Engaging Afghanistan
a non-military approach

"Herat City Enters Transition Era" by ISAFmedia

Introduction

At the beginning of 2011 the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published a deeply critical report highlighting the current failings of the UK's approach to the War in Afghanistan. It states:

> "Although the current international emphasis favours intense military pressure aimed at defeating the insurgency, it is clear that military pressure alone is not enough to bring security and stability to Afghanistan. There is a danger that without appropriate political leadership, the current military campaign is in danger of inadvertently de-railing efforts to secure a political solution to what is essentially a political problem." (Foreign Affairs Committee, 2011)

Engaging Afghanistan reports on the extent of the misery being faced by the Afghan people and examines its causes. It finds that the emphasis on using military force to defeat the Taliban-led insurgency is deeply flawed as it has alienated the Afghan people and done little to address their most pressing concerns. More positively, *Engaging Afghanistan* also offers an alternative, non-military approach to Afghanistan inspired by the Good Friday Agreement.

This report contributes to the debate about Afghanistan. Its aim is not to provide one solution that should be followed ardently by government, but rather to help foster debate about what could and should be done at this point in the war. Public debate about solutions to Afghanistan is important as it helps us – and more importantly our political leaders – to remember that we are a country at war and as such we should be actively looking for solutions that bring about peace.

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"Father and Son/Pére et son fils" by Canada in Afghanistan/Canada en Afghanistan

Outcomes of the Invasion

One of the declared objectives of the US-led military invasion of Afghanistan was the creation of a secure, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan (Cabinet Offce 2009)[1]. The United Kingdom contributed to this invasion in solidarity with a strategic ally and to 'protect its own national security'. Ongoing efforts in Afghanistan have led to some concrete achievements being made in the pursuit of these objectives.

- GDP has risen by 70% since 2002 and government revenue has increased by 400% (Gahr Store, 2009).
- 4.7 million more children attended school in 2007 than did in 2001, of which 2 million are girls.
- The percentage of Afghans with access to basic healthcare has risen from 9% in 2003 to 82% in 2006; child mortality has fallen by 25% (Cabinet Offce, 2009).
- 17,000 villages have used international aid to improve their basic infrastructure (Gahr Store, 2009).
- The Taliban no longer control Kabul and their influence has been reduced throughout the country.
- All citizens – especially women – now enjoy greater personal freedom under the current regime than they did under the Taliban. Although far from emancipated, Afghan women are now allowed to vote and stand for election, receive an education, work and choose whether or not wear the burqa – choices which were denied to them under the Taliban.
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These achievements – welcome as they might be – are outweighed by the enormity of the problems facing Afghanistan and represent a poor return on the lives lost and money spent on rebuilding the country. Military operations between 2002 and until 2009 cost the United States $217 billion and cost Britain £5.5 billion. If the purpose of the US/NATO presence in Afghanistan is to bring democracy, security and prosperity to Afghanistan then it is failing (Cabinet Offce, 2009). At the time of writing, Afghanistan cannot rightly be described as democratic, secure or prosperous. Worryingly, trends in the areas of democracy, security and economics suggest that the situation is actually getting worse rather than better.

- Insurgent activity and with it, the number of violent deaths, has risen steadily year on year since 2003. Violence and fear of violence are part of everyday life in Afghanistan (Oxfam International, 2009).
- Endemic corruption and illegitimate elections, which saw President Karzai re-elected and approved by the international community raise serious questions about the democratic character of Afghanistan's institutions and the international community's commitment to developing them (International Crisis Group, 2009).
- A lack of economic opportunity has created a shadow narco-economy. This narco-economy produces 82% of the world's heroin (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009) and is the single most profitable sector of the Afghan economy (Ward, 2008).

Explanation for Failure of Invasion

Historical factors

US/NATO's lack of progress in Afghanistan is in part a reflection of the damage wrought by years of occupation, civil war and misrule following the overthrow of the Afghan Monarch Zahir Shah in 1973. This coup d'état was followed by a series of uprisings as rival communist and Islamist factions vied for control of the country. Furthermore, in an attempt to maintain influence over its neighbour the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. The Red Army remained in the country for ten years conducting a brutal and ultimately unsuccessful counter-insurgency campaign against the mujahideen (Islamic resistance). The Afghan population suffered immensely during this period.

Civil war followed the Soviet withdrawal, first as the mujahideen fought to overthrow the incumbent Communist Party and then, after the Communist Party's defeat, between rival mujahideen factions.

In addition to many human rights violations the power vacuum created by the civil war caused a deterioration of infrastructure and basic services.

The Taliban's ability to provide the rudiments of law and order and their relative lack of corruption saw them gain a degree of popular support and control of Kabul and the majority of the country from 1996 until their ouster in 2001. After gaining power the Taliban did little to rebuild the country after the years of civil war and instead concentrated their efforts on pursuing their interpretation of Islam and profiteering from opium production and smuggling (Oxfam International, 2009).

