

WHY IS AUSTRALIA INVOLVED IN AFGHANISTAN ?

by George Venturini *

The United States invaded Afghanistan on 7 October 2001, ostensibly to pursue al-Qaeda, held responsible for the 11 September 2001 outrages in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. From the very beginning the invasion appeared as an act of mis-directed revenge, because the majority of the plane hijackers were Saudis, and the nervous centre of the operation was Hamburg, Germany. There is no evidence linking Afghanistan with the attacks. There are some indications that, under certain conditions, the Taliban offered to deliver up Osama bin Laden to the United States months before and even one month after it began the invasion. The offers were rejected. The reason for such a rejection is suspect.¹

On the evening of 11 September President George W. Bush declared, with calculated fury: “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.” What he outlined that night from the Oval Office “committed the United States to a broad, vigorous and potentially long war against terrorism, rather targeted retaliatory strike.”²

Blind revenge was obviously preferred. But revenge is not a legal ground for going to war, which is a crime under the United Nations Charter unless a) for self-defence or b) under UN Security Council authorisation. There was no legal basis for the invasion: neither UN

¹ It is understandable that the Bush Administration experienced a sense of betrayal by its own creation: as early as 3 July 1979, President Carter, upon advice of his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, had signed the first directive for secret aid to the *mujahideen*, the more active opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. Six months later the Soviet Union was drawn into its own ‘Vietnam War’.

² D. Balz and B. Woodward, ‘America’s chaotic road to war - Bush’s global strategy began to take shape in first frantic hours after attack’, *The Washington Post*, 27 January 2002.

Resolution of the Security Council 1368/12.09.2001 nor UNSC Resolution 1373/28.09.2001 authorised it.

Australia joined in the war between October and December 2001. The prevailing, current 'reason' is still based on 'the national interest' and 'solidarity with an ally.' Intervention was deemed authorised by the Australia, New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) Treaty, presumably art. IV, by which "Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on any of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security."

Australia's presence in Afghanistan is in violation of art.2(4) of the UN Charter, whereby: "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations." Nor does Australia's action meet the letter and spirit of art.51: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security."

Time has revolved the 'reasons' for Australia's intervention, from 'solidarity with our great and powerful friend the US', 'obligations under ANZUS', a sharing of 'self-defence', to 'the capture of Osama bin Laden', 'the pursuit of Taliban', the 'war on terror', 'avenging

the victims of Bali outrage', 'establishing freedom', 'honouring human rights', 'liberating Afghan women', 'supporting free elections', 'training the Afghan National Army'. They are all *ex post facto* rationalisations. Nor can they be justified with that mysterious, never defined *passe-partout* which is 'the national interest'.

In fact and in law, nothing, not even the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force in December 2001, could 'cure' that initial violation of the law. Afghanistan is now devastated, its people systematically killed, its democracy non-existent, its impotent 'government' recognisably corrupt.

There has never been a debate in the Australian Parliament on the reasons for the intervention until the one which was held during the last two weeks of October 2010. Then proceedings were opened with a Ministerial Statement by the newly-chosen Prime Minister, Ms. Julia Gillard.³

The Prime Minister directed herself to five fundamental questions: why is Australia involved; what is the international community seeking to achieve and how; what is Australia's mission; what progress is being made; and what is the future of Australia's commitment.

The Prime Minister answered the first question by emphasising that there are two Australia's "vital national interests" involved in Afghanistan: 1) to make sure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists and 2) to stand firmly by Australia's alliance commitment to the United States. There was no elaboration on these two points. "Al-Qaeda has been dealt a severe blow. But al-Qaeda remains a resilient and persistent network." She added, ominously: "We are working to counter the rise of affiliated groups in new areas, such as Somalia and Yemen, and violent extremism and

³ Australia, *Hansard*, House of Representatives, Ministerial Statement on Afghanistan, 19 October 2010, Volume 2 at 692 (Canberra 2010). [hereafter referred to as Ministerial Statement]

terrorist groups in Pakistan.”⁴

Al-Qaeda remains the enemy. How it came about, who financed, armed and sustained it and for what purpose was beyond the scope of the debate - and remains now.

In her New Year’s message the Prime Minister reassured Australians that her government would “persevere in the mission in Afghanistan.” The terms of that mission had been outlined in the remainder of the 19 October Ministerial Statement.

Between those dates, 19 October and 31 December 2010, certain events occurred. To begin with the threats from al-Qaeda, as early as 27 June 2010 the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency acknowledged that al Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan is now "relatively small." He added: "I think at most, we're looking at maybe 50 to 100, maybe less. It's in that vicinity." and that “There's no question that the main location of al-Qaeda is in tribal areas of Pakistan.”⁵ Nevertheless, the Prime Minister proceeded in her Statement to link the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania to those in Bali on 12 October 2002 and 1 October 2005, and with the 9 September 2004 bombing of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta. No forensic evidence has been established of a connection with al-Qaeda in any such cases.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ F. Sonmez and Matt DeLong, ‘Panetta: 50-100 al-Qaeda remain in Afghanistan’, *The Washington Post*, 27 June 2010. Accessed at <http://www.voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2010/.../panetta-50-100-al-qaeda-remain.html>, quoted in J. Cole, ‘Top ten myths about Afghanistan, 2010’, *Informed comment*, 27 December 2010. Accessed at http://_www.juancole.com/2010/.../top-ten-myths-about-afghanistan-2010.html [hereafter referred to as Cole]

Moving forward to deal with the aims and new strategy of the international community, the Prime Minister stated that “Australia’s contribution increased from October 2008 ... as [it] took a growing role in training and mentoring in the southern province of Uruzgan.” But “the international counter-insurgency mission was not adequately resourced until 2009”, when “[in] December ... President Obama announced a revised strategy for Afghanistan and a surge of 30,000 US troops. NATO has contributed more. So has Australia.”⁶ There is a certain automatism there; Australia, arguably a client state of the U.S., is not a party in NATO.

