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En Afghanistan, guerre et reconstruction s'opposent

En ce qui concerne l'occupation de l'armée canadienne de l'Afghanistan dans le cadre de l'OTAN et cautionnée par l'ONU, plus précisément par son Conseil de sécurité fonctionnant sans l'aval de son Assemblée générale, trois positions s'affrontent soit l'appui au gouvernement canadien à la mission telle qu'elle est ou à peu près, la modification de la mission en donnant la priorité à la reconstruction telle que proposée par le Bloc québécois et enfin le retrait rapide des troupes tel qu'exigé par le NPD suivi par Québec solidaire suite à la pression de la base sur sa direction nationale. Cependant, même dans ce dernier cas, on propose plutôt soit d'autres missions soit la transformation de l'actuelle mission en mission de paix de l'ONU ce qui n'exclut pas la présence de l'armée :

NPD : Déclaration du 31 août 2006

« OTTAWA – Aujourd'hui, le chef du NPD Jack Layton a demandé le retrait des troupes canadiennes de la mission anti-insurrectionnelle dans le sud de l'Afghanistan le plus tôt possible. L'objectif est le retrait complet des troupes canadiennes d'ici février 2007. [...] "[Cette mission] est axée sur le volet anti-insurrectionnel et non pas sur le maintien de la paix." Les néo-démocrates comprennent le besoin d'envoyer des troupes au combat, ainsi que les risques que cela implique. Nous appuyons des missions appropriées. [...] »

Décision du Conseil national de Québec solidaire de septembre 2006 :

« 3. Québec solidaire appelle à une mobilisation canadienne et internationale pour exiger de l'ONU - qui partage la lourde responsabilité de l'échec de l'intervention actuelle qu'elle a appuyée et dont les objectifs ont été trahis - de prendre la direction d'une nouvelle initiative multilatérale pour permettre au peuple afghan de sortir de la crise en soutenant les forces démocratiques et grâce à une aide massive au développement social et économique.

« 5. Québec solidaire soit favorable à la participation du Canada à cette initiative multilatérale - qui doit être dotée d'une direction civile qui échappe au contrôle des appareils militaires mais qui pourrait inclure une force d'interposition pour superviser le désarmement des parties en conflit et pour maintenir la paix. »

Est-ce vraiment possible de combiner une logique de guerre avec une logique de reconstruction comme le demande le Bloc ? L'article attaché du New York Times, qui n'est pas un journal de gauche tant s'en faut, montre que ce sont là deux logiques mutuellement exclusives. La logique de guerre donne la priorité à des infrastructures facilitant la protection des troupes et la préparation des combats contre l'ennemi sans égard ou presque aux intérêts de la population civile. L'impératif quasi absolu et immédiat de protéger la vie des soldats canadiens prime sur tout autre priorité même si à moyen terme celles-ci pourraient contribuer davantage à la victoire et à la sécurité des troupes. Cet impératif va jusqu'à détourner l'argent prévu pour la reconstruction afin de s'attacher par la corruption les chefs de guerre et certains autres dirigeants locaux.

Cet impératif sécuritaire découle de la contradiction insoluble de toute invasion impérialiste soit la nécessité de risquer sa vie pour gagner versus le manque de

motivation et d'enracinement des troupes occupantes — répercuté au niveau de l'opinion publique du pays occupant une fois passée l'effet de la propagande haineuse de la peur ou de l'euphorie de la victoire facile — quelque soit leur degré de sophistication technologique. Est-ce à dire qu'une mission onusienne de casques bleus préconisée par le NPD et Québec solidaire réglerait cette contradiction ? Si cette mission se fait sans l'accord d'une des parties au conflit, par exemple les Talibans, il n'y aura pas de différence essentielle avec la mission actuelle et la même dynamique va finir par s'imposer quelque soit les motifs humanitaires ou démocratiques invoqués par une prétendue communauté internationale aussi unanime soit-elle.

S'il y a accord préalable des parties, comme cela est censé être pour une mission de paix de l'ONU, la présence éventuelle de soldats étrangers peut être utile mais ne constitue qu'un élément tout à fait accessoire à la résolution du conflit. La clef de la résolution du conflit, au moins d'un cessez-le-feu aussi boiteux soit-il, ne peut provenir que de la dynamique interne au pays même. Bien sûr, se pose la question des pressions extérieures qui, de la part de pays impérialistes sur un pays dépendant peuvent être énormes, surtout si celui-ci a déjà été ravagé par la guerre, comme l'Afghanistan, elle-même due à l'intervention passée des grandes puissances. Il appartient aux peuples des pays impérialistes de combattre non seulement toute invasion ou occupation mais aussi tout autre ingérence de type économique ou financier autre que des réparations de guerre sans condition ou de remboursement de la dette écologique et celle du pillage impérialiste sous forme, par exemple, d'annulation de la dette ou de dons inconditionnels.

