

THE NEED FOR A PEACE PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN:

A SUBMISSION TO THE INDEPENDENT PANEL ON CANADA'S ROLE IN  
AFGHANISTAN

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Dear Panel Members:

The Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University began visiting Afghanistan in 1994, and from 1999 to 2003 its Afghanistan Working Group undertook peace education, conflict resolution training, and peacebuilding projects with Afghans, both within Afghanistan and with Afghan refugees in Peshawar, Pakistan. Two of our projects were funded by the Peacebuilding Fund of CIDA. Final reports on these projects are available on request. Peace education work by the AWG has continued to the present.

Partner and support organizations in this work included the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, the BBC REACH programme, the Afghan University in Peshawar, the Council of Peace and Unity (CPAU), the Research and Advisory Council of Afghanistan (RACA), the Sanayee Development Foundation, Norwegian Church Aid, ACBAR, the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR), the Ministries of Information and Culture, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education of the government of Afghanistan.

We have produced a Peace Manual for Afghans, translated into Dari and Pashto, and a series of storybooks for children that emphasize peace, reconciliation and healing that are now being printed in the two major languages of Afghanistan. Two of our members have for the last several years been employed in Afghanistan and are currently full-time consultants to the Ministry of Education there.

*We have contributed to, and we strongly endorse, the submission on peace and security made to your Panel by the Afghanistan Reference Group (ARG). After reflecting on whether to make a separate submission, we have decided to send you this letter followed by a separate document.*

The document in question may seem to you a peculiar choice, because it was written in 2004, but its date is precisely what makes it important. The essay's title is: "Alarmed Now or Shocked in 2007? Unaddressed Factors in the Afghan Conflict and the Need for Dialogue." It was written by one of our Afghan-Canadian members, Dr. Seddiq Weera. (Dr. Weera is a Canadian citizen but lived most of his life in Afghanistan and is one of our two members now working with the Ministry of Education.) This essay was widely circulated in Afghanistan in 2004 but is, as far as we now, still not widely known in

Canada. It is, we believe, prophetic, because the factors unaddressed in 2004 are still largely unaddressed in 2007, with resulting grave consequences.

We support a peace process consisting of multiple dialogues, negotiation, and reconciliation, preferably in that order. While some may feel that the 2005 “Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Afghanistan Action Plan” of the government of Afghanistan meets the needs outlined in Dr. Weera’s 2004 document, this is not so. It is, to be sure, a fine plan in many respects, but we do not believe it is possible to proceed directly to reconciliation when neither the pre-negotiation phase of dialogue and problem-solving nor formal negotiation among key stakeholders leading to a comprehensive peace agreement has taken place.

Likewise, we are aware of Mr. Karzai’s several statements and actions in the direction of dialogue with the armed opposition. We admire his wisdom and courage. But we feel these efforts do not have sufficient consistency and have not been supported by the international community. We would like to see Canada take the lead in assuring that an armed solution to Afghanistan’s conflicts is replaced with a political solution that is the outcome of a serious, sustained and sophisticated peace process using the best of Afghan and international expertise.

*You will notice that our proposal does not endorse any of the four options given to your Panel for consideration. It represents a fifth option: a peace process for Afghanistan. Our position on Canadian troops is that they may be used in Afghanistan only if they can be used in a peace support capacity rather than in a combat capacity. By “peace support” we mean that they must enhance and protect a peace process that seriously attempts to include all major parties and belligerents in achieving a comprehensive peace agreement for Afghanistan.*

We offer you our best wishes in your vital work.

**ALARMED NOW OR SHOCKED IN 2007?  
UNADDRESSED FACTORS IN THE AFGHAN CONFLICT  
AND THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE**

Dr. Seddiq Weera, Afghanistan Working Group, Centre for Peace Studies, McMaster University, 2004

If the first half of the pledge made in the Berlin Summit for Afghanistan of March 31-April 01, 2004, ear-marked for security, fails to achieve its purpose, the second half of the pledge will automatically fail as well. It will be shockingly disappointing for both the international community and the Afghan government if, despite unprecedented international support (e.g., pledges in the Berlin Summit 2004 for the next three years), by the spring of 2007 Afghanistan is not sufficiently secure to permit major reconstruction and development. Unfortunately, this scenario is likely unless additional steps are taken to tackle unaddressed problems. It is better to be alarmed now than shocked in 2007.

