

## Afghanistan: More Diplomacy

### Summary

Canada's strong military presence in Kandahar and its role as a major donor in Afghanistan situate it to be a leader in diplomatic efforts to build peace in that country. Canada should work harder to collaborate with the government of Afghanistan and other Afghan peace-makers to formulate peace building strategies that reinforce progress on development and security. This includes boosting Canadian diplomatic efforts to protect civilians and ensure humanitarian access, support Afghan initiatives in negotiations with anti-government groups, and to maintain the political commitment among Afghanistan's international partners to implement the Afghanistan Compact.

### Background

The ongoing violence from anti-government groups gravely threatens prospects for development, reconstruction and stability in Afghanistan. Anti-government groups include general criminals and drug profiteers, groups associated with the Taliban and international terrorist networks, those who resent corruption and abuse of authority by the central government, and those who blame international forces for civilian casualties resulting from military clashes and for 'propping up' the Karzai government. The civil conflict between the Mujahideen and the Taliban, and tensions between Afghanistan's different regions and communities, have been magnified by regional dynamics with Pakistan.

Diplomacy is a key instrument for building peace and security, well respected by Member States of the United Nations, including Canada and Afghanistan. Yet, Canada's support for diplomatic and peace building efforts has been modest compared with our development and military efforts in Afghanistan. Canadian diplomats and non-governmental organizations and individuals provide a substantial pool of political and technical expertise related to negotiation and political and public dialogue processes.

### The Issue

As a major donor with military forces deployed in one of the most difficult parts of Afghanistan, Canada has a vested interest in ensuring that progress is made in reconstructing and stabilizing the country. Clearly, the objectives set out in the Afghanistan Compact can only be achieved if all those involved show the political will to implement its terms. Canada should develop and pursue a long-term diplomatic strategy to keep all partners focused and committed. What's more, political negotiations between the Afghan government and national and regional actors in the conflict have the potential to produce a sustained peace that is supported by the majority of the Afghan population. A failure to devote maximum diplomatic and political resources to the possibility of a negotiated peace in Afghanistan place in jeopardy Canadian military and development efforts.

The conflict in Afghanistan has been complicated by aggressive military engagements in pursuit of the Taliban and al-Qaeda by the US, Canada and other NATO countries. With so many interests at play, an extensive diplomatic strategy is required that places the Afghan government and the warring parties at the centre of an inclusive peacemaking effort that includes local communities and civil society organizations, women's groups, the UN and international organizations, and representatives of selected regional and international states. It would build on, but go beyond, past efforts like the Bonn Agreement, which outlined a political process to establish a stable, democratic government in Afghanistan, but did not address peace and reconciliation between the warring parties. The peace process must be led by Afghans. Canada should be ready to promote and support mediation processes as they emerge. This more inclusive process could build from the small steps made by Pakistan and Afghanistan in the recent Peace Jirga and the recent indication of an opening for dialogue between the Karzai government and elements within the Taliban insurgency.

Diplomacy is not just about negotiating with various Taliban factions or other political opponents of the current Afghan government. A broader diplomatic strategy should operate at a number of levels in Afghanistan and with our allies.

## **Recommendations**

Canada's diplomatic strategy for its engagement in Afghanistan should include:

- Support for the Karzai government's capacity to carry forward diplomatic initiatives, including negotiating with parties to the conflict;
- Support for regional dialogue engaging all Afghanistan's neighbours;
- Support for participatory development processes that involve inter-communal dialogue and relationship rebuilding;
- Support for the Afghan parliament and other mediatory institutions in the country;
- Support for local community and civil society participation and women's participation in peace processes;
- Putting the protection of civilians, including aid workers, first;
- Negotiating humanitarian access in conflict zones for the delivery of humanitarian assistance;
- Upholding international humanitarian law in the treatment of detainees;
- Strengthening our mediation and negotiation capacity within DFAIT and with relevant Canadian civil society stakeholders.

## **Resources**

- The Afghanistan Compact: <http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/I-ANDS/afghanistan-compacts-p1.asp>
- The Bonn Agreement: <http://www.afghangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm>