



Canadian Friends Service Committee

Background Paper on Canada's Role in Afghanistan

September 7, 2007

Purpose of this Paper:

CFSC's Quaker Peace and Sustainable Communities Committee arranged for this paper to be written in preparation for Canadian Yearly Meeting 2007 in order to offer Friends a common reference for discussion. The "Culture of Peace" statement that was written at CYM 2006 expressed Friends' dismay at the increasing militarization of Canadian policy. The role of Canadian forces in Afghanistan is the most pointed example of this. Friends may wish to identify further action to influence a change in Canada's role there.

It is clear that experience is of paramount importance when offering advice and is very valuable in a situation where a conflict is as entrenched and complicated as in Afghanistan. Few Canadian Friends have first-hand experience of Afghanistan and we have no partners in the region, which makes the development of a substantive and informed policy very difficult without being theologically dogmatic.

This paper is limited to laying out the history of Canada's current intervention in Afghanistan, and Canadian Quaker responses to that. The very last section sketches some options for different roles for Canada, as have been proposed by different organizations that have more first-hand experience of Afghanistan, and are pursuing their own leadings towards peace. During May and June, CFSC and the CYM clerks were in consultation with the Canadian Council of Churches on a letter to government on this topic, but a final text has not yet been released. Also, KAIROS has drafted a discussion paper, but has not yet released it. Both resources will be posted through the CFSC website when they are available.

Introduction to Afghanistan¹:

Afghanistan is officially known as the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It is a landlocked country located in the heart of Asia. It has religious, ethno-linguistic, and geographic links with most of its neighbours. It is bordered by Pakistan in the south and east, Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, Kashmir in the north-east and the People's Republic of China in the far northeast.

Afghanistan is a mountainous country, with plains in the north and southwest. Much of the country is dry; fresh water is scarce. Afghanistan is slightly smaller than Texas.

The country's natural resources include gold, silver, copper, zinc and iron ore in southeastern areas; precious and semi-precious stones such as lapis, emerald and azure in the north-east; and potentially significant petroleum and natural gas reserves in the north. It also has coal, chromite,

¹ The information in this section is drawn almost verbatim from the entry on Afghanistan in Wikipedia:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan>

talc, barites, sulfur, lead, and salt. These resources remain largely untapped due to the effects of war. Plans are underway to begin extracting them in the near future.

Afghanistan's population is 32,000,000 (2007), similar to Canada's. In 2006 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated at \$32.4 billion with the per capita GDP at \$1,490, making it one of the world's lowest (placing 158th). The capital is Kabul and the President of Afghanistan is Hamid Karzai. The official languages are Pashtun and Dari (Persian)

In the 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer state in "The Great Game" played between the United Kingdom and Tsarist Russia. On August 19, 1919, following the third Anglo-Afghan war, the country regained full independence from the United Kingdom over its foreign affairs.

Since the late 1970s, Afghanistan has suffered continuous and brutal civil war, which included foreign interventions in the form of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the 2001 conflict with the US in which the ruling Taliban government was toppled. The Afghan people take great pride in having never been a conquered people. The British and Soviets were repelled; the current war is not over.

Background on Canada's role in the war in Afghanistan:

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was mobilized on 7 Oct 2001 as a US-led military retaliation against Afghanistan (the operational base of Al Qaeda) following the attack on the USA by Al Qaeda on September 11th. Canadian Forces joined this operation from the beginning. Afghanistan was invaded by sea, land and air strikes.

Canadian Forces were originally committed to involvement in OEF until 2003. In 2003 the Canadian government, under the Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, extended Canadian Forces involvement until 2005. It has been speculated that this was a way for Canada to avoid participation in an invasion in Iraq, as Canada did not have the capacity to be deployed into two zones of war simultaneously. Public opinion, including the critical voice of the churches, influenced the Prime Minister's refusal to have Canada participate in the invasion of Iraq as it was not sanctioned by the United Nations.

July 2006 marked a new and significant shift in Canadian operations in Afghanistan as Canadian Forces were transferred from the US-led OEF mission to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO troops began to replace US troops in the more dangerous region of Southern Afghanistan, including (Canadian troops prior to this were mostly stationed around more stable Kabul). The ISAF's mandate was for security patrols and protection functions, in contrast to the OEF's military-centred counter-insurgency fighting. Since then, US influence has maintained the counter-insurgency fighting stance in the ISAF in the region.²

In 2006 Canada elected a new minority government led by the Conservative Party of Canada. Within months, the government committed the Canadian Forces to Afghanistan until 2009. This was a controversial move as many felt that debate and due consideration about the commitment was cut short. After a 6-hour debate the House of Commons passed a motion to extend the mission until 2009 by a slim 149-145 majority. So far, 66 Canadian soldiers and 1 diplomat have been killed in Afghanistan. Most fatalities have occurred since 2006 as insurgence from the former regime has become more frequent and more violent and Canadian soldiers are now deployed to a more dangerous region of the country.

