Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada
Research Reports

The Arrow Points Up: A Track-II Perspective on Opportunities for Canada-India Security Policies in Afghanistan

By Alistair D. Edgar

Prepared for the Canada-India Policy Dialogue, April 2-3, 2008, New Delhi, India, hosted by the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada and the Center for Policy Research, India.

Introduction

I.

As described by one official in Ottawa, the arrow still points upwards in Canadian relations with India but it remains unclear exactly in what sense, or how (and how far) to advance the untapped potential in the Indo-Canadian relationship if it is to be translated into concrete expressions of policy. Is it the case that more is better – that is, should advocates of deepening the relationship pursue a quantitative approach to foreign policy by seeking more new agreements, especially involving trade, science and technology, and other economic and educational linkages? Or is it better for Ottawa to focus its efforts on moving forward with a small number of the 'high politics' issues of security and stability – a policy area that for various reasons has been contentious and divisive over the past three decades?

In practice, the quantitative approach already is taking shape with new initiatives or proposals about free trade, foreign investment, science and technology projects, agriculture, the environment and energy. Finding the synergies between these emerging areas of cooperation, and bringing greater coherence to them, also can play a role in building closer ties though mutual economic benefits, assuming that the relationship is a two-way street.

This paper identifies and explores from a Canadian and a 'Track II' perspective, some avenues for Canada-India security policy cooperation, or at least improved mutual understanding and coordination, in these countries' approaches toward fragile states in West Asia – and in particular toward Afghanistan (often included as part of South Asia). For specific and self-interested reasons, which have little or nothing to do with any altruistic concern for the welfare and human rights of the population of Afghanistan, both Ottawa and New Delhi today need a more constructive bilateral relationship. Recognizing each country's policy priorities and political contexts as well as the strengths and limitations of Track II interventions (even sympathetic ones), the goal is to complement official discussions by identifying and addressing some sensitive topics that may be difficult to bring forward in the formal bilateral intergovernmental setting, allowing for more open assessment and communication, and the capacity for changing perceptions and opening up to new options.

Some critical caveats regarding the Canadian mission in Afghanistan need to be noted at the outset. These must be recognized if we are to think carefully and objectively in Canada, instead of adopting the jingoistic and simplistic "support the troops" mentality that has been advocated recently by Chief of the Defence Staff General Rick Hillier. Being self-critical about our own early (and current) policy choices, rather than reading our motives backwards into their origins, also allows us to narrow the gap between what has been seen (and criticized in Ottawa)

as a narrowly power-oriented Indian approach to regional security and foreign policy, and a values-oriented Canadian approach. A little critical bluntness about ourselves also allows for some equally critical, but constructively intended directness in talking about Canadian views toward Indian policy – or at least, the alternative perceptions of that policy – and finding areas of convergence of interests and/or values between the two.

II. Critical caveats on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan

Canada today is engaged in South Asian security directly, with 2,500 Canadian Forces (CF) troops committed to the most active combat zone of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. Of the so-called "three Ds" in Canadian foreign policy here, the defence dimension currently – and heavily - outweighs both diplomacy and development as an instrument of the Harper government's "principled internationalism". Between 2001 and 2007 Ottawa has spent over C$6 billion on its military in Afghanistan, and just a little under $750 million on development aid for post conflict reconstruction. While 2,500 CF personnel are deployed in the combat mission, there are less than 50 civilian government employees posted to support the reconstruction and development effort. This large resource imbalance is not unique to Canada; it reflects a similar trend throughout the alliance, with US$82.5 billion reported as having gone into military spending in 2002-2007 and only US$7.3 into development aid in Afghanistan.

Thus while the recent Manley Report on Canada's mission argued that the proposed (and now approved) extension of the CF mission in Kandahar through until December 2011 was contingent on an additional 1,000 combat troops being deployed by other NATO states to support the Canadians, these extra troops are only a short-term answer to a narrow concern. Security may be a critical prerequisite but the military campaign alone cannot defeat the Taliban and achieve long-term success in stability and peace-building in Afghanistan. The window of opportunity for achieving such success has not yet closed, although after almost seven years there are few signs that US$80 billion of NATO military effort is likely to bear fruit in the near future. Instead the Taliban controls 10% of Afghanistan permanently, and has made much of the remainder too dangerous for Western aid workers to operate in unless accompanied by substantial military protection – contributing to the militarization of humanitarian aid and making such aid itself a new target for Taliban attacks. There needs to be a more clear and coherent regional strategy for addressing the sources of instability in Afghanistan, including establishing improved political and strategic relations with Pakistan and Iran; and a much higher priority being given to overcoming the initial failure to invest adequately in local development and governance programs that will make a much greater difference in the daily lives of ordinary Afghans especially outside of Kabul and its environs.

