

Afghanistan: Ending a Failed Military Strategy



September Eleventh Families for
Peaceful Tomorrows



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A Briefing Paper by September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows is an organization founded by family members of 9/11 victims who have joined together to transform our grief into action for peace and justice. Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, Peaceful Tomorrows opposed US military action in Afghanistan from its inception. We have sent delegations of 9/11 family members to Afghanistan to meet with Afghan civilians harmed by US military action and to educate the US public and policy makers about the true costs of war. By advocating nonviolent responses to terrorism and war, we work to break the cycles of violence that harm ordinary people in the US, Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world.

We present this primer as a resource to all those concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. We hope this can be a starting point for discussion about creating an improved US strategy in Afghanistan.

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Cover photo: Kabul home destroyed by US bomb, killing nine civilians. Photo by Kelly Campbell

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Crater from a US bomb which destroyed a village in the Shomali Plain. Photo by Kelly Campbell

Introduction

Following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, many in the US initially supported the war in Afghanistan because they believed that it would reduce the threat of another attack on US soil, and that it would enable the US to bring to justice Osama bin Laden and others responsible for the attacks. Once the Taliban fell, the war was touted as a success. However, while public attention shifted to the war in Iraq, the conflict in Afghanistan entered a new phase of violence and decay.

Concerns about the increased violence and lack of stability in Afghanistan have led many – including President-elect Obama – to call for an increased presence of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan. However, the idea that more US troops are the answer to Afghanistan's woes is misguided. Rather than a military escalation, what is needed is a shift away from militarism, toward diplomacy, aid and reconstruction.

Today, as calls grow louder for the US military to send more troops to Afghanistan, it is up to the US peace movement to address the realities and counter the misconceptions surrounding the war and occupation. We must educate our own communities about the true consequences of US foreign policy in Afghanistan, connect with Afghan peacemakers and grassroots movements that are calling for alternatives to military action, and devise strategies for joining together to build a lasting peace.

This primer outlines ten reasons the US should end the occupation in Afghanistan. We call instead for a drastically revamped US policy focused on diplomacy, negotiation, aid, reconstruction and international cooperation. We hope that this information will help those of us in the US who care about Afghanistan to unite to call for a new strategy in Afghanistan.

Summary

Ten Reasons to End the Occupation of Afghanistan

1. US and NATO occupation creates civilian casualties, angering Afghans.
2. Military occupation has hampered humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts.
3. Afghan women continue to face violence and oppression under the occupation.
4. US policy has empowered warlords, drug lords and the Taliban.
5. The occupation contributes to violence and destabilization for ordinary Afghans, including refugees.
6. NATO allies and military leaders are questioning the occupation.
7. US troop casualties in Afghanistan are on the rise.
8. Afghans are calling for a negotiated end to the war.
9. Military escalation will only increase the violence, and potentially lead to a wider war involving nuclear-armed Pakistan.
10. Military occupation of Afghanistan does not curb terrorism.

Recommendations for a Changed US Policy

1. Set a swift timetable for the withdrawal of US and NATO military forces, to be substituted by UN forces for short-term security.
2. Immediately cease air strikes on targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
3. Support negotiations between all parties involved in the conflict, including Afghan women leaders.
4. Reform humanitarian aid and reconstruction funding efforts to prioritize Afghan organizations over foreign contractors. Ensure that funded projects address the needs and requests of Afghans and are not simply pet projects of foreign donors.
5. Invest in long-term aid that increases self-reliance such as sustainable agriculture efforts.
6. Immediately discontinue the use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are costly, inefficient, and have militarized the aid process.
7. Standardize, increase, and publicly document compensation to Afghan families and communities affected by US military actions.
8. Sign the treaty to ban cluster bombs, pay for cluster bomb and landmine clean up in Afghanistan, and pledge never to use these weapons again.

Ten Reasons to End the Occupation of Afghanistan

1 US And NATO Occupation Creates Civilian Casualties, Angering Afghans

Due to heightened insurgent attacks and foreign air strikes in Afghanistan, civilian casualties increased 40 percent in the first nine months of 2008 from last year. Of the 1,445 recorded civilian deaths so far this year, 55 percent were caused by the Taliban and other insurgent groups and 40 percent are credited to US, NATO and Afghan forces.¹ In August 2008, the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), reported that an estimated 260 civilians were killed in July alone, a higher number than any other month in the last six years. The number of air strikes by international military forces was up 40 percent over last year since the beginning of 2008. By September 2007, there were more than two times as many air strikes in Afghanistan as in Iraq.²

Shootings, ambushes, kidnappings, suicide attacks and roadside bombings are now more common than ever. In 2006, there were 123 such attacks and, in 2007, that number rose more than 25 percent, to 160 attacks.³ Security in Afghanistan has gotten worse. In 2005, there were an estimated 1,000 violent deaths and injuries. In 2006, that number surged to 4,000. The United Nations has reported that 2007 was the worst on record: casualties in Afghanistan soared above 8,000, with at least 1,500 innocent men, women and children killed in acts of violence.⁴

