



THE HARPER RECORD

Edited by Teresa Healy



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
CENTRE CANADIEN
de POLITIQUES ALTERNATIVES

www.policyalternatives.ca

Peace and Democracy for Afghanistan

John W. Warnock

ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2001, the government of Jean Chrétien pledged Canada's full support to any action by the U.S. government to confront the al-Qaeda organization and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The United Nations passed resolutions calling for all countries "to work together urgently to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers and sponsor of these [9/11] acts." But George W. Bush's administration rejected this proposal and refused to seek the approval of the UN Security Council for the planned attack on Afghanistan.

On October 2, 2001, NATO gave full political support to the assault on Afghanistan. Prime Minister Chrétien announced Canada's support and began to send Canadian Forces naval vessels to participate in the U.S.-directed Operation Enduring Freedom, charged with bringing about "regime change" in Afghanistan.

The assault began on October 7, 2001. The war was short, given the overwhelming military superiority of the U.S. military and its massive bombing campaign. The Taliban fled Kabul on November 12, and the U.S. allies, the Islamist Northern Alliance, assumed the role of *de facto* government. Kandahar fell in early December and the war was over.

The Liberal government pledged 2,000 Canadian troops to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, and Joint Task Force 2 special

forces were engaged in military conflict near Kandahar as part of the last campaign to destroy al-Qaeda and Taliban forces.

From this time on, Canada's role in Afghanistan escalated. In February 2002, Canadian forces were assigned to Kandahar to defend the city and the airport, and to engage any remaining Taliban forces.

Creating the International Security Assistance Force

On December 20, 2001, the UN Security Council agreed to sanction the creation of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, an enforcement mandate. The ISAF is completely outside the United Nations, part of the "coalition of the willing" created by the U.S. government. This "stabilization mission" was to support the UN humanitarian assistance program. Canada was to be part of the ISAF, under British command.

Between 2001 and 2003, the ISAF was confined to Kabul in a peacekeeping role. By early 2003, the rebellion against the interim Afghan government and the occupation forces had begun. Under direction from the Bush administration, which was preparing for an attack on Iraq, NATO assumed the responsibility for the ISAF. Canadian forces served in Kabul between October 2003 and November 2005. They were then moved to Kandahar, first under OEF and then in July 2006 under the authority of the ISAF. Canadian military forces made a major shift from a peacekeeping role in support of humanitarian assistance to fighting a counter-insurgency war.

Over this period, the governments of Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, and Stephen Harper all gave full support to the Bush administration's position on Afghanistan. In April 2008, a resolution was passed in Parliament authorizing Stephen Harper's government to extend Canada's role in the counter-insurgency war through 2011. The resolution by the Conservative government received the support of the Liberal opposition headed by Stéphane Dion.

According to public opinion polls, a large segment of the Canadian public is opposed to the participation of Canadian Forces in this counter-insurgency war, ranging between 45% and 50%. An Angus Reid Strategies poll, released on March 26, 2008, found that 58% of those surveyed were

opposed to extending the Canadian military mission until 2011. The political breakdown showed that only supporters of the Conservative party (72%) supported the extension. The majority of supporters of the other political parties were in opposition: Liberal party (63%), New Democratic party (74%), Bloc Québécois (78%), and Green party (68%). Only in Alberta did an overall majority support the extension.

Persistence of the insurgency

Over the past two years, the insurgency by the Taliban and their allies has grown in strength, and the conflict has spread to all parts of the country. The number of attacks on the NATO forces has greatly increased, and the number of deaths by the military forces and civilians increased by 62% in the first six months of 2008. In spite of defeats in direct conflicts with NATO forces, the resistance movement has been able to continue to find replacements and expand operations.

Why is this happening? As the UN Secretary-General pointed out in his report of September 2007, the main problem is the unpopularity of the government of President Hamid Karzai and the country's National Parliament. The government is notoriously corrupt, and drug lords and regional commanders have great power. The economy remains very poor and at least 40% of the people are unemployed. The average Afghan earns only \$350 per year. Lack of food and housing is a widespread problem. Public services are very limited.

The United States creates the new Afghan government

The formation of a post-Taliban government began in November 2001, when the U.S. government brought some representatives from Afghanistan together at Bonn, Germany, to create an interim government. The Bush administration chose groups aligned to the Northern Alliance, the Islamists who have been their close political allies since 1979. Five broad groups representing the democratic forces in Afghanistan asked to participate, but they were refused official status and voting rights. This set the pattern for everything that followed. The democratic

forces have been excluded from all the operations to create a new constitution and government, as well as from the first elections.

