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SUBMISSION FROM THE **GROUP OF 78** TO THE INDEPENDENT  
PANEL ON CANADA'S FUTURE ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN  
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**Summary of Position & Recommendations**

None of the four options posed by the Government for the Panel to consider speaks to a lasting solution for Afghanistan; they all are short-term tactical choices for the Canadian military. The Panel is empowered, however, to examine "Canada's future role in Afghanistan", which gives it the opportunity to recommend a much wider, comprehensive approach within which Canada's military role can be situated.

Canada's current role in Afghanistan is a departure from its historic strength of pressing for political and diplomatic solutions to conflict, supported by peacekeeping operations, under a United Nations umbrella. This approach should replace the present one to change a failing mission into one that can achieve peace, democracy and development in Afghanistan and produce a lasting accomplishment for Canada and its partners.

The Group of 78 strongly recommends the following broad course of action:

1. Place a peace process - diplomacy, political initiatives, dialogue and negotiation – at the forefront of Canada's role in Afghanistan.
2. Work toward a comprehensive, multidimensional peace agreement among virtually all stakeholders, both internal and external, and advocate this approach vigorously in NATO and UN councils.
3. Advocate a lead role for the United Nations in this effort, with a view to the eventual conversion of ISAF into a robust peace support mission, as was its original intent.
4. Lead the conversion of the current ISAF combat role into a more defensive posture in anticipation of a more clear peace support role for the force.
5. Strengthen community-level peacebuilding and conflict resolution capacities.
6. Ensure that reconstruction and development actions are supportive of peace initiatives.

## AFGHANISTAN: IN SEARCH OF PEACE

It is time to step back from debate over the use of force in Afghanistan and to draw on the wealth of experience that has been accumulated in the area of peace keeping, peace support and crisis stabilization since the end of the Cold War. There have been 63 UN-led peacekeeping operations and a handful of UN-authorized, but not UN-led missions from which we may gather lessons to guide our discourse and, more significantly, the actions Canada must take to help bring Afghanistan forward into a lasting peace.

### **Peacekeeping, Traditional or Comprehensive**

Peacekeeping was never meant to supplant the peaceful resolution of disputes. It was never meant to replace the central tool of conflict resolution and negotiated settlements. The “traditional” understanding of peacekeeping, that which is considered to be the Canadian invention of Lester Pearson, was based on a negotiated ceasefire agreement and a separation of military forces, monitored by UN peacekeepers. This ceasefire was meant to provide a window of opportunity for the negotiation of an overall comprehensive peace settlement. Cyprus is the quintessential example of this approach and was often cited as a military peacekeeping success, whereby the opposing Greek and Turkish Cypriot military forces have, generally, kept on their respective sides of the famous “green line” of separation for over 40 years, even though the political issues were not resolved.

Post Cold War “comprehensive” peacekeeping has broadened the scope of what had been largely military “peace” operations. It has come to encompass a wide variety of civilian actors and elements, all necessary to help parties implement a comprehensive peace settlement.

From what has been learned, it is clear that the starting point in any successful peacekeeping operation is a comprehensive peace agreement that addresses all relevant issues underlying the conflict. Ideally the agreement will seek to lay the political, security and socio-economic foundations for a sustainable peace. They include:

- disarmament, demobilization and reintegration into civil society of former combatants
- the rule of law (police, judges, courts, penal system)
- democratic development, including free and fair elections within inclusive political structures
- improved respect for human rights
- reform of the military
- rehabilitated economic infrastructure and
- the promotion of sustainable development when the situation is sufficiently stabilized.

A particularly important aspect of this negotiation process will be the identification of mechanisms and procedures, down to the grass roots level, to allow the post-conflict society to find the right balance between justice and reconciliation processes.

Each of the above elements contains many issues to be resolved (type of political structures, constitution, legal framework and so on). For these reasons, and many more, external facilitation will be critical to help the parties negotiate this type of agreement. Here the UN has considerable expertise and should be an integral part of this process. We must strive for the most comprehensive peace agreement possible, one that addresses all relevant issues. In turn, we must understand the importance of impartial third party facilitation and expertise in this area.

A comprehensive peace agreement presupposes not only that the full range of issues will be on the table but as well that all necessary parties to the conflict will be involved in the negotiation. This must include all the various factions engaged in the conflict (government and rebels, all sides of the conflict). There may be some “irreconcilables” but they must be kept to a minimum if there is to be any chance of success. Ultimately the more factions that remain outside the negotiation process, the less chance there is of a lasting peace.