Although no comprehensive figures exist, incidents of NATO and US air strikes killing innocent civilians in Afghanistan have been documented every year since the invasion. According to University of New Hampshire Economics Professor Marc W. Herold's *Dossier on Civilian Victims of United States' Aerial Bombing*, as many as 3,600 civilians were killed as a result of US bombing from 2001 to June 2003.⁵ Herold's latest research, released in October 2008, on the seventh anniversary of the first US bombing attacks on Afghanistan, shows that

since 2005, approximately 3,200 Afghan civilians have been killed by US/NATO attacks.⁶

Attacks on civilians have caused controversy for the US military. In July 2008, 47 members of a wedding party – 38 of whom were women and children – were killed by an air strike in Nangarhar Province.⁷ Controversy surrounded another US/NATO attack on the village of Azizabad on August 22, 2008. Originally, the military announced six civilian deaths. It soon became clear that this was an outrageous underestimate, and the Afghan government called for a reinvestigation. The US Central Command reported in October that the death toll was in fact higher than originally reported. It now appears that 35 civilians were killed in the attack, twelve of whom were children. Despite these findings, US military officials maintained that the site in Azizabad was a “legitimate target” and that the attack was a “valid military action.”⁸

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and other government officials have repeatedly expressed anger over attacks on civilians. Responding to incidents of civilian casualties, Karzai said, “Civilian deaths and arbitrary decisions to search people’s houses have reached an unacceptable level.”⁹ Mere hours after Barack Obama was elected President, Karzai called on him to make it a top priority of the new administration to stop the killing of Afghan civilians.¹⁰ Students, tribal elders and grassroots groups have organized demonstrations in different parts of the country in response to civilian casualties, but US media rarely covers these acts of protest.¹¹

By September 2007, there were more than two times as many air strikes in Afghanistan as in Iraq

Military Occupation Has Hampered Humanitarian Aid And Reconstruction Efforts



The International Community Promises Aid, but Fails to Deliver

The US military spends close to \$100 million a day in Afghanistan, while the average amount of all donors' aid per day is only \$7 million.¹² In the first two years after the invasion, aid amounted to only \$57 per citizen.¹³ International aid represents 90 percent of all public expenditure in Afghanistan. As such, aid is a critical factor in the daily lives of Afghans and in the ongoing reconstruction of the country. As of March 2008, there was a \$10 billion shortfall in aid that had been pledged, but not delivered. The US has disbursed only half of its pledged \$10.4 billion in aid. The Asian Development Bank and India have disbursed one third of their pledged assistance. Germany has delivered less than two thirds of its commitment. Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, China and the World Bank so far have delivered less than 40 percent of their aid pledges for the period 2002-2011.¹⁴

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have gained a reputation for extraordinary waste: for example, they employ expatriate consultants, who earn \$200,000-\$500,000 per year. Oxfam reported in November 2007 that 40 percent of aid dollars flow immediately out of Afghanistan in corporate fees and profits. What remains is distributed disproportionately in the form of highly visible

short-term projects that do little to create sustainable, long-term gains.¹⁵ In addition, aid money flooded the market early on in the invasion, creating inflation in Afghanistan that increased real estate and food prices.¹⁶

According to a report issued by CorpWatch, the highly touted road from Kabul to Kandahar, a “symbol” of US humanitarianism cost slightly more than \$256 million – approximately \$1 million per mile. Construction work was done hurriedly so the road would be completed just prior to the 2004 presidential elections in the United States. According to critics, the road was built from materials not likely to last through 120 degree summers and bitter winters. However, maintenance is not the responsibility of the Berger Group, the private company that built the road, but the responsibility of the Afghan government. In addition, the road was built primarily to accommodate military movement from Kabul to Kandahar, and to make it easier to operate a much-coveted oil pipeline owned by the West, not to improve Afghanistan’s economy.¹⁷ In a recent trip to Afghanistan, journalist Nir Rosen described this highway – which runs through an area now under Taliban control – as littered with wreckage of coalition vehicles and “pocked by immense craters, most of them caused by roadside bombs.”¹⁸

Aid Workers Are Under Attack

Further hindering aid to Afghans is the increase in violence affecting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the country. Twenty-nine aid workers have been killed in 2008 as of mid-October.¹⁹ From January through September 2008, more than 146 security incidents were reported in which 28 aid workers were killed and 72 abducted. According to a quarterly report by the Afghanistan NGO’s Safety Office (ANSO), attacks on aid workers went up 400 percent since January 2005. Attacks against aid workers have occurred in 29 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. This insecurity has led many NGOs to scale down their presence in difficult areas.²⁰

Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), an organization that had been in Afghanistan since 1980, withdrew in 2004 after five of their workers

were killed, stating, “Humanitarian assistance is only possible when armed actors respect the safety of humanitarian workers.” They went on to denounce the US “military’s attempt to usurp humanitarian aid.”²¹

Several different groups are attacking NGO workers. More than 60 percent of attacks have been by the Taliban and by followers of warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; another 33 percent of attacks were by armed criminal groups. Because of the growth in violence against aid workers, the UN reports that up to 50 percent of the country is inaccessible to UN aid activities.²²

Humanitarian Aid Has Been Militarized

US and NATO strategy in Afghanistan has blurred the line between combat operations and humanitarian aid. The most bizarre and confusing example of this was in 2001, when US aircraft dropped thousands of food rations in bright yellow packages that were nearly identical to unexploded US cluster bombs.²³

Making the problem worse, in 2004 the US and NATO created “provincial reconstruction teams”

(PRTs) to serve with combat troops in a fusion of military, intelligence and aid functions. PRTs work in areas previously served by non-militarized aid teams – doing far less work at a higher cost. Aid workers are now the most vocal critics of PRTs: InterAction, a coalition of 159 humanitarian organizations said they do not believe “PRTs should be engaged in reconstruction activities” at all. Most alarming is the PRT practice of bribing Afghans with humanitarian aid to gain information. This creates incentive for hungry people to “create information,” turning US forces against family enemies.²⁴

PRTs not only take advantage of the population – trading aid for information – but their projects are wasteful. A typical PRT may build several schools, worth \$10,000 each, and spend an additional \$10 million a year on personnel and support. According to Refugees International, “aid agencies that are experienced and dedicated to small reconstruction projects are far more cost effective.”²⁵

3

Afghan Women Continue To Face Violence And Oppression Under The Occupation

Women in Afghanistan Have Not Been Granted Full Rights as Citizens and Continue to Face Violence and Oppression.

The crimes against women committed by the Taliban are among the worst on record, and the Bush Administration justified the invasion of Afghanistan in part as a feminist mission to relieve their suffering. In November 2001, Laura Bush delivered the President’s weekly radio address, decrying the “poverty, poor health, and illiteracy that the terrorists and the Taliban have imposed on women in Afghanistan.”²⁶ Yet, seven years later, conditions for women and children have not significantly improved.

Since the US invaded Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban from power, the new government has initiated significant – even revolutionary – reforms for women. Many of these reforms, however, have yet to be realized. In 2003, the Afghan government signed the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination

Against Women, yet widespread inequality continues, especially regarding access to public health resources and protection from spousal abuse.²⁷ The new Afghan Constitution recognizes men and women as equal citizens under the law – yet women have no redress for domestic violence or rape.²⁸

In August 2008, President Karzai pardoned three men associated with a warlord who pled guilty to the public and brutal gang rape of a woman in the northern province of Samangan.²⁹ There are also no protections for people who speak out on behalf of women in Afghan society. Recently, a twenty-three year old Afghan journalism student, Sayed Perves Kambaksh was sentenced to death by a local Islamic court for distributing a critique of those who misrepresent the Koran to justify the oppression of women.³⁰ In October 2008, his sentence was commuted to 20 years.³¹

The inability of the Karzai administration to stand up to tribal leaders and thus implement one law for all its citizens has resulted in the continuation

of a system of tribal justice that uses women as compensation to settle disputes within the tribe. Particularly in cases involving crimes such as murder, the murderer's family may give one or two women to the family of the victim as a form of payment. If a crime is committed against a woman, compensation often goes to her father, husband, or brother.³²

The international relief and activist organization, UK-based WOMANKIND Worldwide, reported in 2008 that Afghanistan is still one of the most dangerous places to be a woman.³³

They cite the fact that Afghanistan is the only country in the world where the suicide rate for women is higher than for men.³⁴ In the province of Herat, cases of self-immolation have become increasingly common. The high incidence of this practice is unique to the post-Taliban era.

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Hundreds of Afghan women have burned themselves alive to avoid forced marriages and in protest of the oppression they face on a daily basis.³⁵ As of August 2008, 47 cases of self-immolation had been reported to one burn clinic in Herat; 42 had resulted in the death of the woman.³⁶

Sixty percent of marriages are still forced, sometimes involving girls as young as six and seven years old. Human trafficking and forced prostitution continue to provide income to destitute families. Laws relevant to women's rights and security are only sporadically enforced, as confirmed by the UN's Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) in its 2008–2009 assessment.³⁷ These harsh realities prompted Amnesty International to issue a statement, saying,

“The failure of state institutions to protect women's rights, to ensure that abusers are brought to justice and provide redress points to official apathy toward, and at times blatant sanctioning of violence against women.”³⁸

