

Heart of darkness: Afghan Resistance against Foreign Occupation

By [Eric Walberg](#)

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Princess Patricia, a Taliban takeover. Oh the horror of it all

News from Afghanistan makes no sense. On the one hand there are up-beat stories like the recent Canadian Operation Rolling Thunder in Pashmul, Kandahar. “I started the operation on a hospital operating table and I’m ending it with everybody coming back safely. I couldn’t be happier,” beamed Major Grubb, leading the 2nd Battalion of the bizarrely named Princess Patricia’s Light Infantry Company.

The few locals still living in Pashmul, the scene of this “liberation” campaign by the kuffar Canadians, either fled by foot or cowered in their dugouts before the fighting started. Most are poor farmers. Scores of locals, the “enemy”, were killed by the brave Canucks, who, just to clinch their “success”, called on US military air support to drop several bombs, including Hellfire missiles. Several dozen “enemy” were destroyed. Only one Afghan government soldier was hurt when he accidentally shot himself in the foot. No Canadians were even injured. Major Grubb acknowledged the operation isn’t a “permanent result” because the Taliban seem to have an unlimited supply of fighters willing to battle for Pashmul.

Western readers have become numbed into accepting the code words “enemy” and “insurgents”, ignoring the underlying fact that the Taliban are still the legitimate government, that these so-called insurgents are in fact widely seen as freedom fighters battling the non-Muslim foreign occupiers — the real “enemy” — who invaded the country illegally and have killed hundreds of thousands of resistance fighters and innocent civilians illegally. Rather than “killed”, the word “murdered” might be more appropriate. For locals, the dead are “martyred”, as in Iraq and Palestine.

In a recent report which notably reflects the implicit horror of what the occupiers are doing, the Globe and Mail’s Doug Saunders describes a scene in Naray, on the northeast border with Pakistan, where 200 trigger-happy US Army soldiers huddle in tents, sheltering themselves from regular rocket attacks. He was greeted by a certain Lieutenant-Colonel Christopher Kolenda, a clean-cut, steel-eyed officer in the 173rd Airborne, who introduced him to one of the key battlefield tactics of the new American military — the two-hour PowerPoint presentation. “The heart of the matter here, as we see it, is a socio-economic dislocation,” Kolenda told him, before quoting from Sir George Scott Robertson’s 1900 manual *Kaffirs of the Hindu Kush* and explaining in detail the anthropology and tribal politics of this region, including some new research he had commissioned from American Human Terrain Specialists.

“There’s been an atomisation of society here — the elders lost control over their people, and

a new elite of fighters came in to fill the vacuum, so what we need to do out here is to re-empower the traditional leadership structures. As you approach the possibility of self-sufficient development, then you reach what I'll call the developmental asymptote, which is the point we're striving to reach." Hardly the sort of talk he had expected from an infantry brigade known for its ruthlessness. Here at the headwaters of the river, he felt he had encountered some "latter-day Colonel Kurtzes, losing themselves in Cartesian twists of logic amid all the mud and dust."

This, apparently, is the Petraeus Doctrine, a new version of the infamous "strategic hamlets" strategy of Vietnam days, with officers taking totalitarian command of the society, in hopes of replacing the Taliban with a made-in-America secular, consumer culture. A zealous US officer in Naray effused, "Our goal is to rebuild the government and society from the ground up in our model," using the Commander's Emergency Response Programme, funding so-called society-rebuilding programmes — similar to what the dozens of Western aid organisations might do if they dared venture forth from Kabul.

"We do not believe in counterinsurgency," a senior French commander, clearly recalling Vietnam and Algeria, told Saunders. "If you find yourself needing to use counterinsurgency, it means the entire population has become the subject of your war, and you either will have to stay there forever or you have lost." The Americans, unfortunately, have yet to learn this lesson. "We're trying to raise the opportunity cost of picking up a weapon or growing poppy," says Alison Blosser, a Pashto-speaking State Department official. And they are willing to wait things out, according to one official, an obvious acolyte of presidential hopeful Senator John McCain: "We're still in Germany and Japan 60 years after that war ended. That's how long it can take. I fully expect to have grandchildren who will be fighting out here."

Despite the insistence by the occupiers that they can outlast the resistance, there is a constant string of reports indicating the Taliban are continuing to increase their strength, taking control of the regional centre Ghaszani in central Afghanistan last week, though reports were quick to add that occupation forces rushed in to retake the village. There have been reports of Taliban fighters moving into several other rural districts north and east of Kabul. The Taliban is seen by many in the districts surrounding the capital as a credible alternative to the weak US-backed government.

Kabul itself is the constant scene of bombings. Sunday, a remote-controlled bomb blew up a mini-bus shuttling National Army personnel to the Ministry of Defence, killing a woman and wounding five others, including three army personnel. Three days earlier a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of international soldiers in eastern Kabul, killing three civilians.

Violence has increased around Afghanistan during the last two years, even as more international troops have poured into the country. More than 1,500 people have died in insurgency-related violence this year. Analysts estimate that this has been the bloodiest spring since the start of the insurgency and that the increasing instability is fuelling the call to deploy more troops to the region. Ninety-seven British soldiers have died in Afghanistan since 2001, most in the past two years. At current rates, the 100 mark will be passed in the coming month.

NATO officials claim that the surge in violence is related in part to the recent peace deals between the Pakistani government and the rebels in that country, which, it is argued, allow for a haven for Taliban fighters who cross the border to launch attacks in Afghanistan. The

US response to this American theory has been — yes — to start bombing Pakistan.

Any talk of “society building” must be put in the context of the situation in Helmand province, where, of the 224 schools opened in 2001-02, only 60 are now active. Teachers should get \$60 per month, but are rarely paid at all. On the other hand, the province is now the world’s biggest producer of opium, and the authorities cannot successfully eradicate it or find a substitute crop. And once the harvest is in, or if fields of poppies are destroyed by the occupiers, destitute farmers flock to the Taliban’s ranks.

The insurgency is spread not by fear alone: a weak central government and the country’s declining socioeconomic situation point to the Taliban as the only feasible force to control the situation. “The population of Afghanistan is becoming disillusioned with the government,” says Halim Kousary, of the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies in Kabul. “People in the north believe there hasn’t been enough reconstruction.”

US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen told Congress last week the US will respond by increasing troop strength. Yes, that will be sure to improve the situation: kill even more Afghan patriots, inciting their relatives to seek revenge, and drop some more bombs, terrifying and killing civilians for good measure.

Eric Walberg writes for Al-Ahram Weekly. You can reach him at www.geocities.com/walberg2002/

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About the author:

Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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