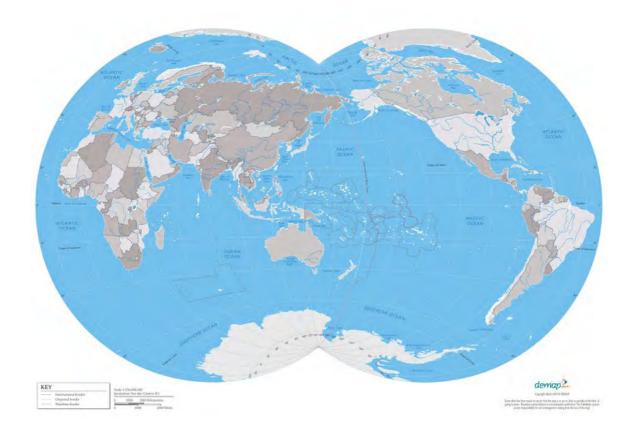# NAUTILUS INSTITUTE
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**Out of the war:
policies for an Australian contribution
to a sustainable peace in Afghanistan**

Richard Tanter

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Synopsis

Richard Tanter from the Nautilus Institute writes that it is clear that "the war in Afghanistan "is a disaster for both Afghanistan and the United States and its coalition partners such as Australia. What is less clear is what is to be done." Tanter sets out "eight policy initiatives by which the Australian government and civil society could constructively move towards a foundation of sustainable peace in Afghanistan:

1. Withdraw all Australian forces: completely, rapidly and unconditionally.

2. Move the United Nations towards a more balanced position.

3. Form like-minded country groupings to frame honest broker role in an international push for peace negotiations.

4. Deny sanctuary to terrorists through containment, leverage, criminalization of terrorism, intelligence and policing, and overt deterrence.

5. Declare ongoing aid commitment comparable to war effort – strictly conditional on civil rights compliance.

6. Build a peace agenda that includes the constitutional framework and borders of Afghanistan.

7. Pilot test legitimate alternatives to the opium war economy.

8. Get serious about democracy in Pakistan.

Tanter concludes by writing that they are surely are no less utopian than the publicly claimed – and privately denied - certainties of current war policies."

Permalink

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Introduction

The United States-led war in Afghanistan, now into its tenth year, has developed a familiar shape – the internationalised civil war. On one side is an incompetent, corrupt and largely illegitimate government whose writ runs little beyond Kabul, unable to survive without massive external military, political and financial support, and with foreign forces doing the bulk of the fighting. On the other side is an indigenous resistance using a familiar mix of guerrilla warfare and terror tactics – the standard weapons of the weak. In between are millions of civilians and a small but vital civil society sector.

Why so silent?

Australians have been remarkably silent about the country's biggest and longest war since Vietnam. This is partly attributable to the bipartisan enthusiasm for the war, especially shown by prime ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard, and the absence of public criticism from the Labor Party. Underneath apparent apathy there is a sense of lack of viable alternatives, and a sense that having helped to ruin Afghanistan, Australia has some responsibility to try to make reparation – at its worst, by "staying the course".

Part of the answer lies in the WikiLeaks papers. In March 2010 WikiLeaks published a CIA Red Team report outlining methods of manipulating European public opinion to support the war.[1] The essential mission was to provide media editors with material that would help prevent the latent majorities in NATO coalition countries crystallising into mobilised opposition.

The second answer from the WikiLeaks disclosures is the public revelation of what has been an open secret in Canberra in security circles for at least three years: that senior defence, intelligence and foreign affairs officials regard the war in Afghanistan as a disaster. At the same time as he was publicly predicting success in the war, in October 2008 former Prime Minister Rudd told visiting US politicians "that the national security establishment in Australia was very pessimistic about the long-term prognosis for Afghanistan". Ric Smith, the former Secretary of Defence and now the government's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan was reported by US embassy officials in Canberra to have "described the … mission in Afghanistan and Afghan government presence as a 'wobbly three-legged stool'".[2]

What is most important about these reports is not so much their contents, as the fact that there has been so little media attention before this reporting on such pessimism in Canberra. In fact, this private pessimism has not been difficult to detect in guarded conversations in security practitioner circles, conveying a sense of disaster completely at odds with the government's public assurances of imminent success. These confusions have been fostered by a mass media reluctant to penetrate the Defence Department's screen around its activities in Afghanistan.[3] With a few honourable exceptions, journalists have avoided serious scrutiny of the war, and academics, with

even fewer exceptions, have failed to utilize their considerable skills and resources to generate informed debate on the war.