NGOs that target women's issues have attempted to provide a forum for women to discuss their concerns and a vehicle for educating the public about preventing violence against women. One such group, the Afghan Women's Network, is comprised of 72 organizations dedicated to advocating for women's rights and against gender-based violence.³⁹

Afghan Girls Are Still Not Attending School in Proportion to their Numbers in the Population

Efforts to provide education to Afghan girls denied schooling under the Taliban have been fraught with difficulty. 65 percent of girls are still outside the education system; a number that seems to be increasing.⁴⁰

Afghans 4 Tomorrow, an international nonprofit organization that has built several schools since the fall of the Taliban – some specifically for young girls attending school for the first time – reports multiple acts of violence against at least one of their schools. An unexploded landmine was found in one classroom and another classroom was set ablaze. Teachers at the school have been followed and threatened. Government security at this school is non-existent.⁴¹

In some areas, education campaigns aimed at women have been successful. However, in the southern and eastern provinces of the country, the Taliban and other conservative forces continue to gain power and subsequently, violence against women has escalated. Schools have been burned down, female teachers have been killed, and the parents of thousands of children have been forced to keep their children from attending school.⁴²

4

US Policy Has Empowered Warlords, Drug Lords, And The Taliban

Warlords Have Gained Power with Funding and Weaponry from the International Community

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1978, the US embarked on a covert military campaign (Operation Cyclone) to supply various warlords and resistance groups with weapons and training.⁴³ Collectively, these resistance fighters became known as the mujahideen, which translates as “freedom fighters” or “strugglers.” Funds and weapons were supplied by the US, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, China and Israel. They were channeled through Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and distributed disproportionately to warlords. These warlords continued fighting between themselves after the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 in a sequence of brutal sieges in and around Kabul.⁴⁴

Some view this history as a key part of the backdrop for the events of 9/11, since both the United States and the mujahideen believed that they were responsible for defeating the former Soviet Union and ending the Cold War. As Mahmood Mamdani writes in *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War and the Roots of Terror*, “The result of an alliance gone sour, 9/11 needs to be understood first and foremost as the unfinished business of the Cold War.”⁴⁵

Warlords Now Hold Appointed Positions in the Afghan Parliament

Where are these cold war era warlords today? Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who butchered thousands of Afghans in the power struggles of 1990s, is wanted by the US for trying to overthrow the Karzai government. He remains at large.⁴⁶

Another warlord, Mohammad Mohaqiq, who has been accused of nailing prisoners to walls, is now an elected member of the Afghan Parliament. In fact, many of the sitting members of the Afghan Parliament are known warlords: Human Rights Watch estimates that 60 percent of members of parliament are either themselves or have ties to warlords.⁴⁷

The Afghanistan Justice Project (AJP) issued a report in 2005 accusing a number of senior Karzai Administration officials of war crimes. People that were named by the AJP include Vice President Karim Khalili; Mohammad Qasim Fahim (former defense minister); General Rashid Dostum (former senior advisor to President Karzai); General Hamayoun Fauzi (holding a senior post in the defense ministry); and the notorious Haji Sher Alam (now Governor of Ghazni province).⁴⁸ Following the 2005 parliamentary elections, Sam Zarifi of Human Rights Watch warned, “There is widespread cynicism about this parliament. How can people trust a government which allows warlords and notorious human rights abusers into power?”⁴⁹ In 2007, the Afghan Parliament granted general amnesty for war crimes committed in the previous 25 years, thus protecting all sitting members and their allies from prosecution.⁵⁰

Parliament members who speak out against the warlords and corruption are often silenced. For example, Malalai Joya, a young woman elected to the Afghan Parliament representing

Farah province, was suspended from Parliament for three years for denouncing the warlords in power. She continues to speak out against warlords and in favor of democracy, in spite of at least four assassination attempts.⁵⁰

The Opium Connection Continues to Impede Efforts to Promote Peace, Human Rights and Development in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the world’s largest producer of opium. Cultivation of opium poppies reached unprecedented levels in 2004, 2006, and 2007. Production increased nearly 60 percent between 2005 and 2006. Weather

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conditions in 2007 led to another increase of 34 percent from the year before. Opium totals reached 8,200 tons, and 93 percent of the global opiates came from poppies grown in Afghanistan. This record crop of poppies accounted for approximately 50 percent of the Gross Domestic Product of Afghanistan in 2007.⁵²

Thomas Schweich, a senior counter-narcotics official in Afghanistan from 2006-2008, described difficulties his department had, including competition with military leaders who felt that Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) activity was an obstacle to their operations. Attacks on aid workers responsible for instituting agricultural programs that would give farmers crop alternatives to poppies were common. Corruption of the justice system, and of police and higher officials who were “deeply involved with the narcotics trade” produced a lack of cohesive strategy on the US side for dealing with the opium problem.⁵³

