

AFGHANISTAN: MEETING THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

John Manley



The author first visited Afghanistan as Canada's foreign minister following the ouster of the Taliban regime in 2002. Five years later, John Manley returned to Kabul and its environs as a private citizen and a director of CARE Canada, one of the leading NGOs working to rebuild that shattered country. In this view from the ground, as part of our continuing *Mission Afghanistan* series, Manley writes that security remains "the major issue, including for NGOs." But while the "promise of 2002 has thus far been unrealized in the establishment of a true system of rule of law and sustainable Afghan institutions," he also found measurable progress, including "programs in housing, micro-credit, infrastructure and community development."

À titre de ministre canadien des Affaires étrangères, John Manley s'était rendu une première fois en Afghanistan en 2002 après la chute du régime des talibans. Cinq ans plus tard, il est retourné à Kaboul et ses environs en tant que simple citoyen et directeur de CARE Canada, l'une des principales ONG travaillant à la reconstruction d'un pays en ruine. Dans le cadre de notre série « Mission Afghanistan », il propose un compte rendu de sa visite sur le terrain et observe que la sécurité reste le « problème central, y compris pour les ONG ». Mais si la « promesse de 2002 d'un système fondé sur la règle de droit et la viabilité des institutions est loin d'être remplie », il estime que des progrès mesurables ont été réalisés du côté des « programmes d'habitation, du microcrédit, des infrastructures et du développement communautaire ».

In January 2002, I became the first Canadian minister in more than 40 years to visit Afghanistan. My visit as Foreign Affairs minister followed shortly after the collapse of the Taliban government and was in the early days of Hamid Karzai's mandate. I took time from my political meetings with Karzai and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to visit a humanitarian project run by CARE in the city of Kabul.

During my brief visit, I met with dozens of burka-wearing widows, just a few of the 10,000 that CARE was helping to feed in the city. I will never forget the woman who asked me, through an interpreter, to thank Canadians for enabling herself and her six children to survive.

I learned that Canada, through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), was the only Western country to have stayed active in Afghanistan during the years of Taliban domination, and that we were recognized for our humanitarian and development efforts there. Though small, our program made a huge difference in people's lives.

In May 2007 I returned with Dr. Janice Stein, Director of the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University

of Toronto and a fellow director of CARE Canada. While weather conditions thwarted our planned visit to Kandahar, we spent several intense days in and around Kabul meeting with staff of CARE, with Canadian representatives, including Ambassador Arif Lalani, ministers of the Karzai government, and US General Dan McNeil, who heads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, and with many representatives of the NGO community. Most importantly, we met with Afghans themselves, some who worked with NGOs, some who were recipients of humanitarian and development assistance, and some who were elected members of the Afghan Parliament.

We were alternately encouraged by and despairing of what we witnessed and heard. There is progress by some measures, but progress that is threatened by the security situation, by corruption and by the difficulty of convincing Afghans that they should trust the determination of their foreign liberators to see their task through to the end.

The promise of 2002 has thus far largely been unrealized in the establishment of a true system of rule of law and the creation of sustainable Afghan institutions. Police lack

adequate training and equipment and are frequently corrupt. Detention facilities are disorganized and inadequate. Courts to try those accused of criminal activity are scarce as are trained judges to preside over them. The poppy trade proliferates. And most important, the attention of Western governments that was so focused at the time of my visit in 2002 and in the period following has been largely dissipated by the folly of Iraq. Thus recent progress is difficult to measure. One frequently hears the complaint that at least the Soviets had built infrastructure when they were occupying the country.

In this challenging environment, CARE has close to 800 workers (mainly Afghan nationals) on the ground endeavouring to deliver development assistance to Afghans. The Aga Khan Foundation has about 1,500, and many other NGOs are present as well.

Our arrival in Kabul was very unlike my last trip, when I made a corkscrew landing in a Canadian Forces Hercules aircraft onto the badly damaged landing field at Kabul airport, which was littered with inoperable aircraft. This time, we arrived on a commercial aircraft from Delhi, landing at a somewhat rebuilt terminal building where we were ushered into a VIP lounge — something that most certainly did not exist in 2002.

It was quickly evident that there had been huge changes for the better since 2002. The Kabul I remembered had been desolate and destroyed by war. Now, most of the main streets in Kabul are paved, there are shops and hotels (including the Serena — an excellent hotel owned by the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development where we stayed) and restaurants.

Women in full burka are now the exception, whereas in 2002, all women wore them.

