New Zealand in Afghanistan

Reflecting on theory and practice

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Outline

- Background
- Theory and methods
- The conventional narrative:
  - Getting to Bamyan (2001-2004)
  - Consolidation (2005-2008)
  - Withdrawing (2009-2013)
- Tentative conclusions

Background

- Puzzle my thesis addresses is the dissonance between what I saw in Afghanistan and what was reported in New Zealand - between the rising insecurity Afghans experienced and the alleged success of New Zealand's role in the international campaign against terror

- My interest is not in *what* happened but *how* New Zealand's suuccess was presented

Background

- NZ and the international campaign against terrorism in Afghanistan
  - Comprehensive approach to the international campaign against terror encompassing security and development
    - NZ Special Air Services (SAS) to combat operation Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)
    - NZDF personnel to UN Security Council-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)
    - NZDF personnel to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), first under OEF and later an expanded ISAF led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
    - Humanitarian and development assistance via usual channels – Red Cross Family, UN humanitarian organisations and national/international non-government organisations

Theory and methods

- Traditional approaches to security argue that threats are out there and can be objectively identified

- Existential threats to the state demand a military response, otherwise the political community ceases to exist

- US-led campaign to eliminate the threat of Al Qaeda, overthrow the Taleban government and reconstruct Afghanistan as a liberal democracy

Theory and methods

Alternative critical approach to security in Securitisation theory

- For a problem or issue to become a question of security it must be constructed as such in political discourse
- To *securitise* a problem or issue is to successfully pose it as an existential threat to the state
- *Securitisation* grants the state authority to use any and all means to protect the political community
- Securitisation also requires *de-descrutisation*

Theory and methods

Poststructural securitisation theory

- From a poststructuralist perspective,
  - Identity does not exist objectively 'out there' able to be discovered but is produced discursively in policy and practice.
  - States do not arrive with fully formed identities, rather identiites are formed through the enactment of foreign policy, which in turn legitimises policy.
  - Identities are simultaneously (discursive) foundation and product.

Theory and method

- Using discourse analysis and authoritative government texts,
- A conventional narrative is reconstructed about:
  - why New Zealand was in Afghanistan,
  - what we were doing there, and
  - why, after a decade we could withdraw.

The Conventional Narrative

- Three phases to New Zealand's participation
  - Joining the US-led international campaign against terrorism and deploying a PRT to Bamyan (2001-2003).
  - Extending security and facilitating development in Bamyan (2004-2008).
  - Withdrawing the NZ PRT (2009-2013).

The Conventional Narrative

- Joining the US-led international campaign against terrorism and deploying a PRT to Bamyan (2001-2003)
  - NZ is a 'good international citizen', upholder of rule of law, multilateralist, always ready to play our part and join our allies and friends to defend freedom and democracy.
  - We have demonstrated our willingness to die for freedom and democracy since Gallipoli.
  - We only fight just wars mandated by the UN.
  - We joined this on because of Taleban intransigence and threat of international terrorism, and because there was a UN mandate.
  - We must fight terrorists and build liberal democracies to eliminate safe havens and the threat of terrorism.
  - It is important to address terrorism comprehensively by contributing to combat operations, peacekeeping and humanitarian/development work.
  - To ensure a comprehensive approach, encompassing security and development, NZ will also deploy a PRT, which is not a combat force; but a strengthened 'military observer capacity' that also facilitates development.
  - Rebuilding Afghanistan as a democracy critical to eliminating risk that it will harbour terrorists again.

The Conventional Narrative

- Extending security and facilitating development in Bamyan (2004-2008)
  - NZ's comprehensive approach encompasses both security and development to fight terrorism and build stability necessary to nation building.
  - The risk of not engaging is Afghanistan 'fails' and again hosts terrorists that pose a threat to the West.
  - Without "security, development is impossible, and without development security by itself cannot achieve economic and social progress" – the two are inextricably linked and cannot be pursued in isolation from each other.
  - NZ PRT is a 'model' for other nations; New Zealand's 'reputation is impeccable' … our efforts have meant Bamyan is becoming one of the most stable, secure and progressive provinces.
  - Our efforts are such our contribution has been described a the "equivalent to two full US divisions."
  - The PRT, especially, "epitomises the mutual relationship between security and development, with each relying on the other."

The Conventional Narrative

- Withdrawing the NZ PRT (2009-2013)
  - New National government reiterates the importance of a comprehensive approach encompassing both security and development and the importance of NZDF with capability to address traditional military threats and new non-conventional threats.
  - Security is about both military threats and "securing New Zealand's interests, and protecting the institutions and values that help New Zealanders to live in the ways we prefer."
  - Contemporary security needs range from defeating or deterring insurgency to eliminating those conditions in which terrorism thrives, refugee camps, ghettos by facilitating civil reconstruction and nation-building."
  - NATO's new 2008 strategy to address rising insecurity 'surges' troops to build stability and security and allow for increased investment and economic development.
  - NZ has been so effective in Bamyan that it is chosen as first to 'transition' lead security role from international military to national security forces, and NZ withdraws from Bamyan in April 2013.
  - Significant investment in solar power, eco-tourism, airport facilities and agriculture are all evidence that the stability NZ brought is holding and economic development taking off.
  - Future investments in security forces to protect the gains of the last decade.

Tentative conclusions

- Absence of context and history makes New Zealand's narrative appear as natural and inevitable and so unchallengeable

- Afghan conflict rendered an Afghan issue with no account of the role of Western interventions, past or present

- Securitisation of the West/international community of liberal democracies and New Zeland's membership that is at risk rather than the threat of terrorist attack

- Desecuritisation through shifting responsibility for that threat in Bamyan to national security forces following capacity development in isolation from the wider context – again emphasis on Afghan deficits

- 'Proof' of the effectiveness of NZ's comprehensive approach, especially the PRT, is the increased level of NZ ODA investment in solar power, agriculture and tourism

- NZDF identity - reconstructed itself as an institution needed to defend the state from miltiary threats but also able to respond to a wide range of non-conventional threats