community.

The object of this paper is to examine and read the current visual strategic communication endeavour of ISAF in the context of contemporary warfare, world order and predominant Western world views and paradigms. The material of the study consists of a set of visual images, numbering in the thousands,<sup>13</sup> produced and presented online by the public affairs unit operation with regards to the ISAF operation. These representations are mainly designed to influence and address the populations of the coalition countries; that is, the “home front” or the domestic audience of the ISAF operation. The aim of this paper is to analyse and interpret what kind of visual messages and narratives the strategic communication images – designed to ensure the spectators view the operation as just, desirable,

winnable and supportable – entail. By reading the images and their visual, historical, social and political features and contents, and by analysing what the images tell their audiences in their historical context and how they address their recipients, stories beyond the official justifications, strategies and formal narratives emerge. When interpreted and analysed in the context of predominant world politics, the images tell stories of their presenter as well as their audience, but also of the values, mindsets and attitudes of their time and of the topical world order they are presented in. Thus, when reading the visual narratives utilised by the strategic communication effort, aspects of the Afghan operation, and action often left unaddressed in political speech, can be indicated, revealed and set out in the open.

### ***Structure of the paper***

In the following chapter I will shed some light on the nature of visual material as a subject of research, and on the status and workings of visual representations in mediating information about wars and crisis. After this, I will open up the evolution and concepts of *information warfare* and *strategic communication*, as well as elaborating on the environment in which the strategic communication of the Afghan war now operates. I will touch upon the different aspects, challenges, sides and novelties of the recent communication war endeavour – keeping focus on the communication aimed at influencing Western audiences. After this, I will explain how I analyse and treat the pictures, what kind of methodology I use and on what kind of theories I base my study and analysis. I will also explicate how the study is conducted, how the material of the study is handled and divided into different narratives that are descriptive of western information warfare and strategic communication, and of the current discourses and paradigms governing our thinking today.

In chapter 3, “*The Humane War*”, I will go on to analyse the different kinds of visual narratives that can be found in the material that describes the operation. This chapter is divided into several sub-categories or narratives – according to the different types of pictures presented on the Flickr site, such as “Humanitarian soldier” and “The Other Protected”. Within the different subcategories I analyse and mirror the emblematic pictures and their messages alongside topical Western discourses, world views, attitudes, political paradigms

and structural changes in recent world politics. The picturing of Western action and the prominent figure of the Western humanitarian soldier juxtaposed with the picturing of the locals as tame and in need of Western help, create interesting narratives on the current war being waged by the international community.

While going through the large amount (over 15 000 pictures) of visual material, it became evident that some narratives were “made visible by invisibility”; that some themes and sides of the operation do not visibly stand out in the ISAF imagery. Chapter 4, “*The War Unseen*”, focuses on the “aspects missing” from the narratives used to legitimise, justify, advertise and “sell” the war effort to the audiences. Things left unaddressed, unmentioned or scantily addressed tell the story of the politically ticklish sides of war, and of aspects that do not fit the overall justifications and rationale of the operation. But things left unmentioned also tell us about the frames in which “we” – the Western audience of these visual narratives – are willing to encounter this war, and of frames in which we see ourselves and others in this global world.

Photographs presented on the Afghan war – when read together with the “missing aspects” – produce the frames of seeing the war of today. Put together, the images create a picture of how the strategic communication machinery wants to present the war to the citizens of participating countries and members of the “international community”. These pictures also reflect how “we” want to see ourselves: as moral agents and international actors in today’s war zones. When juxtaposed with the representations of the local Afghans, these war images also reveal how the military machinery presents the “rest of the world”, as well as the recipients of our help, the objects of the Western action, and, finally, war. In chapter 5, I draw conclusions from the findings and observations made from the different meta-narratives found in the ISAF pictures. Among the imago building endeavour, the strategic communication images also paint a picture of what we are not willing to encounter, and thus I conclude with today’s “frames of seeing war”, comprised by the ISAF pictures.

## 2. Visual narratives of war and strategic communication

News stories and media images, as well as representations of popular culture, play an important role in forming our understanding of the surrounding world.<sup>14</sup> Photographs and visual representations of wars and military operations have been widely used throughout modern history to mediate the story of military operations and aspirations in powerful, spectacular and effective ways. Pictures have been used to tell stories, arouse imagination and political emotions, and to paint images of war heroes, as well as villains. Visual images bring the situation of far away war theatres closer and thus more comprehensible to the home fronts. But, images of war have also been a powerful and a revealing arena for the ugly side of war, which is well guarded by the militaries.<sup>15</sup>

Today's frantically updated news, fast paced media representations, plenteous and striking visual images and strong narratives of war forcefully affect what we see of the world and how we see parts the world not directly in our natural sight. We also reflect our comprehension of our own statuses and roles in today's world, as well as our feelings and political emotions towards the distant others of the global community, according to the representations presented and mediated to us with regards to war.<sup>16</sup> But, news media, new media, expert assessments, scientific analyses and representations of popular culture are not the only soldiers in this vital battle space of today's war. Different sides taking part in today's military conflicts seek ferociously to disseminate information and to influence the perceptions people have of their struggle, actions and aspirations, as well as the justifications of their fight.<sup>17</sup> In this global information struggle over the perceptions of large populations, all possible weapons are used: narratives addressing our fears, beliefs and world views, as well as visual images that affect our emotions and work on our cultural values, therefore showing us "proof" of things and acting as sites of witnessing,<sup>18</sup> are utilised by military actors.

In recent years the status of visual representations in the use of military strategic communication has been elevated and new means of visually addressing populations have been

taken into account. In this paper I drill into the realms of visual strategic communication with regards to the Western war endeavour in Afghanistan. Visual images in the use of military strategic communication are a powerful and significant arena, entailing descriptive stories of the central paradigms of today's world politics, and in our current ways of thinking and perceiving the world.

## **2.1 Visual narratives of war: Every picture tells a story**

Visual images possess great imaginative power. Photographs of war and crises taking place in the far corners of the world shape the ways in which we perceive the world, in powerful, meaningful and signifying ways. Visual representations have formed our perceptions of wars far before photography ever came into existence, but since then "real-life" visual accounts of far away places, foreign cultures, crises, wars and global unrest have significantly come to shape our understanding of the world and humanity in general. The understanding of war among people who have not experienced it first hand is now chiefly a product of the impact of mediated images telling the story of war.<sup>19</sup>

Most citizens of the coalition countries taking part in the Afghanistan mission do not have a straight view of the operating area: they will never witness Afghanistan with their own eyes. The only way they become eyewitnesses to the situation, conditions, landscape and happenings in the area; the conditions of the populations living; and the events and the operation conducted there is by seeing pictures that are mediated, framed and selected in differing ways.<sup>20</sup> Without mediated visual information, the perceptions of the area, the country and the people, as well as the presence and action of the international community and ISAF troops, would solely be based on words and written description. Without the visual passages provided by photographs of the grass root level of the war theatre, our view of the operation would be unimaginably different. Today, film and photographic images powerfully shape our notions and outlooks of global wars and crisis areas: images narrate and tell stories of the otherwise unseen.<sup>21</sup>

The power of war photos has been long recognised, and the effectiveness of images has been feared and utilised by militaries in equal measure. Pictures of conflict and war have historically been in a central position when mediating information, stories and narratives from war zones to far away audiences. War pictures have been seen as testimonials and as proof of positive actions and operations. But they have also served as a revealing arena for the suffering inflicted by wars, misconducts and even war crimes.<sup>22</sup> Historically, crude and disturbing images showing human suffering and the harsh side of war have been used in many ways. Visual records of distress and suffering in the midst of wars and crises have been seen, in Western thinking, to arouse empathy, the will to intervene and to prevent the suffering of others more powerfully than textual records.<sup>23</sup> Humanitarian organisations extensively use images of suffering and distress to wake the moral sentiments of people that are capable of helping. Images are central to our understanding of crises. They arouse empathy and the will to help, thus enabling us to donate money when it comes to natural disasters, as well as war and political crises.<sup>24</sup> Images of war and crises encourage spectators to take a stand and form opinions on these very subjects. They have also been used for pacifistic purposes; as warnings and reminders of the madness of war, used to scare people into opposing war and violence.<sup>25</sup> But they have also acted as an arena for the arousal of fear and instilled a sense of resentment towards the opposing party in a conflict, as well as provoking the will to fight and wage war.<sup>26</sup>

The patterns of use, mediation and production of visual materials of war and conflict have significantly altered throughout the course of history, and they have also altered in accordance with technological novelties and media practices such as the development of photography and cameras, picture magazines and television; and, more recently, the Internet, cell phones, digital cameras and social media. In addition to this, the style of photographic presentation and usage of images have changed together with surrounding societies, politics and political culture, media regulations and guidelines, as well as cultural “codes of taste and decency”.<sup>27</sup> After the Vietnam War the power of images in the television age was bitterly learned by the U.S. Public opinion of the war was badly damaged by shocking images revealing the terrors of war, such as Nick Ut’s picture of the “Napalm Attack” and the

horrific pictures from the My Lai Massacre, taken by Ron Haeberle. After the Vietnam TV-era lesson, western powers and military actors have ever more forcefully strived to govern and regulate the images mediated from wars in which they are a playing a part. According to many researchers of political visual culture, this has led to a situation where crude and haunting pictures telling the story of Western-afflicted human suffering in the midst of war have become more seldom.<sup>28</sup>

However, harsh photographs of war-inflicted suffering, as well as images of violent war crimes committed by Western forces, have also occasionally surfaced in recent wars. In the age of Internet media outlets and real-time communication, mobile phones and social media, the unexpected revelatory information caused by these outbursts is ever more difficult – or next to impossible – to control by militaries.<sup>29</sup> These visual revelations have often damaged the reputation and public imago of military operations and increased disillusionment and strong opposition towards the wars. The 2003 *Abu Ghraib torture pictures* stirred up a vivid discussion on the procedures of the U.S. forces and strongly damaged the reputation of the Iraq operation.<sup>30</sup> The Danish documentary *Armadillo* (2010) showed revealing images of barbaric violence inflicted by Danish ISAF soldiers in Afghanistan, and stirred up a lot of discussion in the Nordic countries concerning the conduct and attitudes of the soldiers, as well as the desirability of Danish participation in the operation.<sup>31</sup> Most recently, violent photos of war have damaged the reputation of the Afghan operation, particularly when *Der Spiegel* (20 March 2011) published a set of photographs exposing the conduct of the so-called U.S. “Kill Team”. The images portray ISAF soldiers posing with the bloody corpses of dead civilians that the soldiers allegedly killed for “fun”. The coalition now fears a major public backlash, and perhaps even Afghan retaliation due to the pictorial eye-opener.<sup>32</sup> These recent instances powerfully illustrate the power of photographs in today’s warfare, as well as the formation of public imagination regarding war, the power and difficulties of images in forming attitudes towards war, and the difficulties for military strategic communication.

However, visual images of war and military operations can also be used and understood in just the opposite way. Pictures of war do not solely tell emotive stories of suffering or the

madness of war: visual images also offer a powerful and persuasive arena for the use of power, mediating positive stories of military operations – heroic tales of honour and victory – as well as being used to market wars in effective and influential ways. Visual materials powerfully address the audience in subliminal and affective ways. They influence emotions and comprehension of wars in forceful ways and embody a vast amount of suggestive power. Over and above, pictures of war heroes, heroic soldiers, leaders and winners have been elevated to iconic positions, acting as agents of identity formation, comprehension and strong emotions – and thus political action.<sup>33</sup>

It is evident that the position of visual images or visual representation in the fight to influence public perception and win the popularity fight is a vital one. Images of war have been often seen as proof and testimonials of occurrences that have really taken place, thus visual images act as an arena in which far away audiences can bear witness to events taking place elsewhere which would otherwise be left unseen by wider public.<sup>34</sup> Visual images are an extremely influential and imaginative tool but what is of most interest when reading and interpreting visual images is their suggestive power. Due to the special nature of visual materials, they partly work and affect us on the subliminal levels of the mind, thus influencing our perception in just the blink of an eye and in a very powerful manner. Images are read in an instant; they stick in our mind and affect us on an emotional and partly latent level.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the cultural, latent and partly subliminal messages sent by the images to their audiences, visual images also often entail and illustrate the attitudes and outlooks of their presenters and producers. In written texts and spoken words, culturally bound attitudes and positionings (especially when it comes to “foreign” cultures) can be hidden behind impersonal and politically correct descriptions. However, visual material often subtly gives away cultural stances and political attitudes which are often hidden in the material culture, positioning, gestures and composition.<sup>36</sup>

This special and problematic relationship between photographs and *the truth* is what makes the study of both so interesting. Just as photographs have been seen as sites of witnessing and as evidence of “something really taking place”, they can also be seen as framed, selected and purposefully produced representations of multidimensional reality.<sup>37</sup> In this way,



visual representations are not just evidence of history or events taking place but are themselves representations and interpretations of reality, and thus historical and political as such. As photographs illustrate and visualise the material culture and “the real world” – landscape, scenes, gestures, dress, appearance and other cultural and political features in striking and revealing ways – they simultaneously paint a picture of the “spirit” of their age, in both cultural and political dimensions. Reading and interpreting images and their culturally coded messages thus requires placing them in their historical, political and cultural surroundings and contexts; and above that being familiar with the cultural codes they entail.<sup>38</sup>

Although the power of visual images as mediators of information and as power players in wars and crises has long been recognised, only recently has the Western military communication strategy elevated the role and status of visual images and narratives in the use of military strategic communication. Images of war, utilised by military actors in strategic communication endeavours, act as one of the major tools shaping our perceptions of war today. How does the current Western strategic communication endeavour deploy and use visual images? And how are visuals used in the current Western fight to influence public opinion? In the following, I will first briefly open up the concept and recent evolution strategic communication as a segment of military information warfare. Secondly, I will open up the usage and workings of visual images in the current ISAF strategic communication effort in Afghanistan.

## **2.2 Strategic communication and visually winning over public perceptions**

*“We need to understand the people and see things through their eyes.  
It is their fears, frustrations, and expectations we must address”  
Stanley McChrystal<sup>39</sup>*

Psychological operations, propaganda and communications have long served an important role when waging wars. Even in the writings of ancient war strategians, influencing the perceptions of one’s adversary, as well as misleading the opponent with information and using it as a weapon, is granted a central role in winning battles and wars.<sup>40</sup> Still, the in-

formation operations of today have their roots in the teachings of the past, as today's information operations namely build on thoughts and methods developed during the propaganda warfare of the Second World War. The basic ideas of using intensive psychological manipulation disseminated via mass media in order to alter and construct the opinions, assessments and thinking of large populations, stem from the times of the Second World War.<sup>41</sup>

Even though modern propaganda is the precursor to the current information warfare, over the years the meaning and means of information warfare have expanded and the field of information warfare has significantly changed. The environment where the military strategic communication operations currently work is miscellaneous, very crowded and complex. Furthermore, despite the long roots of information at the service of the militaries and its use as a tool of warfare – information warfare as it is today – it is a rather newly acknowledged sphere in this field. The first courses of information warfare were taught in the central U.S. army academies in the early 1990s, at the dawn of this new post-modern warfare. Simultaneously, novel descriptions of information warfare sprung up in Western military strategy. In 1993, the Pentagon brought up *information as a "strategic asset"* and "information/knowledge warfare" in its memorandums, with more emphasis on psychological operations influencing "emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately behaviour" becoming more common in U.S. Army briefings at the time of the first Gulf War.<sup>42</sup>

After this, the weight of information has continuously grown heavier and the shift in highlighting the status of information in warfare has been vibrant. The extremely rapid changes in the information environment in recent decades – facilitated by modern technologies and new real time media distribution methods, such as the Internet, digital cameras, cell phones and Internet-based social media like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube, as well as the internet information exposure site WikiLeaks – have drastically changed the settings in which strategic communication typically works. Militaries – as well as insurgent groups and other parties involved in topical conflicts – are now forced to promptly react and respond to the challenges of the drastically expanded information environment, the overall changes in the postmodern information society and this new type of irregular warfare.<sup>43</sup>

The quite novel term *information warfare* refers to (military) information operations that are carried out during a crisis or a conflict in order to accomplish certain objectives, or to advance certain goals. Information operations include the efforts to influence military and political decision-making, operative capabilities and public opinion by using information as a target or a weapon. Like other military operations, information operations have both defensive and offensive sides, and can be conducted in political, psychological, social, economic and military methods, and at any level (tactical, operational and strategic) of warfare. The range of information warfare spans from tactically “hard” offensive cyber attacks on an enemy’s information systems to “soft” defensive surveillance of the information environment.<sup>44</sup>

*Strategic communication* can be seen as a sub-category of the ample domain of information warfare, and the term is mainly used by military actors and governments. Strategic communication refers to psychological operations and processes that seek to preserve, influence and enhance the credibility and favourable conditions of the operation, and to advance the interest, policies and objectives of the party concerned. The U.S. strategic communications and communication strategy handbook from 2009 defines the capabilities of U.S. strategic communications as follows: to *inform* and *educate*, to *persuade* and *coerce*. Four specific strategic communications goals are to: 1) Improve Credibility and legitimacy 2) Weaken an adversary’s credibility and legitimacy 3) Convince selected audiences to take specific actions that support U.S. and International objectives, and 4) Cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the main functions of psychological information operations – or strategic communications – are to work to sustain the morale of the troops and to influence the perception of civil populations (directed at different target audiences, such as domestic populations, decision makers of coalition countries, local populations, neighbouring populations, etc), as well as to protect populations and troops from the offensive information operations of the enemy and counteract enemy propaganda efforts.<sup>46</sup>

In recent years – namely after 2008 – a significant shift and an intensifying trend in Western Afghanistan public diplomacy and communications strategy has taken place. As the war has proven burdensome, hard to win and is diminishing in popularity, more attention has been paid to the development of the communications strategy and strategic communication by the coalition players in Afghanistan. The new U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan-Pakistan and NATO's directives for strategic communication clearly state that a more effective and better resourced strategic communications plan has to be created for the Afghanistan operation. The long, drawn-out war has seriously damaged the reputation and imago of both the war and the warmongers. The papers stipulate that the *imago* and *reputation* of the operation – and of NATO and its allies – have to be improved and communication backing its popularity and image must be intensified in order to win the war.<sup>47</sup> Concurrently, more vigorous communication schemes are made and the status of communications is emphasised in the strategies; NATO's strategic communication is strengthened in order to win over the support of local populations. The other aim is to achieve one of the main goals mentioned in the NATO strategy is to involve the ever more sceptical international community more closely and actively in the war effort.<sup>48</sup> This means addressing and persuading the domestic front more effectively, in order to improve the reputation and imago, as well as to secure the success and future of the operation.

In this paper I concentrate on the “soft”, or “humanistic”, and defensive sides of the information warfare carried out by ISAF during the Afghan operation. The interest is focused on psychological warfare and operations targeted to influence values, attitudes, perceptions, emotions, opinions, motives and decision-making processes. My focus is on how the perceptions of civil populations and decision-makers *at the domestic front* of the Afghan war – namely the populations of the coalition countries, i.e. mainly Western people – are targeted by coalition information warfare/strategic communication operations in new media surroundings and using visual materials.

### ***Visually addressing the domestic front***

The Western coalition of the Afghan war has to be very careful as to what message they send out alongside their actions, conducts and objectives. The ever more war-critical audiences and policy-makers of the NATO ally and partner nations participating in the operation have to be assured of the functionality, desirability and accomplishments of the coalition action as well as the necessity of the war. The conceptions and blessings of the populations of more than 40 nations involved in the coalition are central to reputation and credibility, and thus the successful continuation of the operation. Scepticism, criticism and opposition towards the operation and its objectives, and doubt as to the prospects of winning the war, have risen among the participant nations, and some of the coalition members – for instance Canada and the Netherlands – have already decided to withdraw their troops from the area.<sup>49</sup>

Despite this, the new 2009 U.S. strategy for Afghanistan stresses that the international community must, in coming years, assume more responsibility for the operation and counterterrorism action in the area. By using enhanced and strengthened strategic communication, NATO and the U.S. are calling on the coalition countries to better understand what is at stake for the whole international community.<sup>50</sup> The challenges of the new information environment and the unease over the operation places demands on NATO the strategic communication, which is aimed at encouraging the populations of NATO ally and partner states to support the operation. What is then done in order to visually win over the hearts and minds of the domestic fronts?

More fierce communications plans of the NATO-led and U.S.-commanded force have been developed in recent years and put into action. New forms of communication sketched in the plans concern developing more agile communication and more accountability. The aim is also to develop effective messages and narratives suitable for different audiences. More effective visual strategic communication schemes have been sedulously developed. Timelier, faster, more reactive, frequently updated and more precisely targeted information and communication is now stressed. Within the new communications strategies, ISAF has

stressed the importance of increased efforts towards more accountability, transparency and accessibility. More weight has been put on strategic communications via public announcements, press releases and the enhanced use of new media communication tools such as Facebook, Twitter and the photo-sharing community Flickr, as well as strategic visual messages.<sup>51</sup> In the recently outlined strategic communication strategies, it is highlighted that the information and messages disseminated to the audiences have to be easily accessible, understandable and have to appeal to the audience and influence it.<sup>52</sup>

An active and imaginative implementation of strategic *themes and messages* designed to resonate, appeal and influence target audiences, which include explanations for and justifications of the actions, are highlighted in the recent NATO strategic communication directives. The themes and messages used in the strategic communication have to constitute a logical, instinctive and consistent *narrative* on the organisation and its actions and objectives. These narratives have to resonate with the target audiences, thus these messages are on the one hand fitted to the mindsets of the locals, and on the other to the world views of the coalition nations' populations.<sup>53</sup> The use of unconventional communication arenas, more extensive use of the Internet and the 24/7 information environment, as well as tailored messages aimed at addressing the previously unaffected or unreached strata of Western populations, have become more prominent in the recent U.S. and NATO strategic communication plans and strategies. The communication has to reach out to different segmented audiences in order to make them understand "what the U.S. and NATO are all about. Strategic communication fights to counter the opponent's use of information, but is particularly aimed at enhancing alliance success". This is done through gaining and sustaining the support of the public and opinion leaders of the coalition countries (NATO nations and partners), in order to assist operations and manage public perceptions.<sup>54</sup> As NATO's Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, ambassador Mark Sedwill stated in early 2011, the most important thing in communicating the importance of war to domestic populations is to: *make people realise that NATO is making progress; as people will tolerate deaths if they perceive that the sacrifice was not in vain.*<sup>55</sup> This is what the NATO strategic communication is pointed towards: to make people see the operation as fruitful and worth taking part in, regardless of the heavy human cost.