It is widely known that the Afghan people wanted a restoration of the liberal, democratic constitution of 1964, a constitutional monarch with a parliamentary government, political parties, elections by proportional representation, and a federal state. The U.S. government, backed by the Canadian government and representatives from the United Nations, blocked this development. At the Bonn meetings in November 2001, the U.S. government mandated that Hamid Karzai be appointed the new interim president. He named 30 people, mainly Islamists from the Northern Alliance, to form the transitional administration.

An interim Emergency Loya Jirga (or Grand Council) was held in June 2002. Delegates were chosen by local warlords and the regional leaders of dominant ethnic groups. Their proposal for a constitutional monarchy was rejected by the U.S. government.

Karzai and his U.S. and UN advisors then drafted a new constitution through a very secret closed-door process. The general public did not get a chance to see the constitution, and there was no public debate. It was presented to the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) in December 2003. The majority of delegates opposed the plan for a highly centralized government with enormous power entrusted to the president, and there was also strong opposition to the re-creation of Afghanistan as an Islamist state. When 48% of the delegates walked out in protest, Karzai threatened not to run for president. The constitution was then “unanimously” approved by the delegates even though no vote was held. Representatives from the Canadian government played key roles in helping the U.S. government in this entire anti-democratic process.

Demonstration elections

President Bush insisted that a presidential election be held in Afghanistan prior to the U.S. presidential election in November 2004. But there was no national government and no functioning provincial or local governments. No political parties were allowed to participate. The whole process was deeply flawed. Karzai won by default because Afghans feared a warlord would win or U.S. government aid would be withdrawn.

The election for the parliament, held on September 18, 2005, was worse. No political parties were allowed to participate, which greatly strengthened the regional Islamist forces. The Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system was used, but there were no party lists. The goal was to prevent the development of new political parties on the democratic left. The Karzai administration refused the request by 34 political parties for a system of proportional representation.

Of the 249 elected positions to the House of the People (the lower house), over one-half were filled by men who had fought in the Mujahadeen war, and one-half were clearly identified as radical Islamists. The large majority of those elected had close ties to regional armed groups. Voter turnout was very low, estimated at 40% overall and 30% in Kabul. The Canadian government was deeply involved in these fraudulent “demonstration elections,” as Noam Chomsky has called them.

The Harper-Bush military strategy

Stephen Harper’s government and Canada’s military leaders insist progress is being made in Afghanistan, but this view is not shared by U.S. and British military commanders. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported in June 2008 that the Afghan Army cannot operate without the support of NATO. Only 52 of 433 units of the Afghan National Police are capable of being deployed. There are widespread reports that over 40% of all economic assistance funds disappear within the system. NATO governments, mindful of their own public opinion, are refusing to send additional armed forces to Afghanistan.

Stephen Harper’s new Canada First Defence Strategy dismisses peacekeeping and promises even further integration of Canadian Forces into those of the United States. Military spending will focus on expanding the capacity to be “interoperable with the U.S. Military.” NATO will be Canada’s first priority, described by President George W. Bush as a new “expeditionary force” for the First World. The United Nations and peacekeeping are ignored in the new Tory policy statement.

But a large percentage of the Canadian public does not agree with this policy direction. It is time for Canadians to stand up and be counted, to pressure the political parties and the government to break with

U.S. policy in Afghanistan. It is time to switch to supporting the people of Afghanistan who want an end to the war and a chance to improve their lives.

What can be done

An opportunity for change appeared beginning in 2007, when the Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO) put Afghanistan high on its agenda and called for regional negotiations to settle the conflict and promote reconstruction. The SCO members are China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

At the April 2008 meeting of NATO at Bucharest, the SCO position was advanced by President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan. He proposed the reconstitution of the old Six Plus Two negotiations (1998–2001), hosted by the United Nations, which included the six countries on the border of Afghanistan plus the United States and Russia. To this group would be added NATO. This body would design a general regional plan for establishing peace and democracy in Afghanistan. The United Nations would then replace NATO as the lead organization to direct peace and redevelopment.

Unfortunately, this proposal was rejected out of hand by the U.S. government, and the Harper government agreed. None of Canada's opposition parties seemed to be aware of this peace proposal, which would have had the broad support of the majority of Canadians and been welcomed by the Afghan people.

Since 2001, our Canadian governments have given complete support to the United States on Afghanistan. But this policy has failed to date and is doomed to fail in the long run. The challenge for Canada is to take a different position: one which puts the interests of the Afghan people first. In public opinion polls in Canada over recent years, a consistent 70% have indicated that they want Canada to return to a role of peacekeeper. Higher majorities want Canada to emphasize humanitarian and economic assistance.

The challenge we face is how to convince our elected governments and political parties to join with this majority opinion.