In this brief paper, I will recount the measures taken thus far to bring security in Afghanistan, identify the gaps or unattended problems, and propose solutions. In light of consultations carried out by McMaster University's Center for Peace Studies and by the international peace organization TRANSCEND in Kabul, Nangarhar, Wardak and Mazar-e-Sharif, I will suggest that, unless measures are taken to address these gaps and unattended problems, the achievement of stability and peace in Afghanistan is unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future.

Following the Bonn agreement of December 2001, investments have been focused on government institution-building, creation of a national army and national police, organizing and holding emergency and constitutional Loya Jirgas, and fighting armed enemies of the government. Government institution-building, capacity strengthening, infrastructure rehabilitation and public service reform, despite numerous challenges (weak human resources, unqualified leadership in many offices, fraud and corruption), can be considered a relative success, especially in the capital city of Kabul. National army and police development, although curbed by holders of private armies, is gathering momentum, particularly with changes in the leaderships of the ministries of Interior and Defense. But the presence of the 13,500 and 6,500 Coalition and ISAF forces, respectively, has failed so far to bring a level of security necessary for reconstruction, economic growth and stability. Finally, measures to combat severe poverty (compounded by drought) have not brought notable changes to the lives of ordinary Afghans. ***Failure to achieve durable security, reconstruction, economic growth and stability will persist until the major causes of insecurity are adequately addressed.***

What are the major threats to security in the country and what measures might be taken to address them?

**1.0 THE BIG FIRE: Armed Opposition to the Central Government**

**1.1 Who are the opponents of the government and why are they fighting?**

According to the Afghan and international media, armed opposition to the central government of Hamid Karzai includes non-Afghan and Afghan members of Al-Qaeda, the Taliban Movement and some sections of Hekmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami of Afghanistan. Analysis of the discussions facilitated by peace educators from McMaster University's Centre for Peace Studies and TRANSCEND in the spring of 2003 in Mazar-e-Sharif, Samangan, Kabul, Wardak and Nangarhar reveals mixed motivations for the fighting of the above parties. Some seem to be driven by ideology, which they may adhere to inflexibly. Others might be genuine "spoilers," trying to retain the status, money and power gained from war and the drug trade. But a third group (in this case almost all Afghans rather than foreigners) appears to feel unfairly treated, discriminated against or "forced to take up arms." There are also substantial numbers of Afghans who oppose the presence of foreign troops in the country, threats to Afghan autonomy, dependence on foreign powers, and the influx of Western values and customs. In addition, all of the above groups--as well as the central government--are affected by the "culture of war" (lost empathy and vision, diminished compassion, rigid thinking and habitual conflict) created by more than two decades of warfare and destruction.

### **1.2 What is the global context of the conflicts within Afghanistan?**

The Cold War was a global binary conflict that brought enormous destruction to Afghanistan. Since the demise of the Cold War a different global binary conflict (the "war on terror" and its adversaries) has moved to the center of the world stage, and, once again, Afghanistan finds itself caught in the middle. World opinion polls since 2001 have shown a dramatic and disturbing polarization of opinion, the sharpest splits being between the U.S. population and the populations of predominantly Muslim countries. The March 16, 2004 Pew Research Center Poll, for example, found that "in the predominantly Muslim countries surveyed, anger toward the United States remains pervasive;" and "Osama bin Laden...is viewed favorably by large percentages in Pakistan (65%), Jordan (55%) and Morocco (45%)." In this global context, while an Afghan government seen as a threat by the United States will be unstable, an Afghan government perceived by a substantial portion of Afghans or by a substantial portion of the Muslim world as a "puppet" of the United States will likewise be unstable.

