

President Barack Obama & Prime Minister David Cameron and the future of Afghanistan

by Rupert Douglas-Bate, aid worker

When Mr Obama and Mr Cameron took their respective offices, they both inherited the Afghan war and therefore had no choice about Afghanistan defining their Leaderships. It was always bound to be a hard task to decide for how long the US and UK forces must engage and when they might be withdrawn. The same could be said for the Leaders of all the Coalition nations who have committed their forces to Afghanistan.

The author is an aid worker and businessman, and in my view, there are perhaps seven reasons why the international community should remain in Afghanistan with Mr Obama and Mr Cameron as key figures, underlining them.

In no particular order:-

- Women in Afghanistan often get a raw deal, being treated as objects by some but not all, Afghan men; this issue represents a fundamental human rights problem of the highest order.
- The men who carried out 9/11 are very likely hiding in Afghanistan (or Pakistan), and they need to be brought to account. There are many senior people in the commercial world who feel very strongly about this.
- Afghanistan produces 90% of the world's heroin. In Scotland alone, each year between 600 to 700 people die from hard drugs, including heroin. In Russia, there are 2.5 million people addicted and 30,000 die each year from heroin addiction. Iran has huge problems with heroin addiction. Solving the Afghan problem is a major part of a coherent international anti hard-drugs campaign.
- There are 28 million people in Afghanistan, of which 40% are unemployed, and 53% living below poverty line. Two million children live in bonded slave labour. The median age is seventeen and a half years, meaning most people are very young and very desperate. If the international community deserts them now, they will plunge even further into humanitarian chaos. Which politicians in the international community will forget the massacre at Srebrenica, when 8,000 men and boys were killed as a result of a hasty UN withdrawal? The politicians in the government that fell, as a result, have not.
- Afghanistan sits between two politically unstable nuclear powers, Iran to the west and Pakistan to the east. If Afghanistan is allowed to descend into turmoil by international desertion, it is far more likely that Islamic militants and extremists will get their hands on nuclear bombs with fateful consequences, 9/11 might have been nothing by comparison.
- Over the past 200 years, Afghanistan has been mostly at war and the mind-sets of most Afghans have therefore been in 'survival mode', leading directly to widespread corruption such as nepotism and bribery. It is noteworthy that when they were in power, the Taliban rejected and dealt with corruption swiftly, gaining in popularity as they did so. However it is now stated by many observers that the Afghan Government is so corrupt that it cannot reform itself from within, to deliver basic services and sustainable job creation programs so desperately needed. It needs to be helped by the international community towards a total 'mind-set change' before it is capable of better Governance, this could take a few years at least, but can and should be started without a moment's delay.
- Al-Qaida has an avowed intention to bomb their way to an international Muslim Caliphate, with Sharia Law replacing Democracy everywhere. Democracy, for all its faults, means different peoples can be free to be different.

My seventh reason mentions only Al-Qaida and not the Taliban. The reason for this is that the Taliban come in two basic varieties, local Afghan men who constitute about 85% of their forces and 15% who are their leaders and paymasters, mostly foreigners, often Al-Qaida, from places including Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and some say, perhaps Iran.

It's the 85% of local Afghan Taliban that the international community, led by General David Petraeus and General Nick Parker must reach out towards and convince to lay down their arms and 'win the peace'. Part of this process is to convince this Afghan Taliban group that the poverty and corruption they have suffered at the hands of wars and successive governments are our common enemies, and not each other. It is also to convince them that the international community *really does not* want them 'to switch from electricity to gas' in terms of belief system, but like many Muslim societies, *equal rights for women and children are fully in accordance with the Koran*. Finally, the mission is also to convince them that the international community wants a peaceful Central Asia, free of nuclear weapons. Integral to this *multi-threaded convincing process* is just one word, 'Honour'.

The question of 'how' to win the peace is a tough one, I came to Afghanistan to explore this question and see if my expertise in sustainable job creation, as a humanitarian aid worker and as a small businessman, was relevant.