What is unchanged is that security is the major issue, including for NGOs. While I did not enjoy the protection of a large band of JTF2 (Joint Task Force 2) soldiers on this trip as I had in 2002, Janice and I were made to understand that security was a total preoccupation. We were not to walk outside our hotel without security accompanying us and we were issued cellphones and walkie-talkies, which we were instructed to keep with us at all times.

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It did not take long to understand the essential dilemma facing both NGOs and military forces in Afghanistan. Without an acceptable level of security, development is very difficult to bring about. However, unless there is some sign of development progressing, the sympathetic support of the Afghan civilian population is difficult to maintain. In addition, NATO operations that have resulted in civilian casualties have seri-

ously eroded support among Afghans who had hoped for more immediate progress on development following the downfall of the Taliban.

Regrettably, history teaches Afghans that foreigners don't have much staying power in Afghanistan. So what clear-thinking Afghan will risk being too closely identified with the "outsiders"? If they leave in due course as the Soviets and the British have done before, then the consequences for those who cooperate with ISAF or with international non-governmental organizations could be severe, to say the least.

In view of these difficult circumstances, the range of programming being implemented by CARE is surprisingly broad. Programs in housing, education, micro-credit, infrastructure and community development are delivered by a staff which we found to be very professional and highly motivated.

It was of great interest to me that the widows program that I had witnessed in 2002 was continuing to operate, but now with the added dimension of micro-credit for women. Janice Stein and I visited one of the groups of women that was part of a micro-credit cooperative. The group meets weekly in the simple home of one of the women. The women agree among themselves on how to allocate resources. Borrowers pay a monthly administrative fee of 2 percent, and repayment rates exceed 95 percent.

One of the women taking part in the project, Salma, borrowed 1,000Afs, (the equivalent of \$20) from the community savings box that is managed by the women in the group with support from CARE. With the money, she purchased a cart, and some plastic household wares and beauty products to sell in her neighbourhood market. Her two children have infirmities: her daughter, eight-year-old Mojabine,

was born blind, her son, who was born healthy, lost a leg to a landmine while collecting shrapnel to sell as scrap metal to help feed his family.

Salma is just one of the many widows and their families that CARE and WUSC has been supporting with food aid over the past 11 years. Despite the conflict, the security threats and the logistic difficulties of bringing food-

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stuffs into district number six and other localities on the outskirts of Kabul, this CIDA-funded initiative never failed to deliver.

District number six, which is where Salma lives, lies just beyond the ruins of the old Royal Palace and in the shadow of a government military base. While some Afghans in the district wish the soldiers well, others are not convinced that ulterior motives do not lie behind their presence here. What is certain is that every family has lost loved ones during the interminable decades of war. And each successive conqueror has brought with them both hope and failed promises. When we asked the women about issues that needed attention of the authorities, they immediately mentioned the orphaned children that struggle for survival. Nothing, in their view, was being done for these street orphans.

The Northern Alliance commanders now sitting in Hamid Karzai's government turned on each other once they drove the Soviets out. Caught in the middle were Kabul's inhabitants who paid a heavy price as the warlords fought for control of the city, destroying whole neighborhoods and killing countless civilians along the way. The lawlessness and insecurity was brought to an end by the

Taliban soldiers; who then became overzealous and imposed harsh conditions on all, and intolerable conditions on women.

The Taliban were replaced in 2002 by the Americans and then by ISAF — a distinction without a difference to the widows and their families who have largely been left alone by them. To hear them tell it, the

troops based on the edge of the district have brought them nothing either good or bad.

Salma's world and that of most of the burka-clad widows is light years away from the economic prosperity and opportunity slowly building a mere 30-minute drive away in the centre of Kabul where new hotels, businesses and office towers proudly welcome entrepreneurs, contractors and military personnel.

Unfortunately, the construction boom has done little to meet the lodging needs of the nearly 1 million inhabitants who have flocked to the capital following the overthrow of the Taliban. Many of these have returned from either Pakistan or Iran. Most who could afford it have rebuilt their own ramshackle dwellings in back alleys or perched little stone dwellings on the rocky outcrops and steep embankments of the hill-lines which have long enveloped the city. Little headway has been made in providing potable water, underground sewage or other facilities to the poor and lower middle class who call the city home, and electricity for most is not dependable.

At least in the capital, educated professional women have indeed been able to return to work and countless other women have received training and economic assistance to allow

them to regain some autonomy and dignity. The most visible sign of change to me was the flocks of young girls wearing white head scarves whose giggles and laughter resonate on the streets in the morning and afternoons on their way to and from newly opened schools.

Clearly young girls are publicly attending school in large numbers in the capital city, many of whom having emerged from underground schools which courageous Afghan women quietly conducted with community and NGO support both during the dark days of the Northern

Alliance and under the repressive Taliban regime.

