

Responses to questions on notice for Professor Maley

Evaluation, appraisals

Q1. In your submission, you underlined the importance of Australia having mechanisms in place to ensure that 'there is effective, *independent*, appraisal of how the situation on the ground in Afghanistan has been affected by policy initiatives that Australia has pursued. You added that development policies need to be judged by outcomes, not processes. (submission 4, p. [3]).

- Could you comment on the quality and usefulness of the appraisals that have been done on Australian policy initiatives in Afghanistan?

I am reluctant to offer too many comments in this particular area. First, it may take time before the usefulness of Australian policy initiatives in Afghanistan can be properly appraised. Second, the situation in Afghanistan is not shaped by foreign aid alone, and disentangling the causal effects of aid from the causal effect of other relevant variables may be extremely difficult. That said, it is the *independence* of the appraisal process that matters most, for understandably, aid agencies may have a subliminal tendency to value what they have done, just as parents can often see in their children a beauty which is invisible to all other observers.

- You mentioned that development policies need to be judged by outcomes and not process—what prompted you to make this observation?

Compliance with process is relatively easy to assess. The exact outcomes of policy initiative may be far from obvious. For this reason, it may be tempting to replace appraisal based on outcomes with appraisal based on process.

- In your view, does Australia's strategic goal of making sure that Afghanistan does not again become a safe haven for terrorists¹ undermine objectives such as poverty alleviation?

In my view, this is not necessarily the case. In a whole-of-government context, it is conceivable that an allocation of resources for combating terrorism could be at the expense of resources made available for poverty alleviation, but there is also a sense in which securing a territory in a way that allows the initiative of ordinary people to flourish may constitute a significant contribution to poverty alleviation in and of itself.

Understanding the complexity of local power dynamics

Q2. The August 2012 report published by the Feinstein International Center found that Uruzgan highlights the necessity of seeing powerholders in a more nuanced light—that is as agents who exist in a complex web of personal, social and official relationships, and who act on a calculus of best interests.²

1 AusAid's submission 6, p. 21.

2 Paul Fishstein, *Winning Hearts and Minds in Uruzgan Province*, Briefing Note, Feinstein International Center, August 2012, p. 17.

- In your view, how can Australian agencies working in Afghanistan obtain that necessary understanding of the complex web of personal, social and official relationships?

It is extremely difficult to obtain the required level of understanding unless one exploits the skills and expertise of Afghans and international personnel who have spent a considerable amount of time in the environment in which one wishes to work. The turnover of most personnel in military forces, and in government aid agencies, is typically too frequent to allow such expertise to be readily accumulated. This is one reason why the loss of the expert input of The Liaison Office has been an unfortunate development.

Weak central government

Q3. In your submission you noted that officials of the Afghan state are centrally appointed, and have little interest in building organic relations with the local population; and if they do show an interest, it is more likely to be with the view to pursuing future political agendas than to ensuring that development projects are effectively implemented.³

- How do donor countries, such as Australia, overcome this problem and ensure that projects are effectively implemented and that aid reaches the communities most in need without becoming entangled in local power plays?

This is extremely difficult given the need to work within the constitutional framework that has been established in Afghanistan. One approach would be to look for areas of relative success in local service delivery, and seek to focus one's own efforts in such areas. This, however, could detract from the whole-of-government approach that envisions the use of aid to consolidate the achievements of Australian military forces.

Securing the gains

Q4. You noted that many Afghans have acquired important skills that need to be nurtured and protected for the long-run, that:

Even if a number of the signature projects that have been funded by international agencies wither and die, the knowledge and capacities of these Afghans will remain a critical asset for the future. If the Afghan transition unravels completely, rescuing such people from the wreckage may be the most important long-term contribution that countries such as Australia can make to ensuring that something is saved from the efforts of the last ten years (submission 4, p. [5]).

- When you say rescuing such people from the wreckage—what type of action are you contemplating?

Opportunities to be resettled in countries where such skills and expertise can be nurtured. To some degree this is already being contemplated by the establishment of a special visa category for Afghans who worked directly with Australian personnel, but in the future such an approach might be expanded to

3 *Submission 4*, p. [2].

cover other skilled Afghans who have expertise to contribute to the future of their country.

National Solidarity Programme

Q5. In the article attached to your submission, you referred to the National Solidarity Program as a prime example of the 'bottom-up' approach, which has allowed grants to be made to community development councils.⁴ In your evidence last week you mentioned there had been sustainability issues within some projects (p. 6)

- Could you elaborate on the achievements of this program, why it has been successful and scope for improvement? Also, could you explain further what you meant by sustainability issues?

The strength of the National Solidarity Program is that it reflects the sense of needs that *actually exist in real communities*, rather than implementing a proposed agenda of development that may not match what people think they need. Furthermore, since the individual sums that are disbursed under the National Solidarity Program are relatively small, the consequences are hardly catastrophic even if an individual project does miscarry. However, in some circumstances local communities have not sufficiently appreciated what is required to make a project work in the long-run, and that has led to problems of sustainability, since the National Solidarity Program typically offers a one-off grant rather than an endless stream of income.

Q6. In your article attached to your submission, you stated that 'faced with a dysfunctional but centralised state, it is tempting to work directly with communities as a way of aiding reconstruction'. You identify a number of benefits but also challenges working with communities.⁵

- Could you elaborate on the benefits and challenges of working directly with communities and then on balance whether Australian assistance should be looking to fund aid bodies that work directly with communities?

Working with communities can be a good way of minimising the risk of substantial leakage of funds to inefficient middlemen or corrupt officials, and can better produce a match between aid and the priorities of ordinary people. But that said, it is important to reflect in a nuanced fashion on exactly what one means by 'community'. If money seems likely to materialise, there may be a host of people who present themselves to the donors as 'community leaders' even though many of them may lack legitimacy in the eyes of the local population. Therefore, the idea of 'community' needs to be carefully unpacked before it is treated as an unproblematic category in this context. Communities in Afghanistan are often socially complex, and flows of aid into them can be

4 Attachment to Submission 4, William Maley, 'Reconstruction: A Critical Assessment' in Amin Saikal (ed.), *The Afghanistan Conflict and Australia's Role*, Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 83.

5 Attachment to Submission 4, William Maley, 'Reconstruction: A Critical Assessment' in Amin Saikal (ed.), *The Afghanistan Conflict and Australia's Role*, Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 89.

resources that some political actors seek to use in order to boost their positions at the expense of others. As a result, a donor may unwittingly inflame tensions that hitherto had been latent.

Opium production

Q7. In the article attached to your submission, you noted:

The dilemma now is that not only do the neo-Taliban garner revenue from the opium trade, but the same trade may also be playing a role in preventing hundreds of thousands of marginal small cultivators or wage labourers from slipping into destitution, with potentially devastating consequences for them and their dependents, and for political stability more broadly.⁶

- Can you see a role for ODA in reducing farmers' dependence on poppy production? If so, what strategies would you suggest?

This is an area of extreme complexity. There is not a single 'opium problem' in Afghanistan, but rather a range of local conditions which in their own ways militate in favour of the cultivation of opium as opposed to other potential crops. The role that might be played by development assistance in undermining opium cultivation will likely vary according to these specific local conditions. Recent experience in Afghanistan would suggest that there is no point in promoting the idea of alternative livelihoods underpinned by aid unless one can be really confident that these aid flows will be properly sustained.

- To your knowledge, does Australia's aid strategy reflect an understanding of the prevalence and trends in poppy production in Afghanistan?

My sense is that Australian officials have a very good understanding of these complexities. Uruzgan, however, is not the prime location for opium cultivation in Afghanistan: Helmand enjoys that distinction.

- Is the reliance on poppy production of such a serious nature that Australia should articulate a clear position on it or even state that one of its aims is to reduce poppy production? (submission 14, p. 11).

In my opinion, no.

Q8. In the article attached to your submission, you stated that decades of war tend to alter the consciousness of different social groups defined by criteria such as gender and ethnicity, and these altered mind-sets may underpin demands for opportunities that may have been denied in highly stratified, differentiated and patriarchal micro-societies.⁷

6 Attachment to Submission 4, William Maley, 'Reconstruction: A Critical Assessment' in Amin Saikal (ed.), *The Afghanistan Conflict and Australia's Role*, Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 92.

7 Attachment to Submission 4, William Maley, 'Reconstruction: A Critical Assessment' in Amin Saikal (ed.), *The Afghanistan Conflict and Australia's Role*, Melbourne University Press, 2011, p. 79.

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- How does this altered mind set apply to present day Afghanistan and what are the implications for the future?

This is most concretely manifested in an unwillingness to accept a resumption of domination by members of the Pushtun ethnic group as an acceptable political outcome, and in a disposition to resort either to force of arms or to exit from Afghanistan if this seems likely to materialise. The principal implications for the future are that the return of the Taliban could well lead both to heightened conflict in Afghanistan, and to a significant increase in the number of Afghan refugees seeking asylum abroad.

Questions taken on notice during the hearing

Q9. Prof. Maley: ... In fact, there have been cases where local social capital has been disrupted by well intentioned project work. If, for example, you have a tradition in a village of coming together once a year to clean out the irrigation channel, karez, and then an NGO turns up and says that they have karez cleaning as one of the projects, the danger in the long run is that the skill that of cleaning the irrigation channel will be lost by the community in favour of the skill of writing a funding application.

Senator RHIANNON: Do you have other examples of that? Could you take that on notice?

Prof. Maley: Yes, there are multiple examples. But this is a major concern.

In Afghanistan, the unintended consequences of intentional action have been widely documented, and the erosion of social capital is but one of these. A particularly alarming example, noted by Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart in their book *Fixing Failed States*, was the way in which the reckless supply of grain to Afghanistan after 2001 suppressed grain prices, undermining the livelihoods of local producers, and disposing them to cultivate opium as an alternative to cereal crops. This is but one many examples one could cite.