



SIXTY YEARS  
FIGHTING  
GLOBAL POVERTY

# The Great Game

The reality  
of Britain's  
war in  
Afghanistan



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**War on Want was founded 60 years ago when *The Guardian* published a letter from Victor Gollancz calling for people to join him in an urgent campaign against world poverty and militarism. At that time Britain was fighting an unwinnable war in Asia – the Korean War – and Gollancz asked all who agreed with his call for a negotiated end to that war to send him a postcard marked with the single word ‘yes’. Within a month 10,000 people had responded, and War on Want was born.**

Today the UK is mired in another unwinnable war in Asia, this time in Afghanistan. As the US-led occupation enters its 10th year, casualties have risen among Afghan civilians and NATO forces alike, making the last 12 months the bloodiest of the conflict to date. The intensified militarisation of Afghanistan over recent months has led not to more security but to greater insecurity, both in Afghanistan itself and increasingly in neighbouring Pakistan as well. Coalition commanders are now openly voicing their doubts as to the future.

While the Afghan people pay the highest price for the continuing foreign occupation, not everyone has been made poorer by the war. Private military and security companies – many of them British – have profited greatly from new coalition contracts, while the privatisation of key sectors of the economy is designed primarily to benefit multinational investors rather than the Afghan people. Aided by the World Bank and other donors, this ideologically driven strategy threatens to

set back development prospects still further in one of the poorest countries in the world.

In publishing this report, War on Want seeks to open a new debate on the occupation of Afghanistan. All three major political parties in the UK favour keeping British forces in Afghanistan until 2015, and maintaining a strategic presence in the country for years after that. Yet it is becoming increasingly clear that the US and UK military presence is a central part of the problem in Afghanistan, not the solution. War on Want calls on the UK government to withdraw British troops from Afghanistan immediately, and to support a political solution under UN auspices based on the Afghan people’s self-determination, security and human rights.

The future of Afghanistan must not be determined by the self-interest of the USA, UK and other occupying powers. We owe it to the Afghan people to stand up for their rights and to end the occupation of their country, so that the process of reconstruction can at last begin. Just as with Korea 60 years ago, War on Want is calling for an immediate negotiated settlement to the war in Afghanistan. We invite all those who believe in human dignity and justice to join us in this call.



**John Hilary**  
**Executive Director**  
**War on Want**

# Crisis in Afghanistan

02

The Great Game The reality of Britain's war in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the UK government's "most important" foreign policy and national security issue, according to Prime Minister David Cameron.<sup>1</sup> The current war in Afghanistan has now entered its 10th year, longer than both the First World War and Second World War combined. According to the latest timetable for withdrawal, British combat forces could still remain in the country for a further four years.<sup>2</sup> Over 1,450 US service personnel and 350 British personnel have been killed in Afghanistan to date. The most recent year, 2010, was the bloodiest for foreign troops, with 711 killed compared with 521 during 2009.<sup>3</sup>

Afghanistan has borne the brunt of decades of foreign intervention and conflict, and as a result is now one of the poorest countries in the world. For ordinary Afghans, the situation resulting from the war is terrible. Thousands of civilians have been killed and injured since 2001, human rights are deteriorating and millions of Afghans rely on food aid to avoid starvation.<sup>4</sup> The impact of military intervention can be seen in figures from the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, which reveal that one in four of all refugees the agency deals with worldwide comes from Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

The Afghan government remains mired in corruption and unwilling or unable to satisfy people's basic needs. Meanwhile, the USA and Britain are turning Afghanistan into one of the most militarised countries in the world, while privatising the economy and outsourcing warfare to private armies and militias. The combined effect of these actions is to undermine any development prospects for the next generation.

The USA has spent over \$223 billion on the war since 2001, while Britain has spent over

£11 billion.<sup>6</sup> At a time of economic crisis, with massive cuts being planned across the public sector in the UK, more and more people are questioning why NATO member countries are spending such sums fighting an unwinnable war in Afghanistan, and what they hope to achieve.

**74%** of British people support a withdrawal of British troops either 'soon' or 'immediately'.<sup>7</sup>

**53%** of Americans say the war is 'not worth fighting'.<sup>8</sup>

**70%** of Afghans in the south of the country, where the majority of NATO troops are based, say military actions in their area were bad for the Afghan people, and 74% believe it is wrong to work with foreign forces.<sup>9</sup>

## A decade of war

The current phase of US and British military operations in Afghanistan began in October 2001, when US-led forces destroyed al-Qaida bases in the country and removed the Taliban from power. There are at present two military operations ongoing in Afghanistan:

- **Operation Enduring Freedom**, a US operation in the east and south of Afghanistan along the Pakistan border; and
- **International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)**, a NATO-led operation to which the USA and Britain are the largest troop contributors. There are currently around 135,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup>

In May 2006 British forces, acting as part of ISAF, were deployed to the southern province

