Introduction

The military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially the latter, highlight valuable questions about the cost of general education and the time apparently required for useful results to be achieved. The learnings from these experiences raise even more valuable questions regarding any general global strategy encompassing the full spectrum of crises that characterize the times and the challenges of the 21st century. These would appear to merit urgent attention in the light of a previous argument (We Are on the Brink of Failure in Responding to Global Crises, 2009) which endeavours to makes use of Afghanistan as a strategic metaphor.

In a report by The Economist (The War in Afghanistan, 17 October 2009) with reference to the tours of commanders there, it is noted that: The Afghan conflict, it is often said, has not been an eight-year war, but eight one-year wars. The best initiatives, it is claimed, are too often dropped when the best commanders end their tours. It remains unclear whether the length of the educational tour is too short or whether there is a subsequent failure to integrate individual insights into collective military learning.

It might similarly be argued that an eight year military campaign has been of questionable effectiveness in general education of the public, whether in the USA or amongst its allies in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Given the declared ambition to "spread democracy" it is equally unclear how effective has been the programme of general education of the Afghan population or their neighbours -- especially in the light of the level of fraud in the democratic election extensively supported by the USA and its ISAF allies there.

The question explored here is the adequacy of the approach to general education and whether, as currently conceived, its costs are inherently undesirable or unsustainable. In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, it was argued that the inequality created by huge bankers salaries is a price worth paying for greater prosperity (Public must learn to 'tolerate the inequality' of bonuses, says Goldman Sachs vice-chairman, The Guardian, 22 October 2009). This is reminiscent of the tolerance expected by a US Ambassador to the United Nations, Madeleine Albright, when questioned on whether the sanctions against Iraq (killing more children than at Hiroshima) were appropriate. Albright replied: "I think this is a very hard choice, but the price -- we think the price is worth it." (We Think the Price is Worth It, Fair, 2001).

Of much greater interest however are the insights from the above of relevance to the challenge of generality in contrast with specificity - - in a global context. In that systemic context disciplines, development programmes, and strategic initiatives of any kind, are all essentially specialized in nature and indifferent to consequences beyond their focus. Claims of multidisciplinary approaches tend to be of a token nature or are revelatory of the asystemic manner in which they are conceived and implemented in practice. Major intergovernmental "systems", such as those of the United Nations or the European Union, are systemic only in an administrative sense with very little facility for inter-sectoral coordination on substantive matters (other than to mitigate budgetary competitiveness). There is little sense from within such systems of the relevance of preoccupations beyond their administrative mandates.

The mindset is reinforced within academic environments, fragmented as they are into "faculties" with little concern as to how disparate intellectual faculties call for cognitive integration -- again, other than in an administrative sense. "Interdisciplinarity" and "transdisciplinarity" are viewed with disdain. So-called "general studies" have not engendered the requisite cross-fertilization essential for appropriate global governance. The educational value of "management schools" and "schools of business administration" has notably been
called into question by the implication of their graduates in engendering the financial crisis of 2008.

Outside such frameworks much is made of the need for appropriate leadership -- as the keystone to operational generality -- and many programmes are designed to that end, notably in military academies. But, as with the education of generals, it is quite unclear that leaders of the quality required for the foreseen challenges of global governance are emerging. Those that do emerge as national and international leaders are as likely to be suspected or indicted for malfeasance as not, as the case of Tony Blair has so admirably indicated (Urgent Need for Blair as President of Europe, 2009).

Indicative human costs of general education

Wikipedia provides various lists of potential relevance to this argument, notably a List of events named massacres, various Lists of disasters and a List of battles by casualties. The List of wars and disasters by death toll includes the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Lowest death estimate</th>
<th>Highest death estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World War II</td>
<td>1939-1945</td>
<td>40,000,000</td>
<td>72,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World War I</td>
<td>1914-1918</td>
<td>15,000,000</td>
<td>25,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Congo War</td>
<td>1998-2003</td>
<td>3,900,000</td>
<td>5,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam War</td>
<td>1959-1975</td>
<td>2,495,000</td>
<td>5,020,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean War</td>
<td>1950-1953</td>
<td>2,500,000</td>
<td>3,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan Civil War</td>
<td>1979-present</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data on Iraqi casualties in the Iraq conflict since the intervention in March 2003 is highly controversial [see Wikipedia Casualties of the Iraq War]. Estimates range from approximately 100,000 to 1,300,000 [Just Foreign Policy, 2009]. In December 2007, the Iraqi government reported that there were 5 million orphans in Iraq. Typically there is little if any information available on the number of wounded or their degree of incapacitation.