The heavily weighted focus on the military dimension of the Afghanistan mission should be no surprise. Until the September 11, 2001 attacks on American soil, the decade of civil war and then Taliban repression in Afghanistan had received little or no Western attention. Massacres and widespread human rights abuses, including the systematic repression of women's rights, did not result in significant pressure within NATO member states to intervene in order to protect the suffering population. When Ottawa joined the campaign to oust the Taliban, after the latter refused to hand over Osama bin Laden unconditionally the US, Canadian motives for participating were not simply to support their southern neighbour, or to bring freedom and human rights to the people of Afghanistan. Accusations that several 9/11 terrorists had entered the US from Canada, although proven to be incorrect, left Ottawa concerned about the continued free flow of goods across the border and the potential negative economic consequences of a political backlash. Later, as President Bush prepared his ill-considered invasion of Iraq, the Liberal government in Ottawa vacillated and finally opted not to join the

'coalition of the willing,' and then chose a reinforced military commitment in Afghanistan as a way of demonstrating its pro-US credentials to the White House and to any critics in Congress. The driver in all of these calculations was maintaining access to US markets, not promoting human rights and development in Afghanistan.

The "liberation" of Afghan women became a popular focus of Western governments and media in 2001-2, along with promoting human rights more broadly and a supporting a new democratic regime in Kabul; but the reality of those Western governments' motives in 2001 and the trail of resources devoted to Afghanistan since then tell a different story. This is not an accusation of hypocrisy or even a criticism of those motives; it is intended simply to make clear that narrow national political and economic interests at least as much as any commitment to broader values have been behind the US, ISAF and now NATO (having taken over command of ISAF in 2003) Afghan missions. The nature of these interests can vary among the participants, as well as changing over time.

A final caveat to note is that the presence of the US, Canadian and other Western militaries' in Afghanistan does not meet with broad approval by many Indian commentators. The best that might be said is that some Indian analysts wish for the success of the Canadian Forces' mission to establish security in Kandahar province, while they feel that the political savvy of the Canadians in dealing with the intricacies of local tribal politics is limited and will make such success even harder to attain. These analysts expressed strong criticism of what they saw as a Western military intervention that was of dubious legality or legitimacy, and that initially rather arrogantly sidelined or dismissed any notion of regional consultation. Hence, the receptivity to any initiatives toward collaboration with India now come under fire as being too little, and perhaps too late.

With these points made, and bearing in mind the skepticism just noted, we now can consider the ways in which Canadian and Indian interests in 2008 perhaps may converge in ways that can be put to use for both states – and for the state and people of Afghanistan.

III. Opportunities and Obstacles for Canada-India Collaboration

The Need for Collaboration

The February 2008 report on Afghanistan by the International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that there had been "a collective failure to tackle the root causes of violence," and stated that this failure reflected the lack of a common diagnosis of that was needed for security, stability and peace building. It described an "inability to agree on priorities and plans" and a pressing need to "build better Afghan capacity and accountability at central and, even more importantly, local levels" in order to achieve a stable, sustainable state. Building parallel foreign structures (including the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, with Canada being the lead in the Kandahar PRT) and the toleration of the subversion by "self-interested local elites" of critical good governance measures such as vetting candidates for government offices, create popular dissatisfaction and resentment.

A recent international NGO survey conducted among the Afghan population reported that the people placed NATO and international forces fourth in the list of greatest threats to their security – after the Taliban, warlords and criminals, but higher than drug traffickers. This does not constitute a ringing endorsement of the Western governments' (and NATO's) engagement or their choices of instruments, and it further demonstrates that the priorities of the international community – however well intentioned these may be – are not necessarily shared by the local civilian population. If both Canada and India see benefits to be gained from moving Afghanistan

away from being a fragile state, and toward it being a stable and sustainable one, then both need to look for ways to coordinate and cooperate in addressing the institution building and also the grassroots development dimensions of peace building.