² From "Afghanistan: Toward counter-insurgency by other means" by Ernie Regehr, January 2006.

Canada's military commitment to Afghanistan remains controversial and continues to be questioned within Parliament. On April 24, 2007, a motion to withdraw troops by 2009 was defeated in the House of Commons 150-134, by the Conservatives and the New Democratic Party (NDP). The NDP wanted an immediate withdrawal of the troops.

On the 21 June 2007 the Secretary General of NATO Jaap de Hoop Scheffer visited Canada and indicated that Canadian troops maybe be needed in Afghanistan beyond 2009. In a number of speeches and public comments, both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor have signalled Canada is willing to consider an extended commitment. They have said no final decision has been made and Parliament will have an opportunity to debate an extension. In late June, Harper indicated that an extension would require broad parliamentary approval: "Should Canada be involved militarily after that date [February 2009], we have been clear that would have to be approved by the Canadian Parliament. From my personal perspective, I would want to see some degree of consensus around that. I don't want to send people into a mission if the opposition at home is going to undercut the dangerous work that they're doing in the field."³.

Harper's shifting perspective may well be rooted in public opinion. According to a Decima Research poll (conducted May 31-June 4, 2007), most Canadians are opposed to extending the deadline for Canadian Forces to return from Afghanistan. Only one in four (26%) Canadians feel that "Canada should be willing to extend our mission in Afghanistan beyond February 2009 if that is necessary to complete our goals there." Fully 67% felt that "we need to do our best to accomplish progress in Afghanistan but that we must stick to that deadline and get our troops out." This is the majority view in every region, among men and women, urban and rural voters, all income and every age group.

Configuration: how the Canadian mission is organized

There are three international missions happening in Afghanistan: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF); the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (operational since March 2002). The latter two missions' aims are to facilitate the reconstruction and development of Afghan society.

International efforts to assist Afghanistan are loosely coordinated. The Afghanistan Compact and the Afghan National Development Strategy provide frameworks for cooperation and consequent development between the Afghan government and various large international bodies such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Much aid to Afghanistan is government-to-government (i.e., bilateral) rather than the funding of Civil Society Organizations (CSO).

Canadian Forces transferred from the OEF mission to the ISAF mission, which have completely different mandates, in July 2006. "The initial military objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom, as articulated by President George W. Bush in his Sept. 20th Address to a Joint Session of Congress and his Oct. 7th address to country in 2001, include the destruction of terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al Qaeda leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan."⁴ The USA continues to have approximately 30,000 troops in Afghanistan working on this mandate.⁵

³ <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20070623.harper-afghan23/BNStory/International/>

⁴ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom.htm>

⁵ <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/index.cfm?docid=5194>

ISAF's purpose is "to assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in providing a safe and secure environment within Kabul, the North, West and South, which will assist in the reconstruction of a new Afghanistan.

"ISAF has the responsibility throughout the whole of Afghanistan. These are run via five Regional Commands (RCs). These in turn have Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) underneath them, 5 in the North, 4 in the West, 4 in the South and 12 in the East. There are no PRTs in RC Capital. Their role is to assist the local authorities in the reconstruction and maintenance of security in the area.

"On a political level ISAF works closely with the Afghan authorities, United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), UN agencies, International Organizations, and Non-Governmental Organizations. As part of this process, ISAF has established liaison teams in all departments of both the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and UNAMA."⁶

As of April 2006 there are 2500 Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, working in variety of ways. Some are working in a battle group stationed at Air Field; approximately 350 Canadian personnel are working in the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City which is under the command of ISAF. The PRT facilitates reconstruction efforts in provinces outside the capital. The work of the PRT is supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the work of Justice officials, USAID and the Strategic Advisory Team in Kabul. To achieve the goals of the PRT, civil groups must work with military groups. The effects of PRT's work are anticipated to be long-term and criticism has arisen as there is no evidence of any immediate impact. It has been stated that the PRT is inefficient and ineffective. On 7 July 2007 the Toronto Star reported that the Afghan mission is costing Canada \$1.3 million per day and recent polls show that Canadian sentiment towards the war is primarily negative.

