

A course not worth staying

The mission in Afghanistan can't be won by NATO forces; we need to relinquish control to local forces so that we're no longer viewed as agents of colonialism



HASNAIN
KAHN

'Finish the job' seems to be the phrase of choice for those who want to maintain the current Canadian troop levels in Afghanistan or even increase them. It's a view that has had newfound support after a report on Afghanistan by an independent commission headed by former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley was released on Tuesday.

However, "finishing the job"—a phrase coined by our southern neighbours for defending their continued failures in Iraq—completely ignores the reality on the ground in Afghanistan. The fact of the matter is that the military can't, and shouldn't, attempt to finish this job. Pakistan's Musharraf has famously and rightly stated that guerillas survive and succeed only when they have the support of the public—and the Taliban still certainly have it.

I don't claim to be an expert on Afghanistan, but I'm familiar with some of its history and cultural nuances—especially that of the ethnic Pashtuns, of which the so-called "Taliban" are mostly comprised.

As far as culture is concerned, the Pashtuns have never subjugated themselves to foreign aggressors. Death or victory are the only choices—never submission.

This is a lesson that British colonial forces learned the hard way.

Similarly, before NATO made efforts to "liberate" Afghanistan, the former Soviet Union made a similar attempt and lost big—according to official reports, around 15 000 troops died in just nine years. During that time, their forces were slowly bled dry until the Soviet people eventually grew tired of it.

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The biggest mistake the West has made in Afghanistan is that they have been assessing the situation in black-and-white terms—an attitude that has removed the possibility of opening a dialogue or compromising. Ever since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, the Taliban have gained numbers, momentum, and the will to fight. Their goal is to purify their land of invaders, and so long as we remain their will won't falter.

Whereas the loss of each Canadian soldier is one too many, on the other side of the battleground, every death is martyrdom for the sake of the fatherland—and clearly there's no shortage of those wishing to achieve such status.

In the backdrop to this all, the same Pakistani Army that gave birth to the earliest fighters of this movement is now fighting them across the border in their own country. The West has continued support of a dictator whose army consists of huge chunks of Pashtuns, so it isn't any wonder then that, more often than not, the Pakistan Army troops have preferred to lay down their arms rather than fight their Muslim brothers.

General Musharraf has also arbitrarily pushed Pakistan towards liberal reforms reminiscent of pre-Islamic-Revolution-era Iran. While such changes may have a positive intent, they have been implemented too far and too fast in a country that is not yet ready. The vast majority of the Pakistani people have viewed them as too much freedom, and as a result, the people have naturally appreciated the Taliban's role in both Pakistan and Afghanistan—perhaps as a necessary evil—as it supposedly preserves the Islamic values of modesty and conservatism. So the wall-chalking appearing in the heart of Islamabad wishing the Taliban good luck shouldn't come as a surprise.

We must realize that though we view the Taliban as having imposed their will on the people, it is, in fact, the Western nations that the Afghani people see as the party attempting to force their way.

Only when Western forces cease to be seen as agents of colonialism—and when Kabul and Islamabad are no longer viewed as extensions of Washington—will the Taliban lose the support of the people and crumble.

We all have to share the roads—something you inattentive cyclists need to remember



KYLE
CHISHOLM

It's a cold and placid morning. The sun slowly creeps over the horizon and taunts my bleary eyes, etched with throbbing red veins from a night of whiskey-soaked debauchery. I'm the undergraduate everyman, simply too hung over and preoccupied with printing off notes before a gruelling 9am class to realize that daring bicyclists patiently await a chance to tempt fate and challenge my reflexes as I make my way to campus.

That's right; I'm driving down 112 Street in the general direction of HUB mall.

I have no problems with cyclists, or with any of the reasons one would choose that form of transport (such as health, cost-effectiveness, and eco-friendliness). However, I do have a problem with those same people that believe being on a bike gives them some sort of greater visibility or exemption from the rules of the road.

More often than not, the bicyclists

"I have no problems with cyclists, or with any of the reasons one would choose that form of transport (such as health, cost-effectiveness, and eco-friendliness). However, I do have a problem with those that believe being on a bike gives them some sort of greater visibility or exemption from the rules of the road."

I see cyclists around campus completely fail to give drivers any kind of warning about the lane changes or turns that they're going to make. This really inhibits a driver's ability to anticipate and respond to a cyclist's actions—making it, in turn, harder for them to prevent their bumpers from making back-end love to some unfortunate's Norco in the toe-to-tit rush of Monday morning traffic.

The cruel injustice here is that the University area is laden with clearly marked bicycle paths designed to minimize the interference with vehicular traffic and danger to cyclists. These pathways provide an extremely convenient way of getting around, and in many circumstances are faster than taking conventional heavy-traffic routes.

To me, these seem like a much better choice, especially in winter. In such slick road conditions, I don't know how some cyclists manage not to slip under the hungry tires of a meandering Volkswagen.

The dangers of travel on main thoroughfares are compounded by the fact that there just simply isn't any space for bicycles. All too often, I've seen cars fly by within inches of a cyclist, either eliciting colourful language or, more alarmingly, no response at all. Many of these people aren't wearing helmets either though; perhaps their careless behaviour is due to having been struck on their bare noggin on previous occasions.

So please, cyclists, next time you feel the urge to ride down those main roads at the annoyance of motorists everywhere, consider the alternative options that will get you to your destination in comparable time. Campus is designed with a large volume of bicycle traffic in mind, so make use of the infrastructure.

At the very least, give drivers some warning before making erratic moves and try to be more conscious of the motorists around you, because they're not necessarily paying any attention either.

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