Most of the poppy fields are owned and controlled by warlords. This is one compelling reason why the warlords have been awarded so much power in the new government and why poppy cultivation and narcotics trade has continued to grow.⁵⁴

In the first half of 2008, opium harvest dropped 19 percent, bringing it below 2007 and 2006 levels. The UN credits the decrease in production to “good local leadership assisted by bad weather.”⁵⁵ However, the country maintains its status as the world’s largest producer of opium. Antonio Maria Costa, executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, notes that opium production continues to

thrive in areas where insurgent forces have control. He encourages NATO, the US, and the Afghan military to take measures to help curb the drug trade while providing assistance to farmers.⁵⁶

The Taliban Have Regained Power

Nir Rosen, reporting for *Rolling Stone* in Afghanistan, explains that Defense Secretary Rumsfeld made a mistake in declaring victory after only 18 months of military presence in the country. The US then focused all of its attention in Iraq, allowing insurgent groups – particularly the Taliban – to regain power in many areas. Afghan militias took US funding while extorting bribes and seizing lands instead of hunting down Taliban leaders, who had gone into hiding in Pakistan. Al Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups poured money into Afghanistan and the Taliban received significant funding from the Pakistani government. According to Rosen, the Taliban are “now among the best-armed and most experienced insurgents in the world, linked to the global movement of jihadists that stretches from Pakistan and Iraq to Chechnya and the Philippines.”⁵⁷

The Taliban have gained control over most southern provinces of Afghanistan, and are encroaching on the capital of Kabul in an effort to take back the government from the US backed regime. Karzai himself recently admitted, “our roads are not safe, you can’t go to Kandahar, to Herat. You can’t take the road from Kabul to Paktia.” Taliban insurgents and others have frequently attacked travelers on these roads, sometimes kidnapping or killing them.⁵⁸

5 The Occupation Contributes To Violence And Destabilization For Ordinary Afghans, Including Refugees

The Afghan People’s Needs are Vast and Critical at this Moment

Afghanistan is rated the fourth poorest country in the world today. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the country has a poverty rate of 42 percent, and an additional 20

percent of the population is just above the poverty line. The country is suffering not only from the effects of war, but also from the volatility of the world economy, which has caused food prices to rise significantly. 70 percent of Afghans face food insecurity, 20 percent of rural households are chronically food insecure and 18

percent face seasonal food shortages.⁵⁹ Due to drought, 90 percent of rain-fed agriculture has failed, leaving Afghanistan with a food deficit of two million tons. This will affect Afghans in the last months of 2008 and in to early 2009.⁶⁰

A recent opinion poll funded by the US shows that the number of Afghans who believe that things in their country are going in the right direction has decreased by 4 percent in the last year, while those who believe the country is going in the wrong direction increased by 8 percent. Afghans who believe their family is more prosperous now than under the Taliban decreased by 15 percent; Afghans who believe they are less prosperous increased by 10 percent.⁶¹

US Cluster Bombs Pose an Additional Threat to Civilians in a Country Littered with Landmines

Three decades of war and occupation in Afghanistan have made the country one of the most heavily landmined in the world; between 500,000 and 1 million landmines remain unexploded. Afghanistan has the highest per capita number of amputees, the vast majority were effected by unexploded ordinance.⁶²

The US use of cluster bombs has worsened the situation. Each cluster bomb contains 202 “bomblets,” 5-30 percent of which do not detonate on impact and remain in the area as unexploded ordinance, creating a constant threat to local populations. Human Rights Watch reports that from 2001-2002, the US dropped 1,228 cluster bombs containing 284,956 bomblets on Afghanistan.⁶³ In 2008, an average of two people per day have been killed or disabled by unexploded mines and munitions.⁶⁴

The US has not participated in international efforts to ban cluster bombs. 101 of the world’s governments recently signed a treaty to ban cluster munitions; the US is not among them.⁶⁵ In May 2008, 110 countries participated in a conference to ban cluster bombs. The US did not participate. This added to a sad legacy of apparent lack of concern for the death and injury of innocent civilians that started in 1997 when the US refused to sign a treaty to ban landmines.⁶⁸

Afghan Refugees are Still Not Able to Return Home and are Not Getting Adequate Resources

Confronted by ongoing violence and a lack of economic opportunities, Afghans are fleeing their homes for the relative safety of refugee camps, both inside and outside the country. In 2006, there were nearly one million internally displaced persons in Afghanistan, most living in camps and remote areas.⁶⁷ Since 2001, more than five million refugees have returned to Afghanistan, including 276,700 in 2008.⁶⁸ However, more than three million people still live outside of the country – most in Iran and Pakistan.⁶⁹ Afghans are the second-largest refugee population in the world.⁷⁰

Resources promised by the Afghan government have been slow to get to refugees or haven’t reached them at all. Land plots for returning refugees granted by the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees (MoRR) are located in desert communities that lack access to markets, schools, hospitals, transportation and electricity. Dozens of families that accepted plots from MoRR have left after a short time, frustrated by the lack of resources.⁷¹