In the case of Afghanistan, data is again highly controversial with no overall total presented [see Wikipedia Civilian casualties of the War in Afghanistan (2001-present)].

As reported in Wikipedia, the death toll in Iraq within the multinational coalition numbered 4,667 in October 2009. In Afghanistan the coalition death toll was 1,492 in October 2009, with that of the Afghan security forces at 5,164 [see Wikipedia List of Afghan security forces fatality reports in Afghanistan].

With respect to the troop increase of 40,000 in Afghanistan, requested by General McChrystal at the time of writing, Nicholas D. Kristof (More Schools, Not Troops, New York Times, 28 October 2009) notes that:

- For the cost of a single additional soldier stationed in Afghanistan for one year, we could build roughly 20 schools there.
- ...for the cost of 40,000 troops over a few years -- well, we could just turn every Afghan into a Ph.D.
- ... there is still vast scope for greater investment in education, health and agriculture in Afghanistan. These are extraordinarily cheap and have a better record at stabilizing societies than military solutions, which, in fact, have a pretty dismal record.
- For roughly the same cost as stationing 40,000 troops in Afghanistan for one year, we could educate the great majority of the 75 million children worldwide who, according to Unicef, are not getting even a primary education.

Varieties of general education

General education: These various estimates are presented to focus attention on the possibility of an indicator that is as yet unavailable, namely the body count associated with the education of each general. Obtaining this figure calls for breaking down the figures in relation to the period of tour of duty of each general in command. This would open a realistic discussion of the number of bodies required to educate a general, appropriately distinguishing between "our guys", their civilians, and the "bad guys" -- since for a given degree of education the number of bodies required in each case would be completely different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Security Assistance Force</th>
<th>ISAF/NATO command in Afghanistan (from Wikipedia)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December 2001</td>
<td>Major-General John McCall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2002</td>
<td>Major General Hilmar Alain Zorlu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 February 2003</td>
<td>Lieutenant General Norbert Van Heyst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 August 2003</td>
<td>Lieutenant General Goetz Gilemaroth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 February 2004</td>
<td>Lieutenant General Rick Hiller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 August 2004</td>
<td>General Jean-Louis Py</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2005</td>
<td>General Elhem Erdagi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 August 2005</td>
<td>General Mauro del Vecchio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May 2006</td>
<td>General David Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 February 2007</td>
<td>General Dan K. McNeil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June 2008</td>
<td>General David D. McKean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 June 2009</td>
<td>General Stanley A. McChrystal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Also of interest would then be the degree of learning achieved after 1,000 bodies, 10,000, 100,000, etc. What "extracurricular" degrees of learning can a general derive from increases in the body count? Is it the case that despite any such experience, a general may still need to "repeat" an educational tour in order to "get it" and pass on to the next learning challenge? In this respect it would be useful to compare the optimistic statements of each general commanding the multinational coalition in Afghanistan on taking command and on termination
of the tour.

Given the extent of investment in military game simulations of conflict, it is also of potential interest to what extent generals are required to clock up a bodycount of hits in such contexts and how their learning progressively develops with that number. More controversial is the extent to which generals are exposed to video coverage of the "blood and gore" of those actually killed, dismembered or wounded, as part of that education -- especially given the availability of footage of enhanced interrogation of any prior induced suffering. To what degree do generals need to be trained to violence and its acceptability?

Curiously, following such education, a general is typically endowed with value-charged medals indicating his or her prowess -- effectively the degree of learning attained. It would be appropriate to use any such indicator to establish a correlation between each such medal and the body count associated with its attribution -- possibly with appended coloured "bars" to distinguish between the number of deaths of "our guys", civilians, and the "bad guys" (responsibility for enhanced interrogation is a challenging special case). A "full chest" of medals is necessarily an indicator of great learning, to be appropriately honoured, and it would be useful to enrich the display with the human cost that enabled it.


**Education of the general public** The political will to sustain intervention by the multinational coalitions in Iraq and in Afghanistan depends on the education of the public -- as the Vietnam War made only too clear. The respective body counts in those conflicts need to be appropriately confronted with the number of voters sustaining their support -- in order to provide an indicator of the body counts necessary to convince voters of the merit of continuing. Clearly a distinction has to be made in producing such indicators between a body count for armed force personnel of the voters' country and that for the indigenous populations.

The question is what is the tipping point in each case. What is the acceptability of 1,000,000 or 10,000,000 foreign civilian deaths? The question is of course pertinent to deaths arising from structural violence rather than physical violence, since such numbers are currently commonplace and expected to become even more dramatic. As noted above, presumably speaking for the population of the USA, the cost of starving to death 500,000 children was considered in political terms to be "worth it".

