



STRATEGIC FLASHLIGHT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND ASIAN LANGUAGES



Curtin University

Seminar:

Shooting & Chewing Gum at the Same Time: Why We Should Negotiate with the Local Taliban

Date : 23 March 2011

Time : 4.30 - 6.00pm

Venue : Council Chambers Building 100
Curtin University

Abstract

In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, T. E. Lawrence wrote "...the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they act their dreams with open eyes to make it possible." While Lawrence's extraordinary World War One mission was in Arabia fighting the Turkish, his comment epitomizes the mind set you are confronted with in Afghanistan when negotiating with the Taliban. The key question is how to look them in the eye and negotiate while fighting at the same time. This has been done before such as the Korean War, Northern Ireland and Vietnam.

In Afghan tribal society even when engaged in war against another tribe, lines of communication are maintained. Dialogue between elders from rival tribes is often what resolves disputes, not military defeat. The key to these negotiations is not just that they are a balance of soft and hard power, it is that they occur at the local level or with leaders who are directly connected with the local population. They are not conducted from the top-down approach as the ISAF-NATO Command appears to be focused; with individuals who after years of hiding in Pakistan have little in common with local Taliban.

This presentation asserts: 1) negotiations with the Taliban must be at the local District level and not left to the Quetta Shura and Afghan President Karzai; 2) US General Petraeus should increase the use of hard power that drives a lethal spear into the foreign insurgents; 3) As long as the local District Taliban leaders do not allow foreign insurgents into their area or permit non-state actors such as al-Qaeda to re-establish then the ISAF-NATO forces will not interfere in their community.

If this bottom-up approach was to be seriously implemented the biggest test will be the enforcement of such an arrangement – for one thing is omnipresent in Afghanistan and that is an Afghan's propensity to see if foreign forces (foreign insurgency or ISAF-NATO) have the courage to fulfil their promises.



Presenter: Mr Jason Thomas (Victoria, Curtin University)

In 2010 Jason Thomas has returned from his posting in Afghanistan, where he was implementing counterinsurgency operations in three provinces in Afghanistan - Ghazni, Wardak and Logar with US and Coalition forces. He was engaged with a number of parties, including negotiating directly with the Taliban.

Prior to his mission in Afghanistan Jason had delivered \$3 million of medical equipment to the civil war area in Sri Lanka after establishing one of the largest private responses to the Boxing Day Tsunami in Victoria - this also involved negotiating with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Tigers commanders. Jason implemented the Kokoda Track Project in Boroondara in 2008 taking disadvantage youth up the Kokoda track with the support of the Victorian Police, Hawthorn

Football Club and the Kokoda Veterans from the 39th Infantry Battalion - this has now been adopted by the YMCA as an annual event. Previously he was on the board of the 20th Man Foundation. He has worked as a political advisor in the House of Commons and House of Lords and as well as being a government relations advisor for AWB and Mayne Group. He was Queen's Relay Baton Runner for the 2006 Commonwealth Games, nominated for Citizen of the Year in 2005 and awarded a Paul Harris Fellow from the Rotary Club of Canterbury.

In 2011, Jason has commenced his PhD research at Curtin University.

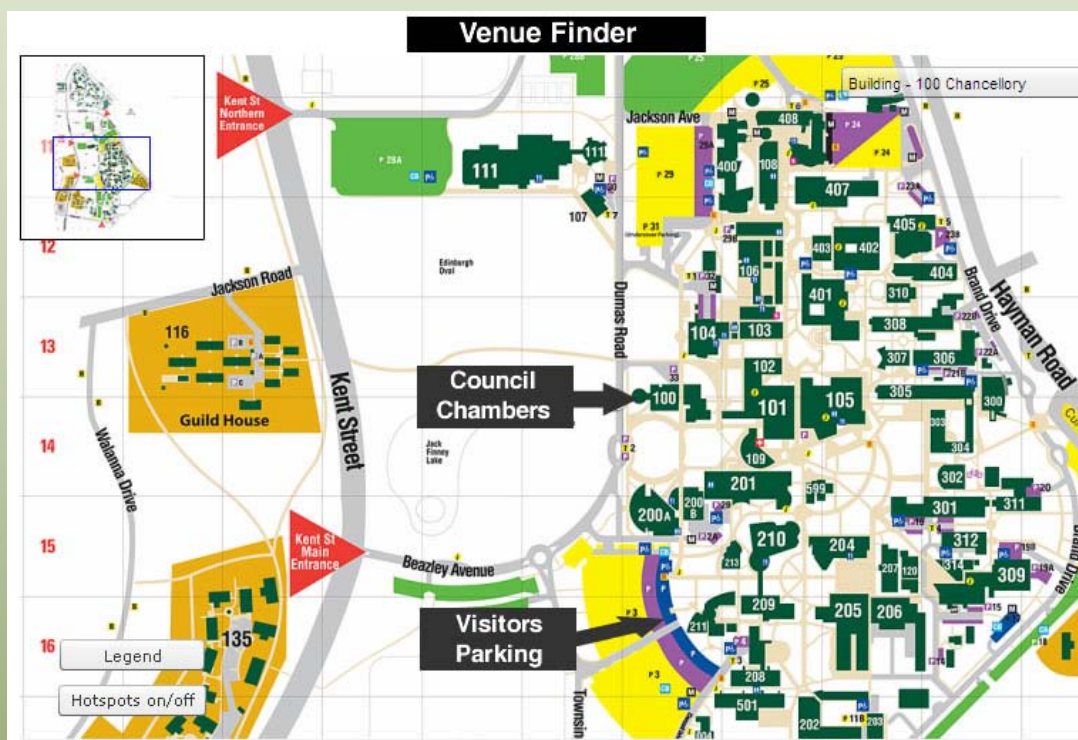
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RSVP is essential



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