Afghans are the second largest refugee population in the world

6 NATO Allies Are Expressing Doubts About The Occupation

US allies are coming under increasing fire. Since 2001, 379 non-US NATO troops have lost their lives in Afghanistan. 105 of these deaths occurred in the first

ten months of 2008.⁷² Citing increasing costs, deteriorating security conditions and public outrage, NATO allies have threatened to reduce their role in Afghanistan in the near future.⁷³

The UK has 8,000 soldiers in Afghanistan – mostly in the southern province of Helmand. British troop casualties have been the second highest after the US, with a loss of 121 soldiers. UK officials have stated that they do not plan to send more troops to Afghanistan and are pulling their remaining forces out of Iraq.⁷⁴ A

68 percent of Britons believe that British troops should be pulled out of Afghanistan in the next year

recent poll shows that 68 percent of Britons believe that British troops should be pulled out of Afghanistan in the next year.⁷⁵

In early 2008, Germany refused to send additional troops to violent Taliban strongholds in the southern provinces.⁷⁶ Six months later, the German government announced

that it would increase its troop level in Afghanistan by almost one-third to 4,500 troops but would keep all of them out of the southern regions of the country.⁷⁷ However, the debate in Germany continues, and even after Barack Obama's July 2008 visit during which

he pressed the Germans to increase troop levels in Afghanistan, opinion polls indicate that as many as 70 percent of Germans oppose German involvement in the war in Afghanistan.⁷⁸

Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon has made clear that Canada is sticking to its plan to pull out its military forces from Afghanistan in 2011. Canada has approximately 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan, mostly in the southern province of Kandahar, and has lost 97 members of its military since Canadian deployment began in 2002.⁷⁹

After the August 2008 death of 10 French soldiers in Afghanistan, French opposition party leaders called for rethinking France's mission in Afghanistan.⁸⁰ Polls indicate that the French are increasingly opposed to the military mission in Afghanistan.⁸¹

Peace movements in Canada, the UK, Germany, France and other countries with NATO forces in Afghanistan are raising serious questions and pressuring their countries to withdraw military forces from Afghanistan.⁸² European peace groups are planning a Europe-wide demonstration in April 2009 that will include a call for NATO to get out of Afghanistan.⁸³

7 US Troop Casualties In Afghanistan Are On The Rise

Numbers of US and NATO Forces Killed in Afghanistan on Are Increasing

More US soldiers die in Afghanistan each year the occupation continues. The military reports that more than 600 US troops have been killed in Operation Enduring Freedom, and more than 1,200 have been seriously wounded, impacting communities throughout the US. The number of US casualties in Afghanistan nearly equaled those in Iraq since May 2008 and exceeded numbers in Iraq in September and October.⁸⁴ The number of US contractors killed in Afghanistan is unknown. Other NATO deaths are on the rise as well, making the total troop casualties over 1,000 since 2001.⁸⁵

The Military is Being Stretched Beyond its Means

Many servicemen and women are forced to serve multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan due to limited enlistment. The RAND Corporation released a study in April 2008 asserting that 20 percent of military service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression. They also discovered that 19 percent of returning service members had a possible traumatic brain injury while deployed. The study predicts that PTSD and depression alone will cost the US \$6.2 billion in direct medical care costs as well as lost productivity and suicide.⁸⁶

Even top officials admit that it is becoming

more difficult to expand troop presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates admitted to Congress that the Pentagon would not be able to provide 10,000 more troops in Afghanistan until

next spring at the earliest.⁸⁷ Despite Gates's assessment, US military commanders are asking for 20,000 more troops in Afghanistan in addition to the 4,000 scheduled to arrive in January.⁸⁸

8 Afghans Are Calling For A Negotiated End To The War

In recent months, several governments have begun coordinating talks with factions of the Taliban. Just before the US presidential election, Pakistani and Afghan leaders held a two-day jirga, or council of tribal leaders. At the end of the meeting, they issued a decision to hold talks with resistance groups, including the Taliban.⁸⁹ The Saudi government also hosted a meeting between Afghan government officials and the Taliban.⁹⁰

These kind of talks can be seen as encouraging developments, since negotiations are a necessary component to ending war. Many Afghan NGOs are calling for negotiations. "People are growing tired of the fighting," says Bakhtar Aminzai of the National Peace Jirga of Afghanistan, an association of students, professors, lawyers, clerics, and others. "We need to pressure the Afghan government and the international community to find a solution without using guns."⁹¹

The *Christian Science Monitor* reports that the majority of Afghans favor some sort of negotiated settlement, however, many peace activists are critical of the Saudi talks because they only included members of the Afghan government and former Taliban officials. "We want reconciliation with the Taliban through a loya jirga," or grand assembly of Afghans, says Fatana Gilani,