I came out here for a month in May 2010, on my own ticket, in the belief that targeting young men and their families with sustainable job training, combined with business mentoring and rolling micro-credit are critical to successful peace building. My motive was to seek an expatriate job in this area, to allow me to further explore these ideas based on 20 years of humanitarian aid experience.

A month ago, I predicated my ideas on the semi-Shakespearean ideal: 'To fight, or not to fight, is a question of hope' or more bluntly 'the competition for hope,' in the mind of a young Afghan man, with no money to feed his mother, let alone pay for a wife. Imagining that if I had been born here in Helmand, as an accident of birth, into a Pashtun family, as a young man growing up here after thirty years of war, with zero education or job prospects, no opportunity to carve out for myself an identity as a man, except by following someone vaguely enticing radical from another country, perhaps Pakistan, Saudi Arabia or even perhaps Iran, offering me US \$10 per day to take up a gun and shoot at NATO soldiers, Afghan Government employees, or aid workers, with the promise of heavenly satisfaction if I died. Would I choose that option? Put a soldier in the same position alongside me, frame the same question and the answer from us both would be a resounding chorus of 'yes!' Every life begins with the accident of birth place.

The Times of London has reported there are about 15,000 Taliban, of which at least 85% are '10 dollar a day Taliban' meaning they fight for money. Before I came here, I felt, as I still do, that setting up sustainable job training programs in trade industries that lead to long term self-employment are absolutely 100% critical to winning the peace. I would have said then, as I do now having listened to Afghans, that these programs are in the first instance, just a bit more critical than creating infrastructure projects such as women & child clinics and schools and village wells, since these do not divert the attentions of young men away from the art of war, and in fact are most likely to be destroyed by young men. In no sense do I believe infrastructure should be denied, but it needs to be just a bit behind the sustainable job creation curve.

During the past month, several nuances of understanding have occurred to me. One of these is about what Afghans generally fear most. It is not death. It is not even losing money, though that is very painful. No, the worst thing an Afghan can lose is their Honour. Politics aside, does that sound too different from the any of the NATO military codes of conduct? I wish that in the world of humanitarian relief agencies and government agencies, we had a greater sense of this ethos. Perhaps it exists in some corners, for example the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, who valiantly work for all people, (including the Taliban) regardless of creed and politics, here there is Honour.

Another nuance I have gained, deeply attached to Honour, is the idea of 'Promises and Consents.' It is apparent from listening to Afghans that safety comes in different disguises here. Military and aid workers can drive around in armoured mastiffs, or sit behind three inches of glass in a white jeep.

Alternatively they can meet the local Mullahs, Village Elders, and Local Government, and sit with them and drink tea. After discussions about families and the weather, the conversation can gently turn to business and the military person or aid worker can ask. "What do you need?" note carefully, the question is not "What do you wish for?"

'Wishes and needs' must always be separated. Sure, I'd love a tomato red Ferrari, but if working in Helmand, it means a four wheel drive vehicle. Similarly, the local Mullahs, Village Elders must be gently pointed in the direction of needs and away from mere wishes.

Next, it's a question of prioritizing the needs with the Elders. Are they personal, or better still, *community needs* that if well answered, will 'reflect and shine back on them'? And which community needs are the most vital?

In my book, 'The Competition for Hope' I have argued that it is nearly always sustainable job creation programs that are best encouraged first, just before infrastructure, meaning identifying what job gaps exist and where, followed by identifying which young men would like to be trained to fill the gaps.

And once the young men are removed from the equation, how should infrastructure building projects, such as schools or clinics be community owned, and made sustainable? Assuming food and water and materials are freely supplied by the aid agencies, it is to be asked of the local Leaders: "Will local men provide 'sweat equity'?" (meaning free labour under a Helmand sun)? And finally, "If we all help one another to get the job done as a team, will you promise to instruct the young men to take care and not shoot anyone? And no death threat letters? Will your young men publicly promise to renounce violence as a sign of Honour? If not, though we would like to be your guests, we have plenty of other places we can find hospitality and do our work."

Invariably this sort of approach has worked many times. Roots of Peace, a Californian NGO run by the inimitable Gary Khune and the Asia Institute run by the gifted introvert eccentric Greg Mortenson, have proved it thus.

