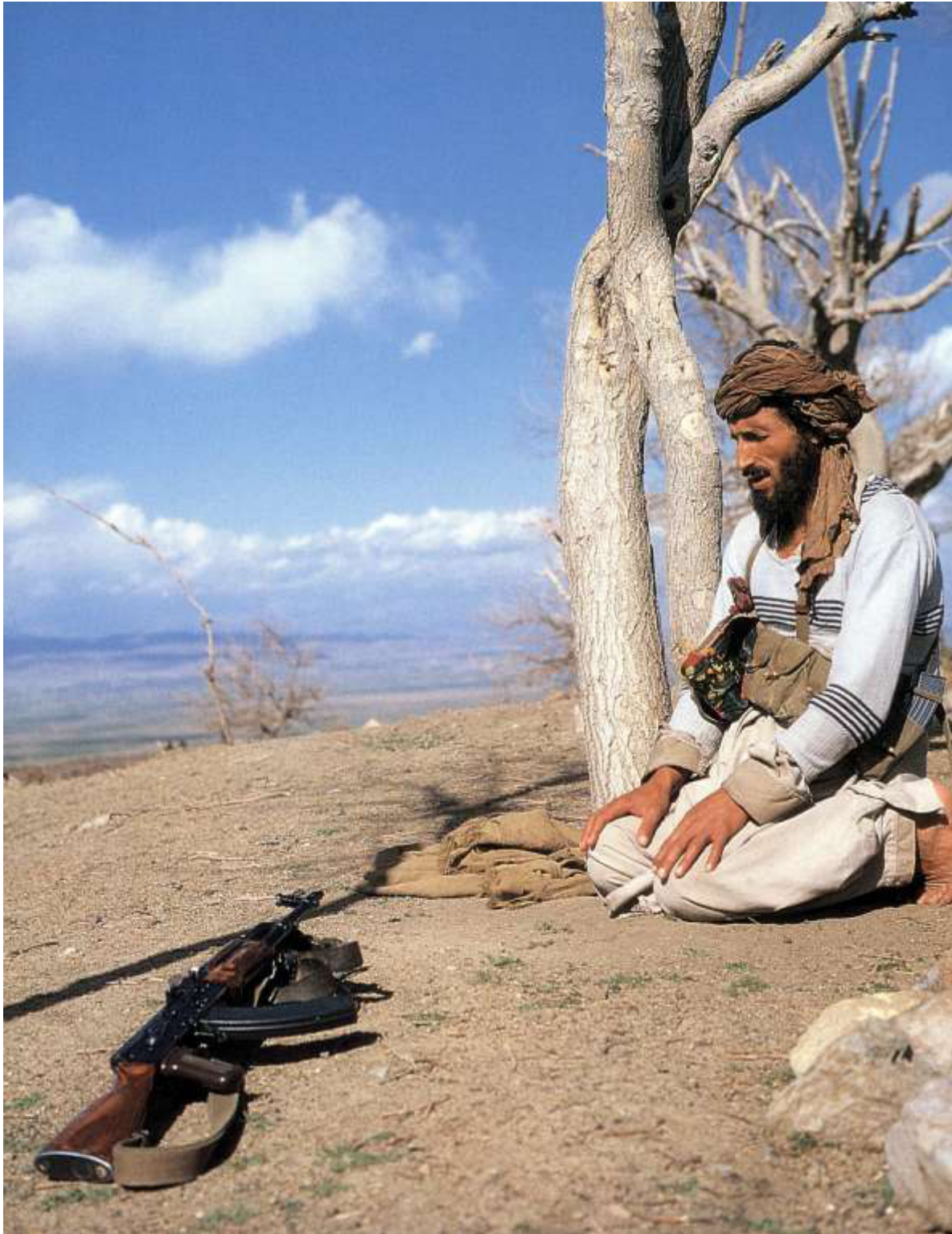


# **A BETTER PATH TO PEACE**

**A more optimistic solution for Afghanistan**



**Compiled and written by Ken Guest, 'RAM' Seeger and Lucy Morgan Edwards**

**17 November 2012**

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Ken Guest** is a former Royal Marine and photo-journalist. He has recently been working in Kabul and has now been closely involved with Afghanistan for 32 years. During its struggle against the Soviets he probably spent more time inside Afghanistan, living and working with the Mujahedin, than any other Western witness to that conflict. As a result of that past, he has a first hand knowledge of not just how the ordinary Afghan thinks, but how the Taliban and Al Qaeda think and act. Ken has written, contributed to and illustrated several books and feature articles, eg *Flashpoint !* (Brassy's) and *British Battles* (Harper Collins) and most recently at the request of the ICRC 'The dynamic interplay between Islam and Conflict in Afghanistan' (International Review of the Red Cross, Vol. 82, No. 880, Dec 2010).

**'RAM' Seeger** is a former Royal Marine who left the Corps in 1976 after commanding the Special Boat Service. He won a Military Cross with 40 Commando during the Borneo confrontation, was an instructor at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and attended the Army staff college at Camberley. After leaving the Corps he set up a Special Force for the Sultan of Oman and then became a security consultant. During the early 1980s he made a number of trips into occupied Afghanistan to give training and help to the Mujahedin. Most of these were to the Panshir valley for **Ahmad Shah Massoud**. After this he did an MA degree in War Studies at King's College London. In 2001 he lobbied for Western support of **Abdul Haq**, along with Ken Guest and another friend and colleague – Sir John Gunston.

