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## Afghanistan: "Open for Business"

by Michael Skinner

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### Bottom of the 4th Inning of the Great Game:

*Many of the Canadian military, police, and civilian personnel who risk their lives in Afghanistan truly believe they are fighting a just war of good against evil. But America's and Britain's claims that the unsanctioned unilateral invasion of Afghanistan, which began the [Global War on Terror](#), was justified by the terrorist attacks of 9/11 are as credible as claims the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian terrorist justified Austria-Hungary's declaration of war against Serbia to begin WWI.*

*It is time to look beyond faith in baseless beliefs to investigate facts. What interests are at stake in Afghanistan?*

When I [visited Afghanistan in 2007](#), many Afghans told me they distrust our motivations for invading and occupying their land. Many initially held some hope for positive change, but they had good reasons to be wary of Western interests. There is even more evidence today to back their fears.

Afghans know why invaders throughout history sought control of Afghan real estate. Not only does Afghanistan contain some of the richest mineral deposits in the world, but it also sits astride the shortest trade routes between China and Europe as well as between Russia

and India. In this age of globalizing free trade and an accelerating scramble for natural resources, Afghanistan sits at the epicentre of Eurasia.

And as [Zbigniew Brzezinski noted in 1997](#): “What happens with the distribution of power on the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and historical legacy.”

### **Regional Ambitions**

American military and economic strategists recognize Afghanistan is a necessary bridgehead to engage America's competitors China, Russia, and India on their home field as well as to contain and pacify potential spoilers to the expansion of free trade in Iran, Pakistan, and the volatile Central Asian states. Plans to develop Afghanistan's abundant natural resources and reopen the ancient Silk Road as a modern transportation, communications, and energy transmission network are well underway.

The first two industrial-scale development projects have proceeded beyond planning to implementation. In 2008, the Afghan government sold the concession to mine [Aynak](#), one of the largest copper deposits in the world. On 11 December 2010, the presidents of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India signed a deal to proceed with the 1,700 kilometre [TAPI pipeline](#), which will transport natural gas from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan and Pakistan to energy-hungry India. Many more mega-projects currently in the planning stages will soon be implemented.

### **The Great Game: Liberating Afghans or liberating capital?**

The industrial-scale developments now underway and other planned mega-projects hold the promise of liberating Afghans from their miserable poverty. However, Afghans recognize the Western intervention that began, in the 17th century, with the British East India Company's relentless push into Asia was primarily about liberating capital to return profits for investors. There is no evidence anything is different today.

Liberating Afghans, even if it is a genuine concern of many people in the West, is secondary to corporate profit seeking and the geopolitical interests of powerful states.

In the early 19th century, Arthur Conolly, an officer of the East India Company, called the geopolitical competition for state-backed corporate control of Eurasia the Great Game. Today, we are at the bottom of the fourth inning of this centuries-long Great Game, with no end in sight. The current score: Afghanistan has been forcibly pried open for business. What might happen in the next inning is anyone's guess, but some powerful investors are betting they will profit.

The U.S./NATO occupation of Afghanistan, now in its tenth year, has failed to institute a democratic Afghan state capable of adequately providing the basic necessities of life – food distribution, water supplies, basic sanitation, housing, energy supplies, education, healthcare, and a legitimate system of law and order.

The bottom-line is human development projects are not where either private investors or states are investing their resources. The bulk of public money, thus far, has gone into military and security spending. Of the little capital that has gone toward human

development, only a fraction reached Afghans. Most of the money returns to the originating states to pay salaries and supply costs, while corrupt Western and Afghan agents siphon off much of the rest.

It is clear the promises of liberating Afghans, particularly Afghan women, are not materializing and are unlikely to materialize in the foreseeable future. The UN reports that 96 per cent of Afghans have been negatively affected by the war. The Red Cross observes that current conditions are the worst in 30 years.