The Military

Although the legacy of occupation, civil war and misrule contributes to the problems facing Afghanistan, it does not in itself explain the extent of the security, economic and governance problems facing the country. These problems are explained by the military-led nature of intervention in Afghanistan. The strategic goal of 'defeating' the Taliban insurgency mistakes pacification for peace and distracts from the root causes of the problems facing Afghanistan.

A strategy of attrition has been at the heart of the US/NATO's military actions in Afghanistan (Betz and Cormack, 2009). One indication of the attritional strategy used by Western forces was the practice of keeping and publishing a 'body count' of the number of insurgents killed in an operation (Phillips, 2009). Such body counts are designed as a measure of success. The higher the body count the more insurgents have been killed and therefore, according to the logic of attrition, their pool of available manpower is closer to exhaustion.

As the insurgency has gathered pace US/NATO forces have been engaged in 'clearing operations' and 'compound searches' (Phillips, 2009), in which US/NATO forces sought out or invited attack from Taliban forces in an attempt to draw them into

battle and defeat them. These operations have largely been successful on their own terms, but overall have caused a further decline in the security situation. There are two main reasons for this; firstly, although ground has been 'cleared' in such operations once cleared it is quickly abandoned and the local population is left unprotected from the Taliban. Therefore, they feel no safer and are thus unlikely to stop supporting the Taliban or acquiescing in its influence. Secondly, the traditional ethical code of the Pashtun areas in which many clearance operations have been carried out (Pashtunwali) requires that revenge be taken for the death of a family member. This revenge culture means that operations that use military force serve as recruitment tools for the Taliban and so increase rather than decrease insecurity. The futility of such military operations was decried by one British officer as simply 'mowing the grass' (Betz and Cormack, 2009).

That military force is valued over non-military approaches is further evidenced by the way in which officers are promoted. In 2008 a Special Forces Officer who had built the trust of the local tribal elders and so managed to reduce the number of IED attacks to the lowest number in his province was passed over for promotion because his command had killed the least insurgents in his tour of duty (Johnson and Mason, 2009). Promotion on the basis of total body count is problematic. Firstly, ambitious officers are less likely to implement non-military methods to improve security; and secondly, promoting on the basis of success in attrition reinforces the mistaken belief that success in Afghanistan can come from military force. That the officer in question belonged to the Special Forces is particularly concerning because the Special Forces claim expertise in 'winning hearts and minds'. If success in attrition is still a criterion for success in the Special Forces it is likely to be even more entrenched in units which do not claim expertise in the counter-insurgency (Johnson and Mason, 2009).

Attrition

A strategy of attrition seeks to kill enemy soldiers and destroy equipment faster than they can be replaced; thus making further military actions impossible. Western armed forces are primarily trained and equipped to implement strategies of attrition. Such strategies are counterproductive in combating an insurgency because the outcome of an insurgency is determined not by which side is exhausted first but by which side can gain and maintain the approval of the population. Sustained combat operations are not supportive of this goal as violence alienates the population and diverts effort from more constructive activities.

Afghanistan's Problems

The strategy of attrition discussed above has distracted from and in some cases contributed to the serious underlying problems facing Afghanistan; this section provides an outline of these problems.

Security

UN risk assessments show a steady decline in security with successive assessments showing an increase in the number of districts labelled as either high or extreme risk (New York Times, 2007). This picture of an increasingly insecure country was confirmed by a leaked map drawn by the US Department of Defense which showed that, as of April 2009, 113 of the 356 districts were defined as a high or extreme risk. Most worryingly, 13 districts were declared 'under enemy control' (Tait, 2009). This increasing insecurity is reflected in the number of casualties sustained by US/NATO forces and by the number of civilians killed.

Civilian Casualties

Although both the insurgent and counter-insurgent forces active in Afghanistan cause civilian casualties, the different composition and objectives of these military actors mean that deaths are caused in different ways.

In addition to their attacks on US/NATO forces, the Taliban and other insurgents operating in Afghanistan conduct illegal attacks against Afghan civilians. These attacks are sometimes intentional and are designed to intimidate or blackmail the

population into supporting the insurgency whilst simultaneously embarrassing US/NATO forces by showing that they cannot adequately protect civilians. Intentional attacks may also target specific people or groups for ideological reasons, such as female education, or for strategic reasons in order to deprive reconstruction efforts of skill or expertise. In addition to these intentional attacks civilian casualties occur when insurgents conduct attacks that are either indiscriminate such as, road side bombs or designed to fulfil a military objective, but in doing so incur civilian casualties that are not proportionate to the military significance of the target (Humans Rights Watch, 2007).

