

Susan Wardak

The Afghanistan Working Group of McMaster University's Centre for Peace Studies believes that current measures to bring peace in Afghanistan are based on a misdiagnosis of the Afghan conflict.

Misdiagnosis

- *All those who fight against the Afghan State and its international allies are terrorists.*

Not true. Many of those who now fight, support the fighters, or sympathise with them are ordinary Afghans who have issues and grievances based on internal Afghan problems. These people have nothing to do with Al Qaeda's ideology or aspirations.

- *The sole force behind the Afghan war is Pakistan's ISI.*

While Pakistan's support of Taliban and Al Qaeda is one important factor in the continuing unrest, it is definitely not the sole cause.

- *Military interventions and increased war – more NATO troops and more war machines – will bring peace to Afghanistan.*

While international forces have a valid role at the moment in securing law and order, protecting civilians, supporting the national army and national police, and while we hope they will soon have an even more important role in assisting with a national peace process, fighting a counter-insurgency war may actually produce more recruits for Al Qaeda and international terrorist networks.

Diagnosis

(a) The unresolved civil war

By 11 September 2001 a civil war between two parties had been waged for five years. Neither party enjoyed a good reputation in the eyes of the Afghan people. Both sides of the civil war oppressed women, tortured, looted, and killed innocent civilians, fought for power, and were being manipulated by regional politics.

One side, the Taliban-Hekmatyar grouping was close to Pakistan and to Arab governments; the second side, the Northern Alliance, was close to India, Iran, and Russia.

An increasing, unhealthy competition between regional countries since 1992 has compounded inter-factional war in Afghanistan and contributed to lack of security in Afghanistan.

US-led forces came to Afghanistan in October 2001 and the Taliban were ousted. At the Bonn Peace negotiations in November a major mistake was made that still remains to be corrected. Only one side of the civil war was involved in the peace negotiations. The Bonn agreement did not, therefore resolve the civil war, it merely postponed it.

This mistake was further compounded by a monopoly on power by what was left of the Northern Alliance as well as by discrimination against Pashtun mullahs and

Pashtun areas, which led to further alienation of Pashtuns in the south and east of the country.

The Northern Alliance has, of course, its own valid needs for security, and it needs assurance that it will not be made the object of new acts of vengeance.

(b) Dualistic thinking by conflict parties

The aims of the two major groupings are:

- to defeat and eliminate the other group
- to exercise a foreign policy in favour of their own regional backers

Since the defeat of Taliban-Hekmatyar in late 2001, an analysis based on a pathological dichotomy has been imposed on the people of Afghanistan. This dichotomy has made everyone on the winner's side of the civil war 'good' and everyone on the defeated side 'evil' (Al Qaeda, terrorists, spies of the ISI). This analysis has become so dominant that anyone daring to criticise it has risked being labelled a supporter of the Taliban or Al Qaeda. This psychological campaign has led to a dehumanisation of Taliban-Hekmatyar among many non-Pashtuns. Several people who challenged this war of thinking have paid a very high price. The result has been widespread fear and resentment.

(c) Unbalanced relationships with neighbouring and regional countries

When the US-led forces used the Northern Alliance as their ground troops, and when the Bonn Peace process excluded Hekmatyar and the Taliban, the Northern Alliance got full control of the government and tried to eliminate their civil war enemy, whilst manipulating foreign relations. The relations of the Afghan government with neighbouring and regional countries therefore became, and remain, out of balance.

(d) Culture of war, drugs, and corruption of Afghan politics

Sunk in the anger, hostility and hatred resulting from infighting, almost all parties involved in the civil war brought their model of political interactions and political thinking with them to the Afghan government and Afghan politics. The vision of a State for all Afghans, which works for the wellbeing of all components of the population, has been lost.

Empathy with other groups and ethnicities is gone, and attempts to attain victory over other political groups have replaced the necessary joint action to address national emergencies such as insecurity, poverty and illiteracy.

Drug trafficking is playing a very important role in the destabilisation of the security situation in the country. The sums of money involved are huge and people at high levels of government are involved in the trade. In order to protect their interests they struggle for power and manipulate the system in their interests.

Prognosis

Without achieving security and a durable peace through national cooperation it will be difficult to get rid of corruption and drug production. Similarly, while the US, Canada and other supporting countries of Afghanistan speak of more investment in

development, this investment is not going to bear fruit without security, national cooperation and peace within Afghan society.

Therapy

It is necessary to launch a comprehensive national peace and reconciliation process.

(a) The first stage of the process will be to hold peace dialogues with the Taliban and Hekmatyar's followers, who have non-Al Qaeda, Afghan issues that can be addressed within the current political system and under the Afghan constitution. Genuine terrorists will be isolated and marginalised through this process and therefore easier to deal with. Recent polls have shown that the majority of Canadians favour negotiations with the Taliban, and power-sharing with the Taliban is also now being openly discussed in Afghanistan. Initial conversations with Taliban by members of McMaster University Centre for Peace Studies have suggested that the group will put forward such interests such as the following:

- The reintegration of the Taliban as a political entity with adequate representation in the government.
- Release of prisoners from Guantanamo Bay
- Independent madrassas (religious schools) not controlled by the government, in each district

(b) Another part of the peace and reconciliation programme should be a permanent dialogue mechanism with neighbouring countries in the region in order to find creative ways for further economic and political cooperation and the establishment of balanced relationships.

(c) A third component will be working with political and ethnic groups to promote empathy and to assist in a national vision-building exercise in order to begin replacing a political culture of war with a culture of peace and democracy.

(d) Other activities should be encouraged to promote empathy, compassion and fairness in the public and to promote a culture of peace, non-violence and national unity through schools and media on a regular basis.

What should Canada do?

- Canada should invest in a well-designed, well-implemented peace process which will prevent further loss among both Afghans and the Canadian men and women who are part of the Canadian forces in Afghanistan. This will allow Canadians and other international forces to return safely to their homes.
- Canada should maintain its development support.
- Canada should terminate its counter-insurgency warfare.
- Canada may keep an armed presence in Afghanistan in order to protect – as a policing force – law and order, women and children, schools and clinics, and to support the national army and national police. This armed presence should be dedicated to supporting a comprehensive national peace initiative and it should have a clear exit strategy and time-line.