It will not be sufficient for the negotiations to involve only political and military leaders. The negotiations must be informed by an inclusive consultative process down to the grass roots level if it is to replace elitist, exclusionary forms of governance with pluralistic, inclusive institutions and mechanisms. We must envision a peace process that, itself, is emblematic of the goals being sought.

Beyond the internal factions of a civil war there are external parties that must be part of the overall negotiating framework. Typically there will be a number of such parties actively aiding one side or the other. Here we may look to the example of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where at one point armies from eight different neighbours were directly engaged in the conflict, either in support of a faction or in pursuit of natural resources. At a minimum, external entities must agree to withdraw their forces and cease other forms of assistance to internal factions of the given conflict. In all likelihood, there will be a host of related issues to resolve, ranging from border and resource disputes and the treatment of ethnic minorities to issues of political influence and trade relations. Ultimately the external actors are involved in the conflict for a variety of reasons relating to their own perceived interests and it is unlikely these intertwined issues can be resolved without a negotiating framework expressly designed to do so.

If the peace agreement is to receive the blessing of the UN Security Council, then the veto-wielding “Permanent 5” (China, France, Russia, UK and USA) must see it in their interest, or at least not against their interest, to support the agreement. This in turn means that, where one or more of the “Permanent 5” have specific interests, they must be satisfactorily addressed. It is precisely in these cases that it will be critically important for the negotiation to be facilitated by an impartial, competent third party. At the same time,

the more important the vested interest, the more difficult it will be for those powerful actors to step back and allow disinterested mediation.

Here we may look to the example of the power held by the USA in the negotiation of the Dayton Accords, in relation to the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. There is much evidence that this control led to an agreement that proved very difficult to implement. The quartet mechanism in the Middle East peace process is allegedly a mechanism to bring into play both the UN secretary-General and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the EU, as honest brokers, counter-balancing USA and Russian special interests but the evidence to date suggests that its main effect has been to dilute the voices of moderation and balance. In short, the most vexing negotiation challenge is how satisfactorily to address concerns of powerful external actors without creating an imbalance that fails to reflect the needs of the main parties in the conflict. The case of Darfur, where the reluctance of China to bring necessary pressure to bear on Khartoum to secure its agreement to a robust implementation force because of its dependence on Sudanese oil, is a significant example of powerful third party interests impeding a robust implementation capacity.

Once a comprehensive peace agreement has been achieved it must be implemented. This is where the modern, multidisciplinary peace operation comes into play: a UN mission under the overall political and diplomatic direction of the Special Representative of the Secretary General and typically comprised of

- military,
- police,
- judiciary,
- corrections and rule of law components,
- a humanitarian coordinator,
- human rights and development components,
- an electoral assistance unit,
- a civil affairs unit,
- child protection experts and
- a gender advisor.

The type and scope of third party implementation must also be negotiated, ideally as part of the overall peace negotiation.

In addition to all of the elements within the UN peacekeeping operation, there will be a diverse array of more or less independent actors operating outside the mission, focusing on humanitarian relief or other aspects of the post-conflict peace building process. These independent entities come from the family of UN funds, programs and agencies, such as UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and UNDP, from the international financial institutions (notably the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction (CPR) Unit of the World Bank), from the donor community (CIDA, DFID, USAID, etc), the international non-governmental community (CARE, World Vision, Oxfam, etc) and from the utterly unique and utterly independent International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). All will be interacting with a multitude of local, national, governmental and non-state actors from the post-conflict country itself, from the neighbouring countries, from sub-regional groupings and, increasingly, from regional entities such as the African Union, NATO or the EU.

Indeed, regional groupings may be mandated formally by the Security Council to assist in the peace implementation process.

Slowly, with much effort, this extraordinarily diverse array of international ‘interveners’ is coming to understand that, for such a complex effort at reconstruction and nation building to succeed, an agreed multilateral framework is required. Ideally this framework will reflect a comprehensive approach, will be freely negotiated and agreed upon by parties and will address all aspects of the governance failure that led to the original conflict. Simply put, the mandate for a peacekeeping mission must be based on a comprehensive peace agreement.