The US/NATO does not directly target civilians, though civilian casualties occur as a consequence of their military actions. The vast majority of civilian deaths at the hands of US/NATO forces are caused by air strikes. These casualties occur either accidentally as a result of technological or intelligence failures or routinely as a foreseen consequence of attacks on military targets. Although, the number of coalition soldiers has been carefully recorded there is no single authoritative record of civilian casualties caused directly or indirectly by the current conflict. Table 2 is thus an aggregate of the most reliable accounts for a given year. It includes those killed by US/NATO forces and insurgent forces alike.

Democracy

Corruption in Afghanistan has increased since the fall of the Taliban regime. In 2005 Transparency International ranked Afghanistan 117 out of 158 in their corruption perception index. By 2009 Afghanistan had fallen almost to the bottom of the corruption perception index being ranked as the 179th most corrupt country out of the 180 measured. Afghanistan's 2009 score of 1.3 out of 10 means it is perceived as highly corrupt by its citizens (Transparency International, 2009).

The consequences of this corruption are serious and varied. The more corrupt a country the greater the cost, in time and money, of doing business in it. These high costs deter private investment and reduce the effectiveness of international aid. Corruption involving security services also carries a high human cost with people being threatened,

Table 1 – Coalition Military Deaths

Year	US	UK	Other	Total
2001	12	0	0	12
2002	49	3	17	69
2003	48	0	9	57
2004	52	1	7	60
2005	99	1	31	131
2006	98	39	54	191
2007	117	42	73	232
2008	155	51	89	295
2009	317	108	95	520
Total	947	245	368	1560

Source: Icasualties.org

injured and killed by security forces. Most importantly corruption is indicative of predatory behaviour on the part of the state and therefore undermines its legitimacy in the eyes of its public (World Bank, 2007)[2].

President Hamid Karzai's re-election in November 2009 is evidence of the legitimacy crisis facing the post-Taliban Afghan state. Far from establishing Afghanistan's new democratic credentials, these elections suffered from low turnout, electoral fraud and violence.

The significant drop in voter turnout was the consequence of voter disillusionment and widespread intimidation (International Crisis Group, 2009). This apathy reflects a general lack of support for Karzai's government and more worryingly a belief that due to high-level corruption the election result was a foregone conclusion and thus people had little incentive to vote (International Crisis Group, 2009).

Fears of fraud in the run up to the election were confirmed in its aftermath. In addition to anticipated bloc voting the International Crisis Group reported that Karzai supporters also rigged the ballot by stuffing boxes. Police and IEC staff either turned a blind eye to much of this fraud or were actively complicit in it (International Crisis Group, 2009).

Voter apathy was not the only the reason for low voter turnout; of equal concern was the lack of guaranteed security for those Afghans who wanted to vote. Like many insurgents the Taliban have made

a policy of threatening and using violence against those who support the counter-insurgency. The implied threat of violence against 'collaborators' is a core component of the so-called night letters – Taliban propaganda delivered to villages under the cover of darkness (Betz, 2008).

This intimidation was intensified in the weeks preceding the election and on the election day itself, although the Taliban never carried out their threat of amputating the fingers of those casting their vote. They did however, succeed in killing and injuring voters and elections workers alike (International Crisis Group, 2009). The violence had its desired effect: a total of 443 polling stations were closed and a further 124 relocated. The violence not only dissuaded many voters from voting, but also – in seven districts of the Helmand and Khandahar provinces – prevented all electoral activity (International Crisis Group, 2009).

Economy
Although the Afghan economy has grown since 2001 the country remains poor. One response to this poverty has been the cultivation of opium poppy. The scale of cultivation is huge, with 82% (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009) of the world's illicit opium now grown in Afghanistan. Opium production is the largest and most profitable sector of the Afghan economy (Ward, 2008). This narco-economy provides funding for the Taliban and other criminal groups, encourages political and judicial corruption, increases inflation, and causes exchange rate fluctuations and real estate speculation (Felbab-Brown, 2007). It displaces legitimate economic activity, causing the 'Dutch disease' in which a single profitable sector of the economy causes stagnation in the wider economy.

As well as a solution to Afghanistan's geographical challenges, Afghan farmers choose to grow opium because it sells, on average, at a higher price than the legal alternatives. However, growing opium is not a lucrative occupation, as even comparatively wealthy farmers only earn the equivalent of a dollar a day (Grare, 2008).

Governance
As the previous section makes clear, the problems facing Afghanistan go beyond armed resistance to US/NATO forces and the Karzai government. The

Table 2 – Estimated Civilians Killed

Year	Number Killed
2001-2003	4000
2004	Not available
2005	408-478
2006	653-769
2007	1,010-1297
2008	2118
2009	2412
Total	6601-7727

Sources: 2001-02: (Herold, 2004)
2005-07: (Herold 2008)
2007-09: (United Nations Assistance Misson in Afghanistan 2009)

Opium
Despite its detrimental effects, opium is grown because it is a hardy crop that copes well with the challenges of the Afghan climate, landscape and infrastructure. It can survive the extremes of temperature that occur in the very hot summers and very cold winters. It requires comparatively little water and so survives droughts caused by low rainfall and poor irrigation. Opium is also non-perishable and so can survive delays in transportation to markets – a result of Afghanistan's war-damaged transport infrastructure.

