

# **“Afghanistan After Elections and Implications for Canada: What Will It Take to Finish the Job?”**

**Remarks by Former Canadian Ambassador and Former Deputy Special  
Representative of the Secretary General Chris Alexander to the  
Empire Club of Canada**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank Alf Apps for his warm introduction and the Empire Club for its kind invitation. It is inspiring to be back in Toronto ó a city still prominent among the political shareholders in the international project that Afghanistan has become. Alf and I share a family association dating back nearly a century, when his uncle Syl Apps was emerging from Paris, Ontario to become one of the true greats of the Toronto Maple Leafs ó and my great grandfather was the town's Baptist Minister. I am afraid the Leafs are unlikely to be rescued today by renewed piety. To be frank, their misfortunes now predate even Afghanistan's! But the ties of family and shared commitment that bind us in Canada to the destiny of that faraway nation are now undeniable.

It is comforting and a bit daunting to be among so many friends. Craig Hilton, now heading the Canadian Defence College here in Toronto, was one of the most capable commanders of Canada's Task Force Kabul in my time as Ambassador. Albert Wong was an outstanding member of the first Strategic Advisory Team. Matthew Fisher and Christie Blatchford were second to none among journalists covering the Afghan saga. We are also privileged to have with us both Afghanistan's Consul General Habibullah Qaderi and Mr Naeem Hassan, a former Ambassador of Pakistan and Secretary General of SAARC, now an advisor to the Canada-Pakistan Business Council.

This presentation will seek to answer four relatively simple questions, ending with the all-important issue of what it might take to bring stability to that troubled nation. The news this summer has been worse than ever. The frequency and intensity of attacks ó both direct and through IEDs ó has grown. Afghan and international casualties are running at unprecedented levels. The unresolved outcome of the August 20 election continues to hang in the balance, adding a new dimension of political uncertainty. Economic growth in Afghanistan has paused, even dropped ó not because of the global recession but because of fear for the future. A rising tide of insurgency has imperiled the institution-building process itself, calling into question the durability of the achievements of the past eight years. How did we get to this point?

## Why are we in Afghanistan?

This audience needs no reminding of the trauma of 9/11 ó a day that still haunts us. It was an attack on this continent ó one of the last since 1812, when the White House in Washington was burned by British and colonial forces ó in part to avenge the burning of the fort and town of York right here on Toronto Harbour.

9/11 was a terrible, unexpected act of destruction ó a massacre of innocents, perhaps the most brutal single terrorist attack ever mounted in modern times. It was followed in subsequent years by major attacks in Bali, Madrid, London, Istanbul, Mumbai, Rawalpindi and many other cities. As many serious attacks have been thwarted thanks to the efforts of security services and law enforcement agencies ó at Heathrow, in Germany, in Canada and in the United States themselves.

The 9/11 attacks were planned from within Afghanistan. Some of those responsible were killed or captured in the military campaign that began in October 2001. Many more, including the leadership of Al Qaida and its principal Taliban associates, withdrew into Pakistan where they have remained ever since. It is effectively this force that has prevented Afghanistan from achieving stability in the years since 9/11. After a brief period of flight and concealment ó the so-called "fighting retreat" of 2001-03 ó Al Qaida and the Taliban leadership of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan renewed their military campaign in three stages: (i) reconstitution in 2003-04; (ii) re-launch of Afghan operations in 2005-06; and (iii) declaration of jihad against Pakistan in 2007-08.

There is obviously much more to this conflict than simply the legacy of Al Qaida and the Taliban. The latter came to govern Afghanistan briefly ó for barely more than half the time President Hamid Karzai has been in power ó only because of successive waves of conflict, culminating in a period of civil war lasting from 1992 to 1996. It is this period Afghans remember as the most cruel chapter in the thirty year chronicle of their country's conflict since 1979. It was during this time that donor nations, so keen in the 1980s to see the *mujahidin* succeed against Soviet forces and the Afghan armies of Karmal and Najibullah, turned their back on Afghanistan ó which became a "settled account" after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Afghanistan entered a period of neglect, as the international community grappled with the complexities of the reintegration of Europe, new conflicts in the Caucasus, Balkans and Africa, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Today Afghanistan has regained international attention ó to put it mildly. Over sixty nations have become donors. Over forty have troops on the ground ó none has yet withdrawn. Over the activities of UNAMA and ISAF spreads the sheltering mandate of the United Nations Security Council, unanimous in renewing these missions for eight years running. We are in Afghanistan to prevent another 9/11; to make up for the neglect of the 1990s; and to achieve objectives set by the United Nations.