### ***ISAF on Flickr***

Pertaining to the new strategic communications plans, ISAF launched a new type of website in late 2008 (<http://www.isaf.nato.int/>). This website integrates ISAF's Facebook and Twitter social media pages, and links to content sharing website YouTube and photo sharing community Flickr. Also, blogs and other frequently updated content appear on the site. As a press release on the new site states, the site is launched "in an effort to more quickly deliver current relevant and accurate news and information about military operations in Afghanistan directly to the public".<sup>56</sup> The regularly updated "ISAF medias photostream"<sup>57</sup> on Flickr consists of thousands of pictures telling stories of the operation. It consists of images of the soldiers serving in Afghanistan, as well as ISAF operations and of local people and everyday situations on the ground. The communications press release then goes on to state that the pictures give a tour of "life on the ground in Afghanistan" and offer a "real insight into the mission and life on the frontline of NATO operations". According to the press release, posting pictures on Flickr is part of the effort that ISAF has recently made in "striving to make our mission in Afghanistan as accessible to *our audience* as possible".<sup>58</sup>

The ISAF Flickr photographs are mostly shot by military ISAF personnel<sup>59</sup> and can be freely used by members of the media as well as a wider audience. These pictures are meant to convey and mediate information from the Afghanistan operation, and to influence the public imagination and perceptions, or the *coalition home front*, of the Afghan ISAF operation. The images are intended to be used and distributed, in order to make the ISAF operation visible, imaginable and available to the intended audiences from the view point of the military and ISAF actors. The presented pictures are also said to illustrate the positive sides and progress – that, according to the press release, are often left unreported – seen by NATO forces on the ground, as well as to show some of the "challenges that we still face". As the briefing states, the photos are, most importantly, meant to "give you a little flavour of the daily life of our colleagues and friends who are serving there", and to make the mission in Afghanistan as accessible to audiences as possible.<sup>60</sup> The images are designed to give spectators a ground level account, to show a "real" and "true" account of the operation

and to allow an understanding of the actors and the operation conducted by the ISAF. The statement describes the audience as “us” and the “ones on our side”; the ones interested in the operation. The shape of the text and type of addressing suggests to the reader that the effort in Afghanistan is a shared, collective endeavour. The text suggests that this is something ISAF wants to share with the audiences, which, due to distance, they cannot see without the help of the ISAF communication effort.<sup>61</sup> Due to the communication channel, the content of the Flickr images and the mode and tone of the addressing, I perceive that the target audiences of these representations are mostly the populations and decision-makers of the participant countries interested in the situation in the Afghanistan-Pakistan area, as well as members of the media.

The new website and the Flickr pictures are clearly an expression of the new public diplomacy and strategic communications agenda of the Western coalition, due to the Internet environment, social media/interactive multimedia arena, and specified and selected target audience. Also, because of the novel use of visual material, Flickr pictures can be seen as an example of the new approach and as an expression of the new kind of strategic communication aimed at influencing the Western coalition audiences. Placing these photos on Flickr is part of the new ISAF/U.S. communication strategy, which strives to mediate prompt information and influence the audiences to perceive the operation in positive ways. In this study I will analyse and interpret these photos and their contents as a part of the NATO strategic communication endeavour.

What is significant and interesting here is that – when it comes to the use of visual material in the use of strategic communication – the narratives meant to brand the operation always reveal more than the carefully constructed story of the Western-led operation in Afghanistan. Narratives and stories of the war – of its justifications and objectives – that are designed to influence public opinion do not work in a vacuum. They are expressions of Western ways of thinking and form part of a larger discourse. In the sub-chapter I will describe the ways and methods which I use to read, interpret and analyse the ISAF visual strategic communication images and the messages they convey, and after that deliberate on the workings of these visual narratives.



### 2.3 Visual representations and the depoliticised speech of war images

*“Learning depends upon freeing the message from constraints of the situation at hand.”*  
Roland Barthes<sup>62</sup>

I perceive and handle the pictures presented by ISAF as visual representations; as interpretations and readings of reality. Visual representations do more than just show “reality”; they reflect the values, attitudes and political, social paradigms and discourses of the time and place, as well as the frames of their presentation and reading. When analysing the messages of images, pictures are *read*, just as texts are read spoken words are interpreted.<sup>63</sup>

During the first level of reading the “natural meaning” comes out, as the observer recognises the identifying objects, such as humans, houses, streets, landscapes, appearance, dress and gestures of humans, etc. The second level can be called “iconographical” analyse. When looking at pictures on this level, the “conventional meaning” of the picture is read: an image depicting an aeroplane hitting a tower in a city is recognised as a picture of the 9/11 attacks, just as an image of a large steel construction in Paris is connected to the Eiffel tower, and a veiled woman showing her inked fingertip in front of a crowd is recognised as a Muslim woman who has voted.

The third – and the most interesting when reading political imaginary – level is often called the “iconological” interpretation. Iconological interpretation is concerned with the intrinsic meanings of the image; the underlying principles that reveal the basic attitudes of a nation: an age, a period, a class, or an ideological, cultural or religious point of view; the spirit of an era, a group, a world view, or the zeitgeist. This is the level when, for example, the picture of the voting Muslim woman can be seen as an image of an emancipated, modern and liberated Afghan woman using her political rights thanks to Western help. However, the picture can be read in another manner: depending on the presenter, place of presenting and the “gaze”<sup>64</sup> of the spectator, the image can tell a story about a woman out of her rightful place, who is violating tradition, religion and the behaviour befitting a traditional Muslim woman. Reading images like this can, depending on the context – the presenter, the audience, the time and positioning – reveal different meanings and messages. In this way, im-

ages are a part of a culture and cannot be understood without placing them in a context or opened without knowledge of the culture and context they are presented in.<sup>65</sup>

Although the messages and narratives conveyed by the ISAF images are carefully formulated by the strategic communications machinery – and skilfully, strategically formulated – there is more to the pictures than first meets the eye. This is especially true in the case of visual representations. Visual images – in addition to the deliberate information and intended messages – always enclose unintended narratives and extra content, such as remains of stereotypical representation, unconscious culturally deeply-rooted paradigms and traces of culturally and historically formed ways of thinking.<sup>66</sup> Visual representations used in the imago-building endeavour of the operation unveil features, partly subconscious perceptions and sides of *our* thinking (the target audience) as well as of the thinking of the presenting party. What is most interesting when studying visual images is that they often entail substance, attitudes, cultural codes and unconscious ways of thinking that frequently remain unsaid and left out of verbal and textual accounts and proclamations.

Visual representations therefore contain a vast amount of connotative, culturally and historically structured content. Thus, they also contain stereotypical, and sometimes even unintentional, content, that are founded partly on subliminal and “naturalised” ways of thinking. This is especially true when it comes to visual representations of far away cultures and cultural encounters.<sup>67</sup> The ways in which we read and understand visual communication is also culturally bind: just as we learn to read, understand and contextualise the contents of speech or text, we also learn to read images and their messages.<sup>68</sup> In this study I am particularly interested in the “Western gaze”: of how the audiences of the Western-led coalition countries perceive the pictures and how the pictures are meant to be perceived by the presenter (ISAF communications). I must add that as an analyser of the images, a Western scholar and a citizen of a country taking part in the Afghan operation, I also recognise my own culture-bound position as a spectator of the images. When analysing the images I seek to assess them on a number of levels. Firstly, a hermeneutic approach: seeking to understand the message the image is seeking to deliberately convey. Secondly, an analytical and political gaze: seeking to open up the topical political meaning of the image; and thirdly, a

culturally critical view where I seek to delve beyond the naturalised cultural reading of the image.

Visual images, as the saying goes, communicate more information than a thousand words. But what words, messages or moral standpoints do the images of crises and war communicate? Photos of crises and war can be sites of bearing witness to far away events and places of contemplation into the suffering of others; but as Susan Sontag states, they cannot solely create a moral position or be instruments for a political standpoint as such. This is important to note when reading the messages of military strategic communication images: images cannot create our moral positions or influence public opinion unless there is already an “appropriate context of feeling and attitude”. As Sontag puts it: “While a photograph cannot create a moral position”, they can work to “reinforce one”.<sup>69</sup> When analysing strategic communication pictures, it is important to remember that they have been produced and figured by dominant political ideologies and world views of their time and of their presenter. They also acquire their meanings and significance in their conceptual surroundings. In order to address the targeted audiences and persuade them to support the military operation, the visual messages have to utilise and be constructed upon culturally-built mindsets and the widely accepted world views of their audiences. Thus, the images of crises and war can be seen as mirrors of their era: they reflect and mould according to the major trends of the world politics of their times.<sup>70</sup>

I analyse and understand the workings of the images and open up their meanings through Roland Barthes’ “mythology framework”. A “myth” – in the Barthesian sense – is something that is presented as an apparent *truth*. Myth is an interpretation presented as self-evident, and thus a myth is often expressed in the form of a slogan. Yet, as Barthes sees it, all things presented within a discourse – texts, visual images and even objects – that seem to be naturalised and “self-evident truths” are always politically, culturally and historically formed constructions which are also read in the constraints of the situation at hand. The “self-evident truths” are seen by Barthes as myths, and thus as *depoliticised speech*.

A Myth is something that makes a fact and a natural truth out of an interpretation. In this way, messages that seem to contain *apparent truths*, naturalised self-evident contents and slogan-like messages are always political, historical, cultural and thus constructed, artificial and mythical. Myths are manifestations of “unconscious ideologies” which influence our thinking in powerful, though often latent, ways. Unconscious ideologies and “myths” are often taken for granted and culturally naturalised, de-politicised paradigms which powerfully determine the ways in which we perceive the world.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the ISAF Flickr images can be seen to contain depoliticised speech and mythical contents. They entail culturally, politically and historically constructed visual meanings and content that when not read carefully seem to be natural and self-evident, and thus non-political. But when read carefully and placed in their cultural, political and historical context, deeper message of the image can be set free and the unconscious ideologies entailed by the images can be seen and analysed.

In the paper at hand, I seek to detect and deconstruct the intrinsic meanings and the mythical contents of the ISAF Flickr pictures, and to examine what the messages and narratives embedded in the visual representations reveal about their presenter, their audiences and the values, morals and attitudes of their time – as well as the world order they are presented in. In the following chapter, I will go on to analyse the pictures presented by ISAF in their contextual, historical, cultural and political contexts by “de-mythifying” their messages. I seek to learn what the messages say, in order to discover what the ISAF strategic communication operation is based upon and how it seeks to address the domestic audiences through the images. By analysing messages that are designed to influence the perception of the participant nation’s populations, a broader understanding of Western world views, ideas of “ourselves”, the persisting world order and the justifications of recent wars can be retrieved. In the following chapter, I will briefly open up how the mass of images are analysed and sorted, before moving on to analyse the visual messages.

### **Conduct of the research**

The ISAF media's photostream on Flickr is an extensive source material; by early April 2011 there were over 15 000 single pictures telling the story of the Afghan operation on the site. The analysis of ISAF's images is conducted by going through the mass of visual material (and the related captions). Subsequently, I have divided the concurring types of images into thematically differing groups. The pictures presented on Flickr can be seen as one wide and multilayered visual narrative of today's war. I have divided the material into different categories in order to analyse the stories these different types of images tell. I present some emblematic pictures of each category amongst the text and analyse some of the images in more detail, but also refer to other similar pictures that can be found in the material, so that the reader can visibly follow the images of today's war while reading the paper.

The thematic blocks or categories are composed of recurrent types of pictures that can be found in the material. The recurring appearance of some visual and narrative features throughout the material proves the significance and standing of the stories told by the images. These recurring types of pictures constitute and produce "iconic" types of picturing and form stories and narratives which constitute the *metanarrative*<sup>72</sup> of today's war. The visual narratives constituting the ISAF metanarrative of the Afghan war reflect ideas and power structures of their time from different viewpoints, and can be perceived to carry within them significant and meaningful messages. In this case, the narratives found in the Flickr images conform with the messages of the strategic communications of the Afghan war. Thus, they figure some of the topical currents of today's world politics, as well as the central paradigms, justifications and objects of today's military operations. In addition to this, the stories told by the images need to be believable; they have to appear supportable within the discourses framing today's ideas of the functions of "international community", humanity and acceptable, just war.

These narratives do not solely tell of the spirit and conduct of the present wars; they also make visible the terms and frames in which war waged by the West/international community can be shown, presented and justified to the intended audience of today in persuasive

and acceptable ways. Thus, these narratives tell about their presenter, but also about the audience and about “us”, the citizens and policy-makers of the countries participating in the war. In the following chapter I will analyse the different narratives embedded in the pictures. I will do this by using visual descriptive and typical examples from the material to illustrate, explain and open up the discovered narratives.

### 3. The images of war today: Humane war



*Image 1: MAYWAND, Afghanistan--A medical technician for 2nd Platoon Alpha Company for the U.S. Army's 2nd Brigade 2nd Infantry (2-2 INF) performs a medical check-up for a child at a local village near Combat Outpost (COP) Terminator in the Maywand District of Kandahar Province on Dec. 23, 2008. Construction began on COP Terminator earlier this month by the 62nd Engineers that work out of International Security Assistance Force Regional Command East and will be used to house members of the 2-2 INF while they conduct security operations in Maywand. ISAF Photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Aramis X. Ramirez.*

A picture of war: blue skies and sunny weather over an Afghanistan roadside landscape; an ISAF soldier is leaning towards to a local child, calmly and gently taking care of him, as a heavily armed fellow soldier keeps watch in the background. Picture 1 is in many ways emblematic and representative in visualising and describing the Afghan mission. The visual composition, juxtapositions, language and messages are typical and recurring in the ISAF visual material depicting today's war.<sup>73</sup> By visual appearance the soldier – positioned as the central figure of the image – is strong and heavily armed, wearing an ISAF uniform as well as a helmet and other modern military accessories. The soldier also seems ready for combat, physically strong and well built, well protected and equipped. But the soldier pictured is not behaving in what is perhaps traditionally seen as “soldier-like”. Instead of entering into combat with the enemy or acting in other action traditionally associated with purely military tasks, the soldier is pictured in an overtly humanitarian position. In the picture, the strong, equipped with modern arms and, by physical appearance, militaristic soldier is bent over the Afghan child, gently taking care, nurturing, and providing medical assistance to the local child. The image places the child as the subject of the care and object of the operation; as the child and

the local veiled woman holding the child are calmly, contently and passively receiving help from the coalition soldier.

Such visual arrangement between the ISAF soldiers and the local inhabitants is one of the most common and emblematic ways of presenting the operation via images. Furthermore the landscape in the background is typical: rural, empty, dry, wasteland-like surroundings are most common in pictures describing the landscape of Afghanistan. The commonly recurring juxtaposition of the Afghan wilderness, with its emptiness and rural, un-modern, un-built surroundings, combined with the local Afghans as receivers of help, alongside the modern, strong and helpful soldier figure constitutes a multitude of visual messages. What is also noteworthy in the pictorial disposition of image 1. is the figure of the armed soldier patrolling in the background; the figure give a sense of safeness and security, but also an impression of the need for protection which points at the local insecurity. The main figures of the images – the soldier, the child and the local inhabitant receiving help – are at the centre of the picture; the centrality of these figures can be seen to act as a symbol of the Afghan war, and the objectives of the ISAF operation in Afghanistan when described in visual images.



### 3.1 The humanitarian soldier

The most visible key figure in ISAF imagery is arguably the figure of the gentle and humanitarian ISAF soldier. Images of soldiers engaging in functions, which can be broadly termed as humanitarian, are strikingly common in the imagery. These images constitute the visual narrative of the *humanitarian soldier*.



*Image 2: U.S. Army 1st Lt. Joshua Edgington, Texas Agribusiness Development Team-04, hands out bottled water to kids from an orphanage near the construction site for the Arbaba Environmental Park in Ghazni, Afghanistan, Oct. 12, 2010. 1st Lt. Edgington and other members of the ADT were checking on the progress of the park, which will provide a central location for conservation and agriculture training in Ghazni. ISAF photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Joseph Swafford.*

The visual descriptions of the ISAF soldiers as humanitarians entail numerous recurring features. The figure of the humanitarian soldier is most commonly pictured with local people – especially children. The soldiers are pictured playing, giving gifts, and in many photographs interacting with the locals: handing out toys and sweets as well as relief supplies. ISAF soldiers are also often pictured carrying out health education and healthcare tasks, and educating and civilising the locals: advising, teaching skills and customs and furthering human rights/women’s rights in the area. Pictures of soldiers handing out food packages and relief help, playing with children, mending locals’ minor wounds, teaching hygienic customs and building roads and school houses, as well as taking part in humanitarian action or behaving in a friendly and helpful humanitarian manner,<sup>74</sup> constitute a notable part of ISAF’s strategic communication images.

All in all, the humanitarian soldier in the images is acting in a humanitarian spirit, even when not conducting relief help or humanitarian missions. Image 2 illustrates this humanitarian spirit in an emblematic way: the soldiers are presented as friendly helpers, smiling and handing out water bottles to the orphaned children surrounding them. What is also noteworthy in the images presenting the current war in Afghanistan is the visual juxtaposition of the strong, helpful, armed coalition soldier and the orphaned children avidly accepting and welcoming the help and care given to them by the soldiers.<sup>75</sup>



*Image 3: KAJAKI, Afghanistan – British Maj. Grant Haywood, Commander of Company X, 2nd Battalion, Parachute Regiment, watches Cpt. Doug Beattie, Operational Mentoring Liaison Team, here June 15, 2008 give a stuffed bear to a local resident during a patrol south of Kajaki Dam. The ISAF soldiers are responsible for the security of the dam as well as working with the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to assist in security for local villages. (ISAF photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Duran, U.S. Army)*

Image 3 also illustrates some of the important features of the modern soldier figure. In this image, the uniformed and armed British ISAF soldiers are pictured patrolling a field in Afghanistan, but in midst of this military function they find the time to make a local girl (on the right, dressed in a traditional gown) happy. The soldiers are pictured bettering relations with the local inhabitants by giving the little girl a teddy bear.<sup>76</sup> Smiling and nurturing yet strong; kind and friendly but armed; as well as secure and trustworthy yet militaristic, are the visual features recurring in the images and determining this figure. The figure of the ISAF soldier appears so humane and sensitive, that while looking at the pictures it is often hard to remember that this figure ultimately represents military power in a war-stricken area where people (civilian and military) are being killed every day. The visual features and actions in which this figure is presented are multiple: the humanitarian soldier has many forms, shapes and roles.



*Image 4: A coalition medical team treats children after an insurgent attack in Muqer district, Ghazni province. A joint coalition and Afghan National Security Force patrol was attacked by insurgents with mortar rounds and rocket-propelled grenades. The insurgent fire hit Afghan civilians in the nearby Yarbi Kala village.*

Image 4 presents the ISAF soldiers as lifesavers, given the image offers an insight to a coalition medical care facility where a coalition medical team is treating an Afghan child injured in an insurgent attack. In addition to the coalition facility mentioned in the text, the male figures in the foreground of the image are recognisable as military personnel by their clothing and weapons. The chief object of the action in the image remains the small body of the weak, injured child and the narrative that directly presents the coalition forces as the saviours of civilian lives in the area.<sup>77</sup>

Images 5, 6 and 7 present the ISAF soldiers communicating with the locals, giving aid and building good relations.<sup>78</sup> Pictures of this type are extremely common in ISAF imagery. What is interesting is that the ISAF soldiers, although militaristic and strong in physical appearance, are by definition pictured in poses and activities usually not affiliated with the traditional soldier. The main attributes visually represent these brave new warriors of today's global battlefield as humane, care-giving, helpful, and deeply intimate and compassionate spirits, who are securitising and rebuilding Afghan society, bettering the lives of the locals and, in some cases, saving them. On the whole, the humanitarian warrior figure is performing more like a peacekeeper – a friendly companion of the people or a humanitarian worker – than a traditional soldier.



*Image 5: Kabul, Afghanistan (Feb. 17, 2011) - An Air Force member speaks to a village elder and offers him a blanket with the help of an interpreter during Operation Outreach's humanitarian mission in Kabul City today. Operation Outreach is a team of American military volunteers at Camp Pheonix in Kabul and they have donated blankets, fuel doughnuts, school supplies, clothing and food to several refugee villages near Kabul.*



*Image 6: Afghan children receive humanitarian aid from Polish soldiers in Dehe Khoda Ydad, Afghanistan, Feb. 28, 2011. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. David Zlotin)*

The humanitarian soldier figure prominent in ISAF pictures has started to look familiar to many Western spectators in recent years; but is rather, in historical terms, a new acquaintance. What does the emergence of the figure of the humanitarian soldier stand for? Why is this figure so prominent in the current strategic communication images and why



are the soldiers of today pictured in this way? What are the messages and the narrative embedded in this figure? What does this figure say about the politics of our time, and of the current war? The functional and visual transformation of the soldier figure into the humanitarian spirit he/she is visualised as, combined with the strong and securitising appearance of the soldiers, could simply be denoted to the historical peacekeeping mission roots of today's ISAF operation. The humanitarian peacekeeper-like spirit and the humanitarian actions of the ISAF warriors visible in the images could both be seen as reminders from the earlier years of the operation, and as markers of the initial functions and objectives from the childhood of the ISAF operation.