But it is equally clear that the liberation of capital is successfully proceeding. Resource and infrastructure development projects on multi-billion dollar scales are rapidly proceeding. It is evident that states and investors are beginning to invest heavily in large-scale industrial development. Whether these investments will return profits for investors is yet unsure.

It is more uncertain whether these investments will have any positive effect for most Afghans. Judging by the centuries of Western intervention in Afghanistan and the well-known effects of the “resource curse” experienced by resource rich but poor people around the world, it seems unlikely many Afghans have much to hope for.

In 2010, the U.S. State Department reported Afghanistan “has taken significant steps toward fostering a business-friendly environment for both foreign and domestic investment.” Afghanistan's new investment law allows 100 per cent foreign ownership and provides generous tax allowances to foreign investors, without providing any protection for Afghan workers or the environment.

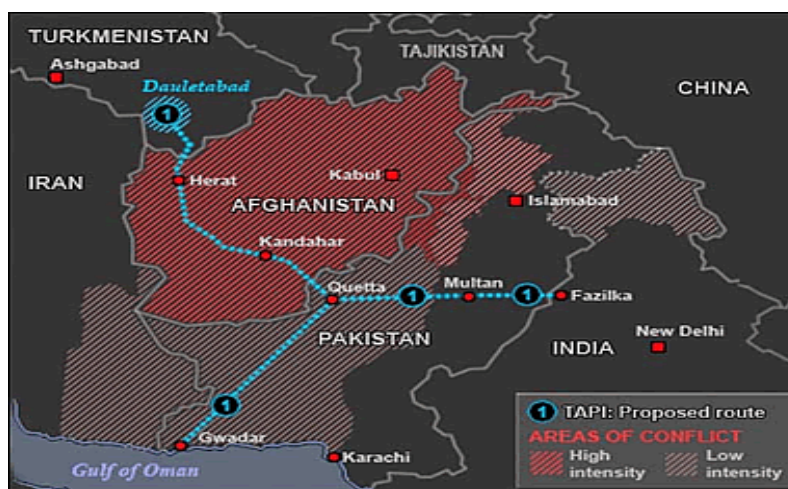
### **If nothing else, the Global War on Terror**

#### **Opened Afghanistan for Business**

Developing the Aynak copper deposit – one of the largest in the world – is the first mega-project to begin in Afghanistan, since the 1970s. Coincidentally, buildings that Soviet miners built at Aynak, in the 1970s, which those miners were forced to vacate during the war in the 1980s, later housed al-Qaeda's base in Afghanistan.

Vancouver-based Hunter-Dickinson's bid to buy the concession to mine Aynak was initially touted as the most likely to win. But, in 2008, a subsidiary of the China Metallurgical Group (CMCC) won the contract for the mining concession with a bid media reports estimated at 3 to 3.5-billion U.S. dollars. Records of the sale peg the actual investment at 4.39-billion U.S. dollars.

Chinese state enterprises are also building the massive infrastructure needed to develop the Aynak mine, including electric power generators, and a railway from China via Tajikistan, which will connect to the extensive Pakistani rail system.



The recent announcement that the long-anticipated TAPI gas pipeline will proceed indicates not the end game sought by American strategists, but the beginning of a long-term strategic process to construct a contemporary equivalent of the ancient Silk Road to reconnect the disparate regions of Eurasia.

### **Why would the U.S., the UK, and Canada sacrifice lives and resources to protect foreign investors in Afghanistan?**

Prominent media pundit Robert Caplan questions why the two parallel military operations in Afghanistan – the American-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – should protect the investment of a Chinese state enterprise at the Aynak mine. He will likely ask the same question about the TAPI gas pipeline and other mega-projects soon to come online such as the mining concession for the massive Hajigak iron deposit.

In the specific case of the Aynak copper mine, no private company was prepared to invest the massive amount of capital needed not only to develop the mine itself, but also to develop the necessary transportation, communications, and energy infrastructure. Developing Aynak requires a huge long-term investment, which will likely far exceed 10-billion U.S. dollars with no return for at least a decade – all this to produce a commodity prone to price volatility in the global markets as well as high risk from the ongoing insurgency and political uncertainty in Afghanistan.