The Prime Minister expressed her confidence that “now we have the right strategy, an experienced commander in General Petraeus and the resources needed to deliver the strategy.”⁷

Australia’s key role in “the mission” was declared that of “training and mentoring the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army in Uruzgan.” which is “expected to take two to four years. And President Karzai has said the Afghan government expects the transition process to be complete by the end of 2014.” Still, “The international community will remain engaged in Afghanistan beyond 2014. And Australia will remain engaged.”⁸

Nothing was given to specifics: not the long-emerging purpose of the invasion - that of securing the exploitation of the Central Asian basin oil, not the long-delayed construction of a 1,700 kilometre pipeline from Turkmenistan to a warm-water, deep-sea port at Gwadar in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, not the need to secure the pipeline from terrorist attacks for which an army of 7,000 troops is to be permanently stationed in three countries, not who will guard the guardians, *et cetera*. The 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, and the establishment of bases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to support the war, could give the U.S. greater freedom to construct the pipeline across Afghanistan to Pakistan and

⁶ Ministerial Statement, at 693.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*, 693-94.

the Arabian Sea - a route some oil strategists favour in order to bypass both Iran and Russia and link Central Asia directly to Western corporations and markets.⁹ Those new Central Asian bases were also intended to place American forces in close proximity to the new Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, running from the Caspian Sea through Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean; oil analyst Yergin called it “one of the linchpins of world supply and energy security in the years ahead.”¹⁰

Later on in her Statement the Prime Minister expressed the conviction that, though “the challenges are huge” she was able to “report tentative signs of progress to date.” Progress has been the *Leitmotif* of anyone reporting on Afghanistan during the past ten years. Ms. Gillard is no exception. It is perhaps understandable that the Prime Minister should prefer the view of U.S. Navy Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He would again declare on 14 December 2010 that, “Though the last of the surge troops only reached Afghanistan [the previous month], they [were] already achieving success.” He attributed that to the surge of 30,000 more U.S. service members, while “NATO and other coalition nations added another 10,000.”¹¹

That was the view of the military. Different views were put forward by two assessments prepared by U.S. intelligence organisations and tabled before the Senate Intelligence Committee. The reports present a gloomy picture of the Afghanistan war, contradicting a more upbeat view expressed by military officials as the White House was preparing to release a progress report on the conflict. The classified reports contend that large swaths of Afghanistan are still at risk of falling to the Taliban, according to officials who were briefed on the National Intelligence Estimates on Afghanistan and Pakistan, which represent the collective view of more than a dozen intelligence agencies. National

⁹ B. Sardi, ‘Is an Oil Pipeline Behind the War in Afghanistan?’, Testimony before U.S. Congress, 15 October 2001. Accessed at <http://www.lewrockwell.com/orig/sardi7.html>

¹⁰ D. Yergin, ‘Gulf oil - How important is it, anyway?’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 April 2003. Accessed at <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2003/04/13/IN307923.DTL>

¹¹ J. Garamone, ‘Mullen discusses surge successes in Afghanistan’, *American Forces Press*, 14 December 2010. Accessed at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/.../mil-101214-afps05.htm> [Cole]

Intelligence Estimates make use of analysis and information from all the intelligence agencies, including those which are part of the Pentagon. The reports also say that the Pakistan's government remains unwilling to stop its covert support for members of the Afghan Taliban who mount attacks against U.S. troops from the tribal areas of the neighbouring nation. The officials declined to be named because they were discussing classified data.¹²

The contrasting assessments illustrate the difficulty in making accurate predictions or gauging progress in Afghanistan. High-profile military operations in southern Afghanistan in 2010 have gone much slower than initially expected. Military officials have said that a key measure of the Taliban's strength will become clear only in the Northern spring, when the traditional winter lull in fighting comes to an end.

On 15 December 2010 President Obama signed off on a draft of the White House progressreport after meeting with his top security advisors. The White House Review said that "there has been some important progress in halting the momentum of the Taliban in Afghanistan," and that "we have seen greater cooperation over the course of the past 18 months with the Pakistani government."¹³ The Review also pointed to problems, including "the ongoing challenge and threat of safe havens in Pakistan."

During 2010, 711 foreign troops - almost 500 American and 213 non-U.S. troops - were killed in Afghanistan, a 40 per cent increase over 2009. By comparison, 60 foreign soldiers were killed in Iraq in 2010, all of them American. Over 800 Afghan government soldiers

¹² K. K. Dilanian and D. S. Cloud, 'U.S. intelligence reports cast doubt on war progress in Afghanistan', *The Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 2010. Accessed at <http://www.articles.latimes.com/2010/dec/15/.../la-fg-afghan-review-20101215>

¹³ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'Overview of the Afghanistan and Pakistan Annual Review', 16 December 2010, Accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/.../2010/.../overview-afghanistan-and-pakistan-annual-review>

were killed in the same period and 2,400 civilians were killed in the first ten months of the year. A Pentagon official in Kabul estimated that 18,000 attacks were conducted against U.S. and NATO forces in 2010, twice as many as in the preceding year.¹⁴

Far from any prospect of a decrease in the death toll in the war-ravaged country during 2011, the spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, Germany's Brigadier General Josef Blotz, stated at the end of 2010 that the Afghan war will only intensify in 2011, that "There is no end to the fighting season; [and] we need to keep pressure on the Taliban all over the country."¹⁵

Still, concerned with the main areas of the new strategy - presumably, security, governance and development and the "entrenching [of] a functioning democratic Afghan state" - the Prime Minister was satisfied that "The new international strategy is comprehensive." In her view it is focussed on: 1) protecting the civilian population, 2) training, mentoring and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces - to enable them to assume a lead role in providing security, and 3) facilitating improvements in governance and socioeconomic development." Finally, the Prime Minister said: "The new strategy promotes efforts towards political reconciliation."

The first aims, at least in the form articulated in the abovementioned three points, underlay many assumptions. The later reveals an extraordinary amount of arrogance; it should be dealt with immediately. How could this plan of reconciliation among diverse tribes, drawing their origin from different historical sources, speaking different languages and dialects, accustomed to different traditions and united probably most likely only be desire to be left alone, take advantage of the transient presence of even well-meaning Australians

¹⁴ *Voice of Russia*, 27 December 2010. Accessed at <http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/12/27/37888169.html>, quoted in R. Rozoff, 'New year to mark intensification of West's war efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan', 31 December 2010. Accessed at <http://www.opednews.com> [hereafter referred to as Roxoff]

¹⁵ *Deutsche Presse-Agentur*, 27 December 2010 [Rozoff]

is impossible seriously to sustain.

