SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO AUSTRALIA'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN AFGHANISTAN

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Antony Loewenstein

I am writing with my thoughts, as an independent journalist and author who has spent time in Afghanistan in 2012, about the best way to ensure Australia's aid program in Afghanistan is delivered in the best way possible in the coming years.

One of the major concerns is that the Australian or US military deliver aid to locals that ensures they believe our support is militarised. Moreover, NGOs and soldiers become indistinguishable, a danger to the former.

I would encourage Australia cease funding warlords in provinces and engage Afghan civil society to establish a more just and democratic future. This will not be achieved if Canberra continues giving aid to only side in a brutal civil war that may be worsen after many Western forces leave by 2014.

Australia's best contribution to Afghanistan would be the non-military kind. Placing ourselves in the middle of a conflict we've never understood, while doing America's bidding, is a recipe for continued uncertainty.

One of the key points I heard while reporting in Afghanistan is that many civilians simply want the West to leave them alone and end the occupation entirely. Resistance to the Australian presence will only deepen in the coming years if we both deliver aid while at the same time conduct destructive and futile night raids against supposed insurgents. It remains very unclear what legacy, if any, our more than 10 year engagement in the country will have, since Australia is largely seen as serving American, occupation interests. This can change, and should, if Australia wants to play a productive relationship with Kabul in the decade ahead.

Aid of the non-military kind, such as in health and education, is the only way this may be achieved and a reversal of a decade of failed, Western policies that have led to a Taliban victory, something civilians there will be feeling for years to come.