The Canadian, American, and British mining corporations that bid on Aynak can rely on state-financed insurance schemes to insure their foreign investments, but not to insure anywhere near the capital needed for this risky project. The Chinese state-enterprise, on the other hand, could rely both on the deep reserves of the Chinese state and China's need to satisfy its own insatiable demand for copper. While it might seem ludicrous that the U.S./NATO forces are protecting a Chinese investment, it makes strategic sense for a state – the United States – whose primary explicit interest is globalizing free trade.

China is financing all the risk in the Aynak project. However, private investors from any state will potentially share the benefits of the Chinese financed transportation, communications, and energy infrastructure when developing future projects. For example, the Hajigak iron mine will require only a relatively short railway to connect to the Chinese

built mainline with its connections to global markets. Most importantly, the Chinese are dependent on the continued presence of the U.S./NATO forces in Afghanistan, as well as the training and equipping of Afghan army, air force, and police force to insure the security of their investment.

In the case of the TAPI gas pipeline, the U.S. supported this project to forestall a competing Iranian plan to build a pipeline from Turkmenistan through Iran. Both the Aynak mine and the TAPI gas pipeline are consistent with America's explicitly stated strategy of engaging China in the globalizing system of liberalization, while containing Iran in an attempt to modify its behaviour.

### **America's Globalizing Liberalization Strategy**

The American strategy is explicitly (although not necessarily clearly) stated in two Bush era documents – the U.S. National Security Strategy 2002/2006 (aka [The Bush doctrine](#)) and the [U.S. National Defense Strategy 2008](#) – both of which continue to guide the Obama administration and the foreign policies of America's closest allies including Canada.

In a chapter titled, “Ignite a New Era of Global Economic Growth through Free Markets and Free Trade,” the Bush Doctrine explains that “real freedom” is free trade. Globalizing this so-called “real freedom” whether through diplomacy, economic coercion, or warfare is the explicit strategy of the USA.

America's strategy to globally liberate capital investors is not new, nor is the more publicized feature of the Bush Doctrine – pre-emptive military action. The U.S. was globalizing free trade and regularly using pre-emptive military force as a tactic to implement its strategy throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. What is new in the Bush Doctrine is that this strategy is explicitly stated.

U.S.-led military operations are currently – in the best-case scenario – establishing a bridgehead in Central Asia to further engage China, Russia, India, and Pakistan in the globalization of free trade, while containing Iran until it might modify its behaviour. In a worst-case scenario, U.S. forces will contain any state, including China, which might deviate from globalizing free trade. American strategists outline this two-track engagement-containment policy in the 2008 U.S. National Defense Strategy.

American-led military forces in Afghanistan and throughout Asia provide the muscle to implement any range of possible tactics, which might be necessary to support this engagement-containment strategy. Even after the planned “departure” of American combat forces, large numbers of U.S. and allied forces will remain based in Afghanistan as they have after almost every American military occupation in history from the Philippines to Cuba.

Regardless of the possible range of outcomes of the liberalization via engagement-containment strategy – at one extreme, pacification of all spoilers and total trade liberalization across Eurasia, or, at the other horrific extreme, total inter-state war – the Global War on Terror generates huge profits for some businesses. Public wealth is transferred not only to businesses in the military industrial complex, but also to those in many peripheral industries such as transportation, construction, and communications.

Contrary to Canada's pacifist myth, Canadian industries are at the core of the globalizing military industrial complex. War has been good for these Canadian industries. Since 2001, Canada has risen from the seventh largest global exporter of military products to sixth with exports barely trailing those of China. In the same time, the Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries (CADSI) increased its membership from a few hundred companies to more than eight hundred, which can boast of adding more than 10-billion CDN dollars to the economy in 2010.

Spending on the Canadian Forces, the RCMP, and other Canadian police and security forces engaged in the Global War on Terror, while an expense to most taxpayers, transfers public resources to private profits.