Last year Hugh White noted the eerie silence in Australia around the Afghanistan war:

> "Australians have remained curiously incurious about the operations which are being conducted in their name.… For all the talk of the CNN age, Australians have less information today about the wars our soldiers are fighting than we had in Vietnam, or for that matter in the Boer War. And we seem not to care."

The most important source of Australian community comment on the war has usually come from refugee advocates, concerned about the disgraceful policies of successive government towards Afghan refugees, especially Hazaras. The fragmented and much diminished peace movement has note responded in any substantial way. The only innovative peace movement actions have been a series of small but powerfully symbolic non-violent incursions into military facilities with a close link to the Afghanistan war: the Pine Gap Joint Defence Facility outside Alice Springs and the ASIS and SAS Swan Island Training Area near Melbourne.[4]

Why so silent? Two important possibilities centre on a lack of confidence on the part of the majority of Australians who want the ADF deployment to end. Firstly, this majority most likely has an intuitive and correct understanding that the real primary reason the ADF remains in Afghanistan is to satisfy expectations from the United States. Alliance maintenance is clearly the main reason for the continuing deployment, but there seems to be a sense of resignation in the public that nothing can be done to alter this – particularly not by governments as willingly compliant as those lead by prime ministers Rudd and Gillard. Resignation is not unreasonable given the long history of Australian government servility to great and powerful friends.

A second likely reason for the continuing de facto acquiescence is a sense of responsibility in this majority about the consequences of the war, but combined with a sense that there is no viable path to peace in Afghanistan should coalition forces be withdrawn. That the war is a disaster for both Afghanistan and the United States and its coalition partners such as Australia, is clear. What is less clear is what is to be done, especially by Australian government and civil society.

In particular, there has been little indication that the pessimism expressed by the Australian government behind closed doors was carried further to its logical conclusion – trying to persuade the United States to change course. When challenged on the benefits of alliance, with its sometimes unwelcome consequences, alliance defenders point, amongst other putative benefits, to "the access to the most senior strategic councils" brought by alliance.[5] It is not clear that Australia actually has such access when it matters. But it is clear that if it does then it has not used that Washington access to robustly advocate an plausible alternative to the present disastrous policies.

First steps to an agenda

Nobody can approach the question of what should be done with much sense of certainty or great optimism. However, it is possible to start to set out the agenda for governments and civil society groups outside Afghanistan to help Afghan domestic political groupings move towards a sustainable peace. Such a sustainable peace will only come about if it is primarily driven by Afghans. However, many of the problems of Afghanistan today have either been created by or rendered vastly more intractable by the actions and policies of foreign governments. ""Staying to clean up the mess we have created" is likely to make matters worse.

There are eight possible steps, difficult and in some cases distant, that the Australian government and Australian activists and community organizations can work towards that would optimise the chances of a peace process in Afghanistan. Hopefully these suggestions will begin to define the necessary conditions of sustainable peace, and provide a basis for debate. It is clear that a number of obstacles to peace are inter-related, and their resolution is consequently dependent on more or less simultaneous movement towards resolution. Perhaps the first hope of this article is to at least begin to get clear the main issues that have to be faced. No-one but a fool would suggest that if the proposals below are implemented all will be well. Any list of proposals will be both presumptuous and incomplete, but the first task is to start the debate outside Afghanistan on a path to sustainable peace.

In what is probably an increasing order of difficulty, there are eight policy initiatives by which the Australian government and civil society could constructively move towards a foundation of sustainable peace in Afghanistan:

1. Withdraw all Australian forces: completely, rapidly and unconditionally.
2. Move the United Nations towards a more balanced position.
3. Form like-minded country groupings to frame honest broker roles in an international push for peace negotiations.
4. Deny sanctuary to terrorists through containment, leverage, criminalization of terrorism, intelligence and policing, and overt deterrence.
5. Declare ongoing aid commitment comparable to war effort – strictly conditional on civil rights compliance.
6. Build a peace agenda that includes the constitutional framework and borders of Afghanistan.
7. Pilot test legitimate alternatives to the opium war economy.
8. Get serious about democracy in Pakistan.

1. Withdraw all Australian forces: completely, rapidly and unconditionally

The first and fundamental step is for Australia to withdraw all its military forces from Afghanistan, and to end its military association with the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.[6] This withdrawal should be complete, rapid and unconditional. The primary purpose of withdrawal is to end Australian military commitment to an extraordinarily destructive war which will become more damaging to both Afghan human security and Australian security interests the longer coalition

forces remain. An Australian withdrawal will encourage the public and leadership in other coalition countries to follow suit, and encourage doves in Washington. Moreover, it will send a crucial signal to Afghanistan's government leaders that they will not be able to rely on external military support for their current political positions.