Further indicators may be developed in relation to those wounded, returning as veterans, possibly severely disabled. Especially important in this respect are those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, potentially creating severe problems in their families and neighbourhoods -- given their trained propensity to violence. The re-integration of veterans is in this respect a major source of general education. Again the question arises as to what numbers can be effectively re-integrated in this way and what are the collective learning stages engendered by particular proportions of veterans so affected? Also of relevance is the rate in which such collective learning is lost through erosion of collective memory (Societal Learning and the Erosion of Collective Memory: a critique of the Club of Rome Report: No Limits to Learning, 1980).

**General systems education** Conflict is enabled through the manner in which relationships are framed by a variety of disciplines and belief systems. In a sense the conflict is engendered and sustained within any such "model". As noted above, typically each such cognitive modality develops and promotes its own model and strives to ensure its dominance in any resource allocation process. Efforts at general systems education are few and far between (General Systems, Education and the relevance of world system data banks and the Inter-Contact technique, 1969). Various initiatives, notably with "blue planet" as part of their title, offer insights into environmental systems, especially from a water perspective. For example the acclaimed Blue Planet role-playing game offers extensive insights into environmental science with some insights into political systems. Few initiatives endeavour to offer insights into the full range of natural and psychosocial systems -- with their interrelationships and their dysfunctionalities.

Given the highly impoverished relationships between such models, the emergent framework is notably significant in terms of its degree of incoherence and inconsistency. It is from such a context that policy think-tanks derive their insights in guiding strategic thinking, and notably engagement in conflict ("Tank-thoughts" from "Think-tanks": metaphors constraining development of global governance, 2003; Meta-challenges of the Future for Networking through Think-tanks, 2005).

It is increasingly acknowledged that the "tunnel vision" and silo thinking engendered by fragmented cognitive modalities are proving dangerously inadequate to strategic governance -- of which conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan are but examples, tragically highlighted by the total inaction in relation to other "conflicts", better described as massacres (e.g. Cambodia, Dafur, Eastern Congo). Examples of equivalent systemic negligence are however evident with respect to other issues typically considered systemically in isolation by institutions claiming exclusive mandates: food, environment, marine resources, energy, etc. Extreme pressures obliging any attempt at inter-sectoral and inter-disciplinary thinking then typically engender dangerously simplistic forms of groupthink, as evident in the case of the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (Groupthink: the Search for Archaeoraptor as a Metaphoric Tale -- missing the link between "freedom fighters" and "terrorists", 2002).

In the light of this argument regarding general education, the question is how many deaths, of whatever cause, are required to ensure that a system boundary is enlarged to include other factors. More simply put, what is the body count tipping point for a cognitive modality to acknowledge its wider social responsibility and the need for it to relate its methodology with other disciplines? More pertinent is the number of bodies required for it to move beyond using any deaths as a means of calling for further investment in its own approach -- as is typical of the pharmaceutical industry.

Again, how many deaths are required to engender what degree of interdisciplinarity and intersectoral coordination? At what point does this emerge from tokenism to engendering genuinely new strategic responses of any relevance? A useful framing of the challenge in
humorous terms is the analysis by John Gall (Systemantics: how systems work... and especially how they fail, 1978), reframed in a separate commentary (Why Systems Fail and Problems Spout Anew, 1980). In terms of faith-based governance and the expectation of a forthcoming "end-times" collapse, the challenge of systemic negligence may be presented in more symbolic terms (Spontaneous Initiation of Armageddon: a heartfelt response to systemic negligence, 2004). More sober analyses are offered by:

- **Jared M. Diamond.** Collapse: how societies choose to fail or succeed. Penguin, 2005
- **Thomas Homer-Dixon.** The Upside of Down: catastrophe, creativity, and the renewal of civilization. Island Press, 2006
- **Donald N. Michael.** On Learning to Plan - And Planning to Learn. Miles River Press, 1997
- **Paul Ormerod.** Why Most Things Fail: evolution, extinction and economics. Wiley, 2005 [extracts].
- **Joshua Cooper Ramo.** The Age of the Unthinkable: Why the New World Disorder Constantly Surprises Us And What We Can Do About It. Little, Brown and Company, 2009
- **Nassim Nicholas Taleb.** The Black Swan: the impact of the highly improbable. Random House, 2007 [contents]
- **John Ralston Saul.** The Unconscious Civilization. Free Press, 1995

More dramatically the question might be asked whether unconsciously the current global civilization has a need for human blood, for reasons similar to those of cultures and civilizations of the past. Blood as the source of life, is central to many religions (notably Christianity, Judaism and Islam) and medicine. Blood has been the basis for many oaths and contracts. Throughout history the many liquid substances (milk, honey and wine) offered in sacrifice to the dead, to spirits and to gods, were symbols of blood. Sacrificial blood was itself obtained from animals in classical times, and from human sacrifice among Asians, Africans, aboriginal Americans, and from prehistoric Europeans. [more]