### **1.3 What has been the impact of internal armed conflict on security?**

The continuing armed civil conflict is the largest impediment to all efforts towards security, democratization, reconstruction and stability. It is also a major impediment to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and basic services.

### **1.4 What has been done to this point?**

- (a) Extensive military operations have been carried out by Coalition forces, and to some extent by the national army.
- (b) Occasional (but unsystematic and professionally questionable) dialogues by some levels of the Afghan government or Coalition forces have been carried out with supporters of the Taliban and Hekmatyar.

### **1.5 What else could be done?**

Measures to address these problems should include systematic dialogues, as well as educational consultations, led by professional mediators and peace workers. Dialogues need not, initially, bring representatives of government and of opposition groups to the same table. They can be undertaken by mediators separately with each party involved in conflict. The purpose of such dialogues and peace education should be (a) to discover, through sincere and active listening, the grievances and areas of flexibility of all parties; (b) to work with all parties to solve areas of disagreement and dissension; (c) to help all parties to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate goals; (d) to begin building trust between the parties in conflict; (e) to initiate the creation of permanent institutions for dialogue and reconciliation; (f) to get a basic agreement from all parties that they will suspend the use of arms against each other and transform armed disagreement into either agreement or unarmed disagreement--whether expressed through political parties entering the formal democratic processes or through other activities of civil society.

These dialogues and consultations will not succeed, of course, without considerable flexibility from the relevant parties, including the central government and the armed forces operating on its behalf. The effort, if carried out properly and consistently, may allow many Afghans who fight because they feel they are labeled and fear unfair prosecution and unjust treatment to lay down their arms. The work of McMaster University's Centre for Peace Studies and of TRANSCEND in Afghanistan has demonstrated changes in views, attitudes and positions of politicians who have taken part in peace and reconciliation dialogues and consultations [see <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~mpeia/>]. If there are parties that are completely unwilling or unable to engage in dialogue, this will become clear.

## **2.0 THE SCATTERED FIRE FACTORS: The Private Armies**

### **2.1 Who are they and why are they trying to remain independent?**

Analysts and governmental and non-governmental media constantly talk about the private armies and their supporters within Karzai's government (Professor Sayaf's groups, Jamiat-related groupings such as Marshall Fahim, Ustad Atta, General Dostum's group, Ismael Khan's army and Khalili, Kazemi and Mohaqeq's groups, to mention the main ones). While the spoiler factor (status, power, drug and other money) is undoubtedly a motivation for some, many have important concerns (e.g., fears about unfair treatment of former Mujahideen, concerns about ethnic rights) that have not been heard and properly dealt with [personal communications with Mohaqeq, Dostum's Political Chief, Haji Deen Mohamed and many intellectuals and political activists in the spring and summer of 2003]. No doubt these groups, like others in the country, are also under the influence of a "culture of war," and maintain various degrees of biased views, ethnic prejudice and hatred, conflictive thinking and habits, as well as the inability to think creatively and open-mindedly and to seek solutions that can be beneficial for all parties.

### **2.2 How do these groups affect security?**

These groups not only prevent democratization and public service reform but also contribute to periodic infighting (e.g., Herat and Faryab in March and April 2004) as well as fraud and corruption, especially in the government. Measures taken so far include attempts to gain their support for the transitional government and efforts to disarm or dislocate them.

### **2.3 What could be done?**

As in the cases mentioned earlier, there is room for dialogues and consultations led by professional mediation, conflict resolution and reconciliation specialists to identify the concerns of these groups and to help them distinguish legitimate from illegitimate concerns. Moreover, peace education is needed to assist those with some flexibility to help build a national vision, transform their objectives and views from a culture of war to a culture of peace, invest their efforts in the transition, and participate in rebuilding the country instead of engaging in destructive activities. The dialogue effort will clearly identify those with such flexibility, as well as those unable to make the transition.