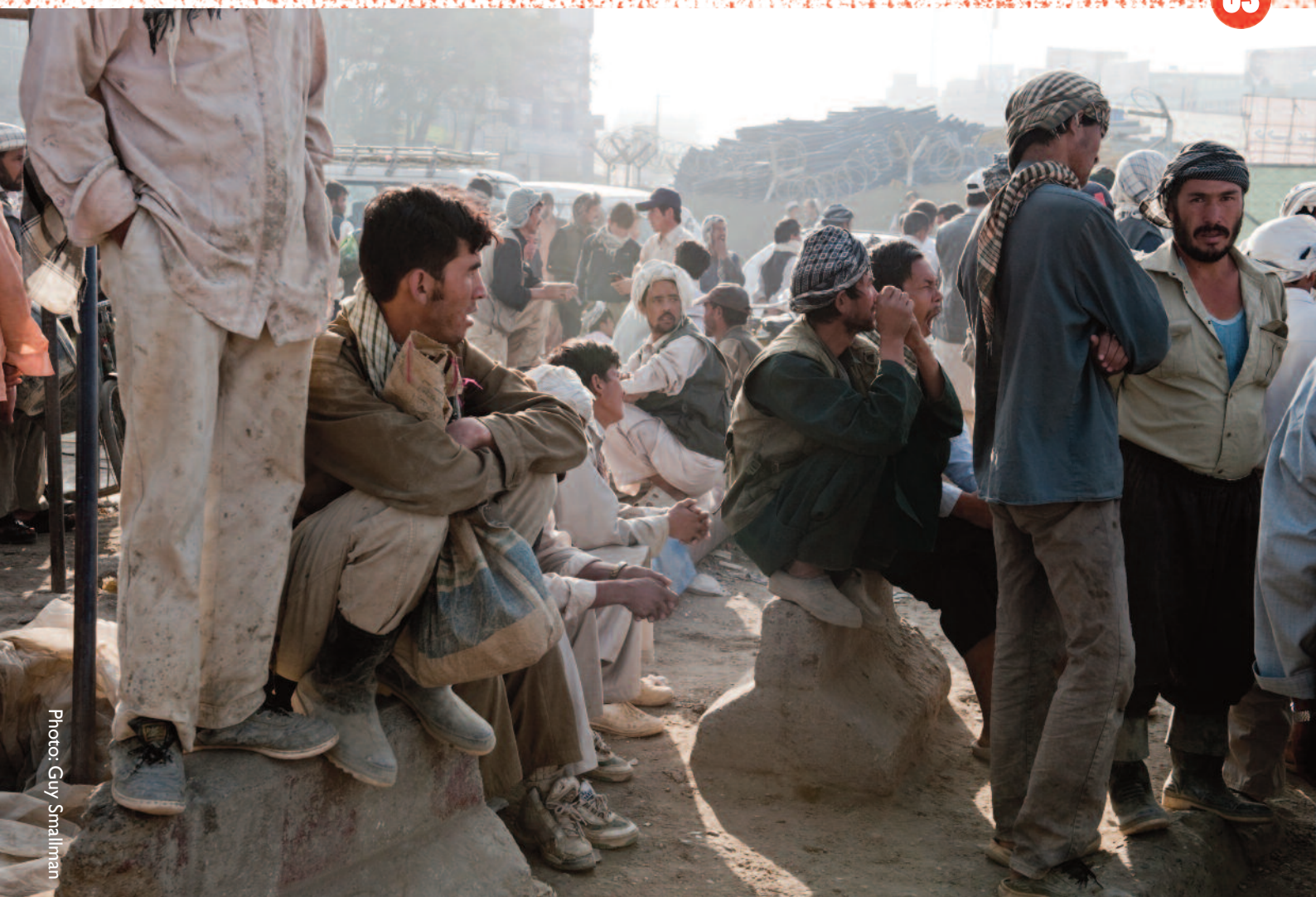


Photo: Guy Smallman

of Helmand, a mainly desert region bordering Pakistan. Since then the war has steadily escalated. There are currently around 10,000 British troops in Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup>

Soon after the British deployment to Helmand, in summer 2006, there was a major escalation in the conflict. The following year witnessed a further deterioration in the security situation, and by 2008 nearly half the country was effectively a no-go area for the international aid community. One academic paper by two members of the UN mission in Afghanistan, UNAMA, notes that ISAF's military operations since 2001 have "pushed" anti-government elements "towards active insurgency".<sup>12</sup> During the four years of 2001-05, evidence suggests that the Afghan population largely supported the government.

In 2006-07 public opinion began to shift in favour of anti-government elements in unstable areas, and by late 2008 the population was voluntarily providing support to anti-government forces.<sup>13</sup>

These forces comprise a variety of groups, not just the Taliban. The major groups are the Quetta Shura Taliban (based in Quetta, Pakistan); the Haqqani Network, named after Jalaluddin Haqqani, a leading warlord; and the Hezb-e-Islami, led by another veteran warlord, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. US intelligence describes the different forces as "localised", with nearly all groups not so much religiously motivated as vying for control of territory, mineral wealth and smuggling routes.<sup>14</sup>

A confidential August 2009 report by US General Stanley McChrystal, at that time the overall military commander in Afghanistan, stated that “the overall situation is deteriorating” and that NATO faced a “resilient and growing insurgency”.<sup>15</sup> Attacks using improvised explosive devices (IEDs, or roadside bombs) have increased from 308 in 2004 to 7,155 in 2009.<sup>16</sup> From July to September 2010 attacks on coalition forces were up 59% compared with the same period the previous year.<sup>17</sup>

The Taliban now has ‘shadow governors’ in 33 out of 34 Afghan provinces, and a permanent presence in 80% of the country.<sup>18</sup> The NGO Safety Office, which advises organisations working in Afghanistan, describes the Taliban as “a movement anticipating authority and one which has already obtained a complex momentum that NATO will be incapable of reversing”.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, ISAF’s Director of Intelligence notes that “the Afghan insurgency can sustain itself indefinitely” since small arms are available throughout the region and IEDs are easily made.<sup>20</sup>

### Map of Afghanistan provinces and neighbouring countries





In order to justify the cost in human life and resources expended in Afghanistan, British government officials have repeatedly said they are fighting the war for reasons of UK national security and to prevent terrorist attacks in the UK.<sup>21</sup> Officials have also claimed that the war is to advance development and to improve human rights, especially women's rights.