**Lucy Morgan Edwards** is a researcher in politics and regional studies at the University of Exeter. She first worked in Afghanistan during the Taliban period running urban development projects for UNCHS in Kandahar and Herat. The 'community forum' aspect of these programmes later became known as the National Solidarity Programme. After spending five years in Afghanistan as an election monitor, researcher on transitional justice for the International Crisis Group and correspondent for the *Economist*, she was Political Advisor to the EU Ambassador (with responsibility for security sector reform, narcotics and civil military relations). She was then 'country expert' to the EU Chief Election Observer on the 2005 Parliamentary elections. She has written a book on her experiences of the current intervention whose central theme is an investigation of the internal plan for toppling the Taliban advocated by famed resistance Commander, **Abdul Haq**, using the ex King Zahir Shah as a rallying point.

### THE WRITING OF THIS PAPER

The authors of this paper have been watching the unfolding tragedy of these last eleven years with consternation and huge sadness. We have all had practical outside the compound experience of Afghanistan ie we have walked, talked, worked and in Ken Guest's case, fought with ordinary Afghans over prolonged periods of time and as a consequence have much affection and great respect for the Afghan people. We also have profound admiration for the courage and fighting skills of the ISAF soldiers and deplore what is likely to become a waste of young men's lives. Ken and RAM as former soldiers feel this especially.

Ken did **34 trips** into occupied Afghanistan during the Afghan-Soviet war, saw ISI agents at work in the 'Jihad theme park' at Ja Wa, Paktia, watched their grooming of **Jalaluddin Haqqani** and Haqqani's development from a resistance fighter to Jihadist leader, and most unusually perhaps, met and discussed religion with **Osama bin Laden** and witnessed his panicky reactions in a combat situation. None of us, however, have had the time or secretarial back up to produce a fully researched and argued academic study. **We have therefore deliberately kept our paper short and to the point.** We have added some notes at the end by way of elaboration, and can add to these if required.

## **A BETTER PATH TO PEACE**

### **A more optimistic solution for Afghanistan**

**(17 November 2012)**

*“We have bought into a policy which will fail. If we are honest, everyone is simply crossing fingers and hoping for the best. In so doing we have continued a pattern of allowing ourselves to be pushed about by events, rather than being active and creative in seeking a solution that would and will be acceptable to all Afghans save the few who have a stake in the continuation of a corrupt and discredited government. The consequences of continuing down this path will be severe, damaging and immediately apparent. As matters stand we are simply, through ennui fatigue or laziness, consciously allowing Afghanistan to drift.”*

*Frank Ledwidge – author of ‘Losing Small Wars – British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan’(1)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this paper is to stress the dangers and consequences of negotiating with the Taliban, and to present an alternative way forward.

Negotiation with the Taliban will not work – at least not in the way we want or expect – and the consequences – to quote Frank Ledwidge above – *will be severe, damaging and immediately apparent*. Negotiation with the Taliban will be orchestrated by the ISI, will result in a Jihadist controlled government and is not the right path to follow. We are wrong to pin our hopes to it.

An equally bad course of action is to continue on the present path. After eleven years of war, heavy costs and failure this is unlikely to suddenly succeed. It too will end with a Jihadist controlled government. Our only hope is that the government we supported and funded, and its large ethnically unbalanced army, will last long enough after our departure for us to claim that this was not our fault.

Given these two very unsatisfactory options we should instead adopt a very different path. Rather than negotiating with the Taliban, we should be thinking in terms of negotiating with the ordinary people of Afghanistan and giving them the space to run their affairs in the way that best suits them. This could be done through devolved government and empowerment of the tribes – a course of action that believers in the centralised Western template will, no doubt, regard as a retrograde and ill-starred step, and one requiring far too much time and effort to implement at this late stage.

However, as we hope to show, given the track record and likely outcomes of the other two alternatives, our third option, although radical, is not as inapt or as impractical as it might at first appear.

## **WHERE WE WENT WRONG**

To fully appreciate the dangers we are warning against and our proposals for devolved government, we need to understand and accept where we went wrong in the past. In summary only, as the intention of this paper is not to conduct a post-mortem on past failures, our main mistakes were as follows.

- We declined the opportunity for a quick and acceptable solution by not backing Abdul Haq and instead selecting Hamid Karzai. Haq was an honest, independent and much respected Pushtun war leader. He bridged the ethnic divides, had reached agreement with Ahmad Shah Massoud and could have overthrown the Taliban with only modest help from the West. (2)
- We fought the wrong war – Kinetic instead of Perceptual. (3)
- We misjudged the role and influence of Al Qaeda and spent too much time and effort on reducing this. (4)
- We tied our credibility to a Government widely perceived to be corrupt and illegitimate – a major handicap and early mistake.
- We failed to play the Tribal card – see comments later in this paper.
- We failed to play the Islamic card. The Taliban should have been challenged on Islam. They should have been shown to have violated Islamic principles and Pushtunwali. (5)(6)
- We tried to impose a Western template (big government, big army etc) on a mainly rural, conservative, poor and primitive society. We failed to realise that 'it was all about local' and failed to give the people what they wanted. Instead we tried to give them what we thought they ought to have,
- Finally we allowed Pakistan to support and control the Taliban - which not only helped the Taliban to conduct an insurgency, but is one of the main reasons why negotiating with the Taliban is not a good option.