## **3.0 THE FUELING FACTORS: The Suppliers and Supporters**

### **3.1 Who are they and what are their motivations?**

In Afghan circles there is talk of countries such as Iran, Russia, India, governmental or private groups from Arab nations and Pakistan as the financial, military, technical, political and moral supporters of the Big Fire and the Scattered Fires Factors. While there is a paucity of credible proof, there are publications about several kinds of motivation for these countries and groups to meddle in the affairs of Afghanistan:

- Economic rivalry (Central Asian resources and markets for Pakistan, Iran, U.S.A.)
- Political rivalry or competition (Iran-U.S.A., India-Pakistan, Russia-U.S.A., Afghanistan-Pakistan over Durand Line, etc.)
- Military competition (U.S.A.-Japan-Taiwan-South Korea versus Russia-China-India-Iran).

### **3.2 What impact do these factors have on security?**

The impact of the fueling factors is crucial to the functioning, morale and even existence of the armed opposition and the private armies. Measures taken so far include rather mild pressure from the U.S.A. on Pakistan in the past followed by renewed joint measures by U.S.-Afghan-Pakistan military operations on both sides of Durand border (e.g., the Mountain Storm operations by the Coalition Forces and the Wazirestan operations by Pakistani army); guarding of borders by Coalition and Afghan forces; establishment of the U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan joint working group on border issues, and eventually the anti-drug trafficking treaty signed by Afghanistan and its six neighbors in Berlin on April 01, 04.

### **3.3 What else could be done?**

- Establishment of a permanent dialogue mechanism between Afghanistan and Pakistan (with a mandate to address recent and long-standing issues such as Durand Line, as

well as future concerns as they exist or arise and to find creative and mutually acceptable solutions)

- Studies of modalities for further economic cooperation among Afghanistan and its neighbors (learning from the contribution of the steel and coal industries in establishment of the European Union)
- Establishment of traders, merchants and business persons' working groups from countries in the region to find mutually beneficial means of trade and trans-regional economic ventures
- Setting up of academic taskforces to develop creative means of equitable and mutually beneficial cooperation and cultural exchanges in the region around Afghanistan
- Creating an initiative for a regional security mechanism in this part of Asia.

#### **4.0 THE WIND FACTORS: The Recruiters, the Sympathizers and the Discontented**

##### **4.1 Who are they and what are their motivations?**

The dialogues and consultations facilitated by McMaster University and TRANSCEND reveal at least three kinds of seriously unhappy people in Afghan society who, as a result of their discontentment, either do not cooperate with Mr. Karzai's government or serve as supporters of, or as a pool of recruits for, armed opposition or private armies. These groups of Afghans can further be broken down into:

- (a) Sympathizers and recruits for the armed opposition or private armies
- (b) Concerned intellectuals and political and social activists
- (c) The unemployed, the poor and the under-served or non-served

(a) The Sympathetics and the Apathetics: Afghans say that this group is made up of the supporters (formerly or presently affiliated members) of the parties in the armed opposition and the owners of the private armies as well as those seriously unhappy about injustices and discrimination. They may be motivated by witnessing major injustices and discrimination on the part of the government, or by feeling sympathy for groups that they take to be unfairly targeted. They may either be ready for recruitment by, or provision of support to, the armed opposition (sympathetics); or they may simply do nothing to prevent armed activities against Mr. Karzai's government (apathetics). They may contribute to disruption of security, prevention of humanitarian assistance and basic services and reconstruction; and they may contribute to fraud and corruption. Measures taken to deal with them so far have simply reinforced their perceptions (bombing villages or innocent civilians and depriving them of humanitarian and development projects, to mention two). Measures taken should include: (a) systematic consultations through public forums and townhall-type meetings to identify their legitimate concerns, unresolved issues, conflictive thinking and habits and biased views; (b) peace education combined with mini-Loya Jirgas to find solutions that are in line with the transition towards democracy and human rights in order to gain support of these communities.