Contradictions between means and stated ends

It is unclear why Canadian Forces transferred operations in 2006. In his article, "Afghanistan: Toward counter-insurgency by other means", Ploughshares' Ernie Regehr notes he is unable to find this information, however he also notes that the US was anxious that the UN-mandated and NATO-led ISAF (which has strong US and no Canadian command leadership⁷) continue the military counter-insurgency strategy of OEF, and that this attitude is controversial with other NATO contributing members such as the Netherlands. While ISAF's stated purpose is focused on peacekeeping in Afghanistan and supporting the Afghan people and helping to reconstruct an infrastructure in the country, it is a highly militarized operation. While it is not a stated part of their mission, Canadian Forces are still engaged in combat with insurgents under ISAF as they were under OEF.

The capture of detainees in Afghanistan by Canadian Forces raises concern about the possible torture and the treatment of detainees transferred to Afghan security forces. The US government classifies captured enemy combatants as "detainees" because they do not accept that these combatants are "prisoners of war" under the definition found in the [Geneva Convention](#).

⁶ http://www.nato.int/ISAF/Update/media_faq.htm

⁷ http://www.nato.int/ISAF/structure/structure_whoswho1.htm

On 6 February, 2006, the CBC reported that the Canadian military investigated allegations of abuse of three Afghan men, in the custody of Canadian soldiers. The investigation came at the request of University of Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran, based on government documents he had obtained under the Access to Information Act.

Amnesty International has noted its strong concern both about the treatment and torture of detainees” and of the high number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan⁸. “Amnesty is particularly concerned that:

- “The legal basis for the presence of ISAF’s forces in Afghanistan places them outside Afghan law and beyond the effective reach of justice in Afghanistan as well as in their own countries;
- “Aerial bombardments carried out as part of ISAF military operations have, as acknowledged by ISAF commanders, resulted in the killing of civilians in the course of specific engagements. These attacks may have failed to discriminate between civilian and military targets in breach of international humanitarian law. Such operations have also contributed to the forced displacement of up to 90,000 people who have fled their homes because of the violence;
- “Detention procedures currently used by ISAF, which require the transfer of detainees to the custody of Afghan security forces within 96 hours, may result in the torture or ill-treatment of Afghan nationals. Amnesty International has for many years raised concerns about the use of torture and ill-treatment by Afghan security forces, including the National Security Directorate (NSD). Amnesty International is concerned that the NSD enjoys effective impunity, on account of the weak judicial system, lack of adequate training and high levels of corruption in the country.”⁹

What have Friends said or done to date?

On 15 September 2001 Canadian Friends Service Committee wrote a letter to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in response to the attacks of 9/11 in New York. The letter emphasized our grief at such loss and urged politicians to respond to the attacks in a contemplative and peaceful way.

In 2002, with donations from Friends, CFSC contributed to a Mennonite Central Committee project focused on income development and assistance work with widows in Afghanistan (who are highly marginalized if not cared for by family).

As there was much ecumenical consensus opposing the Afghanistan intervention, activity related to Afghanistan frequently occurred around the tables of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) or Project Ploughshares.

On 12 October 2001 the CCC wrote an ecumenical appeal to Parliament outlining some useful strategies in responding effectively without violence to the threat of global terrorism.

On 16 January 2002 the CCC wrote another letter questioning Canadian military policy and actions particularly in relation to American military policy and actions. It concerned Canadian military activity in Afghanistan and asks that Canadian military policy should remain independent and transparent and that it should not simply follow policy set by American military.

⁸http://www.amnesty.ca/resource_centre/news/view.php?load=arcview&article=3977&c=Resource+Centre+News

⁹ <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA110202006?open&of=ENG-AFG>

In 2007, the CCC organized several months of consultation with church leaders. This resulted in a letter to the Prime Minister sent on August 16, 2007.¹⁰ Canadian Yearly Meeting signed on. The letter expressed grief for Canadian and Afghani and others' losses, and commented on six points: reconciliation, diplomacy, human rights, just governance, development, and security. It noted that the Afghanistan Compact of 2004, which Canada endorsed, included a Peace, Justice and Reconciliation Action Plan, and strongly recommended that this "profound way of peace" be followed. In sum, the church leaders recommended a complete change in policy for Canadian intervention in Afghanistan: instead of a military counter-insurgency campaign, there should be protection of the vulnerable, a focus for investment on long term human development uncomplicated by identification with military action, assistance to human rights initiatives, fuller inclusion of all Afghani identity groups in the political process, insistence on accountability for members of the Afghan government, and more diplomacy.

Project Ploughshares has engaged on behalf of its members at the governmental level many times since 2001 and has produced a number of briefing papers on issues connected to Canada's involvement in Afghanistan.¹¹

On 19 August 2006 a statement called "Toward A Culture of Peace" was approved by Canadian Yearly Meeting at Winnipeg, Manitoba. It reiterated Friends' commitment to pacifism and outlined some broad goals toward achieving a "culture of peace"

Many of the churches' letters espouse a more pacifistic stance, but if world leaders are to accept non-violence as a viable option instead of military action they need to be offered pragmatic methods.