Opium Flowers by ISAFmedia

problems facing Afghanistan are not only military, but stem from a lack of good governance – which is an important cause of civil wars and insurgency. Furthermore, weak governance not only causes civil wars, it also prolongs them (Jones, 2008).

Following the Soviet withdrawal from the country, the inability of one political faction to maintain a monopoly of violence or even attempt to distribute public goods has led to constant civil war and a politics of 'warlordism.' The Taliban, who came closest to controlling the whole country in the period 1996-2001, owed their relative success to their ability to provide governance albeit in a draconian and frequently brutal fashion.

Two aspects of governance are pertinent to insurgency: the establishment and maintenance of law and order and the distribution of public goods; since the collapse of the Taliban, the Kabul government has struggled to do either. One reason for this is that the state's bureaucracy lacks expertise and, as previously noted, is corrupt. Such ineffectiveness means that schools, courts and utilities are poorly run or non-existent. Even in 2009, eight years after the fall of the Taliban, less than 15% of the Afghan population had access to the national electricity grid (USAID, 2009).

A similar pattern is repeated in the field of law and order: not only is the level of governance poor, but it is overwhelmingly centred on Kabul and the surrounding area. The police – the primary means by which any country maintains law and order – are both corrupt and lacking in competence due to the prioritisation of the army over the police in training and resources. A problem summarised by an Afghan lorry driver when he said 'forget about

the Taliban, our biggest problems are with the police' (USAID, 2009). Taliban-operated courts are preferred because despite the strictness of their 'justice' it is immediate and not subject to corruption. This 'fearsome but clean' form of justice is even preferred by those who initially welcomed the international forces and Karzai government (Witte, 2009).

Insurgencies have been described as a 'process of competitive state building.' In southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan, where this insurgency is at its most intense, the Afghan government's inability to provide law and order means that it is losing this competition. The Taliban-operated 'shadow' government is preferred to the country's 'official' government in an increasing number of areas (Witte, 2009). If this process is to be reversed governance urgently needs to be addressed in Afghanistan.

The area of governance that is most in need of improvement is rural local governance. Rural local governance has seen the least improvements as it was largely neglected by the US/NATO during the period 2001-2007. This neglect of local governance is particularly concerning because it is at the rural level that the Taliban have been able to exert the greatest influence. Indeed the Taliban-led insurgency has been characterized as a rural insurgency (Johnson and Mason, 2009).

However, at the local level the Taliban have an advantage in the state building competition because Afghans have traditionally been cautious of ceding power to a strong central state. This traditional caution has only been encouraged by the behaviour of the post-2001 government.

Recognising the perception and actuality of central government corruption, the most viable course of action, at least in the short term, is to adopt a 'bottom up' approach to local governance.

One such bottom up approach is 'community peace building' in which local and existing actors are encouraged to find ways to collaboratively solve their problems. When successful such programs have led to a reduction in intra-communal violence, a greater resistance to external threats (e.g. insurgents and militants) and improved development activity.

The field of law and order is just one example of how community peace building can produce viable alternatives to the presently distrusted, expensive and corrupt state justice system and the 'shadow' Taliban government (Oxfam, 2008). The traditional Afghan justice system works through councils called either "shuras" or "jirgas". These councils are based on egalitarian principles and are comprised of elders and other respected individuals. These councils are culturally familiar to and trusted by the communities that use them. In contrast to the state justice system the tribal justice system is technically voluntary although in practice there is strong social and familial pressure to submit disputes to elders and abide by their decisions (Dempsey and Coburn, 2010).

The viability of traditional approaches to justice has been partly demonstrated by the work of the Commission on Conflict Mediation (CCM) programme that has been working in the Khost and Pakita provinces. The Commission is made up of six respected tribal elders appointed by a jirga held in November 2006. It seeks to resolve disputes without recourse to the formal state justice system. In its first 18 months, 31 conflicts were referred to the CCM of which 18 were resolved, three were referred to the provincial court and the remaining ten remained in arbitration. During its first 18 months no case remained open for longer than six months. The CCM has proved popular with people of Khost because the justice it provided was free of charge, did not favour the richer party and thus was less susceptible to corruption (Tribal Liason Office, 2009). However, it should be noted that despite these and other successes of the traditional justice system, it is not a panacea. More would have to be done to ensure the inclusion of

women and minorities.