The UN may or may not be the lead entity in the peace negotiation process. UN-led “blue helmets” may or may not be the military force that provides security assistance during the peace implementation phase. At the same time, however, only the UN Security Council can mandate a multidimensional peace operation under UN civilian leadership to oversee and facilitate implementation by the parties of the peace agreement. Only the UN can mandate a comprehensive multilateral peace implementation framework legitimizing international action, and within which governments need to identify and agree on their areas of action and on specific programs and projects within those areas of action. This includes the identification of how specific projects and plans can support the overall strategy. Equally important, only the UN can even notionally lead the overall peace implementation process, if only for the reason that no other single entity is acceptable to the international community. Ultimately there are three components in play here:

- the consent of the parties,
- the comprehensive framework and
- the coherence of the international assistance effort.

### **A Comprehensive Approach for Afghanistan**

Consider now the case of Afghanistan and the indescribably sad, frustrating and inexcusable fact that none of these essential factors for success have been put in place. There has been no peace negotiation whatsoever, let alone a comprehensive one. Key parties to the conflict, notably the Southern Pashtuns, the largest single tribal group in Afghanistan, were conflated with the Taliban, who were in turn lumped in with al-Qaida; all were left out of the Agreement. The Bonn Agreement, which created the country’s elected bodies, was almost entirely developed by external parties and was never the subject of negotiation by Afghans. The framework developed at the London Conference at the end of January 2006 (the Afghanistan Compact) was developed by an even narrower group of foreigners and then ‘presented’ at the Conference. The lower house of the National Assembly, which has the power under the new Constitution to ratify treaties and international agreements, was given no role in developing or approving the Compact.

Afghanistan has long standing conflicts with Pakistan over relations with India, the border, ethnic issues and the transit trade. Iran is a vital economic partner for landlocked Afghanistan. The issue of Taliban insurgents receiving safe haven in the tribal

areas of Pakistan is inextricably intertwined with fundamental issues of governance in those areas. These fundamentally political issues cannot be resolved by pushing the Government of Pakistan into sending yet more troops into Baluchistan or North Waziristan, yet no serious attempt has been made to bring these parties to the negotiating table.

No provision was made in the Bonn Agreement for an overarching, coherent framework for peace implementation. In the immediate post 9/11 period, United States' unilateralism confined the UN to a narrow humanitarian coordination role, while key peace building tasks were parceled out to a series of lead nations, utterly unequipped to handle them (UK – drug eradication, Germany – police training, Italy – the judiciary, Japan - DD&R, USA – the new Afghan military). Later, when election planning ran into serious problems, the UN role was expanded to take on this task. The new Afghan government-led coordination mechanism established under the London Compact (JCMB) is too unwieldy to be effective and key activities, such as the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (each unique to the international military force that created it), take place completely outside its orbit.

Just as the international political leadership in Afghanistan is fragmented, so is the military effort. From the beginning there have been two distinct and fundamentally incompatible military efforts: the US-led Coalition, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The Coalition, whose primary mission is defined as counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, and which enjoys freedom of action under the United States' right of self defense, came to Afghanistan to assure, first, the security of Americans from al-Qaeda and, secondly, that of the Afghan government from the insurgency. ISAF's mission is to help the Afghan authorities provide security according to the Bonn Agreement, relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and a bilateral agreement with the Afghan government.

ISAF, a UN-authorized but NATO-led post-conflict stabilization force, was meant to be a robust peace operation, loosely modeled on those deployed in the former Yugoslavia to help implement the Dayton Accords and in Kosovo. It was to have been in place while a comprehensive political settlement was worked out. Unfortunately, during the critical immediate post-conflict phase, when the Taliban government had been routed, ISAF was only mandated to operate in and around Kabul. The US-led Coalition effectively was given freedom of action in the rest of the country to track down Al Qaeda and Taliban insurgents, operate on the basis of overwhelming force, make deals with local warlords when it was expedient, and, in the process, to put the security needs of ordinary Afghans constantly at risk.

In the end, what occurred was the worst of all possible developments: the expansion in late July 2006 of ISAF into the South when the insurgency there had not been quelled but had steadily grown in strength. This occurred under relentless pressure from the USA as it sought to free up American troops for Iraq. The result was that ISAF too was sucked into the counterinsurgency quagmire.

