



CANADIAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

A COMMITTEE OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS (QUAKERS) IN CANADA

Submission to the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan

November 30, 2007

Submitted by

Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee
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Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan

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We, the Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)¹, wish to express to the Government of Canada our concern that the very premise on which the four suggested options on which the Panel is focused precludes consideration of non-military peacebuilding. With due respect, policy with regard to Canada's role in Afghanistan is not only, or even primarily, a question of what to do with our military resources.

If the goal of Canada's foreign policy is to build peace, then deep consideration of non-military, peacebuilding action is needed. Within the terms of reference of this panel, the only option which offers an opening for this sort of discussion is number four, that is, "To withdraw all Canadian military personnel except a minimal force to protect aid workers and diplomats." Peacebuilding action goes far beyond humanitarian relief and diplomatic presence in the country.

When the criminal atrocities of September 11th, 2001 were committed, international and national legal structures already existed to pursue the perpetrators and hold them accountable for their actions. To pursue this course, and to strengthen such structures, would have been peacebuilding action. Instead, military retaliation was chosen. The violent and overwhelming assault on an already impoverished and war-damaged country, the inevitable killing of innocent bystanders, and the bypassing of tenets of international law were, we believe, immoral and counterproductive choices. The outcome of these choices is that Canada's traditional and cherished role as a peacemaker is now extremely compromised.

Reliance on war and militarism will not achieve lasting and genuine peace. It fails to address the root causes of conflict and pre-empts constructive approaches to just solutions. Each episode of violence sows the seeds for further violence.

¹ Founded in 1931, Canadian Friends Service Committee is the peace and service arm of Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers).

Individually and collectively, we can create a lasting peace only by recognizing each other's God-given humanity, whatever our national or ethnic origin, and then acting with the loving justice that follows such recognition. We in the Canadian Friends Service Committee, invest our effort in developing such responses, and shall continue our work toward that end, to (in the words of William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania) “see what love will do” in situations of conflict. The Government of Canada, with its different position and resources, could follow the same path.

Concretely, at this juncture, this type of approach could involve actions such as:

- 1) Mediation by a low-profile mediator facilitating dialogue among all the actors, armed and otherwise. This person and his or her team would be independent of any individual state's direction or identity, and would be respected for having demonstrated understanding of the political and social history of Afghanistan and Islam. The first goal of the dialogue would be a cease-fire agreement linked to the second step listed below. The cease-fire agreement would include a structure for the delivery of aid and reconstruction to meet the basic needs of the people, with clear expectations of how Afghan (and international) human and material resources will be equitably used and built through the process. This would include a plan of action for transforming the opium industry into a legal and more diverse alternative. We note that a large part of the Afghanistan Compact is dedicated to solving this economic root cause of the conflict, but this aspect is ignored in the terms of reference of the Panel.
- 2) A very inclusive process, including all the Afghan actors involved in step one, to frame a constitution for Afghanistan which provides a high level of autonomy to all major parts of the country.
- 3) Firm support in the multilateral diplomatic world for the decisions and directions arising from the processes of (1) and (2). Here, Canada could have a very important role, although minimally present on the ground in Afghanistan.
- 4) Use of the international legal structures that were ignored in 2001 to pursue the small number of criminal organizers of terrorist action.
- 5) Assistance with funding for the international support workers and observers who would be needed for the political and material reconstruction activities defined in items (1) and (2). Recognition that the Organization of the Islamic Conference might be a more appropriate organizing framework than NATO. The OIC, established in 1969, is a high-level intergovernmental organization with 57 member states. It condemns terrorism in all its forms and undertakes actions to address its root causes. The OIC engages in high-level multilateral diplomacy, including brokering peace agreements and organizing cooperative contributions to humanitarian relief.
- 6) A similar and linked low-profile consultative process in each of the neighbouring countries.
- 7) Adherence and promotion by Canada to key international disarmament, human rights and environmental agreements, in order to overturn the conflict-feeding perception that NATO countries want restrictions on other countries but resist accepting restrictions themselves. Such agreements would include the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the Program of Action on Limitation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Geneva Conventions, the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights, and the Kyoto Accord. A special concern is that Canada must stop all complicity in torture, and roll back the untenable restrictions on domestic civil liberties that are found in “anti terrorism” legislation here at home.

8) Direct assistance by Canada in de-mining and cleaning up depleted uranium munitions used during and since the invasion of 2001, thus recognizing our responsibility as participants in the use of these weapons.

We ask that the Canadian Government withdraw its present support of a violent, and ultimately dangerous, strategy, and turn its resources instead to the creation of a more just world, in which the incentives to terrorism would be steadily reduced. This course does not promise a mythical and unattainable absolute security for the Developed World, but it would vastly increase the genuine safety of all the world's inhabitants.

While we realize that Friends’ pacifist tradition is the path taken less frequently, we are disturbed by our government's lack of interest in and failure to consider alternative non-violent means to resolve conflict. There are many NGOs and peace organizations offering an array of alternatives.

How can we break out of the spiral of violence in which we are now caught without exploring these other options? We ask that our government forsake its overwhelming focus on military action and explore more independent, creative and non-violent approaches to foreign and defence policy in general, and to Canada’s role in Afghanistan specifically.

We hold you in the Light as you struggle with these difficult issues which affect the well-being of those now on earth and of future generations.