Yet British government ministers and military leaders have also given other reasons for fighting in Afghanistan, many of which have gone largely unreported in the media. General Sir Richard Dannatt, then Chief of the General Staff, said in a speech in 2007 that Britain "is well into a new and deadly Great Game in Afghanistan – only this time with a different adversary".<sup>22</sup> The Great Game is a term used for the strategic wars that took place in the 19th century between the British Empire and Russian Empire over control of Central Asia, when Afghanistan was used as a buffer state through which to protect British interests in India.

Today Afghanistan continues to be a chessboard across which global and regional powers attempt to expand their control over the resource-rich Middle East and Central Asia. The USA considers Afghanistan of critical geopolitical importance for its long-term interests in Central and South Asia, as well as for the country's significance as a neighbour of Iran.<sup>23</sup> British interests in the region are closely aligned with those of the USA: "The entire region in which Afghanistan sits is of vital strategic importance to the United Kingdom," stated the then Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth in July 2009.<sup>24</sup>

In May 2010, following a visit to Afghanistan, German President Horst Koehler noted that German military action abroad was vital to protecting its economic interests: "Military

intervention is necessary to uphold our interests, like for example free trade routes, for example to prevent regional instabilities which could have a negative impact on our chances in terms of trade, jobs and income." Koehler was forced to resign his presidency following these comments.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to its other strategic interests, the USA has long promoted a natural gas pipeline through Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup> The proposal, originally drawn up in the mid-1990s, envisages a route that would take gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. Although work on constructing the pipeline has failed to make progress due to the security situation, the governments of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India reaffirmed their commitment to the project at a signing ceremony in December 2010. US Assistant Secretary of State, Richard Boucher, confirmed in 2007 that "one of our goals is to stabilise Afghanistan... so that energy can flow to the south".<sup>27</sup>

The war in Afghanistan is also intimately related to Britain's ongoing ability to effect military intervention. UK Defence Minister Liam Fox MP has stated that a withdrawal of troops would "damage the credibility of NATO" and "would be a shot in the arm to violent jihadists everywhere, re-energising violent radical and extreme Islamism".<sup>28</sup> An additional factor in Afghanistan is the perceived need for Britain to hold its own militarily in relation to the USA. General Dannatt said in May 2009 that Britain's "military reputation and credibility, unfairly or not, have been called into question at several levels in the eyes of our most important ally as a result of some aspects of the Iraq campaign". Therefore, Dannatt continued, "Taking steps to restore this credibility will be pivotal – and Afghanistan provides an opportunity".<sup>29</sup>

# The human costs of the war

06

The Great Game The reality of Britain's war in Afghanistan

The number of civilians killed in Afghanistan in the five years from 2006 to 2010 has been conservatively estimated at over 8,000. Roughly a third of these are attributable to coalition or government forces.<sup>30</sup> Most of those killed by coalition forces have been the victims of bombing. The USA and its allies stepped up aerial attacks on Afghanistan from 2006, and in 2007 nearly 3,000 bombing sorties were flown.<sup>31</sup>

In an effort to gain public support, former NATO commander General McChrystal issued a new tactical directive in July 2009 authorising air strikes and indirect fire “under very specific conditions”.<sup>32</sup> Yet 2010 saw significant fatalities attributable to pro-government forces. One of the deadliest attacks occurred on 21 February 2010, when

at least 27 civilians were reportedly killed in a NATO air strike in southern Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission has reported that in the first 12 days of Operation Mushtarak, the major British offensive in Helmand that began in February 2010, 28 civilians were killed, including 13 children, most apparently by pro-government artillery.<sup>34</sup>

A high proportion of civilian casualties are children. According to the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, a total of 346 children were killed during 2009, including 131 from coalition air strikes, 22 from coalition night searches and 128 by anti-government elements.<sup>35</sup> UNAMA reported that the number of child deaths in the first six months of 2010 had increased by 55% over the same period in 2009.<sup>36</sup>



## Mass graves in Granai, Farah Province



Photo: Guy Smallman



## CAREFUL AND PROPORTIONATE?

British and US leaders stress that all steps are taken to minimise civilian casualties. Yet General McChrystal's confidential report of August 2009 concedes that ISAF's military strategy is causing "unnecessary collateral damage".<sup>37</sup> Leaders publicly stress that their attacks are proportionate. Yet US Lt Col David Kilcullen has stated that US aerial attacks on the Afghan-Pakistan border have killed 14 al-Qaida leaders at the expense of over 700 civilian lives.<sup>38</sup> As one interviewee from the south of Afghanistan recently told the Open Society Foundation: "If even one Taliban enters the village, then Americans bomb the entire village."<sup>39</sup>

### Poverty and development

War is one of the chief causes of poverty, destroying vital infrastructure such as schools and hospitals and putting agricultural land out of use for years to come. Afghanistan has borne the brunt of decades of foreign intervention and conflict, and as a result is one of the poorest countries in the world. Afghanistan was ranked 181 out of 182 countries on the UN's Human Development Index for 2009, and 135 out of 135 on the Human Poverty Index.<sup>40</sup> The UN Security Council notes that 25 times as many Afghans die every year from undernutrition and poverty as from violence.<sup>41</sup>

Quality of life indicators in Afghanistan are truly alarming:

- **1 in 5 children dies before the age of five, and Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world<sup>42</sup>**
- **1 in 8 Afghan women die from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth<sup>43</sup>**
- **Life expectancy is 44.6 years, the lowest in the world<sup>44</sup>**
- **73% of Afghan people have no access to safe drinking water<sup>45</sup>**

