

## **The Buckminster Fuller Award and the Afghanistan War**

The recent recognition of Operation Hope by the Buckminster Fuller Institute acknowledges measures that successfully address the root cause of so much poverty, violence and conflict. This recognition gives hope for situations like Afghanistan, not only Africa where Operation Hope is based. As I write soldiers of several nations - not only American - are dying to buy time for Obama's civilian policies to take effect. General McChrystal's replacement has emphasized that it is time to take a look at the role civilians play in these war situations.

A great question is whether the Obama Administration will recognize this opportunity to review civilian policies in Afghanistan. This administration has inherited policies that can only exacerbate poverty and conflict for years to come costing increasing civilian and military lives and money.

General McChrystal's replacement for criticizing the civilian element has publically highlighted the meshing of the military and civilian roles in such guerilla wars that are, in all actuality, an extension of politics. Guerilla warfare specialists know that only the people ultimately win such guerilla wars. One specialist recently interviewed on CNN emphasized that there are two underlying points vital to winning in Afghanistan. The first being the prosperity and security of the people and the second - good corruption-free governance. Both of these crucial points remain in the Obama Administration's hands rather than the hands of the newly appointed military commander.

Armies, at best, can only hold the situation until civilian policies take effect. Now is a wonderful opportunity for the Obama Administration to revisit, review, and change the civilian policies it inherited. It simply does not make sense to continue supporting an escalating war. A war costing increasing amounts of lives and money based on inherited policies that do not address the root cause of poverty, violence, corruption and conflict but instead exacerbate conflict in this region.

Central to a stable, prosperous Afghanistan are good corruption-free governance and sound land and agricultural policy that address the major cause of poverty, social breakdown and violence – ***fertile soil for dissident movements.***

Previously I have commented on good governance in the paper on our web site, with particular emphasis on Zimbabwe, where I spent much of my early life engaged in all facets of such a war from junior army officer, to commander of a special force unit and member of Parliament leading one of the parties engaged in the war. Most of the comments found in my paper relate to any nation including Afghanistan. Those were hard lessons learned during twenty years of such warfare lost through self-inflicted wounds by incompetent Rhodesian leaders not heeding the lessons of history. The central point in that paper is the role of political parties play in making good governance nothing but a good, but unattainable, idea. There are better ways

to achieve democratic good governance in which all feel secure and well governed. Where I had to learn this the hard way through years of war and politics, General George Washington, I was later to learn, had preceded my views and experience and spelled it out in his farewell address the American nation over 200 years ago!

I also commented on how important it was never to wage a “war on terrorism” in the piece that I put out the day after 9/11 (on our web site) and those comments are as applicable today as they were then. If politicians are determined to use the word “war” then the US should be leading and waging a global war for justice, prosperity and good governance for all.

Leaving governance for a moment and looking at the most fundamental underlying issue of the people’s prosperity and security brings me to this year’s Buckminster Fuller Award. This award was recently given to the Savory Institute and its sister organization Africa Centre for Holistic Management. This recognition is quite significant because in our “proof of concept” we addressed the root cause of desertification, poverty, social breakdown and violence, successfully, for the first time in history. Generally in low and seasonal rainfall environments, like Afghanistan and most of Pakistan, poverty, social breakdown, violence to women and children and conflict are symptoms of grasslands turning to deserts. These deserts are taking over most of Afghanistan and the Pakistan border region where such symptoms provide fertile ground for dissident movements and where the land degradation is exacerbated by current US civilian policy. This alone will ensure when the war is eventually abandoned it will leave the Afghans (and Pakistanis) to a violent future. Already 9 years old, this war is simply unwinnable until US civilian and military planners understand why Afghanistan is being taken over by deserts so severely and being exacerbated by current US policy, whether deliberate or through neglect. It goes without saying that such policy has to be devoid of any US political affiliation and based purely on sound resource management, as any nation would practice above and beyond politics.

About twenty years ago I worked in Baluchistan on the Pakistan side of the border and reported on the situation endangering the region from an ecological point of view. Part of my report included warning that nearby cities would run out of water because of the prevailing policies. As many have acknowledged, we will fight worse wars over water than over oil. Every single Pakistani professional person responsible for such policies that I dealt with was trained in a US university. Every one of them was totally closed to any new knowledge and they, as Muslims, explained to me that in their culture you do not question your teachers! I would wager a bet that no officer at West Point or Sandhurst for that matter, or any advisor on the civilian policy in either the Bush or Obama administrations, has any idea that the civilian policy for Afghanistan/Pakistan needs to address the dogma in US land grant universities. I use the word dogma advisedly because the teachings about managing vast areas of land like Afghanistan, Pakistan and frankly Iraq as well as the boiling Horn of Africa region, and the US itself are based not on science but on deeply held beliefs unsupported by any known scientific research. I realize such

issues are avoided in peace-time because of personal and institutional sensitivities – but a costly war is being waged and lives are being lost. It is frankly only in such times that the President can put matters on a “war footing” with the interests of the nation before the egos or sensitivities of individuals or institutions.

So while General McChrystal’s head has rolled for openly criticizing his civilian superiors, it would be wise I believe for the President to investigate his administration’s civilian policies so fundamental to success. Frankly this is most likely to occur only if ordinary citizens call for change. Change not only in the military command but also in the civilian policies that American, British and other nation’s soldiers are giving their lives to buy time to implement.