CARE, which is very active in educational outreach, has exceeded its targets in educating girls and young women, but problems remain. There is a lack of textbooks and curriculum, not to mention basic supplies like blackboards, chalk and even pencils and paper. Furthermore, teachers are scarce, are in need of training and are paid by the communities in which they work, which is to say they are paid very low wages on a less than regular basis. In addition, there are reports of teachers being killed in their classrooms in front of their pupils by insurgents, although this has not happened in a CARE-sponsored school.

Human Rights Watch reports more than 200 school attacks against both boys' and girls' schools and many more newly constructed schools remain empty due to the number of threats issued against anyone seeming to be complicit in supporting the government. Thus, development and reconstruction have inadvertently brought risks to the populations sought to be assisted, as well as to the humanitarian and development workers seeking to help.

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Photo, Farouk Jiwa, CARE Canada

John Manley visits the Kabul Area Shelter Project implemented by CARE. Over 1,330 returnee families have built their homes and 2 wells have been dug.

needs, CARE and other organizations have undertaken “Community Based School Projects” in outlying provinces in the north, south, east and central regions in a total of 17 provinces. The communities themselves select the location of the schools and the teachers. CARE provides school supplies for the students, and training and curriculum to the teachers. Because they are community-led, these schools are less prone to be attacked. Furthermore, there are no flags announcing which country or what organization provided

the support and so there are no visible targets for the insurgents to use as examples.

Nonetheless, the reality is that there is no effective government authority in many parts of the country. Instances of corruption are common, and the police are often involved. Meanwhile increasing numbers of fighters are coming back to the country from Pakistan who, while they may not be Taliban, may be anti-government. Thus aid organizations need to worry that if too closely associated

with the government, they may become direct or collateral targets of the anti-government forces.

Since 2001 more than 40 aid workers have been killed and a dozen more kidnapped. CARE has had one of its workers kidnapped (and later released), had its offices burned down as a result of a nearby riot and had to withdraw operations from southern Ghazni and Paktika provinces as a result of heightened insecurity. Other organizations have faced grave situations as well, most notably the kidnapping of 23

Korean aid workers, two of whom were killed, two released and 19 who remain in captivity as I write. A pregnant German aid worker was also recently kidnapped in broad daylight in Kabul before being safely rescued by police.

Despite these challenges, our glimpses of hope repeated themselves on a daily basis. We visited a Kabul-area shelter project with the CARE project director, engineer Farid Safi. Since we were leaving downtown Kabul, we needed extra security. Here, we observed the construction of very

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basic housing units. CARE provides a small sum of money to a family to enable it to acquire the necessary materials to build a standard two-room house according to a very basic design. The labour is done by family and friends, with some supervision. The clay bricks are made on-site by hand. A few dollars can go a long way in Afghanistan.

We were also able to see other nearby projects, including some supervised by Shatikah, a woman engineer and a graduate of the engineering school at the University of Kabul. Shatikah, proud as she was to show us the storm water run-off channels being constructed under her supervision, was even more proud to tell us about her two daughters, educated at home during the Taliban years, who were now following in her footsteps and studying engineering at the University of Kabul.

Shatikah accompanied us to a mosque in which the local Community Development Council (CDC) meets. Thousands of CDCs have been established in communities throughout

Afghanistan. We witnessed men and women participating together in discussion. CDCs promote both local governance and community development.

Through the CDCs' communities have been encouraged to come together to identify their own priorities and projects which would benefit their particular community. They are then given funds, assistance and support to see those initiatives through. This initiative is all the more interesting because, with NGO support, it has been applied with success in some of the most insecure provinces — including Kandahar.

As Janice and I looked for signs of positive developments, we were frequently reminded of the rapid growth of Afghan GDP, albeit from a low starting point: GDP growth in 2005 was 14 percent to over \$7 billion. Clearly, small businesses are being established alongside some larger ones, often as suppliers. Roshan, the Afghan telecommunications company owned by a consortium led by the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development and Monaco Telecom, has been enormously successful and is employing close to 900 workers directly, 20 percent of whom are women, and creating another 14,000 indirect jobs through contractors, agents and distributors, providing mobile phone services to in excess of 750,000 subscribers across the country. The Bangladeshi Microfinance Bank and the NGO BRAC have established branches in 20 provinces and have started extending loans to small businesses through their network. In addition, CARE's teams recently visited several small enterprises where both men and women are being trained to produce ceramic prod-

ucts and dried packaged raisins, while vendors and traders on the streets of Kabul are trading in everything from ballpoint pens to toilet paper.

