

Support Peace and Development in Afghanistan

Advocate

Contact your members of Congress and call for U.S. efforts to refocus strategy for a sustainable peace in Afghanistan. For help, see the MCC U.S. Washington Office Web site (<http://washington.mcc.org/>), the Mennonite Church USA Peace and Justice Support Network Web site (<http://peace.mennolink.org/advocacy.html>) or e-mail Theo Sittler (tsittler@mcc.org).

To receive free weekly prayers for peace and other resources from Mennonite Church USA Peace and Justice Support Network, see <http://peace.mennolink.org/getinvolved.html>.

Donate

Donate to MCC's general fund for peace and development in Afghanistan. Your gift will meet basic needs, seek solutions to poverty and build peaceful communities through MCC's ongoing programs in Afghanistan (<http://donate.mcc.org/project/Afghanistan>).

Donate to the Global Family Education sponsorship program. Afghanistan urgently needs sustainable aid to rebuild basic systems. Help the Afghan Children (HTAC) is an MCC partner that cooperates with the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in restoring basic education (<https://donate.mcc.org/project/global-family-afghanistan-help-afghan-children>).

¹UNICEF

²Nicholas D. Kristof, "More Schools, Not Troops," *New York Times*, Oct. 28, 2009.

³Yochi J. Dreazen, "Suicide Toll Fuels Worry That Army Is Strained," *Online Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 3, 2009.

Writers: Lisa Schirch, professor of peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University Center for Justice and Peacebuilding and director of the university's 3D Security Initiative; Theo Sittler, MCC Legislative Associate for International Affairs; Susan Mark Landis, Mennonite Church USA denominational minister for peace and justice (SusanML@MennoniteUSA.org).



Afghanistan needs a security strategy that builds sustainable peace, not more troops.

When we hear the good news of the love of God, ... our response includes ... placing full trust in God alone. ... When we who once were God's enemies are reconciled with God through Christ, we also experience reconciliation with others.

—Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective, Article 8: Salvation

As Mennonite Christians who are called to go into the world to spread the good news of the gospel to all people, we proclaim that sending additional troops to Afghanistan is good news to no one. We believe that our personal security rests only in God and that our nation's security rests in democracy, diplomacy and development.

The current situation

Afghanistan is one of the least developed countries in the world, with more than 60 per cent of its population living on less than U.S.\$1 a day. More than 20 years of wars and internal instability and recent floods and disease have nearly destroyed the country. Only 22 per cent of the population has access to improved drinking-water sources and 30 per cent to safe sanitation facilities.

Additional troops are expensive, both in terms of financial cost to the United States and health and family costs to the soldiers. For instance, the cost to station one soldier in Afghanistan for one year is between \$500,000 and \$1 million. That nearly equals the cost of building 20 schools there. Likely because of multiple and long deployments, last year the Army's suicide rate exceeded that of the general population for the first time: 20.2 per 100,000 people in the military, compared with the civilian rate of 19.5 per 100,000. In October 2009, 16 soldiers killed themselves, an unusually high number. ►

God's Security Strategy in Afghanistan

What would Jesus recommend for Afghanistan?

The New Testament gives us some hints.

God Loves All People. We know that in God's eyes, all people are part of God's creation. So God cares for U.S. security as much as God cares for the children of Afghanistan, even those desperate enough to pick up a gun or plant a roadside bomb.

Jesus Calls Us to Love Our Enemies. Jesus guides us to do good to those who harm us, and to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. The Taliban and Al-Qaeda are some of the most brutal, armed groups the world has ever seen. The Taliban took root amid cold and windy refugee camps where, over decades, poor, landless children of a nation ravaged by the Soviet Union and foreign intervention in their country grew up angry, defiant, humiliated and ready to fight for revenge. To love our enemies means to put ourselves in the shoes of these children who grew up to be violent extremists.

What is the Log in Our Own Eye?

Jesus also notes we should pay more attention to the log in our eye rather than the speck of dust in our neighbor's. According to security experts across the political spectrum, U.S. military presence in Afghanistan is counterproductive. Widespread anger about the presence of U.S. troops and civilian deaths from unmanned drone bombs helps the Taliban and Al-Qaeda recruit new members. What if a foreign government dropped bombs on our towns in an effort to kill terrorists among us? How would we want to be treated if Afghanistan were our own country?

God Gives Humans a Moral Strategy

Jesus' teachings are not just moral advice about how to do what is right. God's security strategy is actually far more effective in building a sustainable peace. What does this mean for U.S. policy in Afghanistan?

Policing, not War

Military experts recommend that there be a change of strategy toward protecting Afghan civilians rather than waging war on the Taliban. Policing and protection are generally accepted as essential for maintaining a democratic civil order. The details

of how Afghan district level police can be supported to protect Afghan civilians are an important part of the U.S. approach to Afghanistan. A number of experts think sending more troops could be counterproductive and is unnecessary in strengthening the Afghan capacity for policing.

Democracy

Real democracy begins with the United States listening closely to the Afghan public. Afghans from the community level to the highest levels of the Afghan government are dismayed at the small voice they feel they have in shaping U.S. policy in their country.

Development

Books, schools, and jobs will be more effective than a military approach at drawing support away from the Taliban. Economic factors like unemployment and poverty fuel support for insurgent groups like the Taliban. Afghanistan needs a development surge to address widespread poverty. Too few U.S. dollars go toward supporting local people's priorities and efforts for stabilizing the country.

Diplomacy

Real security requires a comprehensive peace process that includes high-level regional diplomacy, addressing corruption and the political impasse at the national level, and village-level reconciliation dialogues.

Please join us in prayer:

- for wisdom as U.S. policymakers deliberate how best to support political negotiations, economic development and civilian safety in Afghanistan;
- for the people of Afghanistan who have suffered so much over so many decades—that they may be comforted and find strength to take back their country;
- for the children of Afghanistan—that their hearts may not harden despite the trauma and violence they experience;
- for the men, women and families in the United States and Afghanistan who have been hurt by war and senseless violence;
- for the work of the Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite efforts to foster reconciliation and a comprehensive peace process in Afghanistan
- for NGO workers and their security concerns.