## **THE DANGERS OF NEGOTIATING WITH THE TALIBAN**

In our desire for an early exit, we are convincing ourselves that there is a hawk/dove divide within the Taliban leadership and that we can negotiate an acceptable solution with the more reasonable and practical of the Taliban leaders (See Michael Semple interview and RUSI paper)(7)

We do not think this is possible for three reasons.

Firstly, because if there is any divide within the Taliban, it is between the local Afghan Taliban (who don't like foreign soldiers on their land, have lots of relatives to avenge, want law, order and justice, and see the Government as illegal and corrupt) and the Pakistani influenced Jihadist Taliban who form the bulk of the leadership and are fighting for mainly ideological reasons, and it is this latter group that we will be forced to deal with.

Secondly, because as far as this Jihadist element is concerned, they are winning or have won the war, so any negotiation is simply a discussion of surrender terms and their path to power.

And thirdly, because the ISI (Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence), who support and control them, will try indirectly to orchestrate the negotiations and ensure that any agreed post conflict Government is firmly under the control of the Jihadist element.

The ISI want (and need) control of Afghanistan and see the Jihadist Taliban as the best means of achieving this. They see the Jihadist Taliban as their proxies (they have, after all, supported and controlled them from the outset) and if the Jihadist Taliban are in a position to control an Afghan Government, so too will be the ISI.

The ISI see control as necessary for a growing number of reasons - strategic depth, fear of Indian encirclement and to make trouble against her, to restrain Baluchi and Pakistani Pushtun aspirations for independence in the Tribal Areas, to preserve the Durand line, to gain regional influence and last but not least for financial gain – from Afghan natural resources (copper, rare earth etc), trade (and traffic into and through Afghanistan), oil and gas from the Central Asian Republics and the flow of copper out of Afghanistan into China.

A strong, stable and independent Afghanistan is not perceived by Pakistan to be in Pakistan's interest, so the ISI are unlikely to waste the opportunity of ensuring that this does not happen. To this end they will try to ensure that the 'reasonable and practical' negotiators that the West appear to be choosing are in fact chosen by the ISI, that any 'negotiated settlement' is framed by the ISI, that the West are excluded from the real horse trading, and that the West can believe they have achieved 'exit with honour' – military spin speak for lose without loss of face.

The ISI will be aiming for three things –

- Recognition of those they want to be recognised.
- Collusion by the West in achieving this (so it will become near impossible for them to back out of).
- The morphing from a pariah Jihadist organisation (mistakenly seen in the West as Islamic) into a UN recognised Government.

On past and present showing they are likely to achieve all three of these aims. While they know what they are doing, have clear objectives and will field their best team, we have flexible objectives, uncertain hopes, and if the present Afghan government has any input, are liable to field a failed cabal of former warlords and gangsters propped up by our funding.

The Jihadist Taliban, for their part, are likely to accept their proxy role, because, contrary to popular thinking, they have no supreme leader or master plan of their own (Mullah Omar is a Pakistani installed figurehead) and because they have always done what Pakistan directed (he who pays the fiddler, calls the tune). Many of them are also Pakistanis, live in the Tribal Areas and/or were brought up in Pakistan. (8)

To achieve their ends both groups – the ISI and the Jihadists, will be prepared to accept any government dressed up to be acceptable to the West providing they can directly or indirectly control it.

Both see control as their main aim and they will happily cede short term tactical gains for this ultimate power. They will be quite happy not to be seen to be in control but will of course want international recognition of the Government that they are in.

Although this will be against their interests and wishes, it is unlikely that the Northern Alliance, or any other non-Pushtun or anti-Pakistani groups, will be able to do anything about it. With a Jihadist controlled but UN/Western recognized government in power (and all the financial and military backing that this will entail) it will be very difficult for them to protest without finding themselves suddenly cast in the role of the bad guys. This apart, as soon as they see the way the wind is blowing, actors like Abdul Rashid Dostum will change sides and all opposition will fade away.

### **THE LIKELY CONSEQUENCES**

Assuming our aim is not just to get out as quickly as we can, but to achieve the best possible settlement under the circumstances, all of the above is not good news.

Apart from the fact that it will not be in the best interests of the Afghan people, a Jihadist controlled Government will be widely propagated and perceived as defeat for the West. We will lose much face and the worldwide spread of Jihadism will be much encouraged. This is particularly likely in Pakistan, where their growing Jihadist movement may additionally (and ironically) be able to gain strategic depth from the use of safe havens and bases inside Afghanistan. (9)

The ISI, in their vanity, think this will not happen and believe they can control Jihadism and use it for their own purposes as a 'smart' weapon – to further Pakistan's frontier and regional policies (as already explained) and as a threat to others to leave Pakistan alone. There is a real danger however that they cannot. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it is very hard to force it back in again. (10)(11)