*Image 7: Staff Sgt. Cary Anderson, a team leader with Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, greets an Afghan child in Habibabad during a joint patrol, Dec. 13. Marines and Danish soldiers, alongside their Afghan National Army counterparts met with locals during a joint patrol to establish relationships in the area.*

The International Security Assistance operation was created in accordance with the 2001 Bonn Conference as a UN-mandated multinational crisis management and reconstruction endeavour, which NATO took leadership of in 2003. The initial political decisions to take part in the mission were, in many participant nations, made in a situation far different from today's reality in Afghanistan. The operation and its objectives have, since those times, strongly expanded and evolved, as the operation has also involved U.S. troops since 2006.<sup>79</sup> In many countries, the operation was originally discussed and marketed mainly as a peacekeeping, reconstruction and assistance operation, which was to primarily focus on societal reconstruction and security, human rights and humanitarian questions, as well as more specific issues such as anti-drug work, gender equality

and education. At the beginning of the operation, taking part in a *war* or a “war-like situation” – as the operation has always been seen in the United States – almost never surfaced in the political discourse of some participating countries with regard to the ISAF operation. This was especially true in the participating states that are not plenipotentiary members of NATO, such as Finland and Sweden.<sup>80</sup> In many of the European coalition countries, societal discussion on the changed and recently more war-like nature of the operation has, over the last few years, been heated; and the debate about whether the mission should be termed a war or something else has, from time to time, been a hot topic in the media.<sup>81</sup>

Since the justifications, objectives and reasons given for the ISAF operation have for a long time in many of the participant countries been almost peacekeeping oriented, the use of the humanitarian soldier figure utilised in strategic communication is congruent with these initial justifications and conditions. The figure of the humanitarian soldier can be seen to ascend from the past, as well as partly out-dated justifications and the realities of the operation, and seems to stem from the initial words used in many of the participant countries to justify and describe the objectives of the operation. But this does not solely suffice to explain the visual emergence of the figure – indeed there is more embedded in the figure of the humanitarian soldier.

### ***3.1.1 The international humanitarian order and the figure of humanitarian soldier***

The figure of the humanitarian soldier, so visible and central in the ISAF images, can be seen as emblematic of something far more extensive in today’s world politics than just the justifications and political rhetoric that is used to explain the Afghan operation. Humanitarian and human rights rhetoric and the imperative of helping distant people and individuals in need – saving people from evil states and regimes unbinding to universal humane values and human rights norms – has become one of the central political idioms of today’s international politics.<sup>82</sup> As researchers of current world politics, humanitarianism and international relations claim, humanitarianism has in recent years become one of the essential paradigms and key frames in which different actors in

world politics evaluate each other's legitimacy and determine their roles in the present world. The humanitarian paradigm has, in today's world, become a central expression of the international community and the present world order behind it.<sup>83</sup>



*Image 8: Sgt. Cody T. Romriell, a combat engineer with 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, helps local farmers dig out a clogged canal during the construction of Typhoon 3 in Marja, Afghanistan, Sep. 9. Marine engineers with 2/9 have been constructing new patrol bases in their area of operation in order to increase force protection. Typhoon 3 is one of the many being built.*

The strengthened *humanitarian paradigm* of today's world politics is visible in ISAF photo material. The figure of the humanitarian ISAF soldier can be seen as an embodiment of the international coalition's presence in Afghanistan, but also in broader terms an embodiment of the topical international order, and of the human rights-driven world politics of our time. In the following chapter I will open up the evolution of human rights and the humanitarian paradigm figuring the world order today, as well as the interlinkages of the humanitarian paradigm in today's world politics, in accordance with the use of the humanitarian soldier figure at the service of the topical Western strategic communications.

Human rights and humanitarian arguments – the moral imperative and the action of helping the distant other in need and despair – acted as the major initial justifications and reasoning behind the Afghan war. The moral tone of obligation, and the imperative to help the suffering and oppressed Afghan nation, surfaced in political speech soon after the demand to demolish and destroy the terrorist cells that were behind the 9/11 atrocity. These humane and peace operation-like justifications have been central, par-

ticularly when justifying the operation to the European participant states of the ISAF operation.<sup>84</sup>

Humanitarianism and the protection of human rights – which in today's world politics offer powerful tools of legitimacy – are extensively visible in the pictures presented by ISAF and are specifically targeted at the coalition member country audiences. Therefore, the figure of the humanitarian soldier also acts as a reflection that represents the justifications given to the operation, and serves as a guarantee of the legitimacy of the military endeavour in the country. The visual figure of the humanitarian soldier in the use of the strategic communication machinery gives the Western audience a visual passage to the ground level of the operation, and visually proves that our soldiers are helping and acting humanely. The visual figure proves that the operation is a just and desirable one, drawn according to the moral-political spirit of our time. The soldier figure extensively pictured in a humanitarian light – conducting humanitarian efforts and working for the betterment of humanity – addresses Western audiences in powerful ways according to the widely accepted moral and ethical paradigms of our time.

On the top of this, the Afghan war and the figure of the humanitarian soldier as an embodiment of it act as illustrating examples of how humanitarianism and human rights-driven international politics have, in recent decades, risen as a political alternative to the *Westphalian system*. This system, which has allowed sovereign states to dominate international relations for more than three hundred years, has clearly eroded in the past few years. In the Westphalian system – determined by an international community, constituted of sovereign states with elusive authority and control over their territory as well as jurisdiction, and with force the chief source of legitimacy – international law has constituted the set of norms aimed to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of sovereign states. In turn, humanitarianism allows individuals, groups and non-governmental actors, as well as others states and the international community, to play an important role at an international level and within the boundaries of sovereign states. This has previously, according to Westphalian norms, been practically the domain and responsibility of sovereign states.<sup>85</sup> Today, humanitarian justifications and human rights as power political tools have gained more power in interna-



tional politics, and humanitarian and human rights concerns have started to surface as the central justifications for international operations, and even military endeavours.

This ascendance of humanitarianism to a central role within international politics has happened over years and even decades. The politicisation and rise of humanitarianism – as an action, justification and legitimising slogan of military action – to the centre of today’s global politics and to the status of major legitimising power in world politics has been a gradual process. From the 1970s onwards, numerous humanitarian NGOs began to argue that humanitarian intervention in crisis zones should also include long-term assistance such as peace building, capacity building and development aid. The long-term assistance and solidarity focus soon led to a situation whereby it was necessary for the assisting party to make strategic choices and prioritise which groups to work with. Researchers of the development of new humanitarianism often see this evolution of humanitarian assistance as the root of the development that laid the basis for the human rights discourse of today’s military-humanitarianism and humanitarian world politics.<sup>86</sup> The development happening over years and decades has, until quite recently, often escaped the critical regard of larger populations. Consequently, interventions and operations legitimised by the protection of human rights and humane rhetoric have often enjoyed the almost unanimous blessing of Western policy-makers and populations in particular.<sup>87</sup>

A significant point of alteration in international humanitarianism can be traced back to the beginning of the new world order era that emerged from end of the Cold War, and namely the first Gulf war and the wars in the Former Yugoslavia. Principles of *Right to Criticism* and *Right of Intervention* were then extensively deployed, and assistance – including military assistance – to “those who are striving against oppression, and assist their struggle for dignity and basic human rights” became essential parts of the humanitarian discourse.<sup>88</sup> As Fiona Fox states, in the post Cold War era it became seen as old-fashioned and insufficient to respond to human suffering with the traditional impartial and neutral humanitarianism<sup>89</sup> without links to human rights and broader political issues. This evolution has also blurred the line between humanitarianism and human rights, just

as it has distorted the distinction between humanitarianism, political and military rhetoric, action and ethos.<sup>90</sup> This development – the politicisation of aid, the rise of human rights to the centre of international politics and the ascension of humanitarianism to a significant instrument in the toolbox of Western global governance efforts, added to the rise of humanitarianism among the central justifications of war – has been fuelled yet further in the post 9/11 era.

This evolution and progress reached its peak, thus far, in the institutionalisation of the *Responsibility to Protect* (RtoP or R2P) norm. R2P is a norm and a set of principles based on the idea that sovereignty is not a privilege, but a responsibility. R2P concentrates on the prevention and protection of civilian populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. At the 2005 UN World Summit, the member states agreed on these norms and principles, and R2P was included in the outcome (paragraphs 138 and 139). This UN text gives the final language and scope to the R2P norms.<sup>91</sup> The fact that the responsibility of the “international community” to intervene when human rights and civilian lives seem to be under threat was documented in the 2005 UN World Summit outcome, merely serves to illustrate and vividly underline the human rights and individual-based tendency and progress in world politics. It still remains to be seen what R2P brings with it, as it was, in some ways, used and executed for the first time during the Libyan crisis in spring 2011.<sup>92</sup>

Overall, the humanitarian soldier figure of the Afghan war images acts as an embodiment of this humanitarian evolution of international politics and military interventions – and of the prevailing world order. The humanitarian soldier also powerfully and sententially illustrates the emergence of the humanitarian paradigm to a central role within current power politics and in topical warfare. This brave new soldier figure, used in strategic communication efforts, acts as corporeal manifestation and a symbol of the international order and community at work on a practical level. The strong, heavily armed and muscular but righteous global player is taking care of and educating the “weak and inept Afghan people”, and tending to the “wounds of the civilians”. The nurturing and assisting humanitarian soldier, who is helping the locals to build solid, West-

ern-like governance, is corporally and visually underlining the spirit of the Western-led humanitarian world order.<sup>93</sup>

The figure of humanitarian soldier illustrates a significant change in world politics, a shift in warfare and the heightened status of human rights/humanitarian justifications and language in topical warfare; he/she is also seen as a notable component of the international order. The figure also illustrates some of the topical problems and challenges neutral humanitarian organisational work is facing today. Furthermore, it shows some of the moral, ethical and practical problems that lie within the intermingle of human rights, humanitarianism, powers politics and military conducts. Moreover, the figure visually shows the changed role and identity of today's soldiers, and defines the blurred line between neutral humanitarian work and military humanitarianism. Thus, the humanitarian in military uniform also makes visible the current difficulties faced by neutral humanitarian work in crisis areas and displays the "diminishing of humanitarian space" in today's global war zones, by showing that the distinctions between the humanitarians and soldiers seem only to be uniform-deep.<sup>94</sup>

All in all, what needs to be kept in mind when critically assessing today's international order and military interventions is that today's military humanitarianism – protection of "universal humane values" and human rights by arms – is currently widely used in international politics by Western states (or the international community) as de-politicised standards, excuses, justifications and as a legitimatising paradigm enabling them to play an active role within the boundaries of sovereign states.<sup>95</sup> This order is specifically present and visible in the Afghan operation (as well as the UN mandated operation in Libya in spring 2011). The spirit of this order is descriptively expressed in the ISAF imagery through the figure of the humane and humanitarian soldier, and used in the military strategic communication effort aimed at gaining support for the Afghan operation.

### **3.1.2 Non-political humanitarianism beyond criticism?**

The central role of human rights and humanitarian conduct in current Western-led world politics is often celebrated by Western political leaders as a triumph of the universally shared sacred values of all humanity. They are seen as evidence of the significant progress of humanity and an outstanding collective achievement for all humankind.<sup>96</sup> Although politics is often regarded as an expression of self interest, human rights-based politics is commonly perceived to be an expression of altruism, the sacred collective values of a moral community and acts of moral consensus. Arguably, Western-based humanitarianism and human rights-justified politics – even military interventions – are often seen to originate from the altruistic motives of helping the ones in need – disregarding politics or self-interest.<sup>97</sup> Thus, political actions justified by human rights and humanitarianism often appear to be non-political and beyond criticism.

Questioning the principles of human rights/humanitarian-based military manoeuvres – even in extreme cases such as removing governments of sovereign states from power, air strikes, bombardment of civilians and the establishment of long-time protectorates in “failed states” – advocated by human rights and ethical principles is often seen today as “heresy”. David Chandler argues that the consensus of today’s world politics dictates that almost anything done in the name of human rights is right; and in addition to this, it is often understood that criticism is not just wrong but tantamount to supporting human rights violations.<sup>98</sup> This has led to a situation – and this is true also in the case of the Afghan operation – where questioning the motives and justification of the war could very easily be interpreted as supporting the brutality, inhumanity, extreme Islamism and the terror of the Taliban-regime, or having a hostile attitude towards human rights, rights of women, democracy and freedom of speech.

The language and rhetoric of the protection of these sacred rights in states seen as undemocratic or in areas seen as weak in human rights terms – such as Afghanistan – work as powerful legitimising tools. These paradigms are hard to argue against within today’s widely shared discourse of universal human rights and insuperability of protection of the

individual. Some rigorous critics of today's humanitarianism even say that we have reached a point where humanitarianism has evolved into a moral cover under which powerful countries – namely the United States – oversee their own interests around the world.<sup>99</sup> The much used visual figure of the humanitarian soldier in military strategic communication can also be seen to draw its suggestive power, as well as its function and figure, from this humanity discourse, which seems to be “beyond criticism”.

Human rights-based politics and humanitarian principles are currently widely talked about and expressed as undeniable, natural and universal values; as something that the whole of humankind consensually supports.<sup>100</sup> This is why international political acts, and even military interventions justified by humanitarian goals or by the protection of human rights, serve as a powerful and outstanding means of persuading people to see even violent and sometimes morally dubious power political acts as legitimate and worth supporting. Thus, the power, applicability and usefulness of humanitarian features – and the figure of humanitarian soldier as an embodiment of Western humanitarian goodwill – in the use of the strategic communication machinery and in persuading Western people to support the political actions of today are extremely effective and powerful. The visual features of the soldier figure (kind, helpful, humane, nurturing, tutoring, supporting, smiling, playful, strong, protecting, etc.) and the actions presented (education, help, humanitarian aid, reconstruction aid, playing with children, humanely communicating with locals, securing the area, mending wounds, giving gifts, saving lives, etc.) in the images seem to be beyond criticism. The reason for this is that they point to, and seem to represent, the sincere and high-minded aspirations of the strong and humane Western/international community's influence on the ground.

Within this dominant discourse, criticising the humanitarian soldier within the ISAF imagery thus also becomes questionable. Questioning the goodwill or altruistic actions of these humanitarian soldiers – visually *proven* in the reoccurring images to be unquestionably conducting good work and advancing human rights issues among the Afghan population – could easily be interpreted within this currently very dominant humanitarian discourse as the questioning of universal values. Criticism could also be seen to un-

dermine the self-evident good human rights aspirations of the international community and of the ISAF operation on the whole. The figure of today's soldier pictured as a non-political and non-military-like global humanitarian, and the embodiment of the healing hand of the international community's presence on the ground in Afghanistan, acts as perfect justification, as well as a marketing image for the operation. In addition to this, the figure of the humanitarian soldier works as an effective "guise" for involvement in military action within current world politics and prevailing humanitarian discourse. For the present Western viewer, it is all too easy to agree with the underlying principles and universal values that the figure represents.<sup>101</sup>

The surge of humane values and universal principles of human rights into a dominant and close to undeniable role in present world politics – and military interventions – can be seen as constructions that claim to be natural, self-evident and beyond questioning. As they are presented as the "truth", they can be seen as evidence of discursive power working in the form of a *myth*. Thus, the notions of human rights as *self-evident, natural and universal* can also be seen as myths; and are therefore constructions and products of cultural, historical and political structures, but are often presented as natural, self-evident and universal.<sup>102</sup> Human rights and humanity politics – and for this reason also human rights-driven power politics and "military humanitarianism" of today – can be revealed to be culturally constructed paradigms and practices, and as discourses and paradigms that are in constant flux, ever evolving and politically structured by their nature.

Yet, in the ISAF strategic communications imagery, these paradigms are presented as self-evident, natural and universal. Therefore, the humanitarian soldier figure can be seen as the embodiment and expression of this power, and thus also a myth: a construction claiming to be a-political, a-ideological and a natural expression of Western humanitarian aspirations in the area. The image of the humanitarian soldier is a perfect example of how, in the context of "humanitarian world politics", power works through myths by taking the politics out of the ideological, and thus showing culturally constructed paradigms and stories to be natural and undeniable universal truths.

Strategic communication images of the humanitarian soldiers are intended to influence the perceptions of Western spectators, and they strive to make the narrative of the humane war appear as the *truth*, as something natural, self-evident and thus non-political, appealing, supportable and undeniable. The ideas and paradigms justifying and explaining wars of today and the gathering of support for them – such as military-humanitarian intervention, the protection of human rights and lives worldwide, and the fight against global terrorism – can be seen as ideological constructions which address their subjects in historical, contextual and culturally constructed ways.<sup>103</sup> In the ISAF strategic communication images the coalition soldiers are – through the figure of the always kind, humane and helpful “humanitarian soldier” – presented as good, healing, civilising and the helping hand of the international community, and thus beyond criticism. Humanitarianising the operation with the help of the figure of the humanitarian soldier makes the Afghan operation seem a-political, and thus morally beyond criticism.

In addition to this, the new form in which the soldier is visually presented can also be seen as confusing. Images that present the soldiers primarily as humanitarians and helpers, as friendly, unthreatening and non-violent figures lead the audience to think and feel that the reality of the war is non-violent, and that it is thus morally unquestionable. The figure of the humanitarian soldier is targeted to address the spectators to see the war as just and supportable, and the war effort as unambiguously enduring and “good”. Using the language, messages and narratives of the “protection of humanity carried out by military means”, and by presenting soldiers as helpers and guardians of human rights and value, in many ways fits the mindsets of the “civilised global citizens” of today – they address and powerfully persuade the target audience.

Humanitarian world politics, resting on the declaration of superiority of the universality of human rights, is a topical, cultural and political phenomenon, building on historically constructed paradigms and power politics of the time; it is not a self-evident, absolute or simple condition, as it is often portrayed today.<sup>104</sup> But, presenting war and soldiers in strategic communication narratives according to the values and dominant, widely shared

paradigms of their time is good marketing: it sells and can be expected to contextually gain the support of the coalition spectators.

### 3.2 The protected Other

The imagery contains a vast amount of photographs, that on the one hand paint a picture of the ISAF operation and the international coalition's action in the area, but on the other visually represent the local populations in signifying ways. In this chapter I will analyse the ways of picturing the local Afghans in the ISAF Flickr images. When looking at the images that represent the Afghans, I examine how the actions, position, status and appearance are visually presented *vis-à-vis* the presentation of the ISAF troops, as well as the coalition objectives in the area. I will start the chapter by presenting an image type of the ISAF soldiers, which is slightly different in its appearance and action from that of the humanitarian soldier: the strong and more militaristic ISAF soldier. After this, I will move on to pictures that represent the ISAF–Afghan military and civil co-operation in the area, from which I'll move on to the visual messages embedded in the images that present the local Afghans *vis-à-vis* the ISAF soldiers and personnel.

These pictures represent the targets of the operation. They present local Afghani civilians as receivers of help, tutelage and development aid and as a population to be secured, but the photographs also picture local partners such as soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan police force. Besides working as intentional strategic messages, while simultaneously revealing the principal conscious intentions of the strategic communication effort, the images portraying the local inhabitants and actors also work as representations of a far away area and a foreign culture. Thus, the images provide a window to the attitudes and world views of the presenter. The ways in which locals are pictured – in addition to purposefully describing the operation and the situation on the ground – also unintentionally illuminate and unveil some of the conventional ways and frames in which Western communication and the coalition's domestic target audiences are used to seeing and picturing Afghans and, more broadly, “others” of this



world. “Other” here signifies the targets of humanitarian and development aid, the populations of the less developed world and different, for example Islamic, cultures.

### **3.2.1 Clean hi-tech warfare and trouble-free co-operation**

The figure of the humanitarian soldier is not the only visual way the ISAF warriors are pictured. Among the imagery there are also a lot of pictures of soldiers in day to day tasks, carrying out training and patrolling activities. As the humanitarian soldier is commonly pictured with local civilians, the modern brothers in arms are usually pictured with other soldiers and local security personnel. There are also a vast number of images picturing military meetings and high level visits from generals and politicians.<sup>105</sup> In these images the ISAF soldiers are often posing with weaponry, modern arms and equipment, thereby corporally presenting the coalition power – the muscular force and capacity of the coalition arms and personnel. In these pictures, heavily armed soldiers are often testing and presenting the weaponry and training by patrolling or taking part in everyday military activity.<sup>106</sup>



*Image 9.* [ISAF does not provide a caption for this photo.]

The images of the soldiers, as well as the arms and hi-tech equipment, paint a picture of a strong and effective, modern, powerful and ready to act army. Visuals of hi-tech arms and able-bodied men and women underline the military capacity and power of the coal-

tion. They present the coalition as strong and able, and as hi-tech, functional and powerful. These images allow the viewers to see the operation and the coalition presence in Afghanistan as efficient and strong. They visually and corporally present the coalition's power and the strong presence on the ground, and work to sustain belief in the operation's success.



*Image 10: Benjamin K., a German military servicemember, scans the horizon while securing a 4th Combat Aviation Brigade, 4th Infantry Division CH-47 Chinook supporting an unmanned aerial vehicle recovery mission in northern Afghanistan, Dec. 20. The capable 4th CAB Chinook supported the German troops in sling loading the UAV. (Photograph by U.S. Army Sgt. Sean Harriman, 4th CAB Public Affairs Office)*

What is different about these pictures in relation to the images of the humanitarian soldier, is that these modern warriors are usually not pictured with civilians like their “softer” counterpart, but with other soldiers or with Afghan military/police personnel. Thus, these figures do not act in such a “humanitarian” manner, but instead appear more military-like, as they secure and protect. The image of the “modern brothers in arms” training and simulating war seems to work as a more masculine and strong correction figure when compared to the image of the civilian-orientated humanitarian soldier. These soldiers seem strong and trustworthy, thanks to their powerful and modern weapons. But, despite carrying heavy weapons and possessing the firepower, equipment and training to shoot, fight and “neutralise” the opponent, the modern soldiers never fully

exercise or “release” their capacity: they do not use their firepower in the images. Pictures present training, patrolling, and normal “peaceful” everyday military routines, as well as visits from the operational commanders and other military events,<sup>107</sup> but they do not picture combat, downright military operations or casualties.<sup>108</sup>

A large number of images presenting the hi-tech ISAF soldier include scenes where the soldiers are participating in joint action, co-operation and interaction with the local soldiers of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the local police forces.<sup>109</sup> These images depict shared security tasks, the education of the national army troops and tasks such as delivering relief help or conducting construction work in the area. The work and co-operation seem to be carried out in total harmony, consensus and even close friendship among the ISAF soldiers and their Afghan counterparts. No disagreement, misunderstandings or difficulties are present in the images. The coalition soldiers seem, at least in the images, to be brothers in arms – as do the Afghans and the international troops.