### • Over three million Afghans are refugees or internally displaced<sup>46</sup>

It is no surprise that General McChrystal's 2009 confidential report concedes: "Afghans are frustrated and weary after eight years without evidence of the progress they anticipated," or that large numbers of Afghans "do not trust [the government] to provide their essential needs such as security, justice and basic services".<sup>47</sup>

### Improvements in human rights?

The removal of the Taliban in 2001 created the conditions for improvements in human rights. Yet most reports suggest that much of the positive progress witnessed during 2001-2005 has now ended, and that human rights are again deteriorating. For many Afghans, especially those outside the capital Kabul, improvements were already slight or non-existent; vicious warlords in rural areas can be just as committed to enforcing sharia law as the Taliban. Malalai Joya, a woman MP who was expelled from the Afghan parliament, notes that the government of Hamid Karzai is "full of warlords and extremists who are brothers in creed of the Taliban", notably in the judiciary, which "is dominated by fundamentalists".<sup>48</sup>

General McChrystal's confidential report of August 2009 admitted that "a number of Afghan government officials, at all levels, are reported to be complicit" with criminal networks. Indeed:

*There are no clear lines separating insurgent groups, criminal networks (including the narcotics networks) and corrupt GIRoA [government] officials. Malign actors within GIRoA support insurgent groups directly, support criminal networks that are linked to insurgents, and support corruption that helps feed the insurgency.<sup>49</sup>*

Afghanistan is ranked 176 out of 178 countries in terms of the extent of corruption, as measured by Transparency International's corruption perceptions index.<sup>50</sup>

Human rights abusers have continued to enjoy almost complete impunity since President Karzai secured his reelection through a series of deals with former warlords implicated in war crimes during the 1990s. Afghans continue to face arbitrary detention and are frequently denied access to a lawyer, while court proceedings are often marred by corruption. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), part-funded by the British government, has come under increasing pressure from the Afghan government over its advocacy of human rights, and has been threatened with legal action.<sup>51</sup>

### Progress for women

Women's rights, which had improved following the ending of the extreme oppression of the Taliban, are also now deteriorating again. The "vast majority of Afghan women suffer a significant human rights deficit", notes a report by UNAMA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Women in virtually all areas of public life, such as civil servants, politicians and journalists, have been the subject of targeted killings or violent personal attacks by both anti- and pro-government elements or religious forces. For ordinary women, violence is "an everyday occurrence in all parts of the country", particularly rape and other forms of sexual violence.<sup>52</sup>

A major recent blow to women's rights was the passing of the Shia Personal Status Law, which gives a husband the right to withdraw basic maintenance for his wife if she refuses to obey his sexual demands.<sup>53</sup> Across the country, between 60% and 80% of all marriages are reported to be forced marriages, while women who seek to flee such marriages are often detained and prosecuted.<sup>54</sup> One prominent women's group, the Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan, has long campaigned on the basis that women's emancipation in Afghanistan is not attainable under the current occupation, or while the present corrupt government provides key positions to human rights abusers.<sup>55</sup>

**The use of remote-controlled unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or 'drones', for high-tech military surveillance, bombings and 'targeted' killings of militants has increased significantly in Afghanistan in the past two years. There have been no official reports of civilian deaths as a result of drone attacks in Afghanistan, and they tend to be used in remote and inaccessible areas.<sup>56</sup> In Pakistan, their use has caused more than 600 civilian deaths – around 10 civilian deaths for every militant killed.<sup>57</sup>**

The UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, Philip Alston, has warned the USA that its use of drones for arbitrary extrajudicial executions in Afghanistan and Pakistan may well violate international humanitarian law and international human rights law.<sup>58</sup> According to Alston, "In a situation in which there is no disclosure of who has been killed, for what reason, and whether innocent civilians have died, the legal principle of international accountability is, by definition, comprehensively violated."<sup>59</sup>

Yet the US Air Force is flying at least 20 Predator drones a day over Afghanistan. From the beginning of 2009 until early 2010, Predator and Reaper drones fired at least 184 missiles and 66 laser-guided bombs at targets in Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup>

### **Britain's drone programme**

Britain is also using drones in Afghanistan.<sup>61</sup> These were initially deployed unarmed, but are now equipped with 500lb laser-guided bombs and Hellfire missiles. As of July 2010, British Reaper drones had fired 97 missiles at targets in Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup> The RAF records that Reapers have

completed 15,000 operational hours' flying in Afghanistan over the last three years, 5,000 of which were flown in the six months up to October 2010.<sup>63</sup>

Another drone, the Hermes 450, is not owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) but is provided through a service provision contract with U-TacS, a joint venture of the French company, Thales, and the Israeli military company, Elbit Systems.<sup>64</sup> Elbit develops and supplies UAVs to the Israeli army, which has used the drones for military attacks, civilian surveillance and targeted assassinations in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>65</sup>

As of November 2009, the British had deployed 10 Hermes 450s in Afghanistan, flown remotely from Camp Bastion, Britain's main military base in the country.<sup>66</sup> These drones are unarmed, but the intelligence they collect is used for air strikes.<sup>67</sup> The previous government indicated it would double its Reaper capability and deploy new Watchkeeper drones to replace the Hermes, also to be supplied by U-TacS.<sup>68</sup> Britain is also developing its own 'sovereign' armed drones designed to fly pre-programmed missions.<sup>69</sup>

British forces are also using 'enhanced blast' or thermobaric weapons, which use combined heat and pressure to kill people over a wide area by sucking the air out of lungs and destroying internal organs.<sup>70</sup> The MoD purchased what it describes as 'blast fragmentation warhead' missiles from the USA in May 2008. Media reports suggest their use by British forces may have increased in 2009: by May 2009 Apache attack helicopters had fired over 20 of the missiles in Afghanistan.<sup>71</sup>