As for aims such as “protecting the civilian population”, they are more likely to be achieved if such protection is desired, and expressly requested. There are some signs that a small part of the population (one-third) felt that it was being protected by foreign forces. But, during the past five/four years, favourable view of the United States has plunged from 83 to 43 per cent, support for the presence of U.S. troops has diminished from 78 to 62 per cent, positive rating of U.S. work in Afghanistan has dropped from 68 to 32 per cent, and confidence in the U.S. for providing security has plummeted from 67 to 36 per cent.¹⁶ Only 32 per cent of Afghans now have a favourable view of the United States’ aid efforts in their country. In December 2010 those who hold a “very favourable” opinion of American troops were no more than 6 per cent, whereas more than half of all Afghans - 55 per cent - want U.S. forces out of their country, and the sooner the better. This is rather bad news for the U.S. military as it examines its options in Afghanistan strategy.

During President Barack Obama’s *impromptu* visit to Kabul on 3 December 2010, White House aides said confidently that no major adjustments were expected to the present strategy, which, in the minds and words of most military leaders, is now firmly on course. That strategy has foreign troops in Afghanistan for at least another four years, while the focus turns to training and equipping Afghan forces to take care of their own security, the much-vaunted “transition” to full Afghan sovereignty. But the poll just mentioned shows a place yearning for an end to hostilities. While human rights organisations and women’s advocacy groups mount a spirited campaign against any accommodation with the Taliban, 73 per cent of those polled said it was time to negotiate with the insurgents. The Taliban may not enjoy much popularity in the country - only 9 per cent said they would prefer them to the current government - but it seems that the acceptance of conflict has waned among Afghans, who mainly just want to get on with their lives.

¹⁶ ABC News/BBC/ARD(Germany)/*The Washington Post* poll, 6 December 2010.[Cole]

Those who moan about the lack of readiness among the Afghan National Security Forces might be surprised to learn that more than twice as many Afghans think the police are better able to provide security in their areas than U.S. or NATO forces. Of those polled, only 36 per cent said they trusted the foreigners to protect them, while 77 per cent voted for their local police.

They show a lot more optimism than General Petraeus, who said early in December 2010 that it was far from certain that Afghan troops would be able to take over from the United States and NATO by 2014 - the new target date set by the NATO meeting of the heads of state and heads of government of NATO held in Lisbon on 19 and 20 November 2010.¹⁷

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the popularity of U.S. forces would be even lower in some areas, given the higher incidence of civilian casualties from airstrikes, and the greater frequency of night raids, in which U.S. Special Forces descend on housing compounds, often with a mission to kill or capture alleged Taliban fighters. The latter was a bitterly disputed topic at Lisbon, when President Karzai told the media that he wanted the night raids stopped, prompting General Petraeus to say that such an attitude risked making his own position “untenable.” The polls show that Afghans are implacably against airstrikes by U.S. or NATO troops, with 73 per cent saying that they opposed them even if they help to defeat the Taliban. Even given the vagaries of polls, it is not too farfetched that the U.S. and NATO have all but lost ‘the battle for hearts and minds’ in Afghanistan.

In these circumstances it is very problematic to talk about political reconciliation, as it is fanciful to think either of defeating the Taliban - in terms that the military would understand, or of - on the contrary - to wage war against them until such time as they will be ‘persuaded to come to the negotiation table.’

¹⁷ J. MacKenzie, ‘Afghanistan War: Public opinion turns sharply against US forces’, *GlobalPost*, 9 December 2010. Accessed at <http://www.globalpost.com/.../afghanistan/.../afghanistan-war-us-troops-counterinsurgency-public-opinion>

The most recent attempt at ‘sitting around the table’ with a person from the Taliban to discuss possibilities of peace turned into a rather embarrassing situation. For months secret talks between Taliban and Afghan leaders to end the war seemed promising, if only because of the appearance of a certain insurgent leader at one end of the table: one Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, allegedly one of the most senior commanders in the Taliban movement.

But towards the end of November 2010 it turned out that he was not who he claimed to be. United States and Afghan officials revealed that the Afghan man was an impostor, and high-level discussions conducted with the assistance of NATO appeared to have achieved little. “It is not him,” said a NATO diplomat in Kabul. “And we gave him a lot of money.” American officials confirmed that they had given up hope that the Afghan was the real Mansour, or even a member of the Taliban leadership. The man had said that he had travelled from Pakistan, where - so he said - Taliban leaders had taken refuge. The *faux* Taliban leader, having been flown to Kabul on a NATO aircraft and ushered into the presidential palace, had even met President Karzai.

The episode underscores the uncertain and even bizarre nature of the atmosphere in which Afghan and American leaders search for ways to bring the nine-year-old American-led war to an end. The leaders of the Taliban are believed to be hiding in Pakistan, possibly with the assistance of the Pakistani government, which receives billions of dollars in American aid. Many in the Taliban leadership, which is largely made up of barely literate clerics from the countryside, had not been seen in person by American, NATO or Afghan officials.

American officials say they were sceptical from the start about the identity of the man who claimed to be Mullah Mansour - who by some accounts is the second-ranking official in the Taliban, behind only the founder, Mullah Mohammed Omar. Serious doubts arose after the third meeting with Afghan officials, held in the southern city of Kandahar. A man who had known the real Mansour years before told Afghan officials that the man at the table did not resemble him. A NATO diplomat said that the Afghan man was initially given a sizable sum of money to take part in the talks - and to help persuade him to return.

While the Afghan officials said that they still harboured hopes that the man would return for another round of talks, American and other NATO officials said they had concluded that the man in question was not Mansour. Just how the Americans reached such a definitive conclusion - whether, for instance, they were able positively to establish his identity through fingerprints or some other means - is unknown.

As recently as October 2010 American and Afghan officials held high hopes for the talks. Senior American officials, including General Petraeus, said the talks indicated that Taliban leaders, whose rank-and-file fighters are under extraordinary pressure from the American-led offensive, were at least willing to discuss an end to the war. The American officials said they and officials of NATO governments were helping to facilitate the discussions, by providing air transport and securing roadways for Taliban leaders coming from Pakistan.

