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**A WORD ABOUT PRINTING THIS ARTICLE:** These pages are intended to print on legal (8.5 x 14 inch) paper, two pages per sheet, in a horizontal landscape. Pages can also be printed onto letter sized paper, vertically, at a reduced size.



**KATHMANDU:** A Nepali girl praying on Shiva's Birthday at Pashpatinath temple, the most sacred site in a country that was, until the aftermath of April's revolution, the world's only Hindu kingdom. CYNTHIA COFFILL PHOTO

# The mountain kingdoms

## Afghanistan and Nepal

AFGHANISTAN AND NEPAL ARE TWO FARAWAY MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRIES about which most Canadians know very little. In this section, we hope to go some way toward rectifying that collective ignorance.

The population size of the two countries is nearly identical – roughly equal to Canada's. Both are desperately poor. Nepal's per capita income is half that of India; Afghanistan's is estimated by the CIA to be half that of Nepal. (Any estimate for Afghanistan is confounded by the problem of estimating income from illegal poppy production.) Both countries have experienced protracted civil war. Both have national governments that are weak and bedevilled by corruption, with only a feeble diktat beyond the capital city.

Afghanistan shares with other countries, notably Iraq, the historical burden of borders defined by past imperial masters. The result is a country of divided ethnicities and contingent loyalties. The Pashtun in the south are more than 40 per cent of the population; the second largest group, the Tajik in the north, are more than a quarter. Like the Iraqi Kurds, who have a stronger affinity to the Kurds of Turkey, Syria and Iran than to Iraqi Arabs, many among

the Pashtun in Afghanistan identify with neighbours in Pakistan. Some in the south dream of a Pashtun state carved from southern Afghanistan, northwest and western Pakistan (see the accompanying map).

Marc André Boivin, Doug McArthur and Hakan Tunç analyze the state of Afghan politics, economy and war from different academic disciplines. That said, all three conclude that Canada should remain engaged militarily in the country's civil war. The fourth contributor, Ernie Regehr, is torn as to whether Canada should remain or withdraw.

All four write without illusions, mindful of the country's history and insistent that progress in civil society – better governance, better schools and health care – is as essential as military force if Afghanistan is to escape the torment of war that has been the country's fate since the Soviet invasion of 1979.

To visit Kathmandu in 2006, as I did in August, is to hear echoes of what the political life in Aleksandr Kerensky's Petrograd must have been in 1917. Hence the title of Dominic Cardy's article, in which he introduces readers to Nepal's political complexities, much as he did with Cambodia's in a previous issue of *Inroads* (summer/fall 2005). In Nepal today, as in Petrograd nine decades ago, a discredited monarchy has yielded power to a weak "bourgeois" government that, in turn, is being effectively challenged by a well organized, ideologically driven insurrection. In both cases, the peasantry was tired of war.

In November 2006, the Maoists and the government reached a deal. In the words of the BBC's correspondent: "The deal offers [the Maoists]

huge gains. until May they were regarded as terrorists here; their leaders were wanted men. But by 1 December they will take their place in a temporary cabinet, sharing ministerial posts equally with each of the other main parties." The Maoists have emerged from the jungle, led by a reincarnation of Lenin. Will their leader, Prachanda, try – God forbid – to apply the economics of Pol Pot, another guerrilla leader who emerged triumphant from the jungle? Or will he pursue policies compatible with Bukharin? Most Canadians know even less about Nepal than they do about Afghanistan. And most



While not necessarily supportive of the Taliban, many Pashtun dream of their own Islamic state straddling the international border (see shaded map area).

would be embarrassed if asked to answer these questions. The political future of the country is highly uncertain, and potentially violent. In addition to Dominic Cardy's article, *Inroads* is pleased to publish two shorter pieces by people who, like Dominic, know Nepal's potential and troubles first-hand: Shrishti Rana, a Nepalese development worker and journalist, and Dane Berry, a graduate student at Simon Fraser University who worked with Dominic and Shrishti in Nepal in the summer of 2006.

— John Richards, co-publisher of *Inroads*

# The Afghan mission is in Canada's national interest

by Marc André Boivin

**F**IVE YEARS AFTER THE TALIBAN REGIME'S DEMISE, AFGHANISTAN is back on the brink. Early successes, such as the much vaunted presidential and legislative elections, have been overshadowed by a growing insurgency in the south, a dramatic increase in poppy production, a persistently feeble central government and an uneven economic recovery. The internationally backed plan for the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan seems to have malfunctioned and fostered the same conditions that led to the takeover of Afghanistan by Islamic extremists in the mid-1990s.

Entangled somewhere in the middle of all this, Canada has paid dearly for the setbacks. One of Washington's best troopers in the "war on terror," it has staked a lot on Afghanistan. Of the approximately 3,000 Canadian troops deployed worldwide, 2,300 are in Afghanistan, a proportion that has been relatively constant in the last few years

and is at odds with Canada's more typical sprinkling of troops in a number of operations. Relatively little noticed until 2005, this fact has been dramatically emphasized by the substantial military casualties suffered in 2006. Following the takeover of the Kandahar region, Canada has sustained more casualties per capita than any of its NATO partners including the United States and Britain, making its combat toll the highest since the Korean War.

Jean Chrétien's Liberal dynasty originally sent a significant number of troops into Afghanistan. The succession of minority

governments that followed Chrétien has led to much dithering about Canadian policy in the country. While there has certainly been more continuity than rupture on the issue through the different governments, an inevitable sense of uncertainty and state of flux hangs over the work of Canada's representatives in the field and policymakers in Ottawa.

Events both in Afghanistan and in Canada help explain a downturn in public opinion toward the mission. Sceptics generally ask two questions: why are we in Afghanistan, and when will we leave? Before we can examine the goals set for Canadian policy, we must first understand the present situation in Afghanistan.

## Key failures

The combined pressures of the Taliban-led insurgency, rampant criminality and incomplete national reconciliation jeopardize stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and could lead to renewed civil war. Such an outcome would annihilate all the progress made in five years, which is considerable despite the present gloom. This downturn of events can be attributed to a number of key failures.

At the end of 2001, Afghan and international actors convened in Bonn, Germany, to set the course for post-Taliban Afghanistan. The whole plan was deemed the "Bonn process." It included a number of steps to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan and pledges of support from countries from around the world. A "light footprint"

approach underlay the Bonn process. It was thought that given the history of Afghanistan and the alleged repulsion for any foreign intervenors, the international presence on the ground, or footprint, should be kept to a minimum.

The Bonn process came to a close with the legislative elections held in September 2005. Up to that point, things seemed to be heading in the right direction and the strategy seemed to be vindicated. Yet the recent upsurge in violence contradicts this. The "light footprint" has in fact often been used by countries as an excuse for a "light commitment." Up until now, countries have honoured about half the aid pledges they have made. Per capita development aid provided to Afghans is a fraction of that invested in Bosnia, Haiti or East Timor. These shortcomings are all the more critical considering the dire needs of a country that is coming out of more than 20 years of war. Most international staff in Kabul now recognize that the "light footprint" has proved wrong and that it will need to be far "heavier" if anything is to be achieved.

This approach has also contributed to another key failure: a lack of military presence in the most disturbed regions. Three international missions were sent to Afghanistan: the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and, after the rout of the Taliban, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). To summarize the division of labour, OEF is charged with the warfighting, ISAF with the peacekeeping and UNAMA with coordinating aid and providing political support.

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NATO took over ISAF in August 2003. At the time, the operation covered only the Kabul area. Not until late 2006 did ISAF expand to the southern and most troubled part of the country. This unbearably slow extension process is a reflection of the problems NATO faced in trying to secure contributions from its members and partner countries and in agreeing on a common purpose for the mission. In practice, this means that international security forces have mostly operated under OEF for five years. The mandate of OEF is focused on counterterrorism and its leaders have only reluctantly agreed to get involved in wider nation-building schemes.

European nations and many commentators have criticized an overly military strategy applied in Afghanistan, a well-founded criticism in retrospect. Yet had the Europeans offered troops in a timely manner, they would have secured a more influential role for ISAF and hence a better balance between military and development intervention in the country. To compound the problem, some European troops that were actually sent operate under severe restrictions. For example, German troops in the north are strictly forbidden to take part in combat – a reassuring thought for local militias.

To illustrate the point, OEF had 100 troops permanently based in the restive region of Helmand (although these were backed by considerable reserve forces). When the British took over the region as part of the ISAF extension, they couldn't secure it with more than 4,000. It has long been understood that insurgencies are not defeated by military operations alone. In 1959–60, the French army, under General Maurice Challe, conducted a series of bril-

liant campaigns in Algeria against the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) insurgents, virtually wiping out the FLN's armed wing inside the country. Yet at the same time, President de Gaulle came to realize that the essential contest was lost and that he had to come to some sort of agreement with the independence movement. In insurgencies, the fundamental issue is political.

This provides the backdrop for another key failure: the dismal governance record in Afghanistan, especially in the southern regions. The constitution and affirmation of an Afghan political body was at the very core of the Bonn process. The goal is ambitious. Afghanistan is an uneasy patchwork of

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different religious, ethnic and tribal groups that, when not fighting each other, have never suffered a strong central authority. Furthermore, the level of disintegration of Afghan society after decades of civil wars should not be underestimated.<sup>1</sup>

In 2001, the Taliban held most of the country and the Northern Alliance, a loose federation of warlords, was on the defensive. The American-led intervention following the 9/11 attacks reversed the tide. The Northern Alliance received support in the form of massive military shipments and in return did most of the fighting on the ground, covered by the Western airpower umbrella. When the Taliban were routed at the end of 2001, warlords once again reigned supreme in Afghanistan.

Thereafter, a slow process of integrating these divisive figures into the political stabilization efforts began. Two initiatives have been relatively successful: the disarmament of militias and the constitution of an Afghan National Army (ANA). But the problem of warlords remains. The warlords were empowered by the Western military intervention in Afghanistan, but they remain discredited in the eyes of most Afghans. The Taliban's rise was in many ways the result of popular outrage at the warlords' behaviour once the Soviet troops withdrew.

The Northern Alliance leaders still have much sway over Hamid Karzai's government. Despite their heavy baggage, many hold key positions and the legislative elections became a great whitewashing operation. The 249 representatives in the Wolesi Jirga, or lower house, include an estimated 40 commanders still associated with armed groups, 24 members who belong to criminal gangs, 17 drug traffickers and 19 members who face serious allegations of war crimes and human rights violations.<sup>2</sup> Other examples of impunity abound. The former governor of Kandahar was replaced because of his alleged close links with drug traffickers. Instead of being chastised, he was simply offered a posting as a presidential nominee in the Meshrano Jirga or upper house. Karzai thereby avoided a confrontation, but he has allowed predatory practices to prevail inside his government.

This has been felt most severely in the southern regions where discredited local powerbrokers were reinstated. When the Kabul government was represented at all, too often it was by groups heavily involved in criminal activities. The dramatic increase in poppy cultivation is the result of collusion by various actors, including the Taliban, who

share an interest in opposing any form of rule of law. In their heady days, the Taliban were ruthless and extreme. But they instilled a sense of justice and morality in a country wracked by war. In comparison, the Karzai government inspires contempt and distrust. Three years of relative calm were lost and it is hard to blame local Afghan populations for hesitating between these rival forces. As long as the political alternative to the Taliban is as distasteful as it currently is, the insurgency will not be quelled. The commander of ISAF, General David Richards, commented in early October 2006 after a number of offensives in the south: "We have created an opportunity ... If we do not take advantage of this, then you can pour an additional 10,000 troops next year and we would not succeed because we would have lost by then the consent of the people."<sup>3</sup>

The quasi-absence of international troops and abysmal governance record created a political vacuum which insurgents were keen to fill. This was facilitated by the havens provided in Pakistan's border provinces. The sudden Taliban comeback in 2005 and rapid deterioration of the general situation in the south in the last year are hard to explain without reference to Afghanistan's neighbour. Whether because of internal constraints or a covert strategy, Pakistan is a refuge for insurgents and is used as a launch pad for large-scale penetration of the southern regions of Afghanistan. A map of the most violence-prone regions of Afghanistan and the progress of the insurgency is a clear indictment of Pervez Musharraf's government in Islamabad. It is impossible to ignore Pakistan's role in the destabilization of the entire Pashtun belt in the south. This is all the more troubling considering the past close ties between the

Taliban, the Hizb-i-Islami of Gulbaddin Hekmatyar and the Pakistani military secret services or ISI.

Pakistan's internal politics are complex and many religious, regional and ideological forces are pulling it in different directions. Musharraf's military dictatorship has muddled through, relying in part on radical Islamic parties. Karzai, himself educated in India, has bluntly blamed Pakistan for the violence in the south. Musharraf has replied in kind, alleging that the Taliban were mostly Afghans and that Pakistan was on the receiving end of Afghan problems. Unfortunately, both are probably right.

The main failure here is the lack of involvement of regional players in the peace process. Regional rivalries have played a key role in aggravating the tensions within Afghanistan and helped sustain decades of continued fighting.<sup>4</sup> Reassuring bitter adversaries in the complex political realm of Central Asia, including them in the restoration of an Afghan government and ensuring that none of them feel sidestepped is always going to be a tricky enterprise at best.

## The results

In a report to the United Nations Security Council in September 2006, Secretary-General Kofi Annan wrote, "While previous periods have been marked by progressive and significant deteriorations in the security situation, the recent upsurge of violence represents a watershed. At no time since the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 has the threat to Afghanistan's transition been so severe."<sup>5</sup> Key failures in Afghanistan's planned recovery have indeed led to ominous results.

First of all, although Afghanistan's economy has grown since 2001, the

recovery is concentrated in the northern half of the country. This uneven progress plays into the hands of ethnic animosity. The Bamian region in the north, where the local Hazara people have welcomed the foreign presence and where reconstruction projects and schools abound, stands in stark contrast to Kandahar where daily violence precludes any meaningful development work. The southern part of the country is dominated by Pashtuns who, being the largest group with an estimated 42 per cent of the population, are used to holding the reins of power. Other groups, such as the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazara, reside mostly in the north. Although Karzai himself is a Pashtun, the Northern

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Alliance, based on these minorities, wields much influence in Kabul. The Taliban and Hezb-i-Islami are dominated by Pashtuns, and the uneven development effort gives credence to their grievances.

Second, it is now safe to say that an all-out insurgency is occurring in the south. In the Helmand region, British soldiers have been faced with groups of Taliban numbering in the hundreds and standing their ground. Such a feat requires not only a vast number of foot-soldiers but also significant financial and logistical support. Their tactics are in line with what is known as asymmetric warfare. This is a very nasty type of fighting that requires a prolonged presence and massive economic and political as well as military efforts. Two months after calling

for an extra 2,500 troops for the south, NATO was still waiting for someone to heed the call. Faced with a counterinsurgency campaign, most European countries still didn't want to see any combat role included in ISAF's mandate. NATO had to settle for revised rules of engagement and including a liaison officer with OEF as it extended its mandate to the southern half of the country. Not exactly a great start.

The usual cycle in a postconflict intervention sees military contingents peak at first; then police take on a more important role as organized violence decreases; finally civilians and development workers remain to help in longer-term development. This cycle is dependent on the gradual improvement of security. It also reflects the limited attention span of most intervening countries. The international community has been in Afghanistan for five years and now is presented with a huge challenge. The third result is a sense of exhaustion and a loss of momentum at a time when international actors on the ground say they need extra effort from their governments.

Fourth, the Bonn process emphasized building Afghan political institutions, but complacency regarding governance has allowed incompetent, divisive, corrupt and self-interested figures access to power. This is especially true in the judiciary and interior ministry, which both have a central role to play in fostering the rule of law.<sup>6</sup> Five years on, predatory leaders have had the time to entrench themselves and will now be much more difficult to discipline, let alone expunge. Despite their fatigue, international actors involved with the Karzai government will have to be much more forceful on these issues. This is critical if the insurgents who

are now threatening the entire stabilization process are ultimately to be defeated.

Finally, no matter what the intent of the Pakistani government, Pakistan's frontier regions are destabilized and openly welcome Taliban, Al Qaeda and other affiliates of radical Islamic parties. The deployment of 80,000 Pakistani troops to some of these fiercely autonomous regions has only accelerated the radicalization of local elites. The recent Pakistani military withdrawal treaty signed with "tribal leaders" is recognition of Islamabad's limited room for manoeuvre.

There are serious border disputes between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In 1893, Sir Mortimer Durand, Foreign Secretary in the British Indian government, defined the border between British India and Afghanistan. The "Durand line" divides the Pashtuns between Afghanistan and present-day Pakistan, and most Afghans do not accept the legitimacy of this border. A movement exists among Pashtun Afghans – but not among their non-Pashtun compatriots – for a Pashtun state incorporating Pakistan's Baluchistan province. These conflicts are further compounded by complex regional relations involving India, Iran, China, Russia and Central Asian states. The bottom line is that Pakistan has a key role to play in Afghanistan's transition. So far, that role has been more negative than positive.