If the ISI are proved wrong, this growing and out of control force of Jihadism will threaten the Pakistan state, spread to other countries, destabilise the region, force interference from China, India and Iran and have long term implications for the security of the West. If Pakistan's nuclear assets come under Jihadist control, there is the danger of nuclear leakage or misuse. (12)(13)(14)

**The end result therefore will be that we will have fought and paid for an Afghan war, only to have recognised and allowed the very things that we went to war to prevent. (15)**

### **MORE OF THE SAME**

Given our past mistakes and need soon to withdraw from Afghanistan, the continuation of current policies is not a serious option. If we, the West, like the Russians before us (with similar aims and policies) are unable to defeat an Afghan insurgency, it is highly unlikely that Karzai's government and army (modelled on ours) will be any more successful. Nor are they likely to last any longer after our departure than Najibullah's

did after the Russians ended their funding. The increasing number of green on blue killings – an attempt to make amends and protect families against reprisals - is a sure sign of declining confidence. As stated earlier the end result will be the same as negotiating with the Taliban – a Jihadist controlled government.

### **A BETTER PATH**

Contrary to common perceptions, the choice is not between more of the same - ie continuing war and corrupt government, and negotiation with the Jihadist Taliban. It should still be possible, by engaging with the Afghan majority, to give it what it has always wanted – no war and no return of the Jihadist Taliban. Jihadist Taliban, it must never be forgotten, is an imported concept that was designed and launched by the ISI in 1993. It is not an Afghan concept and runs against the Afghan nature. The 2001 collapse of Taliban authority was widely welcomed by the vast majority of the population who were fed up with its interference in their daily and very traditional lives.

**We maintain that the best way of getting in contact with the ordinary Afghan and marginalising the Taliban is by reducing the power and scope of the central government, establishing semi-autonomous regions and following what we have come to call the Tribal Path. (See our paper 'The Tribal Path' dated 9 June 2010)(16)**

Regional Government would be more in keeping with Afghanistan's historical past. It would allow us, without loss of face, to correct past mistakes and be harder for the ISI and Jihadist Taliban to control. Instead of having to infiltrate a single central government, they would have to infiltrate multiple governments many of which would be ethnically different and jealous of their independence. By following the prescriptions advocated in the Tribal Path it should be possible to reduce most of the difficulties and dangers, win over the moderate Afghan Taliban, and bring new hope to the Afghan people. (17)

### **DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS OF REGIONAL GOVERNMENT**

The difficulties and dangers of Regional Government could be considerable.

For a start the concept is unlikely to be well received by the current Afghan Government who will see it as an unwelcome dilution of power and loss of control.

It might also mean multiplying the central government corruption problems by the number of regions to which power is devolved and lead to inter-factional feuding, civil war and Balkanisation.

These dangers can be minimised, providing:-

- The devolution process is carefully and securely planned.
- The regional division is correctly balanced – this is the essential first step. Get this wrong (as we did with the Durand line) and the concept is under a permanent handicap.

- Regional governments do not mimic the strong central government we are trying to get away from. They too must have a light footprint.
- Suitable regional governors are democratically elected and all decision making and ownership is as transparent and as close to the people as possible. This means devolving power to tribes and local communities and following the principles of the Tribal Path.
- The Afghan Security Forces are restructured, reformed and reduced in size with the use of traditional Tribal Forces as the front line first responders.

## **HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY**

Whilst the difficulties and dangers should not be underestimated, we would argue that they are, at least, no less than those attached to negotiating with the Jihadist Taliban or continuing on our present course, and at best, offer far more hope of achieving a peaceful outcome.

If we can accept them, make a start on devolving power to regions and local communities and reduce the Army to a more manageable and effective size, we will be giving Afghan morale what it badly needs – a highly visible indication of beneficial change.

The need for this is paramount, as it is the only way of capturing the enthusiasm, hope and backing of the Afghan people and ensuring that the expenditure of blood and treasure since 2001 has not been entirely in vain.

## **PROPOSED REGIONS**

The obvious solution of forming regions round the country's main towns leaves much to be desired. Space is as important as population, and Afghanistan is still predominantly rural. Other critical factors are trade routes, security, ethnicity, easy access to the regional capital, and speedy Quick Reaction Force (QRF) access to all corners of the region.

Taking all these factors into account, we feel that the country could be divided into seventeen regions. (See map at end of paper after 'NOTES'.

The population based regions would be **Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat and Mazar**, while other possibilities subject to further and more detailed consideration could be:-

**Meaymaneh (Faryab)**. This area offers alternative routes to Turkmenistan and splits the distance between Mazar and Herat. It will act as a trip wire aiding northern border security. Whilst the northern reach of the Afghanistan ring road is being developed, Taliban activity develops at a faster pace. Significant effort and resources need to be focussed on its completion.

**Kunduz**. This is Hekmatyar's home ground and the Taliban have been expanding their activity in this region. It therefore needs special attention if it is to be kept under control, not least because the Taliban are beginning to expand their circle of recruitment. This



development represents a serious risk, which, if it becomes wide spread, changes the dynamics of the operational environment in the north.

**Badakhshan with its capital in Faizabad.** This is a large area with a low population, so is often seen as less important. But it is part of the access route to the north, and includes the Wakhan corridor to China. It also borders with Pakistan and Tajikistan. Poor security here has allowed the Taliban to use the area as a rat run and supply route to Kunduz and other northern regions (18). Although the ground is physically challenging, the Taliban have been able to move through it relatively easily. As they are channelled through high passes, a focused effort by suitably trained and supported forces could cause significant disruption.