Working at the communal level to improve governance would undermine Taliban support which would in turn lay the foundations for negotiated peace with any willing partner. The aim of negotiations should be to have all political groups in Afghanistan respect the rule of law and reject violence as a means of pursuing political ends. Such a process would seek to replicate the successes of Ireland's Good Friday Agreement.

"Murals - IRA-Wandbild in Belfast, Women" by PPCC Antifa

"Sandy Row Mural" by bilfromesm
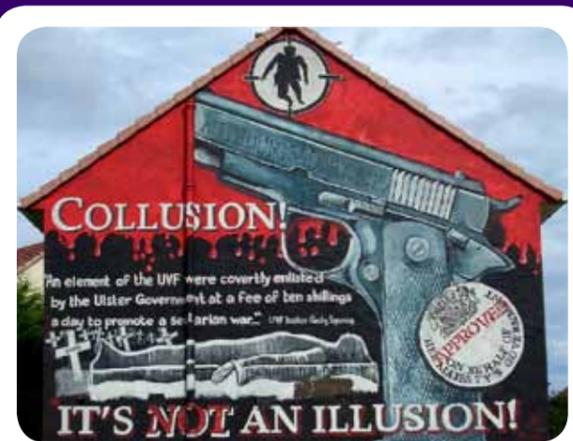
"Wandbild-Mural Collusion, Belfast" by PPCC Antifa

Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday or Belfast Agreement was signed on 10th April 1998 and effectively ended the longstanding insurgency that had been taking place in Northern Ireland since the 1960s. Known euphemistically as 'the Troubles', this insurgency was the latest chapter in the historical conflict between Britain and Ireland over the sovereignty of Ireland.

During this time there was much civil and armed resistance against the Ulster state by a variety of Catholic paramilitaries – the most prominent being the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). The PIRA used beatings, shootings and bombings in Ulster and in England in an attempt to make British rule in Ulster untenable. In addition to operations designed to disrupt British rule the PIRA also carried out vigilante activities in order to exert influence over the communities they sought to represent. Loyalists also formed paramilitaries, although they were less organised than the Catholic paramilitaries. Loyalist armed groups conducted sectarian attacks on Catholics suspected of paramilitary activity and on occasion, anyone who was Catholic. Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries became involved in tit-for-tat killings in which attacks on one group would be matched by attacks from the other.

The often bitter sectarian nature of the insurgency, its long historical antecedents and the intransigence of its belligerents led many to be pessimistic about the chances of peacefully resolving the Troubles. However, throughout the 1990s a peace process was able to produce the Good Friday Agreement which made temporary ceasefires permanent. It led to the main Republican and Loyalist political parties rejecting violence as a means of pursing their political goals, which in turn allowed for devolved government in Northern Ireland.

Although not without setbacks and returns to violence, the Northern Ireland peace process was ultimately successful. From this success at least five lessons can be learnt:

1. Superior military force can be counter-productive to the goal of stopping insurgent violence. During the 1970s and 1980s the British Army was deployed as a means of maintaining order in Ulster. Although order was maintained the actions of the British in this period, most notably Bloody Sunday and the internment of paramilitary suspects, damaged the legitimacy of the British state and prolonged the conflict (Johnson and English, 2008).

2. Both state and non-state actors can rapidly lose credibility if their rhetoric is not consistent with their actions or the facts on the ground. During the Troubles the British state's refusal to grant captured PIRA members the status of political prisoners cost it the support of moderate Irish Nationalists. The Omagh bombing (taking place shortly after the Good Friday Agreement was signed) destroyed the credibility of the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA) and of armed struggle in general for the majority of the population (Johnson and English, 2008).

3. The ability of a state to legitimately command the allegiance of all belligerents is vital for negotiated settlement. Peace negotiations sought not to resolve the issue of whether the six disputed counties should remain part of the United Kingdom or become part of the Republic of Ireland. Rather, they sought to create a political structure that would allow the dispute to continue, but in a non-violent form. This shift in emphasis transcended the simple Republican-Loyalist dichotomy and allowed for constructive negotiations (Johnson and English, 2008).

4. Success requires a long-term commitment to negotiations and may require groups to share a table with those who have been willing to use violence and those whose politics they disagree with. One of the most controversial aspects of the Northern Ireland peace process is that it has allowed unapologetic members of paramilitaries to hold government office. Martin McGuiness, Northern Ireland's Deputy First Minister, was an active member of the PIRA declaring himself to be a proud member of the PIRA's youth wing whilst imprisoned for possessing explosives and guns. The inclusion of paramilitaries in negotiations was, in spite of its controversy, conducive to the success of the peace process because those most involved in the violence were best placed to stop it

(Johnson and English, 2008).