Honour. I was offered a job in a Government Ministry in Afghanistan. The deal was to help them write several programme summaries about job creation for the Kabul Conference. The young Director General of my particular Department promised the position would last up to the Kabul Conference on 20th July, after which he would re-evaluate my position.

Just over a week after I started my job at the Ministry, out of the blue, they broke their promise and said they did not want to hire me. We had been writing proposal papers for the Kabul Conference, requesting a very great deal of money, and I was responsible for editing the English, formatting and to a degree, program content changes.

It was seemingly quite coincidental, as we had just completed the papers, for which my contribution seemed necessary as they wanted to ask for a lot of money, actually US \$450 million, and do so in good English. I was in the taxi on the way home, when the Director General called me on my mobile phone and told me in a friendly tone that he no longer wanted to hire me. He simply said I did not know enough about Afghanistan, which was true from the start. When I pressed him, he simply repeated this idea.

So they managed to get that work out of me for free. As well as wasting some of my very precious job hunting time. On the other hand, it was a valuable insight into the nature and mind-set of some of the senior Afghan government, added to which I began some friendships with several middle ranking Afghan civil servants. Some of these people are heroes.

Out here in Afghanistan, various very different people explained that generally nobody trusts anyone else, as my story confirms. This is a hard-fact-of-life. Many people there have a mind-set that is often very manipulative, calculating and non-trusting by nature. Accordingly one eloquent and highly intelligent American Afghan feminist, spat out the words: "It's due to so much war and deprivation, the heart of our country has been torn out and left dying on the pavement."

Later I discovered that a close co-worker, who had also applied for a job in my section, was the son-in-law of the Minister. He got a job. Nepotism and corruption are rife in government departments, indeed everywhere. It's embedded in the culture and seen as normal. It's part of a survival instinct developed over many years, to help 'the family survive'. Over the past 200 years, the only time there has been peace here, was when the King was in charge, for 40 years. Survival is a honed instinct.

Yet it's a contorted situational ethic, today Afghans should take most jobs in Afghanistan, that's fair and indeed vital, if this country is to have any hope of regaining its direction and life. Yet a couple of my Afghan co-workers later kindly (and angrily) told me how appalled and ashamed they felt about what had happened to me. They wanted to help me keep my honour. My last words, spoken kindly, to the Director General, were a request to pass my best wishes to the Minister.

During my time in Afghanistan, I have seen many Afghan faces and never ceased to marvel at their variety and beauty. Once when sitting at lunch in the Ministry I looked around the room and saw faces that would not look out of place in England, in China, in India, North Africa, Arabia and Greece. It occurred to me as I chewed on my flat 'nan' bread, that this was a bit like America, a great melting pot of peoples created and crisscrossed over centuries, by migrations, in this cauldron of veins on the Great Silk Route, used by traders from East and West, and also by many invaders, knee deep in money and blood and adventure. It's also relevant that the rest of the world now wants to help out, to help train and develop Afghanistan to a place where the nation is able to look after itself and all of its peoples, to try and break the cycle of survival mentality; after every single invasion apart from this NATO led one, the invaders have never ever lifted a finger to help develop the economy and to help the ordinary adult and child in the street. One hopes that all Afghans will begin to appreciate this, and the price that has and is being paid.

A question that many have been asking is how can this country become self-sustaining, and how long will President Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron need to persevere in Afghanistan, before the peace is increasingly won and the troops can go home ?

My Afghan American feminist friend gave an answer, explaining that "the three basics will not go away before the country can self-manage", so, I asked her to explain what she meant, and she replied "Good Governance, Basic Services, Sustainable Jobs". In other words, meeting local people at their greatest points of need. It felt to her that these three elements were vital to winning the peace, winning over the 85% Taliban, but only if Honour was maintained in the process.

How can the peace be won by realizing these three basics ? I have always been from the school of development that says 'bottom up development' rather than 'top down.' This means we start in the villages and get them moving in the right direction and sooner or later the Government will catch up. As Mahatma Ghandi said, dressed in a dhoti, and with conviction: "There are the people, I will follow them." (And now, in a delicious comparison, General Petraeus and General Parker are gallantly attempting the same Mahatma Ghandi approach.)