Modern societies appear to require "human sacrifice" before legislative changes are considered necessary: children have to die before dangerous foodstuffs are prohibited by law, and demonstrators have to be willing to suffer, or lose their lives, before their cause receives attention. More controversial is the extent to which the policies of the Abrahamic religions regarding unchecked procreation should be understood as a dramatic example of neglect of vital systemic boundaries (Johan Rockstrom, Will Steffen, et al., Planetary Boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity, 2009). Should the current and expected deaths be understood as a curious form of deliberate human sacrifice on the altars of their beliefs? (Root Irresponsibility for Major World Problems: the unexamined role of Abrahamic faiths in sustaining unrestrained population growth, 2007)

The question is whether global civilization has an unacknowledged need for a high order of human sacrifice, ironically following the much deprecated pattern of the Aztecs -- even to the point of representing a pyramid on the main global currency on which the livelihoods of so many have recently been sacrificed. Should any "battle for hearts and minds" be considered from this perspective?

How many such sacrifices are required in order to engender an approach to curtail the systemic negligence which currently requires them?

**Possible transformative refractions of general education**

The question here is whether the framing of current initiatives and preoccupations can be fruitfully transformed by approaching them in a new light as previously explored (Transforming the Encounter with Terrorism, 2002). There it was suggested that an alternative framing could draw on alternative policy metaphors as recommended by Donald Schon (Beyond the Stable State, 1973):

> the framing of problems often depends upon metaphors underlying the stories which generate problem setting and set the direction of problem solving.

Could it be that 'counter-terrorism' is a metaphoric trap that guarantees the perpetuation of the cycle of violence - as the Middle East seems so effectively to demonstrate? The following are an indication of some alternative possibilities.

**Transforming canon fodder:** As with the World War 1, it is appropriate to see those who suffer most from current levels of general education as "cannon fodder", namely those regarded or treated as expendable in the face of enemy fire, possibly because of their lack of experience in contrast to the more valuable veterans. They are the metaphorical food for cannon.

This understanding, which remains a fact in Afghanistan as the number of deaths on all sides have indicated, might be fruitfully understood in terms of an alternative framing as canon fodder. Whether it be the canon of democracy which the ISAF allies are seeking to spread with the aid of violence, or the religious canon in terms of which this is violently resisted, the form of the canon has indeed been changed, but perhaps not in its mode of operation in systemic terms. And it still needs fodder in order to operate -- fodder which is destroyed through the digestive processes of the canon.

This transformative reframing is appropriate in that the "clash of civilizations", of which Afghanistan is a manifestation, emerges from the pressures of faith-based governance. These have been exemplified on the one hand by the underlying mindsets of George Bush and Tony Blair, and by the Islamic perspective on the other. Many such religions are governed by canons, most explicitly the Christian religions inspired by the Biblical canon. Believers may then be understood to be the fodder of such religion -- who may indeed be called upon to sacrifice themselves, as fodder for that canon.

A further transformation may however be considered in that the concept of a canon is fundamental to a certain aesthetic understanding of musical harmony. In music, a canon is a contrapuntal composition that employs a melody with one or more imitations of the melody played after a given duration in a different voice -- then termed the follower. The follower is required to imitate the leader, either as an exact replication of its rhythms and intervals or some transformation thereof. The engagement between distinct perspectives is thereby transformed. Traces of this are to be detected in the manner in which those in military conflict adapt creatively to the initiatives of the
other -- in a tragic "music of the battlefield". Ironically this was originally echoed in competing martial music -- now degraded into use of dissonant music and sound.

Cognitively the contrapuntal importance of the canon has been extensively explored by Douglas Hofstadter (Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid, 1979). This discusses how self-reference and formal rules allow systems to acquire meaning despite being made of "meaningless" elements -- arguably of fundamental importance to reframing the meaninglessness of conventional conflict.

Developing responsive operational network enhancement (DRONE): As unmanned aerial vehicles, drones have become of major significance to decreasing face-to-face engagement with insurgent forces in Afghanistan -- reducing the associated costs and increasing the destructive efficacy. The question is whether the technology can be transformed -- even "inverted" -- to enhance the nature and quality of engagement between distinct cultures.

The technology enables a remarkable overview of zones of potential conflict, and the identification of those who may constitute a threat. These may be targeted for elimination. In traditional military terms, this is the epitome of cowardice, exemplifying inability to face those it is possible to destroy with superior technology. It thereby enhances immeasurably the reputation for courage of those who find ways of resisting such modes of engagement.