What is interesting and remarkable in the visual language of these images is the positioning of the local actors and the ISAF soldiers. In most of the images describing the joint efforts of the ISAF troops and the local military and security field partners, the ISAF soldiers are presented as trainers, tutors and leaders of their local counterparts. The visual language of the images underlines this positioning of West/international coalition. Thus, the locals are usually seen in supporting roles or tasks, or as straightforward subjects of help and targets of tutoring and education. The images present the coalition soldiers teaching the local security personnel how to handle and fire weapons, while they guide and closely monitor them. This arrangement of statuses is rarely inverted, meaning the locals would never be tutoring the international troops, nor would the ISAF troops take part in Afghan-organised work in the area.

The positioning seems relevant and understandable, as one of the main objectives of the ISAF troops is to train and educate the local security authorities to be able to handle the task of securitising the area without the help and supervision of the coalition forces. Under the leadership of ISAF, and in co-operation with the locals, the capabilities of the Afghan

national army and police in maintaining security in the area are being developed.<sup>110</sup> Different estimates concerning the date of the coalition departure or the transition of responsibility have still not been concretely decided. The year 2014 is frequently mentioned as the point when the ISAF troops will withdraw, although the time frame is often described as flexible and moulded according to the local needs. General David Petraeus describes the transition as a process of “thinning out” Western responsibility when the situation allows it, and not “handing off” responsibility when the coalition feels like it.<sup>111</sup> These pictures can be seen to underline the NATO strategies of handing over security tasks to the local authorities as soon as they are capable of handling the job. By showing the seamless co-operation and trouble-free, friendly co-existence of the locals and the coalition troops, belief and trust is therefore cast on the operation. It underlines the capabilities needed to fulfil the objectives of the power transition according to the planned schedule.



*Image 11: During the whole course ANP members learn how to take maximum benefit of their official weapon, AK 47 7.62mm rifle. At the shooting range they perform shooting tactical exercises. On the picture a member of the Spanish POMLT shows how to aim their rifle.*

Visual representations of seamless co-operation, friendly co-habitation and happy and grateful recipients of coalition advice, help and Western tutelage can be seen to work to build the support and trust of the operation in the eyes of the addressees. They produce the motivation needed to carry on the mission, as they show that progress is being made in securitising the area and that the locals are happy with the operation, co-operation and the overall process. Positive pictures of co-operation in security and reconstruction work, as

well as images of friendly co-habitation and co-operation with the locals, underline that the Afghan state and the state of Afghanistan are evolving in the direction desired by the international coalition and ISAF. These pictures motivate the viewers of the pictures, and they see the operation as worth taking part in; things are evolving as planned, co-operation is trouble-free and the local populations are willing to and capable of taking responsibility for security and carrying on the work and legacy of ISAF in the area.



*Image 12: U.S. Army military Police Soldiers from 401st Military Police Company, 720th MP Battalion based at Fort Hood, Texas serve as range safeties for Afghan National Police personnel at a weapons range during a month-long train-the-trainer course on Forward Operating Base Airborne in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, Jan. 23.*

As the images show, the co-operation is proceeding in harmony and understanding. They also strongly show coalition tutelage and even the patronising position of the international troops over their Afghan counterparts. The ISAF soldiers are in the lead: they teach, give advice, tutor and educate. At the same time, the visual language of the pictures create somewhat subordinate positioning, whereby the locals assume a strongly subsidiary status. In image 11, the ISAF soldier is physically supporting the ANA soldier during shooting practice: the former is pictured behind the practicing young ANA soldier and holding him by the shoulders in a little brother-big brother-like visual position.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, in picture 12 the coalition soldiers are pictured overseeing an ANA shooting practice. The visual language and message of the image is meaningful in its symbolic positioning: the practicing apprentices – the ANA soldiers – are lying on the ground as the coalition soldiers oversee the action standing up, therefore underlying the difference in status between the experts

and their pupils. Even when describing the close relationship between the locals and the ISAF soldiers, this juxtaposition of statuses prevails.



*Image 13: FORWARD OPERATING BASE JACKSON, Sangin, Helmand province, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan – Corporal Michael Creighton, a team leader with the Police Mentoring Team, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, smiles and hugs an Afghan Uniformed Policeman during a stop at a local AUP station, Nov. 21. Creighton, a 25-year-old native of Los Banos, Calif., and his fellow Marines teach the AUP weapons handling, discipline, and patrolling, but they also live with and are good friends with the Afghan policemen. (Official U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Ned Johnson)*

In image 13, a local policeman and an ISAF marine are presented in an overtly friendly and close interaction.<sup>113</sup> The Marine hugs the local policeman while smiling and posing for the camera. The related caption describes the local police and ISAF representatives as often being close – perhaps even friends. The language of the picture visually underlines the subordinate position of the local police in relation to the international coalition troops. The – by appearance – young, almost child-like local police officer smiles timidly, adopts a stiff stance and leans ahead, while the heavily armed and far sturdier, smiling Westerner holds him by the shoulder. The strong, big brother-like ISAF soldier is portrayed as protective and friendly, as well as mindful towards the local officer. Such pictures underline the friendly, efficient and seamless co-operation. However, they simultaneously produce a visual presentation of the locals as somewhat child-like and weak. The visual language and positioning of the images describing the coalition-Afghan co-operation perhaps, partly unintentionally, underline this leader-subordinate juxtaposition.

The subordinate position, the status of secondary actor and the arrangement of the locals as the subsidiary objects of action is noteworthy and recurring in these pictures. The

ISAF personnel are seen as the more developed, strong, adult actor, giving advice to the adolescent Afghans. Thus, the ways in which the locals are pictured in the images, in relation to the ISAF personnel, also enclose content other than that deliberately intended by the presenter. Representations of culturally different areas and people often mirror subliminal paradigms, attitudes and impressions the presenter has on the *other*. In the following sub-chapter I will move on to analyse what kind of meanings and signifying ways of expression the visual representations of the locals in the operation areas as perceivers of help, and as the tutored ones, the helped and the instructed, cultivated objects of the operation, enclose.

### **3.2.2 The colonialisised Other**

The same positioning in the images presenting military co-operation between the coalition and the local troops is also present in images portraying coalition-local civilian co-operation. A prominent number of ISAF pictures present the operation in Afghanistan through pictures of reconstruction and development that has been enabled by the international troops. Furthermore, images communicating the ISAF actions in order to securitise the area are frequent in this type of imagery. These pictures present the happy Afghans part taking in co-ordinated work, which is led by the international actors. Here again, the helpful, humane, protective and patronising humanitarian soldier is the most prominent figure describing the ISAF, Western or international community's role in the country. But, there is a flip side to the figure of the humanitarian soldier that represents the tutoring, healing and securing hand of the international community. The other side of the coin involves the ways in which the local populations – the receivers of outside help, aid, as well as the objects of the teachings and cultivation – are pictured in the imagery. As we have seen in the previous chapters and pictures visualising the operation, the pictures reveal a strong division of tasks and statuses on the ground (for example in the environment of work and security tasks, as well as in development and aid work). When reading the messages of the images, a duality of responsibility and leadership between the locals and the international troops becomes very visible.<sup>114</sup> The helper and the helped, the tutor and the pupil, the providers of the help and the subordinate receivers of help are examples of the two sides of the same coin.





*Image 14: Sgt. Cody T. Romriell, a combat engineer with 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, high-fives a local after helping him unclog a backed-up canal during the construction of Typhoon 3 in Marja, Afghanistan, Sep, 9. Marine engineers with 2/9 have been constructing new patrol bases in their area of operation in order to increase force protection. Typhoon 3 is one of the many being built.*

The juxtaposition of the West (the humanitarian, strong and modern soldier figure) and the locals is visually apparent in the majority of the ISAF images. One major visual theme that is easily detectable and noticeable from the visual representation of locals is the representation of a different culture, and of a less developed area, a foreign land and the foreign customs of Islam, Muslim people and of Islamic culture and its society through Western eyes. Afghanistan is an Islamic state, and this shows in the pictures, even if it is not always referred to or mentioned verbally. Here, also, the landscape and material culture present in the images becomes noteworthy. When reading into pictures of other cultures, the external appearance of the persons pictured is crucial. What people look like, how they are clothed and how they appear physically is of significance when freeing the messages of images. As Franz Fanon writes in his book, *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*: “The way people clothe themselves, together with the traditions of dress and finery that custom implies, constitutes the most distinctive form of a society’s uniqueness, that is to say the one that is the most immediately perceptible.”<sup>115</sup> These differences in visible culture become even more significant and culturally noteworthy when Islamic culture and its people are visibly presented



to the mostly Western viewers in the environment of today's military communication, and in reference to the Afghan war – which was initially started as a response to “Islamic terrorism”. Ways of clothing, dressing customs and the appearance of people become more visible when locals are presented away from security tasks and other similar activities; i.e. when the locals are out of uniform. In the following pages I will mostly analyse images that depict the locals in their cultural surroundings, while taking into consideration their action, positioning, roles and status *vis-à-vis* the ISAF troops.



*Image 15: U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Iascc Baca, a builder and Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team engineer, teaches proper mortar mixing techniques to local engineers, construction contractors and foremen during a monthly contractor training session held at the Civil Military Operations Center, Khost, Afghanistan, Nov. 14. Engineers from the Khost PRT provided construction quality assurance training to locals in order to facilitate high quality construction practices in the region. (Photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephen J. Otero, Khost Provincial Reconstruction Team Public Affairs)*

Many of the ISAF images provide a glance into the material culture, scenery and landscape of Afghanistan. The poverty of the area and the insuperability of Western help, modernity and development are time and again juxtaposed in the images through the physical appearance, landscape, material culture and background of the images. Images 14–19 all serve as examples of this. The uniformed, modern ISAF soldiers are presented as clean, official, technical, disciplined, modern and advanced. They are portrayed as tutors, leaders, experts and enablers of development. The locals pictured beside the ISAF personnel seem not to be in charge, and they are traditionally dressed, under the tutelage of Western influence and their appearance sometimes makes them seem dirty and poor. In addition to being empty and often without infrastructure, the landscape, by Western standards, seems rural and underdeveloped. The fact that the most common landscape seen in the images is rural and images of cities or towns are rare merely serves to underline the impression of underdevel-

opment and poverty. As developing the area serves as one of the major objectives of the operation,<sup>116</sup> the pictures surely show that there is still lot to accomplish. The poorness of Afghanistan is a fact: the country is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a life expectancy of 44 years; 42% of the population live under the UN poverty line.<sup>117</sup> The landscape, infrastructure and material culture visible in the images all work to paint a picture of extreme poverty, and of a weak country that has been reduced time and again to rubble. The coalition development and reconstruction aid, much underlined in the images, does not yet seem to have got the area back on its feet.



*Image 16: HERAT, Afghanistan--An Afghan local receives medical treatment at the International Security Assistance Force Role 2 Medical Center on Camp Arena, Sept. 23, 2008. The center provides medical treatment to military personnel assigned to the camp and local residents. (ISAF photo by U.S. Air Force TSgt Laura K. Smith)*

Picture 14 opens up some of the common compositions used when picturing the locals *vis-à-vis* the way in which the coalition actors are presented. In the image, a soldier (named) and local (unnamed) “high-five” after undertaking a joint task of unclogging a canal at the construction site of a new patrol base. The juxtaposition in the picture is what is relevant: the smiling yet heavily equipped and armed soldier greets the unarmed local man. The soldier, as seen by his physical appearance, is modern, big and strong, while the civilian man is pictured in a traditional ambience. What jumps out of the composition and the story of the image is the visible difference in appearance. The composition presents a bigger and stronger soldier who is named and the smaller helped local who remains nameless – and can thus be seen to represent a part of the mass of “Afghans”. Also, the extremely Western habit of greeting (high five) imposed on the Afghan man sticks out.<sup>118</sup> The picture does not

just talk about the soldier helping the traditional Afghan man with work-related issues, the good co-operation evident and the grateful receivers of help, it also talks about the West and the international community as a patronising influence, imposing Western cultural practices on the locals and picturing the locals as the instructed and the cultivated crowd; and thus, from the western point of view, as the underdeveloped Others.



*Image 17: CAMP BASTION, Afghanistan – A British Royal Irish soldier gives school supplies to local children outside Camp Bastion June 6, 2008. The ISAF soldiers provide the Force Protection to Camp Bastion and will often visit local villages to give out donated supplies. (ISAF photo by Staff Sgt. Jeffrey Duran, U.S. Army)*

The same positioning is visible in picture 16: a traditionally clothed Afghan man is sitting down at a coalition medical centre as a uniformed ISAF actor apparently takes his blood pressure. Also, image 18, of the Afghan girl's worn sandals on her dirty feet and the text explaining that she is waiting for a new pair of shoes from the U.S. soldiers, repeats the same juxtaposition and narrative. In addition to underlining the humanitarian objectives of the ISAF operation in the area, the pictures also communicate the fact that the locals are the passive subjects of the operation, as the Western influence is personified and pictured in the modern ISAF uniform. Likewise, the Afghan child is waiting for help in her dirty, broken shoes. Development, know-how and help are pictured to emanate from the ISAF figure, who represents outside help, modernisation and development; while on the other hand, the local Afghan receiving the medical care and the girl in the broken sandals are representative of the local Afghans: the helped. Both of them are passively resorting to the outside help and thus, in the composition of the images, become the weaker, less developed party.

The images represent the way in which the Afghans and the ISAF action are depicted in the strategic communication imagery, which is justifying and explaining the operation, but symbolically such images and the juxtaposition of the figures also tell another story. This division and duality in the representation offers a window into the Western ideas about the operation and the Western presence in the area. It presents somewhat unconscious cultural attitudes, values and stereotypical paradigms of the presenter, as well as their intended audience. These photographs illuminate the ways in which ISAF is picturing us, the Westerners, our operation action, the international community and our values and aims. On the other hand, these images represent the ways of depicting different, foreign and far away cultures, areas and people. Thus, they open up a route to the representation of the “others” used in the current strategic communication, designed to motivate the war.



*Image 18: 091204-F-9171L-311 An Afghan girl wearing worn sandals waits for a pair of shoes being distributed by U.S. Soldiers , Boragay Village, Zabol Province, Afghanistan, Dec. 4, 2009. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Efred Lopez)*

The Others – representatives of different cultures, mindsets, areas, etc. – are often seen as an antonym of the self – of us. Features and attributes opposite to ours – the familiar, right, good and normal – are often associated and inserted into the Others. The Others are seen as different from us and thus often “less or worse”: less developed, less advanced and weaker than us. Therefore, the other is often a reflection of the self. The helpless and weak Afghans become the antithesis of the strong, modern West, the international community and ISAF. This juxtaposition – extremely typical and characteristic of the human mind – can be conscious or unconscious. It is often very evident – particularly in visual representations.



As attitudes can be easily hidden in written texts, visual material is bound to show the often stereotypical positioning of “us” and “them”. When encounters between cultures are visualised, the images are likely to be more or less stereotyped; they lack nuances and place one culture (way of life, style, type, etc.) above the other.<sup>119</sup>

The traditional mode of life and traditional appearance (visible in clothing, landscape, material culture and appearance) that become evident in the imagery are often, in Western imagination, seen as equal to underdevelopment.<sup>120</sup> In the ISAF images, the Afghans and Afghanistan, the traditional Afghan way of living, physical appearance (the veil, the Burka, the beards, the traditional gowns of the men, the worn shoes of a child, etc.) become associated with underdevelopment, helplessness and weakness. On the contrary, the Western-style modern military appearance, behaviour, features and functions become associated with power, capability and development. In the eyes of the Western viewer, the imagery thus underlines the weakness and subordination of the Afghan in comparison with ISAF and the international community work in Afghanistan.



**Image 19:** Gen. David H. Petraeus, commander of NATO and International Security Assistance Force troops in Afghanistan, visits a successful road construction project in the Badakshan province, Regional Command North, Sept. 30. Petraeus also attended a shura with Afghan President Hamid Karzai and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry. (Photo by U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Joshua Treadwell)

The ISAF images seem to be repeating some of the age-old Western inversions of us and of them. The military strategic communication images that present *the self* as stronger and more developed than *the Others*, serve the purpose of justifying the coalition presence in the area. Visually showing the intended audience that the coalition help and presence is

needed – the old man receiving medical care and the child in need of new shoes – persuade the viewer of the images to see the war as necessary and as an efficient project. The images say: we need to be involved, we make a difference, they need us, the war is essential. This reoccurring positioning also highlights the idea of a strong operation, and the superior and overwhelmingly strong position of ISAF in terms of military capacity. This juxtaposition underlines the idea that the international coalition will be triumphant and victorious in its operation. The weakness of the local Afghans *vis-à-vis* the ISAF figures can also be seen as a reference to the inability and incompetence of the adversaries to beat the coalition forces. In this respect, it also builds trust in the successfulness of the operation. This kind of picturing also tells a broader story of Western thinking: the story of Western insuperability and the need to cultivate and impose one’s own customs, conventions and ways of thinking upon the less developed Other.



*Image 20: GURESHK, Afghanistan--Royal Army Sergeant Adam Kennedy of the Royal Engineers Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) regiment conducts mine awareness training with local Afghan residents outside of the Host Nation Clinic at Forward Operating Base Price on Jan. 27, 2009. Military leaders at Task Force Helmand are beginning a rigorous mine awareness campaign with local residents, Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army to teach proper identification and marking of unexploded ordinance with the goal of reducing civilian casualties from accidental handling of explosive devices. ISAF photo by U.S. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Aramis X. Ramirez.*

The positioning of the helped and the helpers – the composition of masters and subordinates – is so repetitive and visible in the ISAF pictures that it cannot escape the eye. It can even be said that the conventional Western way of presenting different cultures and peoples – especially the Islamic world – in *orientalising* and *colonialising* ways is most visible in the ISAF images. By “Orientalism”, Edward Said meant that the Western practices of circulating stereotypical imageries of the Orient (the East, Asia, the “non-Western world” and “other” cultures in general) often present the cultural Other as a subordinate to Westerners.

Orientalising representations often presents the Others as barbaric and brutal, or as child-like and underdeveloped – as well as primitive and immature.<sup>121</sup> Orientalist ways of representation are visible in much of the ISAF imagery that pictures the locals. The local populations are generally not pictured in the ISAF images as brutal or barbaric, but mostly as child-like, immature, in need of help and guidance, and subordinate in character and position *vis-à-vis* the Westerners and their practices. This is very much present in the images.

According to Edward Said, the Europeans constructed their own identity by researching, observing and building representations of the “Orient”. Just as the Orient was often described as irrational, primitive and underdeveloped, so Western identity was conversely built as rational, civilised and developed.<sup>122</sup> A similar type of projection becomes evident when observing and reading the ISAF representations of the Afghans. The Afghans are shown in the imagery as less developed, immature and weak, and in need of guidance and civilising; thus the West and the international coalition at work in Afghanistan become the civilised counterpart – rational, humane and legitimated in its action.

Critics of the current humanitarian world order and military humanitarianism have observed a similarity of statuses and roles between colonial times and the present era. In the past, Westerners used to carry the “the white man’s burden” – the obligation to spread civilisation, reason, religion and law to the “barbaric” parts of the world. The main characters of this colonial story were the colonial administrator, the master, the missionary and the barbaric, uncivilised savages. Nowadays, it is clear that civilisation has been replaced with humanity, humanitarianism and development, and the topical main characters are now the humanitarian workers, humanitarian soldiers, the military and the international community, who all act as state builders. On the other side of this picture are the weak sufferers and suppressed locals of the failed states and the helped people of the crisis areas. The humanitarian soldiers and the helped locals of failed states are the new faces that have replaced the old colonial figures.<sup>123</sup> In addition to this, the representation and juxtaposition of the ISAF actor and the locals works wonderfully in the use of military strategic communication: the images and positioning also reinforce and construct the Western identity as superior and the image of the West/coalition as strong and able to win the fight in Afghanistan.

### **3.2.3 *The grateful locals and the emancipated Others***

What is different in the ISAF images when compared to the old colonial prototypes is that the locals in the ISAF images are not pictured as barbaric, violent or brutal. The locals are, however, pictured as child-like and weak; but also as tame, grateful and the happy recipients of help. The grateful, friendly and happy spirits are present and visible in almost all of the images picturing encounters and co-operation between the ISAF actors and the locals. This kind of representation of local populations is effective from the viewpoint of the strategic communication endeavour backing the operation. Picturing the locals as barbarians or as violent, mistrustful and discontent would not only be detrimental to the strategic communication aim, it would not fit the current humanitarian story. Pictures of happy, co-operative and content locals (civilians as well as the local security force personnel) market the operation in an up-to-date humanitarian style and help to win over the hearts and minds of the coalition home fronts. These images encourage the spectators to think and feel that the operation is a just and an efficient one, which is also wanted and unanimously supported by the local populations.

One of the major narratives found from within the images is constituted of the following elements: crowds of Afghans enthusiastically shaking hands with General Petraeus – the commander of the ISAF operation – while smiling and welcoming the military leader;<sup>124</sup> images of happy smiling children receiving gifts from the ISAF soldiers;<sup>125</sup> orderly and friendly fellow soldiers avid to learn from their big brothers;<sup>126</sup> and grateful, humble and calm women and men receiving development aid, health care and advice.<sup>127</sup> The happy and grateful figures of the Afghans also communicate to the viewers of the images that the locals pose no danger or threat to the soldiers or the coalition effort, as they are calm, content and tamed.

The happy and grateful receivers of aid and Western teachings surely motivate the audiences of the pictures to see the endeavour in a positive light. The images convey that this is an operation progressing and worth taking part in. This same mechanism has been detected



in the humanitarian and development NGO pictures: Pictures of happy, appreciative, orderly and accepting crowds of aid receivers more effectively encourages the potential donors to give money to NGOs; much more so than images of angry, frustrated masses or ambivalent reactions towards outside help.<sup>128</sup>



*Image 21: U.S. linguist Shafiq Ansary of Union City, Calif. (right), and U.S. Army Master Sgt. Darla Sheasley of Everly, Iowa, veterinary technician for the Iowa National Guard's 734th Agribusiness Development Team, answer questions while providing basic animal care training to 22 women from the Chowkay District Jan. 31. (U.S. Army photo/Sgt. Tessa Poppe)*

What these images show is that the helpers – the ones providing assistance – want to show that their help is making a difference. They also give proof that this is what the weaker Afghans unanimously want. A narrative of civilising the Afghans is very clearly visible in the images. Muslims and Islamic culture have often been presented, at least in Western representations (historically as well as in recent decades), as aggressive or even violent, barbaric and cut as a terrorist figure.<sup>129</sup> But, the ISAF pictures do not present the locals as aggressive or barbaric, but rather as docile, happy, very friendly and accepting of the coalition presence and action in the area. The locals are never pictured in the ISAF images opposing the coalition operation, nor do they appear frustrated, aggressive or in the role of the enemy.