"We don't want interference from foreign countries or negotiations behind closed doors"

head of the prominent NGO Afghanistan Women's Council (AWC). "We don't want interference from foreign countries or negotiations behind closed doors." Gilani explains that Afghans are against Western policy. "They should bury their guns in a grave and focus on diplomacy and economic development."⁹²

Some Afghan women leaders, however, have cautioned about the danger of compromising with the Taliban on women's rights. According

to the BBC, the Afghan Minister for Women's Affairs, Hasan Bano Ghazanfar, said that women were against "any political compromises" that did not guarantee their constitutional and human rights.⁹³

9 Military Escalation Will Only Increase The Violence, And Potentially Lead To A Wider War Involving Nuclear-Armed Pakistan

As of November 2008, there were approximately 50,700 NATO troops in Afghanistan.⁹⁴ This includes 4,500 from Germany, 2,500 each from Canada, Italy and France, 1,700 from the

Netherlands, and 1,000 from both Australia and Poland.⁹⁵ The US has approximately 31,000 troops in the country, 20,000 under NATO control and some 11,000-12,000 troops operating outside NATO's command.⁹⁶

General David McKiernan, the top US commander in Afghanistan, has asked for 20,000 additional troops in 2009. The Bush administration is expected to endorse this request. The decision will ultimately rest with President-elect Obama, who has spoken publicly about the need to “heed the call” from McKiernan and has said he will send 7,000-12,000 more troops to Afghanistan when he takes office.⁹⁷

Journalists, Military and Government Officials Agree, An Increased Military Presence in Afghanistan Will Not Curb Violence

Each year since 2001, every year the US has put more troops into Afghanistan and each year, the violence has gotten worse, resulting in more troop and civilian casualties.⁹⁸

Journalist Nir Rosen spoke with a number of officials in Afghanistan who explain that an Iraq-style surge would continue the destruction of the country. “It is too late,” he says, for Bush’s surge or for Obama’s plan for more troops. “More soldiers on the ground will only lead to more contact with the enemy, and more air support for troops will only lead to more civilian casualties that will alienate even more Afghans.”⁹⁹

Some political leaders are going against the mainstream assumption that more troops are the answer. For example, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, foreign policy advisor under President Carter said that he doubts that the answer to what ails Afghanistan is more troops. Speaking to the Huffington Post in July, he said, “I think we’re literally running the risk of unintentionally doing what the Russians did. And that, if it happens, would be a tragedy.”¹⁰⁰

“My sense is that we’re not going to troop-surge our way out of Afghanistan,” said Stephen Biddle, a former Army War College professor and now a senior fellow on defense policy at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, D.C. “The problem is that the troop ratio needs are too much. Conventional wisdom says that there are not enough feasible reinforcements that can be sent to Afghanistan, even if you draw down fully from Iraq.”¹⁰¹

US military leaders also admit that the war has not been going well.¹⁰² Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, deviated from his prepared

statement when testifying before the House Armed Services Committee in September, saying “I am not convinced we are winning it in Afghanistan.”¹⁰³ General McKiernan has requested more troops in Afghanistan, and maintains that his forces were “not losing” against the insurgency, but admitted, “I will be the first to tell you that additional military forces themselves will not guarantee victory for the Afghan people.”¹⁰⁴

Abdullah Anas, who has been working with the Karzai government to attempt to draw the Taliban away from Al Qaeda and to bring peace to Afghanistan, told the *New York Times* that “the problem is not going to be solved by war.” Neither NATO nor the insurgents could win the war outright, he said, and he predicted that fighting could continue for 10 more years at the cost of some 100,000 casualties.¹⁰⁵

Expansion of Military Presence Could Lead to Conflict with Pakistan

After 9/11, Pakistan and the US entered an “uneasy alliance,” as described by the Associated Press.¹⁰⁶ Recently, however, the US has stepped up missile strikes in Pakistan, against Pakistani authority and in defiance of international law.¹⁰⁷ The escalation in attacks has heightened tension between the US and Pakistan. Just before the US election, Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani warned the incoming president to halt missile strikes in the country or risk further anti-American and anti-West sentiments.¹⁰⁸ While Vice President-elect Joe Biden is popular in Pakistan because he has advocated for \$15 million in non-military aid for the country, threats Obama made during his campaign to attack terrorist camps within Pakistan have created unease.¹⁰⁹ Since the election, Gilani has stated that Pakistan will not allow US ground or air strikes inside its territory and plans to discuss the issue with the new administration.¹¹⁰

In November, the *New York Times* reported that since 2004, the US military has been able to launch attacks against Al Qaeda under a secret order in more than a dozen countries outside the “conflict zones” of Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹¹

“We’re not going to troop-surge our way out of Afghanistan”