Appropriately inverted the technology would enable the enhancement of operational networks through which fruitful interaction between opposing perspectives could take place -- as argued from a global perspective (From ECHELON to NOLEHE: enabling a strategic conversion to a faith-based global brain, 2007). The challenge is to use such technology to sustain the emergence of superordinate structures (Using Disagreements for Superordinate Frame Configuration, 1992; Configuring Globally and Contending Locally: shaping the global network of global bargains by decoding and mapping Earth Summit inter-sectoral issues 1992; Implementing principles by balancing configurations of functions; a tensegrity organization approach, 1979).

Given the recognition of the importance of enabling the emergence of a robust civil society, especially significant is the potential use of DRONE technology to sustain viable configurations (Polyhedral Empowerment of Networks through Symmetry: psycho-social implications for organization and global governance, 2008).

Arming civilians: There is a high degree of hypocrisy to the programme for spreading democracy to peoples such as those of Afghanistan, notably in the light of the values of the USA as self-acclaimed standard bearer of democracy. This is most evident through the historical role of the heroic militia in the USA in resisting the forces of the British crown -- a role reflected in the Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States (part of the Bill of Rights) and vigorously defended to this day by the US National Rifle Association. Such militia were of course framed as terrorists by the British. Any such equivalence is currently denied. The point remains however that democracy, as it is hoped to spread it by the USA, is necessarily dependent in constitutional terms on the right of citizens to bear arms and to participate in armed militia (Arming Civil Society Worldwide: getting democracy to work in the emergent American Empire? 2003).

The question is whether, in the emerging global knowledge society, citizens have the right to be "armed" otherwise and to participate in forms of "militia" appropriate to that context. If such a military metaphor is to be used, with what knowledge should civilians be "armed"? In what forms of "militia" is it appropriate that they should participate? The distinction between "freedom fighters" and "terrorists" has never been resolved -- with those affected claiming or attributing labels as they see fit. Counter-terrorist measures now typically confute any form of dissent as indicative of a potential terrorist threat.

There is clearly a case for much greater effort to clarify distinctions regarding unacceptable forms of extremism, especially in the light of the risk-taking by the financial community that has so endangered the livelihoods of millions (Extremes Financial Risk-taking as Extremism -- subject to anti-terrorism legislation? 2009; Norms in the Global Struggle against Extremism "rooting out" vs. "rooting in" extremism? 2005; Varieties of Terrorism: extended to the experience of the terrorized, 2004).

From such a perspective, how are deprecated notions of "insurgency" to be related to notions of "outrage"? (Madeleine Bunting, Our speechless outrage demands a new language of the common good, The Guardian, Monday 19 October 2009). In response to any "surge" in invasive forces, what sort of response is appropriate?

Enhancing IED deployment: The use of improvised explosive device (IEDs) in the unconventional warfare of Afghanistan has been a major source of casualties for ISAF forces -- and a justification for the use of DRONE technology. The innovative development and deployment of these IEDs has been a characteristic of the resistance.

Strategically the success of these devices points metaphorically to the possibility of development and deployment of "improvised educational devices". Clearly there are deficiencies in the deployment of conventional educational processes seeking to spread the "canon of democracy". The question is how to enable the innovation capable of improvising educational devices under exceptionally problematic conditions -- in an extremely hostile environment. There is a tragic irony to the fact that IEDs, as currently conceived and used, indeed have a major educational role in general education.

As devices which currently encourage extreme precaution and the expectation of the unforeseen, the question is what kinds of improvised educational devices might be designed and how might the be deployed. Pointers in this direction are offered by the highly creative initiatives of Greenpeace. At an individual level, another indication is the initiative of the international network of "entarteurs" which specialize in "pieing". This is the act of throwing a pie at an authority figure, politician, or celebrity to evoke embarrassment. Other pointers are to be found in the learnings traditionally offered by Zen masters. More generally these may all be seen as examples of liberating provocations (Liberating Provocations: use of negative and paradoxical strategies, 2005).

In a period when there are calls for greater recognition of the Precautionary Principle, improvised education devices clearly have a vital role to play in encouraging the emergence of more appropriate strategies.
Developing landmine placement and removal: Conventional IEDs are of course the "amateur" equivalent to the "professional" use of mass produced landmines, so widely distributed through the international arms trade in which so many of the ISAF countries are deeply implicated.