The Broader Context for Bilateral Cooperation

Although the focus here is on a Canadian perspective and Canadian interests and values, both New Delhi and Ottawa do have wider political and security interests that can benefit from improved bilateral cooperation and that can be negatively affected by a relationship that either remains cool or that takes a step backwards. Canadian cooperation in the Nuclear Suppliers Group will ease the way forward for India's civilian nuclear program, and Delhi also stands to benefit from a firm and continuing Canadian commitment in Afghanistan. For its part, the Canadian government has made a relatively large military financial and personnel investment – if not yet an adequate investment of civilian economic and other resources – in the success of an Afghanistan mission that still needs far greater support and that can be hampered badly if not entirely derailed by potential circumstances over which India can have a significant positive or negative influence. In both cases – at the NSG for Canada, and in Afghanistan for India – the potential for influence also brings with it the likelihood of real costs which make calculations of interest more difficult for either party.

In the former instance, the US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (subsequently passed into legislation by the US Congress) is seen in Washington D.C. and New Delhi as a key step in recognizing India's status as a strategic partner of the United States, and a vital element in securing India's future energy needs as its economy grows. India also signed the agreement with a view to helping it offset the regional and global growth of China. However, the NSG regulations governing nuclear trade with India effectively give every member – including Canada – a veto; and it is not clear that 'official Ottawa' has overcome its historical frustration at India's development and testing of nuclear weapons. However, Ottawa may hesitate to impede the US-India agreement through a negative vote at the NSG (while Australia and France support the agreement and not coincidentally seek new deals of their own with India), and thereby unravel President Bush's much-touted accord. Doing so would earn the chagrin of Washington, open the door to agreements between India, the US and other governments that might sidestep the NSG (thus eliminating Canada's voice and eroding the NPT regime), and endanger any commercial agreements being pursued between the two countries that would provide access for Canadian firms to India's enormous and growing market – leaving those firms even further behind the competition from American and European businesses.

Opportunities in Afghanistan

Canada and India each stand to gain from any measures of success in building a more secure, stable Afghanistan. The decision of the Harper government to extend the CF mission in Kandahar through to the end of 2011 means that some concrete measure of success there has become a touchstone of the Conservatives' foreign and defence policies. In this case, although there is no expectation of (or desire for) Indian combat troops operating in support of NATO forces, there might be much greater scope for Indian engagement in the currently badly under-funded development and good governance programs. India's aid to Afghanistan currently equals that of Canada at approximately $750 million, and it has opened five new consulates around the country; road building projects in eastern Afghanistan have local protection for workers provided by Indian security forces; and Afghan National Army officers are being trained by India.

The success of India's own domestic development efforts can be seen in its burgeoning economy and in it no longer being a recipient of development assistance (previously including

CIDA support) but rather becoming itself an international aid donor. New Delhi has wide, direct experience in the design and management of rural development programs that could be useful models for Afghanistan.

For many regional observers, India also stands as a successful, stable multiparty, multi-ethnic and multi-faith secular democracy with a parliamentary and federal political system. Of course, sharing democracy as a political form does little or nothing to ensure that states also share common foreign and security (or any other) interests; but these characteristics do make India a country whose experience could be very valuable and which might be studied in relation to governance practices in Afghanistan either at the level of government-to-government exchanges or technocratic and bureaucratic knowledge and practice.

These sorts of measures of support for development and rebuilding in Afghanistan on face value should be pursued and welcomed by Canada, whether coming through the bilateral, NATO or United Nations (UNAMA) routes. It must be noted, however, that there are concerns expressed by some observers that Afghanistan is becoming another arena for India-Pakistan proxy competition – such as the new Indian consulates serving an additional intelligence gathering role, whether in support of Baluchi nationalist rebels or in promoting Indian influence across Afghan political circles. An India-friendly Afghanistan would oblige Pakistan to split its attention between opposite sides of its border and give New Delhi a new instrument of leverage in what the security hawks there see as its inescapable zero-sum strategic rivalry with Islamabad.