5. Success requires understanding and respecting the rationality and motivations of opposition groups and where possible finding ways to harness insurgents' needs to strengthen rather than weaken state legitimacy. During the late 1980s and 1990s the strategy and tactics of the Republican Movement were transforming from armed resistance to political engagement. Reactions to the Omagh bombing highlighted this transformation. Prominent Sinn Féin members' condemnation of the bombing showed that their legitimacy derived not from violence but from their association with the nascent Northern Ireland state. This transformation was a product of rational re-evaluation of the failing strategy of violence (Johnson and English, 2008).

How do these lessons apply to Afghanistan?
Similarities between Northern Ireland and Afghanistan suggest that these lessons are relevant to the Afghanistan conflict and that the Northern Ireland peace process may provide a model for Afghanistan. These lessons apply despite the differences between the two situations, (most notably the Taliban's previous experience of ruling the country and far stronger position relative to the incumbent government) because in both cases the belligerents used or are using a combination of violence and politics in an attempt to meet their goal of state control. The above lessons, when applied to Afghanistan, suggest ways in which belligerents may be persuaded to pursue their goals solely through political means.

1. As in Northern Ireland superior military force has been ineffective in stopping insurgent violence in Afghanistan. The US/NATO's vastly greater military resources allowed them to swiftly oust the Taliban and enables them to win tactical engagements; however, it has not brought security to Afghanistan. Indeed, as the earlier sections of this report make clear, insecurity has increased under the watch of the US/NATO since the end of major combat operations, with the number of coalition casualties rising in spite of an increased number of soldiers being deployed and heavy casualties being inflicted on the Taliban. Military force has only a very limited effect on improving the governance problems that encourage support for the Taliban insurgency (Johnson and English, 2008).

2. The consistency of rhetoric with the facts on the ground is the same in Afghanistan as it was in Northern Ireland. All parties in the conflict engage in activities that contradict their rhetoric. These contradictions can sustain a conflict or be used to help bring it to an end (Johnson and English, 2008). The US/NATO's use of air strikes and their willingness to accept collateral damage as routine, undermines their claim that they are protecting the Afghan people. Even more damaging is the persistent and entrenched corruption of the Kabul government, which significantly undermines claims that they are acting in the best interests of the Afghan people. These contradictions sustain the Afghan conflict by causing discontent that can be transformed into support for the Taliban. However, it should be noted that the Taliban's targeting of civilians is a contradiction that can be used to help bring the conflict to an end, as it discredits the notion of the Taliban as defenders and contributes to the already severe war-weariness amongst the Afghan people.

3. The ideologues of both violent Irish republicanism and violent fundamentalist Islam combine a narrative of persecution with a revolutionary programme for the creation of a just state. This ideology has led Republicans and the Taliban to contest the legitimacy of the central state on the grounds that it is foreign, imperialist and sectarian (Johnson and English, 2008). For a long time existential opposition to the British state prevented Republicans from entering into negotiations that had any other purpose than the wholesale dismantling of the British state apparatus. Similarly, the Taliban demand the total withdrawal of US/NATO forces from Afghanistan and refuse to enter negotiations aimed at compromise because of the rhetorical dismissal of the US/NATO as infidels. In the case of Northern Ireland this existential opposition gradually weakened and negotiations designed to modify rather than remove the British state were able to take place. This precedent shows that the current intransigence of the Taliban may be overcome if proper incentives can be offered.

4. Arguably the most significant lesson for Afghanistan is the importance of entering into constructive negotiations with former enemies who show little or no contrition for their previous actions (Johnson and English, 2008). Talking to those directly involved in violence is essential, because only those who are using violence have control of it and therefore are able to stop it (Powell, 2008). The process of entering negotiations with former enemies was difficult in Northern Ireland and is likely to be as or even more difficult in Afghanistan as both sides have suffered extensive casualties at the hands of the other. Both sides have also devoted considerable energy to vilifying the other in order to maintain the support of their constituencies for continued military action. As a result both sides may be fearful of losing 'face' by being seen as the first to seek negotiations. In Northern Ireland these problems were partly overcome by establishing discreet channels of communication that would enable initial negotiations to take place without either party losing face (Powell, 2008). Michael Semple, a former deputy to the EU Special Representative in Afghanistan, has suggested that such a channel could be opened by working with insurgent commanders away from the front in Pakistan (Bajoria, 2009).

5. The importance of respecting the rationality of opposition is also especially relevant to Afghanistan. A combination of prejudice and propaganda has reduced the Taliban to 'terrorists' whose defining characteristic is their predilection for violence; a stereotype that is further reinforced by frequent descriptions of them as being fundamentalist, medieval and barbaric. Such value judgements neglect the fact that, although the ends the Taliban pursue are at odds with Western values and the values of much of the Afghan people, the Taliban are rational and tenacious in pursuing those ends. The rational nature of the Taliban means that negotiations are in principle possible (Johnson and English, 2008).