There is a deep and tragic irony to the fact that the term is used in conflicts in which one or other party lays claim to the "land" as being "mine". This tragedy is indicative of a cognitive challenge and opportunity given the deep psychocultural engagement with the land that is typically characteristic of one of the parties. The nature of this engagement has been most fundamentally explored with respect to indigenous peoples by Darrell Posey (Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity, United Nations Environmental Programme and Intermediate Technology Publications, 1999). It is most evident in the claims made by the Jewish people for the land of Israel.

The cognitive challenge is therefore twofold, namely how to develop a deep association with the land -- to develop a profound bond with the land, notably as is appropriate in terms of healthy engagement with the environment. Interesting examples of this at the collective level are provided by the process of land nám, coined by Ananda Comaraswamy (The Rg Veda as Land-Nama Book, 1935), to refer to the Icelandic tradition of claiming ownership of uninhabited spaces through weaving together a metaphor of geography of place into a unique mythic story. This territorial appropriation process, notably practiced by the Navaho and the Vedic Aryans, was further described by Joseph Campbell (The Inner Reaches of Outer Space: metaphor as myth and religion, 1986):

\[
\text{Land nám ("land claiming or taking") was [the Norse] technical term for this way of sanctifying a region, converting it thereby into an at once psychologically and metaphorical Holy Land.} \ldots \text{Land nám, mythologization, has been the universally practiced method to bring this intelligible kingdom to view in the mind's eye.} \text{The Promised Land, therefore, is any landscape recognized as mythologically transparent, and the method of acquisition of such territory is not by prosaic physical action, but poetically, by intelligence and the method of art; so that the human being should be dwelling in the two worlds simultaneously of the illuminated moon and the illuminating sun. (p. 34)}
\]

The question is then how to interrelate the processes of exclusive cognitive claims and engagement with disassociation from such claims through appropriate detachment. The emergence of a global civilization has been associated with the considerable development of insights into complexity beyond the cognitive simplicities of "flatland" and a "flat earth mentality" as charmingly described by a number of mathematicians. The cognitive challenge has long been delightfully articulated in such mathematical fiction as Edwin A. Abbott's Flatland: a romance of many dimensions (1884), Charles Howard Hinton's An Episode on Flatland: or how a plain folk discovered the third dimension (1907), A. K. Dewdney's The Planiverse (1984), Ian Stewart's Flatterland (2001), and Rudy Rucker's Spaceland (2002). The 1884 novel has recently taken the form of an animated version (Flatland, 2007) to highlight the challenges otherwise.

Despite such insights, little insight has emerged into the possibility that the "land" that is "mine" may lie in other dimensions -- and that it is only through such higher dimensionality that conflicts governed by a two-dimensional flat earth mentality can be reconciled (And When the Bombing Stops? Territorial conflict as a challenge to mathematicians, 2000; Geometry of Thinking for Sustainable Global Governance, 2009; Irresponsible Dependence on a Flat Earth Mentality -- in response to global governance challenges, 2008)

Enhancing collateral impact: Of deep concern in Afghanistan is the impact of the initiatives of both sides on innocent parties. The deaths to civilians caused by suicide bombers are widely deplored as barbaric. The numerous incidents in which innocents have been (mistakenly) targeted by ISAF forces have contributed significantly to antagonism to their intervention -- especially the proclivity for attacking wedding parties. Such consequences have of course been framed as regrettable necessary collateral damage by both parties -- each perceiving and framing that of the other as being more barbaric. This regret extends to incidents of "friendly fire".

The question is how collateral impact might be enhanced, notably through the use of improvised educational devices and reframing the nature of the "missiles" used . The challenge would seem to be the metaphorical entrapment of both parties in the tangibles giving rise to damaging physical impact. This metaphorical entanglement is most evident in the use of military metaphors with respect to intangible ends -- the "battle for hearts and minds" (Missiles, Missives, Missions and Memetic Warfare: navigation of strategic interfaces in multidimensional knowledge space, 2001).

Any enhancement of collateral impact raises the question of the appropriateness of current understandings of "impact" consequent upon "targeting", notably as in any marketing exercise, whether commercial, ideological or spiritual. More relevant are understandings emerging from techniques of viral marketing. Of particular relevance is the nature of the interface across which "impact" is sought in terms of the communication of insight, notably the question of whether the interface is designed for unilateral communication or allows for feedback and genuine "communication". It is in this sense that the psychocultural significance of poetry merits considerable attention, especially given the respect for this mode in Afghanistan (Strategic Jousting through Poetic Wrestling: aesthetic reframing of the clash of civilizations, 2009; Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity?, 2009).

