



Afghan Australian Development Organisation

Education Training Livelihoods

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Foreign Policy White Paper Taskforce

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The Afghan Australian Development Organisation (AADO) offers these brief suggestions, with specific reference to Afghanistan, as a country with which Australia must remain involved. Some lessons or approaches could be considered more broadly. This submission will not aim to address all questions.

The Afghan Australian Development Organisation is a diaspora-led Melbourne-based community organisation which provides education and training in Afghanistan for those with minimal opportunities, in particularly women, to foster sustainable livelihoods and professional skills development.

Working in Afghanistan as AADRO, the Afghan Australian Development and Rehabilitation Organisation, AADO has a proven track record of high outcome, low cost programs which are delivered by local project staff with deep community networks and trusted relationships.

01 AUSTRALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY NEEDS TO BE GROUNDED IN A CLEAR-EYED ASSESSMENT OF OUR NATIONAL INTERESTS.

→ How should we define Australia's national interests in a changing world? How should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy? What should we do differently? How can we do better?

Australia's national interests lie in helping achieve a more stable, peaceful, environmentally safe and equitable global order. Gender equality, disability inclusion, concern for the poorest and most vulnerable, linked with greater skilling, sustainable development, livelihoods support, job creation and barter and social protection systems to ensure all people gain greater access to the resources needed to live are vital. Values of greater equity, respect, fairness and non-discrimination should be promoted.

The Sustainable Development Goals involve setting wider social and political goals that are crucial for the planet's survival, for example, climate safety; reducing conflict and so supplying a peace dividend into greater development for poorer nations.

In a changing world it can be difficult to ascertain what 'national interests' are. For Australia, it may appear that it is our national interest to predominantly on our region, in an attempt to avoid the conflict and confusion that currently exists across the globe. The danger, however, is an avoidance of our global commitments as a developed nation. Whatever the benefits or drawbacks of our Middle East and South-West Asian involvement have been, Australia must face the reality that as a result of a prolonged engagement, we have a responsibility to remain active in the pursuit of humanitarian goals.

As such, AADO seeks to ensure that the Australian foreign policy outlined in the White Paper continues to follow traditional values that define the Australian character. Among these is a commitment to honour responsibilities, to help those less fortunate, and to strive for a freer, safer world.

AADO believes that DFAT should re-commit to focusing on aid delivery through diverse means and programs in Afghanistan. This is a time when Afghans are asking Australians not to forget Afghanistan. AADO seeks to build and maintain the direct link that sees Australians from all walks of life joining with the Afghan diaspora to harness both financial and in-kind resources to support Afghan families.

While not directly in our region, Afghanistan has been Australia's longest war. A significant commitment, immense sacrifice and financial resources have been brought to this effort for more than a decade of engagement. AADO urges the Government not to give up now. Very significant bonds have resulted between Afghans and the Australian community. The risks are real, but this is often the case in places that desperately need our development contribution on the ground. There is no doubt that, in an insecure environment like Afghanistan, the ability of diasporas to work under the radar with an ear to the ground for emerging security risks and disruption is critical to managing risk.

In our dealings with Australian community, there is considerable engagement around our local effort in improving the lives of Afghan families and communities, and this can be built upon.

02 AUSTRALIA HAS DIVERSE INTERESTS THAT SPAN THE GLOBE.

→ Which countries will matter most to Australia over the next 10 years? Why and in what ways? How should we deepen and diversify key relationships?

→ Which global trends, such as developments in technology, environmental degradation and the role of non-state actors, are likely to affect Australia's security and prosperity? How should Australia respond?

Afghanistan is a country in which Australia has had long military and humanitarian aid involvement. Additionally, it has been a significant source of asylum seekers and refugees to Australia, and globally. Non-state actors, the Taliban, and more recently reports of ISIS's presence, are significant concerns to the Afghan Government and to Australia. As already mentioned, the support of local Afghan organisations in development efforts is important. Successful development initiatives can help lessen disaffection in communities that otherwise may support non-state actors.

More moderate factions of non-state actors may also be persuaded to work with the government and the international community if aid resources are shared with their traditional supporters.

Education, training and employment are as valuable as military might. To counter the spread of extremism, AADO promotes greater livelihood support, education and training, especially for women and their families.

Relationships with Afghanistan could be deepened by:

- Maintenance of aid
- Discussions on power-sharing between the Afghan Government and Taliban
- Negotiating the need for respecting agreed rights
- Promoting trade
- Family reunion for more recently arrived Afghans, notably those accepted as refugees, even if they have arrived by boat.

Australia undoubtedly has a long list of relevant partners across the globe, and for some, Afghanistan may not figure highly on this list. At AADO, however, we seek to ensure that Afghanistan is not forgotten once more as it has been several times throughout history. In the early 1990's, as global attention left Afghanistan after the Soviet-Afghan War, the Taliban was able to take control and foster the growth of organisations such as Al Qaeda. With this in mind, as the Taliban seeks to once more take control across Afghanistan. Australia should continue to support the current government while undermining non-state actors in the region.