**Panjshir.** As the Tajik heartland, this is a secure area and the purpose of placing a regional centre here would be to reward success and consolidate security. It would serve as a base against Taliban infiltration routes through southern Badakhshan and Northern Nuristan and give support to their regional centres.

**Nuristan.** This is one of the Gateway provinces, and used by the Taliban as a passage north to Badakhshan and west to Laghman and Kapsia. Nuristan would act as a central buttress mutually supported by Panjshir to the north and Jalalabad to the south.

**Khost.** This has to be a separate region as border crossing points are cut off from Nangarhar (Jalalabad) and Logar (Ghazni) by high mountains. The area is also the stamping ground of the Haqqani Network, so for this alone merits special attention.

**Paktika.** This area plugs the gap between Khost and Kandahar. Development of the road from Gardez to Paktika and on to Kalat would enable an outer trip wire route, offering additional protection to the main Kabul-Ghazni-Kandahar highway.

**Ghazni.** This is an important staging point and security hub, on the highway between Kabul and Kandahar.

**Lashkar Gah.** A region here would protect part of the main Kandahar-Herat highway and act as a point from which to connect with the Afghan Baluch community. The Baluch are ethnically different from the Pushtun. Baluchistan is also a sensitive issue for the Pakistanis, and more effective Western connection to the Baluch could be used as a pressure point to encourage co-operation by Pakistan.

**Farah.** A regional hub in Farah would help protect the Kandahar-Herat highway. Subject to regional political needs, it might become the hub for a new border trade and supply route serviced via Iran and their deepwater port of Chah Bahar. In addition to increasing trade benefit, the potential use of Chah Bahar might prove a useful tool for leveraging more effective Pakistani support, as it competes with the new Pakistani deepwater port in Gwadar. It could also impede the transport of drugs across to Iran.

**Chaghcharan.** This would give a region to the Aimaq people. It would help to secure the central highway trade route and impede Taliban supplies and personnel heading north towards Badghis and Faryab. It also represents a suitable staging post, as it is presently about a one day drive from Herat.

**Bamian**. By including Bamian, the Hazaras would have their own region. The central highway trade route security would be better serviced as Bamian is about a days drive from Chagcharan. Having both Bamian and Chagcharan would mean the Herat-Kabul drive was broken down into manageable legs, with sizable staging posts and security hubs at the end of each days drive.

Increased use and security of the central highway would provide competition for the Kabul/Kandahar/Herat road ie trade and revenue would follow the most secure route. Local communities would then not only gain from improved security, but lose if they failed to provide it.

## **THE TRIBAL PATH**

The Tribal Path paper we wrote in 2010, advocated four things, all of which are relevant to regional devolution and, if devolution is to be successful, should be incorporated into regional institutions:-

- Bottom up community governance.
- Tribally raised and tribally controlled Tribal Forces.
- The importance of building up trust and allowing the Tribes to lead the way.
- A properly sponsored and authoritative study to find out more about the Tribes and local communities than is currently the case.

## **Tribal based Community Governance**

Local governance should be based on the tribal system because:-

- Tribes and local community structures still matter in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still a traditional, kinship-based and mainly rural society. If its people are not always as tribal as each other, they are likely at least to be clannish by nature and conservative in outlook. They are likely to have more in common with each other than divides them. They share a common experience and respond in similar ways. Tribes are used by the people (who can expect more certain and reliable support from them than from other organisations), the Central Government (to an extent), and the Taliban (see below).
- For the Afghan, the traditional Jirga, with its open forum assembly, transparency and accountability, is much fairer and more democratic than a Western electoral system which can be misunderstood, difficult for rural Afghans to participate in, and easily manipulated. The system has always worked well in the past, and has shown itself to be trustworthy and sustainable. It was collective and transparent and well suited to the people it managed. There were Jirgas at different levels of society, with every member of the tribe and community being allowed to attend their meetings. Tribesmen received information through their representatives in the Jirga, and everyone was fully aware of decisions made, and allowed to ask their leaders and representatives to justify these. Jirga members were voted in on grounds of capability and included women, often from non-prominent households. (19)

A common criticism is that tribal structures have been weakened by the pre-9/11 Communist, Mujahedin and Taliban regimes, and since then by the assassination of uncooperative leaders by Taliban insurgents. These have certainly damaged the structure but not fatally.

Perhaps the strongest argument for following the tribal path, is the use made of it by the Taliban. Unlike the West or the Afghan Government, the Taliban have taken active (and successful) steps to utilise the tribal dynamic – at first using its support and then replacing it with its own direct influence and control. A policy of tribal empowerment and cooperation would not only give the government a very effective asset, it would deny the same to the Taliban. This is important because **if the Taliban lose the support (20) of the tribes - they will ultimately fail, while if they retain their dominance over this resource, it will be almost impossible to defeat them.**

### **Tribal Forces**

Our Tribal Path proposal for Tribal Forces was more controversial, but only because, quite wrongly, it evoked memories of warlord militias (paid retainers of mafia thugs) or central government militias, which were more of a source of enrichment and prestige to government ministers than a threat to the Taliban. (21)

Properly structured however, Tribal Forces are a cost effective way of securing tribal lands, although they must be controlled by their own tribes-people and tribal leaders, operate in their own areas, and work for the readily perceived benefit of the tribe providing them - eg community defence and the ejection of unwelcome intruders. Local security and stability is now becoming a major issue for ordinary Afghans as they face an increasingly uncertain and turbulent future. Responsible and accountable Tribal Forces who can safeguard tribal space will do much to reduce this concern. (22)

Although regional and central governments should resist the direct control of tribal forces, they must still support them, and provide escalating layers of follow up forces for situations they cannot control or deal with. Working together in this way should allow both sets of forces to develop a sense of interdependence and mutual respect.