To be fair, the picture is not nearly as dark as enumerating these failures and results would indicate. Although the situation is worrisome, immense improvements separate Afghanistan today from what it was in 2001. As for the future, ISAF's extension to the entire country signals a shift in strategy that encompasses social, political and developmental aspects and is certainly more conducive to long-term stabilization. The

successor to the Bonn process, the Afghan compact, announced at the end of January 2006, is a much-improved approach to rehabilitation and reconstruction. Although we may find the Bush Administration's outlook on international relations abrasive, lessons have been learned from the blowbacks in Afghanistan and the disaster in Iraq. The switch of 12,000 U.S. troops to NATO command in early October clearly signals a newfound American willingness to work in a multilateral setting.

Five years on, the original momentum may have been lost, but a great deal has also been learned on the ground. Originally, most countries and international organizations involved in Afghanistan underestimated the scale of what they were attempting. The question now is whether these same actors will find the political will and consequent resources necessary to follow through.

## Canada's objectives

The recent debate on Canada's presence in Afghanistan reflects these doubts. Canada intervened in Afghanistan earlier and far more extensively than its international partners. Since 2001, Afghanistan has been one of the centrepieces of our foreign policy. Ottawa's International Policy Statement, tabled in Parliament in April 2005, described it not only as a priority but as a model for Canada's future role in world affairs. Around 80 per cent of the Canadian troops deployed overseas are in Afghanistan. CIDA has also made Afghanistan its most important beneficiary of bilateral aid.

In contrast to the United States and Britain, Canada did not participate in the war in Iraq. In Afghanistan, Canada has clearly signalled its intention of working within a

multilateral framework by earmarking the bulk of its contingents for ISAF since 2003. In many ways, Canada has been NATO's most committed supporter in Afghanistan, caught between dithering and suspicious Europeans and overly aggressive and unilateral-prone Americans.<sup>7</sup>

The character of Canada's Afghanistan commitment is thus in line with Canadian foreign policy traditions, but its importance relative to other international commitments is unprecedented in peacetime. Some would argue that this is appropriate because we are at war against terrorism, but this is a dubious notion that has more to do with a political

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slogan than an actual description of the state of international affairs.

The September 11 attacks on the United States left a mark on international relations and put security issues back on top of the agenda. Canadian policymakers reacted accordingly. Defence budgets have been increased following a decade of reductions. General Rick Hillier launched a profound reform of our military to make it lighter and more responsive, and the 2005 International Policy Statement led us to concentrate our efforts in Afghanistan.

Canada's objectives are a mixture of realpolitik concerns and traditional liberal-internationalist discourse. First and foremost, Canada's deep involvement in Afghanistan is related to its vital partnership with the United States. It is a show of good will in the "war on terror" and a resolute answer to the "either you are with us or you are with

the terrorists” challenge posed by President Bush. Some hard facts need to be recalled. American and Canadian defence are closely knit, more than for any other two countries in the world. There are clear political and geographical reasons behind this 60-year old partnership. The two countries are also economically intertwined. The United States is by far our most important trading partner and Canada’s prosperity depends on this relationship. A severe crisis between our two countries would have devastating effects, especially for Canada. Canadian politicians are all too aware of the risks involved.

Thus Canada’s participation in Operation Enduring Freedom is readily understandable in terms of *realpolitik*. But there is more than *realpolitik* at stake. Condemnation of the September 11 attacks was universal across the world, and Canadians expected their government to show solidarity with their longtime partner and friend south of the border.

An important shift occurred in May 2003, when the Canadian government announced that it was sending 2,000 troops to Afghanistan as part of ISAF, which at the time was operating only in Kabul. The timing of the announcement was eloquent. This was both compensation for Canada’s noninvolvement in the invasion of Iraq and an ideal excuse to say troops were not available for the Iraq invasion.

The decision to go to Kandahar, announced by the Martin government in May 2005, only deepened our commitment. The government had released its new International Policy Statement a month earlier, declaring that it wanted Canada to leave its mark on world affairs. The statement concluded that Canadian efforts should be targeted at specific priority countries. Trying

to be everywhere meant having influence nowhere. Canada needed to overcome “ad hockery,” to quote General Hillier. In short, focus is key to influence.

Kandahar is the stronghold of the Taliban and the city is the gateway to southern Afghanistan. Back in early 2005, the situation there was far more stable than it has become since. The decision to move the centre of gravity of the Canadian presence in Afghanistan from Kabul to Kandahar made perfect sense as a way to secure influence in the constant negotiations that are part of any international deployment of troops in a country.

To reconcile Canada’s traditional liberal outlook in international affairs with the military imperatives of engagement in countries like Afghanistan, pushed by our southern neighbour, the International Policy Statement had introduced the “failed state” logic. This logic posits that states with severe internal dysfunctions tend to export their problems in an ever more interconnected world. Misery, death, fanaticism and rampant criminality translate internationally into destabilizing waves of refugees, terrorism, spreading conflict, increased trade in illegal goods, severe environmental degradation and so on. Afghanistan happens to be an ideal example.

To satisfy the more liberal-minded internationalists, the Canadian government linked the logic of failed states to the Human Security and Responsibility to Protect paradigms. To satisfy the political realists, including current policymakers in Washington, the statement linked the notion of preventive military action to burgeoning threats such as countries supporting terrorist organizations.



## Canada's scorecard

When countries set policy objectives, these must be weighed against their costs, and the strategies employed should be regularly reevaluated based on results. An assessment of our substantial Afghan involvement reveals that the results have been lukewarm.

In terms of our relationship with the United States, the American government understands that, no matter how significant our military contingent in Afghanistan, Canada would have accorded the United States much more political legitimacy by backing its invasion of Iraq. At the same time, however, the last few years have been humbling for the Bush Administration's foreign policy. On the whole, Canada's focus on Afghanistan has proved right and few would doubt that the adjustments made in our foreign policy and defence are in line with the "war on terror." The election of a more lenient Martin government and then the obvious symmetries between the Bush and Harper governments have been additional factors leading to reconciliation.

Canada has certainly secured an influential role in Afghanistan. For half of 2004, Canada's General Hillier assumed command of ISAF. Because of the deployment of an operational group in Kandahar, the main core of the current Canadian military presence, Canada was rewarded with the command of the Multi National Brigade for Regional Command South in Afghanistan. This means

that Brigadier-General David Fraser is responsible for Canadian and ISAF operations, leading a force of about 6,000 soldiers from Canada and seven other countries: Britain, the Netherlands, the United States, Australia, Denmark, Romania and Estonia. This recognition of military commitment is complemented by a high-profile role for Canadian representatives involved in political and developmental issues.

The focus of resources has certainly led to a higher profile in Afghanistan, as the International Policy Statement intended. But the quick succession of governments in Ottawa, two of them with parliamentary minorities, has impeded the overall strategic orientation. The model for the International Policy Statement's integrated Development, Diplomacy and Defence (or "3D") vision of Canada's role in the world was the British approach. Too often in the past, federal departments had been at odds, their different mandates leading to three different Canadian foreign policies. Unifying such divergent agencies requires very strong leadership from the Prime Minister's Office. Tony Blair's government has had the time and power to

do this; a series of minority governments could not do the same in Canada. In practice, this means that although these governments have been consistent in the commitment to Afghanistan and its basic parameters, Canada's representatives on the ground in Afghanistan have been guessing what to do with their new influence.

There is no great risk in saying that the disintegration of Afghanistan, the coming of the Taliban and their harbouring of Al Qaeda has had devastating worldwide effects. But the failed state concept is at odds with a selective approach to Canada's involvement in the world. If Afghanistan warrants Canada's efforts, what about Somalia, Zimbabwe or Côte d'Ivoire? The International Policy Statement mentioned Darfur, Haiti and Afghanistan. The failed state logic may be helpful in justifying Canadian interventions in any of these countries; the same cannot be said about why and how these specific cases were selected.

There are clear reasons for Canada's deep involvement in Afghanistan, but they were not stated as clearly as they should have been to Canadians at the time. Undertaking the justification now, given the combined pressures of a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and rapidly mounting Canadian casualties, is politically difficult. Although Canadians have been mobilized in the past to support international military interventions, society has changed. The electronic media report casualties instantaneously and visually; arguably, public concern for the sanctity of life has also risen. The combination has made public opinion much more averse to casualties. How to overcome this aversion to military action?

The first tactic is to connect the Canadian presence in Afghanistan to a lingering threat

hanging over our daily lives. This justification, used with much success in the United States, calls on powerful emotions bordering on paranoia. However, the fact is that the actual chances of dying or being injured in a terrorist attack are extremely low. And how do you assess whether actions taken internationally have reduced the terrorist threat? Even American intelligence agencies have come to realize that the invasion of Iraq, supposed to be part of the "war on terror," has actually produced more terrorism.<sup>8</sup> Europeans, who have long experience with terrorist organizations, have been much more cautious in linking foreign terrorist activities to potential domestic dangers.

Another angle is to invoke a humanitarian point of view. Much has been said about the plight of Afghan women and the extreme violence under the Taliban. This rationale was not enough to engage international actors in the 1990s, and it is doubtful that it will be enough to sustain a large commitment today.

While idealistic Canadians may not like it, humanitarian justifications must be balanced with an understanding of our national interest.<sup>9</sup> But the minority situation in Parliament makes it difficult for the Canadian government to discuss our realpolitik interests publicly. Public opinion is thus far more important in the current Afghanistan debate than it was when the Prime Minister's Office could confidently count on a parliamentary majority.

From an international point of view, Canada's record in Afghanistan is enviable. Successive governments have maintained a balanced approach including political, developmental and military dimensions. In all three, it has delivered while most other international partners have proved

unreliable. Canada has also favoured multi-lateral arenas and has mostly been involved through either ISAF or UNAMA, which share a balanced approach to solving Afghan problems in the long run. Recent dramatic footage should not obscure these facts.

More could be done in provision of development aid to Afghans, but this is a problem related to Canada's overall development aid budget. Canada's percentage of GDP spent on international aid is low compared to many other donor countries and at odds with the benevolent image we have of ourselves.

Some Canadian politicians argue that Canada's Afghan intervention represents "an offensive turn" and a betrayal of Lester Pearson's legacy. A few myths need debunking here. First, Canada's defence during the cold war entailed preparations for an intensive, dramatic conventional war with the Eastern bloc. Peacekeeping was at the margins of this central commitment although Canadian governments have been keen to use it as an example of Canada's honest-broker role in international relations.

Second, Canada's military was deeply scarred by its experience in former Yugoslavia. Back then, the same people who now criticize Canada's Afghan intervention lamented the inaction of the United Nations Protection Force as large-scale ethnic cleansing was taking place. Lessons learned in the 1990s have generally led to much more aggressive mandates being voted for new peace missions. This includes UN blue helmet operations in, for example, Congo-Kinshasa where armed militias are sowing havoc as in southern Afghanistan (although admittedly on a smaller scale).

None of this denies the difficult moral dilemmas and tricky political implications

entailed by use of force. But an insistence on peacekeeping operations without resort to force is unhelpful in understanding current missions or in understanding the changing nature of war itself.

The Canadian government has given itself the tools and resources to have a significant impact on an important international crisis. With it must come a full explanation to the Canadian public. ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000).
- <sup>2</sup> Andrew Wilder, "A House Divided?: Analysing the 2005 Afghan Elections," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, Dec. 2005, p. 14.
- <sup>3</sup> Fisnik Abrashi, "General: Afghans May Soon Back Taliban," Associated Press, Oct. 8, 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> Barnett Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
- <sup>5</sup> United Nations, Security Council, Secretary General Kofi Annan, *The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for Peace and Security*, 61st year, S/2006/727 (New York: United Nations, 2006), p. 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Barnett Rubin, *Still Ours to Lose: Afghanistan on the Brink*, prepared testimony for the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations (Sept. 20, 2006) and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (Sept. 21, 2006).
- <sup>7</sup> Paul Gallis, "NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance," *Report for Congress*, Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, Aug. 22, 2006.
- <sup>8</sup> Mark Mazzetti, "Spy Agencies Say Iraq War Worsens Terrorism Threat," *New York Times*, Sept. 24, 2006, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> David Rudd, "Afghanistan, Darfur, and the Great (Unexpected) Debate over Canada's Role in the World," *Policy Options*, June 2006, p. 54.

# Don't leave Afghanistan in American hands

by Doug McArthur

**T**

HE U.S. INVASION AND OVERTHROW OF THE TALIBAN GOVERNMENT in 2001 seemed at the time to many in Canada, and in the Western nations generally, a welcome development. While doubts existed about the wisdom of proceeding so quickly with the use of force, United Nations approval was obtained, and the result was the removal from power of an unelected government that had shown a deplorable lack of respect for human rights and human life at home and abroad. The Taliban provided a sanctuary for terrorism against Western nations, and it treated its own people with disdain. The defeat of the Taliban was supported by a majority in Afghanistan itself, and support was widespread for a new, more democratic government that would protect basic human rights and provide stable government.

Five years later, it is hard to be so positive. The country is once more caught up in armed conflict. Hundreds of military

personnel have been killed in Afghanistan since the overthrow of the Taliban government. More than 40 of these have been Canadians. The new government has proved less than successful at establishing order and at providing needed services and development. Many people in the country express fears about security; the longevity of the new democratically elected regime is in doubt.

The events of mid- and late 2006 are particularly alarming. In late May, an incident in Kabul brought thousands of armed people into the streets, and was suppressed with great difficulty and loss of life. This incident challenged the widespread assumption that

Kabul is secure and supportive of the regime. There has also been intense fighting in the southern regions around Kandahar, generating new fears that a resurgent Taliban may be poised to lead a more broadly based uprising against the government. Incidents in other parts of Afghanistan also suggest that the ability of the government to impose order is in doubt over much of the country.

In Canada, the doubts and questions are particularly acute. For the first time since the Korean War, Canadian soldiers are dying on active duty in direct combat as part of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). While Canadian soldiers are now part of an international force, the first deaths occurred when they were fighting with the U.S. Operation Enduring Freedom forces. There is concern that the ISAF effort is simply part of a misguided U.S.-led venture of doubtful origins and even more doubtful management.

Canada and the other countries involved are eager to have people believe that much more is taking place than armed conflict. An elected president and parliament, a major effort at development and reconstruction, and the creation of Afghan police and armed forces are all cited as evidence that progress is being made.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the effort to rescue Afghanistan from the Taliban and extremist terrorist forces and to establish order, security, democracy and development is in grave difficulty. Many argue that the current venture is fatally flawed and must either be abandoned or radically restructured. This view has particular salience in Canada.

I argue that abandoning Afghanistan now would be strategically wrong and morally

unacceptable. While it would be easy to withdraw and leave the Afghan people to their fate, Canada has an interest in what happens that transcends the tragedy of the death of soldiers and the desire to disentangle from U.S. foreign ventures. Canada's departure would almost certainly encourage other countries to do likewise, leaving the fate of the country in the hands of the United States. It is doubtful whether the United States has much continuing interest in the future of the country beyond that which military dominance can provide. To leave Afghanistan to the United States is not in the interests of the Afghan people or the world community. Afghanistan would most likely continue to be a pawn in the ever-growing battle between the United States and those who see the U.S. as an imperial power determined to impose its will around the world.

Canada is needed in Afghanistan. Canada has been there since the beginning of the reconstruction effort and is in a unique position to provide the leadership needed to help the country develop democratic institutions and political, social and economic stability in tune with what Afghans want.

## **Canada's presence in Afghanistan**

Canada has committed \$1 billion in development aid to Afghanistan over ten years. This commitment originally arose out of the 2001 Bonn Agreement, which provided for an interim government, the convening of a Loya Jirga to draft a new constitution and the creation of an independent judiciary. Under that agreement, Afghan representa-

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tives asked the international community to assist with protection of the national sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Afghanistan; the rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction of the country; and combatting terrorism and the drug trade. Canada, along with many other Western countries, agreed to help meet these requests.

Canada's reconstruction assistance is specifically directed at responding to the needs identified by the Afghan government in its National Development Framework of 2002. This is being done through programs in support of governance, rural assistance and development, and management and administration within the central government. A Provincial Reconstruction Team

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(PRT) deployed to Kandahar in the summer of 2005 is intended to work to stabilize the Kandahar region and support development efforts. The team works together with military forces in an attempt to ensure that development and security are integrated into a common effort. Canada's main commitment is to assign a Canadian development officer to administer a Security Sector Reform Fund, leverage other development efforts and support the delivery of national programs in the region. The killing by the Taliban of the first person appointed is a tragic reminder of this commitment.