### **The American-led Global Protection Racket**

Today, as in previous eras, the state, coalition of states, or empire that can seize the position of arbiter and protector of trade can rule as a hegemonic sovereign in the global system.

Reminiscent of Buck Henry's brilliant 1960s spoof of the Cold War, *Get Smart*, Western state leaders and opinion-shapers tell us our only choice is control versus chaos. Without an omnipotent American empire, so the story goes, our world, as we know it, will devolve into chaos.

The challenge for the U.S., as Zbigniew Brzezinski has argued since the 1990s, is that whoever controls Central Asia including Afghanistan will control Eurasia and consequently the world. The problem for the U.S. is that, other than its military power, it has no comparative advantage economically, politically, or socially over other powerful states in the competition for influence in Central Asia. A constant state of insecurity in the region is, thus, to America's advantage.

Liberalization, whether in economic, political, or social terms, is in a state of disrepute globally. Liberalization has lost its attraction. Seemingly, the only viable alternative to globalizing liberalization is coercion – force the foreigners to liberalize. However, this tactic is not working in Afghanistan.

### **Roots of Afghan Resistance – Four Innings of the Great Game**

Neoliberal theorists promise that liberating capital liberates people. However, reality demonstrates that, even in the best of liberal states, unless mitigating factors such as strong labour unions and social movements exist, liberating capital enriches and empowers stockholders with little excess left to trickle down to anyone else. Likewise, profit-seeking behaviour is proven to be environmentally destructive, unless corporations and states are constantly held to account by other social forces.

It should not be surprising then that Afghans are sceptical that imposing the neoliberal system of economic liberalization on Afghanistan will work in their favour.

Afghans of all Afghanistan's multicultural nations, even those who Westerners might judge as illiterate, have rich traditions of oral history through which they learn their own histories. Considering Afghan history, it should not be surprising, as Afghans constantly



reminded me during my visit, that they are sceptical of promises they will be liberated as a result of Western intervention.

### **The 1st Inning – 19th Century to WWI**

Throughout the 19th century the leaders of the British, Russian, and Persian (Iranian) empires redrew the borders of Afghanistan, so this fledgling multi-cultural nation-state would serve as a buffer zone between their empires. This purpose for Afghanistan as a buffer state, which was thrust upon it by competing empires would prevail throughout the first three innings of the Great Game until the collapse of the USSR left the U.S. as the sole superpower.

After losing three wars in Afghanistan, the British finally withdrew from Afghanistan after WWI to end the first inning of the Great Game. The Russian Tsar facing a popular revolution had his own domestic problems to deal with, so Russians briefly lost interest in Afghanistan as well.

### **The 2nd Inning – Development During the Early Cold War**

After a brief respite from Western intervention during the interwar period and WWII, Afghanistan was again forced into the role of a buffer state – this time separating the empires of the American “First World” and Soviet “Second World” during the Cold War.

The second inning of the Great Game was played in Afghanistan, as it was in many parts of the so-called Third World, via competing development projects rather than warfare. But the development competition between the First and Second Worlds was only marginally less destructive than warfare for many Afghans. The Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority (HAVA) project directed by the U.S. from the 1940s to the 1970s is one example of the direct destruction caused by so-called development.

Whether well-intentioned, or not, the net result of the HAVA, according to historian Nick Cullather in his 2002 article “[Damming Afghanistan](#)” was disastrous. Afghans were left with a devastated environment and on the hook to pay millions of dollars to the American construction contractor Morrison Knudsen.

Cullather reports that beginning in 1946, the salaries of Morrison Knudsen's staff cost the equivalent of Afghanistan's total exports. The Afghan government passed these costs on to agricultural producers, which offset any gains irrigation produced. “Although it pulled in millions in international funding,” Cullather notes, “the HAVA soaked up the small reserves of individual farmers and may well have reduced the total national investment in agriculture.”