Reconciliation – is it really possible?

Serious attempts at reconciliation have thus far not been made, but as this report hopes to make clear, are possible. This section will consider the arguments that have been made against attempting to reconcile with the Taliban.

The most straightforward argument made against reconciling with the Taliban is that the senior Taliban are uninterested in negotiations and without a willing partner negotiations are impossible. Two reasons are usually given for the Taliban's lack of interest in peace talks. The first is that elements of the Taliban are ideologically committed to violent jihad and as such would not be prepared to negotiate with the US/NATO under any circumstances. Furthermore, even if negotiations were to take place the Taliban's demands on issues such as the post-Bonn constitution, the presence of US/NATO forces in Afghanistan, and human and women's rights would make a settlement impossible (Tellis, 2009). However, the Taliban's commitment to jihad regardless of circumstance is questionable. Public statements by Taliban leader Mullah Omar suggest that he is prepared to forego international jihad to improve his domestic position (Associated Press 2008). Compromise on constitutional issues is likely to be harder to achieve; however, the heterogeneous nature of the Taliban means that some elements, particularly middle elements, may be prepared to comprise even if a unified decision cannot be reached. This can be seen through the willingness of former Taliban officials including Mullar Abdul Salaam Zaeef to attend a closed conference in London in February 2011. Though he claims not to speak on behalf of the Taliban, he is thought to still have close ties to many of the group's leaders (Duncan Gardham, 2011).

The second reason why reconciliation is seen as impossible is because the Taliban remain convinced of their ability to force the US/NATO to leave Afghanistan and overthrow the Karzai government by continuing their insurgency and thus have no reason to compromise with the US/NATO (Tellis, 2009). This objection is blind to the historical tendency for most insurgencies to gravitate towards a stalemate where military force is unable to significantly advance either side's objectives (Betz, 2009). In such circumstances the Taliban would be more inclined to enter into peace talks.

A further criticism of reconciliation is that attempts at peace talks with the Taliban would be not only useless but also potentially dangerous. Peace talks

could strengthen the Taliban's position because they would be interpreted as a sign of coalition weakness (Tellis, 2009). This perceived weakness would not only provide a boost to Taliban morale but also be used for propaganda purposes to advance their cause. Initially, the Taliban are likely to interpret US/NATO overtures as signs of weakness and possible withdrawal. However, if US/NATO forces remain in situ for the duration of what would inevitably be a long peace process, then any such perceptions and any propaganda benefits gained from them will be temporary.

Alternatively, but no less dangerously, the Taliban may choose to enter into peace talks but be insincere in their negotiations. Adopting this tactic would offer several advantages to the Taliban. First, on a military level it would provide a break from fighting which the Taliban could use to make good their losses and improve their capabilities for continuing the insurgency. Second, negotiating with the Taliban would increase their legitimacy by normalising their status whilst at the same time providing them with an opportunity to project their message to a wide and attentive audience (Byman, 2009). Third, the Taliban may negotiate and appear to reconcile with the US/NATO and the Karzai government but in reality be playing a 'long game' in which they wait for US/NATO forces to leave Afghanistan before resuming the insurgency against a Karzai state which does not have the protection of US/NATO forces (Weitz, 2010).

Although there are dangers of entering into negotiations with an insincere Taliban these risks should not be overstated and need to be weighed against the potential benefits and against the constraints that negotiations would place on the Taliban.

Sharing a table with the Taliban would confer on them a degree of legitimacy in Western eyes that they have not previously enjoyed; though, concerns over the legitimacy of the Taliban are more acute outside Afghanistan than inside it. Maintaining the Taliban's pariah status serves the domestic needs of Western politicians seeking public support for the war more than it does the needs of the Afghan people. For many Afghans the Taliban are either already considered legitimate or are an everyday reality whose actions are not restricted by declaring them illegitimate. Indeed Oxfam research suggests that Afghans are more concerned with the situation as a whole than with the question of Taliban legitimacy and so are unlikely to have a principled objection to negotiating with them (Oxfam International, 2009).

Although the Taliban would be able to use ceasefires to make good their losses a temporary ceasefire would also benefit the US/NATO and as such it is not clear that playing a waiting game is as beneficial to the Taliban as is commonly assumed. As previously discussed the crisis of governance in Afghanistan is the primary reason for the spread of the insurgency. Time spent by the Taliban engaging in temporary ceasefires would also be time spent developing governance in key Taliban constituencies thus undermining the appeal of insurgency.

The fear that the Taliban will reconcile in public whilst harbouring intentions of resuming violence once US/NATO forces leave is based on American experiences in Vietnam. Such a deception was used by the North to take control of the South after US forces withdrew (Weitz, 2010). The circumstances in Afghanistan are different from Vietnam and importantly US/NATO forces need not withdraw with the same immediacy as in 1973. More crucially this fear is based on a mistaken view of how conflicts end. Peace is not a state which follows the signing of a treaty but is the culmination of a peace process. Such a process may take years but if successful makes a deception of this type unlikely because as the process continues the rewards of violence are reduced and the rewards of co-operation increase (Powell, 2008).