Australia has no significant strategic interest in Afghanistan, and does have a very serious interest in the war's resolution before it further imperils the stability of nuclear-armed Pakistan. After acquiescence with alliance requirements for almost a decade, this opens the possibility of genuine Australian influence.

Withdrawal of all Australian military forces, both in combat and support roles, including trainers, must be carefully planned, but should be rapid and not protracted – more like the half year for the Dutch withdrawal than the equivocal Canadian 2008 promise for July 2012 withdrawal.

There should be no mistake: any indication of any intention to withdraw will be greeted by a tsunami of pressure by the Obama administration and by loyalist defenders of the United States alliance within Australia. While the Australian military role is small, the value to the US of an unambiguous and to date unquestioned Australian war commitment is very significant. More important to the United States than the size of the ADF deployment are the disposition of the Australian forces and the rules of engagement governing their activities. Along with those of British and Canadian forces, ADF rules of engagement lead to a higher level of military engagement with the enemy and willingness to accept casualties. In the Pentagon's terms, less than half of the 40,000 non-US coalition troops could be regarded as "fully committed" like the US contingent. The majority of non-US coalition forces were classified as "Allied caveat and stand aside" forces.[7] This is a distinction which allows Australian leaders to take a vicarious macho stance, as the US embassy in Canberra reported Kevin Rudd telling visiting US politicians in October 2008:

> ""In the south-east, the US, Canada, British, Australia and Dutch were doing the 'hard stuff', while in the relatively peaceful north-west, the Germans and French were organising folk dancing festivals."[8]

2. Move the United Nations towards a more balanced position

According to successive Australian governments, Australian forces are deployed to Afghanistan at the invitation of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Australia, like other members of the coalition, contributes military forces under a United Nations mandate deriving from Security Council Resolution 1386 (2001) which "calls upon Member States to contribute personnel, equipment and other resources to the International Security Assistance Force".[9] The most recent of annual successor resolutions on October 13th ensures that this remains a United Nations war for another year.[10]

UNSC 1386 is now completely inappropriate and anachronistic: the task now is to wean the UN off the Afghanistan war, back towards a more balanced position. The core problem is that is that the situation in Afghanistan today is completely different

from that which obtained immediately after the September 11th Al Qaeda attacks. In essence, rightly or wrongly, the Security Council members at the time, in sympathy with the United States, regarded Al Qaeda, like pirates in the past and torturers and genocidists today, as "*hostis humani generis* - enemies of all mankind".

In 2010 the United Nations is now auspicing one side in an internationalised civil war, in which the embedded presence of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the original *casus belli*, is no longer a salient element, and has not been for at least 2002.[11] Both the ISAF and the civil United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) are at the centre of the partisan contest. UN-auspiced ISAF forces acknowledge their role in the deaths of at least one-third of civilian deaths in the war, a figure that is almost certainly an underestimate in absolute terms.[12] One key step towards a possibility of viable peace is to shift the United Nations from an increasingly partisan role that both damages the global authority of the United Nations, and prevents it taking any plausible role as an honest broker in the Afghan conflict.[13]

Ending the UN-auspicing of ISAF is a matter opposing or appropriately amending the annual successor resolution to UNSC 1386 in the Security Council. Powerful though they are, the veto power of the five permanent members is not relevant: a veto cannot ensure a resolution is passed. The politics will be bitter, difficult and complicated, but the legal process of removing United Nations authority from a freewheeling American-controlled ISAF is clear.[14]

3. Form like-minded country groupings to frame honest broker roles in an international push for peace negotiations

There may well be a pathway through or around the United Nations system whereby countries like Australia could play a constructive role in initiating and supporting moves to build an international framework to support a viable peace process in Afghanistan.

What is needed is a shift in the position of the United Nations through a new alignment of member states. There may well be different groupings in the UN system that could push in such a direction. Australia is likely to find its natural home amongst other exiting or soon-to exit former coalition members – such as the Netherlands[15], Canada[16], and Germany[17], and conceivably France[18], Poland[19], Italy[20] and Sweden[21].

One harbinger of a new UN dynamic was the attempt in May 2010 by Brazil's then president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to mediate between the US and European powers and Iran over the standoff concerning Iran's nuclear development.[22] Under Lula, Brazil had been opening a new and more independent diplomatic space.[23] Big countries from outside South and Central Asia and outside the ISAF club like Brazil, Nigeria and Indonesia may well play a key role.

Many analysts have suggested a key role for "regional countries" in developing a framework for peace in Afghanistan.[24] Clearly these countries must have a role: they are affected to varying degrees by what is happening in Afghanistan, and will continue to have a deep connection with the issue. But propinquity does not in itself

mean that these countries' role will necessarily be constructive: Unfortunately because of their histories and the character of their relation to contemporary Afghanistan countries like Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan and India are next to or close to Afghanistan they cannot function easily as the requisite honest broker.

