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AFGHANISTAN, NATO AND WOMEN'S SECURITY

Background on NATO's involvement in Afghanistan

The war against Afghanistan was allegedly a reaction to the 11 September 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Centre. NATO Member States invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, "that an armed attack against one or more of them [the Parties] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all"¹. The first US military response to the 9/11 attacks commenced on 7 October 2001 and were assigned the name Operation Infinite Justice which was changed to Operation Enduring Freedom because it caused offence to Muslims for whom infinite justice is the domain of god alone. The initial military objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom, as articulated by President George W. Bush included the destruction of terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al-Qaeda leaders, and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan.² On 5 October 2006, NATO officially took over control of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. In December 2001 the United Nations Security Council established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which transferred to NATO command and coordination in August 2003. This was NATO's first "out of area" mission outside the Euro-Atlantic region, which is cast by NATO as part of its, "transformation to meet the threats of the 21st century." The initial Security Council resolution 1386 (2001) has been extended on an annual basis, bestowing NATO with a UN mandate for this role in numerous UN Security Council Resolutions from 2002 till now. ISAF's mission was initially limited to Kabul, but resolutions since 2003 have mandated ISAF to operate beyond Kabul in the form of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – a force that is said to "extend the authority of the Afghan Government across the entire country."

The NATO Self Perception of the Role in Afghanistan

NATO describes ISAF's role as, "*assist[ing]* the Government of Afghanistan and the International Community in maintaining security within its area of operation. ISAF supports the Government of Afghanistan in expanding its authority to the rest of the country, and in providing a safe and secure environment conducive to free and fair elections, the spread of the rule of law, and the reconstruction of the country." ISAF and the PRTs are working in cooperation with the Afghan National Security Forces and the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) coalition. The NATO countries contributing to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan are the following 26: Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States. The non-NATO countries are the following 14: Albania, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Finland, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Ireland, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, Jordan, Singapore.³

What are the results of the NATO Presence?

In oral evidence taken before the UK Defence Committee⁴ a testimony from Afghanistan expert Rory Stewart stressed the importance of the international community to be associated with

¹ <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/treaty.htm>

² <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/enduring-freedom.htm>

³ <http://www.nato.int/isaf/structure/nations/index.html>

⁴ UK operations in Afghanistan Thirteenth Report of Session 2006-07, House of Commons, Defence Committee, Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 3 July 2007, Published on 18 July 2007

permanent development projects so that “in 50 years’ time they could point to and say, ‘This is a gift from the international community to the Afghan nation.’ There are very few permanent symbols of our commitment. There is very little that Afghans can point to when they are asked what we have done for them.”⁵ At this point the prevailing commitment is military, and the symbols are all too often connected to destruction and do not bring human security such as food, clean water, a livelihood. When troops in Afghanistan are working alongside humanitarian organizations on reconstruction projects, they are blurring the distinction between military and civilians roles, which affects the credibility and trust of non-military humanitarian and development actors.

Women’s Security

Poverty and lack of human security in Afghanistan has a female face. A February 2008 report from the WomanKind Worldwide organisation found that violent attacks against females, usually domestic, are at epidemic proportions with 87 per cent of females complaining of such abuse – half of it sexual. More than 60 per cent of marriages are forced. Despite a new law banning the practice, 57 per cent of brides are under the age of 16. The illiteracy rate among women is 88 per cent with just 5 per cent of girls attending secondary school. Maternal mortality rates – one in nine women dies in childbirth – are the highest in the world alongside Sierra Leone. And 30 years of conflict have left more than one million widows with no enforceable rights, left to beg on the streets alongside an increasing number of orphans. Afghanistan is the only country in the world with a higher suicide rate among women than men.⁶ Further comes, “The fact that a climate of impunity reigns throughout Afghanistan regarding the violence of the past encourages violence in the present. In this vein, scant progress has been made in holding individual perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including gender crimes, accountable for their actions. Nor have there been effective challenges to many of the structural and systemic factors that conspired to create a framework of collective gender apartheid. The reality of life for Afghan women remains one of segregation and struggle within a climate of fear.”⁷ The risk of being raped or exposed to other kinds of sexual abuses – both by family members and strangers, both civilians and soldiers – is growing radically during armed conflicts. In United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security, concern is expressed that, “...civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and *recognizing* the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation.” This is the reality in Afghanistan. And in SCR 1820 the SC “Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict;”

What do we Call for?

As women working for peace and women’s rights we should call for: (1) a total reconstruction of the international involvement in Afghanistan; (2) the US troops and all NATO troops to leave the country; (3) the Warlords and Taliban leaders to be brought to a war-crime tribunal

The Afghan people can’t start building their own future in security and freedom until this has been accomplished. Only after serious peace negotiations led by the United Nations and leading to a peace agreement – the deployment of UN peacekeeping troops with reconstructions teams can be established. And only when all involved parties have taken part in peace negotiations, with democratic participation of women (1325), a foundation for peace and reconstruction can be established.

⁵ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmdfence/408/408.pdf>

⁶ Taking Stock: Afghanistan Women and Girls Seven Years On, Womankind <http://www.womankind.org.uk/news-and-events.html>

⁷ Mark A. Drumbl, p. 1, “*Rights, Culture and Crime: The Role of Rule of Law for the Women of Afghanistan*”, Vol. 42, No. 2, Columbia Journal of Transnational Law, 2004.