In October 2010 White House officials asked *The New York Times* to withhold the alleged Taliban negotiator's name from an article about the peace talks, expressing concern that the talks would be jeopardised - and his life put at risk - if his involvement were publicised. *The Times* agreed to withhold the man's name, along with the names of two other Taliban leaders said to be involved in the discussions. The status of the other two Taliban leaders was still not clear.

Since the last round of discussions Afghan and American officials had been puzzling over who the man was. Some officials say the man may simply have been a freelance fraud, posing as a Taliban leader in order to enrich himself. Others say the man may have been a Taliban agent. "The Taliban are cleverer than the Americans and our own intelligence service." said a senior Afghan official who is familiar with the case. "They are playing games." Others suspected that the *faux* Taliban leader might have been dispatched by the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan. Elements within the I.S.I have long played a 'double-game' in Afghanistan, reassuring United States officials that they are pursuing the Taliban while at the same time providing support for the insurgents.

Publicly, the Taliban leadership is holding to the line that there are no talks at all. In a recent message to his followers Mullah Omar denied that there were any talks at any level.

“The cunning enemy which has occupied our country, is trying, on the one hand, to expand its military operations on the basis of its double-standard policy and, on the other hand, wants to throw dust into the eyes of the people by spreading the rumours of negotiation.” his message said.

Despite such statements, some senior leaders of the Taliban did show a willingness to talk peace with representatives of the Afghan government as early as January 2010. At that time, Abdul Ghani Baradar, then the deputy commander of the Taliban, was arrested in a joint C.I.A.-I.S.I. raid in Karachi. Officials from both countries hailed the arrest as a hallmark of American-Pakistani cooperation, but Pakistani officials have since indicated that they orchestrated Baradar’s arrest because he was engaging in peace discussions without the I.S.I.’s permission. Afghan leaders have confirmed this account.

Neither American nor Afghan leaders confronted the impersonating Taliban negotiator with their doubts. Indeed, some Afghan leaders are still holding out hopes that the man really is or at least represents Mansour - and that he will come back soon. “Questions have been raised about him, but it is still possible that it is him.” said a prominent Afghan leader. He said negotiators had urged the *faux* Mansour to return with colleagues, including other Taliban leaders whose identities they might also be able to verify.

The meetings had been arranged by an Afghan with ties to both the Afghan government and the Taliban, officials said. The Afghan leader said both the Americans and the Afghan leadership were initially cautious of the Afghan man’s identity and motives. But after the first meeting, both were reasonably satisfied that the man they were talking to was Mansour. Several steps were taken to establish the man’s real identity; after the first meeting, photos of him were shown to Taliban detainees who were believed to know Mansour. They confirmed - it seems.

Whatever the Afghan man’s identity, the talks which unfolded between the Americans and the *faux* Mansour seemed substantive. The man claiming to be representing the Taliban laid down several surprisingly moderate conditions for a peace settlement: that the Taliban leadership be allowed safely to return to Afghanistan, that Taliban soldiers be offered jobs, and that prisoners be released. He did not demand, as the Taliban have in the past, a withdrawal of foreign forces or a Taliban share of the government.

Sayed Amir Muhammad Agha, a onetime Taliban commander who says he has left the Taliban but who acted as a go-between with the movement in the past, said in an interview that he did not know the tale of the impostor. But - he said - the Taliban leadership had given no indications of a willingness to enter talks. “Whenever I talk to the Taliban, they never accept peace and they want to keep on fighting.” he said. “They are not tired.”¹⁸

Even such a tragicomic event should scandalise no one. It could embarrass pro-consular interlopers, but the Australian government is not likely or willing to see itself as such.

President Hamid Karzai has a very unusual view of probity in office. It was reported as recently as 23 October 2010 that Iran was giving him cash by the bagful. Sometime last August, while President Karzai had just concluded an official visit to Iran, his plane was idling on the airport tarmac, waiting for a late-running passenger: Feda Hussein Maliki, Iran’s Ambassador to Afghanistan. When the ambassador arrived he sat next to Umar Daudzai, Karzai’s chief of staff and his most trusted confidant. He then proceeded to hand Daudzai a large plastic bag bulging with Euro notes. Another of Karzai’s functionaries confirmed the transaction.

The delivery of bags of money is part of a secret, steady stream of Iranian cash intended to maintain the loyalty of Daudzai, a former ambassador to Iran between 2005 and 2007, and to promote Iran’s interests in the presidential palace, according to Afghan and Western officials in Kabul. In this way, Iran uses its influence to help drive a wedge between the Afghans and their American and NATO forces. The payments, which officials say total millions of dollars, form an off-the-books fund that Daudzai and President Karzai have used to pay Afghan lawmakers, tribal elders and even Taliban commanders to secure their loyalty. “It is basically a presidential slush fund.” a Western official in Kabul said of the Iranian-supplied money. “Daudzai’s mission is to advance Iranian interests.”

¹⁸ D. Filkins and C. Gall, ‘Taliban leader in peace talk was an impostor’, *The New York Times*, 22 November 2010. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/world/asia/23kabul.html> [Cole]

Both Daudzai and President Karzai declined to respond to written questions from Western journalists about their relationship with Iran. An aide to Daudzai dismissed the allegations as “rubbish.” The Iranian ambassador in Kabul also declined to answer similar questions. A spokesman branded the allegations as “devilish gossip by the West and foreign media.”

Daudzai is known for consistently advocating an anti-Western line to President Karzai. “Karzai knows that without the U.S. he is finished.” an associate of the President said. “But it is like voodoo. Daudzai is the source of all the problems with the U.S. He is systematically feeding him twisted information.”

The payments to Daudzai illustrate the degree to which the Iranian government has penetrated Karzai’s inner circle despite his presumed alliance with the United States and the other NATO countries, which have sustained him with military forces and billions of dollars since the Taliban’s ouster since 2001.

Early in 2010 President Karzai invited the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to the presidential palace, where Ahmadinejad gave a virulently anti-American speech. On the occasion of that visit, Ahmadinejad brought two boxes of cash - “One box was for Daudzai personally, the other for the palace.” an Afghan official said. A senior NATO officer confirmed that the Iranian government was conducting an aggressive campaign inside Afghanistan to undermine the American and NATO presence and to gain influence in politics. He added that Iran’s intelligence agencies were playing both sides of the conflict, providing financing, weapons and training to the Taliban. Iranian agents also financed the campaigns of several Afghans who ran in the September 2010 parliamentary election.