We are also there because NATO is an alliance originally conceived for European purposes and invoked Article 5, the provision deeming an attack against any one to be an attack against all, for the first time in its history in 2001. NATO assumed command responsibility for ISAF in the summer of 2003. To date all NATO members have fielded forces together with fifteen further states from Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world and with development indicators in 2001 below those of any other population outside Africa. Our commitment to eradicate poverty, and to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), requires us not to abandon this cause. We are also in Afghanistan to protect the human rights of Afghans and systematically abused over decades of shattering war, now further imperiled by civilian casualties, mostly caused by the Taliban itself. We are there to meet humanitarian needs, because of the Responsibility to Protect, and to implement the human security agenda articulated in multilateral fora throughout the 1990s.

But deeper issues have prolonged our stay. Jihad in the 1980s had roots in the Frontier Policy of the British Raj. It became an article of faith for officials in pre-Partition Governments of India, Punjab and the Northwest Frontier Province that Afghanistan must be managed as a buffer state and with power in Kabul never permitted to fall into the hands of an enemy of British India. This policy precipitated three wars, bringing Afghan foreign policy under effective British control from 1880 until 1919.

This policy thrust had major implications for Canada. It was in part to meet the demands of consolidating control in the Indus Valley that Upper and Lower Canada were united in 1848 and Confederation agreed in 1867: cost-cutting measures in North America would help meet the pressures of expansion in South Asia. The 1857 Mutiny galvanized the Frontier Policy even further. The British North America Act is itself explicit on this point: our federation was intended to meet the needs of the Canadian colonies themselves and the British Empire and then less than one decade old.

The Frontier Policy was cemented by the Treaty of Gandamak in 1879; by Emir Abdurrahman Khan's installation in 1880; and by the Durand Line Treaty of 1893. It was further entrenched by Curzon's creation of the Northwest Frontier Province in 1902. It survived partition to become a core feature of Pakistan's foreign policy, used to counter Afghanistan's Pashtunistan policy in the 1950s. In 1971, Pakistan's Afghanistan policy gained strategic importance after the loss of Bangladesh.

What doctrine lies at the core of the Frontier Policy? In the time of the Raj, it was a policy of consistent involvement in Afghan affairs to protect the interests of Calcutta and Delhi, and keep potential enemies at bay. In the post-1947 world, Karachi and later Islamabad have continued it and largely to undo the influence of Afghanistan, Iran, the Soviet Union and India when seen as harmful to Pakistan's national interest.

It is the interference of the Pakistan-based Taliban in Afghanistan that is the principal cause of the continuing conflict today. This Taliban wishes to re-establish Afghanistan as an Islamic Emirate, having already declared one in North and South Waziristan, as well as other parts of FATA, NWFP and Baluchistan. Their supporters inside Pakistan argue assistance to the Taliban is justified in light of Indian influence in Afghanistan. As a result, the Frontier Policy is a new flashpoint for competition; until this pattern of interference ends, there is little prospect for peace in Afghanistan.

In summary, we are in Afghanistan for five principal purposes: (i) to prevent further terrorist attacks along the lines of 9/11; (ii) to boost development and institutions devastated by thirty years of war, including the neglect of the 1990s; (iii) to achieve peace and security under a United Nations mandate; (iv) to protect civilians, meet urgent humanitarian needs and strengthen human rights; and (v) to uphold the Westphalian principle of non-interference. It is the last that has so far been hardest to achieve. Failure on this front will continue to make the entire project vulnerable, imperiling the credibility of the UN and NATO over the longer term.