To achieve this, Australia should harness the diverse resources across the aid sector and the

general Australian community. While military intervention should be avoided, funding should be directed towards programs with a proven history of success that may encourage long-term growth and prosperity in Afghanistan.

An example of this exists in the AADO Master Science program. Such a program seeks to train teachers in better teaching methods, directly leading to better academic results for the students. As a result of better results, the students may attend university – an opportunity that has been too long denied to them. With the increase of academic success, Afghanistan can actively turn away from its past chaos with the generation of a professional class, capable of helping genuine development from the inside.

By helping Afghan youth turn away from extremism, Australia can actively aid the fight against terrorism without necessarily promoting violence. As has been stated by several studies, as education rates increase and genuine opportunities open up – the draw of radical Islam and terrorist groups diminishes.

An interrelationship exists between extremism in Afghanistan and in Australia. Continuing our development activities in Afghanistan has an important connection with the Government's' efforts to prevent the recruitment of young Afghan Australians into extremism.

03 AUSTRALIA IS AN INFLUENTIAL PLAYER IN REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

→ Which regional and global organisations matter most to us? How should we support and shape them? How can we maximise our influence?

One key body is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its importance of strengthening creative protection-oriented approaches to assist asylum seekers and refugees, in countries of first asylum and for voluntary return when it is safe to do so. Australia should adequately fund the UNHCR and continue to work with it on developing effective regional refugee protection systems, continuing to involve countries that are not signatories to the UN Refugee Convention.

05 AUSTRALIA CONFRONTS A RANGE OF STRATEGIC, SECURITY AND TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGES.

→ How can Australia best deal with instability beyond our borders? How can our foreign policy, including our overseas development assistance program, support a more prosperous, peaceful and stable region? How should our international engagement work to protect Australia against transnational security threats, such as terrorism?

As a small nation, our ability to influence global affairs is decidedly small. However, with our relative economic wealth, Australia has an ability to support developing countries through education and training. Given our limited human resource capabilities, Australia should rely on links across the globe to help magnify our influence. An example of this would include additional monetary support for aid organisations that operate using international staff that have an ability to act within the country.

For AADO, this local knowledge and acceptance has been a crucial factor in long-term success. While a small Australian staff of volunteers can oversee operations and direct funds, the Afghan team runs and designs the programs with feedback from Afghan men and women. Such a model has allowed for the empowerment of women, ensuring their involvement throughout the program and increasing their life-skills and their confidence.

Overall, Australia can enhance its influence by using non-traditional means to affect change across the globe. Aid work should be seen as a means to generate prosperity, thereby undermining the appeal of non-state actors.

The commitment by the Australian government to promote and strengthen the role of diaspora groups could include supporting the involvement of diaspora groups in dialogue with their respective national governments. Such governments may often regard diaspora groups with suspicion as critics, or supporters of non-state actors. Dialogue involving diasporas could help build greater opportunities for conflict-resolution.

06 AUSTRALIA USES A RANGE OF ASSETS AND CAPABILITIES TO PURSUE OUR INTERNATIONAL INTERESTS.

→ What assets will we need to advance our foreign policy interests in future years? How can we best use our people and our assets to advance Australia's economic, security and other interests and respond to external events.

How can Government work more effectively with non-government sectors, including business, universities and NGOs, to advance our international interests?

AADO joins with the Diaspora Action Australian to commend the Government on its intention to support the role of diaspora-led smaller NGOs in delivering Australian aid programs. DFAT recognises the real advantage of diaspora-led organisations being able to work effectively and efficiently through enduring and trusted relationships with local staff and community leaders. Our work is from Afghan to Afghan supported by Australians. As already indicated, using diaspora groups can maximise our aid impact by helping to build dialogue and peace in their home countries.

AADO proposes that DFAT proactively broaden the group of agencies it funds to deliver

development programs, through creating a mechanism that would allow support for diaspora organisations, without the present full burden of ANCP Accreditation. Such support could include funding for overseas projects as well as local diaspora group staff capacity building, for example, by placement of paid staff. AADO is aware of the Australian Government’s concern with risk management, for example in Afghanistan limiting implementation options to a few trusted partners with strict risk management procedures. However, we believe that local groups should be considered for funding, submit risk analyses and be recognised for their local knowledge on the ground. One way is that funding should be allocated to diaspora organisations that can affect real change without costing as much as larger organisations.

Australian people are caring, smart and capable of incredible generosity. As such, it is their potential that should be harnessed in addressing global problems. An example is that a small voluntary organisation like AADO last year brought to this work a fundraising effort of \$225, 000 from the donations and philanthropy of Australians, while its volunteers across the Committee of Management, Executive Director, and working groups and students contributed salaries and skills valued conservatively at \$220, 000. There is potential for organisations like AADO to deploy much more significant Government resources and to replicate successful initiatives. A trial of accountability structures should be implemented to move towards more significant grants to diaspora organisations. Current structures like the DAP grants are too small to fill this void.

Making room in DFATs funding allocations for a smaller NGO like AADO will contribute significantly to future sustainability but would also recognise the role organisations like AADO can play in the fight against extremism and radicalism. Education, training and employment are undoubtedly as valuable as military might.

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