President Obama’s officials have expressed alarm about Iranian activities. Early in October 2010 the late Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. Administration’s special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, complained to Afghanistan’s Finance Minister, Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal, about Umar Daudzai and Iran’s influence in the presidential palace. Mr. Holbrooke did not respond to requests for comment, and the finance minister refused to talk about the discussion with Mr. Holbrooke or about any Iranian activities in

Afghanistan. “We have no choice but to be friendly with Iran.” he said. “It is a hostile neighbourhood.”

Daudzai belongs to a hard-line Islamist organisation, headed by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, which fought the Soviet Union during the 1980s. The group fought during the civil war in the 1990s and then took refuge in Iran, wherefrom it continues the fight against American, NATO and Afghan forces. It still maintains long-standing ties with the I.S.I. and with the Taliban in Pakistan.

It is the view of current and former Afghan officials that the Iranian government began financing President Karzai long before Daudzai became his chief of staff in 2003. It is not clear when Daudzai became a conduit for Iranian cash. In 2005 he was named ambassador to Iran. It was then that Daudzai became acquainted with Iranian intelligence officials and grew close to senior Iranian leaders like Ahmadinejad. Since his return to Kabul in 2007, Daudzai has maintained a close relationship with the Iranian ambassador. Iranian officials have easy, informal access to President Karzai. How much money flows into the presidential palace is not known, but it is believed that Daudzai receives the equivalent of between US\$ 1 and \$ 2 million every other month - sometimes more. Daudzai is known for owning real properties in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates, and in Vancouver, British Columbia.¹⁹

A former employee of Unocal, which intended to build the pipeline, Hamid Karzai is a person of very questionable reputation. Putting it in words that the Prime Minister of Australia would understand: Karzai is ‘a crook’. Not only is he corrupt, he has been for longer than one would remember.

It has been estimated that, during the past three/four years, more than US\$ 3 billion in

¹⁹ D. Filkins, ‘Iran is said to give top Karzai aide cash by the bagful’, *The New York Times*, 23 October 2010. Accessed at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/world/asia/24afghan.html> [Cole]

cash have been openly flown out of Kabul International Airport. This has alarmed U.S. investigators, who believe that Afghan officials, including President Karzai, are sending billions diverted from Western aid projects and U.S., European and NATO contracts to provide security, supplies and reconstruction work,²⁰ as well as proceedings from the sale of drugs. The purpose is to move money to financial safe havens abroad.

Ostensibly the transfers are recorded as legal, but U.S. - and even some Afghan officials - say that they are checking the flows in major anticorruption and drug trafficking investigations because of their size relative to Afghanistan's small economy and the murkiness of their origins.

The amounts declared as they leave are disproportionate in a country where the gross domestic product last year totalled US\$ 13.5 billion. More declared cash flies out of Kabul each year than the Afghan government collects in tax and customs revenue nationwide. Most of the funds passing through the airport are being moved by private money transfer businesses with roots in the Muslim world stretching back centuries. They are called *hawalas*. An *hawala* is an informal value transfer system based on the performance and honour of a huge network of money brokers. This is how it works: a customer drops off money at one dealer and is given a numeric code or password, which is then used by the money's recipient when the cash is picked up elsewhere. The *hawala* operators then settle up among themselves. *Hawala* fees are far cheaper than standard banks, and transfers can be done in minutes or hours as opposed to days. The Afghan banking system is in its infancy, and *hawalas* still form the backbone of the financial sector. The U.S. State Department believes that 80 to 90 per cent of all financial transactions in Afghanistan run through *hawalas*.

Local U.S. officials believe that the beneficiaries of such transfers are, in addition to highly-positioned officials in President Karzai's administration, the Vice President

²⁰ The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation spent about US\$ 14 billion in Afghanistan alone last year.

Mohammed Fahim, and one of the President's brothers, Mahmood Karzai, an influential businessmen. Questioned by journalists, Vice President Fahim, responded through his brother, A.H. Fahim, a businessman, who denied the allegations. "My brother? He does not know anything about money." said A. H. Fahim.

As for the President's brother, Mahmood Karzai, he said in an interview that he has engaged in only legitimate businesses and has never transferred large sums of cash from the country. In a financial disclosure form dated 22 January 2010 and made available to *The Wall Street Journal*, Mahmood Karzai - who incidentally is an American citizen - declared his net worth was US\$ 12,157,491 with assets of US\$ 21,163,347 and liabilities of US\$ 9,006,106. He reported an annual income of just over US\$ 400,000 but did not provide details. Speaking to journalists, he blamed the allegations that he was transferring illicitly earned cash from Afghanistan on political opponents. "Yes, millions of dollars are leaving this country but it is all taken by politicians. Bribes, corruption, all of it." he said. "But let us find out who is taking it. Let us not go on rumours. I have said this to the Americans."

President Karzai dismissed the allegations during a news conference, and called for greater scrutiny of business run by relatives of officials. "Making money is fine and taking money out of the country is fine." he said. "The relatives of government officials can do this, starting with my brothers. But there is a possibility of corruption." he said without being specific.

Between the beginning of 2007 and February 2010, at least US\$ 3.18 billion left through the Kabul airport, according to Afghan customs records reviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*. U.S. officials say the sum of declared money may actually be higher: one courier alone carried US\$ 2.3 billion between the second half of 2008 and the end of 2009, said a senior U.S. official, citing other documents which are in the possession of investigators. The officer said officials believe the money was declared, but that Afghan customs records may not be complete. In their declarations, couriers must record their own names and the origins of the money they are transporting. Instead, they usually record the name of the Afghan *hawala* which is making the transfer and the one in Dubai which is accepting the cash. Often, the actual sender of the money is not even named. "We do not

even know about it. We do not know whose it is, why it is leaving, or where it is going." Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal said during a conference in December 2009 about the money leaving the airport.