Within such a framing, "collateral" then takes form of entrapment consequent upon collective appreciation of aesthetic engagement. There is even the sense in which, rather than the two-dimensional metaphoric geometry of "lateral", there is an evolution into the three-dimensional geometry of "encompassing" (Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality -- in response to global governance challenges, 2009)
Undermining democrasy: The efforts to spread democracy in Afghanistan have provided numerous examples of how these have been undermined, notably through myriad forms of corruption and intimidation. Less clear is the extent to which analogous processes effectively operate to a considerable degree in countries claimed to represent the epitome of democracy -- as argued by Naomi Klein (The Shock Doctrine: the rise of disaster capitalism, 2007), reviewed by (Juan Santos, The Face Of Fascism In A Global System Headling For Collapse, Countercurrents.org, 31 December 2007).

The challenge would appear to be one of undermining a crass form of democracy, perhaps appropriately to be termed "democrasy". The question is what processes are used as fig leaves to disguise the crass nature of democracy -- namely processes that use universal values as camouflage beneath which democrasy can flourish, with principles then serving a purely decorative function optimistically invoked for purposes of self-glorification.

Interro-negotiating: Those who have laid claim to the highest moral and spiritual principles have made it evident in Afghanistan that they were only too ready to lay these aside to advance their agendas -- claiming military necessity in defence of those very principles. Those ends have been explicitly held to justify the means -- dramatically setting aside the longstanding dilemma and providing a remarkable precedent for others. Whilst this has been evident on the larger scale in the deliberate recent use of what are categorized as inhumane weapons, it has also been especially evident in the extensive use of "enhanced interrogation techniques" -- indistinguishable in many respects from the most extreme forms of torture recognized by the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984). This is all the more extraordinary in that the governments concerned base their own legitimacy on claims to a special relationship to God -- implying that such actions are blessed by God, as evident in the extent in which military chaplains are complicit in the process.

The global strategic challenges of the future are increasingly understood as liable to create a situation of "terror-for-all". This will go far beyond the unilateral, instrumental inculcation of terror in a single person to one in which all are increasingly immersed in collective existential terror. This may indeed encourage a dysfunctional hyperdevelopment of "positive thinking" or global "bright-siding", systematically denying and negating such terror -- perhaps to be termed "interro-negotiating" (Barbara Ehrenreich, Bright-Sided: how the relentless promotion of positive thinking has undermined America, 2009; see review).

A possible transformation beyond this condition is through a form of mutual deep questioning and challenge -- calling into question, beyond the constraints of the unilateral mode and tepid forms of inter-faith, inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary discourse. This form of mutuality in challenging dialogue might be termed "inter-rogating" (beyond the perverse limitations of the Stockholm Syndrome).

More intriguing is a proactive response to shared terror and the special bonding which is well-recognized as emerging in such circumstances. Under conditions of destruction "mutually assured" by global circumstances, unforeseen forms of negotiation may become possible -- perhaps to be termed "interro-negotiation". The (in)action of all parties together might then be understood as contributing to the classic ticking bomb threat -- a multi-party analogue to a binary chemical weapon.

Such recognition might even open the gate to strategic opportunities through which such circumstances can be circumvented -- perhaps to be termed "interro-gating", the archetypal, existential gate "through" terror. From a faith-based governance perspective, this may constitute a fundamental existential reframing of inter-faith negotiation (Thinking in Terror: refocusing the interreligious challenge from "Thinking after Terror", 2005).

Achieving effective presence in Afghanistan through strategic absence

Comparisons have been made between the engagement of the USA in Afghanistan and that in Vietnam -- whether to recognize parallels or to deny them. These comparisons tend not to mention a particularly insightful study comparing the metaphor fundamental to the strategy of the Vietnamese (supported by China) with that fundamental to the strategy of the USA there.

As in the game of go, the real challenge may be at a contextual level - recalling the analysis of Scott Boorman (A Protracted Game: a wei-chi interpretation of maoist revolutionary strategy, 1969). He compared the go-strategy of the Vietnamese with chess-strategy employed by the USA. This analysis is echoed in the International Bulletin of Political Psychology (Vol.10 No.13 Apr 13, 2001) comparing Vladimir Putin's judo-influenced strategy with that of the 'weight-machine' mindset of the USA. Does the fact that the few web references to 'defensive terror' in a counter-terrorist manual are followed by numerous references extolling its merits in American football lock strategic thinking into a particular mode?

Reframed in the light of go-strategy and the martial art understanding of "empty hand" strategy, the strategic challenge then has the elements of a non-linear shadow game that will always out-maneuver any obvious achievements against obvious targets desperately sought. Targeting itself becomes a metaphoric trap.

Given the current major review of the strategy of the USA in Afghanistan -- at a time of increasing popular doubts regarding the costs of that engagement -- the possibility that merits exploration is one of "absence" rather than "presence", of "engagement through disengagement". It is such paradoxes which characterize the strategy of go rather than any "face off" typical of chess.