Canada was also the sole donor for the National Priority Programmes Co-ordination Unit within the government of Afghanistan

from mid-2005 to mid-2006. Its role was to help the government direct its resources and programs into the provinces with the greatest strategic reach and impact and extend central government control and activity to rural Afghanistan.

And of course Canada has a major military presence in the country, about 2,500 soldiers. The decision to commit Canadian troops was made by the Liberal government in late 2001. While Canadian forces were first mobilized in small numbers in support of the U.S. invasion forces, a much larger commitment came when Canada decided to be part of the International Security Assistance Force, which from August 2003 to November 2005 assumed a presence in the Kabul area, focusing on helping the international community maintain a safe and secure environment in and around the capital. Ottawa defended this commitment as consistent with participation in multilateral peacekeeping, as an effort to ensure peace and security in the country. It was also linked to reconstruction efforts in which Canada works with the international community to rebuild the country after years of war and internal fighting. Not a lot was said about the military forces also being there to prevent the Taliban from reestablishing a presence in the country, in part because it was believed that the Taliban were a spent force.

## **The current situation in Afghanistan**

Much has been written and said about the current situation in Afghanistan. Much of it is discouraging and most of it is true. The most salient features of the current situation can be summarized as follows:

- **THE ECONOMY IS DISMAL:** Unemployment is reported to be about 40 per cent, and the real figure is likely higher. Private-sector foreign investment is negligible, and there is little internally generated capital and savings. The market aptitudes and skills of people are evident on the streets and roads where hundreds of stalls provide a wide range of merchandise and food products, but significant economic opportunities are very limited. What is obvious is pervasive poverty, and little is being done for ordinary people to escape it.
- **PUBLIC SERVICES REMAIN GENERALLY PRIMITIVE OR NONEXISTENT:** Sewage and water systems do not exist except in some privileged areas. Clean, safe water is a luxury. Electricity is virtually unknown in most of the country. In Kabul, a city of more than five million people, electricity is available for a few hours per day at best, and in many areas it is every second day or less. Police forces are inept and unreliable. The effort to build a new competent system of policing has made slow progress, even though this was given a high priority. Many of the top officers are previous warlords, drug dealers and smugglers. While some roads and streets have been built, particularly main thoroughfares and those with a high profile (the Kabul-Kandahar highway is now a first-class highway, but traffic is minimal because of the security problems in the south), most streets and secondary roads are in severe disrepair.
- **BASIC HOUSING IS IN SHORT SUPPLY:** This is particularly evident in Kabul, where it is estimated that well over a million people have no housing. More than a million returning refugees have settled in Kabul in squalid conditions. Many of these people

were expected to return to their rural areas where they previously lived, but this has not happened. An even greater number of people are living in abysmal hovels.

- **WHILE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM HAS MADE SOME ADVANCES, A HIGH PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE STILL DO NOT GO TO SCHOOL:** There are simply not enough schools and teachers. The quality of education is generally poor, with senior posts in the sector often filled by people from the Communist and pre-Communist periods. There has been considerable progress, particularly in urban areas, in opening up schools for girls. However, the government is beginning to yield to Islamic fundamentalists demanding that girls be excluded from schools, and there is a real fear that the number of girls in school will drop.
- **ELECTIONS FOR THE NEW INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN ONLY PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL:** The presidential election in 2004 went well, with good voter turnout and few problems. The parliamentary elections had a lower turnout but few problems in actual voting. Approximately 12 million people were eligible to vote, of whom about 6 million did. Elections were for both the 249-seat lower house (the Wolesi Jirga) and the 34 provincial councils, which elect one third of the members of the upper house. There were 2,707 candidates for the lower house: 328 women and 2,379 men. Women were guaranteed 25 per cent of the seats and won 28 per cent, six more than the minimum. All candidates ran as independents, since parties and lists were not permitted, and voting was by single nontransferable vote (SNTV) in multimember constituencies, meaning that each voter votes for only one candi-

date. With so many candidates, no parties and SNTV, there was little to distinguish between candidates. Votes were widely dispersed; voting results were almost random in some cases and in others were manipulated by well-organized candidates who understood that a small proportion of votes was enough to win. Former warlords and their adherents gained a large proportion of the seats in both the lower house and provincial councils. Fragmented voting and the ability to win a seat with a low proportion of total votes has meant that many elected MPs are not considered credible representatives – and in many cases are considered illegitimate criminals. The parliament has nevertheless

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been working hard to get organized, and to date has displayed a remarkable flair and enthusiasm for democracy in its internal workings. It has elected officers, passed a budget and approved cabinet and supreme court appointments after much debate and voting. However, the absence of parties has meant that proceedings are very time-consuming, and it is likely that this will create great difficulties when the parliament turns to considering legislation.

- THE EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT UNDER PRESIDENT KARZAI HAS GENERALLY FUNCTIONED POORLY: There are many reasons for this. There is virtually no professional public service.

Karzai himself is not a good manager, and displays considerable insecurity regarding his political situation. To shore up his position he has appointed numerous warlords and drug dealers to positions of leadership, including cabinet posts. Corruption is widespread. There is very little trust in the government, even though the vast majority of people hope that it will work. The government has very little revenue. Its total budget is just \$500 million – less than that of Yukon with 30,000 people. There is virtually no tax base because of the wreckage of the economy, and little means to collect taxes. The overall result is that the government is delivering very little to the people in terms of services, and its credibility is declining as time passes. Karzai is struggling to retain some vestige of power and support, but to more and more people he appears barely competent and largely impotent. As his position becomes more tenuous, he is reverting to many of the old ways of brokering to shore up popularity. He is increasingly dependent on warlords and other questionable characters. He has started to play to fundamentalist sentiment, for instance by reinstating the Ministry of Virtue and Vice. He is desperately dependent on the United States, which in turn seems to see him as the only leader whom they can depend on to satisfy their interests. Rather than insisting on good, reasonably honest government, the United States is now accommodating practices it would elsewhere consider abhorrent. The government appears to be in the early throes of a downward spiral to failure – unless clear and desperate measures are taken soon.

- **AN INSURGENCY, LED BY TALIBAN AND FORMER TALIBAN DISSIDENTS AND FUELLED BY POPULAR DISCONTENT, IS GATHERING MOMENTUM:** These insurgents had virtually no credibility or support four years ago. However, they have been continuously financed and supported by a murky collection of actors intent on reversing the political situation in the country and reestablishing an anti-American, anti-Western state that will provide a base for various forms of jihad, terrorism and fundamentalist ideology to operate in the region and the world. There is no doubt that elements of Pakistan's government are complicit in this effort. Many of the insurgents use border areas with Pakistan as a base, and move back and forth across the border. Money and arms also come from Pakistan and various other places, including Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich states. The Taliban forces are well stocked with men from the Arab world who have joined the fight for a variety of religious and personal reasons. The Taliban today is largely an external force, but there is a real possibility that it could regain popularity if life does not improve for ordinary people.
- **INTERNATIONAL AID HAS IN MANY CASES BEEN INEFFECTUAL:** The reasons for this are varied. First, there has not been enough of it. Basic things like infrastructure require much more money than the donors have made available. Second, it has not been successful in capturing the "hearts and minds" of the people. Many donor countries, Canada included, have administered too much aid through contractors. As one report has eloquently summarized the situation:

*Donors are rightfully proud that billions of dollars have poured into Afghanistan. But little of that international aid has filtered down to the average Afghan. In a vicious cycle, security is blamed for slow reconstruction and the failure to rebuild is said to lead to deteriorating security. A reevaluation of the reconstruction projects implemented in Afghanistan in the last five years would undoubtedly reveal mistakes. Many shortcomings might be related to a focus on shorter-term projects that the donors and Afghan government alike have tried to use to demonstrate progress to their respective constituencies – or even to each other. In other words, the emphasis thus far has not been on infrastructure but on Potemkin projects. But the infrastructure work is necessary in pursuit of long-term, state-building strategies despite its lack of immediate political benefits. Another, and more crucial, shortcoming has been a heavy reliance on foreign contractors to rebuild Afghanistan. Foreign contractors continue to boast of multimillion-dollar reconstruction projects while the average Afghan worker remains untrained and unemployed.<sup>1</sup>*

### **What is Canada doing in Afghanistan?**

When Canada first engaged in Afghanistan, Canadians paid limited attention. As long as Canadian soldiers were not killed, there was little public or political focus on Canada's part in the venture. That began to change when the last of the Canadian forces left Kabul and moved to Kandahar in November 2005, initially with U.S. forces and then since July 2006 as part of ISAF, which took over military responsibility in Kandahar and the southern region from the United States. This

is the stronghold of the Taliban. Since that time, battles involving Canadian soldiers, including the highly publicized deaths, have become a regular part of the news cycle.

On May 17, the House of Commons voted on a motion to extend Canada's mission in Afghanistan until February 2009. The motion carried by four votes. A poll of Canadians taken at that time showed support at 41 per cent and opposition at 54 per cent, with 6 per cent not sure.<sup>2</sup> Clearly both Parliament and the country are now sharply divided on the issue of troops in Afghanistan. It is probable that a free vote in the House of Commons would have defeated the motion, as would a vote taken of Canadians in general. Prime Minister

**Most Canadians do not accept this as an exercise in peacekeeping. Peacekeepers don't seek out parties to the conflict to kill their soldiers and defeat them in battle, as is the case with the fight against the Taliban.**

Harper engineered the vote to force the hand of the opposition parties, and to highlight the support of his party for the war effort. It was an attempt to drive a wedge between his government and the opposition parties, split the opposition and rally Canadians around the fight.

But events have not unfolded as Harper expected. Canadian participation in the Afghan conflict has become a major obstacle to improving Conservative support. Public opinion polls continue to show that a majority of Canadians are deeply troubled by Canada's participation.

Canadians are uncertain why Canada is in Afghanistan. The doubts are in part rooted in Canadian views about the legitimate use of

our forces in the world. Of particular importance is the distinction between peacekeeping and active combat. Canadians generally view peacekeeping as a good thing, part of a tradition of support for peace and multilateralism that Canadian governments have nurtured since the 1950s. Canadian peacekeeping forces are to reinforce and stabilize political settlements that have been brokered by the international community, preferably through the United Nations. The United Nations umbrella is important because the use of force is then based on the rule of law rather than the unilateral exercise of power.

A justification for Canada's military role that might convince Canadians is thus that it is an exercise in peacekeeping. In this case involvement has been backed up by UN resolutions, and Canada is part of an international presence. The overall objective of the international effort is to support stable democratic government, security, reconstruction and development and to promote human and democratic rights, women's equality and universal education.

It is the facts on the ground that are the problem. Most Canadians do not accept this as an exercise in peacekeeping. Peacekeepers don't seek out parties to the conflict to kill their soldiers and defeat them in battle, as is the case with the fight against the Taliban. This is not peacekeeping as it is known and understood by experts and citizens alike. Like it or not, Canada is continuing the war against the forces that the United States defeated in 2001.

One possible way around this difficulty is to redefine the exercise as peacemaking. But what exactly is peacemaking, in keeping with international norms and legitimacy? In 1992 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then Secretary General of the United Nations, stated that

peacemaking is “action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations: Pacific Settlement of Disputes.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter refers largely to diplomatic efforts where representative political institutions are engaged in processes of negotiation and reconciliation. In sum, Canadian intervention in the Afghan civil war cannot be redefined as peacemaking.

The focus of peacemaking is on conflict between claimants to a political role, on reconciling them in a way that realizes some form of accommodation. Not surprisingly, peacemaking is largely a means of addressing inter-nation conflicts, which is of course very much the focus of the United Nations and international law. While the concept perhaps has enough flexibility to encompass internal conflicts in which there are challenges to the legitimacy of the established government, the parties need to be open to some form of accommodation. In the case of the government of Afghanistan, its only interest is in defeating the Taliban. The Canadian and other forces are there to support them in that objective. At present the situation is symmetrical, in that the Taliban are intent on defeating the government, the Americans and their allies, including Canadians. The Afghan situation does not lend itself to peacemaking.

Attempts to justify the Canadian presence through international conventions and practices associated with peace are largely futile. They risk becoming simply semantic games. The simple fact is that the Canadian military is in Afghanistan in a highly partisan role, at least so far as the main military threat is concerned. The Canadian military is there to make Afghanistan and its government safe from the Taliban and other insurgents. By

common agreement, this is the necessary prelude to democratic governance, security, reconstruction and development.

In this sense those who suggest that Canada should withdraw its military have a point. If we are neither peacekeepers nor peacemakers, the moral foundations for what we are doing are open to legitimate challenge. This is essentially what Jack Layton and the NDP argue. Layton has concluded that either Canada should withdraw or the Taliban should be brought into negotiations to resolve the differences and to make some kind of peace to which the Taliban could be a party.

The intellectual clarity of the NDP position has not been acknowledged as fully as it should in the political debate. The NDP is correct in arguing that Canada cannot justify its presence on the basis of either peacekeeping or peacemaking.

## **Should Canada withdraw its troops?**

However, peacekeeping and peacemaking are not the only possible moral justifications for the presence of Canadian troops. There are other ways to frame the moral case. Many, including obviously the United States, consider the Taliban to be a legitimate military target for the simple reason that they are a threat to U.S. and Western security. When it was in power, the Taliban government provided shelter and protection to Al Qaeda, and the Taliban continue to support and defend terrorism directed at the United States and other Western countries, including Canada. Framed this way, every country has a right to defend itself, and preventing the Taliban from once again becoming a force in Afghanistan is thereby

justified. This position enjoys international legitimacy, inasmuch as it is supported by UN resolutions.

It is hard to dispute this argument. The Taliban sees the United States as an enemy, and supports future attacks on the U.S. It is almost certain that the Taliban sees Canada in exactly the same way. The moral force of the argument may not seem as compelling to Canadians as do peacekeeping and peacemaking, but national self-defence is almost universally recognized as a legitimate reason to use military force. There is room to argue whether there is a real and present danger, but the evidence of September 11, 2001, and statements since then support the

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claim that the Taliban and Al Qaeda pose a real threat.

Having a defensible moral justification for Canada's military presence doesn't mean Canada needs to be there. Canada has a choice. The risk of Taliban success may be so low as not to warrant devoting Canadian resources, including soldiers' lives, to the effort. Or Canada could free-ride on the work and sacrifices of others. We could leave fighting the Taliban to the United States and other willing members of the international community. There is nothing immoral about this position. Self-interest is a widely accepted motive in foreign policy, and this would simply be a case of Canada acting in its own self-interest.

Looked at in this way, the problem entails weighing Canadian benefits and costs. The main cost of withdrawal is U.S. disapproval. Withdrawal would also prevent Canada from having a say in what happens in Afghanistan.

But there are also benefits to withdrawal. First of all, it avoids a large numbers of Canadian deaths. And most Canadians do not believe that the United States places that much importance on what Canada does. Canadians who think like this have a case. The United States is no doubt pleased to find Canada taking as much responsibility as it is, and would be annoyed if Canadian troops withdrew, as it was annoyed when Canada did not participate in Iraq. But Canada-U.S. relations did not much change post-2003, and they would probably not much change if Canada withdrew from Afghanistan. If we are to stay and fight in Afghanistan, a better argument is needed to convince Canadians.

A better argument does exist. It can be argued that it is both morally right and in Canada's interest to be there, based on the needs of Canada, the world community and Afghans. There are many international conflicts today that threaten instability and disruption. These conflicts are part of the reality of living in a complex world. The real questions are about the impact of the conflicts and how best to resolve them. Canada is a member of the international community. It is affected by these conflicts and can in turn have an impact on how they are resolved. Canada's status in the world means that impact can be unique and positive. The results of engagement may not only serve Canada's interests, but also bring about a better outcome for the Afghan people.

In the Cold War era, Canada's ability to influence the outcomes of conflicts was limited. Superpower interests inevitably dominated most conflicts. Canada's status as a satellite of the United States further constrained its room for manoeuvre. The best option for Canada was generally not to engage. A limited Canadian role in support of conflict resolution and peacekeeping at times served the purposes of the superpowers, and Canada wisely carved out a place for itself in such processes. This had the collateral benefit of permitting Canada to develop a reputation in the world as a supporter of peace, and of having Canadians come to see foreign policy as an endeavour carried out on a higher moral plane than the mere pursuit of self-interest.

In the post-Cold War era, conflicts have taken on a different character. The United States is the only superpower. It has to some degree adopted the role of world police, using mediation, threats and force to remove conflicts and challenges to U.S. national security. But these recent challenges are not nearly as substantial as the ones that arose in the days when the United States and the Soviet Union threatened each other with annihilation. Contrary to much popular opinion, the United States has become less invested in many of the conflicts in which it takes an interest. A pattern is developing in which the United States is generally interested in taking out the immediate source of the conflict and less so in rebuilding societies inevitably damaged by the conflict. This can lead to costly mistakes, as in the case of Iraq. It can also lead to a growing neglect of what is needed to restore damaged societies.