## 'TARGETED KILLINGS'

NATO maintains a list of people targeted for death or detention without trial called the Joint Priority Effects List, which as of late 2009 included over 2,000 names. The Afghanistan files published on Wikileaks in 2010 revealed that the list is compiled by a joint targeting working group which meets every week to consider 'Target Nomination Packets'.<sup>72</sup>

According to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, "standards for getting on the list require two verifiable human sources and substantial additional evidence".<sup>73</sup> In order for such targeted killings to be lawful, the target must be a combatant, or someone who at the time "directly participates in hostilities".<sup>74</sup> However, drug traffickers are known to have been included on the list.<sup>75</sup>

Individuals on the Joint Priority Effects List have been targeted by drones, conventional aircraft and also Special Forces. One Special Forces unit, Task Force 373, has reportedly killed civilian men, women and children and a number of Afghan police officers during its missions.<sup>76</sup> Under President Obama, the USA has stepped up its policy of 'targeted killings': in the five months up to July 2010, commando raids took "more than 130 significant insurgents out of action".<sup>77</sup>

British Special Forces have also been involved in targeted killings. The SAS was deployed to Afghanistan in May 2009 after having reportedly killed or captured hundreds of key targets in Iraq.<sup>78</sup>

### Search and seizure operations

So-called 'search and seizure operations' by NATO and/or Afghan forces are common in Afghanistan. The operations are usually conducted at night time, putting women and children at risk of abuse. UNAMA reports that in the first six months of 2010, a total of 41 civilians were killed in 13 night raids.<sup>79</sup> It recorded 98 civilian deaths as a result of such operations in 2009, stating that "concerns have ranged from allegations of ill-treatment, aggressive behaviour and cultural insensitivity, particularly towards women".<sup>80</sup> UNAMA also reports that "individuals are arrested and detained without their families being notified of their location", and that Afghans complain of "a culture of impunity" surrounding the practice.<sup>81</sup>

Witnesses have given accounts of Afghans being gun butted or kicked, sometimes while handcuffed, in violation of the Geneva Conventions.<sup>82</sup> NGOs and medical clinics have been raided by pro-government forces, also in violation of the Geneva Conventions. In April 2009, for example, ISAF forces raided a hospital in Uruzgan province after receiving information that injured Taliban fighters were receiving treatment.<sup>83</sup> In September 2009 soldiers raided a medical facility in Wardak province run by a Swedish medical NGO, allegedly tying up four employees and two family members of patients whilst a search for militants was conducted.<sup>84</sup>

### Torture prisons

Since the invasion of 2001, Afghanistan has been a key link in the network of secret prisons used by the USA for unlawful detention and torture, and Britain is intimately involved. The best known of the Afghan 'secret' prisons is within Bagram airbase, officially known as the Bagram Theater Internment Facility, or 'The Hangar'. Two other secret facilities were established near Kabul, known as the 'Dark Prison' and



Photo: Guy Smallman

the 'Salt Pit', while UN experts investigating secret detention centres were also told of three other prisons: one in the Panjshir valley, north of Kabul, and two others identified as Rissat and Rissat 2.<sup>85</sup>

Over 4,000 people have been held at Bagram; as of December 2009, a total of 757 people were still in custody there.<sup>86</sup> US lawyer Tina Foster, who is arguing several cases on behalf of Bagram detainees, says that from the beginning, "Bagram was worse than Guantanamo" and "has always been a torture chamber". Former Bagram inmates report sleep deprivation, beatings, rape and various forms of sexual humiliation.<sup>87</sup> Two Afghan detainees died at Bagram prison in 2002 after being beaten by American soldiers and hung by their arms from the ceiling of isolation cells.<sup>88</sup>

Some of Bagram's detainees have been captured by US forces abroad and 'rendered'

to Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup> The Obama administration has announced the closure of the CIA's secret prisons, but not those run by other parts of the US covert establishment – it appears that the facilities in Afghanistan are part of a continuing US programme to 'render' prisoners from various countries.<sup>90</sup> This is the likely reason for US authorities barring the courts from having access to foreign prisoners at Bagram.<sup>91</sup>

The British government is directly involved in the USA's illegal detention and torture programme. It long denied being so, and continues to remain as silent as possible on Bagram. But former Defence Secretary John Hutton admitted that British soldiers in Iraq handed over two individuals to the USA in February 2004 and that the men were then transported to Bagram airbase.<sup>92</sup> One former SAS officer has stated that "hundreds" of individuals have been detained by British forces in Afghanistan and Iraq and that they are "routinely" handed over to US forces in the knowledge that they will be tortured.<sup>93</sup>

### **British residents tortured**

A number of British residents – including Bisher Al-Rawi, Jamil El-Banna, Omar Deghayes and Binyam Mohamed – have been illegally detained in Afghanistan before being transferred to the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Deghayes and Mohamed have stated that British intelligence officers were involved in their 'rendition'.<sup>94</sup> Al-Rawi has described Guantanamo as a "holiday camp" compared to Afghanistan.<sup>95</sup> He told UN experts that at the 'Dark Prison' there were no lights or heating and that all the guards wore hoods with small eye holes, and never spoke. His cell contained only a bucket to use as a toilet, an old piece of carpet, and a rusty steel bar across the width of the cell to hang people from. Very loud music was played continuously and he was subjected to sleep deprivation for up to three days.<sup>96</sup>

# Militarising aid

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**Much of the aid that the USA and UK have provided to Afghanistan has been 'militarised'. Of the \$38.6 billion given in US aid to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2009, 56% was actually spent on 'security', mainly building up the army and police.<sup>97</sup> Although NATO portrays military operations as paving the way for the delivery of aid, many aid agencies criticise the arrival of troops for simply provoking a response from anti-government forces, creating further instability.<sup>98</sup>**