4. Containment and deterrence: Deny sanctuary to international terrorists with leverage, criminalization of terrorism, intelligence and policing, and overt deterrence

Clearly, any proposal for peace must have a high likelihood of preventing a return of Al Qaeda bases for transnational mega-terrorism. This is largely a matter of realpolitik, of what will be required to permit withdrawal of foreign forces. This war originated in American rage following the Al Qaeda successful terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. The United States had for several years been pressing the Taliban government in Kabul to stop hosting the Al Qaeda camps: the invasion that began in the months after September 11th had the at least rational, if not automatically justifiable, goal of destroying Al Qaeda on the ground in Afghanistan and, consequently, deposing the Taliban government. Yet the war is continuing long after those goals were achieved. In large part this is because serious and viable alternative approaches to controlling such international mega-terrorist criminal groups through law-based police and intelligence cooperation were ignored for most of the past decade. However, it is also true to say that any proposal for peace in Afghanistan that does not offer a convincing answer as to why such a peace will not result in a return of Al Qaeda-like bases in Afghanistan is probably politically doomed to failure.

The coalition war is clearly generating ample recruits to the cause of terrorist tactics in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. But contrary to these essentially domestic terrorist activities, there is little evidence that Al Qaeda remains a potent force in Afghanistan. [25] At most there are Pakistan-based Al Qaeda fighters operating alongside (and often resented by) Afghan Taliban groups, but Al Qaeda as it existed in late 2001 no longer exists. What remains, still potent, has been displaced to Pakistan, north Africa, Yemen and Somalia. Al Qaeda seems to have shifted from a hierarchical network headed by Osama Bin Laden to a differentiated franchise effectively separated from Afghanistan.[26] Few analysts see any prospect of anything like a return to its position in Afghanistan in 2001.

However practical politics in the United States at least requires a response to serious anxieties of Afghanistan again becoming a safe haven for international terrorists. There are three elements of a positive post-conflict Afghanistan policy that would deny sanctuary to international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda, through a process of containment and deterrence.

The first is the response given by police and intelligence specialists a decade ago: Al Qaeda and their like were and are criminals committing crimes against international society, to be dealt with by properly resourced police and civilian intelligence organizations operating under strict legal constraints. Indeed, one achievement has been the development of at least the outlines of a practical global legal structure based

on doctrines of universal jurisdiction criminalizing terrorism and weapons of mass destruction by citizens of all UN member states. The possibility of effective police cooperation to interdict transnational terrorist attacks is far greater than it was ten years ago. Police and intelligence organizations, flush with post-9.11 budgets, need closer legislative oversight and public scrutiny than governments wish. Yet set against the failed and counter-productive alternative of another decade of war in Afghanistan, law-based police and intelligence cooperation to bring international criminals to justice is an approach much more likely to succeed. The universal jurisdiction instruments created through the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy remain imperfect and limited, but provide a systematic basis for addressing trans-national terrorism.

The second part of the answer is that any post-conflict government in Afghanistan, Taliban-led or otherwise, will be greatly dependent on multilateral and bilateral economic assistance and at least a lack of active hostility from its neighbours. Any Afghan government will be dependent on foreign assistance, and such governments will find it very much in its interests to abjure the hosting of international terrorist groups.

A third possible safeguard against the unlikely possibility of an Afghan government foolish enough to allow international terrorists to once again establish training camps and launch operations from its territory, could be a carefully specified and circumscribed overt and credible deterrent threat. Given the high level of civilian casualties in Afghanistan from US Air Force carpet bombing in the early phases of the war, ongoing "precision" bombing using B-1, B-2, and B-52 bombers, and the more recent upsurge of drone attacks, the risks of even proposing such an approach are clear.[27] Not only does it open the door to legitimating great violence and the doctrine of pre-emptive strikes, but there may be little American domestic and international capacity to keep unilateral and unjustified strikes in check.

The fact is that the United States does already have the capacity for long-range pre-emptive attacks and is developing a capacity to use conventionally-armed missiles on very short notice under the Conventional Prompt Global Strike programme, aimed at providing an alternative to nuclear weapons.[28] Having such a capacity, and having used massive bombing with long-range bombers so much already in Afghanistan, it is difficult to imagine an American president allowing known preparations for similar attacks to proceed unimpeded after 9.11 – and it is all the more dangerous in its likelihood of unilateral and unjustified use given past United States behaviour. However, there is a universal interest in not allowing the preparation of transnational terrorist attacks. Since the threat of such an American response will constitute a de facto deterrent, there is an argument for recognizing a law-based version under genuine global authority. The difficulty is just how such action in a universal interest by individual countries could be effectively regulated under international law under the current global framework.