### **What has been achieved?**

If there is to be any hope of mobilizing the political will necessary to tackle these issues, it is vital that the achievements of the past eight years be properly assessed. The Taliban regime that ruled from Kabul and Kandahar is no more. Its place has been taken by a strengthening set of state institutions now delivering education, clinics, road-building, rural development, support for agriculture, public expenditure management and regulation in fields such as monetary policy, construction and telecommunications that are unprecedented in Afghan history.

While the conflict continues unabated, with even some further intensification this year, the Afghan National Army (ANA) has reached a strength of 100,000, with brigades now deployed to all parts of the country. Its commando units, air corps and logistics units are now capable of supporting operations nationwide. The National Directorate of Security (NDS) delivers invaluable direction to what is at bottom an intelligence-driven counter-insurgency campaign. For the first time this year, the National Police under the leadership of Interior Minister Atmar are achieving the scale of training effort required to give gendarmerie, criminal and civil police national coverage ó and to raise competent guard forces for each community.

Afghanistan has become a new lynchpin for a burgeoning regional economy ó anchored in ECO, SAARC and SCO integration. Both the ECO and SAARC have set the goal of achieving free trade among their members. Civil aviation has improved. A major mining investment is underway in Logar south of Kabul in one of the largest copper deposits in

the world. Afghanistan's craft and carpet industries are recovering. The country has implemented the largest demilitarization programme in the world – including DDR, ammunition destruction, mine action and disbandment of illegal armed groups (DIAG).

There is a blueprint for the country's future – the five-year Afghanistan National Development Strategy. Approved in 2008, it covers seventeen sectors and five cross-cutting themes. It is complemented by a National Drug Control Strategy, as well as a counter-insurgency strategy, now properly resourced thanks to President Obama.

What does this mean? The state is getting stronger. The Afghan economy is growing – by 7% again this year. Drug production has been rolled back into the southwest – where the insurgency is stiffest. Most importantly, Afghans are in control of their own destiny – with more talented ministers than ever able to set priorities and pursue results within a unified budgetary process and cabinet system facing ever more demands.

Obviously this is not enough for Afghans – by and large still mired in poverty, with staggering levels of unemployment. As investment flows have increased, so have the perception and reality of corruption – inside government and out. Implementation is slow in virtually all areas, as the capacity simply does not exist to manage projects and deliver results, particularly at local level. Local governance has remained an area of constant frustration and friction both for Afghans and internationals, as weak human capital – smart men and women who simply lack the skills to do the jobs that need to be done – slows the pace at which urgent human and community needs can be met.

The new government has tackled some bottlenecks this year – particularly by strengthening interior and agriculture ministries, and energizing reform programmes for both sectors. But the insurgency has hit hard, rolling back progress in many areas, preventing the rollout of new programmes in others. Now the controversy over the August 20 elections threatens to overwhelm all of these achievements by calling into doubt the legitimacy of the Afghan government itself. All eyes will remain fixed on the Election Complaints Commission – itself headed by a very capable Canadian, Grant Kippen – as it struggles to separate fact from fiction, to sift and weigh allegations of fraud, and to determine whether a second round of voting will be required.

### **Why is the insurgency stronger?**

The conventional wisdom has it that two factors drive Afghanistan's Taliban-led insurgency – one set is internal; the other external. There is no doubting the importance of the former. Weak governance, predatory police, civilian casualties and treatment of detainees – all have played a role in inflaming this conflict, as have tribal grievances aggravated by the rough-and-ready transition of political power in 2001.

But after six years in Afghanistan, I must confess that the external reasons have primacy. Without the sanctuary of North Waziristan ó now perhaps the greatest playground for international terrorists on earth today ó there would be no complex suicide attacks in Kabul and elsewhere. Without the Taliban leadership based around Quetta, with recruitment, training and command support throughout Baluchistan, the insurgency in Kandahar and Helmand would be an order of magnitude weaker.