Years of experience mostly at a grass roots level and many conversations with other aid workers has shown this to be true. Where the line of sight is short between the input and the output, local people become totally motivated to take responsibility and own their own situations and deliver the changes they want, in their own way, with just a little encouragement from outside.

Yet now I am inclined to think that we need both in Afghanistan; both local development in villages by aid workers and soldiers, as well as development of leadership in the Government Ministries in Kabul and provincial Government offices. At some point, the two approaches might just meet in the middle.

My short time in the Ministry, my snapshot understanding, leads me to believe that the 'butterfly thinking' I witnessed, the jumping around from one idea to the next, making project budgets by pulling numbers from thin air, *without competitive quotations for specific budget lines¹ and therefore no detailed foundational costs analyses*, does not auger well for the Kabul Conference on 20th July. Another aspect of this butterfly approach is the seeming lack of objectives and priorities based upon a clear analysis of what the Afghan population size and needs will be 5 or 10 years from now. At times, the planning process was confusing and jumpy and felt like one was 'sliding around on butter'.

Is this how Government should be done at any level? In my experience in aid work and the commercial sector, I make the observation that we not only have to count our pennies jolly carefully today, but also think ahead for tomorrow.

Then there is the corruption. A young taxi driver poured out his disgust at this venal disruption at high levels of his country's Government. One day, I ate breakfast with an Afghan American business man, who lamented the many palms in the Justice system that he had to grease, and the endless court appearances he had to make, to claim back rightful ownership of his family properties. He is exactly the young, savvy and culturally aware investor, that this country so desperately needs, yet he is frightened to invest, or do anything more than claim back what belongs to his family. The taxi driver is exactly the bright young man that this businessman might have wanted to hire one day, but for the corruption.

There is a wall of money, actually a tsunami of money, heading for Afghanistan, at the Kabul Conference on the 20th July when fifty or sixty international government donors are due to arrive in Kabul. How well will this money be spent? Just how capable is the collective honesty and 'mind-set' of the Afghan Government? Yet everyone is agreed that Afghans need to learn to govern for themselves, not easy for any population after so many years of war. Not easy when the population mind-set is therefore in *survival mode*, being manipulative and hunting for whatever scraps can be grabbed, either from under the table or from on top of it. How can the international community help them become self-governing and financially self-sustaining?

The Singapore Government comes to mind as an Asian economic success story almost beyond compare, because of the very fact that it has created a strong sense of organizational values which takes good leadership at all levels very seriously. The deal there is that Singaporean Government Officials are paid well and given Honour. But in return, there is a reliable whistle blowing system where anyone can report corruption to an Independent Commission, and their name is kept a secret. Should the allegation be found to be false, the reporter is punished, but if it is found to be true, the perpetrator is swiftly and publicly dealt with, but the reporter remains anonymous, thus retaining their private Honour.

The situation here in Afghanistan is that such the international community has a rather limp anti-corruption system. It would be doing a great service to categorically insist on a Singaporean model of anti-corruption commission, with stiffened teeth, to both threaten against corruption, as well as a good digestive system to deal with problems, meaning special courts that are honest and swift at dealing with corruption where ever it is found, without fear or favour.

In the present legal system judges can and do receive valid terrifying death threats. Back up plans, should these courts be obstructed by politicians, need to focus on using groups of judges to listen to the same case and make swift

¹ This is common practise in other development zones.

democratic decisions. Removal of aid from one dishonest section of government and giving it to another more honest section of government would also help cement a culture of 'competition for honesty'.

Otherwise much of the wall of money heading this way on July 20th, will splash into Swiss bank accounts and the taxi drivers blood will continue to boil and the Afghan American businessman and others like him will not invest here, and the Afghan American feminist shall continue her lament, and the people at grass roots will continue to be disappointed. And so on...