Afghanistan is just such a case. Despite many promises, the U.S. reconstruction and development effort has been dismally

inadequate. It is difficult to believe that so little has been done after all the grand promises the United States made to build a new and prosperous democratic society in the wake of the Taliban. But the results speak for themselves. The failures have been many-faceted. The wind-down of the U.S. presence has been much more rapid than the security situation allows. The United States has not done nearly enough to pressure the new government to distance itself from warlords, drug barons and mujahidin as sources of support. The restoration of public infrastructure has been too little too late. Private investment in commercial ventures has been virtually nonexistent.

### **Can Canada make a difference?**

Ironically, the failures of the United States provide an opportunity for Canada and other donor countries to establish their presence and influence in setting the direction and pace of development for the better. Military action is an essential component of what is needed. Virtually all Afghan leaders and observers agree that development and reconstruction are one side of a coin, the other side of which is security and safety. The Taliban and its supporters are betting that if security and safety are undermined, development and reconstruction will fail. The issue is not so much the Taliban as such: it is ensuring the necessary conditions for people to live, work, travel and study without fear of attack from hostile forces. Security forces must be accompanied by meaningful development; otherwise there is no real case for the forces being there. And without security forces, there is no real case for supporting development. The

ISAF commander, Lieutenant-General David Richards, has emphasized the urgency of the situation. As Radio Free Europe reported:

*[Richards] warned on October 8 that without visible improvements in the daily lives of ordinary Afghans in the next six months, up to 70 per cent of Afghans could shift their allegiance to the Taliban-led insurgency. "The next six months have to be used for effective reconstruction and development to ensure" the continuing support that the Afghan government enjoys among citizens. But Richards added ominously that he knows that "ISAF cannot take the support of ordinary Afghans for granted." Richards pledged that having "shown [its] skill and power in combat," NATO is "now putting equal effort into supporting the reconstruction and development that will improve [Afghans'] lives and offer a real future to all."*

*Richards' warning is a very real one for Afghanistan. The crux of the matter arguably is not whether Afghans will support the resurgent neo-Taliban, but whether – in the absence of a genuine improvement of their daily lives – they care to support the current system. The operative word is "genuine."<sup>4</sup>*

The most important moral question is not whether our troops should stay. Rather, it is whether there is a willingness on Canada's part to ensure a genuine improvement in the economy, public services, poverty reduction and governance. If there is not, keeping troops there is pointless. If there is, keeping troops there is essential.

Canada's choice is perhaps as important as that of any country currently involved. Canada has made a proportionately large commitment to date, and is respected

enough by all of the major players to have a huge impact on what happens next. If Canada cuts and runs, many others will follow. If Canada simply supports the status quo, and does what it has in the past on the reconstruction and development front, others will do the same. In either of these two options, Afghans will be left with broken promises, the cruel fate of a resurgent Taliban and an unreliable United States likely to offer little long-term help.

Canada is not immune from the criticisms directed at the international community as a whole regarding its development and reconstruction programs. It must reform its own practices and approaches along with the other donors. The money it has committed needs to flow more quickly and efficiently. The reliance on contractors and agencies must be reduced, and the capacity to get the job done must become the number one priority.

If Canada takes the lead, and demands that others do the same, there is a real possibility that Afghans will get the chance to shape their own lives and live in security with hope of a better economic future. But time has virtually run out. Change is urgently needed, and leadership is essential. It is time for Canada and Canadians to step up, not back. ■

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Amin Trazai, "Afghanistan: ISAF Warning Offers Chance to Break Destructive Cycle," Radio Free Europe, October 13, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Decima Research/Canadian Press.

<sup>3</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (New York: United Nations, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Trazai, "Afghanistan: ISAF Warning Offers Chance to Break Destructive Cycle."

# A stable Afghanistan is within reach

by Hakan Tunç

**T**

HE DEBATE OVER CANADA'S MILITARY DEPLOYMENT IN KANDAHAR province has, until now, focused on the "why" question (why are we in Afghanistan?) and the "what" question (what is our mission in Afghanistan: peacekeeping or peacemaking?). As it is now clear that Canadian troops in Afghanistan are at war against the Taliban and its supporters, the major questions around which debate should occur is: What are the prospects of the mission's success? Can we win this war? Can we achieve our objectives in Afghanistan?

Let me clarify what I mean by *we* and *win*. *We* means not only Canadian troops, but also the other member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) serving in Afghanistan. The Canadian mission is intrinsically intertwined with NATO's. A Canadian victory in Kandahar will be of little significance if NATO fails to make progress against other Taliban

strongholds inside Afghanistan. All of Afghanistan, especially the southern provinces where the Taliban is most active, is the battlefield. Overcoming the Taliban in part of the country is not enough as long as they maintain their strongholds elsewhere as bases to continue their assaults. Canada and other NATO members are in the same boat, and will all sink or swim together. This is especially true of Britain, the Netherlands and the United States, the three countries whose troops are engaged in active warfare in southern Afghanistan.

Identifying *winning* is not easy. NATO forces are engaged in a counterinsurgency operation, and in this kind of warfare there are no victory parades. Realistically, NATO will never be able to defeat the Taliban and their ilk in Afghanistan, unless the Taliban leadership decides to forego armed struggle, which is a very remote possibility. Winning therefore should be defined as weakening the Taliban's power to the extent that its militancy is reduced to little more than a nuisance, say to one suicide bombing per season as opposed to the current rate of one suicide attack every week. We will "win" when we establish a secure environment for people to carry out their daily activities without fear and when we ensure that the Afghan government has the capacity to establish and sustain a secure environment on its own. This may take many years, even a decade.

The prospects of stabilizing Afghanistan increasingly preoccupy the minds of Canadians. As bad news flows from Afghanistan and the number of Canadian casualties mounts, there is growing doubt that this goal can be reached in southern Afghanistan. This doubt is understandable. The problems seem intractable. The enemy is ferocious and fanatical, the Afghan national government is largely dysfunctional and most local officials are corrupt. Add to this the existence of multiple warlords, the drug trade and Pakistan's support for the Taliban.

And yet, there are reasons to be optimistic about success in Afghanistan. The Afghan population remains generally pro-American and pro-NATO, and its appetite for sustained conflict is low after more than two decades of war. Most Afghans do not

view NATO troops, including Canadian soldiers, as an occupation force. By contrast, almost every Afghan was against the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Moreover, NATO has overwhelming firepower against the Taliban. The Taliban are not invincible and make costly mistakes. Afghanistan is not a quagmire for NATO.

Success in this war will depend on determinants on three fronts: the home front of NATO countries, the operational front in southern Afghanistan and the degree of improvement in Afghan security institutions. Developments on each of these fronts will inevitably affect the others.

## The home front

Sustained public support for the mission at home is the first condition NATO member countries fighting in Afghanistan must meet for success to occur. The level of public support, in turn, mostly depends on the number of troop fatalities in Afghanistan. If troop fatalities continue to mount rapidly, the presence of Canadian, British and Dutch soldiers in Afghanistan will become too politically costly, leading to a premature withdrawal from the NATO mission. Liberal democracies are casualty-averse, whereas the Taliban are not. The Taliban can sacrifice hundreds of militants; we cannot. In this asymmetric warfare, the resolve to fight is also asymmetric.

This inverse relationship between casualties and public support is clear in Canada.

On the eve of the Canadian troop deployment in Kandahar, the majority of Canadians (around 60 per cent) were supportive of the mission. Six months and more than

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three dozen fatalities later, this support has declined to little more than 30 per cent. Canadians have become increasingly dismayed over the loss of Canadian life. What makes many Canadians sceptical about the mission is not so much its perceived purpose or the belief that it is ultimately “Bush’s war,” but rather the cost of the mission measured in terms of human life and its chances of success. As long as Canadian troops carry out their operations with minimal casualties, a significant minority – maybe a majority – of Canadians will support the mission. This support will require Prime Minister Stephen Harper to clearly convey to the public the importance of the Canadian deployment in Afghanistan, something he has failed to do so far. The counterargument – that most Canadians, and Quebecers in particular, want to see their military’s primary role as peacekeeping rather than soldiering – may be overblown.

If Canadian troop fatalities in Afghanistan continue to mount rapidly, public support is likely to decline further, putting enormous pressure on the government to withdraw. A turning point in the decline of public support may come if the number of Canadian deaths passes a psychological threshold, such as 50 or 100. In these circumstances, public support could easily fall well below 30 per cent, with little possibility of recovery. This would mean the end of the Canadian mission in Kandahar. The government would either pull Canadian troops out of Afghanistan prematurely, reduce their number substantially or redeploy them to safer areas inside Afghanistan still under NATO command. Extending the presence of Canadian troops beyond 2009 would be completely out of the question, regardless of the level of progress achieved in Kandahar.

In light of the above, the main question that needs to be answered is: can Canadian fatalities be kept sufficiently low? The answer to this question is yes. Thus far, most Canadian casualties have been the result of three sources: in descending order, fighting, suicide bombs and roadside bombs. Casualties from roadside bombs (Improvised Explosive Devices or IEDs) cannot be fully eliminated, but with technology they can be kept low. In Kandahar province, Canadian troops are now using infrared technology to defuse IEDs, to great effect. In the past few

**We will “win” when we establish a secure environment for people to carry out their daily activities without fear and when we ensure that the Afghan government has the capacity to establish and sustain a secure environment on its own.**

months, only one Canadian casualty from an IED was reported.

Suicide bombing is a different story. The only effective weapon against suicide bombers is vigilance (in addition to having intelligence to preempt the attacks). Suicide bombing has so far taken the lives of five Canadian soldiers, four of them in one single attack in September 2006. One bright spot in analyzing these gruesome attacks is that, according to American military sources, almost all the bombers have been Pashtun villagers from Pakistan with little training. As the Taliban turn their attention to soft targets and Afghan government members (whom they see as collaborators), suicide attacks against Canadian and other NATO troops may decline.

In the coming months, most Canadian fatalities are likely to result from direct combat with the Taliban as Canadian troops increasingly take the battle into Taliban territory in Kandahar. As Canadians become more battle-hardened and experienced, however, we should expect a decline in Canadian fatalities on the battlefield. If these predictions hold, it is most likely that public support for the mission in Canada will remain at its current level of around 35 per cent – a politically bearable situation for the government in terms of keeping the troops in Afghanistan. A similar prospect is also likely in Britain and the Netherlands.

### **The operational front: Southern Afghanistan**

The outcome of this war will be largely determined on the operational (or military/security) front in the four provinces of southern Afghanistan. The war against the Taliban and its allies can be characterized as a counterinsurgency war, albeit with some Afghan characteristics. Fighting the Taliban insurgency is, above all, about routing, killing and capturing its militants. Equally important, the war NATO is fighting is about gaining the allegiance and support of local residents.

Negotiation with the Taliban is a delusion. The Taliban militants are motivated by an ideology based on a radical interpretation of Islam derived from the Deobandi school of thought. They will not settle for anything less than imposing their ideology on all of Afghanistan, something they had largely achieved in the 1990s. Diplomacy and compromise are alien concepts to the Taliban leadership. What could one negoti-

ate with the Taliban, after all – the right of girls to attend school, the acceptable length of men's beards? In the words of one Afghan official from Kandahar province, "The line is very clear now. This fight is between the democrats and the fundamentalists. If we do not kill the fundamentalists, they will kill us."

Even without negotiation, however, the future prospects of military success are more promising than many believe. There are several reasons for optimism. The obvious one is NATO's firepower and superior planning and technology. Since their deployment, coalition troops in Afghanistan have not lost a single battle and have killed scores of Taliban fighters. Equally important is the clear understanding now existing within NATO that an offensive stance against the Taliban can only be achieved by the deployment of large numbers of forces on the ground. Small battles here and there are ineffective – as is the reliance on army patrols, as Canadian troops learned in the first weeks of their deployment. This past spring, Canadian troops' engagement in piecemeal and small battles against the Taliban in the areas around Kandahar City accomplished little and failed to dismantle the Taliban's control in many villages and small towns, while taking an unprecedented toll on Canadian troops and nurturing the perception among the Taliban that Canadian troops are faint-hearted.

Only when NATO began to take the battle to Taliban strongholds in the countryside and resorted to aggressive operational military tactics was some progress made. The two large military offensives launched in southern Afghanistan this past summer – Operation Mountain Thrust and Operation Medusa – proved that coalition forces,

together with the Afghan National Army, could defeat the Taliban even in the latter's traditional strongholds. Operation Medusa, involving a Canadian offensive in Pashmul near Kandahar City, mostly cleared the area of Taliban forces.

From a tactical perspective, large-scale military offensives may not seem the appropriate way to conduct a counter-insurgency operation. Experts agree that counterinsurgencies require the use of minimum force in response to the enemy's asymmetrical warfare tactics, such as ambushes and assassinations. Yet large-scale military offensives have certain advantages in NATO's counterinsurgency operations. First, they affect the psychology of many local Afghans by demonstrating who is, ultimately, the stronger fighting force. By merely occupying and holding its ground, the Taliban gain prestige in the eyes of local Afghans. Thus, uprooting the Taliban from such places is critical.

Furthermore, the Taliban frequently resort to conventional war tactics alongside guerrilla ones. During NATO's operations this past summer, for reasons that are not clear, the Taliban chose to stay and fight pitched battles. This gave the coalition the opportunity to hit back and inflict heavy losses. During the two large military operations, it is estimated that the Taliban lost more than a thousand militants, a large loss considering that the number of active Taliban militants operating in Kandahar province is no more than a few thousand.

Winning the allegiance, help and support of local populations is complicated. We know that, except for a few districts in the southern provinces, the Taliban do not have strong popular support. Because they are a recent movement rooted in the

Afghan refugee camps and madrasas across the border in Pakistan, the Taliban have no natural tribal, ideological or military allies in southern Afghanistan. The Taliban's radical ideology is alien to the traditionally tolerant version of Islam practised by most Afghans. Even though the Taliban share Pashtun ethnicity with 40 per cent of the Afghan population, this does not automatically translate into Pashtun support for the Taliban. The Pashtuns are divided across tribal and regional lines – President Hamid Karzai himself is a Pashtun.

The gravest threat to a future coalition victory would be the failure to obtain local

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Afghan support, the consequence of which would be increased support for the Taliban. The most potent factor that may alienate local support lies in the drug policies of NATO and the Afghan government.

The current policy is to destroy Afghan poppy crops and to punish farmers who engage in the cultivation of these crops. Unless this policy changes, it is unlikely that the Taliban will be effectively routed. Although there is no clear evidence that the Taliban are directly involved in the drug trade, poppy cultivation is their main source of financing. The Taliban receive payments from local drug barons to provide security to farmers.

**SURPRISE VISIT TO KABUL BY MINISTER [JOSÉE] VERNER:**

“Bonjour madame, is it hard for you having to live under a burka?”



The current poppy eradication policy enables the Taliban to gain sympathizers among the local population. In the southern provinces, particularly Helmand and Kandahar, poppy cultivation is the only viable source of income for tens of thousands of families. Poppy eradication may deprive local people of their livelihood. Poppy farmers do not see the difference between drug eradication teams and NATO troops, and rightly so. While NATO troops (mainly Canadians and British) are not directly involved in eradicating poppies, they provide security for American and Afghan officials who are and, hence, are seen as collaborators by most poppy farmers. Unless the poppy eradication policy changes, foreign forces in Afghanistan may come to be regarded not as saviours but as invaders.

A recent United Nations report shows that poppy eradication programs have been a failure and are likely to remain so in the foreseeable future. In the past year, eradication teams were able to destroy only a tiny fraction of poppy cultivation. Consequently, the poppy yield in Afghanistan increased by nearly 60 per cent in the past year, mostly in the poppy heartland in Helmand.

Crop substitution, which is often advocated as a solution to the problem, will likely

not work given the tremendous economic advantages of growing poppies – poppy cultivation nets four times the revenue of wheat and twice that of garden vegetables. More creative alternative strategies are needed. One such strategy has been offered by the Senlis Council, a European think tank, and by Canada's Nobel laureate John Polanyi. It involves legalizing but regulating poppy production in Afghanistan. The poppy supply will be used to produce opium-based medicines, which are already in high demand for patients with cancer and HIV/AIDS in developing countries. If opium is legalized, farmers will no longer buy protection. Despite the difficulties in initiating this strategy (the international community would be required to legalize opium, to name one), it is worth considering. Buying the entire Afghan poppy crop at the current market price and burning it is politically and financially not palatable to NATO countries, the United States in particular.