Furthermore, NATO has embarked on a strategy of often delivering aid through the military as part of its counterinsurgency strategy. Around \$1.7 billion worth of aid had been delivered by military forces by the end of 2009, and a further \$1 billion in aid was to be channelled through the US military in 2010 alone – more than the Afghan national budgets for agriculture, health and education combined. A US army manual covering operations in Afghanistan and Iraq defines aid as “a nonlethal weapon”.<sup>99</sup>

Aid in unstable regions of the country is provided through Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) – joint civilian-military operations that were established in 2002. Many PRTs see their role as providing services in exchange for intelligence-gathering and political activity against anti-government forces.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, CIA agents are believed to have used PRTs as a cover to gather field intelligence.<sup>101</sup> The UK-led PRT in Helmand province includes personnel trained in military propaganda and ‘psychological operations’.<sup>102</sup> A report by eight NGOs working in Afghanistan notes that aid is being used as a propaganda tool to “facilitate defeating the insurgents”.<sup>103</sup>

Senior UN officials in Afghanistan have also criticised NATO for militarising aid.

In February 2010, the deputy special representative of the UN Secretary General, Robert Watkins, said that UN agencies would not participate in the military's reconstruction strategy in Helmand province as part of its present military offensive there. “We are not part of that process, we do not want to be part of it ... We will not be part of that military strategy,” he said.<sup>104</sup>

Hundreds of millions of dollars of aid money has been wasted in Afghanistan or siphoned off to corporations or consultants. The then World Bank Director in Kabul, Jean Mazurelle, estimated in 2006 that 35-40% of all aid was “badly spent” and said: “There is real looting going on, mainly by private enterprises.”<sup>105</sup> It is estimated that as much as 40% of ‘aid’ to Afghanistan returns to donor countries in corporate profits and consultants' salaries.<sup>106</sup>

As of late 2009, there were more than 121,000 unregulated US private contractors working in Afghanistan, either for the US Department of Defense, State Department, USAID or other government agencies. One reason is that the Obama administration is continuing the Bush era practice of sending contractors to oversee contractors.<sup>107</sup> Even the World Bank accepts that there is a “second civil service” of externally paid consultants and advisers, many of whom are “unsupervised by the government”.<sup>108</sup>

## Privatising the economy

It is not just aid and the military that are being privatised in Afghanistan, but essentially the whole economy. The World Bank and the USA began privatising Afghanistan soon after the October 2001 invasion. The World Bank's Transitional Support Strategy (TSS) called for the establishment of a “conducive environment for the private sector – which will be the engine of Afghanistan's longer-term economic growth and poverty



Photo: Guy Smallman

reduction”.<sup>109</sup> The TSS stated that the Bank should compile a register of state assets and appoint a body to oversee the privatisation process. Public utilities could be “run on commercial principles” and there was “considerable scope for corporatising state-owned firms and private sector provision of infrastructure”.<sup>110</sup> Also envisaged was that the health sector would be “contracted out” to NGOs and “any interested private sector entity”, meaning, in effect, that it was being privatised.<sup>111</sup>

A privatisation policy was adopted in November 2005, since which time over 50 state-owned enterprises have been slated for privatisation or liquidation. This policy is being led by USAID, which openly states that its aid seeks to promote “export-oriented business development” and “trade policy liberalization”.<sup>112</sup> USAID’s ‘Land titling and economic restructuring’ project – which was implemented by the private consultancy Emerging Market Groups and ran from 2004 to 2009 – privatised 25 state-owned enterprises in the agricultural sector, transferred \$12 million in assets to the private sector and identified 1,302 state-owned land parcels for privatisation.<sup>113</sup>

In addition, USAID projects have helped to privatise three state-owned banks and the telecommunications industry. USAID is also working to “seek private investment” in order to develop the Shibirghan gas fields in northern Afghanistan, and has helped to “transfer assets to a new commercialized” Afghan Electrical Utility: Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat.<sup>114</sup>

Aid acts as the facilitator of privatisation, paving the way for companies, especially from the USA, to reshape the Afghan economy according to the needs of a handful of foreign investors intending to make large profits. One USAID-funded project – the Economic Growth and Governance Initiative – was awarded in 2009 to the US company Bearing Point/Deloitte. It intends to help the government “enhance the regulatory environment for key sectors” such as energy and mining, in order to “attract investment”. Indeed, the project aims to “encourage greater participation by the private sector into [sic] government policy formulation”. This project involves collaboration with the UK government’s Department for International Development (DFID).<sup>115</sup>

## PRIVATISING THE MINES

US geologists working with the Pentagon have reportedly discovered over \$1 trillion worth of untapped minerals in Afghanistan, including huge veins of iron, copper, cobalt and gold.<sup>116</sup> If verified, this discovery could intensify great power competition over Afghanistan in the future, and reinforce government corruption.

The World Bank helped Afghanistan's Ministry of Mines to produce a new Minerals Law in 2005, and to facilitate an international tender for the Aynak copper deposit near Kabul, one of the largest in the world. This has meant providing advice on "internationally acceptable laws, regulations, contracts and tax regimes"<sup>117</sup> – ie, few laws, low taxes – and privatising the minerals sector, since large-scale mining in the country was hitherto controlled by the government. One section of the Afghan government's Mines and Natural Resources Strategy for 2007/08 to 2012/13 is entitled: 'Delivering the mines to private sector'.<sup>118</sup>

The winner of the Aynak tender was the MCC Jiangxi consortium from China, which offered a premium of \$808 million payable in three tranches.<sup>119</sup> One US official has alleged that the Minister of Mines was given a \$30 million bribe to award the contract.<sup>120</sup> Other sources close to the deal report that the tendering process lacked transparency and ignored the legal requirements to consider rival bidders.<sup>121</sup> The World Bank itself says that: "Afghanistan needs to manage this process well, to avoid the problems associated with the 'resource curse' experienced by some other natural resource rich countries."<sup>122</sup> Given the extent of corruption in Afghanistan, there is little chance of these revenues being 'managed well' in Afghanistan.