The Institute for International Strategic Studies recently outlined a similar step towards withdrawal of coalition forces, which emphasized the shift in goals required

for possible success, and the contribution a containment and deterrence approach could make to that shift:

> "A containment and deterrence approach would be a strategy that was limited to dealing with the threat as originally defined by the coalition forces that intervened in Afghanistan. Outlining such an approach earlier rather than later would demonstrate that the long-term strategy need not depend on winning an ever-lengthening succession of tactical local battles against an enemy incentivised by the presence of foreign forces. It would replace the impression that an eventual drawdown of combat forces from Afghanistan would constitute victory for the enemy, with the reality of a strategy that could be maintained for a longer period while meeting the principal security goal."[29]

5. Declare economic aid commitment comparable to war effort – strictly conditional on gender and minority civil rights compliance

Afghanistan is wretchedly poor, and its poverty will always contribute to its insecurity. A sustainable peace in Afghanistan requires not only an end to war, but equally the generation of an acceptable level of human security for all citizens of the country. In Afghanistan that in turn requires vastly higher likelihood of effective protection of civil rights, especially the rights of women and minorities, both ethnic and religious. Economic development and the rights of women and minorities are an interlinked matter of justice and real politik .

Both population and economic data in Afghanistan are hopelessly inaccurate, but the roughly 30 million Afghans were the poorest in Asia before the coalition war started, and probably remain so. In 2008 Jane's Security Review noted that while "on paper, Afghanistan's economy is growing rapidly, with the legal economy expanding by an average of 13 per cent per annum since 2005",

> Post-Taliban Afghanistan lacks a functional economy of any significance. Its agrarian-based subsistence economy is not even capable of meeting the basic food requirements of Afghans, forcing the population to rely extensively on foreign-donated food and other basic requirements, which are in most cases inadequate to meet the growing needs of the impoverished population.[30]

Gross Domestic Product per capita figures, for what they are worth in a country where at least a third of the economy is related to the unmeasured opium and heroin trade[31], to say nothing of uncounted corrupt inflows and outflows sliced off foreign military and aid spending, differ wildly according to source and method. The IMF and the World Bank give current per capita income figures ranging from US$572 to $1,100.[32]

These economic realities of the country where the war is being fought should be compared to the amounts of money coalition countries are spending on the war. The United States direct defence budget authorization for Afghanistan operations in the coming year is US$104.9 billion, amounting to about ten times the IMF estimate for Afghanistan's GDP this year.[33] Even the Australian direct military budget for Afghanistan at A$1.6 billion is equal to about 15% of Afghan GDP on the IMF count.

Of course, little of these coalition military budgets are spent in Afghanistan, but they do indicate, very roughly and with much underestimation, how much Australia and the United States are willing to spend on a perceived problem of security in Afghanistan. If in a post-conflict situation the United States were willing to spend one-tenth of its FY2011 Afghanistan military budget on civil aid to Afghanistan, that country's income would roughly double. Clearly even a fraction of that would help dramatically.

The first implications of these figures are obvious, and hardly original: it is perfectly possible for the United States and Australia to make a long-term significant difference to the economic well-being of the Afghan people through economic rather than military means. If the coalition governments are as seriously committed to the welfare of Afghans as they say they are, then there is one obvious pathway to reducing a key source of endemic insecurity in Afghanistan. Having done so much damage to Afghanistan in order to save it from the Taliban, the obligation to continue reconstruction assistance is clear: Afghanistan has been punished enough. The current level of war spending on the country indicates the capacity of coalition countries to spend comparable amounts on post-war economic aid for reconstruction – and thereby begin to counteract the poverty that is one undoubted domestic source of human insecurity in Afghanistan. Even allowing for inevitable negative economic and distributional effects from large-scale foreign inflows as in the current distortions of an unregulated aid-fed economy, the human benefits would outweigh both those costs and those of the war.

But there is one further contribution that a long-term substantial post-conflict commitment to Afghanistan GDP-sized financial transfers from rich coalition countries can make to Afghanistan's long-term sustainable security. Civil rights, especially for women, were originally a key rallying point in coalition countries for support of the war. As with Afghan democracy, the rights of women and minorities are now regrettably little mentioned by proponents of the war, and the coalition has little to offer by way of hope.

Yet such transfers, which would very much be in the interests of any Afghan government to maintain, could and should be made strictly conditional on upholding the civil rights of women and minorities. This civil rights are those that the government is obliged to protect under Afghanistan's existing constitutional and international treaty obligations. Such flows should be highly dependent on strict compliance with these obligations, and hence, in the interests of Afghan power-holders to uphold.