Prior to the HAVA project, pastoralist wool producers had produced the primary export and greatest foreign exchange, but they were entirely displaced by the project. Moreover, rather than providing irrigation for existing farmers, many farmers were displaced from their traditional land holdings. Consequently, “the bulk of the reclaimed land was farmed by tenants of Morrison Knudsen, the government, or contractors hired by the government,” according to Cullather.

Perhaps the greatest long-term effect of the mega-dam project is the waterlogging and salinization, which led to desertification of much of the formerly productive farmland of Kandahar and Helmand. In 1949, before even the first dam was completed, salinization was evident. But demolishing half-completed dams would have been a loss of face for the Afghan government and a loss of income for Morrison Knudsen. A 1965 study Cullather cites concluded: “crop yields per acre had actually dropped since the dams were built, sharply in areas already cultivated but evident even in areas reclaimed from the desert.”

Consequently, opium poppy is one of the few viable crops that can grow in what was previously a fertile food-producing area suitable for vineyards and orchards, which fed not only Afghans, but provided substantial income from agricultural exports.

In an article the *New York Times Magazine* published in 1956 titled, “Lessons in Foreign Aid Policy,” the authors observe the burden of U.S. loans and lack of tangible results created “a dangerous strain on both the Afghan economy and the nation's morale” which “may have unwittingly and indirectly contributed to driving Afghans into Russian arms.”

By 1970, according to Cullather, agricultural yields in the HAVA area “were among the lowest in the world” and “farm incomes in the valley were below average for Afghanistan and declining.” In 1972, Afghans suffered an acute food shortage followed by a drought in 1973, which compounded the crisis.

As its signature development project to justify its participation in the Global War on Terror, the Canadian government chose to reconstruct the Dahla dam – one of the many HAVA dams originally built by Morrison Knudsen. The Canadian contractor, SNC Lavalin, is likely to be the only beneficiary of this 50-million CDN dollar boondoggle. At present, it is unclear whether SNC Lavalin will complete the reconstruction after Canadian Forces withdraw from Kandahar.

While American and Soviet development projects could at times be directly destructive, there was an even more destructive political problem. Various Afghan political leaders developed allegiances to serve their respective American or Soviet patrons as opposed to being accountable to Afghans. Consequently, and sparked by the intensifying food crisis, in 1973, Afghans violently overthrew the constitutional monarchy to create a republic, which was itself soon overthrown, in 1978, to create a state that was democratic-socialist in name only.

### **The 3rd Inning – the Anti-Socialist *Jihad* During the Late Cold War**

The PDPA (People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan) that seized power, in 1978, was as paranoiac and brutal as Stalin at his worst. The party leadership not only purged its opposition, it purged its potential Maoist allies as well as the members of a critical faction within the PDPA. Nevertheless, the PDPA government did institute (albeit, by ham-fisted and ultimately counter-productive means) some progressive socialist policies such as land redistribution, the banning of dowries for brides, and legislation protecting freedom of choice within marriages.

In March 1979, legislation instituting the universal education of Afghan girls and boys sparked a violent revolt in Herat by Islamic radicals led by a former Afghan army major Ismail Khan. During the uprising a number of visiting Soviet political advisors and their



families were killed. Steve Coll, in his research of both American and Soviet government documents for his book *Ghost Warriors*, notes that leaders of both superpowers were at a loss as to how to react.

Soviet leaders retaliated immediately by bombing Herat. However, the gradually democratizing Soviet leadership, according to Coll, were loath to further support the heavy-handed Stalinistic PDPA government in Kabul.

Then on 3 July 1979, U.S. President Jimmy Carter, acting on the advice of his security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, secretly provided military aid, via the Pakistani ISI military intelligence service, to the *mujahedeen* insurgents (*Mujahedeen* translates as warriors for Islam, but was sanitized in Western accounts as “freedom fighters”).

