

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

**The Taliban are winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the Afghan population in southern Afghanistan and we are losing it. International troops in southern Afghanistan are fighting a war that will not be won on the battlefield alone. It will be won through gaining the support of the Afghan people – by winning their hearts and minds. Blunt political errors and the absence of comprehensive development aid plans to support the military have played directly into the hands of the Taliban by enabling their swift return to the southern provinces of Afghanistan.**

### **Policy errors are making us lose the Hearts and Minds and letting the Taliban win**

The Taliban are leading the only successful Hearts and Minds strategy in southern Afghanistan by reaching out to the local population, responding to their needs, recognising their plight and shaping their perceptions through anti-American and anti-western propaganda. In contrast, the international community's Hearts and Minds campaign has so far accounted to no more than an empty PR strategy aimed at home constituencies, rather than a comprehensive attempt to reach out the local population and address their basic needs.

The failure of past British and Russian campaigns show that intensive military campaigns bring limited success in Afghanistan; victory in Afghanistan comes with the strategy most adapted to local dynamics and realities. The rural Afghan village is a central piece of this reality. It is time for a serious Hearts and Minds campaign to win back the support of the people for the reconstruction process and de-escalate the hostile environment faced by the troops.

### **There is more destruction than reconstruction in southern Afghanistan**

If a Hearts and Minds strategy is to shape the outcome of this war, its positive impact must help to overcome the negative consequences of the military campaign. So far, the international community has placed more emphasis on military confrontation, recently intensifying the bombing campaigns.

Western governments engaged in southern Afghanistan have painted a misleading picture of "success" in Afghanistan for the public back home. Classical "measures of success" such as the number of casualties inflicted on the enemy, widely publicised by Western governments, are not truly reflecting the state of the war in southern Afghanistan. Moreover the sixth month rotation of key military commanders deprives the ground campaign of the strategic continuity required for long-term success. Whilst commanders change every six months, the enemy consolidates its grip on southern Afghanistan.

The Taliban Hearts and Minds propaganda has thrived on emphasising the negative impact of the international community actions and the lack of a robust and systematic aid and development programme in southern Afghanistan. The violence of air bombing campaigns, forced crop eradication and the extreme level of poverty that these have engendered call for a broader and deeper Hearts and Minds campaign from the international community, one which can win back people from poverty and out of the grip of the Taliban insurgency.

## **The politics of bombings undermines the Afghan government and does not create the conditions for stabilisation**

On the one hand, the international community fails to deliver aid policies that can make a difference to the living conditions of the people. On the other, it implements violent policies such as aerial bombing and forced poppy crop eradication, which deprive the people of income. Those policies have triggered a negative chain reaction of further violence and poverty.

The extensive use of bombing in Afghanistan and its political, humanitarian and legal consequences have not been discussed in a proper and open manner by the international community. The failure of the international community to make any improvements in southern Afghanistan over the last five years has put a heavy burden on the troops by requiring them to achieve quick fix results. With more than 2,600 air missions flown this year alone, including missions for close air support to operations in southern Afghanistan, display of air power is the chief tactic of the operations in Southern Afghanistan. It is clear that aerial bombing has been given a disproportionate emphasis in order to compensate for the limited number of troops on the ground. The violence and destruction of aerial bombing makes tactics, like suicide bombing by the Taliban just more of the same, and more tolerable to the local population. Each civilian bombing casualty widens the gap between the population and the international troops. The Karzai administration which is seen as powerless because it does not prevent the bombing of civilians.

## **Dysfunctional aid and development delivery frameworks have failed to provide positive environment for military actions**

Five years after the fall of the Taliban, the main foreign governmental development agencies such as the United States Agency for Aid Development (USAID), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have failed to make any significant improvement in the living conditions of the population in southern Afghanistan. Starvation, internal displacement, lack of basic medical aid and social support as well as dependence on illegal opium activities are still the everyday reality for hundreds of thousands of Afghan families.