We would see the Tribal Forces being structured on traditional tribal lines. These involved three kinds of force – the *Kishakee* who gathered intelligence, the *Lashkar* who were a large grouping called together for defence against a common enemy (usually also an enemy of the country), and best known and most used, the *Arbakai*.

The *Arbakai* were volunteers and respected members of the community. They were embedded in the community, engaged on community tasks, and were answerable to the community. Their main duties were to implement their Jirga's decisions, maintain law and order, and protect the borders and boundaries of the tribe or the community. **Unlike militias they were unpaid and not used for the political or financial interests of individuals.** Moreover, whilst being an *Arbakai* member was considered an honour, belonging to a militia was considered shameful. (23)

### **Tribal Police**

Working alongside the traditional Tribal Forces should be a specially recruited and formally recognised tribal police force. This would function in a way not dissimilar to how tribal police are used in the USA on Native American reservations.

### **Scouts**

Based on the old North West Frontier Scouts, should be a para-military regional organisation recruited from the Tribes, but not tribally owned or part of the Police or Army. They would be controlled by a Political Officer, and would be used to back up local forces, keep quarrelling tribes apart, or punish misdemeanours of tribe against tribe.

### **Quick Reaction Forces (QRFs)**

Efficient, effective and highly mobile QRFs are essential to the concept of escalating layers of Government support for Tribal Forces. Whenever possible these should be heliborne.

Where the QRFs are located is important, as this will affect how quickly they can reach likely trouble spots. Any area they are unable to reach easily will soon be realised by the insurgents and used by them to advantage.

The concept of relentless pursuit is essential and to this end combat tracker teams must be developed with expert human trackers.

### **Building up Trust and Allowing the Tribes to Lead the Way**

Having decided that the Tribal Path is worth following, it is important to understand that even after finding the right people to deal with, it will take time to build up bonds of trust.

And having won the trust and cooperation of the Tribes, the next step is to realise that in order to keep this and use it productively, the Tribes must lead the way in the use of Tribal Forces.

**Tribal Forces will work if they are raised and controlled by the Tribes and seen by the tribes as working on their behalf. They will not work if they are merely an extension of government power in tribal disguise.**

### **Need for a Tribal and Local Community Study**

An independent and authoritative study is necessary as the tribal situation in Afghanistan is a complicated one. The study would involve not just tribal mapping (which to a large extent has already been done), but establishing the social, economic and historical inter-relationships between the tribes.

### **RESTRUCTURED STATE SECURITY FORCES**

Paralleling the devolvement of power to Regions and local communities, should be a restructuring and reforming of the Afghan State Security Forces. Neither the Army nor the Police are functioning properly and despite optimistic Western forecasts are unlikely to. This should take place at the same time as changes in governance.

## **A More Sustainable and Acceptable Army**

The Army should be renamed as the Afghan Defence Force, reduced in size, and be reorganised into regionally recruited regional regiments. The Army should be of a limited size so that it can be more sustainable, better trained, better paid and more effective. It should wear local style uniforms with the traditional *salwar*. Basing it on the failing model of a large US/ISAF army was a mistake. (24)(25)(26)

## **Western Officers**

Initially at least, the Army could also be partially officered by Westerners – some of whom might be seconded, others of whom might be contracted. A model for this might be the highly competent and successful Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces (SOAF) during the Dhofar war.

Loyalty of Afghan troops to Western officers need not be a problem. In a properly run regiment, with Western officers speaking the language of their men and committed for a period of several or more years and where the troops are well equipped, well looked after and confident about the future, the situation could be very different from the present one. **In the Indian army, there was no problem in recruiting and holding the loyalty of Pushtun soldiers even when they were used on the frontier against other Pushtuns.**

## **Restructured, Renamed and Better Paid Police**

A better structured and more effective police force is essential. As a first step in countering this, the pay for the Police should be increased. Rural police should be recruited on a regional basis from the areas they are to police. City police should have a wider regional and ethnic mix and more women. The force should also be renamed as the Afghan Nation Police instead of the Afghan National Police. They too should be given new uniforms with a specially coloured *salwar*.

## **REGIONAL ISSUES**

We see regions breaking down into provinces and districts under Regional and Provincial Governors and District Officers. As with the new regional boundaries, provincial and district boundaries will need to be the subject of a careful and detailed study. This should take full note of the tribal and local community study we are also proposing.

The new governments should try to follow the principles and practices of the tribal path as completely as possible. Some examples of where this can be applied are the selection of Governors and District Officers, governance by committee, selection and use of Political Officers, control of budgets and allocation of funds.