With the prospect of possible serious negotiations between the government and insurgent groups (including both the Taliban and Islamist warlords such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar), Afghan women's groups and human rights activists have raised concerns about the protection of even the limited advances for women's rights under the Kabul government to be maintained.[34] Just how limited these gains have been became clear when Amnesty International reported that the first punishment of death by stoning (for a couple accused of eloping) since 2001 came in August 2010 "two days after Afghanistan's highest Islamic religious body, the Council of Ulema, called on the

government to more strictly enforce physical shari'a punishments, known as *hudood*, as a concession to the Taleban in an attempt to end the war."[35]

Fatima Ayub and her colleagues in a report written for the International Center for Transitional Justice make the same point about the cultural depth of the difficulties facing women in Afghanistan:

> "Less comfortable for observers to acknowledge, perhaps, is that the Taliban's vision for social order was not entirely alien to large segments of Afghan society. Many of the government's laws, particularly with respect to women, were an extension of the complex tribal codes and social customs already in effect in the Pashtun south. Castigating the Taliban as the primary offenders of women's rights in Afghanistan is unhelpful and misleading, as it fails to confront the deeper social forces that produce and reinforce patriarchal norms that predate the Taliban movement." [36]

The fact that the government and legislature of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has not prevented similar behaviour – and indeed occasion has sanctioned comparable behaviour – means that any future government, with or without Taliban influence or control, must be held accountable for violations of the civil rights of women and minorities. This is also a matter of creating the conditions whereby any future governments are held accountable for their failures to uphold the rights of citizens set out in the country's constitution, and in turn in the international covenants[37] to which Afghanistan is a party. [38]

The excellent Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission makes clear that the fundamental issue of discrimination and violence towards women is by no means limited to the Taliban:

> "However, despite all these treaties and laws and relative development of women in recent years, a myriad of problems for women in political, social, cultural, etc spheres still persist." [39]

The task, which is by no means simple, is to find ways by which the international community can ensure that these commitments are upheld in practice by any and all post-conflict governments. Ensuring that large scale foreign economic aid is made strictly conditional on upholding the civil rights of women and minorities is the most likely constructive and effective option available from outside the country. At the moment the IMF and other international lenders do not hesitate to make their funds highly conditional on privatisation and budget down-sizing. Making large aid flows conditional on upholding existing Afghan domestic law in order to improve the human security of more than half the population – can hardly be considered objectionable.

6. Look again at Afghanistan's borders and constitution

The agenda of viable peace negotiations must include questions of Afghanistan's borders and its constitutional form. Much of the long-term dynamic of insecurity in

Afghanistan derives from a deep mismatch between the shape of the country and its enduring underlying social, cultural and political realities. These disjunctures mostly derive from the time of British colonial domination. The most notorious, and most damaging for any semblance of sustainable security, is the so-called Durand line – the line imposed by Britain on Afghanistan which presently divides Afghanistan from Pakistan's north-western and southern provinces. The largest single ethnic group in Afghanistan, the Pashtuns, straddle both sides of the border in the central part of the Durand line. Successive Afghan governments have called for a new approach to the border, while Pakistan, as one of the successor states to British colonial India, rejects any suggestion of illegitimacy.

Since Afghanistan, and, more truculently, Pakistan are both client states of the United States, there are potential effective lines of influence. However, nobody should be under any illusion about the depth of Pakistan military determination to retain its territorial advantages and leverage over Afghanistan – which makes the border issue even more important to begin to unravel. For the United States, the insistence by its Afghan ally on border rectification is an embarrassing irritation. Addressing the Pakistan-Afghanistan border issue would require it to face up to the full role of the Pakistan state – effectively the military – in destabilising Afghanistan for its own strategic ends.

Together with the border issue, Afghanistan's socio-cultural, ethnic and linguistic divisions have long mocked the nominally unitary state of the current Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as well as its Taliban, communist, and royalist predecessors. The agenda of peace talks needs to include the constitutional form of Afghanistan, since the existing constitutional form bears little relation to the actual dispersed pattern of authority and power in the country. Recurrent proposals to make a separation of the south and east of the country (the main region for the largest ethnic group, the Pashtuns) from other parts of the country – either by a deeply federal state or by creating a Pashtunistan by partition – need serious consideration.