Turning the tide against the Taliban also depends on reconstruction, although less so compared to establishing stability and

security. The link between security and development in Afghanistan, however, is not completely clear. The assumption that reconstruction will immunize local residents against the Taliban may not be true. Afghans in some endemically poor areas that lack basic services have never been supporters of the Taliban. On the other hand, certain regions where schools, clinics and wells have been built in the past few years have succumbed to Taliban control.

Take Zabul province in the south. The U.S. Army spent \$17 million on development projects there in the past two years with the help of local Afghans. This assistance did little to bring order to Zabul's countryside because the Taliban gained the upper hand in providing security and distributing justice to the people. The example of Zabul indicates that not all hopes should be pinned on the Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – mixed military and civilian groups established to win the hearts and minds of Afghans living in poverty. The Taliban resurgence in southern Afghanistan can be directly linked to the absence of law and order as well as to Taliban terror tactics. These factors may be more important than any absence of infrastructure.

Economic development projects can be effective in winning the support of Afghans when those projects enhance the income and employment opportunities of local residents. The most needed projects in the rural areas of southern Afghanistan are related to water resources necessary for farming. This requires NATO to prioritize projects. Building irrigation canals should be the focus of infrastructure projects rather than, say, roads and clinics.

## The Afghan institutional front

Another condition that must be met to weaken popular support for the Taliban involves the Afghan government. It is clear that the ability of the Taliban to win local sympathy is directly and positively correlated with the Afghan government's failure to establish a solid official presence across the country, particularly in the realms of security, justice and social services. Thus, when the Taliban burn down coeducational schools and kill teachers, it is not only because they oppose the education of women (the Taliban banned girls from school during their five-year rule) but also because, in many areas, schools are the only symbol of government authority.

**Negotiation with the Taliban is a delusion.**

**What could one negotiate with the Taliban, after all – the right of girls to attend school, the acceptable length of men's beards?**

The only viable long-term policy to defeat the Taliban is to strengthen and expand the Afghan army and police – more recruitment, more ammunition, more pay and more training. After the fall of the Taliban in late 2001, the United States and NATO put most of their energy into building a professional and ethnically mixed Afghan army. The Afghan National Army (ANA), created from scratch, is now 35,000 strong. Although it suffers from the usual problems of corruption and indiscipline facing every Afghan institution, its quality and performance are improving. The ANA effectively fought alongside NATO forces during military operations against the Taliban this summer. With additional resources forthcoming from

the U.S. government (\$2 billion worth of weapons and vehicles), the ANA will likely be better equipped and trained in the future and will ultimately increase its troop strength to more than 50,000. This number, however, may be insufficient to secure the country. According to several estimates, at least 100,000 Afghan troops are needed for the task.

The emphasis on creating a professional Afghan national army came at the expense of creating reputable and effective police forces. The Afghan National Police (ANP) is the Achilles heel in Afghanistan's security net today. By all accounts, both the quality and

“soft” civilian targets like schools. For that, a police force is necessary. Effective and honest policing may be the key to defeating the Taliban in the long term. Many Afghans in the southern provinces frequently cite harassment by the local police as being among their most serious problems.

Upgrading police forces is a more complex and decentralized function than creating an army. Tribal politics, corruption and warlords stand in the way. The first necessary step is to recognize that without accommodating local power-holders and finding compromises, little can be achieved on this front. In this regard, a step largely in the right direction was President Karzai's appointment of some 50 regional strongmen as police chiefs in June. Karzai's policy has been criticized for legitimizing the power of local warlords, some of whom have violated human rights and are involved with the drug trade. But the alternative to this policy, at least in the short term, is not clear. The options in Afghanistan are usually between the bad and the worse. The option of clean, technocratic and powerful local leaders does not exist.

NATO can significantly contribute to improving the quality and quantity of the Afghan police forces. It should first recognize that the official target of 55,000 police is woefully inadequate. This means a ratio of about 180 Afghan police per 100,000 inhabitants, which is low compared to other countries in the region. Based on an analysis of other stability operations, the number of domestic police in Afghanistan should be at least 250 per 100,000 inhabitants after five years. This means increasing the number of Afghan police to approximately 75,000.

Improving the quality of police forces in the “ink spots” – secure zones that

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**Many Afghans in the southern provinces frequently cite harassment by the local police as being among their most serious problems.**

quantity of police are abysmal. Police officers are semitrained and corrupt, and their pay is both low and highly irregular. As a result, the police frequently resort to extortion from ordinary Afghans. Partly because of these problems, and partly because they are organized on a regional basis, most police forces have a close working relationship with local warlords.

The importance of establishing an effective police force cannot be emphasized enough. A time-honoured rule when fighting a counterinsurgency war is to create an effective local police force. The NATO forces in southern Afghanistan can defeat insurgents in pitched battles, but they cannot counter the Taliban's terror tactics, such as suicide bombings and strikes on

NATO hopes to slowly expand outward – is particularly essential. In a promising sign, after retaking control of the Andar district in Gazhni province from the Taliban, an American and Afghan National Army brigade announced that it would remain until a new police force can be trained and deployed. A similar approach is recommended for districts in Kandahar, such as Panjwai, where Canadian and Afghan troops recently purged most of the Taliban.

Strengthening and expanding the army and police forces are also essential to secure the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and thus, in the long run, prevent the infiltration of Taliban militants from Pakistan. Intelligence reports indicate that the Taliban have training camps, recruiting centres and safe havens in Pakistan. The Pakistani city of Quetta, capital of Baluchistan, is considered the Taliban's "command central." The Taliban's most important leadership council, the Quetta Shura, has strong support from elements within the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) and the Pakistani government. It is also evident that Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf is either unable or unwilling to control the ISI's support for the Taliban.

It is unrealistic to expect the Pakistani government to play a significant role in blocking Taliban insurgents and their supplies at the border, regardless of the amount of pressure Western countries may exert on it. This is largely because Pakistan has other strategic objectives related to its historic rivalry with India. In the eyes of the Paki-

stani government, a pro-Pakistani Taliban regime in Kabul will be a bulwark against India's increasing influence in the region. Moreover, by doing as little as possible to defeat the Taliban, the Pakistani government can continue to exploit American reliance on Islamabad in the pursuit of Al Qaeda leaders.

Given our conundrum with Pakistan, the only feasible solution appears to be strengthening border controls on the Afghan side. Indeed, "sealing" the border could seriously disrupt the Taliban's supply lines. This can only be done, however, by increasing Afghan troop levels and by improving the level of training they receive from NATO. American special forces have played a critical role in stopping infiltrators and training Afghans to patrol their eastern borders over the last two years. With NATO's financial and personnel commitment, this relative success can be repeated along the southern border.

There is a good chance that the tide can be turned in Afghanistan in favour of coalition forces. We are at the beginning of a long process of stabilizing the country. It has been only a few months since NATO assumed responsibility in the parts of Afghanistan which suffered from a power vacuum when the Taliban regime was ousted. Taliban commanders are often quoted as saying, "The foreigners have the clocks; we have the time." In the next year or two, with commitment and appropriate policies, NATO and the Afghan government may very well find that the Taliban is running on borrowed time only. ■

# Canada is ignoring its own advice

by Ernie Regehr

In

THE IMMEDIATE WAKE OF SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, THE DOMINANT refrain was that the menace had arrived on our shores and we in North America would now all have to rise to the challenge and “defend our way of life.” But Prime Minister Chrétien’s early message was different. Now more than ever, he told the House of Commons, we would have to *depend* on our way of life: “Let our actions be guided by a spirit of wisdom and perseverance, by our values and our way of life. As we press the struggle, let us never, ever, forget who we are and what we stand for.”

It was a distinction that went unnoticed where it counted most. Washington adopted the mantra that on 9-11 “everything changed,” while CNN’s omnipresent banner headline trumpeted “America’s New War.” The claim that “everything changed” actively discouraged the idea that we could depend on our way of life, on its durable civil values and standards, in responding

to the challenge of terrorism. The insistence that we were in extraordinary times fed the view that extraordinary measures were now required and we should not be constrained or inhibited by the rules and values that guide us in normal times. The “everything changed” mood fostered the sense that we were in a new context in which the usual political rudders and the navigational aids offered by established morality could not be relied on and needed to be jettisoned in favour of new tools.

Within weeks of the attack, CNN’s banner ceased to be a metaphor. Claiming self-defence, the United States attacked Afghani-

stan; the United Nations Security Council implicitly agreed; NATO states invoked article V of their alliance pact to declare the terrorist attack on the United States an attack on them all; and Canada sent four ships to the war effort in symbolic but unmistakable acquiescence to the prevailing mood – and in sanguine disregard of the Prime Minister’s earlier wisdom.

Five years into America’s New War, we’ve seen a surfeit of innovative tools, used by the United States as well as Canada: arrests without trial or security certificate detentions, violations of privacy through wiretap programs, illegal deportations, abuse of prisoners and of course renewed warfare. In time, warfare converted Iraq from an oppressive state that nevertheless eschewed Islamic extremism and refused cooperation with Islamic terrorism into a spectacularly failed state where lawlessness and escalating sectarian violence offer an open arena for the recruitment, training and activity of terrorists. In Afghanistan, the all-out American attacks in 2001 deposed the Taliban with impressive efficiency, but then things got a lot more complicated. Once again, Afghanistan was flooded with small arms and light weapons. Warlords continued to use their private armies for criminal trafficking in drugs in a thriving opium trade that now accounts for half of the country’s GDP and finances the still-growing insurgency.

Washington and Ottawa still find battles to win and victories to proclaim. But from the United Nations to a host of analysts and think tanks, the testimony speaks to a steadily and significantly deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. Insurgent fighting is widespread, and suicide bombers, as Ca-

nadians have tragically learned, increasingly attack foreign troops as well as expatriate aid and construction workers. Afghan police and government officials and facilities – notably schools – continue to be prominent targets. The Canadian death toll continues to rise and the end is not in sight.

## Lessons spurned

It is a bitter irony that these wars to build democracy and end terror follow more than a decade of lessons learned about what does and doesn’t work when trying to reverse state failure, build sustainable societies and prevent violent conflict – in other words, peacebuilding.

The basic understanding that had emerged out of the peacebuilding decade that followed the end of the Cold War was that to prevent violent conflict, and especially to prevent backsliding in societies just emerging out of prolonged war, it was necessary to focus on building conditions in which the local population could see positive change and would develop some confidence that the pursuit of such change was being seriously engaged. Elections, as a means of demonstrating a commitment to political inclusiveness and power sharing, were an important component, but by no means the central one. Inclusiveness had to be part of a much larger strategy: building local security institutions, like the police and judiciary, that were experienced by the people as fair and operating in the interests of all; building an infrastructure of basic services, especially humanitarian relief to the most stricken populations but

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also education, health care, transport and communication; the demobilization and disarming of combatants to give the civilian population the assurance of a serious effort to control crime and sectarian violence; and the start of economic development measures.

When Mozambique emerged from decades of violent conflict in the early 1990s, the prospects were woefully dim for one of the world's poorest countries, rent by ethnic and regional divides and awash with Kalashnikovs and every imaginable make and style of small arms. But combinations of development projects – especially ones that linked economic activity to gun collection and cooperation among former enemies – with the buildup of basic services and good governance have transformed it into an African success story. Mozambique's remarkable recovery has taken more than a decade and is obviously not finished, but it is testimony to both the possibilities and the requirements for overcoming prolonged armed conflict.

Complementing the peacebuilding lessons, the Canadian-sponsored report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), "The Responsibility to Protect," was released in late 2001 and gradually became the focus and stimulus for an international effort to formally recognize the international community's responsibility to come to the protection of highly vulnerable communities when their own governments failed or refused to provide such protection. On the military protection of the vulnerable, the report had brief but explicit advice about a new kind of military intervention, for humanitarian purposes, that "involves a form of military action significantly more narrowly focused and targeted than all out warfighting." Winning the acceptance of

civilian populations, says the report, "means accepting limitations and demonstrating through the use of restraint that the [military] operation is not a war to defeat a state but an operation to protect populations in that state from being harassed, persecuted or killed."<sup>1</sup>

In Afghanistan the lessons have been spurned rather than learned – reconstruction objectives have been radically underfunded and military methods have been all too familiar. Indeed, America's Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) had the declared purpose of defeating a state without any plan for successfully supporting a successor regime. Removing the Taliban was also to remove the obstacles to human rights and democracy, but that was more an added hope than a determined objective. The core concern in the attack on Afghanistan, practically and formally, was the interests and security of the United States. It was an invasion intended to advance the interests of the invader, and it was formally acknowledged as such.

That does not mean it was illegal, and the UN Security Council, by acknowledging the right of self-defence, implicitly confirmed that it was not in violation of the UN Charter. Still, the focus was the safety and interests of Americans, and five years later American OEF forces in Afghanistan continue to operate formally under the self-defence umbrella. There is no bilateral agreement between the United States and Afghanistan through which Afghanistan acknowledges or welcomes the U.S. presence, which means that the United States continues to override Afghan sovereignty and continues to operate entirely at its own discretion, according to its own goals and interests and without feeling any obligation to consult its host.

Canada participated in the early phase of the war, focused on the destruction of the

Taliban regime and on immediate post-regime counterinsurgency operations (it was during these operations that four Canadian soldiers were killed by fire from U.S. aircraft). Then in 2003 Canada joined the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which was established in the 2001 post-Taliban meeting of Afghans in Bonn to launch an interim government and set in motion a process leading to elections. The ISAF mandate, approved by the UN Security Council, is sharply different from that of OEF. The objective of ISAF forces is not the security of the intervening forces, but the security of Afghanistan.

Explanations for Canada's priority involvement in Afghanistan have ranged from helping to give NATO a 21st-century purpose<sup>2</sup> to repairing Canada-U.S. relations to advancing neo-imperialist agendas – but also to alleviating human suffering and building conditions for a durable peace. No doubt the motives of the various actors cover all of the above, but the ISAF mandate is overtly focused on this last objective: to advance conditions for a durable peace. ISAF was initially limited to Kabul and the region around it, and protection and peacebuilding objectives were prominently featured. When Canadian general Rick Hillier, now Chief of Staff of the Canadian Forces, served as ISAF Commander for a six-month rotation beginning in August 2004, he emphasized both civilian protection and peacebuilding approaches.

A shortcoming of the early ISAF was its narrow range of operation, but in late 2003 the UN Security Council expanded ISAF's mandate "to allow it, as resources permit, to support the Afghan Transitional Authority and its successors in the maintenance of security in areas of Afghanistan outside Kabul and its environs" (Resolution 1510). In each renewal of the ISAF mandate, the Security Council

calls on ISAF "to continue to work in close consultation with the Afghan Transitional Authority and its successors and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General as well as with the Operation Enduring Freedom Coalition in the implementation of the force mandate."

However, the failure to distinguish between ISAF and OEF methodologies, and the decision in the south to align ISAF closely with OEF's counterinsurgency war, have helped bring about a marked decline in the legitimacy of both ISAF and Hamid Karzai's Afghan government. Counterinsurgency strategies that kill civilians and displace communities<sup>3</sup> and charges that ISAF's close

**In Afghanistan the lessons have been spurned rather than learned – reconstruction objectives have been radically underfunded and military methods have been all too familiar.**

military collaboration with OEF is advancing American interests rather than serving the security needs of Afghans have contributed to the sense that the government is being supported by foreign forces that do not have the interests of Afghans at heart. Hence the suspicion that the government itself does not have the interests of Afghans at heart is exacerbated. Failure to meet reconstruction goals (in significant measure due to the failure of the international community to provide effective nonmilitary support), charges of corruption and deals with feared warlords have also contributed to a decline in public support for the government and thus to a sense that ISAF is propping up an illegitimate regime. The decline in legitimacy of the government and ISAF is mutually reinforcing.

By early 2006 Canadian forces – initially explicitly under OEF but now under ISAF – were deployed in the Kandahar region, where the legitimacy of the government and its foreign backers is most seriously in question. Rejecting the counsel of its own Responsibility to Protect commission, Canada has been adamant that ISAF and OEF strategies are identical. Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor told the House of Commons that in Canada's switch from an OEF to an ISAF force, "There will not be one iota of change except that we will be under NATO command instead of Enduring Freedom. Nothing will change. We are following the same tactics. We are following NATO tactics." Why, then, do both the Afghan peace agreement and the UN Security Council make a clear distinction between ISAF and OEF? If the roles and tactics are indeed identical, why bother with ISAF in the first place?

The full integration in the south of ISAF into OEF counterinsurgency operations has in fact been a recipe for failure. The only real question is whether the failure is irreversible.

### **Can the Afghan mission be fixed?**

If good intentions and serious effort were what it took, Afghanistan would be a peaceful democracy today. Instead, a half-decade of cooperative security, democratization and reconstruction effort has left a frayed and fading vision of sustainable peace.