Governors and District Officers should be elected, governance committees should replicate the jirga system and include tribal representation from local jirgas. Political Officers should be specially qualified and appointed. Their prime duty would be to liaise with the Tribes and be responsible for tribal affairs. The Regional Government should control its own budget.

Priority issues for the regions are likely to be Aid, Justice, Reconciliation and Revenue collection.

Properly administered Aid will be the most visible gain for local communities so must be the top priority if their support is to be won. Next in line is Law and Order and Justice (27). This is a prime concern for the ordinary Afghan, and must run in tandem with Aid or we run the risk of Aid fuelling corruption and injustice, as is the case now. With visible local benefits and improved Law and Order, the space for local Reconciliation is created. Last in line is Revenue collection as it can only come from a stable environment, and if given priority would undermine the scope for creating the stability it needs. Note Law and Order is a rallying cry for Taliban. We need to own that banner.

## **WIDER CONSULTATION**

Our final plea, whatever the course of action, is to widen the consultation process to include those with practical experience of living and working with ordinary Afghans and travelling throughout the country. This is not to knock academic study or the efforts of MOD and FCO officials, it is simply to point out that because of the security situation getting this experience nowadays is very difficult, so those who have been lucky enough to have obtained it are a valuable and dwindling resource, which should be used more than has been the case hitherto.

## **CONCLUSION**

We are at the eleventh hour. For the past eleven years we have failed to make sustainable progress in Afghanistan. This is mainly because we've used the wrong models for the development of the Government, Army and Police. If we can resist the siren call of negotiation with the Taliban, it is possible to recover from this faulty start, but only by radically changing our approach and building these institutions on different lines. If we cannot embrace such change we will, most certainly, embrace failure.

## **NOTES**

(1). 'Losing Small Wars – British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan' by Frank Ledwidge. ISBN 978-0-300-16671-2.

(2). See Lucy Morgan Edwards' book - 'The Afghan Solution – the inside story of Abdul Haq, the CIA and how Western hubris lost Afghanistan' published by Pluto Press/Palgrave Macmillan (USA). ISBN 978-0-9568449-0-3.

(3). Instead of imagining the opposition as a physical mass with a weakness at the centre, we should have seen it as a formless gas affected by all kinds of indirect factors. We should have made more of an effort to target how the enemy thinks and so perceives and structures for the contest. For example, while we might see drones as a calculated and effective way of striking at the enemy leadership, the Taliban perceive them as a sign that the West is too weak and frightened to fight man to man.

(4). Al Qaeda never existed in large numbers, was never a major participant and never had a chance as a non-Afghan enterprise of functioning inside Afghanistan in the way the Americans imagined. More dangerous than the organisation is the idea that drives it. This is a general

dissatisfaction with the Muslim lot, which is blamed on the West. Al Qaeda is the smoke, not the fire.

(5). We should have created debate and seeded doubt. We should have attacked their pillar of presentation, that they are engaged in a war against non-Islamic occupying forces, by stressing that the only real invaders are those infiltrating from Pakistan, intent on destabilising and destroying Afghanistan.

(6). Clearly the UK government has no credibility as a commentator on Islam. However, friendly Islamic authorities (*ulema*) could have been approached either directly or through friendly governments. Such authorities include Al Azhar University in Cairo, the centre of mainstream Sunni theology, the many sound Pakistani authorities or Islamic scholars at our own universities (there are some fine ones at Oxford for example); or all of the above. All have expressed a willingness to name Al Qaeda's approach as heretical.

(7). See the Emma Alberici/Michael Semple interview on ABC News Australia, 4 September 2012 and the RUSI Briefing paper September 2012.

(8). Within ISI arsenal are firm allies, such as Jalaluddin Haqqani, but even Haqqani is not a Pakistan puppet, although he will accommodate them as long as it suits him. The proof of that is what happened immediately after 9/11. Pervez Musharraf rushed to offer Haqqani an opportunity to become the acceptable face of Taliban, replacing Mullah Omar, but Haqqani turned Musharraf down. Mullah Omar is Pakistan's puppet, Haqqani is not. Haqqani has the capacity to become the prime focus of Jihadism along the Pakistani N.W. Frontier, easily outpacing Mullah Omar. Mullah Omar is and always was, merely window dressing.

(9). Jihadism in Pakistan developed in the 1980s out of a controlled ISI experiment. Its purpose was to use Islamic credentials to legitimise the holding onto power by the military. However as this aggressive use of Islamisation gathered popular support – it was a powerful rallying cry among the deprived rural population for whom the government had done little – it began to gather its own momentum. This was accelerated by an unrealistic evaluation of the role played by the Islamic resistance in the 'defeat' of the Soviets in Afghanistan, seen by some as proof that Allah was on their side. That perception increased the pace from Islamisation to Jihadism.

(10). Jihadism in Pakistan has now become a serious threat, as its expansion has left the ISI with a fragmented web of factions it finds hard to control. Some will be loyal cohorts, some will be allies of expediency, and some will be opposed, resenting attempts to impose controls or frustrated by any one of a number of issues which vex them.