Aside from the “docile locals” narrative, what can be seen in the images is what is often done by giving help, as well as civilising and developing less fortunate people and areas: imposing what are seen as civilised or Western ways and customs on the less developed world and the culturally different Others. The practices of imposing one’s own culture on the Other is extremely present in the ISAF images depicting the helped and “civilised” locals. This is visible, for example, in image 14, where an ISAF soldier is “high-fiving” the

bearded, local Afghan man dressed in a traditional white costume. The cultural practice of the high five is hardly very Afghan; and neither are the figures of Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Minnie Mouse, who are all used in a mine awareness campaign.<sup>130</sup> Such traces of cultural predominance are occasionally visible in the imagery. They can be seen as accidental slips, but also as indicators of indifference towards cultural differences and nuances. Also, on a much deeper level than just imposing straightforward cultural practices and markers on the other, this practice of not taking cultural differences into account or pushing one's own ideas of good, tolerable life and value systems on others is in many ways visible in the imagery. This projection becomes visible in many of the images depicting development and emancipation.

The narrative and ethos of the development furthered by ISAF troops in Afghanistan is extremely present in the ISAF images. This is understandable given the development of the area is one of the major objectives of the ISAF mission.<sup>131</sup> ISAF troops building schools and infrastructure, handing out aid, teaching government officials, educating populations, encouraging modern practices, developing healthcare, etc., constitute a majority of the images. But development, just like humanitarianism, is not always so innocent, altruistic and simply non-political as it presented to be, and as it may seem at first glance. The images narrating ISAF-enabled development in the area embed themselves in many messages that only open up when scrutinised in the context of contemporary world politics, and when analysed in more depth. Development can also be seen as a political keyword, as well as a political global governance practice, that is topically widely used not only by aid agencies but by states and in international politics. Development or emancipation as terms can be used, for example, in counterinsurgency war rhetoric, and thus as a powerful justification for war.

The description of ISAF's mission is that the aim of the operation is to "*facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population*". War and military acts are nowadays widely seen by the international community as preconditions of developing failed states and the underdeveloped corners of the world. Mark Duffield states

in his book *Development, Security and Unending War* that we are often nowadays told – and especially in the case of the Afghan war – that more fierce and more war-like posture, even more so that was at first planned, is required to solve the conflicts of today. It is often said that war and military suppression are necessary for *development* to follow and take root in “failed states” and global crisis zones occupied by international troops. This has led to a situation where development (as well as humanitarianism) becomes mingled with war. In this situation, development can also be used as a tool to further political means in so-called failed states. It can be seen as a practice to govern and contain risks and threats that could potentially stem from these areas, such as terrorism, political extremisms, disorder and migration.<sup>132</sup>



**Image 22:** Afghan women show off her ink-stained fingers in Kabul after taking part in their country's parliamentary elections Sept. 18. Photo courtesy USAID.

On the bases of human rights violations, humanitarian emergency and developing failed states, Western influence in global crisis areas has, in recent decades and years, increased. Usually, the relationship between the helper-developer and the helped-under-developed – the West and “the rest” – is presented as a relationship of mutual self-interest. However, both increased penetration and interventionist politics could also be seen as essential for the West’s own security. Although development is often presented in the ISAF images in a way that makes it seem non-political, it can also be interpreted as a de-politicised practice, a guise and a Western interstate technology of security to govern the worlds of people.<sup>133</sup> Political, as well as military involvement in far away, less developed areas and in the socie-

ties of culturally different others under the guise of modernisation and development, is not exactly a new phenomenon.

The concepts of civilising, cultivating and helping the others have also been used to govern the less developed corners of the world after the colonial era; often in the form of modernisation. As Said states, the modernisation of Muslim countries can be seen as a child of Orientalism. In the times of the Cold War, the modernisation theory was often seen by the West as an ideological answer to the increase of revolutionary upheaval in Asia, Africa and the Muslim/Arab countries. Modernisation was then used by the U.S., for example, to block the spread of communism. By planting modernisation, good leadership and a political system resembling the Western style of governance, countries seen as backward were moulded in to a shape that was not threatening to the West. The local Muslims were then often presented as child-like victims of their own nature and barbaric political leaders, while the West was presented as the bearer of progress, civilisation and development. This constitutes an interesting narrative of our global world and highlights the divisions of different levels and characters of humanity. The discourses, practices and representations of modernisation, humanitarianism, civilising and colonising the *Others* constitute the figures and roles of the *helped*, the *evil* and the *helpers*; and of the *ruled*, the *excluded* and the *rulers*; the *weak uncivilised*, the *brutal*; and the *strong civilised*; thus they produce the Global Other.<sup>134</sup> When looking at the images and reading their narratives, this story does not seem to be so far from the Afghanistan of today. The ISAF images tell an updated story of development and modernisation planted, by international armed troops, into a backward failed state tyrannised by its political system and underdevelopment, and populated by child-like locals.

Post-development research has also questioned the whole concept of development: developing the global Others has been construed as Western violence and forcefully pushing Western ideas, practices and ideals towards non-Western areas and people. As such, development has been seen as a political practice parallel to colonialism and imperialism.<sup>135</sup> Consequently – and in addition to justifying military interventions, securing one's own interest and containing threats – what is often achieved by helping, civilising and develop-

ing less fortunate people and areas is the forcing “the Western ways”, customs and ideals on the less developed world – or the culturally different “others”.



*Image 23: Along with heating and electricity needs, the Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team assessed that the Farah City Fourth District Girls School they visited, Dec. 9, needs more space for its over 1,700 students as evident by a first grade classroom filled to its capacity with 50 young girls, Farah, Afghanistan. (Photo by Master Sgt. Tracy DeMarco, Farah Provincial Reconstruction Team)*

An interesting and revealing passage into the development-driven colonialist visual representations of the local Afghans, and of the external modernisation and “Western ways” imposed on the less developed other, are the images of Afghan women within the ISAF imagery. One of the most important narratives legitimising the war and intervention in Afghanistan was – and still is – the development-driven idea of the betterment of the Afghan woman’s position. Women’s rights and liberating women from under barbaric and intolerant political regimes, who were unwilling to protect and respect women’s rights and gender equality, have become the moral justifications of Western war efforts in the age of “war on terror” and humanitarian war. Human rights violations in general and women’s rights violations in particular have in recent years become powerful justifications for the international community to intervene and play an active (and military) role within the boundaries of another state. This harnessing of gender rights in to a legitimising discourse of war has also been noticed, often sceptically, by feminist scholars.<sup>136</sup>

Putting an end to the brutal handling of women under the Taliban era and the emancipation of Afghan women have been central to the legitimisation of the ISAF operation. The schooling of girls and education of women are among the most used justifications for the Afghan operation. Freeing, emancipating and bettering the societal standing of women who had been left without social, economic and educational rights under the Islamist era has been one of the central aims proclaimed by the coalition. Furthermore, the rights of women have been sedulously repeated in the political speech that has legitimised and backed the operation.<sup>137</sup> Against this background, the vast amount of pictures of emancipated women that can be found within the ISAF imagery is not surprising. Showing images of happy, active, content, emancipated and freed women is a powerful tool in the toolbox of the current information warfare and strategic communication which backs the operation in Afghanistan.

What else do the images of emancipated women articulate to the Western viewer of the ISAF images? What kind of meanings do these pictures embed, and how do the pictures present the ISAF operation and the women of Afghanistan? What kind of signifying messages of the operation, as well as ISAF activity and the outside emancipation endeavour of the Afghan women, Afghanistan and Islam, do the pictures enclose? Also, how and what do these pictures communicate to the domestic audiences of the pictures?

Encouraging images of local women are well represented in ISAF imagery. The Western home front viewer of the ISAF images, who most likely believes in gender equality and human and gender rights, probably feels relief when looking at some of the imagery depicting the activities of the Afghan women, who have been liberated from under the strict rules governing their lives and oppressing their rights under the Taliban era. Images of Afghan women sitting down in classrooms being educated by the coalition soldiers visually represent development and the emancipation of women. The photographs also tell us that the women of Afghanistan are already able to play soccer and compete in sports, a fact that has been facilitated by the ISAF effort in order to better the status of women in the country. When compared to the treatment and juridical rights of women under the Taliban era, Afghan women proudly showing their inked fingertips as a markers of them casting their vote,

as well as images of smiling little girls in a classroom while waiting the coalition soldier to better their schooling facilities, satisfies the viewer bound to Western mentality.<sup>138</sup> The images depicting the emancipated women of Afghanistan usually show the ISAF troops as enablers of development and emancipation and facilitators of women's liberation.<sup>139</sup>

The Western liberal viewer – believing in human and gender rights and the humane justifications of the operation – will look at the image of an unveiled woman and, in many cases, feel happiness, satisfaction and relief; the viewer sees an emancipated and liberated woman, freed from the shackles of an oppressive, traditional Islamic order. The images show that the ISAF operation has made a positive difference. The visual narrative of modernisation and development, as well as the imagery of the women emancipated by the help of ISAF, create a narrative that suggests that the war has been inevitable for development and emancipation; that there has to be war and coalition military presence on the ground before the Afghan woman can be freed.



*Image 24: The Afghan Women's International Team (in red) played a friendly, yet competitive, game of soccer against a team of International Security Assistance Force women (in gold) on April 1. The game ended with neither team scoring a goal, but the real goal of the game was met. The Afghan women had an opportunity to play their sport against another women's team. The team does not get the opportunity to play against other teams in Afghanistan, so the game was chance for them to play a new opponent and build a relationship with women from several NATO countries, said Khalida, the coach, and a player of the Afghan Women's International Team.*

But images of Afghan women attending schools, graduating from the police academy, voting, playing soccer or undressing her veil, may give the spectator premature satisfaction. They may be casting false belief on the achievements of the ISAF operation and the immediate effect of the external help on the status of Afghan women. The attitudes towards women are deeply rooted in culture and society (as in our own Western societies) and the oppression of women is most apparent in domestic and private, everyday life, and in the



attitudes and value systems of the people. Often, these are also supported by the local communities. There is only so much that a state-system or outside influence can do to the grass root level practices which prevent women freely and plenipotentiary participating in the functions of education, society, politics and private life.<sup>140</sup> These systems and attitudes do not change in an instant; they cannot be brought into a society overnight and be expected to flourish soon after seeding. It takes years to break societal gender systems, and the same can be seen in many Western societies.



*Image 25: (KABUL, Afghanistan, Oct. 29, 2010) Players from Afghanistan's national women's soccer team posed for pictures after a friendly match against an international pickup team of women assigned to the International Security Assistance Force Headquarters in Kabul. The Afghan women controlled much of the game, but scored just once. That goal, which came in the first half, was enough for the win.*

Furthermore, inequality between the genders is often more easily identified and seen in other cultures – in far away places and especially in “less-developed” areas of the world – than in cultures closer to one’s own. It is easier to detect and try to mend the gender equality questions and shortages in the Other than in one’s own, familiar surroundings. That is not to say women’s rights would not be insufficient in Afghanistan or in some other parts of the Islamic world. However, what is typical of the predominant Western political discourse, as well as feminist discourse, is that Islam is often presented as a religion naturally and by definition repressive to women and disregarding of women’s rights, as opposed to other religions – namely Christianity.<sup>141</sup>



In post-development and post-colonial feminist research, Western-based feminism and women's liberation are often perceived (especially by non-Western scholars) as a part of Western cultural hegemony and colonialism. West as a norm also means the Western woman as a norm. In Western feminist discourse, "Third World women" are often seen as a homogeneous group labelled by oppression and powerlessness. Chandra Mohanty talks about discursive colonialisation, whereby the Third World woman is often constructed as traditional, backward and weak *vis-à-vis* the Western norm of the modern, advanced and emancipated woman.<sup>142</sup> It can be seen in the ISAF images that the women of Afghanistan are often emancipated according to Western principles. It is assumed that the societal standing of women and the condition of gender rights are mended when the Afghan women are acting, at least in our view, in an emancipated manner – as a liberated woman. Westerners are usually quite feeble in detecting the structures and conventions that inhibit the freedom of women (and sexual minorities), as well as norms that repress genders in their own surroundings and societies, but agile in detecting imperfections in the cultural Others. This could also be said about the discussion concerning the use of the Burka in Western European countries,<sup>143</sup> as well as the strong condemnation of the practice of female circumcisions as opposed to Western women's appearance and beatification norms, such as plastic surgery, or the gendered violence towards women still persistent in many Western countries.<sup>144</sup> All in all, the whole universality of the Western ideas of feminism and women's liberation has been strongly criticised by the non-Western (as well as the Western) feminists. Critics of Western-based ethnocentric feminism have also brought to the fore the idea that above "universal sisterhood", "universal feminist claims" and the oppressive patriarchal system there are a vast number of power structures that differentiate women globally, such as colonialism, racism, imperialism and globally and culturally unequally divided wealth.<sup>145</sup>

Clothing and apparel are important markers of identity and culture, and they are very visible and prescriptive in visual representations. Clothing and external appearance are even more significant in visual representations of the Muslim women. As clothing traditions reveal belonging to a certain type of society and culture, the veil (or Burka) – which carries many culturally signifying implications – worn by Muslim women is at once noticed and

essentialised by spectators. The veil, so apparent in Afghan society, presents a disturbing mystery and miscellaneous trouble for the Western viewer, as well as for the development project and feminist emancipation effort.<sup>146</sup> Just as traditional modes of life, customs, apparel and appearance often equate to underdevelopment and “uncivilised” culture, so the veil is often seen in the West to point to the oppression of women and to a disregard of woman’s rights.<sup>147</sup>



**Image 26:** Kabul –Afghan National Police women qualify on the AK-47 rifle during the tactical training program portion of the police basic training course at Kabul Military Training Center, April 13, 2010. During the eight-week course, trainees learn police-specifics such as penal and traffic codes, use of force and improvised explosive device detection. The course also covers the Afghan constitution, human rights and two weeks on weapons and tactical training. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Sarah Brown)

Franz Fanon saw that the Algerian women of the colonial era were subordinate to their colonial masters: they were the subjects of seduction and were forcefully tired to made to convert to their masters’ culture and “unveiled”, in order to better fit the Western cultural description of a modern woman.<sup>148</sup> Emancipating women and placing them in, according to Western perception, progressive and liberating positions can also be seen as a process of unveiling the women. Picture 26, where the Afghan women are practicing shooting dressed in trousers, could portray a practice of undressing or stripping the veil that belongs to Islamic culture. Thus, it represents modernisation and the emancipation of women, but at the same time the culture and modernisation of the master can be seen to be imposed upon her.

When seeing the veil removed, the Western viewer can sigh and be relieved – another woman is liberated from Taliban terror or Islamic oppression. These women can be seen to be liberated, but also stripped and civilised according to the world views of the master and

the West's perception of women's liberation and gender equality. In post-colonial feminist studies, Western feminism is often regarded as one of the West's import products. Western feminist ideas are placed upon non-Western women, and emancipatory language is used as a means of forcefully thrusting something foreign on what is seen as underdeveloped and backward women of the orient.<sup>149</sup> Unveiling the Afghan women, seen in the images, and thus saving them from oppression can also be viewed as the workings of naturalised, de-politised myths. Women's rights, gender equality and the schooling of girls are such strong and powerful, naturalised subjects in many Western societies that they are often seen as indisputably noble aims; and questioning the aims and practices used to further these goals that are seen to be universal may be regarded as supporting the oppression of women. The Western viewer, when seeing images of emancipated Afghan women, wants to believe that a woman unveiled is a woman saved.

## 4. The war unseen

*“If there is no picture, no photographic evidence of the suffering; there is no atrocity.”*  
Susan Sontag<sup>150</sup>

ISAF’s imagery paints a multilayered picture of the current operation, the war and the situation in Afghanistan. The images allow us an insight to the ground level of the operation and show the operation in an appealing light in order to sustain its support. However, they also communicate some of the structures of today’s world politics, as well as global power structures and the zeitgeist of our time. The images also, partly unintentionally, reveal some paradigms that are left unsaid about the operation when it comes to written accounts and the spoken word, for they reveal stereotypical picturing formed according to cultural attitudes and political aspirations. However, some things that usually belong in military conflicts, operations and war-like situations are left out – or are indirectly addressed in the ISAF imagery. These themes, left unseen, are also relevant when reading and analysing the strategic communication imagery and the messages they entail. The *unseen war* creates narratives, just as the pictured operation does. What is framed out of these images makes the viewers focus and ignore, but at the same time confine and imagine. Thus, they construct the frames in which the war, and in turn the ISAF operation, is understood. In this chapter I will concentrate on some of the visual “blind spots” of the ISAF imagery and address the missing aspects: the features of war and military action that remain unaddressed or indirectly addressed in the imagery.

### 4.1 The invisible enemy and the protected coalition soldiers (inviolable Western bodies)

What sticks clearly out in the imagery is the invisibility of the enemy figure. The operation is, and has been throughout, violent; the number of casualties is on the rise; and the fighting and insurgent attacks are frequently reported in the media. However, the ISAF images do not visibly present the “enemy”, the figures of the “insurgents” and “terrorists”, nor do they visually show the antagonist of the story.<sup>151</sup> Given that representations of the “Islamite

terrorist” are frequent and much used in popular culture and the imagery circulating in the West, such figures are absent from the ISAF imagery.<sup>152</sup> Why is this, and what could this tell us in the context of strategic communication? What does this say about the war and the operation in broader terms; and what does the “invisibility of the enemy” say about the principles and the narrative of the contemporary war waged by the “international community”?



*Image 27: Afghan and coalition forces discovered home-made explosives during a search for a Taliban improvised explosive device facilitator in Zabol province, Dec. 12. Additionally, they found a weapons cache including chest racks, assault rifles, fragmentary grenades and rocket-propelled-grenade casings. The facilitator was detained along with two of his associates. (DoD photo)*

The invisibility of the enemy in the ISAF imagery seems to indicate that the enemy really is, in today’s counter insurgency operation, quite rarely encountered face to face. The tendency to avoid showing the corporal opponent may well be because the adversary in today’s war is not dressed in uniform, meaning the enemy could be anyone. Not picturing the enemy in a human figure therefore descriptively illustrates the paranoid reality of the war on terror on the ground.<sup>153</sup> This paranoid spirit of today’s war is well visualised, for example, in the Academy Award-winning movie *The Hurt Locker* (2008, Kathryn Bigelow), which

tells the story of a U.S. army bomb squad unit working in Iraq.<sup>154</sup> The reality is that the opposition and the enemy are very hard to visually spot in warzones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. The enemy fighters are not an army in a traditional sense; the insurgents do not carry identification badges or similar uniforms, and thus they are in a visual sense “civilians”. A “Taliban fighter” could look like any normal Afghan civilian, as this is the logic of an insurgency war. Visually personifying him/her in the strategic communication images could lead to a mixed situation, whereby the ISAF images picturing the grateful, cooperative and tame Afghans receiving help, protection, tutoring and developmental aid from the coalition forces would be hard to visually distinguish from the figure of the enemy. This absence of the aggressive opponent also relates to the presentation type that we have already seen – the figure of the tame and grateful local help receiver. Leaving the enemy visually unaddressed also suits the strategic communication endeavour, as the tame and grateful locals are a much more desirable object of help – and less confusing to the audience of the pictures – than two quite opposite characters illustrated in a fairly similar visual figure. Also, personifying the enemy in a visual human form could be seen to visually tarnish most of the local peace-loving civilians as potential terrorists.



*Image 28: Insurgent weapons, munitions and Improvised Explosive Device components recovered during the joint Special Operations Task Group/Afghan National Security Force operation against the insurgent stronghold in southern Afghanistan. Photo courtesy Australian Government Department of Defence.*

Although the figure of the enemy, the opponent or the “terrorist” is not personified in the form of a human figure, the weapons they use, as well as the mark that the insurgent attacks leave and the damage they cause, do sometimes show visibly in the images. The most common way of depicting the opposition of the enemy is by picturing the weapons the coalition troops have confiscated or found on the enemy fighters. These arms are then presented in the images as pillage. The images presenting the arms can point to the potential danger and threat that the otherwise invisible enemy poses to civilian lives, as well as the coalition soldiers. Presenting the arms as pillage taken from their users also shows that the arms and the potential threat have been neutralised and taken care of.<sup>155</sup>

The images depicting the confiscated armoury of the enemy often portray “improvised explosive devices”, homemade bombs and usually quite a lot of old and weary looking weapons (images 27 and 28). The appearance of the arms and the technical capacity of the insurgent weapons, when compared to coalition arms, seem outdated, obsolete and weak, yet at the same time vicious. As the coalition arms pictured in the images underline capacity, modernity, cleanliness and preciseness, these arms, judging by their visual appearance, do quite the opposite. The outdated arms visually point to the traditional and even backward ways of the opponent: his weak economical, structural and technical condition and skills, as well as the disorder and imprecise nature of insurgent warfare. Yet, these weapons also point to the disruptive force, vicious power and violent operating method of the adversary. The dirty-looking and improvised weapons are the ones used in the persistent and relentless opposition. They also point to the challenging task of rooting out insurgent activity in the area.

Insurgents and enemy violence can sometimes, although quite rarely, manifest themselves in the images in bloodier, more frightening and concrete ways. Image 29 shows a picture of a shoe in a puddle of blood after a suicide bomb attack. The text explains that the attack claimed the lives of “multinational personnel” and damaged nearby infrastructure. Another photo describing the same occasion portrays burnt vehicles, while armed ISAF soldiers securing the area point, in a straightforward way, to the corporal suffering of the local Afghans. Occasionally, the suffering or even death of a member of the coalition personnel is



also addressed in the images. However, the bodies of coalition members are never visible in the images. In the imagery there are some, although relatively not many, graphic images that show corporal suffering in the bodies of the local people.