Poetic engagement was cited above as an example of changing the "language" of strategic engagement with those seemingly intractably opposed (Strategic Jousting through Poetic Wrestling: aesthetic reframing of the clash of civilizations, 2009; Poetic Engagement with Afghanistan, Caucasus and Iran: an unexplored strategic opportunity?, 2009). In terms of geometrical metaphor it might be expressed as a shift from the linearity of missiles and missions to a non-linear mode, opening up new cognitive spaces, and offering greater degrees of coherence (Metaphorical Geometry in Quest of Globality -- in response to global governance challenges, 2009).

Addendum

Julian Borger: US deserves big share of blame for Afghanistan military disaster (The Guardian, 13 August 2021)
Commentary on strategic update announced by Donald Trump (21 August 2017)

  - Trump repeatedly presented his ideas for south Asia as a radical departure from the Obama administration, with a tighter focus on counter-terrorism, describing his approach as "principled realism"). "We are not nation building again. We are killing terrorists," he said.
  - In his address, Trump made a virtue of avoiding details, saying he would not repeat what he presented as the Obama administration's mistake of signalling plans to the nation's enemies. Instead, key decisions would be taken by military commanders and determined by "conditions on the ground and not arbitrary timetables".
  - he president admitted that escalating the US war in Afghanistan had not been his initial instinct when he came to office. Trump scarcely mentioned Afghanistan during last year's election campaign, but prior to entering the presidential race, he had vociferously argued for withdrawal. So had his former chief strategist, Steve Bannon, who ... had pushed for US troops to be replaced by private contractors but was outvoted by the serving and retired generals in the administration. He has returned to running the rightwing news outlet Breitbart, which filled its home page ... with critical reports of Trump's "flip-flop" on Afghanistan.

  - President Trump put forward on Monday a long-awaited strategy for resolving the nearly 16-year-old conflict in Afghanistan, but he declined to specify either the number of troops that would be committed, or the conditions by which he would judge the success of their mission there.
  - In a nationally televised prime-time speech to troops at Fort Myer, Va., Mr. Trump said there would be no "blank check" for the American engagement in Afghanistan. But in announcing his plan, Mr. Trump deepened America's involvement in a military mission that has bedeviled his predecessors and that he once called futile.
  - But he did not define what victory would look like, nor did he explain how his path would be different from what he labeled the failed strategies of previous presidents.

- **Kelly Magsamen**: Afghanistan Is Now Trump's War (Foreign Policy, 21 August 2017):
  - President Donald Trump has just made one of the most consequential decisions of his young and turbulent presidency ... increasing the American commitment in Afghanistan was the Trump national security team’s preferred outcome -- and despite the president's misgivings, the final one... The Trump administration will assert that this is a new strategy -- a clear break from President Barack Obama's approach -- but in reality it is just a moderate adjustment of a core strategy that has been in place for years, with mixed results.

- **Donald Trump's new Afghanistan strategy welcomed by 'fully committed' NATO** (ABC News, 22 August 2017)

- **Trump to ask Americans to trust him on Afghanistan** (CNN, 22 August 2017)

- **Sune Engel Rasmussen**: The war America can't win: how the Taliban are regaining control in Afghanistan (The Guardian, 3 August 2017)

Since 2001 the US has been at War in Afghanistan -- the longest war in US history. Headlines concisely tell the story of this cruel boomeranging quagmire of human violence and misery. Below are some newspaper headlines from 2010 to the present to show that a militarized foreign policy without Congress's constitutional duties and steadfast public engagement will drift on, costing our soldiers’ lives and limbs, nearly three-quarters of a trillion taxpayer dollars, hundreds of thousands of Afghani lives and millions of refugees, with no end in sight. (Ralph Nader: The 16 Year War in Afghanistan: headlines tell the story (eNews Park Forest, 15 August 2017)

"Mother of All Bombs" (April 2017)

- **Mother Of All Bombs: What is it and why is the US now using it to fight Islamic State?** (ABC News, 16 April 2017)

- **Donald Trump's Afghanistan 'mother of all bombs' shows US President's interventionist side, experts say** (ABC News, 22 April 2017)

- **This is what's left after the 'Mother of all Bombs' hit Afghanistan** (New York Post, 24 April 2017)

- **The Mother of All Bombs: How badly did it hurt IS in Afghanistan?** (BBC News, 24 April 2017)

- **U.S. Continues Quagmire-Building Effort In Afghanistan** (The Onion, 27 October 2009, 45-44)

- **The battle over Sangin should teach the west some vital military lessons** (The Guardian, 24 September 2015)