It would also help that just as the Afghan government is asking for money for particular items, so later on, corresponding bank statements and summary information were published in local newspapers, with textual project summaries, photographs and maps, *to show exactly how and where the money was spent*. This system need not be arduous, it is simply a matter of organization and would use relatively tiny resources, compared to the amounts invested. Further, it is exactly what frequently happens in other countries that have become most successful. Transparency means economic success, because investors trust both the systems of banking and law, in event of disruption and corruption.

How is good governance created ? Is it good management of money ? and time ? and objectives ? Or all ?

If putting the fear of God and man into Government officials is needed to make sure that money is not misappropriated, then surely *on-the-job leadership training, as part of the reason for a pay-check, or big Donor support*, will help create a better time and task management system within Government ministries. The prevailing attitude amongst the majority of Afghan government employees seemed to me that they just need to turn up, sit at a desk, shuffle some papers and take a salary. Levels of innovation and personal leadership have been severely dampened by many years of war and survival mind set. Endless clerks now sit in most ministries whiling away the time, shuffling paper from one pile to another.

A leadership that is clear thinking and has the courage to be self-critical and self-analytical seems absolutely vital, to be developed for good Governance. Leadership is needed that sees self awareness as strength, not weakness. A leadership based upon several matters, including the study of 'what has worked' in history and 'what has not', and in both cases 'why.'

In many parts of Kabul there are huge feverish classes of ladies and others of gentlemen, crammed into small hot rooms in people's homes in the evenings, learning all sorts of things, including literacy and business studies. After an educational drought of some thirty years, the people are desperate to catch up. Taking advantage of this phenomenon, perhaps for two or three whole years, the whole of government (in Kabul and Provinces) should stop for one whole day each week and take a Leadership Training Course that would include discussions and practical exercises in subjects such as, innovation, ethics and outcomes, personality examination, ego and vision studies, humility as strength, prioritization techniques, setting objectives, time management, interpersonal and team dynamics, accountability, gender studies, listening techniques and self awareness. Study, discussion and comprehension of real case histories about governments in other countries and at other times, which have both failed as well as succeeded, will impart vital new perspectives to the whole Afghan Government body. The whole thing should be tutorial based and not lecture based, it should be 50% discussions and 50% exercises, because 'by doing one becomes'.

Turning up should be mandatory and payroll linked and Certificates should also be awarded. If the intellectual levels were not stratospheric, so what ? Government does not have to be perfect, just good enough.

Those who might need literacy training can be screened at the outset and receive training that results in a special Afghan Government Literacy Certificate and then begin a Leadership Class. And for the majority, why not at least have a series of Afghan Government Leadership Certificates to be really proud of, especially accredited by one or more

prestigious international universities ? Given the hunger to learn amongst Afghans, the chances of success are very high, so it would most likely need to be followed up the next year at higher intellectual levels. And of course, since Leadership starts at the top, Ministers will attend on pain of losing big Donor support, since the big Donors will pay the salaries of international trainers, from international Leadership training institutions of high repute. I listened to one scientifically trained man, in one of the ministries, drily recounting how many of his colleagues came to work, shuffled paper from one tray to another, had a few chats and cups of tea, and then went home, wasting large amounts of time in doing not very much. Another person explained that if one asked a young Afghan what they wanted to become, mostly they would not understand the question, the answer being brutally obvious to them: 'whatever makes money'. This is a survival mentality. It does encompass the idea that 'if I did what I loved, and got better and better at it, this would tend to lead towards both happiness and making reasonable money.' Leadership training would begin to open the mind to these sorts of possibilities, to change the mind-set.

A final thought on this subject would be to run a short Leadership Training Course, check for improvements and then roll it out.

Along with the Leadership Training Course, it would probably be very helpful to have a small group of effective and proven Administrators with cross cultural experience and large corporate and civil service experience² from one or more developed countries including the UK, working full time in the Ministries, to pass on experience and skills to the Afghan government officials in a mentoring capacity. In these days of corporate and public service cuts, it is likely that unemployed but well experienced people could be found. These Administration mentors would meet at the outset to agree common standard operational procedures with the Afghan government, and within their own leadership structure, meet regularly to help counsel and advise one another. Another good idea would be to build upon the existing international efforts to train civil servants, with intensive short courses in Leadership and also in Administration, at existing Afghan university premises during vacations, thus saving money.

