

Under the heading “Not Stay a Day too Long in Afghanistan”, independent (left-of-center) *De Morgen* (9/10) (circ.55,000) publishes quite a lengthy article introducing the new U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, Howard W. Gutman, to its readers.

A transcript follows:

“Howard W. Gutman, new U.S. Ambassador in Belgium, Will Go into Dialogue with Muslim Community”

**“Not Stay a Day Too Long in Afghanistan”**

“Howard W. Gutman, the new Ambassador of the United States in Belgium, says that Afghanistan in the future will have to be self-sufficient. ‘The hope is that the Afghans are capable of taking control themselves of their country. We will be out, we hope’.”

“In Belgium Ambassador Gutman during debates wants to go as much as possible into dialogue with the common people, ‘also with the Muslim community and the people who do not know the U.S., or do not like it.’”

“During a meeting with Belgian newspaper reporters, U.S. Ambassador Gutman left no chance unused to emphasize the difference with the policy of the former administration. ‘I want to listen more than talk.’ Also concerning the commitment of Belgian troops in Afghanistan, about which he will have a meeting with Belgian Defense Minister Pieter De Crem.”

“Afghanistan is a global issue on which we are partner. We’re in it together. I will never be in a position asking for commitments. Hopefully I will be in a position in which we can discuss about the objectives (we want to meet). We will always continue to talk about contributions in terms of manpower, finances, and the reconstruction of Afghanistan as long as the problem of terror exists. I think that everybody recognizes that there is still more work to do in Afghanistan to make the planet safer, not only for my children, but for each and every one of our children. Terror does not only occur in New York, London or Mumbai... Accidentally, it is so that today it has been eight years that a Belgian blew himself up in the North of Afghanistan together with the leader of the Northern Alliance, Ahmed Shah Massud, who fought against the Taliban. This attack was the forebode to 9/11, two days later.”

“At the same time I do not think that someone in the Belgian government – also my President not, I know – wants to say there a day longer than is necessary. They do not want a Belgian or an American son in the line of fire when not necessary. The problem of terror and Afghanistan will not only be solved with a military solution. There is full recognition by all present NATO partners that civilian reconstruction has to go play an important role. The more we focus on that, the more certain we are to attain our goals. The hope is that the Afghans are capable of taking control of their own country. I presume that we are coming closer and closer to that goal. And we hope ... We will be out. Those are feasible objectives. I am only not able yet to give you a timetable.”

### **“Dialogue with Muslims”**

“Gutman has had an impressive career already. After having worked for the Supreme Court and as a counterterrorism adviser of the FBI-director, he became a litigator for 27 years with the law firm Williams & Connolly LLP, which defended former President Bill Clinton for instance during his impeachment procedure in the Lewinsky affair and Al Gore with the Supreme Court against the President victory of Bush in 2000. That the image of the U.S. during the presidency of George W. Bush in part has been worn down by the foundation of the special prison of Guantanamo still gets him fired up.”

“We have to repair the rule-of-law-state standing of the U.S.’, he says. ‘In Belgium, I hope to go into dialogue with diverse Muslim communities, also in Islamic centers. There has to come a partnership covering the full spectrum. We certainly do not want to meet people only loving us. A bit like in Star Trek: to boldly go where no one has gone before. Obama provide with his speech in Cairo that it is possible. He spoke about the unbreakable bond between the U.S. and Israel, but still received a standing ovation. If you can do that, then you are making the planet a whole lot safer all of a sudden. All US Ambassadors in Europe for that reason will – after the example of Obama in Cairo – reach out to Muslim communities.’ The Jewish Community is known by Gutman from home. As a son of a Jewish father who during WWII went undercover in the Polish woods, before he migrated in 1950 to the Bronx in New York, he during the campaign directed himself mostly at the Jewish constituency.”

“But Gutman also says to look forward to meeting with Belgians ‘who have no single bond with the U.S., both in Flanders and in Wallonia – which we will shortly start during a debate with common people in Charleroi’. Gutman does not want to go tough questions out of the way there either. He is used to them: during

the campaign, he represented the Democrats in the talk shows of Fox News with violent Obama critics like Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity.”

“According to Gutman, entering into debates, also with opponents, is the dominant trait of the Obama presidency. ‘There will be no zero-sum games anymore. Whether it is about the recession, healthcare, climate change, national security or the Middle East. Either we grow, or we slip together.’”

### **“Damian”**

“The chance that Obama in October will come to Belgium for the sanctification of Father Damian has in the meantime become very small. Gutman tested the waters both with the President as with Vice-President Biden about the possibility, but their overloaded agenda does not allow a trip as yet. But it is being discussed: ‘All Belgians ask when Obama is going to come’, Gutman laughs, ‘everyone is enthusiastic, except for your security services for whom organizing such a visit is not easy’.”

“The big public can get to know Gutman on the website of the U.S. Embassy, where he presents himself. Or can see him in movie theatres, when the film ‘Fame’ is going to go into premiere in Belgian theatres. In that movie, he plays the role of the father of a student. The latter he has become again himself too: Gutman starts each working day at 7 with an one hour of language classes Dutch or French.”