One of the most promising potential sources of Afghan economic growth is the large expenditure of funds by military forces and other government agencies. A Canada-based NGO called the Peace Dividend Trust (PDT) has compiled a list of over 2,000 small businesses in Afghanistan and is working with ISAF and member countries to facilitate local procurement. In

one case PDT helped link a portion of a police uniform contract with a CARE trainer's tailor shop. Nuria (not her real name) employs through her shop ten widows who graduated from a tailor training program and who were assisted with the purchase of sewing machines through CARE's

vocational training project and associated savings and lending groups.

Another successful development initiative has been the funding and creation of the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA). This donor-driven initiative (with Canada as the leading donor), overseen by the World Bank, directed by the government of Afghanistan and implemented by both NGOs (like CARE) and by private-sector partners has extended small-scale business and micro-credit loans to tens of thousands of Afghans allowing them to take control of their lives, improve their own welfare and participate in growing the local economy in their neighbourhoods. In addition, the majority of borrowers are women.

Despite these successes many ordinary Afghans are becoming disenchanted with the slow pace of change and have become frustrated by what they see as the lack of real improvement in their own lives. They have heard that billions of dollars of aid have been pledged yet many still have difficulty finding clean water, food and shelter.

Mounting insecurity, violence and a civilian casualty and death toll that is paralleling the initial days of the war are undermining hope for a more positive future. Both the insurgents and NATO itself have come under repeated criticisms for failing to stem the tide of civilian casualties. Opium and criminality have soared in the new democratic Afghanistan and it is said that some in Karzai's cabinet are more interested in retaining their own power base and regional control than in seeing the apparatus of the state take hold in their home areas.

Small wonder, then, that patience for the task in Afghanistan is wearing thin in countries like Canada and the Netherlands, where the humanitarian mission sits more comfortably on the shoulders of the population than does the military one.

What became very plain to me, however, was that there is no possible way to separate the development or humanitarian mission from the military one. There can be no meaningful progress on development without an improved security environment. This can only exist if the institutions of rule of law can be established and the government of Afghanistan can succeed in establishing a welcome presence in more regions of the country.

Whenever we asked Afghans what they thought ISAF or Canada should do, they did not hesitate to say that we must stay. Without the presence of the international forces, chaos would surely ensue.

But in looking to the future, expectations must be reasonable. Afghanistan is a deeply divided tribal society, with divisions between Sunni and Shiite Muslims further complicating the mix. It has been racked by decades of war, and it remains the third-poorest country on earth. There should be no belief that after five or even ten years of Western military

presence and aid, Afghanistan will resemble Kansas. With patience, commitment and some luck, it will resemble Afghanistan. But an Afghanistan in which people can live together in relative security. Democracy has very shallow roots and has yet to prove itself to Afghans as a viable system of government.

Institutions that are respected will not be built overnight. Police and judges will need time to be trained, and the means to pay them must be established, but a functioning economy needs security in which to grow.

Afghanistan's agricultural districts need to be reclaimed from land mines and poppy fields, so that traditional crops can once again flourish where they have in the past.

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Punishing US and European agricultural subsidies must be rolled back if Afghanistan and other developing countries are ever to hope to grow produce (other than opium) for export.

Both the reality and the perception of corruption in the Karzai administration must be rooted out. They are undermining not only the only hope for an Afghan solution but also support for the Western forces sacrificing their lives to help secure the situation.

Roads, bridges and electrification must be enhanced, so that ordinary Afghans can see progress. We love to do what we call "capacity-building", which is doubtless very important, but invisible to the average villager in an Afghan province.

For me, Afghanistan is an enormous opportunity for Canada. For the first time in many years, we have brought a level of commitment to an international problem that gives us real weight and credibility. For once, our 3Ds (defence, diplomacy and development assistance) are all pointed at the same problem, and officials from three departments are working together.

Canadians hear mainly about our military role and are hard-pressed to put it into a broader context of either peacekeeping, development or humanitarianism. They should hear more about the important and meaningful contribution our development assistance is making and they should be proud of the increasingly effective nature of

Canada's diplomacy, spearheaded at a very senior level by Associate Deputy Minister David Mulroney and Ambassador Lalani.

We often seek to define Canada's role in the world. Well, for whatever reason, we have one in Afghanistan. Let's not abandon it too easily. But let's use our hard-earned influence to make sure the job is done right.

John Manley, former deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, is now counsel in the Ottawa and Toronto offices of McCarthy Tétrault LLP. He is former Canadian co-chair of the Task Force on the Future of North America, a project of the Council on Foreign Relations, and a director of CARE Canada.



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