All of this represents a need to help the Afghan government learn and imprint an organizational culture of quality upon itself. Organizational psychology is a subject that America, amongst other countries, excels at. Case studies and academic texts have repeatedly demonstrated that organizations that succeed long term, having come from ground zero, do so because their initial leaders set out to live by a basic set of excellent core values, which set the tone for the organization for years to come and result in consistent and incredible success. America has many examples, but one example from the Middle East is a corporation called CCC, which is the largest construction company in the Arab world with offices in 31 countries. It was started by penniless refugees from the Palestine in the mid 1950's. CCC's founders decided on six basic truths, (which incidentally one of their mothers instilled into them, having proven the truths very valuable in surviving the rigours of middle eastern village life). These truths and ideals were: a) to help others without discrimination, b) never turn down a request for something needed c) anticipate people's needs rather than wait for them to come forwards, (here is the concept of Honour, once more, d) seek to identify and be the same as others e) to extend hospitality f) to be honest under all circumstances.

It is obvious that good government will generally lead to good sustainable job creation programmes. A key question I sought to find answers about was the education of young people leading to 'sustainable jobs.' What does 'a sustainable job' mean in Afghanistan ? In my book, *The Competition for Hope*, I have defined it as: "Sustainable employment is where someone gains a skill enabling them to create immediate and enduring income, wherever they are. Start-up costs are usually minimal. A sustainable job provides an essential service or product (meaning non-luxury), in response to long-term demand by citizens, in exchange for a swift monetary reward from the citizens. " Usually such jobs offer a

² Previous cross cultural experience and both corporate and civil service experience would reduce risks of failure.

non-luxury service to a large number of people in a community, which helps reduce the risks of failure in hard times. The definition of a sustainable job is not 'cut and dried', but it is worth noting there is a distinct relationship between increased sustainability and reduction of risk. These jobs are frequently found in the vocational trades and services sectors, and in Afghanistan include a variety of some sixty occupations including car mechanics, plumbing, tv repair and intensive irrigated agriculture.

Although I was at the Ministry for only a week, I learned some key facts. Traditionally in Afghanistan, 95% of all learning after secondary school has been 'on-the-job learning' or apprenticeship based and only 5% by a college or university of further education. This year, 2010, about 80,000 secondary school leavers will graduate, of whom 20,000 will go to a college or university, perhaps 40,000 might find jobs via family and neighbor connections and *20,000 will be unemployed*. By 2013, as the secondary school system ramps up with the influx of aid, there will be about 600,000 graduates per year, of which 100,000 will go on to further education. This leaves *500,000 graduates per year and every year following, in need of jobs*. There are several questions that are begged by these projections, firstly, if the international community does not step up to the plate now, and begin to find a way to create serious numbers of sustainable jobs, will these educated but unemployed graduates find their solace in Political Islam and Bin Laden, rather than Mystical Islam and their local and rather kind Mullah? Secondly, is the policy of the Government of Afghanistan (which is supported by the international community), to provide a large number of 'good enough jobs', or is it to supply a 'smaller number of high quality jobs'? If it is the former, my question is: 'How much capacity is there to physically build and the equip large numbers of training institutions, or is it wiser to follow 'the 95% route' and rally and then up-skill those small businessmen who are already making a success of their sustainable jobs, and give them secondary school graduates to train? As well as help them to make the jump into being medium sized enterprises? These employers would have to be incentivized against results, meaning payments for students who made an economic success of their apprenticeships. In either option, as always a good job market analysis is critical, to enable a clear picture of where gaps might be found in the job market.

On the plane home I sat next to a journalist who has visited Afghanistan over many years and who has made significant personal humanitarian contributions to the country. He explained that what he feared most in the Government Ministries was the 'Mafia mentality,' where money would be siphoned off by senior private individuals with the connivance of middle management, some of whom would be their relations. He felt this could easily occur after the Kabul Conference.