The conventional Western narrative of the war begins when the Soviet military later invaded Afghanistan, on 25 December 1979. The ensuing war between the allied Soviet and Afghan militaries versus American-backed *mujahedeen* insurgents was devastating for most Afghans, except for the few warlords who gained wealth and power.

The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 did not end the war. The *mujahedeen* insurgents, still backed by the U.S. among other states, continued to fight, but could not topple the PDPA government until 1992. One of seven competing *mujahedeen* factions then instituted the first Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Afghans criticize the hypocrisy of Western leaders who profess to uphold liberal social values, but, for the sake of power, supported the rise of an Afghan political regime based on religious zealotry. The *mujahedeen* began their ascent to power specifically opposed to universal education among other progressive reforms congruent with both socialist and liberal social values.

The *mujahedeen* were explicitly congratulated in the Bonn Agreement. Many of the leaders of the Islamic insurgency, including its instigator Ismail Khan, despite many credible allegations against them as war criminals, were rewarded with powerful political positions in the post 9/11 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan constructed by the U.S.-led military alliance.

#### **The 4th Inning – New World Order, American Primacy & the Empire of Capital**

With the collapse of the Soviet empire, the need to use Afghanistan as a buffer state ceased, but its geopolitical and economic importance on the Eurasian supercontinent remains. Unlike the three previous innings of the Great Game during which Afghanistan was used to contain competitors, Afghanistan is now a bridgehead to engage America's competitors China, Russia, and India. Nonetheless, it is still used to contain and pacify potential spoilers to the expansion of free trade in Iran, Pakistan, and the volatile Central Asian states. In a worst-case scenario, if the current environment deteriorated, U.S./NATO forces based in Afghanistan could be used to contain China, Russia, or India.

George Bush Sr. re-proclaimed Woodrow Wilson's dream of a New World Order as the Soviet empire collapsed. However, rather than a multilateral world order of united nations, this is a hierarchical world order in which the U.S. declares its exceptional right to unilaterally invade any state that threatens American primacy. It is a liberal world order

ruled by an American-led although not exclusively American Empire of Capital engaging in pre-emptive war as a tactic to further globalize economic liberalization.

The Aynak mine and the TAPI gas pipeline, along with dozens of other mega-projects for trade, resource extraction, and commercial infrastructure development, were envisaged decades ago. The *Silk Road Strategy Act of 1997*, which was introduced to the U.S. Congress, but failed to pass into law, is one of many documented indications that, in the 1990s, American strategists were intent on opening Afghanistan and all of Central Asia to business by re-establishing under-utilized trade routes not only for gas pipelines, but for every conceivable medium for transportation, communication, and energy transmission.

However, in Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic the U.S. had helped create, in 1992, instantly began to collapse at its inception. This was not a good environment for investors other than arms suppliers.

The seven factions of *mujahedeen* insurgents the U.S. had variously supported throughout the *jihad* against the PDPA government in Kabul turned against one another in a competition to control Afghanistan. Each faction drew support from myriad foreign sources. While one faction held power in Kabul, three others shelled the city from the surrounding hills. Eighty per cent of the city was destroyed during the next four years of civil war.

As Afghanistan descended deeper into the chaos of this civil war, the Taliban movement emerged in 1994, in Kandahar, promising to bring order guided by *Sharia* law to Afghans. In 1996, the Taliban gained control of Kabul and most of Afghanistan instituting the second Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Leaders of the first Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and two formerly warring *mujahedeen* factions retreated to the north allied as the *United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan*. Western media invented a more palatable translation of the *United Islamic Front* (UIF) – the Northern Alliance.

From 1996 to 2001, the U.S. tacitly recognized the de facto governments of both Islamic Republics, and frequently played one against the other in negotiations to among other things, proceed with the original TAPI gas pipeline proposal.

In the end, the significant difference between the two opposing regimes was not that the Taliban was a regressive and brutal regime and the UIF were benevolent. In fact, both regimes were regressive and brutal. Leaders of both regimes are alleged to have committed egregious war crimes and crimes against humanity. The significant difference was that the Taliban were less willing to bend to American demands; whereas, the UIF leaders were prepared to profit from a closer relationship with the U.S. and its closest allies.