The aim of a peace operation, however robust, is not to go to war with the parties but to help them build the democratic institution and processes that will enable them to manage societal conflicts in a non-violent way. A robust force can deter violations, effectively address them when they occur and thus build confidence in the peace process. However, this presupposes that all or most of the key players want peace more than war, so individual spoilers can be effectively isolated and dealt with. Without a credible peace process, the international military force, as it seeks to take action to address violations, risks becoming just another party to the conflict, as it has done in Afghanistan.

On June 12, 2007 the ICRC, which has had an uninterrupted presence in Afghanistan since 1987, gave a press briefing entitled "*Afghanistan: three decades of war and no end in sight*". Their statement emphasized that the conflict between Afghan and international forces on the one hand and armed opposition groups on the other had "significantly intensified" and had spread, during the previous 12 months, beyond the south, to parts of the east, west and north. The September 21, 2007 Report of the UN Secretary General to the Security Council states that 2007 is turning out to be the worst year, in terms of security, for Afghanistan since 2001, with an average of 548 insurgent and terrorist related incidents per month. This represents a 20 per cent increase in violence since 2006. The ICRC and UN reports are the latest in a long, grim list dating back to late 2004 with each one documenting a further deterioration in the security situation in Afghanistan.

NATO military commanders themselves know that there is no military solution to Afghanistan's myriad problems. According to respected analyst, Paul Rogers of Bradford University, "There is a widespread and bleak consensus among NATO commanders: unless there is a significant change in policy, foreign forces will remain in the country for decades, tied down in bitter counter-guerilla operations".

Fighting the Taliban, al-Qaida, and other disaffected groups loosely aligned with them, involves tactics that rely heavily on air power and aggressive search and destroy missions. These tactics have led to at least as many civilian casualties by international and allied Afghan forces as by opposition groups. This breeds hatred against foreign forces and, in the south, builds support for the insurgents. Equally problematic, the use by the military of humanitarian aid as a tool in the information campaign against the Taliban carries the grave risk of making humanitarian workers themselves a target, as well as the civilians they seek to assist.

Fighting the Taliban et al also means that military forces cannot focus on helping build and support the institutions that the Afghan people desperately need for long term security, particularly a professional, accountable police service and national army. Similarly neglected are the disbanding of armed groups, the countering of government corruption and the ending of impunity for abuses. The Canadian military and other NATO forces in the South are in an impossible situation. They cannot help build a secure environment without ending the war and they cannot end the war by military means. How

then can the war be ended? Without a decisive victory, history tells us that the only way to end such internal conflict is through negotiated settlement.

The optimum time to negotiate with the Taliban was when they were defeated and routed by the USA military in late 2001, a strategy that would have had the added benefit of separating them from al-Qaida, rather than pushing them ever closer. Now they are infinitely stronger despite the short-term tactical gains that have been made by ISAF and the OEF on the battlefield at significant human cost.

President Karzai, an array of Afghan Parliamentarians and even former high profile members of the Taliban have realized there is no other way forward but, incredibly, negotiations are being opposed by Canada. This is surely the most powerful evidence that Canada has become part of the problem, not the solution.

What is not needed in Afghanistan is another backroom deal forged by elites to save their political hides. Yet this is what will happen and, to a certain extent, what is already underway, if a new direction is not taken by the international community. What is urgently needed is a UN-led broadly-based political dialogue in Afghanistan engaging all sectors of society and communities of interest. Canada has a key role to play, one we have bought with the blood of young Canadians, in securing support within NATO for a comprehensive peace process to build the political consensus that is now absent.

To be an effective peacemaker, Canada must devote its efforts at resolving conflict and helping build a sustainable peace within a whole of government peace building policy that is itself embedded in a UN-led, international strategic framework. This is where Canada should focus. This means, in turn, giving priority in our foreign policy, together with the eradication of poverty and the promotion of fair trade, to the peaceful resolution of disputes and the prevention of conflict through “deep prevention” efforts focused on systematic change, the promotion of human security and a sustained commitment to post-conflict peace building. Embedding Canadian peace building activity in a UN-led international strategic framework also means a rededication by Canada to the principles of the UN Charter; to one set of rules for all, fairly applied to all; and to the principle that security of each state is equally important and can be truly safeguarded and enhanced only by means of the twin objectives of human and common security. This ultimately lends itself to the paramount need for Canada to work actively to support and strengthen UN institutions and capacities for peace building.

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