Tant que les peuples des pays riches seront perméables à la propagande chauvine de peuples arriérés du tiers monde soi-disant incapables de démocratie et d'auto-développement, ils laisseront le prétendu impérialisme humanitaire voler au secours de peuples victimes de dictateurs sanguinaires ou de sectes sexistes à la Taliban sans se rendre compte que les uns et les autres ont été systématiquement soutenus pendant longtemps par ce même impérialisme. Pourquoi d'ailleurs a-t-on pendu rapidement le dictateur Saddam Hussein si ce n'est pour éviter un procès sur la guerre Iran-Iraq où la complicité étasunienne aurait été étalée au grand jour y compris pour la massacre des Kurdes ? Pourquoi les ÉU se sont-ils soudainement retournés contre le régime Taliban qu'eux, et leurs alliés pakistanais et saoudiens, avaient financé, protégé et armé si ce n'est que ce régime ne voulait pas laisser les intérêts pétroliers étasuniens et canadiens construire un pipe-line à travers l'Afghanistan à leurs conditions ?

N'ayons crainte, le peuple afghan est fort lucide à propos des Talibans comme le laisse entendre l'article du New York Times. Cependant, s'il n'a le choix qu'entre les Talibans et le gouvernement des seigneurs de la guerre soutenu par l'impérialisme, des deux maux il choisira le moindre exactement comme les peuples québécois et canadien font lors des élections !

Marc Bonhomme

New York Times, January 13, 2007

NATO'S AFGHAN STRUGGLE: BUILD, AND FIGHT TALIBAN

LES MISES EN EVIDENCE SONT DE MOI

By CARLOTTA GALL

SPERWAN GHAR, **Afghanistan** — The road that cuts through the heart of Panjwai district here tells all that is going wrong with NATO's war in Afghanistan.

To fight their way into this area and clear it of **Taliban** insurgents, NATO troops bulldozed through orchards, smashed down walls and even houses, and churned vineyards and melon fields to dust.

Reconstruction projects were planned, but never materialized. Now NATO countries are championing the thoroughfare as a \$5 million gift to local people.

Displaced and buffeted by fighting since May, the Afghans are homeless, fearful and far from being won over. They say the road was built for the troops' benefit and forced on them, at the cost of their land and livelihoods.

"We are compelled to be happy about the road," said Hajji Baran, 48, a farmer from Panjwai. "They are building the road and they are not going to stop, but in fact we are not happy about it. We have been displaced for nine months and no one has asked us how are we managing. This is a kind of cruelty.

"In fact, we are selling our wives' jewelry to support our families."

The conflict over the road is just the most apparent of the many things that Afghans, diplomats and aid workers cite in explaining why NATO's war looks uncertain in southern Afghanistan. Others include what local people see as the indiscriminate killing of civilians by NATO forces, and corruption and incompetence among local officials.

Panjwai and an adjoining district, Zhare, just west of Kandahar, the provincial capital, are considered vital because the Taliban presence there has directly threatened Kandahar, and thus all of southern Afghanistan.

Yet so far not much has gone according to plan.

There has been little coordination between the military operations and reconstruction projects, which has frustrated aid workers and diplomats almost as much as local people.

After NATO troops and United States Special Forces mounted their operation to clear the area of insurgents in September, the assistance programs were not ready. Then the troops pulled back, and the Taliban were active again within days.

"We are all scratching our heads as to why the aid has not rolled out faster," said a Western diplomat familiar with Panjwai. "It's not for a lack of resources. We are meeting basic needs, but when it comes to sustainable livelihoods and jobs, it's not happening."

NATO's struggle to secure the area inevitably hampered reconstruction and deterred the thousands of displaced villagers from returning home. Aid workers who started to venture into the area to kick-start assistance programs complained of continued insecurity and even of coming under fire from NATO forces. The result was that very little assistance arrived.

"There was a lull, and for three weeks they did nothing," said Andrew Douglas, operations manager of an agricultural development group in Afghanistan. "They were going round talking and handing out candy." He did not want his organization named because his comments were personal remarks.

It took a second military operation at the end of the year finally to expel the Taliban. Already on everyone's mind — in the government, the military, the police and among villagers — is how to stop the Taliban from infiltrating back for a new offensive in the spring, which in this southern region will come in February.

Without the support of the local people, that task will be virtually impossible, military and government officials and local elders said.

Now finally villagers are trickling home. Yet the mood is at best resigned.

"They bombed our orchards and fields and we have nothing now," said Hajji Abdul Wahab Kutaisi, 65, a farmer from Pashmul. "They made a road through my land."