Aid and development agencies have not delivered timely, targeted and effective development and aid to support the military endeavours of NATO. There are a number of causes behind this aid crisis: the lack of funding, the inadequacy of delivery models to the environment of southern Afghanistan, the tension and competition between aid actors, staffing concerns, cultural issues, improper prioritization and sequencing, overall bureaucratic approaches keeping funds dormant, and lack of innovative approaches to this crisis. But at the end, Afghan civilians and the international ground troops are the ones paying for the development failure of the international community.

## **Aggressive poppy eradication intensifies the insurgency and poverty**

The recent preparations for the launch of chemical poppy eradication operations in Afghanistan's next growing season are testimony of the failure of the current counter narcotics approach. It rests on the assumption that "more of the same" will solve the deeply rooted illegal opium problem. In the volatile context of southern Afghanistan, chemical eradication will amount to a further act of war on farming communities, dealing the last blow to the fast deteriorating relationship of local Afghans with the international community and the Karzai government. The Taliban will take full advantage of this 'chemical warfare' approach to strengthen their political grip on the local population.

## **Zroona aw Zehoona: A real Hearts and Minds strategy**

In the face of a versatile enemy, which capitalises on every policy error and shortcoming of the international community, a large scale programme of emergency financial aid must be immediately initiated to blanket the ground with a Zroona aw Zehnoona (Hearts and Minds) campaign targeted at Hakia Kalay (Every Village). The military forces must be given a positive political climate within which to work, and which counters the Taliban's own successful Hearts and Minds campaign.

### **Three Recommendations**

**The Taliban are winning the battle for the hearts and minds of the population of southern Afghanistan and this contributes to the high number of military casualties suffered by NATO troops. NATO troops are foreigners fighting on alien ground, home to the Taliban. It is thus urgent to launch a well-planned and comprehensive Hearts and Minds campaign to support the troops' mission. At present the international community has the choice between a wholly military approach with ineffective short-term political results and military casualties or an intensive Hearts and Minds strategy that lays the ground for long-term stability.**

#### ***Hakia Kalay/Every Village strategy for intensive rural reconstruction***

The international community's Hearts and Minds campaign has to be as local and versatile as the one pursued by the Taliban. A *Hakia Kalay/Every Village Reconstruction Plan* to stabilise southern Afghanistan will target the chronic poverty of every village in southern Afghanistan with a specific *Emergency Reconstruction Package* covering medical assistance, shelter, irrigation, employment and education as well as the use of poppy for the production of morphine and codeine.

#### **Recommendation I: Robust and systematic food aid and refugee emergency**

The international aid and development agencies framework is so dysfunctional that even the most elementary aid has failed to reach the local population. A robust, extremely well funded and well organized, comprehensive food aid and refugee outreach programme reaching both urban and rural areas must be urgently developed; particularly to help the populations deal with the harsh winter period.

#### **Recommendation II: An end to the strategy of fear and destruction**

A full assessment on the nature and extent of the bombing campaigns must be conducted, giving particular attention to the political, humanitarian and legal consequences of this tactic. Immediate compensation and re-building schemes must be put in place to compensate for civilian loss of life and infrastructure. NATO-ISAF must also communicate more transparently on bombing casualties; this will put an end to the rumours and Taliban propaganda on unaccounted civilian casualties.

#### **Recommendation III: End to Chemical Warfare against Poppy Farmers and Immediate of Rural Economic Reconstruction Plan**

US plans for chemical poppy eradication must be immediately halted. As the lead country for international counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan, the UK bears the responsibility for the consequences of this 'chemical warfare', including troops casualties. With the lives of Afghans and international military troops on the line, a full assessment of the security and political consequences of chemical spraying must be conducted and fully disclosed. An integrated control of poppy

cultivation for the production of codeine and morphine must be one of the building-blocks of this *Emergency Rural Economic Reconstruction* for Afghanistan. This reconstruction plan will lay the ground for a successful stabilisation mission in Afghanistan.