*Image 29: KABUL, Afghanistan: A shoe stands alone in a puddle of blood after a suicide bomb attack went off on Jan 17. A vehicle born improvised explosive device (VBIED) exploded near the German Embassy and a US base. The VBIED killed and wounded multinational personnel and damaged vehicles and nearby buildings. ISAF Photo by US Air Force Tech Sergeant Brenda Nipper.*

The power and deviation of the enemy is sometimes shown through pictures of hospitalised locals and injured children. In many of these images, the coalition personnel are portrayed in the figure of the humanitarian soldier: playing with the injured children, cheering them up and trying to make their pain a little more bearable,<sup>156</sup> as well as attending to or enabling the medical care of the wounded.<sup>157</sup> The images of wounded locals suffering from insurgent-inflicted violence show the brutality of the enemy in the most powerful way: through visual records of bloody bodily pain. The image of a local male victim lying on the ground immediately after an insurgent rocket attack also names the coalition and Afghan service members as the helpers. Thus, the image also points to the help and relief offered by the coalition and its allies as a counterforce of insurgent violence.<sup>158</sup> Images presenting the marks of violence on the human body are extremely powerful visual representations. Picturing the victims of the destruction through images of bodily suffering let the spectators understand the severity of the situation, and thus they react to the destruction and horror. It has often been thought that a visual record of a violated human body acts as a shared template for all humans, as the surface where the pain of others can be most powerfully understood, felt and perceived. The pictures of blunt suffering are therefore commonly



used to picture catastrophes, famines and crises, in order to make the spectators understand the pain of others and to respond to it.<sup>159</sup> In the ISAF images, when the suffering the Afghan civilian has been inflicted by the terrorists is shown out in the open and the coalition and ally forces are presented as the helpers, the image can address the viewers in a way that encourages the continued participation in the operation.



**Image 30:** KABUL, AFGHANISTAN - Volunteers from International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Headquarters in Kabul visited the Indira Ghandi Children's Hospital Burn Ward downtown to bring gifts and raise the spirits of the children through coloring, reading and playing games. ISAF volunteers have visited the burn ward on numerous occasions and donated much-needed medical supplies. ISAF Photo by Navy Mass Communications Specialist Petty Officer 1st Class Monica R. Nelson.

What is interesting and remarkable in these images of horror is that the enemy is presented only through arms, firepower, violent deeds and the destruction he causes. Through this kind of presentation, the enemy becomes de-personalised, invisible and thus almost mythical and hard to grasp. The enemy is “the Taliban” or “the insurgents”, but the human behind the monolithic enemy hides from our gaze. Thus, the enemy is seen only through the arms, the violence and the destruction he causes, but he is not shown as a human or in the figure of a human, unlike the ISAF soldiers. Remembering that the terror attacks conducted by extreme Islamists were the underlying reason for the war, as well as freeing the country from under the Taliban order and scattering the international terrorist groups and terrorist safe heavens in the area, it seems strange that there are no images of the terrorists in the imagery. What could explain the invisibility of the enemy figure in strategic communication images? Could this be explained by the fact that the enemy really is so invisible? Or does the invisibility of the enemy point to the fact that opposing, destroying, “neutralising”, killing and fighting something that is not visually shown has often been seen as easier than

seeing the opponent eye to eye? On the other hand, not visually picturing the enemy can also point to the discourse of the protected coalition soldier.



*Image 31: KAPISA PROVINCE, Afghanistan: Service members from Task Force La Fayette provide medical attention to a local Afghan who was injured during a rocket attack that killed and wounded Afghan civilians, in the Tag Ab market in Kapisa province, Afghanistan, yesterday. The victims were medically evacuated to several military hospitals. (Photo by French Army ADC Jean-Charles Thorel, Task Force La Fayette)*

## 4.2 Individuals and crowds

The discourse of the protected coalition soldier is visually manifested in another blind spot of the imagery. Another, almost unaddressed, topic to be found within the images concerns wounded or fallen coalition soldiers. Clear, visual corporal suffering of coalition personnel is totally absent from the images. There are, however, a few images in the material that picture the coffins of fallen coalition soldiers.<sup>160</sup> Photographing and publically presenting the caskets of U.S. army soldiers coming back from the theatres of war were banned until recently (this ban only concerned the U.S. and U.S. soldiers). Images picturing war casualties and returning caskets containing the dead bodies of fallen soldiers have been known to damage the war efforts of the United States and diminish public support for recent wars.

This ban was imposed by George Bush Senior during the first Gulf War in the 1990s, and lifted in 2009.<sup>161</sup> Therefore, showing the coffins of fallen soldiers in the ISAF strategic communication images and in this light is certainly quite daring.



*Image 32: HERAT, Afghanistan--Spanish Army soldiers load the remains of a soldier killed onto an aircraft headed for Spain, Nov. 10, 2008. The soldier died during a vehicle borne improvised explosive device attack near Shindand in western Afghanistan. The soldiers were performing an International Security Assistance Force mission at the time of their death. (ISAF Photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Laura K. Smith)*

Visually encountering the coffin, known to contain human remains, points towards war-inflicted pain and loss. Nonetheless, the casket is as close as the ISAF images get to addressing physical vulnerability and suffering on the part of coalition personnel. There are no images showing the bodies of wounded or deceased coalition soldiers in the imagery. Presenting and publishing photographs of the wounded bodies of Western soldiers is widely seen in the West as banal, tasteless and brutal, as well as offensive to the rights and honour of the victims and a violation of the personal integrity of the person in question.<sup>162</sup> David Campbell has observed that “codes of taste and decency” govern the presentation of visual images of suffering and violence on display in the Western media, causing Western bodily suffering in particular to disappear from the scene. Placing harsh pictures of suffer-

ing or of deceased Westerner's bodies on display is resented by Western audiences and avoided by Western media houses, on the grounds that showing suffering is immoral, tasteless and indecent.<sup>163</sup>

The same phenomenon is visible in the ISAF strategic communication images. The audience does not want to see harsh images of Western bodily suffering; and for military strategic communication, surely dead bodies of their own boys/girls do not encourage support for the war. It is evident that death and the human cost of war seen in bloody images would reduce support for the operation. From the point of view of the coalition strategic communication, it would not be wise to show the suffering of soldiers on the battlefields of a far away war theatre. The spectators want and need to believe that the soldiers are (at least relatively) safe, protected and doing well. In addition to this, they also want to know that the bodies of dead soldiers do not fit the justification given to the Afghan operation, nor the rhetoric of the war, and its public image.<sup>164</sup> The suffering and potential death of coalition soldiers is clearly a troublesome issue which the coalition does not want to address in the images. But by not showing pain (or showing it very rarely and indirectly), danger and the potential for death, the images imply and aim to indicate that the coalition soldiers are protected, safe from harm, inviolable and strong. However, what is interesting is that the same rule in its totality does not seem to apply to the bodies of the locals. Although the picturing of wounded locals is quite rare in the imagery, they are still occasionally seen in suffering from corporal pain. What does this difference tell us and what kinds of meanings are embedded in this kind of presentation?

Why is it that strategic communication images that are targeted at the coalition home front audience do not show coalition personnel in pain, but find it suitable and presentable to show local Afghans in pain? One explanation could be that as the ISAF images show local Afghans in the midst of the war and crisis and in corporal pain, the images can be seen to point to the potential threat and danger in the area. Thus, they offer justification for the operation. And on the contrary, showing coalition damage would point to the weakness and violability of the operation. On the top of this, even deeper meanings are embedded in this representability-unrepresentability difference<sup>165</sup> (which is also present in the coffin dis-

course mentioned above) between the locals and the coalition soldiers. The difference, created by the images, can be explained by moral philosophical considerations towards empathy, distance and similarity.

The sensitivity and reluctance to see death and the suffering of our own is embedded in the human mind. The human mind works – according to the Western moral philosophy – in such a way that the closer we feel emotionally, culturally, politically, societally, geographically and historically, as well as age and appearance wise, to the one suffering, the more we empathy we feel towards the sufferer. The opposite, in this case, is also true: suffering that is far away and pain experienced by a person not so similar to ourselves is met with a reduced amount of empathy, and thus is easier to encounter and see.<sup>166</sup> We grieve the death of one of our own and are more touched by it and more sensitive to it, as it also reminds us of our own mortality.<sup>167</sup> We would like to see ourselves, people like us, our political and societal system and our world views as being safe from harm. For example, when a northern European sees an Afghan person in pain in a mediated image from a global crisis zone thousands of kilometres away, he/she is likely to react emotionally differently than when seeing his/her fellow citizen in pain in the same area. But on the top of this (in the environment of military strategic communication), the spectator has different political potential to react to the suffering – for instance in the form of protesting against her/his country's involvement in the conflict.

From this logic rises the distinction in reacting to pain, which is also visible in the ISAF images: a hurt Afghan body can represent the Afghan mission, but the hurt coalition body does not fit in to the frames representing the war. But when thinking about the visual representability of hurt Afghan bodies in relation to inviolable Western bodies, the questions of dignity, rights, honour, personal integrity and the individuality of the victim play a part. As the unrepresentability of wounded Westerners has been rationalised and explained by “codes of taste and decency”, the violation of rights, honour and the personhood of the pictured individual, the same codes do not seem to apply to the “foreign bodies” to the same extent.<sup>168</sup> A descriptive example of this difference in presentability is offered by the photographs taken of a dying U.S. marine in Afghanistan in autumn 2009 and published by

the Associated Press. Pictures taken by Julie Jacobson of the mortally wounded U.S. Marine Joshua Bernard stirred up a lively debate on war photography, the ethics of imagery, embedded journalism and the extent to which a Western soldier's suffering is allowed to be show in public.<sup>169</sup> Visually showing the dead body of a U.S. soldier in the Western media evoked discussion and comments from the highest political circles. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Robert M. Gates, intervened personally, stating that AP should have not published the picture. Gates resented the publication of the photos on the grounds of "respect for the soldier" and honouring the family by not publishing such photos of their loved one. Gates accused AP of a "lack of compassion and common sense", calling the showing of such footage "appalling" and intimating that it showed bad judgment and a lack of decency.<sup>170</sup>

However, as the ISAF imagery also seems to prove, the codes of decency are globally and contextually conditional, and the same rules do not seem to apply to all humans. Showing a picture of a dying U.S. marine is seen as indecent and appalling. The *honour* of the Western *person* is the bottom line in, for example, the statements of Mr. Gates. On the other hand, showing photos of dead or wounded foreign bodies is seen to be suitable, and is simply normal news, the mediation of information and business as usual. The injured man in image 31 or the injured people in the coalition hospital (image 4) are not even named; thus neither the personality nor the integrity of the individuals is taken into account in the same way. Showing coalition *individuals* is seen as different from showing the pain of the local *crowds*.<sup>171</sup> The bodily suffering of Westerners in the midst of political violence and war seems to be more of a touchy issue than showing the suffering of the Others. The bodies of the Others tell a story of the topical war, but wounded bodies of the coalition soldiers do fit the story. This visual positioning – which hides the suffering of some and shows the suffering of others – visualises and reveals the Western stance and attitude towards globally and culturally divided humanity, human worth and the integrity of the human body.<sup>172</sup>

### **4.3 The narratives of unseen aggression and the identity crisis of today's soldier**

Another blind spot in the images is the absence of coalition soldiers in combat situations. The coalition soldiers are never presented as violent, nor do they cause violence or suffering through their actions. As we have seen in the images, the ISAF soldiers do carry heavy weapons and they practice and handle arms, but what is remarkable is that the soldiers are never pictured in “real combat” or in potentially violent action.

There is no single image in the ISAF imagery that would overtly point to a situation where an ISAF soldier has caused human suffering. This is, of course, understandable from the point of view of the strategic communication effort: there is no point in showing the brutality of war while simultaneously building support for the operation by promoting its humane spirit and noble aims. Showing aggression and violence among the images would be conflicting, contradictory and even damaging to the grand humane narrative created for the operation. But, the absence of such imagery also creates certain interesting positionings and reveals notable aspects of today's war. It is easy to understand while looking at the imagery – the messages it contains and the narratives it creates – that showing aggression or violence caused by coalition soldiers does not fit into the strategic communication story of ISAF. ISAF spirit, activity and the mission are also usually addressed in political speech and in the justifications of the operation, which is non-violent, humanitarian and of a peacekeeping nature.

As followers of world happenings, we hear from the news and read in the papers that the situation in Afghanistan is violent: people kill, get killed and fight. We also know that in reality the ISAF troops are armed with real bullets, they take part in military missions, use fire power, and cause human suffering and even civilian deaths.<sup>173</sup> Regardless of this, the violence and suffering caused by the coalition and its allies is painted by the pictures as non-existent. Violence is solely devoted to the enemy forces. The imagery gives a non-violent, peaceful and humanitarian, yet strong (bodily inviolable), image of coalition action and presence. But what kind of narratives does this pictorial representation and denial of

violence and aggression create? And where does the non-violent presentation of the “Western” war effort and action stem from, and what does it tell us?

The unseen violence of the ISAF imagery stems from larger discourses, political change and the cultural currents of today. Despite the overall media surroundings (fiction, movies, video-games, news, documentaries, etc.) being flooded with atrocious images, media images of wounded or dead Western soldiers and Western-afflicted pain in political conflict have become few in recent decades. The disappearance (or thinning out) of the suffering of Westerners and Western-afflicted violence in wars and conflicts is an evolution that has to do with the new type of warfare<sup>174</sup>, tightening of media control by the Western militaries and the Western media inlet’s invocation of the criteria of “taste and decency”. There has also been talk of embellishing the images of war in recent times due to media codes of taste and decency and Western military restrictions on war photography – for example regarding the policy of embedding war journalists.<sup>175</sup>

The absence of such imagery has lead many spectators to feel, think and hope that the Western military presence, soldiers, war effort and practices do not cause suffering or are in essence non-violent. When the brutality and violence of the coalition soldiers are very seldom seen, and as the political speech and justifications of war are humane and highlight the protection of civilians and human rights, thus it has been tempting and easy to think and hope that Western violence does not exist.<sup>176</sup>

This can be perceived paradoxically through recent sightings of atrocious war images: “escaped” pictures of extreme violence revealing the brutality of Western/international coalition military personnel. Although the military imago control is tight and the cultural conventions and media practices shun violent images, from time to time images revealing and exposing brutality, inhumane practices and human suffering inflicted by the coalition soldiers have surfaced in the media. Such examples from recent wars include the Abu Ghraib torture pictures (2003), the documentary *Armadillo* showing Danish soldiers killing unarmed men (2010) and the “Kill Team” images published by *Der Spiegel* (2011). These instances are examples of “escaped” information and images conflicting with the official



story of today's war waged by the West and the international coalition. These kinds of sightings of images have, in the age of "war on terror", caused several media spectacles, vivid discussion in the media and a lot of anger and disillusionment. The instances when sensations and atrocious images have leaked from the theatres of recent wars have all caused the Western world to ask "is this really what we are doing", "how can this still happen" and "are we involved in something like this"? The sensations these atrocious images of the cruelty of war have caused in the West tells of the beliefs of the Western spectators. As they also enlighten what Western spectators are told, believe or want to believe about contemporary Western war conduct. The sensations enlighten that the Western spectators want to believe that the contemporary wars waged by the West do not cause suffering and their actions do not include cruelty, killing, torture or pain.<sup>177</sup>

Even when we constantly hear in the news that people (civilians, soldiers and insurgents) are been killed and wounded in the course of war, the dominant discourse of the Western war on terror and the war fought by the international community is painted to be painless, somewhat humane, precise, clean and not the cause of terror, death and suffering.<sup>178</sup> This is what the strategic communication imagery of the coalition war effort – and also the ISAF Flickr images – are built to do. The images are meant to give – from the military operation's point of view – a desirable image of the operation. They are also designed to influence the audiences of the coalition countries, so that they see the operation in a desirable light and are reassured that pain and brutality are not a part of the topical war. In addition, the official imagery is designed to fight this conflicting visual information and to make it look exceptional. Thus, it seems that often the exposures of brutal images of war, with regards to Western military conduct, are thought of as abnormalities, and as exceptions from the norm of humane war. The brutality of war expressed by these images is thought of as a deviation from the normal humane conduct and guidelines of war waged in the name of humanity. Thus, these atrocities are blamed on the brutal individuals and are regarded as acts of disturbed persons, as acts not belonging to the logic and nature of the topical Western wars.<sup>179</sup> It seems that killing, brutality and the violent madness of war have become something that does not fit in to the frames of today's war, which is being fought by the international community.

When thinking about the visually painted non-violent nature of the ISAF operation and the soldiers, we have to go back to the figure of the humanitarian soldier. When compared with historical photographs that visualised and reported war, the humanitarian soldier figure circulating in ISAF pictures clearly breaks the accustomed visual norm of a traditional soldier. Unlike the ISAF soldier, traditional soldiers are pictured fighting and are expected to fight, to participate in military action and operations, and use the weapons they carry. Furthermore, they are expected to encounter opposition and, to put it bluntly, act like a warrior.<sup>180</sup> As we have seen, ISAF soldiers are not presented as fighters; they have the firepower, but they do not fully exercise or release their capacity. The role of the humanitarian soldier seems to be preventing the soldier figures in the ISAF strategic communication images acting like traditional warriors. ISAF soldiers are muscular and armed figures that look like soldiers but are expected to patch things up, be nurturing and humane, rather than fight, destroy or kill. The roles of the soldier seem to be mixed and the identity of the soldier in crisis. The traditional role of soldiers as fighters, added to the depiction of the operation and the violence and fighting painted invisible by the images, seems to construct contradictory roles for the soldier of today.

Cynthia Weber writes about this “identity crisis of the soldier” in her book *Imagining America at war*. She describes how American soldiers, taking part in the Bosnia-operation in the 1990s, feel frustrated and even ashamed. The soldiers felt that the mission in Bosnia was not a “real mission” and the war was not a “real war”. There was not enough action, too much waiting around and, furthermore, the enemy was not usually visible or even precisely defined.<sup>181</sup> This phenomenon is likewise visible in the ISAF imagery, and articulated, for example, in the recent Danish documentary *Armadillo*, which illuminates the Afghan war. This documentary follows the life of Danish ISAF soldiers serving in Afghanistan. The soldiers serving in Helmand province are craving participation in the “real action”, instead of just patrolling, talking to the locals and waiting around at the base camp. The soldiers in the documentary clearly state that they want action – firefights and real war, as well as extreme experiences that one cannot have in a normal life living in a secure Nordic state.<sup>182</sup>

Handing out stuffed animals or sweets to the local children, chatting with the locals, drinking tea, securing, patrolling and acting as armed humanitarians does not seem to be what Western soldiers expect from their war experience. Through time warfare has changed, and the everyday life of the soldier has altered. Along with this transformation, the identity of the soldier seems to have been somewhat lost. The humanitarian soldier figure seems to point to the identity crisis being endured by the soldiers. This crisis has originated due to the topical frames and justifications of war, as well as the changed spirit and new conduct of today's warfare. On one hand, soldiers are expected to be strong and tough, do their job and overcome their enemy, but on the other, they have to be presented (from the point of view of military strategic communication and the justifications of the operation) as humane and in a strictly non-violent visual form.

It is worth noticing that the transformation of the soldier figure also tells a powerful story to the audiences of the pictures and domestic followers of the war effort. The portrayal of the soldier as a humanitarian and helper, as well as a friendly, unthreatening and non-violent figure, leads the audience to think and feel that the reality of the war is non-violent, and thus palatable, and morally unquestionable. Therefore, the reception of the *Armadillo* documentary in Denmark – as well as in Finland<sup>183</sup> – tells a revealing story of the clash of the traditional soldier and the (at least to some extent strategic communication-built) new expectations that the larger populations have, especially in European countries, about humane spirit and the conduct of war. The European audiences of *Armadillo* were shocked, disturbed and surprised about the violent nature and rough operational mode of the Danish soldiers revealed by the film. Pictures of Danes shooting people to death, participating in firefights and getting hit by real bullets firmly opened the eyes of the audience in the NATO-member countries. The European audience had not, it seems, pictured the Afghan war looking like this. Lively discussions on the desirability of participation in such an operation surged in Denmark after the launch of the film.<sup>184</sup> The soldiers are trained to fight, use their arms and take part in military action, however it seems that the frames of justifications and the presentation of today's

war have created a situation where the ISAF soldiers are not expected to release their violent potential.

The invisibility of battle and aggression, and the tendency of not visually addressing physical military activity, violence and fighting throughout the ISAF imagery, can also be seen to point to the coalition brute force impotence. The coalition is visually hindered from releasing its ultimate military power. The inhibition of releasing the ultimate physical power, visualised by the unseen war of the imagery, can be seen as troublesome to the whole operation. The ability and power to use force is there but the humane spirit, the justifications of the operation and expectations bestowed on the ISAF operation prevent and inhibit the use of power.

By not showing the ISAF personnel fighting or actively “releasing his/her fire power”, and thanks to the vast number of images picturing the soldiers in humanitarian action and spirit, the ISAF images create a narrative whereby the coalition soldier is not first and foremost seen as a fighter, and the operation not as a violent war. On top of this, the coalition soldier is never pictured causing pain or suffering – nor does he/she act in an aggressive way in the images – although he is seen alleviating suffering, as well as helping, healing and saving. Thus, the ISAF operation, at least when viewed through the images, seems non-violent and non-war-like, concentrating instead on civil and humanitarian action. But at the same time, the images manifest that the violence and pain of the conflict are solely associated with the enemy: the enemy uses violence, but this is never associated with the coalition and coalition soldiers. Fighting, combat, casualties and pain do not seem to fit the frames of picturing today’s war, the conducts of the “international coalition” or ISAF soldiers in today’s war zones.