The capital flight has continued apace in 2010 - most of it in U.S. dollars, but also in Saudi riyals, Pakistani rupees and even Euros. The declared cash is believed to represent only "a small percentage" of the money moving out of the airport and all of Afghanistan, said General M. Asif Jabar Khail, the chief customs officer at Kabul's airport. Cash also moves easily without detection or declaration through the airport's VIP section, where officials are not searched and often driven straight up to their planes, according to General Asif and U.S. and Afghan officials. Asif said that last year, his men found a "pile of millions of dollars," all undeclared, and tried to stop it from being put on a flight to Dubai. But "there was lots of pressure from my higher ups," he said. He refused to name the officials who were pressing him, but said: "It came from very, very senior people."

In addition, hundreds of millions of undeclared dollars, maybe billions, are being carried across Afghanistan's long and fluid borders with Iran and Pakistan, where a number of Afghan *hawalas* have branches. One figure often mentioned by Afghan and Western officials is US\$ 10 million a day leaving Afghanistan - US\$ 3.65 billion a year, more than a quarter of the current GDP. Officials cannot say how much money is coming into Afghanistan; that is not tracked by Afghan authorities. Afghanistan's endemic corruption and the suspected involvement of high-ranking officials in the opium trade have left the government deeply unpopular and fuelled support for the Taliban, undercutting a war effort which is now focused on convincing Afghans to support their own country and turn away from the insurgents.

U.S. officials are also trying to disrupt the flow of money to the Taliban. The insurgency is believed to earn a sizable portion of its operating expenses from extortion and the opium trade, funds which can easily be moved abroad to avoid detection or seizure. But anticorruption efforts have increasingly taken centre stage for the U.S. and its Western allies.

Restoring the credibility of the Afghan government is a central tenet in the American

counter-insurgency strategy. Combating corruption by the government is now as important a priority as actually fighting insurgents. But the U.S.-led initiatives carry significant risks: many of those believed by U.S. officials to be involved in shipping money out of the country are key Afghan power brokers who are important allies in the fight against the Taliban. Balancing demands to clean up the government with the need to keep them on the same side will not be easy, especially after so many years of Western officials effectively turning a blind eye to allegations of wrongdoing by their Afghan allies.²¹

On 3 December 2010 Afghanistan became one of the latest countries to have scathing appraisals of its leaders exposed by WikiLeaks.

As a 'kingpin of Kandahar,' Ahmed Wali Karzai, the younger half-brother of President Karzai is using his influence as the unrivalled strongman to manipulate the country's institutions and protect illicit businesses, a secret diplomatic cable from the US embassy in Kabul, posted by WikiLeaks revealed. Observing that the national legitimacy of the Afghan President originates from the Kandahar province, the cable highlights the corruption-ridden system in the country. The U.S. has been asking President Karzai to check the massive corruption in the administration, as it hurts the credibility of the government and distances it from the people.

The President's half-brother virtually dominates the political landscape of Kandahar where he operates parallel to formal government structures through a network of political clans which use state institutions to protect and enable licit and illicit enterprises. "As the kingpin of Kandahar, the President's younger half-brother Ahmed Wali Karzai dominates

²¹ M. Rosenberg, 'Corruption suspected in airlift of billions in cash from Kabul', *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 2010, *Global Research*, 29 June 2010. Accessed at <http://online.wsj.com/.../SB10001424052748704638504575318850772872776.html>

access to economic resources, patronage, and protection," said the cable released by WikiLeaks. "Much of the real business of running Kandahar takes place out of public sight," it said. "A dramatic example is the Arghandab river valley, an agriculturally rich and heavily-populated district strategically located at the northern gate to Kandahar city, where the President's direct intervention in the Alikozai tribal succession increased Karzai's political dominance over two of the most valuable resources in Kandahar - fertile land and water." it said.

"The overriding purpose that unifies his political roles as Chairman of the Kandahar Provincial Council and as the President's personal representative to the South is the enrichment, extension and perpetuation of the Karzai clan, and along with it their branch of the Popalzai tribe. This applies equally to his entrepreneurial and his alleged criminal activities." ... "At its core, this [Popalzai tribe's] network has a caste-like division of labour." it said.²²

Karzai is the quintessential corporate pawn, who could very well be held, in the C.I.A.'s *patois*, as an 'asset'. This may not disturb his 'owners' in Washington, who seem to have tolerated quite a lot.

At mid-May 2010 the U.S. Ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, proclaimed that Afghanistan is an important ally of America and President Karzai's then recent meetings with top officials in Washington had strengthened bilateral ties between the two countries.

There was much expectation from the Peace Advisory *Jirga* - an assembly of regional leaders and tribal chiefs - which was held on 29 May in Kabul. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended the traditional assembly, in which 1,500 delegates discussed the

²² 'WikiLeaks: Karzai's brother protecting illicit businesses in Kandahar,' 3 December 2010. Accessed at <http://www.indianexpress.com/.../wikileaks-karzais-brother-protecting-illicit-businesses-in-kandahar/720021/>

key issues facing the country in the context of Karzai's new peace strategy.

The former military commander explained that 15,000 extra U.S. soldiers had already been deployed to Afghanistan since December 2009 - as part of President Obama's urge - and that the remaining would arrive in the following months. The United States has nearly 100,000 soldiers in Afghanistan within NATO-led International Security Assistance Force's framework.

During their meeting at the White House in early May 2010, Presidents Obama and Karzai discussed a wide range of issues including peace and stability, economic development and the public health situation in Afghanistan. They also conferred on the need for progress on the civilian side, agricultural development, good governance, implementation of the Afghan constitution and respect for women's rights.

Ambassador Eikenberry emphasised that relations between Kabul and Washington had been strong over the past nine years. The Afghan leader's visit had helped in further cementing the ties, he added. ²³

Ambassador Einkenberry would content himself with the trappings of democratic life, very much like Prime Minister Gillard.

And what better to show signs of such life than to rely on elections - no matter how fraudulent - such as those held on 20 August 2009 for the presidency office ?