7. Pilot test legitimate alternatives to the opium war economy

The black economy in Afghanistan outweighs the licit economy. Thriving under war and corrupt or absent government regulation, this large illicit economy includes the highly profitable export to Pakistan of duty-free products purchased in Afghanistan; antiques smuggling into Pakistan; arms smuggling, and smuggling into Pakistan of illegally cut timber products, which are then sold on in the Gulf for up to 20 times the purchase price.[40]

But large though these are, they are outweighed by the narco-economy. Opium production and export – and subsequently heroin processing and export – are estimated to make up at least one-third of the country's real domestic product, and the most of its actual exports.[41] Control over opium and heroin revenue is a key resource for all Afghan parties to the conflict – government officials, pro- and anti-government warlord, and Taliban groupings alike.[42] Together with foreign military spending and foreign aid, opium is at the centre of the political economy of the war.

Coalition policy towards opium production in Afghanistan has been set by the United States' global prohibitionist agenda towards heroin, resulting in interdiction and crop destruction operations and mainly unsuccessful crop-replacement programmes. The results have been worse than useless: increased actual production and heightened resentment, with increasing heroin consumption in Afghanistan itself, as well as in neighbouring Iran and Pakistan.[43]

Numerous government agencies and NGOs have proposed alternative approaches to failed crop-destruction and crop-replacement policies. The most promising untried possibility was suggested by the International Council on Security and Development (formerly the Senlis Council) in its Poppy for Medicine proposal to license production of medical opiates for the global market. Its 840 page Feasibility Study in 2006 was the most detailed assessment of multiple facets of the problem ever undertaken, and made a strong case for at least a village-based pilot study in Afghanistan.[44] This valuable harm reduction proposal was immediately rejected by the United States and Britain and ignored by Australia.[45]

The most powerful criticism has come from Victoria A. Greenfield, Letizia Paoli and Peter H. Reuter, the authors of *The World Heroin Market*. Sympathetic though they are to the aims of the Poppy for Medicine proposal, they argue that

> "Legal medicinal opium production is an improbable answer for at least five reasons: first, illegal production will continue; second, diversion from the legal market to the illegal market is inevitable; third, diversion will involve further corruption; fourth, there may not be a market; and fifth, Afghanistan lacks the institutional capacity to support a legal pharmaceutical industry." [46]

The ICOS researchers replied that each of the arguments are important and have some validity,

> "but the current security and development situation in Afghanistan unfortunately renders them simplistic and places them outside of a reality that demands urgent action."

> "… with insufficient alternative livelihoods available to reach all Afghan poppy farmers and their extended families in the coming decades, we need to start testing Poppy for Medicine as an integral part of a balanced mix of short-term and medium-term economic development policies. No other effective policies are ready and waiting to be implemented: rural development takes too long and the Taliban insurgency is tapping into the illegal opium economy in an almost unhindered manner."[47]

Once again, it would be foolish to suggest that there is a simple solution, or that a pilot study of licensed production of medical opiates in Afghanistan is certain to succeed. But the dead hand of American prohibitionist policy is a global failure, and should not be allowed to stand in the way of at least an attempt at a rational alternative with a real possibility of improving the situation through a carefully designed pilot study as ICOS proposes.

Australia is crucial to the assessing the viability of the Poppy for Medicine proposal, since Australia is one of five countries that produce most of the world's medical opiates.[48] In 2003, 1400 farmers in Tasmania cultivated 20,000 hectares of opium poppy, using more mechanized processes than Afghan poppy farmers to produce "151 metric tons of "morphine-rich poppy straw, equivalent to 33.5% of the global morphine production that year, and 58 metric tons of thebaine-rich poppy straw (77% of global thebaine production)."[49]

In the same year Australia exported 300,000 kg of poppy-straw concentrate (CPS) for the manufacture of morphine and thebaine, mostly to the European Union and the United States. The United States, the world's largest consumer of medical opiates, imports most of its morphine inputs from India and Turkey under the "80:20 rule" mandating US imports of morphine materials from those countries.[50]

Greenfield, Paoli and Reuter correctly note that "ICOS' claims of global competitiveness appear to rest on the promise of preferential trade agreements". War coalition members Australia and France, as two of the four main global producers (together with Turkey and India), would be well able to move over to allow imports of medical opiates to aid a licensed production scheme in Afghanistan to provide markets. Supporting such a pilot scheme in Afghanistan may well offer serious security benefits in Afghanistan itself and further abroad, and deserves better than the silence of successive Australian governments in the face of the United States hostility to harm reduction approaches to illicit drugs.

8. Get serious about democracy in Pakistan

The most intractable impediment to enduring, sustainable peace in Afghanistan lies outside that country, in neighbouring Pakistan. This is true in three respects. Firstly, the border is meaningless for much of the Pashtun ethnic group that straddles the border with Pakistan. Secondly, there is now a down-spiral spreading the violence across the border, with the United States deeply involved with CIA and Special Forces operating on the ground in northwest Pakistan and the CIA directing drone targeted killings. Thirdly, the permanent leadership of the Pakistani state remains intent on destabilising Afghanistan in the strategic interests of Pakistan.