Based on evaluation of the current democratic, security and economic situation and by comparing the Taliban insurgency with the Irish Republican insurgency this report makes five proposals for action in Afghanistan. These proposals build on each other and offer a non-military approach to the problems facing Afghanistan.

Proposals for Action

1. Long-term thinking is required for Afghanistan
Due to the nature and severity of the problems facing Afghanistan, even if optimal policies were to be implemented straight away, significant progress would only occur in the medium to long-term. Unfortunately this long-term approach is often alien to a Western political culture which is more focused on maintaining popularity and finding expedient solutions to immediate problems. One way to encourage such long-term thinking would be the creation of a politically independent and influential body comprised of a diverse range of interested parties to oversee reconstruction efforts.

2. Cease large scale offensive military operations
Large scale military operations have not fulfilled the US/NATO strategic objectives and have led to a deterioration of the security situation. The volatility of Afghanistan and the unreadiness of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police to protect civilians means that US/NATO forces must remain in the country. However, their mandate and concept of operations must be *significantly* changed. US/NATO forces must adopt a defensive posture designed to protect civilians from Taliban intimidation and reprisals and where necessary from the actions of corrupt ANP units.

3. Fight corruption and build bureaucratic expertise
Effective and legitimate governance is a prerequisite for ending insurgencies. The Taliban insurgency has been successful because the Karzai government has been unable to provide effective and legitimate governance to the Afghan people, particularly those living in rural areas, because the Afghan government is widely corrupt and lacks a skilled bureaucracy. Although reducing corruption and training a competent bureaucracy is neither quick nor glamorous it is essential to the resolution of the Afghan conflict and this, not military operations, must become the highest priority for the US/NATO and the Afghan government. In the short term the viable means to establish such governance in rural areas is to reconstruct some form of tribal governance. Effective and legitimate governance would not only undermine Taliban support but it is a prerequisite for a negotiated end to the insurgency. The Afghan state must also be made strong enough to implement any agreement reached through negotiations.

4. Engage in talks with all sincere parties
The Obama administration's strategic review of Afghanistan has recognised the necessity and desirability of seeking some form of negotiated settlement to the conflict. Although this is a welcome development the manner in which a negotiated settlement is conceptualised remains problematic. Negotiations are to be conducted 'from a position of strength'; that is, they are to be made possible through military actions. This means that the military remains the primary instrument through which the US/NATO ends are to be achieved in Afghanistan; in doing so, the US/NATO are in effect operating a policy of 'negotiated attrition' in pursuit of a military victory.

An alternative to this 'negotiated attrition' is a Northern Ireland style peace process which seeks to reform political processes instead of affect outcomes. Such an approach does not specify which outcomes are legitimate and those which are not, but rather it specifies legitimate and illegitimate ways of achieving objectives. The desired outcome of such talks is not to force the surrender of the Taliban and force their acceptance of a secular state, but rather to persuade the Taliban to pursue their political objectives without the use of violence.

5. Conduct 'police operations' against those unwilling to renounce violence
If some members of the Taliban cannot be reconciled and continue to use violence in an attempt to fulfil their political aims, then the use of force will be necessary. However, the scale and character of the force should be different from the current modus operandi and should be closer to a police operation than to war fighting. Specifically, it should be led by intelligence, with operations planned to capture and try specific named figures and disrupt their activities. The principle of minimum necessary force would also have to apply.

Conclusion

The strategic goal of defeating the Taliban in order to bring security, democracy and prosperity to Afghanistan is not being achieved. Insurgent activity has increased and with it the numbers of military and civilian casualties. The post-Taliban government is corrupt and has failed to provide basic services to much of the Afghan population; in addition, a lack of economic opportunity has continued Afghan farmers' reliance on opium as a cash crop. This has occurred because the military approach focuses on exhausting its enemy rather than addressing the grievances that have led to its support. This report's proposals provide a means of moving past a military strategy and towards a non-military approach to the problems facing Afghanistan.

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this report is to help foster debate about what could and should be done at this point in the War in Afghanistan. Public debate is vital, and as a country at war, we should be actively looking for solutions that bring about peace.

This report has been written for **conscience** by Thomas Furber. If you have any comments or suggestions you would like to raise about the content of this report or if you would like to contact the author, please email **conscience** at info@conscienceonline.org.uk

"The Means are the Ends" by Ari More

Notes and References

Notes
1. The other objective was the capture of Osama Bin Laden and the destruction of al-Qaeda.
2. Also see: Asian Development Bank, UK Department for International Development, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

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