In the face of the whole world, it is the stated purpose of the Taliban leadership to re-establish an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. They make these pronouncements from Pakistan. Their leaders reside in Pakistan. Taliban elements have attacked Pakistan in growing waves since 2007. In this regard, the failure of the Pakistan army and other security forces to move against these groups is as inexplicable as it is scandalous.

All the same, there are reasons for this inaction. President Musharraf is characterized by some as having been nonplussed by the Taliban's loss of power in Afghanistan, and determined to keep them in reserve against the day when a comeback would be possible. Civilian government in Pakistan since 2001, and even since the success of the PPP at the polls last year, has been unable to challenge this military consensus rooted in both the army command and the ISI. The religious parties and other Taliban allies take genuine offence at the presence in Afghanistan of so many non-Muslims ó as they did during the decade of Soviet occupation. Finally, the strategic thinkers both inside and outside the army and ISI remain determined to pursue õstrategic depthö ó Pakistani influence through Afghanistan into Central Asia ó at all costs: with the Kashmiri front inactive for now, they see this as their principal arena of rivalry with India.

### **What will it take to finish the job?**

The first investment we need to make to have any prospect of seeing peace and stability come to Afghanistan is one that has been scarce of late. Its absence from the scene is itself a paradox, as it is the one crucial ingredient for success that is absolutely free. Here of course I am speaking of the will and determination to tackle the fundamental issues still driving the conflict.

It has been fashionable in some quarters to believe or argue that õnothing good will ever come of Afghanistanö ó a view bred into the bone of British subjects after their experience of three imperial wars there, ending in 1919. It is also common now to mythologize the Taliban as õsons of the soilö fighting a just cause against õoccupying forcesö. These opinions are not only difficult to square with the fact that over forty nations, including several with muslim majority populations, have sent forces under UN mandate into combat against the Taliban. They are self-denying fallacies: if we cannot overcome them, we should not be in Afghanistan at all.

This is not a "forever war". It has been a neglected war. It has been an under-resourced effort. It has been a campaign in which political leadership has been weak, or failed altogether. But there is no reason why it should continue without end.

The nettle of sanctuaries in Waziristan and Baluchistan must be grasped before further harm is done to Pakistan, Afghanistan and other parts of the world. The regional dimension must be understood for what it is, and any imbalance redressed.

As President Karzai has repeated during the recent campaign, there must ultimately be a political settlement with the Taliban leadership on acceptable conditions, with accountability, and within existing constitutional frameworks.

Above all, we must continue to support on a growing scale the Afghan institutions for which there is no substitute. Without them, we ensure ourselves a long stay. With them, as the army has shown, as other sectors are poised to show, Afghans will have the tools and the partners to finish the job of rebuilding their country.

This has been the first year in which the political attention and resources required to bring stability have been available. We must not expect results overnight. But nor should we abandon hope just as we begin to give this project our best effort. This is an historic opportunity to stabilize Afghanistan one which our generation must not miss.

President Obama is renewing the unity of the international community. Despite the controversy over elections, there is still a remarkable correspondence of view among the nations of Europe, North America and Asia including all neighbours on over the need to continue and even deepen support to Afghanistan.

Our efforts must continue to focus on three areas: peace process, massive institution-building and effective counter-insurgency, with protection of civilians at the centre of the equation, and all necessary steps taken to end the impunity and scatter the leadership residing in cross-border sanctuaries. This dagger must be definitively sheathed.

My call is for tenacity and perseverance. Afghanistan has shown it can achieve results when the right support is given. Take the safeguards now working to protect a legitimate result from these elections under the leadership of Canadian Grant Kippen. Take the example the Pakistan army has set in Swat and South Waziristan. Take the renewed Afghan cabinet capable of shouldering ever more of the development and stabilization burden. Take the example of humanitarian action. Look at Peace Day on September 21, when again the guns across Afghanistan once again fell silent.

Ladies and gentlemen, Afghanistan remains a pivotal arena in which prospects for international peace and security for this century will be decided. I invite you to join me in showing the determination to finish the job one in which Canada has figured so prominently from the beginning, together with our partners from around the world.