## 5. Conclusions: The frames of seeing war

The ISAF strategic communication imagery on Flickr visually sketches a manifold depiction of the current operation in Afghanistan. The images describe and adapt according to the official objectives of the operation and present the coalition presence and work in the area in a positive, humane light. Thus, the ISAF Flickr images can be viewed as the official imagery of the operation and the war. The images work in order to win over the hearts and minds of the intended audiences according to the paradigms and spirit of the time. In order to be influential, the visual stories of the ISAF strategic communication need to speak about the actions, values, aspirations and political ideals that the Western viewer feels and perceives as right. War is a serious business: it takes lives and it takes morals, will and money. In order to persuade people to take part in this costly and morally heavy military operation, serious justifications are needed. To address the audience in adequate ways, these strategic stories need to be drawn according to the mindsets of the perceivers – they tell us more about who we are, but even more they tell us who we want to be. Thus, the images reveal the aspirations, world views, values and identity of the audience. They use very naturalised, self-evident and latent cultural and political messages, which are sometimes hard to be aware of and notice.

In the context of the Afghan war, the visual stories and narratives of the strategic communication have to tell about the things we (the coalition countries' populations) are willing to defend; the values we are willing to sacrifice; the things we believe in; and about the essence, roles, features and character in which we want to see and perceive ourselves as participants in a war, as members of the international community and as inhabitants of this global world. On the other hand, by not addressing some things, they also tell a story of what we do not want to be. Narratives and stories of the war – tales of its justifications and objectives – designed to influence public opinion are not constructed out of thin air. They are expressions of widely shared thinking which is constructed and moulded by the predominant world order, global power politics and the dominant military machine.

On the top of this, the images reveal and visualise some of the central paradigms of the world politics of our time; they tell about the structures, trends and currents of topical global politics, international relations paradigms and the evolution of war and military concepts. Novelties such as War on Terror, Pre-emptive warfare and Humanitarian war, as well as concepts prominent in today's world politics such as military-humanitarian interventions, have also left their mark on the visual representations of war. The figure of the humanitarian ISAF soldier most prominent and apparent in the imagery illustrates the current warfare, its justifications, the topical world order and the humanitarian paradigm widely used today in the global governance efforts of the Western powers and the international coalition. The gentle figure of the humanitarian soldier can be seen as a corporal manifestation and a symbol of the healing hand of the international community at work on a practical level in today's global crisis zones, failed states and the developing world. The figure describes and makes visible the international humanitarian order prominent in today's world politics and global order. The humane and helpful, non-violent humanitarian soldier figures seem a-political and veil the operation in an altruistic and non-violent guise. With the help of the visual humanitarian soldier figure, the operation appears to be a humanitarian aid, development and reconstruction project conducted by the strong and responsible international community, in order to benefit the local people of the war-stricken area. The narrative of the strong but humanitarian and helpful, a-political international community helping the weak Afghans addresses the intended audiences to see the operation in a positive light and in a multilayered way, drawn according to the humane and human rights-driven zeitgeist of today.

However, the images also bring into sight narratives beyond the official justifications and intended strategic narratives. When looked at more closely, they also contain unintended content that gives away subliminal ways of thinking and perceiving the world, and therefore sheds light on the Western ways of seeing ourselves and the Others of this global world. Thus, the ISAF imagery also produces a flip side to the image of the strong, humanitarian and civilised ISAF soldier figure. The visual presentation of the operation – handled by the strong, modern, humane and mostly Western coalition troops *vis-à-vis* the local actors and populations – illustrates many meaningful narratives. The visual disposi-

tion and the messages embedded in the images present the ISAF troops, almost without exception, in a dominating and stronger status compared with the local actors. Showing the locals as weaker, less-developed and in a subordinate position, but as the happy, co-operating and content subjects of the international coalition's help, coerces the audience into supporting what seems to be an eminently needed mission. This works to justify the ISAF operation as a development and modernisation project aimed at helping the unani- mously willing, welcoming and grateful Afghan people; it also shows the operation as a precondition to development, and thus presents the war as a necessary requirement for bet- tering the lives of the local people in distress. Picturing the operation as a development and modernisation project can also be seen to de-politicise the military operation, and to guise the power political aims of the operation in an easily supportable and humane costume.

Such picturing also creates other meaningful juxtapositions between the coalition actors, representing the international coalition, and the local Afghans in the images. The Afghans represent the human populations of the developing world, the failed states, Islamic socie- ties and the Others of the global world governed by the strong coalition: the West and the international community. When picturing the Western actors as the strong, civilising, dominating and humane builders of Afghan society, the images place the local Afghans as the "others" – the weak, underdeveloped and child-like. The images create the two main characters of the humanitarian story: the humanitarian *helper* and the weak *helped*. Recur- rently placing the coalition troops and the Western way of life above the locals creates a strong position of Western coalition predominance over the traditional way of life, and constitutes narratives of the underdeveloped and weak others. In these narratives, con- structed by the images, the differences in visual appearance, clothing and material culture are noteworthy.

What comes out of this visual representation is a strong tendency of imposing Western or modern ideals, value systems and cultural practices on the Afghans as the others. This kind of visual picturing resembles the age-old orientalising and colonial picturing of the cultur- ally different other; and thus modernisation, development and civilising the others reflected in the images can be seen to be violent, compelling and colonialising practices. This is very

visible, for instance, in the visual descriptions of emancipated Afghan women. The images of emancipated Afghan women place the modern, Western-style freed woman as the norm of gender equality and shows Afghan women, unveiled by the coalition modernisation effort, as a justifying and legitimising instrument for the military operation.

Some topics and matters are extensively and in signifying ways addressed in the imagery, while other issues are, at the same time, left either unaddressed, covered indirectly or not noted at all. The topics and sides of the operation left unaddressed also constitute signifying narratives, as they communicate and draw visible frames of today's war being waged by the international community. Matters framed out of the imagery guide the viewers to focus, imagine and to ignore and confine and thus they construct the frames in which the war and the ISAF operation is understood. The figure of the enemy is invisible in the imagery, but the depersonalised opponent is only visible through his dated arms, as well as the destruction he causes. The viciousness of the enemy is presented through images of his brutal arms, violated local bodies and the destroyed material culture left in his wake. At the same time, the conduct and actions of the ISAF soldiers are pictured in a completely non-violent way; and ISAF soldiers are never seen participating in combat, causing destruction or suffering, nor are the soldiers themselves ever pictured in pain. The division of picturing pain and vulnerability in images of corporal pain also separates the Western individuals and the bodies of the locals into differing strata of humanity: as the suffering of ISAF bodies is non-representable due to the honour of the individual, the suffering body of an Afghan can be visually shown in order to illustrate the war and the violence of the adversary.

As coalition aggression is never visually shown, the spirit, identity and status of the soldiers also begin to resemble that of the non-violent humanitarian. When juxtaposed with the images of the destruction that the enemy causes and the pain he causes, the whole ISAF operation is subsequently painted as a non-violent and humane action, as pain, traditional war and aggression are removed from ISAF's conduct.



The ISAF images also illustrate how the wars waged by the West and the international community can be shown, articulated and justified in today's political surroundings. The images quite firmly reflect the official justifications and the political marketing speech of the operation, and are very much drawn according to the lines of the prevailing common sense of good and bad, decent and indecent, honourable and dishonourable. By not addressing some points of war, the images also paint a picture of what the brave new war does not include; just as the images are used to humanise war, they are also used to demonise it. Thus, the images also produce two conflicting sides: the civilised and the inhuman. As the inhuman is taken out of the self by not addressing some themes, it is included into the other – the insurgent.

When looking at the extensive ISAF imagery and the narratives it produces, one cannot help but wonder if the eventually quite black and white, emotionally, culturally and politically-driven juxtaposition of good and evil suffices to convince the intended audiences of the humanitarian, non-violent, kind and clean coalition war? Does the humanisation narrative of today's war have the power to persuade the audience? Is it believable enough? Does the absolute invisibility of coalition-caused pain and aggression, and the presentation of the coalition soldiers as next to inviolable, cause a narrative gap when compared with the everyday news of fallen ISAF soldiers and civilian casualties? Can the ISAF visual narrative of humane, clean, hi-tech war without mistakes, pain and suffering, be producing disillusionment when reflected against the reality on the ground and the news mediated from the war theatre?

Undeniably, war has always been – and still is today – a grievous business that takes lives, destroys, and causes pain and terror. Softening it up with up-to-date explanations and humane images does not abolish the deviance embedded in the phenomena. What is to be borne in mind when looking at the images of today's war is that there has never been a war that was not reasoned as a just and a necessary war; it is only the justifying narratives and the legitimising components that vary according to time. What is remarkable in these images that tell the story of the current war is that they draw the topical narratives used in current military strategic communication out into open, and visibly shed light on the frames

of seeing and presenting war in today's public eye. By looking at and analysing the images, it is possible to learn what kind of authorisation and legitimisation are currently needed and used for war in order to win over our hearts and minds.

By reading the images we can detect and learn about the themes, stories and narratives that are used to politically mobilise us – and calm us down. The images also communicate some of the common ways of perceiving ourselves and the Others of this global world. In other words, the images of war that are designed to address us speak more about the evolution of our values, mindsets and the current political paradigms of the topical world order than they talk about the situation in Afghanistan or the change in wars. By looking at the images depicting the operation mandated by the UN – and fought by the international coalition – we can potentially learn about ourselves, our time and the ideologies and political constructions that shape our world views and influence our thinking on deep and sometimes unconscious levels. However, I am afraid that we do not learn much about the reality of the operation, the situation on the ground, the war experience of the local people, or the humanitarian emergency in Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is often attributed to Leon Trotsky, although there is no concrete evidence that Trotsky really said this. However, the aphorism describes the logic of military-strategic communication very well.

<sup>2</sup> Huhtinen, Aki -Mauri: *Sanasota*. Johdatus Sodan ja Sodanjohdamisen Filosofiaan. Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Helsinki, 2005;57, 72–73, 76–77; Huhtinen, Aki-Mauri: *Keinosota. Taistelu vastaanottajista*. Elan Vital, Lahti 2003, 33–34; Virilio, Paul: *Ground Zero*, Verso, New York, 2002, 24–27, 33–34, 35–36. ; Zizek, Slavoj: *Welcome to the Desert of Real*.2003.; Baudrillard, Jean: *The Spirit of Terrorism* , Verso, New York 2003 28–34.; Virilio, Paul: *The Information Bomb*. Verso, London, 2000. *Understanding Information Age Warfare*: Alberts, David, S et al., CCRP Publications, August 2001, 9–34, 43–52.

<sup>3</sup> By *international community* I refer to the term as it is often used in international relations and in the realm of human rights and moral value systems. International community-often refers to all of the peoples, cultures and governments of the world, and their common moral duties and obligations. However, the use of the term can be seen as problematic, since it can be used in political, economic and military contexts to gain authority and legitimisation. See, for example: Fehrer, Mikael: *Powerless by Design: The Age of the International Community*. Public Planet Books, Durham, 2001; *What is the International Community*, 1 September 2002, *Foreign Policy*.

<sup>4</sup> Huhtinen, 2005;57, 72–73, 76–77; Huhtinen, 2003, 33–34; Virilio, 2002, 24–27, 33–34, 35–36; Zizek, 2003; Baudrillard, 2003, 28–34. *Understanding Information Age Warfare*, 2001, 9–34, 43–52.

<sup>5</sup> One of the key aspects of the Counter Insurgency Theory (COIN) is to win over the support of the populations via communication, and thus to win the war. For more about COIN, see: Nagel, John, A: *Learning to eat soup with a knife. Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002; *The US Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Marine corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007.

For further information on the topical military strategic communication and its challenges concerning Afghanistan, see: *Commander's Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy*. Version 2.0 US Joint Forces Command, Joint war fighting Center, October 27, 2009; *Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive*, September 15, 2008; *Allied Command Operations and allied command transformation Public Affairs Handbook*: July, 2010; *Principles of Strategic communication*, US Department of Defence, August 2008; Payne, Kenneth: *Waging Communications War*. Parameters, Summer 2008, 37–51.

On the fight to win the counter-propaganda, see: *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the war of Words?* The International Crisis Group, Asia Report N°158 – 24 July 2008; Taliban winning the war of Words. Taliban slick Propaganda confronts US. *BBC News*: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/8176259.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8176259.stm); U.S struggles to counter Taliban propaganda, *Washington Post*, October 1, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Huhtinen, 2003, 33–35, 28–29; Zizek, 2003.

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<sup>7</sup> See: Commander's Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy, 2009; Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive, 2008; *Principles of Strategic communication*, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> There are now 43 Troop-contributing nations in ISAF and the total strength is approximately (March 2011) 132 203 (about 90 000 of which belong to the US). US General (from the summer of 2010) David Petraeus commands the NATO operation. Since 2006, the US army operation "enduring Freedom" (Started in 2001) has been part of the NATO-led multinational *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF), which has been active since 2002. ISAF is mandated by the UN. For more information on the operation, and about the formation of ISAF and the historical evolvement (involvement or evolution) of the operation, see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/PLACEMAT.MARCH%2004..pdf>; <http://www.isaf.nato.int/news/index.php>; <http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html>.

<sup>9</sup> For the local perceptions, see: *The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan*. Erica Gaston and Jonathan Horowitz, October 2010, Open Society Foundations. For the coalition member state perceptions and criticism towards the operation in recent years, see for example: "Germany sets Beginning of troop withdrawal", *New York Times*, January 28, 2011; "Opposition Demands Answers: War Logs sparks German debate on Afghanistan conflict", *Der Spiegel*, July 28, 2010; "Obama's isolation grows on the Afghanistan war", *USA Today*, December 1, 2010; "Dutch Troops Leave Afghanistan", *BBC News*, August 1, 2010: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10829837>; "Japan ready to withdrawal support for Afghanistan", *The Times*, September 16, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> *Obama's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Council on foreign relations. March 27, 2009; *NATO in Afghanistan. A Test of Trans-Atlantic Relations*. Morelli, Vinsent & Belgin, Paul. Congressions Research Service: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33627.pdf>; NATO: Afghanistan Strategy Reaffirmed. *NATO News*, July 1, 2010, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_64766.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_64766.htm).

<sup>12</sup> As ISAF announces of its mission: *In support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, ISAF conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency, support the growth in capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population*. See about ISAF mission: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>; and history briefly: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html> ; and the official texts (UN resolutions and NATO texts etc.) concerning the operation. <http://www.isaf.nato.int/official-texts.html>

<sup>13</sup> The study material can be found at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/> By Early April 2011, there were 15 044 images picturing the operation on the Flickr service. The images are usually produced (photographed, selected etc.) by ISAF personnel (soldiers, communications officers, and sometimes by the US army or relevant Aid agencies) and presented and published

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by ISAF. I, therefore, see that the images represent the narratives, perspectives and standpoints of the ISAF operation.

<sup>14</sup> Huhtinen, 2003, 74–75; Zizek, 2003, 36–37; Glover, Jonathan: *Ihmisyys. 1900-luvun Moraalihistoria*. 2008 (1999) Like, Helsinki, 2008 (1999), 221–

<sup>15</sup> For war images and their uses, see: Sontag, Susan: *On photography*. Penguin Classics, New York, 2002 (1977); Sontag, Susan: *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2003.; Sontag, Susan, *Regarding the torture of Others*. New York Times, 23.5.2004; Goldberg, Vicki: *The Power of Photography. How Photographs changed our Lives*. Abbeville Press, New York, 1991; Moeller Susan: *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat*. Basic Books, New York, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> Weber, Cynthia: *Imagining America at war. Morality, Politics and Film*, Routledge, New York, 2006, 10–13; Baudrillard, 2003, 27–31; Sontag, 2003 & 1977 & 2004; Butler, 2009, 63–100; Moeller Susan: *Compassion Fatigue: How Media sell Disease, Famine and Death*. Routledge, New York, 1999, 33–53.

<sup>17</sup> Huhtinen 2003, 28, 33–35; Glover, 2008, 221–227.

<sup>18</sup> For atrocity and war images as proof and sites of witnessing, see, for example: Sontag, 2003, 74–75 ; Butler, 2009, 78–82; Zelizer, Barbie: *Remembering to Forget. Holocaust Memory through the camera's eye*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998; *Rules of Engagement . In Reporting War. Journalism in Wartime*. Ed. Allan, Stuart & Zelizer, Barbie. Routledge, New York, 2004, 5.

<sup>19</sup> Sontag, 1977, 7.; Sontag, 2003, 21.

<sup>20</sup> Zizek, 2003, 36–37; Huhtinen, 2003, 72–74

<sup>21</sup> Sontag, 2003, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Butler, 2009, 69–75; Moeller Susan, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat*. 349–384 (The Photographers: Committed Critics); Campbell, David: *Horrible Blindness. Images of Death in Contemporary Media*. Journal for Cultural Research, Vol. 8/1, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Ideas on the power of visual images in arousing empathy towards the distant sufferer and their central place in arousing will to help and intervene have been frequent from the enlightenment onwards. see: Burke, Edmund: *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful: And Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings*. Penguin Classics, New York, 1998; Smith, Adam: *The theory of moral sentiments* Cosimo Classics, New York 2007 (1759).. see also: Sliwinski; Sharon: *The Aesthetics of human rights*. Culture, Theory and Critique, Vol. 50/1, 2009, 23–39.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Moeller, 1999.

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<sup>25</sup> One example of visual representations used this way is the 1920s pacifistic pamphlet *Krieg Dem Kriege*, by Ernst Friedrich, 1923. For more on the usage of images in opposing wars and crises see: Sontag, 2003, 12–15.

<sup>26</sup> One well known emblematic picture, from the Second World War, that was used to hoist anger and defense-will is a picture taken by Norman Hach, *Soldier killed at Buna Beach*. For more on the use of such war photographs, see, for instance: Goldberg, Vicki: *The Power of Photography. How Photographs changed our Lives*. Abbeville Press, New York, 1991.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, David: Horrific Blindness. Images of Death in Contemporary Media. *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 8/1, 2004; Campbell, David: Representing Contemporary War. *Ethics & International Affairs*, Vol. 17/2, 2003, 99–108; Robinson, Piers: Researching US Media-State relations and twenty-first century wars. In *Reporting War. Journalism in Wartime*, 96–112.

<sup>28</sup> Petley, Julian. *War without Death: Responses to distant suffering*. *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media*. 1, Vol. 1 2003, 72–85; Robinson, 2004; Campbell, 2004; *Missing Bodies. The Politics of Visuality*. Caspers, Monica & Moore, Lisa, J. New York University Press, New York, 2009, 3–4; Butler, 2009, 63–67, 70–73; Campbell, 2003, 102–107.

<sup>29</sup> Sontag, 2003 & 2004; Butler, 2009, 78–83.

<sup>30</sup> See for example: Sontag, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Homepage of the documentary: [www.armadillothemovie.com/armadillo/TRAILER.html](http://www.armadillothemovie.com/armadillo/TRAILER.html); see also: “Armadillo: the Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark”, *The Guardian*, June 3, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> See: “The “Kill team” Images: US Army Apologies for Horrific Photos from Afghanistan”. *Der Spiegel*, March 21, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> Sontag 1977 & 2003; Butler, 2009, 95–100, Weber, 2006, 10–13; Baudrillard, 2003, 27–31 Moeller, 1999, 33–53. Burke, 2001; Goldberg, 1991.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example: Sontag, 2003, 74–75; Butler, 2009, 78–82. A vivid and a topical example of this kind of usage of images in relation to the Afghan war can be found in the operation (May 2011) in which Osama Bin Laden was killed in Pakistan. There was a lot of discussion in the media and in US politics about whether to publish the images of the killed terrorist leader, in order to prove to the people that he “really was dead”. On the discussion see, for instance: David Campbell Blog: Osama Bin-Laden and the pictorial staging of politics, <http://www.david-campbell.org/2011/05/06/thinking-images-v-16-bin-laden-and-pictorial-staging-of-politics/>

<sup>35</sup> Sontag, 1977; Barthes, Roland: *Camera Lucida*. Hill and Wang, New York, 1981; Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies*. Vintage Classics, London, 2000 (1957); *Visual Culture a Reader*, 1999; Michell, J.W.T.: *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1994.

<sup>36</sup> Burke 2001, 123–125.

<sup>37</sup> Burke 2001, 22–23, 151.

<sup>38</sup> Burke, 2001, 23–24, 34–38.

<sup>39</sup> ISAF Commander's counter insurgency Guidance.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance. Nojonen, Matti: *Jymäyttämisen taito. Strategiaoppeja muinaisesta Kiinasta*, Gaudeamus 2008 Tampere, 15–18, 56–63, 137, 149, 181.

<sup>41</sup> Huhtinen, 2005, 58–60.

<sup>42</sup> *War and Anti-War. Survival at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Toffler, Alvin & Heidi: Little, Brown & Company, New York, 1993, 139–141.

<sup>43</sup> Virilio, 2000; *Commander's Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy*. Version 2.0 US Joint Forces Command, Joint war fighting Center, October 27, 2009; *Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive*, September 15, 2008; *Allied Command Operations and allied command transformation Public Affairs Handbook*: July, 2010; *Principles of Strategic communication*, US Department of Defence, August 2008; Payne, Kenneth: *Waging Communications War*. Parameters, Summer 2008, 37–51; *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the war of Words?* The International Crisis Group, Asia Report N°158 – 24 July 2008: [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/158\\_taliban\\_propaganda\\_\\_\\_winning\\_the\\_war\\_of\\_words.ashx](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/158_taliban_propaganda___winning_the_war_of_words.ashx)

<sup>44</sup> Huhtinen, 2005, 60–61; *War and anti-war*, 1993, 139–141.

<sup>45</sup> *Commander's Handbook for Strategic communication and Communications Strategy*. Version 2.0 US Joint Forces Command, Joint warfighting Center, 27 October 2009, Chapter 3, 18–19.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*; Huhtinen, 2005, 60; *Understanding Information Age Warfare*: Alberts, David, S et al., CCRP Publications, August 2001.

<sup>47</sup> *Principles of Strategic communication*, US Department of Defence, August 2008; NATO allied Command Operations directive for strategic communications, September 15, 2008; *Allied Command Operations and allied command transformation Public Affairs Handbook*, July, 2010; *Allied Command Operations (ACO) Strategic Communications directive*, September 15, 2008; White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/assets/documents/Afghanistan-Pakistan_White_Paper.pdf); “Obama's Afghanistan strategy”, *Washington Post*, March 29, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

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<sup>49</sup> Regarding the diminishing popularity and withdrawals, as well as discussion in different countries, see footnote 8.