On 9 November 2009 the United Nations General Assembly declared that Afghanistan's presidential election had been both credible and sound, despite allegations of widespread fraud which led critics to question the vote's legitimacy. In a unanimously adopted resolution, the 192-nation Assembly also urged the government of reelected President

²³ S. A. Sadaat, 'Afghanistan key US ally: Eikenberry,' *Pajhwok Afghan News*, 19 May 2010. Accessed at <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2010/05/.../afghanistan-key-us-ally-eikenberry>

Karzai to press ahead with "strengthening of the rule of law and democratic processes, the fight against corruption [and] the acceleration of justice sector reform." Frauds reported during the election and his chief rival's refusal to contest a run-off have damaged Karzai's credibility at the start of his second term. But the UN assembly raised no doubts about Karzai's mandate or his right to continue leading the country. The resolution welcomed "the efforts of the relevant institutions to address irregularities identified by the electoral institutions in Afghanistan and to ensure a credible and legitimate process in accordance with the Afghan Election Law and in the framework of the Afghan Constitution."

Afghanistan's UN Ambassador Zahir Tanin said that his nation and government were "deeply grateful" for the Assembly's vote of confidence. He acknowledged that there were problems with the vote but added that no elections are perfect. "They are even less perfect in an emerging democracy threatened by conflict." he told the Assembly. ... "Complaints and irregularities were uncovered and addressed in a meticulously fair and systematic way." ... "The elections were as free as possible, as fair as possible, and as transparent as possible."

Ambassador Tanin told the Assembly that his government welcomed calls for an international conference to renew its partnership with allies around the world and said Kabul supported the idea of agreeing to a "second compact" with the international community. The first international 'compact' with Afghanistan had been agreed at a conference in London in 2006. That pact called for "good governance" in Afghanistan and other commitments on both sides, many of which remain unfulfilled.

The Assembly also expressed "great concern" about the links between illegal drug trade and Taliban militants, al-Qaeda and "other extremist and criminal groups" in Afghanistan. The resolution urged the Afghan government to step up its counternarcotics ²⁴ activities across the country. ²⁵

²⁴Afghanistan produces 92 per cent of the world's opium, a thick paste from poppy used to make heroin, and the equivalent of 3,500 tons of opium is trafficked out of Afghanistan every year, according to the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Since 2005 the Taliban

The only credible adversary to Karzai, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah had withdrawn from a run-off vote on 1 November 2009 but, with Afghanistan mired in political uncertainty, the disputed process was not over.

Afghanistan's Constitution is vague about the consequences of a candidate withdrawing from a run-off. The government-appointed Independent Election Commission, blamed by Abdullah for the failings of 20 August's fraud-marred first round, decided that a run-off would go ahead with just one candidate.

Karzai said he would not automatically declare himself president for another five years but wait for the Afghanistan's Supreme Court to make a final decision. Political analysts and some Western diplomats said that Karzai's legitimacy would be severely undermined, as would the West's insistence that a 'true democracy' take hold in Afghanistan after so many years of war. Analysts said such a process would be flawed because only Karzai's supporters could be expected to vote. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton however disagreed, saying that such a move is not unprecedented and that it was a personal decision for Abdullah to make. Other analysts said that tacitly to accept Karzai as the winner by allowing the run-off to go ahead with one candidate would undermine all efforts to ensure a fair contest.

The run-off was seen as nothing more than a constitutional formality and Karzai will have to fight off perceptions over the next five years that he did not win fairly. ²⁶

has been making up to US\$160 million a year from taxing opium cultivation and trade in Afghanistan, the UNODC disclosed in November 2009.

²⁵ UN declares Afghan election 'credible, legitimate', *Reuters*, 10 November 2009, Accessed at http://www.rferl.org/.../UN_Declares_Afghan_Election_Credible_Legitimate/1873742.html - [Cole]

²⁶ G.Matevalli, 'Afghan leader Karzai's legitimacy under cloud', 1 November 2009. Accessed at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5A00L420091101> [Cole]

In the end, the Afghanistan Electoral Complaints Commission disqualified 21 candidates who had participated in the parliamentary elections for electoral fraud. Widespread irregularities were found in 12 out of the 34 provinces. Nineteen of the disqualified candidates had either won or were leading in their districts, seven of them were incumbents and two were winners in second place in districts where the first place winner was also disqualified. The disqualified candidates comprise almost one-tenth of those elected to the 249-seat *Wolesi Jirga* - the 'House of the People', the lower house of the bicameral Afghan Assembly. According to the ECC, the candidates had no right to appeal the decision. With the disqualification of the 21 candidates, it was expected that the ECC would certify the election results within days.

While the ECC had disqualified candidates, the body and the Independent Election Commission faced charges of possible voter fraud. The IEC was responsible for investigating complaints of voting frauds in the country, and itself was accused of tampering with the results. There was widespread concern that the IEC did not provide sufficient reason for October 2010's invalidation of 1.3 million votes, constituting nearly one-fourth of the 5.6 million votes cast nationwide. Following the disputed 2009 presidential election, the ECC invalidated results from 210 polling stations and found clear and convincing evidence of fraud. In April 2010 President Karzai blamed foreign officials for the extensive irregularities which had occurred during the presidential election.²⁷

Dr. Abdullah complained that the legislative election of 18 September 2010 was beset by "massive fraud and rigging". "Most of the mistakes of the past have been repeated." he said.

²⁷ Jurist, 'Afghanistan officials disqualify 21 parliamentary candidates for fraud', 22 November 2010. Accessed at <http://www.law.hukuki.net/afghanistan-officials-disqualify-21-parliamentary-candidates-for-fraud.htm> [Cole]

The same problems were re-emerging largely because too little was done to clean up the electoral machinery after the 2009 flawed presidential poll. There were still about 5 million more voter cards than actual voters. But in two respects things had actually got much worse. Firstly, the Electoral Complaints Commission had lost much of its independence. After the Commission found that at least 1 million votes had been fraudulently cast for him in the presidential poll, President Karzai gave himself the right to appoint its members. Secondly, neither Karzai nor any of his international allies wanted to look too deeply into accusations of irregularities this time. NATO heads of government were due to meet for a summit on Afghanistan shortly after the election results were due to be announced on 31 October 2010.

So, already, everyone was pretending that the vote was a success. NATO spokesmen announced that the Afghan Army and Police performed well on polling day and that the number of security incidents was down. Actually, as NATO officials later admitted, the number of violent incidents increased by about a third compared with presidential polling day, which heretofore had been the most violent day in the history of modern Afghanistan.

A variety of high turnout statistics had also been proffered, though they were largely meaningless in a country without a proper census, so that nobody knew how many eligible voters there are. There were, however, 4.3 million ballots cast - making this the least well-attended of the four national elections of the post-Taliban era. Even then, nobody knows quite how many of those votes were cast legitimately.