Another USAID-funded project involves, as USAID puts it, "improvement of [the] Afghan public's awareness of the benefits of a liberal trade regime". This ideological propaganda offensive is a \$63 million trade project awarded to the US company Chemonics International in November 2009.<sup>123</sup>

The World Bank's private sector arms are also active in Afghanistan. The International Finance Corporation, which lends to private companies, has investments of \$95 million in five companies operating in Afghanistan.<sup>124</sup> One involves supporting the provision of private health services; another is a loan of \$7 million to renovate the Kabul Serena Hotel. The IFC notes

that this project will "address the lack of accommodation facilities in Kabul to meet the needs of diplomats, government workers, aid organisations, media, NGOs and potential business investors visiting the city. As such it will comprise an essential part of the city's business infrastructure by providing international standard facilities/services."<sup>125</sup> The Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, which provides risk guarantees to investing companies, has a portfolio of investment guarantees in Afghanistan of around \$80 million, mainly for MTN Group of South Africa "to provide state-of-the-art telecommunications services to clients throughout the country".<sup>126</sup>



**Afghanistan has become one of the most militarised countries on earth, with the security sector far and away the largest single element of national expenditure. In 2009, the Afghan government reported that security spending by the Defence and Interior ministries accounted for fully 47% of the country's core operating budget.<sup>127</sup>**

British policy is to build the capacity of the Afghan police and army so that they are able to provide security throughout the country. Yet policing in Afghanistan has become increasingly militarised. The Royal United Services Institute suggests that the Afghan police are “excessively armed, with Rocket Propelled Grenade anti-tank weaponry not uncommon”.<sup>128</sup>

The US police training programme has since 2005 been directed by the US military. Its Focused District Development Programme, launched in December 2007, provides police trainees with seven weeks' instruction in military tactics, weapons use, survival strategies and counterinsurgency operations – and only one week of training in basic police skills.<sup>129</sup> Cadets at the Helmand Police Training Centre are being trained not by civilians but by MoD Police and Royal Military Police.<sup>130</sup> It has also hired the private military company ArmorGroup to provide police mentors in Afghanistan.<sup>131</sup>

## **Private armies**

Alongside the US and British military in Afghanistan is a ‘shadow army’ of private military and security companies (PMSCs) operating largely outside legal or democratic control. Many of the same companies have also been operating in Iraq, also outside effective regulation.<sup>132</sup> These forces undertake a range of activities such as close protection, escorting convoys, surveillance and training, but are also alleged to be used for ‘black

## **A FEW MORE GUNS**

**Afghanistan is already awash with weapons, but Britain and the USA are helping the country acquire a few more. From 2008 until March 2010, Britain exported £32.5 million worth of arms to Afghanistan, including over 18,000 ‘assault rifles’ and over 800 machine guns.<sup>133</sup> In the years 2001-09, Afghanistan imported \$621 million (in constant 1990 dollars) worth of military equipment; \$396 million of this came from the USA, of which \$280 million worth was supplied in 2009 alone.<sup>134</sup>**

operations’, including detention and interrogation.<sup>135</sup> PMSCs often have more of an interest in promoting war than peace: one British contractor recently said that, for his firm, the more the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated, the better.<sup>136</sup>

The number of armed private security contractors working for the US Department of Defense doubled from 5,000 to more than 10,000 during 2009.<sup>137</sup> Most PMSC employees are Afghan nationals, and many are former members of militias.<sup>138</sup> One US Senate report recently concluded that Afghan warlords associated with US-funded security contractors were involved in murder, bribery and kidnapping.<sup>139</sup>

US mercenary companies such as DynCorp and Xe Services (formerly Blackwater) have received hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts for operations in Afghanistan. Xe/Blackwater, which has received tens of millions of dollars in State Department funding for personnel security, is run in part by CIA veterans, and has allegedly played a role in the US secret assassination



programme as well as in drone attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>140</sup>

In June 2010, the Obama administration awarded \$220 million in new contracts to Xe to protect CIA bases and new diplomatic premises in Afghanistan.<sup>141</sup> The company has been implicated in a number of extra-judicial shootings in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2003. In May 2009, for example, employees of a Blackwater subsidiary removed hundreds of guns from stores intended for the use of the Afghan police and allegedly used them on drunken shooting rampages that killed two Afghan civilians, leading to their arrest in the USA on murder charges. Blackwater employees opened fire in a crowded square in Baghdad in 2007, killing 17 civilians, following which its licence to operate in Iraq was withdrawn by the Iraqi government.<sup>142</sup>

Of the 39 registered PMSCs operating in Afghanistan, 10 are from Britain – more than from any country except Afghanistan itself. The UK companies are AEGIS, ArmorGroup, Blue Hackle, Control Risks Group, Edinburgh International, Global Security, IDG Security, Olive Security, PAGE Associates, and Saladin.<sup>143</sup> The Foreign Office first employed such companies in Afghanistan in April 2004. Between then and 2009 its annual spending on private security increased tenfold, and in the three years 2007-09, the UK government spent £62.8 million on PMSCs.<sup>144</sup> Almost all of the Foreign Office's money has gone to one company, ArmorGroup (which is now part of G4S), for projects involving “mobile and static security”.<sup>145</sup> ArmorGroup was the focus of a recent US Senate inquiry alleging that the company “relied on a series of warlords to provide armed men” who were engaged in murder and bribery and “threatened to attack Afghan Ministry of Defence personnel”.<sup>146</sup>