Beliefs and myths relating to the current situation in Afghanistan.

A range of myths and beliefs circulate about the situation in Afghanistan which complicate understanding the situation and possible choices.

Human rights violations and misery were at extremely high levels when the Taliban took power in 1996. The Taliban had many objectionable policies, particularly towards women, but they were able to bring enough order into society that people felt more safe than they had previously. The elections in Afghanistan, which took place in 2002, excluded the Taliban and many warlords and others party to the pre-Taliban woes in Afghanistan were appointed into the new government. The current Afghan government is not necessarily more democratic and less violent than the Taliban were when they were in power there has not been an improvement for Afghans.

Afghanistan has a democratically elected leader free from controversy. Hamid Karzai won the presidential election, held on 9 October 2004, with 55.4% of the votes. Approximately 75% of eligible Afghans voted in the election. Karzai is the first democratically elected leader of Afghanistan. He worked as a consultant for the large US oil company Unocal and developed strong relationships with people who became key members of the Bush administration. The US Army allowed him to use military transport during his election campaign; the campaign was only a month long; and his opponents received little press. There were allegations of voting

¹⁰ http://www.ccc-cce.ca/english/home/2007/aug16_2007.htm for text of letter.

¹¹ <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/>

irregularities which the UN investigated ; the national election commission declared Karzai winner on November 3.

Many believe that the Taliban refused to assist in finding and handing over members of Al Qaeda post-9/11 and, thus, the US was justified in invading Afghanistan in 2001. Instead of protecting members of Al Qaeda at all costs, in fact, the Taliban offered in September 2001 to arrest the Al Qaeda members that they knew of and to surrender them to an International Court, but not to the US, a strategy that was rejected by the US¹².

As has already been mentioned, the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom mission (mandate of defensive militarism) and that of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (mandate to enhance security to facilitate restructuring) in practice still have Canadian Forces heavily involved in combat despite the aim of the ISAF mission being to implement peaceful activities.

Foreign forces tend to characterize all those that oppose them with the use of force as “Taliban”, whether or not the links of the perpetrators to the Taliban organization are clear (this is picked up by the media). There are a various groups engaged in the conflict on the ground, not just the Taliban. This practice oversimplifies the reality of the situation and obscures the actual political situation to which a peace strategy would need to respond.

What are some of the options for Canada?

Several options for future Canadian action have been cited by different groups: Canadian Forces should simply leave Afghanistan; they should leave Afghanistan ensuring that appropriate people are there to help build peace; they should stay in Afghanistan and oversee the building of a peaceful society.

The churches in Canada have struggled a great deal with the war itself and the presence of the military in Afghanistan. Given the degree of violence and instability in Afghanistan presently, the ecumenical consensus expressed in the August 2007 Canadian Council of Churches’ letter to government, lends itself towards the continuation of a Canadian Forces presence in Afghanistan but for them to change the focus of their operation. This change would mean a shift from engaging in military violence to assisting rebuilding in Afghanistan.

This is consistent with the stance put forward by Project Ploughshares through a briefing paper¹³ which emphasized that public and political discussions in Canada about the situation in Afghanistan need to be transparent. Also it states that progress in Afghanistan relies on dialogue and subsequent political stability, which in turn relies on the belief of the Afghan people in their own political regime.

The Afghanistan Working Group of McMaster University’s Peace Studies Program also state that they can envisage Canadian Forces remaining engaged in Afghanistan with a completely different role from the one they currently have¹⁴. Their position paper emphasizes the important and peaceful role Canadian Forces could have in supporting and protecting dialogues between political sides in Afghanistan.

KAIROS is presently working on a briefing paper on Afghanistan.

¹² PowerPoint presentation “Canadian Operations”

¹³ Project Ploughshares, “Briefing On The Situation In Afghanistan” (8 November 2006).

¹⁴ McMaster University Centre for Peace Studies Afghanistan Working Group, “Canada’s Role in Afghanistan: A Third Option” (2006?).

Contrastingly, researcher and peace activist John Galtung insists that NATO is absolutely the wrong group to be intervening and suggests that there are Islamic organizations that could themselves provide the peacekeeping support that is needed.¹⁵ Galtung believes that answers to the crisis within Afghanistan must come from Afghan agencies as opposed to external influences such as NATO.

¹⁵ Speech by John Galung, given at a rally in Oslo on the occasion of a meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 25 April 2007.