



Group of 78 Annual Policy Conference ***Armed Intervention: Lessons from Afghanistan***

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Brittany Salon, Cartier Place Suite Hotel, 180 Cooper St., Ottawa

Conference Conclusions and Recommendations

As Canada's military engagement in Afghanistan draws to a close, it is vitally important for both the Canadian government and the Canadian people to reflect on the lessons to be drawn from this costly and painful experience. And that was the context within which the G78's Annual Conference set out to simulate a discussion of those lessons based on substantive presentations by a range of eminent and experienced speakers. Based on those discussions, the G78 suggests that the following lessons, in the form of conclusions and recommendations, should be given serious consideration by our government and policy makers.

(1) Basis for and terms of Foreign Military Intervention

Under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, the use of force may be authorized to maintain or to restore international peace and security when all other measures, peaceful and coercive, have failed. It also recognizes the inherent right of self-defence of states under threat of imminent attack.

Peacekeeping, both unarmed and armed, was developed as a consensual form of military assistance, to help countries resolve conflicts between them and, increasingly, in the case of internal armed conflict.

Afghanistan represents a toxic and self-defeating blurring of robust, armed peacekeeping on the one hand and all-out combat and counterinsurgency operations on the other. The coercive use of force, in the absence of a credible political framework to build peace, is far more likely to fuel conflict and the extremism underpinning it, than to defeat it.

Accordingly, we recommend:

Despite the proliferation of ideological extremisms around the world, indeed precisely because of this, Canada's foreign policy must remain firmly grounded in our steadfast support of the UN Charter and of international law in general, of diplomatic

peacemaking and of negotiated compromises embedded within comprehensive, ethically defensible and sustainable peace settlements.

Canada's political and military decision makers must keep foremost in their minds the acute limitations of, and risks inherent in, foreign military intervention. Military intervention, outside a clearly defined peacekeeping context, must be invoked only as a last resort, when Canada's national security is directly threatened.

Canadian military participation in "robust" peacekeeping, variously called peace support and/or security assistance operations – that is, military operations of choice – must be guided by the following:

Canada should establish a clear policy guiding decisions on whether to participate with military forces in international security assistance operations (variously called peacekeeping, peace support, stabilization and security assistance operations). This policy should include:

1. an international legal framework for intervention based on a UN mandate;
2. a UN-led and broadly agreed political framework for the intervention, ideally in the form of a comprehensive peace agreement or, at a minimum, an agreed negotiating framework to this end;
3. clear Canadian objectives, benchmarks and timelines for Canadian participation; and
4. timely public and parliamentary debate and full transparency in regards to the policy and its application in a specific case, in all phases of the intervention – that is, before it is begun, during the engagement and after its termination.

Canadian participation must also be based to the maximum extent possible on a comprehensive understanding of the situation, including not only the geo-political and security dimensions, but also the socio-economic and cultural aspects and the root as well as proximate causes of the conflict. Deep respect for local culture, customs and codes of conduct must also guide Canadian participation, within the overarching framework of respect for international law.

(2) Comprehensive Peace Process

The international Community, including Canada, has struggled since 2002 to help build security, stability, good governance, economic and social development in Afghanistan. However, the failure to end the military conflict in that country has undermined – and continues to stymie – all of these efforts. As has been so often repeated, without security in Afghanistan, there can be no development and without development, there can be no lasting security. What has not been sufficiently articulated, however, is that

there can be neither security nor development without an end to the civil conflict, ongoing in Afghanistan in one form or another for the last 30 years.

Current ad hoc and incoherent efforts to achieve a negotiated peace settlement have failed to bear fruit and frequently have heightened division and suspicions on all sides. Expert, independent, third party UN-led facilitation is urgently needed to build trust among the parties in a comprehensive peace process that seeks to address all relevant actors, both internal and external including regional actors; as well as all relevant issues.

Recommendations

Accordingly, we call on the Canadian government to advocate at the UN, within NATO, in the capitals of non-NATO participants in ISAF and generally within the international community, to encourage the immediate establishment of a UN-facilitated comprehensive peace process.

Afghanistan Civil Society, including women's groups, has a vital consultative role to play in designing the negotiating framework and the range of issues it will address as well as building support for this process among Afghans in general. We call on the government of Canada to assist Afghan Civil Society in contributing to such a comprehensive peace process.

(3) Transparency and Accountability: A Public Enquiry on Canada's mission in Afghanistan

Canada has paid an enormous price in lives lost and war wounded; in public expenditures and in opportunity costs. Serious allegations linger regarding the transfer of Afghan detainees in contravention of international law. There are grave doubts about the operational security of soldiers participating in the ongoing training mission and very uncertain prospects for Afghanistan's future post 2014. It is imperative that Canada learn the lessons of its engagement in Afghanistan, to pursue any instances of misconduct or criminality that may be found and to restore confidence in Canada's ability to perform effectively and at the highest standard.

Recommendation

We call upon the Government of Canada to convene a public enquiry into all aspects – military, diplomatic and developmental – of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Such a review also provides an opportunity for non-governmental actors, such as the media and civil society organizations, to assess their roles as well.

(4) Humanitarian and Development Assistance

Humanitarian action to meet basic human needs should be guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.

Key operational principles for longer term development in post conflict situations include the paramount need to establish security so that development might proceed; local ownership of the reconstruction process, a commitment to local capacity building to ensure sustainability; and adequate and sustained funding for the long term effort that post conflict development/peacebuilding requires.

Contrary to these well-established principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance and for post-conflict peacebuilding, in Afghanistan military-led humanitarian and development activities have distorted aid priorities, sacrificed long term sustainability to ineffective short term “quick fixes”, and have often put both aid workers and ordinary Afghans at risk of becoming targets of opposition groups.

Recommendations

To address the problems of militarized aid and focus on solutions that work for Afghans, we recommend that international donors and NGOs work with the Government of Afghanistan to:

- ensure that aid is equitably delivered throughout the country based on development and humanitarian needs and in line with national development plans; this in turn means separating these programs from any military funding or direct military participation;
 - work to improve the capacity, responsiveness and transparency of the Afghan government, particularly at the local level;
 - ensure that “quick impact projects” proceed on the basis of sound development principles so that they support, rather than undermine, capacity building and longer term development;
 - use conflict sensitive methodologies for project development and implementation;
- and
- take all possible steps to avoid a local “brain drain” that pulls talented, committed people and experienced local staff out of the national or local government into international donor or non-governmental organizations.