<sup>50</sup> White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan, 3, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Allied Command Operations Strategic communications Directive*, September 15, 2008; *Implementation of the Department of Defense Strategic Communication Plan for Afghanistan*, September 12, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> *ACO Strategic Communications*, Aco Directive nr. 95-2, New Allied Command Operations Directive, . Supreme headquarters Allied powers Europe September 15, 2008, chapter 2; *Principles of Strategic communication*, 2008; *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication and Communication Strategy*; *Field manual 3.0 Operations*, Washington, Department of the Army, February 2008, (see Chapter 7); *Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Field Manual no.3-24, Headquarters, Department of the Army, 15 December 2006, <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-24.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Sedwill is responsible for communication with non-military directions. *Naton siviiliedustaja: Afganistanin vastuunsiirto alkaa monella auleella*. Helsingin Sanomat, January 26, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> International Security Assistance Force launches a new website: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/article/press-releases/international-security-assistance-force-launches-new-website.html>; the web site: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/>

<sup>57</sup> <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/>

<sup>58</sup> <http://acositrep.com/2009/02/06/isaf-launches-flickr-site/>

<sup>59</sup> The photographer is often appointed in the information attached to the image. Usually, they are ISAF troops, but can often be US army soldiers, and sometimes an aid organisation is mentioned. As the images are presented on the ISAF Flickr site, I handle them as representations of the ISAF public diplomacy /strategic communications policy lines.

<sup>60</sup> *ISAF launches a Flickr site*, Allied Command Operations Blog, February 06th, 2009: <http://acositrep.com/2009/02/06/isaf-launches-flickr-site/>; Flickr Community Guidelines: <http://www.flickr.com/guidelines.gne>

<sup>61</sup> <http://acositrep.com/2009/02/06/isaf-launches-flickr-site/>

<sup>62</sup> Roland Barthes: *Mythologies*.



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<sup>63</sup> For information about reading visual images, see, for example: *Visual Culture: a Reader*, 1999; Burke, 2001; Barthes, 2000.

<sup>64</sup> *Gaze* is a term used by Jacques Lacan, and concerns the different viewpoints or different culturally varying ways in which different groups look at things. It can be perceived that there are different gazes: a “tourist gaze”, a “male gaze”, a “western gaze” or a “colonial gaze”. By this it is meant, for example, that, from the viewpoint of the scientifically educated Western, secular woman, things look different than from the viewpoint of an African male peasant. Lacan, Jacques: *Seminar Eleven: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1978.

<sup>65</sup> Panofsky, Erwin: *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1939, 3–31; Burke, 2001, 34–37.

<sup>66</sup> Burke, 2001, 124–125.

<sup>67</sup> Burke, 2001, 124–128; Barthes, 2000, 111–121.

<sup>68</sup> Barthes 2000, 109–111; Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: *The world of perception*. Routledge, New York, (1948) 2004; Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception* Routledge, New York, (1945) 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Sontag, 1977, 17.

<sup>70</sup> For visual representations and their conceptual meanings and readings, see, for instance: Barthes, Roland: *Mythologies*, Hill and Wang: New York, 1972. (1957); Mitchell, J.W.T: *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

<sup>71</sup> Barthes, 2000, 109–111, 128–131, 142–145; Weber, Cynthia: *International Relation Theory. A critical Introduction* (.2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Routledge, Oxon, 2005, 6–7.

<sup>72</sup> By “metanarrative” it is meant in postmodern philosophy a combining story of the order of things, that is not told outright, but which totalises the world and justifies cultural power structures. See, for example: Lyotard, Jean-François: *The postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984.

<sup>73</sup> Picture one: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3137404397/in/set-72157611673009576>

<sup>74</sup> Such pictures, for example: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040863306/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040862800/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4631919068/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4343101024/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3311572558/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5080386066/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5571032342/>;

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<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4116275981/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4748021811/in/photostream/>

<sup>75</sup> Image 2: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5096674476/in/photostream/> (Air Force Staff Sgt. Joseph Swafford/released)

<sup>76</sup> Image 3: [www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2755581527/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2755581527/)

<sup>77</sup> Image 4: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5378001350/>. For such images from hospitals etc, see, for example: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040905874/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040076233/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4092331226/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/sets/72157626809060641/>

<sup>78</sup> Image 5: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040863306/> ; Image 6:  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5490856231/> ; Image 7 :  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5265297822/>

<sup>79</sup> For the history and evolution of ISAF, see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html>

<sup>80</sup> Salenius-Pasternak, Charly & Jarno Linnéll: *Miksi Afganistan on Tärkeä Suomelle?* National Defence University, Department of Strategy, Julkaisusarja 4: Työpapereita No. 30. 2009, 3–4.

<sup>81</sup> For Finnish discussion on the matter, see Salenius-Pasternak, Charly: “Suomi on paraikaa sotaa käyvä maa”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 24 July 2009; Paavo Arhinmäki: “Suomi on ollut sodassa jo pitkään”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 28 July 2009; “Stubb ja Häkämies: Suomi ei ole sodassa”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 25 July 2009; Lindholm, Jari: “Afganistan on Suomen sota”, *Suomen Kuvalehti* 25 July 2009.

<sup>82</sup> Chandler, David: *From Kosovo to Kabul and Beyond: Human Rights and International Intervention*. Pluto Press, London, (2002) 2006; Douzinas, Costas: *The Many Faces of Humanitarianism*. *Parrhesia* 2007/2, 1–28, 6–8.

<sup>83</sup> Aaltola, Mika: *Western Spectacle of Governance and the emergence of humanitarian world politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2009: 1, 9.

<sup>84</sup> President Bush declares “war on terror”. Speech to a Joint Session of Congress, September 20, 2001: <http://middleeast.about.com/od/usmideastpolicy/a/bush-war-on-terror-speech.htm>; ISAF Mission: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>, Chandler, David: *From Kosovo to Kabul and beyond. Human rights and international Intervention*. Pluto Press, London, 2006; Weber, 2006, 21; Zizek, 2002, 1–3.

<sup>85</sup> Belloni 2007, 451–452; Douzinas, 2007, 6–11.

<sup>86</sup> Chandler, David. *The road to Military Humanitarianism. How the Humanitarian NGOs shaped a new humanitarian Agenda*. *Human rights quarterly* Vol. 23, 2001, pp. 678–700, 682–683; Douzinas 2007, 5–8; Fox, Fiona: *New Humanitarianism: Does it provide a moral Banner*

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*for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Disasters, 2001/4, 275–289; Barnett, Michael, N: *The international Humanitarian order*. Routledge, New York, 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Chandler, 2006, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Chandler, 2001, 685. (Quote from a George Foulkes speech, 17 April 1998); Douzinas 2007, 5–10.

<sup>89</sup> The fundamental principles of “neutral humanitarian work” are often stated as: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence, universality, unity and voluntary service. See ICRC: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/fundamental-principles-commentary-010179.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Fox, 2001, 278; Douzinas, 2007, 6–7.

<sup>91</sup> The UN 2005 World Summit outcome document: <http://www.who.int/hiv/universalaccess2010/worldsummit.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> UN Resolution 1973 (2011): <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/268/39/PDF/N1126839.pdf?OpenElement>. In particular paragraph 4, “Protection of civilians”.

<sup>93</sup> Douzinas, 2007, 6–7; Fox, 2001. For more about the evolution of humanitarianism from neutrality to selection and politics, see, for example: Rieff, David: *A Bed For the Night*, Vintage, London, 2002.

<sup>94</sup> For more on the problems and challenges the neutral humanitarian NGOs are facing topically, partly due to “military-humanitarian interventions” as well as the moral and ethical problems faced today due to “humanitarian power politics”, see, for example: Fox, 2001; Rieff 2002; Chandler, 2006; Barnett, 2010; Chandler, 2001; Belloni, Roberto: *The Trouble with Humanitarianism*: Review of International Studies, 33, 2007 451–474.

<sup>95</sup> Douzinas, Costas: *The Many Faces of Humanitarianism*. Parrhesia, 2/2007, 1–28.

<sup>96</sup> Chandler 2006, 12–15, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 14–19.

<sup>98</sup> Chandler: 2006, 5, 13–16.

<sup>99</sup> Belloni, Roberto: *Is humanitarianism part of the Problem. Nine Thesis*. BCSIA Discussion Paper 2005-03, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, April 2005, 1, 8.

<sup>100</sup> Chandler, 2006; Barnett, 2010; For more on the evolution, historical readings and evolution of human rights, see: Hunt, Lynn: *Inventing Human Rights: A History*. WW Norton & company, New York, 2007.

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<sup>101</sup> Belloni, 2007, 463–471.

<sup>102</sup> Barthes, 2000, 142–145.

<sup>103</sup> For example, Belloni (2007) sees humanitarianism as a type of ideology.

<sup>104</sup> For the conditionality and evolution of human rights, see, for example: Hunt, Lynn, etc: *Inventing Human Rights. a History*. Norton, New York, 2007.

<sup>105</sup> For such images, see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5433717504/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5433717504/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4641642143/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4903766137/>

<sup>106</sup> Further images: Image 9, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5381004854/>; Image 10, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5302229644/>; and other similar images: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5470184241/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4080166554/>

<sup>107</sup> See footnote 105: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/2957212147/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5096242657/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5096211471/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5856321722/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5847990304/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5197720504/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4649277399/>

<sup>108</sup> More on this in chapter 4.

<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, pictures 11–15 in this paper.

<sup>110</sup> The ISAF Mission as stated on the website: *In accordance with all the relevant Security Council Resolutions, the main role of ISAF is to assist the Afghan government in the establishment of a secure and stable environment. To this end, ISAF forces conduct security and stability operations throughout the country together with the Afghan National Security Forces and are directly involved in the development of the Afghan National Security Forces through mentoring, training and equipping.* see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>

<sup>111</sup> An interview with General Petraeus, February 9, 2011: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-7083AE7D-6A471658/natolive/opinions\\_70492.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-7083AE7D-6A471658/natolive/opinions_70492.htm)

<sup>112</sup> Image 13: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5253341411/>

<sup>113</sup> For other similar images, see:  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5197459832/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4649278101/>

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<sup>114</sup> For such images, see, for example: images 11, 12, 15, 16, 17 and, for example, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4748021811/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4668355797/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4668978796/in/photostream/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3311582148/>

<sup>115</sup> Fanon, Franz: *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. Earthscan Publications inc. London, 1989 (1959), 35.

<sup>116</sup> For more on the ISAF Mission, see: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>

<sup>117</sup> See the World Bank fact sheet: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/afghanistan>

<sup>118</sup> Image 14: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5043265509/in/photostream/>. For other such pictures, see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3745894616/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4084691875/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4084925343/>

<sup>119</sup> Burke, 2001, 123–126.

<sup>120</sup> Said, Edward: *Covering Islam. How The Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Vintage, London, 1997 (1981), 29–30.

<sup>121</sup> Said, Edward, W: *Orientalism*. Penguin classics, London, (1978) 2003.

<sup>122</sup> Said, 2003.

<sup>123</sup> Douzinas, 2007, 21. Ignatieff, Michael: *Empire Lite*, Vintage, London, 2003, 17.

<sup>124</sup> Image 19.

<sup>125</sup> Images 17, 6, 5, 3, for example.

<sup>126</sup> Images 11, 12, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Images 16, 15, 14, 2, 5.

<sup>128</sup> According to interviews of Afghans, the ISAF presence in the area does not seem to be so unanimously supported, but many Afghans feel resentment and distrust towards the troops. See, for instance: *The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan*. Erica Gaston and Jonathan Horowitz, October 2010, Open Society Foundations.

<sup>129</sup> For more on the figure of the Islamist Terrorist, see, for example: Said, 1997.

<sup>130</sup> Image 20: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3238372698/#/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/5043265509/in/photostream/>

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<sup>131</sup> <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html> The ISAF mission is depicted as such: to “*facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population.*”; “*ISAF supports reconstruction and development (R&D) in Afghanistan, securing areas in which reconstruction work is conducted by other national and international actors. Where appropriate, and in close cooperation and coordination with GIROA and UNAMA representatives on the ground, ISAF also provides practical support for R&D efforts, as well as support for humanitarian assistance efforts conducted by Afghan government organizations, international organizations, and NGOs.*”

<sup>132</sup> Duffield, Mark: *Development, Security and Unending War. Governing the world of peoples.* Polity Press, 2007, 215–222.

<sup>133</sup> Duffield, 2007, 219–220.

<sup>134</sup> Said, 1997, 28–31; see also Douzinas, 2007.

<sup>135</sup> Mattila, Päivi & Vuola, Elina: *Kehitys.* In *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. Kymmenen käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen.* Ed. Kantola, Johanna & Valenius, Johanna. Vastapaino, Tampere, 2007, 216.

<sup>136</sup> Wylie, Gillian: *Women’s rights and righteous war.* *Feminist Theory*, 2003, 2/4, 217. Kouvo, Sari: *Ihmisoikeudet*, 266–267. In: *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. 10 käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen.* Ed. Kantola, Johanna & Valenius, Johanna. Vastapaino, Tampere, 2007.

<sup>137</sup> Wylie, 2003: “George W Bush Warns Against withdrawal from Afghanistan: ‘Women would suffer’”, *The Huffington Post*, April 1, 2011.

<sup>138</sup> Images 21–25.

<sup>139</sup> Image 24 and Image 23.

<sup>140</sup> Kouvo, Sari: *Ihmisoikeudet*, 266. In: *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. 10 käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen.* Ed. Kantola, Johanna & Valenius, Johanna. Vastapaino, Tampere, 2007.

<sup>141</sup> *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. 10 käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen.* Ed. Kantola, Johanna & Valenius, Johanna. Vastapaino, Tampere, 2007.

<sup>142</sup> Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, *Under Western Eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse.* In: *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 1991, 51–52; Mohanty, Chandra Talpade: *Cartographies of Struggle: Third world women and the Politics of Feminism*, in *Third World women and the Politics of Feminism*, 1991, 51–52.

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<sup>143</sup> For example, the law prohibiting the public use of the *burka* and the *nigba* in France came in to effect in early April 2011.

<sup>144</sup> Kennedy, Aileen: *Mutilation and Beautification*. Australian Feminist studies, vol 24, 2009, 211–231.

<sup>145</sup> Mattila & Vuola, 2007, 211; Mohanty, 1991 a&b.

<sup>146</sup> Fanon, Franz: *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. Earthscan Publications inc. London, 1989 (1959), 34–35.

<sup>147</sup> Said, 2007, 27–31.

<sup>148</sup> Fanon, 1989, 35–44.

<sup>149</sup> *Toinen Maailmanpolitiikka. 10 käsitettä feministiseen kansainvälisten suhteiden tutkimukseen*. Ed. Kantola, Johanna & Valenius, Johanna. Vastapaino, Tampere, 2007; Mohanty, Chandra, Talpade: *Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and Colonial Discourses*. In: *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991, 333–358.

<sup>150</sup> Sontag 2003, 85; see also: Butler 2009, 69–70.

<sup>151</sup> For more regarding civilian deaths in Afghanistan, see: Afghanistan Annual Report 2010: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts, <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/March%20PoC%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf>. On the Coalition casualties year by year see: *ICasualties. Coalition military Fatalities by Year*: <http://icasualties.org/oef/>

<sup>152</sup> For more on the figure of the Islamist terrorist, see: Said, 1997; Burke, 2001, 128.

<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Zizek, 2002, 37.

<sup>154</sup> See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0887912/>

<sup>155</sup> Images 27 and 28. For other such images, see, for example <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/sets/72157626878569059/>

<sup>156</sup> Image 30: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3040076233/>

<sup>157</sup> Image 31: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/4114227024/> ; <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3050409382/>

<sup>158</sup> Images 30& 31, for example.

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<sup>159</sup> See footnote 22 and for example, Butler, 2009, 77–81; Sontag, 2003 ; Zizek, 2002, 5–14; Scarry, Elaine: *The Body in pain. The Making and unmaking of the world*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. Boltanski, Luc: *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999. Moeller, 1999.

<sup>160</sup> For such images: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3026818205/> ;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3181644214/>;  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/isafmedia/3180806353/in/photostream/>

<sup>161</sup> For more on the ban of the photography of the coffins, see: Carter, Bill: “Pentagon Ban on Pictures of Dead Troops Is Broken”, *New York Times*, April 23, 2004; Scott Tyson, Ann and Berman, Mark: “Pentagon Rethinks Photo Ban on Coffins Bearing War Dead”, *Washington Post*, February 17, 2009. See also *Missing Bodies. The Politics of Visibility*, Caspers, Monica, J & Moore, Lisa, Jean. New York University Press, New York, 2009.

<sup>162</sup> For Example, a picture of a mortally wounded US soldier in Afghanistan, taken by Associated Press photographer Julie Jacobson in the autumn of 2009, stirred up a high level political and moral discussion. See: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/behind-13/>;  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/09/04/joshua-bernard-photo-mari\\_n\\_277828.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/09/04/joshua-bernard-photo-mari_n_277828.html);  
[http://www.ap.org/fallen\\_marine/](http://www.ap.org/fallen_marine/)

<sup>163</sup> Campbell, David: *Horrific Blindness. Images of Death in contemporary Media*. Journal for Cultural Research, Vol. 8/1, 2004; Campbell, 2003, 106–107.

<sup>164</sup> Petley, Julian. *War without Death: Responses to distant suffering*. Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media. 1, Vol. 1 2003, 72; Zizek, 2003, 38–39.

<sup>165</sup> See, for example, Butler, 2009, 70–78.

<sup>166</sup> Ginzburg, Carlo: *Killing a Chinese Mandarin: The Moral Implications of Distance*. Critical Inquiry, 1994, vol. 21, 46–60.

<sup>167</sup> Butler, Judith: *Precarious Life. The Power of mourning and violence*, Verso, London, 2004, 37–38.

<sup>168</sup> Butler, 2009, 70–78; Zizek, 2002, 13.

<sup>169</sup> See Dunlap, David, W.: “Behind the Scenes: To Publish or Not?”, *New York Times Lens Blog*, 4 September 2009: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/behind-13/>; . De Montesquiou, Alfred & Jacobson, Julie: “Joshua Branand Photo: Marine Dies in Afghanistan”, *Huffington Post*, September 4, 2009: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/09/04/joshua-bernard-photo-mari\\_n\\_277828.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/09/04/joshua-bernard-photo-mari_n_277828.html); “AP and the Death of a Marine”, Associated Press, September 3, 2009: [http://www.ap.org/fallen\\_marine/](http://www.ap.org/fallen_marine/)

<sup>170</sup> Dunlap, David, W.: “Behind the Scenes: To Publish or Not?”, *New York Times, Lens Blog*, September 4, 2009 <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/09/04/behind-13/>; Dunlap, David, W:



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“Behind the scenes: rewriting new rules”, *New York Times, LensBlog*, September 15, 2009:  
<http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/10/15/behind-21/>

<sup>171</sup> Malkki, Liisa: *Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization*. *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11(3), 1996, 377–404.; Butler 2009, 93–95. See also Zizek, 2002, 112–134; Bauman, Zygmunt: *Wasted Lives. Modernity and Its outcasts*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2004, 32–33.

<sup>172</sup> About invisible bodies see also: *Missing Bodies. The Politics of Visibility*. Caspers, Monica, j and Moore, Lisa, Jean. New York University Press, New York, 2009.

<sup>173</sup> According to the UNAMA Afghanistan Annual Report on Protection of the Civilians in Armed Conflict (2010), the coalition and pro-government forces were responsible for 440 of the civilian deaths (16% of the total) recorded in Afghanistan in 2010. Anti-Government elements were responsible for 75% of civilian deaths, and 9% were unaccounted for. See UNAMA: *Afghanistan. Annual Report on Protection of the Civilians in Armed Conflict (2010)*:  
<http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/March%20PoC%20Annual%20Report%20Final.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> By this I mean the humanitarisation of war, the concepts of war on terror, war fought by the international community and in the name of human rights, the intermingling of humanitarian aid and war, the concepts of precise, surgical war and “war without casualties”.

<sup>175</sup> Baudrillard, Jean: *The gulf war did not take place..* Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1995; Robinson, 2004. Glover, 2008, 222–232.; Campbell, David: 2003, 99–108, 99, 105–106; Butler 2009, 63–68; “4000 U.S deaths and a handful of images”:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/26/world/middleeast/26censor.html>; see also: ISAF Media embed rules: *Media Embed Application Packet International Security Assistance Force Afghanistan*: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/media-visit-information-embed-request.html>

<sup>176</sup> Campbell, 2003, 105–108.

<sup>177</sup> Sontag, 2004; Butler 2009, 62–100. see also Dauphinee, Elizabeth: *The Politics of Body in Pain. Reading the Ethics of imagery*. *Security Dialogue*, vol. 38 (2), 2007, 139–155.

<sup>178</sup> This has also been the case in spring 2011, when the international community (NATO took leadership of the operation at a later date), by UN mandate, declared a no-fly zone over Libya and used missiles to aid the Libyan opposition to fight Gaddafi’s forces on the ground. The NATO/Coalition story has been that the coalition has not caused civilian deaths in the course of the operation. See discussion: Saif, Tafwig: “Fresh Libya Deaths Pile Pressure on NATO”, Reuters, June 20, 2001.

<sup>179</sup> Sontag, 2004.

<sup>180</sup> Weber, 2006, 57–61.

<sup>181</sup> Weber, 2006, 57–61.

<sup>182</sup> [http://www.armadillothemovie.com/armadillo/ARMADILLO\\_-\\_ENGLISH.html](http://www.armadillothemovie.com/armadillo/ARMADILLO_-_ENGLISH.html)

<sup>183</sup> For more about the Finnish reception of the film *Armadillo*: Kotilainen, Noora: Tyttökoulumiina, erillissotateesi ja vientidemokratian rajat. The blog of The Finnish Institute of International Affairs: <http://www.fii.fi/fi/blog/330/>; Kotilainen, Noora: "Afganistanin sodan Pojan kasvot", *Ulkopolitiikka Journal* 4/2010.

<sup>184</sup> About the societal discussion the documentary aroused in Denmark; see: "Armadillo: The Afghanistan war documentary that shocked Denmark", *The Guardian*, June 3, 2010; "Tappakaa ne kaikki", *Voima* 8/2010.

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