His house was destroyed in the fighting and he and his extended family now live in two rented rooms in Kandahar. He said he had not received any compensation.

He was sitting with several other men on the stony ground in the Panjwai district police station waiting for permission from the military to work in his fields, close to a Canadian military checkpoint. "When we don't inform them, they shoot at us," he said. Minutes after he spoke a Canadian tank fired a round from the nearby base, shattering the calm, sunny morning.

"They did not come to bring peace for us, they came to destroy us," said Hajji Abdul Ghafar, 60, an elder on the Sperwan village council, who was waiting for permission to pass through a checkpoint to reach his house. "There are 3,000 families hoping to go back to their houses. If they lose hope, this would be very bad for the government," he warned.

"We are angry with both sides, the foreigners and the Taliban," he added. "It is impossible to talk to the Taliban," he said, shaking his head. "And the foreigners don't listen to anyone."

Sperwan Ghar, the district center of Panjwai, is a quiet, country one-street town, with small shops, two schools and a police station. For the NATO forces here, which are led by Canada, the town, at least, is a success story. By December it was peaceful, commerce had returned, the school was repaired and children were back in class.

Yet the place looks like a fortified camp, with soldiers and sandbags blocking the street, an armored vehicle parked outside the school, and guard posts on all the hills looking down into everyone's yard. The local police admit the guard posts are not popular because they violate one of the most important codes of behavior for the Pashtun: privacy and respect for their women.

Maj. Stephen Murray, the acting military commander of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, a NATO unit, defended its efforts, saying the team had spent \$100,000 in just a few weeks providing jobs for people in the cleanup.

The team members were assessing the battle damage and compensation claims with government officials, and consulting with village councils, he said. Rushing things would leave people out and only aggravate local tensions, he said.

"There are lots of challenges," Major Murray said. "We have to go step by step."

As for the new road, he said the military needed a straight road that was more easily secured. Over the past few months, Canadian troops were repeatedly ambushed on the old road, which twisted and turned through the hamlets and walled farmsteads. He is having intensive discussions with the local people to work out a fair deal for those whose land it crosses, he said.

Yet Pashmul, the village most affected by the road, remains one of the most unsettled areas of the two districts, partly because the population remains divided over whom to support, the Taliban or the foreigners.

The Afghan people will withhold their support until they can see some material assistance, said the development manager, Mr. Douglas. "The Afghans don't trust anyone," he added. "They have seen military coming in all colors before."

Corrupt and ineffective local leaders have done as much to turn people against the government and its foreign backers as have any failings in reconstruction, said Joanna Nathan of the International Crisis Group, a research group.

At the same time it is becoming clear that development assistance to an area does not lead to security in a community or district, she said. NATO has mapped where the international assistance has gone, and found that there is little connection between the amount of aid spent on an area and the level of security, she said.

Regarding the Taliban, "they are not very popular, even in the south, but they have spread," said Tom Koenigs, the head of the **United Nations** assistance mission in Afghanistan. "We have to be prepared to have these levels of conflict for some time."

But that conflict increasingly threatens to alienate NATO's local supporters. As suicide bombings have taken their toll on the troops, who took over command in southern Afghanistan from the Americans last year, the soldiers have frequently resorted to lethal force, calling in airstrikes and firing on approaching cars, often killing and wounding civilians and further worsening the public mood.

"They said we came to bring peace to this country," said Abdur Rahim, 35, an auto mechanic, as he lay in a hospital bed. He was shot in the back by British soldiers after their convoy had been hit by a suicide bomber. The soldiers shot at least eight civilians as they drove through the town.

"Why are they shooting the people?" he asked. "Is this peace?"

After suffering 13 suicide bombings in 14 days in Kandahar, some Canadian soldiers had to be repatriated because they were reacting badly to the stress, according to one diplomat in Kabul.

"The people are saying, 'If the British are scared, why did they come to our country?' " said Mullah Naqibullah, leader of one of Kandahar's largest tribes. "They should not view the people as the same as the Taliban."

Then there is the nagging feeling behind every conversation in southern Afghanistan that the Taliban cannot be beaten and that the government will have to find a way to accommodate them.

Several important elders like Mullah Naqibullah and a former Taliban commander, Mullah Abdul Salam Rocketi, advocate talking to the Taliban.

At the very least, there should be stronger protection for those Taliban commanders who want to come over to the government, said Mullah Rocketi, a member of Parliament, because at the moment few trust the government and the foreign forces not to imprison them.

The biggest test for NATO forces, together with their Afghan military and police counterparts, is to prevent the Taliban from returning. With the ordinary people still ambivalent, that job is going to be much harder.

"We need a huge effort," said the United Nations official, Mr. Koenigs. "We cannot believe it will resolve itself at the pace we have now."