Photo: Guy Smallman

In May 2010, Britain's commander in southern Afghanistan, Major General Nick Carter, said that private security companies in Afghanistan operated in a “culture of impunity”, and admitted there was no system of registering guns or vehicles.<sup>147</sup> US and Afghan officials have admitted that PMSC mercenaries protecting NATO supply convoys in Kandahar province regularly fire wildly into villages they pass. One US Army captain said: “Especially as they go through the populated areas, they tend to squeeze the trigger first and ask questions later.”<sup>148</sup>

In August 2010, President Karzai announced that eight private security companies would be banned from Afghanistan by the end of the year, a decision which reportedly “caught Western officials by surprise” and “rattled Afghanistan's foreign community”.<sup>149</sup> However, under pressure from NATO commanders and foreign embassies, Karzai later rolled back the plan, saying that firms involved in military or diplomatic security would still be allowed to operate in Afghanistan.<sup>150</sup>

### **Working with militias**

ISAF and coalition forces have recruited, formed or armed 1,000-1,500 illegal ‘Armed Support Groups’ to perform functions such as providing security at forward operating bases and to escort convoys. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on these militia groups, which are frequently run by former military commanders who are responsible for human rights abuses or involved in illegal drugs and black market economies.<sup>151</sup>

Investigative journalist Bob Woodward claims there are 3,000 CIA-backed paramilitaries in Afghanistan, working closely with US Special

Forces on combat operations and intelligence gathering.<sup>152</sup> In Kandahar, one CIA-backed militia has been accused of murder, rape and extortion, and is said to be regarded by local people as little more than a death squad.<sup>153</sup>

US Special Forces have armed the Shinwari tribe in Nangarhar province after they rose against the local Taliban and drove anti-government forces out of a string of villages.<sup>154</sup> By January 2010, the USA was pledging to give Shinwari leaders \$1 million for development projects if they agreed to “support the American-backed government, battle insurgents and burn down the home of any Afghan who harboured Taliban guerrillas”.<sup>155</sup>

Other similar programmes have been promoted, echoing policy previously adopted in Iraq. From 2006 to 2008, the Afghan government recruited thousands of men from villages in the south of the country, forming a force known as the Afghan National Auxiliary Police.<sup>156</sup> One report suggests that, in some southern provinces, nearly one third of the trainees were never seen again after they had been given a gun, uniform and brief training.<sup>157</sup>

## **LICENCE TO KILL**

**UK companies are some of the biggest players in the private military and security industry, but remain unregulated and unaccountable. As the British government is plunged deeper into conflict in Afghanistan, national regulation is urgently needed to hold these corporate mercenaries to account.**

**The UK's coalition government has failed to respond to calls from civil society for robust regulation of PMSCs, and instead is pressing ahead with plans for a voluntary code of conduct. Yet a voluntary code of conduct would leave civilians in war zones like Afghanistan exposed to the risk of further abuses by mercenaries working for private armies, and fails to address the serious issues raised by the outsourcing of war to private companies. Legislation should be introduced to ban private armies from taking part in direct combat, and to ensure that any government department which outsources a service to a PMSC should be responsible for its conduct.**

# Take action

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**As the situation in Afghanistan deteriorates, an urgent change of UK policy in the region is needed. This report has outlined the impact of the war on the Afghan people, whose country has been devastated by decades of warfare and foreign interference.**

The last three decades have turned Afghanistan into one of the most militarised countries on earth. US and British forces are now engaged in a dirty war using aerial bombing, drone attacks, torture prisons and corporate mercenaries against the Afghan people, all of which are fuelling further insecurity and fostering human rights abuse.

Development policy is being used to pursue military goals and to privatise the country's economy, while multinational companies profit at the expense of one of the least developed countries in the world. It is imperative that aid is not used as a military weapon, but directed to the needs of the Afghan people themselves.

War on Want calls on the UK government to:

1. Withdraw British troops from Afghanistan immediately, and support a political solution under UN auspices in favour of Afghans' self-determination, security and human rights.
2. To cease aerial bombing and all uses of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
3. To cease all British involvement in the USA's illegal detention and torture programme, and to guarantee all detainees in Afghanistan access to lawyers as well as full human rights.
4. To introduce legally binding regulation for private military and security companies, in place of the present policy of voluntary codes of conduct, and ban all use of such companies in combat situations.
5. To end the policy of privatisation of the Afghan economy, and in its place to introduce an economic policy dedicated to the welfare of the Afghan people.

All readers of this report are urged to support these recommendations by writing to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at:

Rt Hon William Hague MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign  
and Commonwealth Affairs  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
King Charles Street  
London SW1A 2AH

For more information about  
War on Want's campaigns please visit  
[www.waronwant.org/campaigns](http://www.waronwant.org/campaigns)

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*Should be at least four weeks from today*

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*We'd like to keep in touch with you to tell you more. If you don't want to hear more from War on Want, just let us know*

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To the Manager Bank / Building Society .....

Address .....

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Name(s) of Account holder(s) .....

Branch Sort Code  -  -  Account No.

## Instruction to your Bank or Building Society



Please pay War on Want Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with War on Want and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s) ..... Date .....

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**War on Want**

War on Want fights poverty in developing countries in partnership and solidarity with people affected by globalisation. We campaign for human rights, especially workers' rights, and against the root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice.

Cover picture: The road between Kabul and Bagram  
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