(11). Pakistan believes it won the Soviet-Afghan War by 'controlling' Jihad like a 'smart weapon'. It thinks it is winning now in Afghanistan in the same way. In reality it is achieving its ambition far more on the back of Western failures than its own brilliance. The 'smart weapon', overall, is not obedient and has the capacity to bite the hand that feeds it.

(12). Although the ISI/Jihadist movement in Pakistan is more interested in controlling Afghanistan and influencing near neighbours than it is in exporting Jihadism world wide, its use of Jihadism as a threat to others to leave Pakistan alone is likely to increase. Meanwhile the Jihadist elements within Pakistan are likely to expand to a point where the ISI can no longer contain their threat to the state.

(13). The Jihadists who morph out of ISI patronage will have a much more far reaching view of 'Jihad', not least because they are infused with Wahhabi ambitions. They will see it as their duty to overthrow the West, making penetration of Western Islamic enclaves a key part of their strategy. Interestingly, they will attempt to do what the West should have done in Afghanistan. They know they cannot hope to occupy the battle space physically, so will make their 'frontline' a battle for perception among the resident Islamic community in the West. They will do this by

exploiting grievances, pushing for favourable political reforms, uniting and mobilising the disaffected, agitating to seed chaos, in fact using all the essential ingredients for war by other means. Added to this will be a certain amount of kinetic activity to force heavy handed counter measures which can then be used for propaganda purposes. Their aim will be to establish cells that are self-motivating rather than operating in a conventional command and control organization.

(14). The danger is that the 'secure cordon' that the ISI describe as protecting their nuclear systems faces the wrong way. In theory it protects by preventing entry, in practice, the most likely source of danger is not Jihadists climbing over the wire but facility staff already inside the compound.

(15). One can admire the skill of the ISI without being blind to the weak link in their armour - ego. This infuses them with an absolute conviction of their own invulnerability. Admittedly the West has given them ample reason to bond with that perception. However, in our opinion, in doing so they credit their own performance more than it deserves. It does deserve a lot but it should be balanced against the degree to which the West has defeated itself. In effect, the ISI on its own could not win. It needed the West to fail, making significant mistakes. This the West did, and it was these mistakes, more than ISI perfect planning, which is delivering victory to the ISI.

(16). 'The Tribal Path – Commanding the prime battle space' dated 9 June 2010 by Ken Guest, RAM Seeger and Lucy Morgan Edwards. Published earlier in March 2010 in the Small Wars Journal. See also <http://thetribalpath.weebly.com/the-tribal-path-9-june-2010-pdf.html> (click on view in full screen)

(17). For a supporting perspective on the Tribal path and ISI manipulation see the Pushtun Awakening brief by the NWSC (New World Strategies Coalition) which describes the Taliban as "a religious mafia concocted on white boards in Rawalpindi" (<http://www.eurasiareview.com/15092012-pashtun-awakening-defeat-the-taliban-by-changing-the-narrative-analysis/#comment-435357>)

(18). August 2010 saw the murder of 8 expatriate aid workers in one attack in Badakhshan, when it was reported the local police chief had an agreement with Taliban to allow safe passage through his space in exchange for allowing illegal smuggling of semi precious stones from mining activity he had a share in.

(19). Tribal Security System (Arbakai) in Southeast Afghanistan – Occasional Paper no 7 – dated December 2008 by Mohammed Osman Tariq from the Crisis States Research Centre. <http://www.crisisstates.com/download/op/OP7.pdf>

(20). This tribal support has never equalled approval or a willingness to see the instalment of a Jihadist Taliban regime.

(21). An example of what the Tribal path is not about, is the Warlord force allegedly recruited by Ahmed Wali Karzai and his associates and known as the Kandahar Strike Force. Such militias have been accused of murder, rape and extortion, while this particular one was investigated for shooting dead Matiullah Qateh, the Kandahar chief of Police (see article by Stephen Grey <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/16/afghan-prosecutor-arrest-warrant-us-officer>). As mercenary forces, Warlord militias are notoriously unreliable, with loyalty, at best, questionable (as shown by the number of times people like Abdul Rashid Dostum have swapped sides) and their performance, as part of legitimate government, extremely counter-productive.

(22). Recent reports recount that the going rate for an AK47 have increased to \$1,000 from \$300 a year ago.



(23). As for Note 19.

(24). Even some of its own commanders acknowledge that it is far too large and highly likely to fragment after NATO's withdrawal.

(25). It naturally follows, if the power is decentralised to natural regional locations then the military force at its disposal must also be decentralized and operate in a more local manner whilst reflecting the ethnic balance of their home regions. This removes the need for the mass mini-me preference of the US, reduces cost and permits a custom made structure for the environment in which it must function.

(26). Frank Ledwidge author 'Losing Small Wars' recounts a telling story of how a group of Pushtun Taliban prisoners being guarded by British and ANA soldiers watched with surprise when the ANA soldiers (Tajiks in Western style uniforms) went off to pray. They asked the British soldiers what the ANA soldiers were doing. "Praying" replied the Brits. "But why" said the Taliban, "They're Russians aren't they?"

(27). A major justice problem is deciding how to deal with those personalities that the West empowered after 2001, who instead of being indicted (as they should have been), have remained in power and are continuing to orchestrate mafia heists of resources in Afghanistan.

## AFGHAN REGIONS

A Better Path (17 November 2012)