Of course, setbacks are to be expected and are themselves not evidence of the futility of the effort. The real surprise would be if recovery from decades of war and attempts to implement the ambitious Afghanistan Compact<sup>4</sup> – "to overcome the

legacy of conflict in Afghanistan by setting conditions for sustainable economic growth and development; strengthening state institutions and civil society; removing remaining terrorist threats; meeting the challenge of counter-narcotics; rebuilding capacity and infrastructure; reducing poverty; and meeting basic human needs" – were accomplished without a hitch in a matter of a few years. The question is whether the inevitable setbacks will be a spur to more effective effort or simply lead to the conclusion that in Afghanistan good governance ambitions have to be shelved in favour of a series of temporarily expedient and shifting protection contracts with an assortment of armed warlords, drug barons, gangsters and criminals, with the population permanently abandoned to endure assaults on their rights.

The good intentions for Afghanistan remain valid, but persisting in efforts that are demonstrably failing to implement them is not. CARE Canada President John Watson put it succinctly: "The truth is that our strategy for reconstituting failed states – military intervention followed by democratic elections – is failing." As former foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy put it, the Afghan mission was to be a careful mix of diplomacy, development and defence – portrayed as a 3-D approach – but "now it has become one big 'D.'" Even Defence Minister O'Connor has come to recognize that "Western militaries cannot eliminate the Taliban by force."<sup>5</sup>

NATO representatives also acknowledge that "just killing the Taliban is not really the game. The objective is to occupy space that is currently left to the insurgents ... A lot of these spaces are effectively ungoverned."<sup>6</sup> But the key to stabilizing such space in the

long run is not so much military prowess as it is winning the support of the local population for the government that is to occupy the space, as well as for the domestic and foreign forces sent to patrol it. In September, reports tracked the progress of Canadian troops in clearing Afghan insurgents from a region measuring four by five kilometres in Panjwai district. The removal of Taliban fighters from this particular district (some were killed, some were captured, some fled) was hailed as a significant victory. At the same time, however, there are reports that as much as 80 per cent of the local population in the Kandahar region supports the Taliban.<sup>7</sup>

If the Karzai government has indeed lost the confidence of Afghans<sup>8</sup> within specific ethnic groups and regions, it raises the prospect of Canadian and other troops in Kandahar region having been drawn into fighting on one side in Afghanistan's longstanding civil war. Current stabilization efforts are premised on reinforcing the current political order, an order many Afghanistan watchers regard as intrinsically unstable inasmuch as it attempts to reward one side in this war. What was the Northern Alliance now dominates, while the regions and ethnic communities broadly linked to the Taliban are sidelined. Journalist Eric Margolis describes the forces which the West knows simply as the "Taliban" as including "a growing coalition of veteran Taliban fighters led by Mullah Dadullah, other clans of Pashtun tribal warriors, and nationalist resistance forces under Jalaladin Hikkani and former prime minister Gulbadin Hekmatyar."<sup>9</sup>

In other words, ISAF's adversaries are not simply spoilers without political objectives or their own constituencies. Our political leaders portray the Afghanistan war as a

fight by those who love freedom against those who hate our freedoms, but it looks increasingly like a fight between insiders and outsiders. Seddiq Weera, an Afghan who is a senior associate at the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University and a senior policy adviser to the Minister of Education in Afghanistan, describes these Taliban-linked communities as having genuine grievances – notably having been frozen out of the 2001 Bonn accord – which need to be recognized and addressed through a political process.<sup>10</sup>

**Current stabilization efforts are premised on reinforcing the current political order, an order many Afghanistan watchers regard as intrinsically unstable inasmuch as it attempts to reward one side in Afghanistan's longstanding civil war.**

As long as they are excluded from the political process they will act as spoilers.

Peggy Mason, a former disarmament ambassador for Canada and currently an instructor at the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, adds that for foreign military stabilization forces to be successful, the key players have to want peace more than war – if that is the case, "individual spoilers can be effectively isolated and dealt with."<sup>11</sup> But if significant stakeholders believe that peace will leave them indefinitely marginalized, they will prefer war to peace – and Afghans wrote the book on the futility of trying to militarily defeat determined spoilers mounting armed insurgencies. That suggests opening the political process for renewed negotiations to bring dissident communities and regions into the political and governance process, and Prime Minister Stephen

Harper's assertion in the House of Commons on May 17 that "Al Qaeda and the Taliban are not interested in peace" clearly needs some nuancing.

Negotiation between states and their bitter enemies is hardly a new concept, but suggestions that the government of Afghanistan undertake such negotiations have been largely met with ridicule. Afghanistan's Ambassador to Canada cast it as a general principle: there cannot be "peace talks between an elected government and heavily-armed gangs of militant school-burners."<sup>12</sup>

If that is indeed a principle, we should be grateful that it is regularly honoured in the breach. Governments of varying degrees of democracy are even now in prolonged negotiations with nonstate groups guilty of vicious attacks on civilians and state authorities. India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Sudan make up a partial list of governments that have finally had to sit down and deal with insurgents guilty of the vilest of deeds. The elected government of Uganda is now in talks with the Lord's Resistance Army. This is a group of heavily armed bandits with no apparent agenda other than the maniacal fantasies of its leader and the kidnapping of young children, but after two decades the unspeakable horrors for which there have proven to be no military solutions must be ended. And so they're talking.<sup>13</sup>

Enemies talk to each other because that is how wars are ended. Calls by Canadians for talks by the government of Afghanistan and its international backers with the Taliban recognize some hard realities. First, that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict – indeed, Canada's defence chief, General Hillier, recently confirmed it "has never been the strategy" to defeat the Taliban militarily: "We don't have to defeat them

militarily. What we've got to do is build a country."<sup>14</sup> Second, that many Afghans are transferring their allegiance to the very groups the international forces are fighting. Third, that rebuilding a country and restoring the legitimacy and effectiveness of the central government and its backers is not simply a matter of improved performance: it also depends on a commitment to political inclusiveness that reaches out to those now in opposition to the government. Realism demands attention to the warnings of serious failure and requires a more credible response than a call for more soldiers – and now tanks.<sup>15</sup>

A prerequisite to peace is that Afghans become persuaded that their government has the interests of all Afghans at heart. In turn, that means dealing with those political-military entities in conflict with the government that represent genuine grievances and aspirations of Afghans, a group that by some accounts now includes at least elements of the Taliban. In the south the term "Taliban" includes Pashtun nationalists – the Pashtun are Afghanistan's ethnic majority without whose cooperation national stability is impossible.<sup>16</sup> The most recent report of the Senlis Council draws an east-west line across the centre of Afghanistan between the north that is essentially in support of the government and the south that is largely under the grip of the Taliban.

It is certainly true that conditions need to be right for successful negotiations, and it is not for observers in distant Canada to name the people, places and times for talks with representatives of that broad swath of Afghans alienated from the present government. But it is entirely appropriate for outside observers to insist on the principle that the Afghan government and its backers

talk to their declared adversaries in search of accommodations that respect the needs of Afghans, including adherence to international standards of human rights.

Clearly, no one change or initiative will end this war or reverse decades of instability and conflict. An end to Pakistan's acquiescence to or connivance with Afghan spoilers acting within and from its territory is part of what needs to happen. Similarly, a reversal of the current approach to poppy crops and the opium industry is increasingly called for. Current programs of crop destruction are more likely to drive farmers to seek protection and alliance with Taliban fighters than to persuade them to forego their primary source of livelihood.

## Canadian interests and obligations

While Prime Minister Harper and Defence Minister O'Connor have regularly tried to link the Afghanistan mission to immediate and vital Canadian interests – such as if we don't fight the terrorists over there we will have to do it here – true Canadian interest in Afghanistan is both indirect and easy to define. Former defence minister Bill Graham did it as well as anyone: "We must address [failed states] not only because of the geopolitical instability they generate as breeding grounds for terrorism and international crime ..., but also because the suffering and denial of human rights challenges basic Canadian values."<sup>17</sup>

Graham simply and persuasively makes the case for Canada being engaged in the world in support of responsible governance, human rights and the safety and well-being of people. After that, because it is obviously not possible to be everywhere, it is necessary

to argue for particular cases, and Afghanistan is not any easy sell. If global leadership is a Canadian ambition, we should be at the forefront of efforts to mobilize an effective international response to glaring instances of desperate need. There is no particular Canadian interest in Afghanistan, any more than there is in the Darfur region of Sudan, the north of Uganda or the Democratic Republic of Congo – just some of the places where the international community has an obligation to help create security and protect vulnerable people.

A specific obligation to the people of Afghanistan, however, was incurred when

**Enemies talk to each other because that is how wars are ended. Calls by Canadians for talks by the government of Afghanistan and its international backers with the Taliban recognize some hard realities.**

Canada imprudently decided to join the United States in its war to unseat the Afghan government in late 2001. And now it is hard to escape our self-made Afghan dilemma. On the one hand, there is no clear, persuasive rationale for Canada to give Afghanistan priority over other, more devastating crises; on the other hand, if all others were also to question the priority accorded to Afghanistan and precipitate a wholesale military and civilian withdrawal, Afghanistan could be condemned to the worst kind of repetition of history. After helping to defeat the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the West left a devastated country to fend for itself and fall prey to the catastrophic ascendancy of the Taliban. The Afghans have paid a terrible price, and part of the cost was transferred to America when the Al Qaeda leadership that

the Taliban had been harbouring launched its September 11 attacks on the United States.

Canada has sacrificed a great deal of human and material treasure in Afghanistan. The NDP has concluded that we have reached the limit. Opinion polls suggest that at least half of Canadians have reached the same “tipping point”<sup>18</sup> and have concluded that Canadian troops should be returned home. But it is not clear that such Canadian views are driven by the level of sacrifice. Or at least, the impact of the sacrifices cannot be divorced from the question of whether the extraordinary costs are linked to real and honourable results. In fact, a September 2006 poll conducted by EKOS Research found that opposition to the Afghan mission is not driven by concerns about mounting casualties but by a sense that “the mission is unlikely to bring stability and democracy to Afghanistan.”<sup>19</sup> In that sense, there is really only one relevant question: is the ISAF mission in southern Afghanistan working? The justifiably growing Canadian doubts about the Afghanistan mission arise because of well-documented uncertainty as to whether our presence there is actually serving the human security interests of the people of Afghanistan.

It is likely that if it could be demonstrated to Canadians that our forces really are helping to build a sustainable future for Afghanistan, that we are helping to give that country a chance for survival as a stable society, a chance for it to meet the needs of its citizens and to become a constructive presence in the international community, Canadians would remain in support of the mission. It would then not be too expensive. The sacrifice in lives would be understood as profoundly costly and tragic, but as made and honoured in the pursuit of a better world. The issue of Canada’s peacekeeping tradition being in

conflict with warmaking would evaporate if there was confidence that military operations in dangerous circumstances were contributing to a broad-based peace-restoring strategy. Charges that we are there to do Washington’s bidding would be of no consequence if what we were actually doing was demonstrably serving the interests and well-being of the people of Afghanistan in creating chances for peace to take a foothold.

But that is truly the question. Is it working, or are we actively spurning the lessons of peacebuilding and humanitarian protection, as well as the values and standards of our way of life, and expending human and material treasure in a futile effort? Canada cannot allow the 2001 decision to join the war on Taliban to indefinitely trump all other considerations. Persistence in failure is not a virtue, especially when we face other serious humanitarian and military obligations in a troubled world.

Still, obligations to the people of Afghanistan continue. Ongoing support for civilian reconstruction efforts, wherever they are possible, must be ensured. To the extent that external military forces continue to be necessary, the burden must be broadly shared, meaning that sooner or later other states will need to take their turn in Afghanistan. Above all, being in solidarity with the people of Afghanistan means being unrelenting in the search for ways to be effective in support their security and viability as a stable country that respects human rights. Whether or not Canadian troops should come home is a relevant question, but there is a prior need to rethink the role, strategy and tactics of international forces generally in Afghanistan. This reevaluation needs to be undertaken by the United Nations Security Council which has authorized the ISAF

presence, by NATO which is managing that presence, and by Canadians who have asked our young men and women to pay the price of our commitment. ■

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# Nepal's Kerensky interlude

by Dominic Cardy

**F**

OR A FEW WEEKS IN THE SPRING OF 2006, THE WORLD PAID attention to Nepal, when a coalition of nominally democratic political parties and Maoist rebels united to overthrow King Gyanendra. Then, as talks between the parties and the rebels dragged on, Nepal faded back into its accustomed obscurity.

Gyanendra had seized absolute power in 2005, claiming that the elected government had been unable to deal with the Maoists' decade-long insurgency. With a long history of power-hungry aristocrats, the Nepalese have reason to worry that the king may yet attempt a comeback. But the rebels, who are consolidating their control over the country, present an even more serious threat to the future of democracy. Able negotiators, the Maoists have backed the political parties into a corner, forcing them to choose between allowing an armed force to enter a government and quickly dominate it or refusing a coalition and taking the blame for the collapse of a peace

process. The last general election took place seven years ago and the legitimacy of the democratic party leaders is dubious. Nepal may soon join a very short list of countries – China under Mao Zedong himself, Albania under Enver Hoxha, Cambodia under Pol Pot – that have experienced the dubious benefits of a Maoist regime. How it got to this point is a long story.

## Dubious democracy

Half of Nepal's 28 million people live on hills and mountains, often accessible only after days of walking. The villages that dot its cliffs are as remote as islands in the middle



**KATHMANDU:** The opening salvos in Nepal's revolution consisted of teenage boys throwing rocks at police. The police would then throw them back again, before both sides retreated for cover. DOMINIC CARDY PHOTO

of a huge and hostile ocean. In such terrain, the Maoists had little difficulty over the last decade in evading the Nepali army. A Chinese military man once told me, "A vertical metre is as hard to occupy and defend as a full kilometre of open plain." In area Nepal is roughly the size of the three Maritime provinces. Bearing in mind that eight of the world's ten highest mountains (including Everest at 8,860 metres) are within its borders, and multiplying by 1,000 as suggested by my Chinese observer, this quintessential mountain kingdom is a very big country to defend against guerrilla activity.

Nepal's northern border is defined by the Tibetan Plateau; its southern frontier has shifted with the political tides. It generates the bulk of its agricultural and industrial

wealth from the Terai, the flatlands that occupy the southernmost one sixth of the country adjacent to India. In addition to the Terai, the Kathmandu and Pokhara valleys, protected from the heat and diseases of the plains by a range of mountains and sheltered from the worst of the Himalayan winter, are regions of relative prosperity.

At the end of World War II, Nepal was ruled, as it had been for a century, by the Ranas, a prominent Nepali family that had seized control from the king and established a government of hereditary prime ministers. Monarchs, reduced to virtual house arrest, continued as heads of state but without real power. The Ranas imported European fashions and inventions, but ideas such as national liberation, liberalism and modernity

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failed to make it across the mountains. A further consequence of Nepal's geography was its fragmented demographics. Dozens of ethnic groups and languages, further divided by a caste system, rendered nearly impossible the rise of effective popular leaders able to pose an alternative to the Ranas. Peasant rebellions were quickly and ruthlessly suppressed; often the Ranas allowed hunger to do the work of soldiers as rebellious villages were starved into submission.

Still, Nepal did not entirely escape the upheavals marking the end of European empire in the mid-20th century. Newly independent India, unhappy at the anach-

**Reformers had promised everything, but changed nothing. Democracy had not led to development, or tangible progress.**

**These lessons were not lost on a new generation of young Nepalese.**

ronism perched on its border, supported Nepali dissidents gathered under the banner of the Nepali Congress (NC) Party, modelled on the Indian National Congress. A guerilla war launched in 1950 led to a New Delhi–negotiated ceasefire one year later that restored the monarchy and established a multiparty democracy.

The seeds that have led Nepal to the brink of a Maoist takeover in 2006 were sown in 1951. Eager young Nepali Congress cadres spread the rhetoric of socialism and nationalism and the panacea of a constituent assembly to remote corners of the country, creating expectations for progress and development and introducing a new awareness of Nepal as a state. But the new government entered years of negotiations with the palace,

steadily losing ground in several rounds of constitutional negotiations. In opposition, the NC had made calls for a popular assembly to draft a new constitution the centrepiece of its program, but once it was in power the promise was forgotten.

Elections were finally held in 1959, but when an NC majority was returned to office King Mahendra, backed by Ranas who continued to dominate the armed forces and bureaucracy, responded by seizing power, banning political parties and establishing an absolute monarchy. Reformers had promised everything, but changed nothing. Compromising with defeated enemies had allowed the *ancien régime* to return in greater strength. Democracy had not led to development, or tangible progress. These lessons were not lost on a new generation of young Nepalese.