The Free and Fair Elections Foundation of Afghanistan - an NGO - said that its observers saw ballot stuffing in almost every province. Sources within the Independent Election Commission said that turnout in some polling stations in insecure areas exceeded 100 per cent And the ECC has received almost 4,000 complaints of irregularities.

The questions now were how many of them the ECC would dare investigate, and how long it would be allowed to hold up the announcement of an official result. President Karzai had already said that he wanted to see a speedy outcome. No wonder that there was a growing sense of gloom among observers, as well as of *déjà vu*. As Dr. Abdullah put it,

with or without a proper inquiry, “democracy is already damaged.”²⁸

In December 2010 WikiLeaks released some cables which revealed Afghanistan a hotbed of corruption.

Clearly, from the viewpoint of American diplomats, Afghanistan has a long way to go before it becomes a ‘stable democracy’. Their diplomatic cables paint the place as a lawless and corrupt kleptocracy.

One dispatch from American Ambassador Karl Eikenberry contained some harsh words about President Karzai, depicting him as an “extremely weak man who did not listen to facts but was instead easily swayed by anyone who came to him to report even the most bizarre stories of plots against him. Whenever this happened, Karzai would immediately judge the person to be loyal and would reward him.” Senior members of Karzai's government were portrayed as corrupt. The American Embassy noted that the Agriculture Minister, Asif Rahimi, "appears to be the only minister about whom no allegations exist."

Ambassador Eikenberry also raised concerns after a meeting with the President's half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, the most powerful man in Kandahar and someone who is suspected of being involved in the drug trade. “The meeting with Ahmed Wali Karzai highlights one of our major challenges in Afghanistan: how to fight corruption and connect the people to the government, when the key government officials are themselves corrupt.”

Another Afghan official explained to American diplomats that there were four stages where money was skimmed from American development projects: when contractors bid on a project, at application for government permits, during construction, and at the ribbon-

²⁸ ‘Not exactly a ringing endorsement - Another year, another rigged vote - Afghanistan's parliamentary election’, *Economist*, 23 September 2010. Accessed at <http://www.economist.com/node/17106306>

cutting ceremony.

Afghanistan is ranked as the world's third most corrupt country by Transparency International: no. 176 on a list of 178.²⁹

Amin Saikal, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (The Middle East and Central Asia) at the Australian National University said that the 'revelations' come as no surprise, "because there have been a number of commentators, including myself, who have been saying a number of things that now Ambassador Eikenberry has confirmed in some of his communications to Washington as it has been disclosed by WikiLeaks."

According to Professor Saikal those cables describe a dysfunctional relationship between Washington and Kabul, as well one that will suffer because of the revelations.

"Well, it appears that the relationship has been a very troubled one in the sense that President Karzai has been a very weak president and also, at the same time, a paranoid one, as Ambassador Eikenberry has pointed out. But I think that Ambassador Eikenberry revealed some more than has been perhaps stated so far. [It] is that President Karzai also has a split personality: on the one hand he has a very rudimentary knowledge of what is involved in nation-building; on the other hand he also would like to be an Afghan nationalist hero."

And of course, as Ambassador Eikenberry has pointed out, Washington would have to deal with both of these personalities, which would make the task of really interacting with President Karzai a very difficult one and not only for Washington but also for the U.S. allies which are all involved in Afghanistan.

²⁹ Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Accessed at the end of 2010, at http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi

Asked by the interviewer whether the revelation of these documents will make it more difficult for the U.S. to deal with Karzai given that he has some insight as to how they think about him, Professor Saikal said: “Well, it will make it tougher for Washington but more specifically it will make it very difficult for Ambassador Eikenberry who is on the ground in Kabul. But I think these are some of the realities that both President Karzai and Washington will have to come to terms with and of course it also reveals very clearly that Washington and its allies do not have a credible partner on the ground in Afghanistan and that makes the task of really overcoming a Taliban opposition effectively more difficult for the United States and its allies than had been expected so far.”³⁰

A ‘parallel’, and in a sense prescient, history of the Western adventure in Afghanistan is soon to be published.³¹

It tells the story of a similarly misconceived invasion, attempted ‘pacification’, and inglorious retreat by the Soviet Union. It sent in 100,000 troops, lost 15,000 and caused as many as 1.5 million civilian deaths.

The author was the British ambassador in Moscow between 1988 and 1992. Very few would have more reliable sources and authoritative voice.

As 2010 turned into 2011 the balance is nothing but tragic: civilian casualties as a result of the invasion are guess/timated between 14,643 and 34,240 as at the end of 2010. According to Amnesty International Afghans constitute the world’s largest single refugee group - around 5 million. 2,284 lives had been lost by the International Occupation Forces in Afghanistan. The U.S. alone spends more than US \$ 2 billion a week in

³⁰ ABC, PM, ‘WikiLeaks reveal Afghanistan a hotbed of corruption,’ 3 December 2010.

Accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s3084324.htm>

³¹ Sir Rodric Braithwaite, AFGANTSY, The Russians in Afghanistan 1979-1989 (Profile Books, London, March 2011).

Afghanistan - US \$ 366 billion at the time of writing, and counting.

To date the Australian Defence Force has suffered 21 deaths in Afghanistan and 162 A.D.F. members have been wounded in action.

The Prime Minister of Australia will do well to secure an advance copy of the book - and read it herself (her courtiers only read opinion polls) - so that she may, as she prefaced on 19 October 2010, “paint a very honest picture”, and really answer the question: why is Australia involved in Afghanistan?

Dr. Venturino Giorgio Venturini, formerly an *avvocato* at the Court of Appeal of Bologna, taught, administered, and advised on, law in four continents, ‘retiring’ in 1993 from Monash University. Author of eight books and about 100 articles and essays for learned periodicals and conferences, his latest work is *THE LAST GREAT CAUSE – Volunteers from Australia and Emilia-Romagna in defence of the Spanish Republic, 1936-1939* (Search Foundation, Sydney 2010). Since his ‘retirement’ Dr. Venturini has been Senior Associate in the School of Political and Social Inquiry at Monash; he is also an Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University, Melbourne. george.venturini@arts.monash.edu.au.