The events of 9/11 provided the pretext to eliminate the Taliban along with al-Qaeda to begin a Global War on Terror with overt and covert military operations in every region of the world from the Philippines to Africa and Latin America.

### **The Next Inning of the Great Game – Corporate Expansion and Social Repression?**

The first Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, with Canadian help has been re-instituted as the Karzai led third Islamic Republic. Like its predecessors, it began collapsing at its

inception. For almost ten years Canadians fought to protect it. Soon the Canadian role will change from combating the Afghan resistance to training some of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers and hundreds of thousands more police who will replace U.S./NATO forces in Afghanistan as well as profitably supplying them with their weapons and equipment.

The war in Afghanistan is escalating, but we Canadians might content ourselves with the knowledge that our military and police personnel, relegated to a new training mission, will no longer be in harms way. However, there are no firm assurances that Canadian Special Forces the JTF2, and the newly created CSOR, and SOAS will not continue combat operations in Afghanistan as well as in the numerous other overt and covert battlefronts of the Global War on Terror.

Regardless, the issue of protecting Canadian Forces (CF) personnel from harm is a red-herring. CF personnel recognize their personal risk and are prepared to take that risk, if their mission is justified. The question is not whether we should protect CF personnel from harm. The question is whether any military intervention in Afghanistan is justified. Whether engaged in direct combat or only in military and police training as well as military and security equipment supply, Canada remains engaged in an illegitimate military intervention.

If Afghans had a legitimate government to govern a legitimate system of law and order, there might be some justification for providing training services as well as for providing military and security equipment even though the invasion of Afghanistan that created that government was itself illegal and unjustified. However, no such system of legitimate governance exists or is likely to exist soon in Afghanistan. We have been propping up an illegitimate government with military force for almost a decade.

With Afghanistan opening for business there are promises Afghans will reap the rewards. However, if the history of development of other states “blessed” with natural resources in the past few centuries holds true, Afghans are most likely to suffer the negative political, social, and environmental effects of the so-called “resource curse.”

Any profits that might be directed toward Afghans will likely be needed to pay Western military and security equipment suppliers who are equipping the hundreds of thousands of national security forces and rebuilding an Afghan air force that is likely to cost many hundreds of billions of dollars.

### **What Are We Training Afghans For?**

Are we training Afghan soldiers and police only to kill terrorists, or are we training them to also suppress any Afghan activists who might resist their loss of freedom or destruction of their environment during the inevitably conflictual process of economic liberalization and industrial development?

The American record, in recent decades, of training military and police who then become war criminals and human rights abusers is horrific. The former School of Americas at Fort Benning Georgia, now called WHINSEC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) is a prime example. Many of the 60,000 alumni of this training school became

prominent leaders of right-wing military coups and perpetrators of torture and repression of democratic movements throughout Latin America.

Do we think sustaining the Global War on Terror whether by direct combat, or by providing training and arms supplies, will transform the people Michael Ignatieff dismissively refers to as “barbarians” in his book *Empire Lite*?

If so, imagine if the [War of 1812](#) had never ended in North America, or that the [Fenian raids](#) (the American-based terrorist attacks on Canada between 1866 and 1871) had continued with little respite until today. I suspect Canadian society would be far different – it would probably be like the war-torn society in Afghanistan where the world powers continue to play the Great Game of geopolitics. Consider that most people of means would flee gutting the intelligentsia and middle class. Every founding and immigrant nation, backed by various foreign powers with their own agendas, would fight one another. The survivors would be those who can either fight well or remain subservient to the warriors.

This is the legacy of several centuries of economic liberalization and warfare in Afghanistan. As chaotic as it is, it presents a better environment for returning large profits on capital investment than one in which social movements, environmental movements, and labour unions might freely form to resist and mitigate if not eliminate the prime interest of corporate profit seeking. •