The next three decades saw the country open to the world even as the monarchy maintained its hold on power. Exotic landscapes and relaxed drug laws made Kathmandu a favoured haunt for hippies, while endemic poverty and an elite quick to adapt to new opportunities made the country a magnet for foreign aid. New money created the kernel of a new middle class, and taxes on a limited manufacturing industry, concentrated in the Terai and Kathmandu, helped fund a broader-based education system.

More young Nepalese travelled abroad for higher education; India's universities were a popular destination – particularly the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. JNU was dominated by Marxists and Maoists, looking for scapegoats to blame for India's post-independence failures. For Nepali students, the lectures on imperialism resonated even more strongly than with

their Indian hosts – Baburam Bhattarai, chief ideologue of the Maoist rebels, holds a doctorate from JNU. Marx may have known nothing of Nepal, but his description of the bourgeois impact on feudal societies fit well enough:

*The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation.*<sup>1</sup>

The Himalayan kingdom had yet to develop a strong bourgeois class, and the “ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors’” and “ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm” were accurate descriptors of their homeland. However, the implications from Marx were that Nepalese communists needed to encourage capitalism as the next step on the road to socialism. This progression has never appealed to revolutionaries: calling workers to the barricades is more exciting than encouraging peasants to take jobs in urban sweatshops. Hence the draw of Maoism, the doctrine cobbled together by Mao Zedong and his Chinese Communist Party: “It can therefore be said that politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed.”<sup>2</sup>

Mao Zedong Thought holds that the peasantry can serve as the engine for revolution, as long as it is led by a properly disciplined communist party. In the emphasis on a “vanguard party,” Maoism is not unlike

Leninism, with the added appeal to Third World revolutionaries of a framework to justify any means – rhetoric, compromise or atrocity – in furthering the revolution. This, along with insightful writings on guerrilla war, has been enough to ensure Mao Zedong Thought’s life past its creator’s death in 1975 and disavowal by China’s post-Maoist leadership.

Nepal’s royal government responded to the post-1960 challenges with token reforms. Members of banned parties were allowed to hold seats in the rubber-stamp parliament, and active suppression waxed and waned. The NC had long since lost its monopoly on dissidence, and was now joined by a range of fractious communist parties, each calling for more radical solutions than the others. Armed uprisings were sometimes backed by India and sometimes opposed, as New Delhi’s strategic interests evolved in a volatile region. In 1989 Indian displeasure with the increasingly autocratic regime of King Birendra, who had succeeded his father in 1972, reached such a level that sanctions were imposed, crippling Nepal’s economy. The rift coincided with the global liberation movement that swept away the regimes of eastern Europe, and in April 1990 bloody protests in Kathmandu forced the King to cede power to the political parties under a deal brokered, as usual, by India. A new constitution was promulgated, drafted by party leaders, legal experts and representatives of the palace, who once again played their hand as a stabilizing symbol to great advantage. The mistakes of 1951 were repeated. Democracy was restored but the palace was left with significant power, and the constitution gave more power to political parties than to the citizens of Nepal.

In 1991 the NC won an absolute majority of seats in the first national election in more than 30 years. While the democratic communists regrouped and won the midterm elections called in 1994, many on the left were alarmed by the parallels with the failed democratic experiment of the 1950s. With an increasingly free press revealing outrageous examples of government corruption, it appeared to many that the country's leaders were using Orwell's *Animal Farm* as a guidebook for governance. There were tangible and significant increases in living standards in Nepal throughout the 1990s, something often forgotten today, but the

**The government obscured its achievements through a combination of obvious failures, unrealistic promises and endless partisan attacks. Every new road was dismissed as a money-laundering scheme, every village development project as a pretext for hiring party cadres.**

government obscured its achievements through a combination of obvious failures, unrealistic promises and endless partisan attacks. In the five years between 1996 and 2001 six men served as prime minister, two of them more than once. Each new government promised to transform Nepal into Asia's Switzerland. Every new road was dismissed as a money-laundering scheme, every village development project as a pretext for hiring party cadres.

Faced with the messy compromises of an emerging democracy and the extra dirt added to the body politic by corruption, some leaders looked for a cleaner path and, following a common if depressing pattern

of human behaviour, decided blood was the best cleanser of all. Less than five years after Nepal's democracy had been reborn, and two years after democratic communists won power through the polls, the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M) launched its Peoples' War on February 13, 1996.

At first the rebels, armed with knives and homemade weapons, were a distraction. But over time they became better organized, better armed and more powerful. Their success owed less to the strength of their popular appeal than to the failings of the government. As the Maoists gained ground, development work was affected and casualties mounted. Village councils in regions under Maoist influence made "contributions" to the Maoists from infrastructure contracts; teachers and others receiving public salaries were subject to tithes. State security forces took often indiscriminate revenge for rebel attacks, increasing public resentment. In an essentially feudal country the opinions of individual Nepalese remained irrelevant, but whatever support had existed for the political parties and their government eroded.

Support for the parties ebbed, but the Maoists' attacks on infrastructure – including village schools and health clinics – did not endear their cause to the majority. By the time of the ceasefire in early 2006, an estimated US\$1 billion in infrastructure had been destroyed. Teachers, civil servants, unarmed police and activists from the mainstream political parties were abducted, often beaten, sometimes tortured or killed. "Social criminals," including those who were engaged in extramarital sex or conducted funerals without the Maoists' approval, were punished with sentences ranging from public humiliation to death.

## The crumbling foundations of the kingdom

On June 1, 2001, the political foundations of the Hindu Kingdom crumbled when most of the royal family was gunned down in the royal palace, apparently at the hands of a drunken Crown Prince Dipendra. King Birendra, the political survivor and architect of the compromise of 1990, died in the fusillade. His assassin, the crown prince, lived long enough to be crowned king, but he appears to have shot himself and he spent his three-day reign on life support before he too succumbed.

Prince Gyanendra, a businessmen and friend of Britain's Prince Charles whose hobbies included a cigarette factory and environmental issues, had been out of town on the evening of the massacre. He had touched the crown before when, as a child, the Ranas installed him as king in a last-ditch effort to protect their government just prior to its final collapse. Nepal is rife with conspiracy theories as to who committed the massacre and why, and some believe Gyanendra orchestrated it himself. Nonetheless, on his coronation in 2001, Nepalese treated him with customary reverence.

The new King promised to take an "active" role. Taking a step his late brother had long resisted, he authorized the government's request to deploy the Royal Nepali Army in the fight with the Maoists. Then he approved a request to dissolve parliament, in preparation for elections that never took place. Next he dismantled Nepal's elected local governments, among the few democratic institutions to have delivered real results. With effective checks on his power removed, King Gyanendra used a questionable interpretation of the

constitution to seize power over Nepal in stages, starting in October 2002 with his dissolution of the elected government and appointment of a replacement cabinet. Over the next two years he sacked a series of prime ministers and presided over a second round of failed peace talks with the CPN-M. Gyanendra's slow-motion coup reached its logical conclusion in February 2005 when he assumed direct rule over the country. Claiming he needed three years to deal with the Maoists and prepare for elections, he unleashed the army and security forces on both the rebels and the mainstream political parties.

In the aftermath of the April 2006 uprising that swept the King from power, it has been forgotten that these moves were broadly welcomed. There were no protests, and many, especially among the urban elite, hoped Gyanendra could deliver peace where the political parties had failed. Claiming a mantle of Hindu divinity, he cloaked himself in every national myth. Initially there were some successes as the Maoists were driven from the Kathmandu Valley. But through increasingly bloody confrontations with an increasingly well-armed and seasoned enemy, it became clear that a purely military solution to the insurgency was an illusion, and the King's strategy, which had cost the country its hard-won democracy, had led to another stalemate. Gyanendra further soured elite opinion by engaging in flagrant corruption and nepotism, appointing men instrumental in crushing previous pro-democracy movements to positions as senior advisors while turning the national coffers into an automatic teller machine for the unlimited use of his family and friends.

Alarmed by Gyanendra's incompetence, India, which had turned a blind eye to his

seizure of power, urged the mainstream political parties and the Maoists to join hands. Earlier in the year seven non-Maoist parties, including the NC and Communist Party Nepal – United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), the largest democratic communist party, had come together in an anti-Gyanendra alliance. In Delhi in November 2005, the Seven Party Alliance and the CPN-M signed an agreement that committed them to cooperate in putting an end to the royal regime. But the King's government refused to compromise, and when the rebels declared a four-month ceasefire in late 2005, he would not reciprocate. Instead, in February 2006

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the government conducted local elections, which all the major parties boycotted.

In one year Gyanendra dissipated his personal political capital and much of the traditional authority enjoyed by the monarchy. Excesses by the armed forces – including well-publicized murders of civilians after arguments with soldiers – led not to a reshaping of security tactics but to royal proclamations restricting media freedom and banning criticism of the royal family.

When the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) announced plans for a mass protest in early April 2006, few thought that much would come of it. While the public was increasingly unhappy with the King's failure to address the country's problems, the political parties

had little credibility. The first two days of demonstrations were better attended than expected, but most of the protesters were young boys.

The security forces' behaviour during the demonstrations destroyed what was left of the foundations of royal prerogative. Across the country, relatively peaceful protests were broken up with baton charges and tear gas; houses were raided, and people who had nothing to do with the protests were hauled from their homes, beaten and taken into custody. Popular anger was coupled with fear as the security forces had a reputation for brutality – of the estimated 13,000 deaths in the ten-year civil war, more than 8,000 are attributed to government forces.<sup>3</sup> Reports of beatings and killings circulated; when one of the first victims of the protests was cremated without his family's consent in violation of fundamental Hindu tradition, numbers on the street swelled and demonstrations spread across the country. The government instituted shoot-to-kill curfews, lifted them, then imposed them again. The protests built steadily, fuelled by an average of one killing per day. Party leaders, content to leave the streets to teenagers in the early days, began to coordinate activities as the protests grew, helping to maintain order and, belatedly, talking with security forces to prevent misunderstandings that could have led to further bloodshed. In Maoist-controlled regions, the rebels transported whole villages to attend rallies in district capitals in commandeered buses and cars.

On Friday, April 21, the King offered a vague compromise, quickly dismissed by both the SPA and the Maoists. A rally on Saturday attracted hundreds of thousands of people to the Ring Road surrounding Kathmandu. Defying the curfew, protest-



**BHAKTAPUR, NEAR KATHMANDU:** Mythic creatures, east and west – Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god, and Frankenstein. JOHN RICHARDS PHOTO

ers streamed past security forces, finally stopping at a police barricade less than two kilometres from a royal palace that had become a fort. Then an unseasonal hailstorm pelted the city, breaking up the demonstration. But Gyanendra could not rely on such acts of God; with pressure mounting from foreign governments and a “decisive” protest looming on Tuesday, Gyanendra went on national television just before midnight on Monday to announce restoration of the 1999 parliament and passage of power to the SPA. Street celebrations broke out across Kathmandu and in other cities. The Maoists called for protests to continue until the King

abdicated, but the public was ready to give the new government a chance.

Rapid change followed: the SPA appointed the ailing 83-year-old NC leader, Girija Koirala, as Prime Minister. Within days, the Maoists announced a three-month ceasefire and the government declared an indefinite halt to hostilities. Maoist prisoners were released from detention, the CPN-M was removed from Nepal’s list of terrorist organizations and the rebels opened an office in Kathmandu and began to organize openly in the capital for the first time since 1996. The Royal Nepali Army, still answerable to the King, returned to bar-

racks, followed by the police. The Maoists responded by moving armed cadres into the city in large numbers and redeploying units of the People's Army from their base areas toward the capital.

## **An October revolution?**

The new government faced a monarch with constitutional control of the army and a Maoist army whose intentions were far from clear. Civilian administration of the countryside had been eroded first by the insurgency and then by the militarization that accompanied the royal regime.

### **The Maoists entered the peace process with a unified army and political structure, and with an intelligent and sophisticated leadership team operating with a clear mandate.**

Nominally the country's rulers, the SPA were in fact only one of three sources of power – and the only one without an army. The SPA took power without any structure, leadership or common political platform beyond opposition to Gyanendra. The two major parties, the NC and UML, had spent the previous 16 years at each other's throats, while the third largest, the Nepali Congress – Democratic (NC-D), had split from the NC in 2002. The four smaller parties had little influence, and included groups with ideologies closer to the Maoists than to the centrist NC.

As peace talks began, the lack of cohesion among the seven parties quickly presented problems. Nepali traditions favour top-down and often unaccountable leadership, which would admittedly have made difficult

a broader and more consultative process prior to negotiations with the Maoists. The absence of cohesion among the SPA made it natural for the Prime Minister to act alone, or on the advice of a close circle of family and party advisors. Other party leaders had few confidential avenues for addressing their grievances, resulting in public recriminations between Koirala and other SPA leaders.

The dynamic that weakened the SPA gave strength to the Maoists, who delegated clear authority to their negotiating team, maintained strict confidentiality, and stayed on message. A high-level split in 2005 between Chairman Prachanda and chief ideologue Baburam Bhattarai had been resolved.<sup>4</sup> The Maoists entered the peace process with a unified army and political structure, and with an intelligent and sophisticated leadership team operating with a clear mandate.

The Maoists' demands were clear: the creation of an interim government and constitution that would prepare for constituent assembly elections, and the immediate abolition of the monarchy. The government, internally divided on these key issues, responded with a series of parliamentary proclamations, passed with little or no debate, which acceded to most of the CPN-M's longstanding political demands. These included placing the military under civilian control, making Nepal a secular state and reserving one third of all government positions for women. Beyond these gestures, the SPA appeared to have no plan to govern, and no strategy to counter the Maoists, who quickly realized that the parties would make nearly any concession to preserve the peace process. By implementing much of the

*(continued on p. 85)*



**VALLEY NEAR POKHARA:** Photographed from an ultralight aircraft, this is one of Nepal's numberless low-lying valleys, strung between chains of high and nearly impassable mountains. CYNTHIA COFFILL PHOTO



**KATHMANDU:** Maoist posters are plastered on walls throughout Nepal. The figure portrayed in the star is Prachanda, wearing dark glasses. JOHN RICHARDS PHOTO



**FEWA LAKE, POKHARA:** These colourful boats on Fewa Lake are waiting for tourists, but the resort town's tourist-based economy has been devastated by a decade of civil war. CYNTHIA COFFILL PHOTO



**POLICE HARASSMENT:** This student was pulled from his house, beaten, then released when it became clear he was not involved in the protests. Such mistakes fuelled violence, and more protests. DOMINIC CARDY PHOTO

(continued from p. 80)

Maoists' agenda, the SPA gave up valuable negotiating cards. It was clear over the summer that the CPN-M was dictating events. The SPA prepared and presented a budget, and carried on with the routines of running a government, but this just reminded the public that the parties' words had little in common with their actions.

In May a 25-point ceasefire agreement was signed. While the Maoists routinely violated 15 of the points, criticism was muted as the parties feared alienating the rebels. The CPN-M condemned any government complaint as a violation of the ceasefire, while refusing to acknowledge the violations that had triggered the complaint. Throughout the summer Maoist control of the country solidified. The rebels collected taxes, staffed border and customs posts, and coordinated law-and-order patrols with the police. Reports of extortion skyrocketed, and "Peoples' Courts," using the Maoists' own legal code, expanded to nearly every district, including Kathmandu, in defiance of the rebels' commitment to dismantle their parallel government. The elites in Kathmandu debate how and when the rebels should disarm, with everyone ignoring the inconvenient fact that the CPN-M has little to gain from giving up its weapons and has shown no inclination to do so.

One of Nepal's greatest flaws is the disconnect between the capital and the countryside. NGO and political activists living in the countryside are less naive than those in Kathmandu; they know first hand the cost of living under the CPN-M, and have been witnesses and often victims of Maoist harassment, which intensified after the King's abdication. On the other hand,

the Maoists have received uncritical support from many Kathmandu-based human rights and civil society organizations, as well as many in the media and political parties. Kathmandu elites have remained hopeful that the Maoists' comforting rhetoric is a good guide to their future actions. Because the Maoists had been unable to win a military victory, many argued, they were desperate for peace, looking for a "soft landing." But in a July 2006 interview, Prachanda did not sound like a leader suing for peace:

*We are not taking recourse to this new strategy due to some weakness ... People should understand that we have changed*

**The elites in Kathmandu debate how and when the rebels should disarm, with everyone ignoring the inconvenient fact that the CPN-M has little to gain from giving up its weapons and has shown no inclination to do so.**

*our policy not because of some sort of setback but due to the strength derived from the People's War ... Even Lenin was forced to enter into Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany at the time of October Revolution. At that time, many in Lenin's party said that it was like an act of surrender but it was not that. Rather, it was the result of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, the result of their gaining strength.<sup>5</sup>*

As Maoist excesses increased in the fall, press coverage and urban public opinion became more critical, but this has had little effect on Maoist activities that rely for their legitimacy on the force of arms, not opinion polls. In September, a rumour circulated that the government was moving arms into Kathmandu. In response, the CPN-M

implemented a nationwide blockade. In less than one hour they stopped all traffic and brought the capital to a standstill. Barricades of burning tires were lit outside embassies and hotels, guarded by Maoist cadres often joined by the police. When it became clear the rumour was false and no arms were being delivered, the blockade was lifted as quickly as it had been imposed. Three hours later the country was back to normal, but the rebels had made their point.