It may be the case that India has good and legitimate reasons for seeking greater influence here. Nonetheless, the perception of this being an Indian objective could lead to more support by Pakistani elements (militants, elements within the government, or by the government itself) both to the insurgents in Afghanistan and to Islamic militant groups attacking Indian targets within the disputed state of Kashmir. With this and its own interests regarding stabilization of Afghanistan in mind, Ottawa should week reassurances from New Delhi that its governance and development assistance initiatives there will be undertaken within a coordinated multilateral framework that can assure a neutral political-security context, or at least a context that does not exacerbate existing rivalries or create new ones.

One particular initiative – not a headline grabbing project in the Canadian media, but one with potentially important and positive consequences for a politically very sensitive issue -- on which Canada has taken a proactive position in Afghanistan is border management support. When then-Foreign Minister MacKay met with Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf, and the latter suggested he might authorize the laying of a large new minefield as a border security measure on the Pakistan-Afghan border, Canadian objections to the use of landmines (based on Canada's commitment to the Ottawa Convention signed during Lloyd Axworthy's tenure at Foreign Affairs) were met by the Pakistani president with a request that Canada instead find alternative viable programs. The result has been Canadian funding of the so-called 'Dubai process' wherein Afghan and Pakistani officers are brought together in Dubai, where they receive technical training and knowledge transfer in support of their bilateral border security management functions. This kind of lower-level, technical and functional cooperation can have immediate practical benefits, and at the same time can assist in developing improved local cross-border awareness and mutual cooperation. There is no discussion of such programs being transferred into the India-Pakistan border security context which has its own historical dynamic, but India has extensive, painfully earned experience of its own to offer such training programs for Afghans – especially in addressing counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations.

Human Security and Peace Building in Afghanistan?

There is a view in Ottawa that Canadian foreign policy in the 1990s under Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy placed too much emphasis on values and too little on interests – devoting DFAIT's attention and resources, and its political-diplomatic credibility, to promoting the human security agenda. This included advancing the negotiations for establishing the International Criminal Court, signing the Antipersonnel Landmines Ban Treaty (the 'Ottawa Convention'), fostering new concepts regarding humanitarian intervention leading to the general international acceptance of the *Responsibility to Protect* doctrine, and supporting initiatives on the control of small arms proliferation and the recruiting of child soldiers. Today the talk in Ottawa is about rebalancing considerations of interest and values, in the form of a 'principled inter-nationalism' that identifies and pays much greater attention to what are seen as Canada's key bilateral relationships – starting with the United States, but also including India. Under direction from the Harper government, DFAIT officials cannot speak in public about the human security agenda, or about the *Responsibility to Protect* except in very narrow and specific terms relating to departmental projects or to actual program initiatives. The Indian government, which opposed both the ICC and the Landmines Ban Treaty as unwelcome possible intrusions on their sovereignty and security interests, should welcome this 'rebalanced' Canadian language and policy framework. If so, it may reduce an element of friction in official diplomatic and political discourse that while not in itself decisive, nonetheless indicates some convergence – with the adjustment having been made in Ottawa rather than in New Delhi.

From a Track II perspective (Canadian or otherwise) however, there is some reason to be disappointed or at least to point out that these human security dimensions can and do have very real, practical importance in Afghanistan. De-mining programs have an obvious security component but also open up land once again for agriculture, for transportation, and even for education as children must walk in safety to school. The perceived impunity from prosecution for war crimes, and instead the rewarding of many warlords with positions of power and authority in local or national Afghan government positions, disillusions ordinary Afghans runs the risk of turning them against Hamid Karzai's government in Kabul and its Western backers. This returns us to the theme that the priorities of the Afghan population are not always compatible with those of the international community – but without the support and engagement of the local population, the security and stabilization efforts of the West will be much harder to achieve or to maintain. If both Ottawa and New Delhi can gain from a more secure and stable Afghanistan – even if their reasons and their objectives diverge – these local human security measures, benefiting the immediate needs of Afghan citizens at least as much as the lofty but abstract goals of state institution-building, must be given greater priority not just rhetorically but in terms of the allocation of real resources: money, material and personnel. Here perhaps, the values and interests of external actors and local citizens coincide, while the NGO community also can play a useful role on the ground.