(b) The Activists: These are individuals who are concerned about ethnic rights, as well as past and present injustices. To some extent, they share in the "culture of war," with conflictive thinking, lack of empathy, biased and exaggerated views and fixed (ideologically driven) solutions. However, they are also motivated by real and perceived concerns, painful memories and hatred born of experience; and to their credit most of them are anxious to see progress, development and justice in Afghanistan. As for their impact, in many cases these individuals are behind the scattered fires; on other occasions they disrupt political processes, or they create or exacerbate the friction between urban progressive values and rural traditional and religious values. Measures taken so far include instituting freedom of the press and freedom to form political parties and social groups, which are extremely important but not sufficient. Additional measures needed include consultations, dialogues and peace education, as well as scholarly conferences and intellectual Jirgas to help individuals with opposing ideas develop mutual understanding and jointly find win-win solutions.

(c) The poor, unemployed and un-served masses: These are millions of Afghans who have suffered from lack of security, extremes of poverty, lack of basic services and deprivations of human rights by armed groups. They are motivated by their obvious life circumstances and their immersion in a culture of war. Their impact on the situation may be expressed through apathy (e.g., not bothering to register to vote or to report activities of the armed opposition) or through involvement in mercenary activities (selling their skills to the armed opposition or private armies). Measures taken so far include many attractive projects that are in the planning stage but that have to wait until the problem of armed opposition and private armies is solved. Additional measures needed include finding creative ways to implement sizable poverty-reduction and reconstruction initiatives as well as carrying out community reconciliation, reducing conflictive thinking and habits and promoting social responsibility.

## **5.0 THE SYNERGETIC INTERACTIONS**

All of the above factors interact with each other (synergetic effects), so comprehensive measures that address all of these determinants in parallel need to be prescribed.

## **6.0 OPERATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE MEASURES RECOMMENDED IN THIS DOCUMENT**

A national mechanism, with assistance from international experts, is needed to work on at least two levels--political and societal. Components of the societal level can be supplemental to important initiatives such as the DDR and Public Service Reform (our experience leaves no doubt that this will assist these processes). A combination of political and societal initiatives can be applied to address major conflicts like those of Dostum with Atta, Pashtoons and non-Pashtoons in the north, Ismael Khan and others in Herat. A political and inter-party approach can be used to address the tension in the cabinet between former mujahideen and the technocrats. Another combined approach can be used to assist former and newly established parties to dialogue with one another and to transform their structures and objectives to unarmed and non-violent strategies.

Attempts to resolve major conflicts can be combined with consultations on reconciliation approaches. While the South African, Peruvian, Guatemalan and Rwandan models provide rich experiences, Afghanistan needs a model of national reconciliation that accomplishes the central goals of any national reconciliation program in a post-war society but is specifically designed for the Afghan situation.

This national mechanism can be established in the form of an Independent National Commission on Peace and Reconciliation or can be created within UNAMA or as an Advisory Ministry to President Karzai. Such an initiative may be needed for 3 to 5 years. It could be started as a pilot or feasibility study. Whichever route is taken, the Afghan and international communities cannot afford to ignore the need for reconciliation.

**Final Points:**

Expecting to bring security by means of dollars and bombs without parallel efforts to gain the cooperation of discontented segments of the population is naïve and will fail. While the attempt to address the legitimate concerns of all may appear to take too much time, human resources and money, we should recall that:

- a) Afghanistan is already paying the price of previous failures to carry out the work suggested here.
- b) The resources available for Afghanistan may be short-lived: the international community's attention to Afghanistan, despite its pledges, is not guaranteed to last, and Afghanistan may well be sacrificed for other, emerging priorities.
- c) Peace and security that are imposed and do not emerge from within the society are short-lived.
- d) It is possible, if one takes the time and makes it a priority, to gain the cooperation of the Afghan people.
- e) There are national and international experts who have experience in the types of initiative outlined in this document.
- f) There is preliminary evidence that there are more people in Afghan society potentially ready to join a transition to democracy than there are spoilers and inflexibles.