He also lamented the large amounts of Saudi Riyals, amounting to US \$ 900 million in May 2010 alone, which are pouring into Pakistan from Saudi Arabia, where they are then converted to US Dollars and Pakistani Rupees and sent to northern Pakistan, to supply the Pakistani Taliban leaders, to do with as they wish, in other words pay Afghan Taliban to prosecute an insurgency against the Government of Afghanistan and the Coalition. And what about motives? He explained that some Pakistanis do not want a pro-Indian government in Kabul, they fear being squeezed between a successful Afghanistan and India. And some Saudis hate the Iranians, and want them to be distracted by problems on their eastern borders. In sum, some Saudis provide the cash, some Pakistanis the people.

But surely it cannot be that all Saudis are in favour of this strategy? Surely the moderate gentlemen in the Saudi Government both respect and honour the friendships they enjoy with Westerners? and enjoy certain aspects of the culture of the West? After all, many Saudi families have second homes in Western countries.

It therefore seems vital that the international Coalition, led by the USA, makes its foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia and Pakistan ever a top priority, given that the world buys a lot of oil from Saudi Arabia. Why should any of the money spent on Saudi Arabian oil then be used to help destabilize the People and Government of Afghanistan? Isn't there a

more peaceful way to deal with Saudi and Iranian relations ? And why should the international community support Pakistan with aid if it allows this to occur ? Furthermore, if Pakistan is afraid of India, surely there needs to be efforts to allay fears ?

Why indeed should the world be so dependent on oil in the first place ? Is it so necessary when there is so much alternative energy available and at the same time petro-dictatorships allow the their wealth to keep their own populations anesthetized with cash, whilst allowing hand-outs as a foreign policy instruments to gain influence in some way that is detrimental to their neighbours ? Reducing oil income to petro-dictators, by US and European law makers legislating for the wide spread use of alternative energies, would solve a lot of the Middle East and Central Asia's problems.

Ultimately the Kabul Conference could 'make or break' Mr Obama and Mr Cameron's Leaderships, depending on whether or not the peace is won or lost, which leads to another question. If the investment is to succeed and to make Afghanistan and therefore make the world a safer place, much needs to be done rationally and in manner that is both coordinated and reasonably quick.

Conclusion

It seems absolutely vital that the peace in Afghanistan is won, and ever more clear that it will be won through a multi-spectrum approach of:-

- total support for General Petraeus and General Parker, valiant men doing a hard job. They are winning hearts and minds and trying to do this as peacefully as possible, putting ordinary local people first, (despite having spent the best part of their careers learning how to take on conventional enemies)
- aid negotiated with Honour, including sustainable job creation programmes and basic services, and well as
- Government leadership training, more equitable pay and anti-corruption measures. These are what ordinary local people want, as well as a
- collective and continuing engagement of both military and aid efforts which should not be withdrawn too hastily (that would lead to a sectarian bloodbath) before the Afghan Government is capable of taking charge

And to protect the overall situation,

- a revised and robust foreign policy concerning Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and Iran that spells out realistic consequences for unhelpful behaviors and rewards for helpful behaviours
- a massive government led revision of the need for developed economies to be addicted to oil

On the way to the airport, I went through multiple check points and searches, which were most reassuringly tedious and boringly efficient. The Afghan police were courteous. As I sat in the car, a few moments before entering the airport, I received two phone calls, from a couple of my middle management friends at the Ministry. Both wished me a safe journey and asked when I might return to Afghanistan.

About the author

Rupert Douglas-Bate is an international humanitarian aid worker and a businessman in the UK food industry. He originally trained as an agriculturalist, but over more than 20 years has worked in several roles in post-conflict and post-disaster reconstruction in Kosovo, Africa, Iraq, Indonesia and others. He is the author of the book 'The Competition for Hope and the founder of the not-for-profit, Global Map Aid (GMA). His book and the work of GMA have attracted the attention and praise of General David Petraeus, General Stanley Mc Chrystal, former US President Clinton and

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, amongst many others. He is most grateful to Richard G. Johnson and Anthony Evans for their wisdom and advice.

This article contains his personal views and is not representative of the views of Global MapAid.

Further information at www.thecompetitionforhope.org and www.globalmapaid.org