



**Adrian Hamilton**

take place in the country this August and to deprive the enemy of safe havens where they can train and plan attacks on the West. But that simply begs the question of whether pouring troops into Helmand is the best way of achieving this, or indeed whether it can manage it at all. Three quarters of all the plots detected in Britain, according to the Government's own intelligence are, after all, connected to Pakistan. Very few with Afghanistan.

Al-Qaeda, insofar as it does exist as a centralised organisation bent on bringing terror to the West, has affiliates in a range of countries difficult to get at including the Yemen, Somalia and North Africa. It doesn't need Afghanistan as a training ground. Lose Afghanistan, answer ministers, and you lose Pakistan as well. Yes, but to lose Helmand Province doesn't mean that you necessarily lose Afghanistan as a whole.

There is a perfectly sensible strategy that would have coalition forces withdraw to concentrate on ensuring the main lines of communication throughout the country and keeping secure those parts of the north and west as well as the north-east, where the Taliban haven't had much of a hold but are beginning to make inroads (as recent deaths among German and Italian forces testify).

Insofar as the central problem is the Afghan-Pakistan border - as the military keep saying - then our troops might well be better employed sealing the border

rather than trying to dominate a province. Pakistan, which has now undertaken a full offensive to take control of its border areas, complains that the co-alition efforts on the other side of the border are far too little and ineffective. And it may have a case.

If counter-terror and Pakistan's stability are our real concerns - as they ought to be - then that is where we should be concentrating our resources on, not waging a war in a land that has only rarely been controlled from the centre and which has always bitterly resented the presence of foreign troops. Most of our terror plots, and those of Europe, are home-grown. In so far as the would-be terrorist receives training abroad rather than from the internet, your best means of control is through the supervision of the coming and goings of young men and women from the country, particularly to Pakistan.

And if Pakistan stability is your main concern, then tackle it directly by helping that country develop a prosperous democracy instead of putting all our efforts in propping up a particular weak regime in Kabul.

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largely specious. We're in Afghanistan because we - like others - wanted to support the US after 9/11 and removing the bases of al-Qaeda seemed obviously right at the time. We're in the mess we are in now because we allowed that initial impulse to drift into a confused and under resourced attempt to impose security for the government, stamp out drug dealing, rebuild society and defeat the Taliban. We're suffering higher casualties now because we've joined a US-led surge which Washington has adopted for its own reasons and in which we have precious little say.

No-one seriously believes that the present policy of trying to do everything without the resources to do it is a viable option. But the only alternative is not to double up the ante. There are other perfectly viable possibilities. We could scale down the enterprise to concentrate on preserving rule and communication in the key parts of Afghanistan, leaving it up to the Afghans themselves to make deals or enforce control in the outer parts.

We could withdraw most of our troops, continuing with just a basic anti-terror force and border patrols or indeed we could announce a date for leaving altogether; as we and the Americans have done in Iraq.

The one thing we cannot do is to go on as we are, led by events and the despairing claim that "we cannot afford to lose this war". History is littered with the graves of the soldiers who died obeying that call.

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SO HERE we go again, in a war which half the population does not believe in, in which we are committing ourselves ever more deeply at the behest of the US and over which politicians display no real sense of purpose.

The most depressing aspect, once again, is just how hopeless the UK political system is in throwing up real debate. Instead of discussing objectives we have an increasingly bitter exchange of accusations about the availability of helicopters, the armoured protection of vehicles and the number of troops on the ground.

These are serious deficiencies, no doubt, and have been since the beginning. But talking about them is not going to do much good at this moment. Even if you allocated the money for dozens more helicopters and several thousand more troops, they would not arrive to help in the surge which is causing so many deaths this summer. The row over numbers is becoming just part of the political blame game - good for a pre-election spat but no use in deciding what the present numbers are there for, never mind more of them.

According to the Prime Minister they're there to ensure security for democratic elections to

## There's nothing wrong with a polite orgy



**Helen Croydon**

"ORGY AT 17th Century mansion" screamed the popular press. Even *The Independent* described it as "group sex of bacchanalian proportions". What they're actually referring to is a privately run, tastefully organised, masked ball at a manor house near Bristol, where a few consenting adults made good use of a purposely prepared "chill-out" room.

I was at the party and I can't really see what all the moral fuss is about. Don't get excited, I wasn't there as one of the indulgent guests, but as a strictly lingerie-stays-on writer for *The Erotic Review*.

The party is appropriately named *Eyes Wide Sin*, after the hit

film *Eyes Wide Shut* starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. In tune with the movie, guests arrived in full-length capes and Venetian masks. At midnight they were removed in a hierogamy-inspired ritual led by a chanting priest in the centre of a ring of women. They ended the ceremony by circulating a passionate kiss one-by-one and then slid off their cloaks.

The organisers, Little Sins, brought the concept over from Holland where I'm told everyone's much less inhibited and swinging parties are unashamedly attended by a very respectable set.

Granted, the midnight ritual is a bit quirky but the media outrage was a little excessive. Had this kind of activity taken over a wedding reception, I could understand, but with the exception of my rather stunned mini-cab driver, everyone who drove through the towering wrought iron gates to Halswell House on Saturday knew ex-

actly what the night was about. Most are couples in long-term relationships, willing to try new things. Some just want to relieve their fantasies, built up through years of relationship constraint.

The few I dared speak to told me their liberal lifestyles had injected passion into their relationship. Most set boundaries as to how far they are happy for their partner to go. One first-timer told she will gently dig her nails into her partner if she needs to let him know he's going too far.

In fact, I found it to be the most honest form of flirting I've ever come across - refreshingly free of

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hidden agendas. How many times have we all been on the receiving end of unwanted attention in a bar knowing they have an ulterior motive in mind?

What these fancy swingers are guilty of, though, is allowing themselves to believe sophistication appeases seediness. I nearly fell into the trap myself. In normal circumstances the thought of two, three or even five naked strangers bouncing around on a four-poster bed would be quite repulsive. Yet sipping *Veuve Clicquot* under grand chandeliers surrounded by middle-class accents and prancing bodies clad in Agent Provocateur, it seemed so much more acceptable - seductive even.

Feelings towards sex fluctuate between ultimate pleasure and sordid repulsion. Perhaps it's because there's such a delicate balance between the two extremes that we're so loath to dress it up with decadence to pass it off as respectable.

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## Public to

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