10

Military Occupation Of Afghanistan Does Not Curb Terrorism

Military Action is Not the Way to Counter Al Qaeda

The US response to 9/11 was to use the military to overthrow the Taliban government in Afghanistan as a means to defeat the Al Qaeda terrorist organization that operated from Afghanistan. This was the beginning of what was to be characterized as the “war on terror.” However, a recent study by the RAND Corporation points out that historically, military force rarely works to defeat terrorist organizations. The study asserts that in a number of situations dating back to 1968, military force has created civilian casualties that can turn the local population against the government. The study concludes that US strategy in Afghanistan has not been successful in undermining Al Qaeda’s capabilities, which have only grown stronger since 9/11.¹¹²

The authors of the study recommend ending the use of the phrase “war on terror” to frame the conflict, treating terrorists as criminals rather than warriors, and understanding that war is not a solution for terrorism:

Calling the efforts a war on terrorism raises public expectations – both in the United States and

elsewhere – that there is a battlefield solution. It also tends to legitimize the terrorists’ view that they are conducting a jihad (holy war) against the United States and elevates them to a status of holy warriors. Terrorists should be perceived as criminals, not holy warriors.¹¹³

Al Qaeda has Regained Power and Influence Around the World

In July 2007, it was reported that Al Qaeda had reorganized and had grown to its pre-9/11 size. This growth was credited to anti-American sentiment produced by the Iraq war, as well Pakistan’s failed attempts to control tribal areas on the Afghan border.¹¹⁴ Al Qaeda’s organizational influence has grown and spread; it was estimated that 22,000 people were killed by terrorists in 2007, an eight percent increase from 2006.¹¹⁵ The concept of jihad has allowed Al Qaeda to recruit from Turkey, Central Asia, Chechnya, the Middle East, and across the Muslim world.¹¹⁶

The fundamental failure of the military approach in Afghanistan should cause us to formulate new strategies to defeat terrorism that do not rely on ineffective military means.

Conclusions and Recommendations for a Changed US Policy in Afghanistan

The events of the past seven years show that the more US and NATO troops that deploy to Afghanistan, the greater the violence against Afghan civilians and troops, and the greater the recruitment levels for insurgent fighters. Why would adding more troops now change that dynamic? Why would we risk one more soldier’s life or conduct one more air strike with the potential to kill Afghan children in the pursuit of a policy that has failed? What we need is an honest assessment of how the international community, and the US in particular,

can play a positive role in assisting Afghans to counter violence and rebuild their country.

The US Government Should Assess How It Is Spending US Taxpayer Dollars and the Message It Sends with Its Choices

A portion of the \$100 million a day the US currently spends on military operations in Afghanistan could be better spent on addressing the pressing needs of the Afghan people. If delivered effectively, this

humanitarian aid could quiet the skeptics in Afghanistan, who have seen foreigners as trying to gain control of the country for their own ends for decades.

As suspended Afghan parliament member Malalai Joya pointed out, “No nation can donate liberation to another nation.”¹¹⁷ It is time the US stops playing the game of “liberator” and starts learning to cooperate respectfully with other nations and peoples of the world. Beginning this new strategy in Afghanistan is the best legacy the US can leave for the lives lost on

9/11 and the most effective way to become a friend to the people of Afghanistan.

The peace community in the US must stand in solidarity with the women of Afghanistan, and all citizens and organizations working for human rights in Afghanistan, the end of the occupation, and the rebuilding of their country. Below are issues for the US peace community to consider as recommendations we should be making to the new administration.

Recommendations for a Changed US Policy

1. Set a swift timetable for the withdrawal of US and NATO military forces, to be substituted by UN forces for short-term security.
2. Immediately cease air strikes on targets in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
3. Support negotiations between all parties involved in the conflict, including Afghan women leaders.
4. Reform humanitarian aid and reconstruction funding efforts to prioritize Afghan organizations over foreign contractors. Ensure that funded projects address the needs and requests of Afghans and are not simply pet projects of foreign donors.
5. Invest in long-term aid that increases self-reliance such as sustainable agriculture efforts.
6. Immediately discontinue the use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which are costly, inefficient, and have militarized the aid process.
7. Standardize, increase, and publicly document compensation to Afghan families and communities affected by US military actions.
8. Sign the treaty to ban cluster bombs, pay for cluster bomb and landmine clean up in Afghanistan, and pledge never to use these weapons again.

Afghanistan Resources

United for Peace and Justice, a national US coalition, has formed an Afghanistan working group and added an Afghanistan resource section to its website. Go to www.unitedforpeace.org for a continually updated resource list, or to get involved.

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- Afghanistan Justice Project, <http://www.afghanistanjusticeproject.org/>
- Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief, <http://www.acbar.org/>
- Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), <http://www.rawa.org/index.php>

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- Women for Afghan Women, <http://www.womenforafghanwomen.org/>
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