It is very much in Australia's interests to help ensure Pakistan is not swallowed into the American war. The only realistic way to do so is to follow something like the course of action suggested here: as an ally and friend of the United States, withdraw from the fighting coalition and work to end the war itself.

But the second problem is for the United States to recognize and act on the grave danger that Pakistan's behaviour towards Afghanistan poses to peace – locally, regionally, and potentially, given Pakistan's location, political structure, and nuclear armament, globally. To some in the US, Pakistan effectively fits the model of a rogue state, especially given its government's inability to control the Inter-Services Intelligence agency in its destabilisation of Afghanistan, or more seriously in the long-term, its sponsorship of major terrorist attacks in India.[51]

Throughout the current war the role of the Pakistan Inter Services Intelligence has been publicly recognized by American officials as a key funder and driver of a large part of the Taliban insurgency. Pakistani leaders have repeatedly called the American bluff with great success. The permanent American mission statement concerning Pakistan appears to have been "better a lying and double-dealing ally than none at all".[52]

Paul Barratt has identified "an overarching problem" about the US attitude to Pakistan, which goes a long way towards explaining both the US schizophrenic attitudes to its ally, and the dangers that flow from this policy posture:

> As is so often the case (Vietnam, Iraq) many of the key U.S. decision makers seem neither to know nor to care about the history of the country or region they are dealing with. The United States, over two Administrations (Bush and Obama) has been telling the Pakistanis that they must sort out what is going on in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and becoming exasperated to the point of incandescence that the Pakistanis fail to do so (not, it should be noted, that they haven't carried out a number of major military operations, with great loss of life amongst their soldiers as well as great dislocation and loss of life amongst the tribals).

> I would be one of the first to say that Pakistan has been and is an unreliable ally in Afghanistan …. But I have a lot of sympathy for the Pakistan Government in relation to their problems in the FATA, and for those who argue that American actions in and in relation to the FATA are a major problem. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas are designated thus because, to the extent that they are administered at all by any external agency, they are administered direct from Islamabad. They are neither states nor parts of states.[53]

Pakistani democrats have long made the essential point that Pakistan, the fragile acronym state, has always been ruled by either representatives of feudal landlords with dubious democratic credentials – witness the Bhuttos, father, daughter and now son-in-law - or military dictators like Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq or Pervez Musharraf – always with American support. For the United States, the realpolitik logic of the Cold War or the requirements of the Bush and Obama "war on terror" trumped serious assessment of the blowback and follow-on costs so evident in Afghanistan.

Australia needs to encourage the United States not only to disengage from Afghanistan, but also to abandon its bullying of corrupt and weak Asif Ali Zardari government. Australia should recognize the unavoidably deeply fragile state of Pakistan, and especially discourage US demands to destabilize Islamabad's always tentative relationship the border regions, lest they be hugely counter-productive, and bring down the Pakistani house. Australia needs to encourage its ally to abjure the perennial temptation to once again to back another military strongman, and turn at last the fostering of genuine democracy in Pakistan.

Conclusion

The purpose of these remarks is to contribute to discussion of policies with a better chance of resulting in sustainable security in Afghanistan than those currently being pursued by the coalition partners in the US-led war. The immediate question is what Australian governments and Australian civil society groups can do to foster such as outcome. Eight steps have been proposed, each of them addressed necessarily only in a preliminary way.

Such a list presumptuous, especially from a foreigner speaking about the future of a country whose only hope of peace finally emanates from the ability of its political groupings to work towards a less violent future together. Yet these remarks are addressed to Australians about what the Australian government and its coalition partners are doing, and what Australians can do to shift those policies.

There is also necessarily a hopeful and no doubt unjustifiably optimistic quality to some of the proposals – some would say utopian in places. Yet they are surely are no less utopian than the publicly claimed – and privately denied - certainties of current war policies.

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10 *Security Council resolution 1943 Adopted by the Security Council at its 6395th meeting, on 13 October 2010*. S/RES/1943 (2010).

11 Philip Dorling, "Terror groups 'broken'", The Age, December 15, 2010: "The head of Australia's top intelligence agency, the Office of National Assessments, told American diplomats in October 2008 that al-Qaeda 'ultimately has failed to achieve the strategic leadership role it sought within the Islamic world'. The assessment undercuts a key argument of the Gillard government to justify Australia's continued commitment to the war in Afghanistan — that al-Qaeda could return to use the country as a terrorist training ground."
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