The mainstream politicians and the national elite appear to have made a fundamental error: they cannot differentiate between democratic politicians and revolutionaries. For any group to take up Maoism

**For any group to take up Maoism as ideology in the 1990s indicates a devotion to ideas divorced from their reputation in the broader world.**

as ideology in the 1990s indicates a devotion to ideas divorced from their reputation in the broader world. With Mao's China and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge serving as successful precedents, and the bloody Peruvian Shining Path as their avowed inspiration, Prachanda and his colleagues are unlikely to strike a conventional compromise, take up plush ministerial offices and drive around Kathmandu in SUVs. Rather than rely on Maoist blandishments, better to take Prachanda at his word. As recently as last August, he described his current tactics this way: "We will have to take a diversion. That's why our moving forward after reaching an understanding with the liberal faction of the bourgeoisie is being called a transitional phase by us."<sup>6</sup> There is no reason not to believe him.

The roadmap of this revolution has been laid out in the writings of Mao and expanded in numerous books, articles and interviews with the CPN-M principals. While it is hard to reconcile the roadmap with recent pronouncements of the rebels aimed at an elite and international audience – they now praise multiparty democracy and claim to have learned that the time is not right to impose a communist state – their actions are consistent with a straightforward progression through the stages of Maoist revolution.

What makes the Nepali revolution unique is that the ruling elite has followed the Maoist script so closely. Far from looking for a soft landing, the Maoists view Nepal in 2006 as a vindication of 70 years of theory: bourgeois parties fail to defend their class interests and fight among themselves, while the unity of the communist party enables it simultaneously to expand its military and political bases. The Maoists are preparing to assume the leadership of the so-called New Democratic revolution, a stepping-stone on the road to socialism that will include peasants, the proletariat, the petite bourgeoisie and capitalist classes. The pragmatism of Maoist tactics does not mean any change to the final goal.

As long as the political parties and civil society organizations contribute to their united front and progress towards the Maoist New Democracy continues, the Maoists will be cooperative. But it is worth reading what Prachanda has prescribed for parties other than his own:

*After the Chinese revolution there existed eight political parties in China which did not support feudalism and imperialism. Mao allowed them to continue to work because he wanted them to support the*



**KATHMANDU:** The author spent most of a day under this shelter, watching as police charged protesters and protesters charged police, exchanging bricks and insults. When the sun set both sides went home. DOMINIC CARDY PHOTO

*Communist Party ... We feel that in order to make a society lively, the proletarian party should also take up the task of organizing competition. It does not mean that we are moving towards bourgeois democracy.”<sup>7</sup>*

Throughout the summer of 2006 the Maoists talked about an October revolution. Historical parallels are often forced and unconvincing, but this one is not. The similarities between Aleksandr Kerensky’s regime that emerged in Russia after the Tsar’s abdication in February 1917 and Koirala’s unstable post-Gyanendra government are simply too striking to be dismissed.

Russians, like Nepalese today, yearned for peace. The spring revolutions in both countries unleashed a wave of optimism that raised the expectations of long-oppressed peoples. Such expectations could not be met by the parliamentary leaders, hobbled by inexperience, hubris and – perhaps most importantly – an underestimation of the ruthlessness of their revolutionary opponents.

Like the Maoists, the Bolsheviks had pressed for a constituent assembly. When the election produced an assembly they did not control, they quickly ensured its dissolution. Prachanda and his cadres are

sophisticated politicians and doubtless realize that they would not win a transparent election. But winning elections has never been their goal.

In October, a new round of peace talks began in Kathmandu, focusing on disarmament, the role of the King and other contentious issues. The parties, dismayed at their lack of preparation before previous talks, took greater care in preparing their agenda. But the stakes are now incredibly high. Will the Maoists make real concessions? Will the parties give way and allow the CPN-M to enter the government with its army intact?

If the talks fail, the Maoists are unlikely to walk away. Even failed talks take time and allow them to strengthen the grip of their "People's Government" on Nepal. If the preparations for the constituent assembly fail completely, they are confident that the SPA will share the bulk of the blame. And if public sentiment turns against the Maoists, they can continue to press their demands with the aid of an army estimated to be 15,000 to 20,000 strong, and a lightly armed militia of another 100,000.

The Maoists have repeatedly said that they do not plan to return to the jungle; if this round of talks does not succeed, they propose to launch an "urban movement" to make sure their demands are met. Again to quote Prachanda: "In case the talks fail, we feel that we will have to take certain steps to address the people's desperation. You will know about these steps after a week. Let's keep it a secret for now!"<sup>8</sup>

If the Maoists launch street protests after a failure of peace talks, the government will be faced with a difficult choice. If it fails to act and anarchy prevails, the Maoists win. If the army intervenes and suppresses

the protests, the SPA's legitimacy will be destroyed and any who oppose the military, and by extension the King, will side with the CPN-M. Again the Maoists win. The fundamental question in Kathmandu, the question no one asks openly, is "What is the price of peace?" For many, any price is worth paying in hopes of ending the civil war. For others, looking at the toll of the Cultural Revolution or the one in five Cambodians killed during three years of Maoist rule, there is worse than war. ■

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 37.
- <sup>2</sup> Mao Zedong, "On Protracted War," *Selected Works, Vol. 2* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), pp. 152–53.
- <sup>3</sup> Ed Douglas, "Inside Nepal's Revolution," *National Geographic*, November 2005, p. 54
- <sup>4</sup> While the split between Prachanda and Bhattarai was resolved, small ethnically based factions splintered from the party. One of these, the Jantantrik Terai Mukti Morcha, engaged in limited combat with CPN-M forces during the summer of 2006, and in September 2006 killed a member of parliament from the right-wing Rastriya Prajatantra Party.
- <sup>5</sup> International Nepal Solidarity Network, "Interview by Prachanda with Anand Swaroop Verma," August 19, 2006. Available online: <http://66.116.151.85/?p=3755> (accessed October 8, 2006).
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Kantipur Online, "Interview by Prachanda with Kishor Nepal," October 7, 2006. Available online: <http://www.ekantipur.com/> (accessed October 8, 2006).

## Beyond the illusion of Rolpa's *Tar Bar*

by **Shrishti Rana**

IT'S TEMPTING TO BE SANGUINE ABOUT the future of our country. A lasting peace seems imminent. But is it?

Many of us have forgotten Rolpa, the birthplace of the Maoists, but the Rolpalese themselves have not. On the one hand, the pain of seeing the state security forces kill 700 innocent villagers is too strong ever to be forgotten. Only the Rolpalese know what it is to have your own sons and brothers killed on the mere suspicion of being Maoists. On the other hand, the memories of Maoist violence are no less painful. Assault, extortion and abduction by the Maoists, mere news items in distant Kathmandu, were part of the daily grind in Rolpa.

During my recent visit to Rolpa, Shiva Chettri, proprietor of the Shiva Shakti Hotel in Liwang (Rolpa district headquarters), showed me the barbed wire surrounding some buildings. "Behind that wire is a *Tar Bar*," he explained. The *Tar Bar* was the area housing many government buildings, party offices and private schools, and it enjoyed the protection, such as it was, of the state security forces during the civil war. Shree Maya Magar remembers, "We often had to stay at our neighbour's house outside the *Tar Bar*. We could see our house from

there but the police would not let us go to our own house, citing inexplicable security reasons."

The *Tar Bar* may have enjoyed state security, but that security was largely illusory. Madav Acharya, District Chairman of the Nepali Congress, confessed, "My wife never used to let me go to the terrace, fearing that the Maoists would attack me from the surrounding heights. Though we were protected inside the *Tar Bar*, we felt that we were under house arrest and did not dare go outside our rooms."

For the Maoists, the *Tar Bar* was meaningless; it did not inhibit their movements and activities. Even in the presence of security forces, the Maoists always managed to collect taxes and threaten and even abduct residents. If anyone refused to make the required "donations," the Maoists abducted him and imposed a ransom ten times as large. This *Tar Bar*, avowedly a safe haven, was in practice a trap. The continued presence of the *Tar Bar* in Rolpa is a grim reminder of the violence and senselessness of the years of civil war.

Are things any better now?

Prem Bahadur Buda, a Liwangi, is cautiously optimistic: "Things are much better

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**PROTESTERS RETREAT:** Bricks, some taken from temples and houses, litter the street in a lull in the battle between police and mostly teenage protesters in early April. Within days the small gangs of youth had grown into mass rallies that toppled a king. DOMINIC CARDY PHOTO

but the Maoist activities are almost the same. We do not have enough food, yet we have to pay the Maoists – two different taxes of 5 and 50 rupees monthly.” Hari Khadki opened up to me: “In spite of the peace process, the Maoists still force us to construct roads, leaving our own work undone. The alternative is to pay 5,000 rupees as compensation.” A shop owner vented his ire: “We have been troubled by both the Maoists and the police. Our problem is that we have no one to turn to.”

If the high-handedness and brutality of the security forces have been contained, it looks as if the Maoists’ threat of violence is

a continuing fear for many. The descriptions of events by some party men were revealing. Madav Acharya, the Congress man, averred: “We are really happy with the ceasefire. We do not fear for our lives any more.” However, he admitted, his party workers still have no access to the villages. Curiously, the Maoists invite them to their rallies. Asked if they could campaign in the villages for anything that clashes with the Maoists’ ideas, his answer was a straightforward “No.” Yet, he seemed to believe, somewhat naively, that elections to the constituent assembly would be fair.

According to Man Singh Dangi, a veteran United Marxist Leninist leader who has been a facilitator of the Maoist–Seven Parties negotiating team in Rolpa, “Living in a conflict zone teaches many things. The government needs to decide quickly about the model for the constituent assembly. Otherwise it could be delayed up to 30 years, as has occurred in India.’

Krishna Gharti, District Chairman of the Democratic Congress Party, mused that the only good thing about the Maoists is that they have made the Rolpalese aware of many things beyond Rolpa, and have made the Nepalese aware of Rolpa. He maintained that since Rolpa has suffered more than any other region during the conflict, the government owes us better roads, hospitals and jobs. Nepal will never develop without developing Rolpa!

Most of the party men in Rolpa seem convinced that the Maoists are genuine about the peace process but want peace on their terms.

The Maoists have a different story than the local inhabitants and party men. According to Nava Raj Acharya, a district-level Maoist leader, “The recent parliamentary proclamations are not enough. We need to do away with exploitation completely.” When I asked whether the Maoists would accept the result of the constituent assembly election if it goes against them, he replied ambiguously, “We are sure that we will forge ahead at the hustings, even in your Kathmandu.” Still, he confided to me that the Maoists have made mistakes and these mistakes explain why most villagers do not support them. Setting the mistakes aside, he boasted that soon the Maoists would have 95 per cent of the people on their side, even if they have to go back into the jungle.

Interviewed under conditions of anonymity, a top-level Maoist leader defended the insurgents’ behaviour: “Our cadres may be violating the code of conduct because we have not got time to talk to people ... People needn’t worry. Maoist harassment will stop soon.”

Yet another Maoist insurgent I met was Narendra Batha Magar, a militia man. His conclusion is that the Maoists’ case will never be heard if they give up their arms straight away. I confronted the Maoists with whom I talked with stories I had heard about their still recruiting soldiers and child spies. The local Maoist leaders brushed aside these allegations. They claimed that they are just transferring their militia men to their people’s army. Sadly, these events and rationalizations do not fit with the Maoists’ promises of justice, fair play and nonexploitation.

What do those in the state agencies think about all this? The police, paramilitary and military forces in Rolpa seem relieved. The uniformed forces have been instructed to go out of their way to be polite. Hari Bahadur Baruwal, a soft-spoken police inspector, insisted, “We have always done our duty and protected the public good and we will continue doing so.”

A police subinspector went beyond polite comment: “We feel hurt the way the police force has been discredited. Even though the army has more sophisticated weapons, they were stationed at the mountain heights whereas we, the police, were inside the *Tar Bar* risking our lives to protect the people living and working there.” With bitterness, Baruwal then described an incident in which the police were patrolling in a nearby village. Suddenly, the Maoists started firing from the cliffs, and the police below were stuck in

the narrow winding treeless road with their backs to the gorge of a raging river.

On my way back to Kathmandu from Rolpa, our Jeep was routinely stopped at checkpoints. When told why I was in Rolpa, a young army soldier excitedly came forward to talk to me. “That is Krishna Bahadur Mahara’s house,” he indicated. “His whole family have joined the Maoists.” He showed me a small shop where an old man was making a *paan*: “Even now, the Maoists do evil. They beat this poor old man for not paying the Maoists’ tax and we are helpless.”

While the soldier was briefing me, the *Kantipur* channel was playing on the television set. The journalist was reporting on the government’s questionable appeasement strategy and the response of Maoist leader Prachanda: “Prachanda says that they will have an October revolution if the talks fail.” The soldier’s face fell as he contemplated the harsh realities of the unfolding drama. I felt, somehow, that the whole country is caught up in an extended *Tar Bar*. Are we all living in false security? ■

## NEPAL

# Revolution as an instrument of development

by Dane Berry

THE NEWS COMING OUT OF NEPAL IN recent years has for the most part been grim. In addition to a gruesome massacre at the royal palace and battles between the army and Maoist insurgents, there are the usual floods and landslides that wreak havoc on the countryside during the annual monsoons, coupled with increasingly erratic weather patterns, droughts and fears about global warming. With the exception of the

widespread jubilation that followed the protests last spring and King Gyanendra’s reinstatement of the parliament, the media give the impression that lately very little has been going well for the people of Nepal.

It may come as a surprise, then, that Nepal has a shot at being a Millennium Development Goals success story. Several indicators for these goals have seen dramatic improvements in the last decade. Between

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1996 and 2004, the proportion of the population living on less than one dollar a day fell from roughly a third to a quarter. In the same period, the net enrolment rate for primary-school-age children increased from 69 to 84 per cent, and the ratio of girls to boys in primary school went from 0.66 to 0.86. The infant mortality rate dropped from 79 to 61 deaths per thousand births, and the maternal mortality rate has shown a similar reduction. While there has been little progress on the environment and a rise in the incidence of both HIV and tuberculosis, overall the country has made considerable progress toward achieving its MDG targets.

To what does Nepal owe this unexpected success? First, despite the nascent rebellion, Nepal's economy performed relatively well in the late 1990s. Tourist arrivals reached record levels and there was steady growth in nearly all sectors. Overall economic conditions deteriorated only after the palace massacre of 2001 and the intensification of the conflict in the countryside. Second, some credit belongs to the Maoists. Not because their "People's Liberation Army" and "People's Governments" are freeing the poor and oppressed from the tyranny of capitalism, but because they made living conditions in rural areas so miserable that the Nepalese are giving up village life and moving to the cities en masse.

Poverty in Nepal is much more prevalent in rural than in urban areas, and rural social services are inferior. Around 95 per cent of the country's poor live outside its cities. Urbanization is on the rise: between 1996 and 2004, the urban population doubled. As a result, the typical Nepalese generally has better access to social services like schools and health clinics than before. Thus, while

few new health clinics were built between 1996 and 2004, the proportion of households within a half-hour walk of a clinic rose from 45 to 62 per cent. In addition, the number of Nepalese working abroad has increased substantially. A third of Nepali households are now receiving remittances from foreign workers and the recent annual growth in remittances has sometimes exceeded 30 per cent. These two factors – better access to social services in urban centres and increased income from urban and particularly foreign wages – explain the bulk of Nepal's recent MDG gains.

Sadly, revolution as an instrument of development only goes so far. Economic growth since 2001 has been barely sufficient to keep pace with the growing population. More importantly, growth in the industrial and service sectors has stagnated as the threat of Maoist violence has driven away tourists and made it more difficult for industries to maintain production.

These sectors are vital if Nepal's urban economy is to keep pace with its growing population. If Nepal is to have any hope of consolidating its development gains, it must resume the transition from an economy dominated by agriculture to one where industry and services play a major role. And for this, peace is a prerequisite. So the question is: Will the Maoists finish what they started? Will they work to establish the political and economic stability needed to move the country forward, perhaps a combination of Chinese capitalism and Indian democracy? Or will they merely make life in the city as intolerable as they have made it in the country? No one knows at the moment, but repeated threats made by the Maoist leadership for a new urban-based revolution are hardly encouraging. ■



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