From liberation to bachabasi

By Paul Flynn MP

It's easier to repeat an old lie than reveal a new truth.

Politicians are in denial and refuse to confront the deep futility of the war in Afghanistan. It's more comfortable to tilt at the windmills of peripheral issues. Last year it was blaming fellow Europeans for dodging their share of the burden. Now, it's the myth that more troops and helicopters are solutions.

The media serve up delusional pap from embedded journalists. The ugly truths on Karzai's corruption, evil human rights record and the atrocities of his police and army are disregarded.

One un-embedded Reuters reporter revealed the hatred that the people of Helmand have for Karzai's police. The message from an elder in the newly liberated Pankela village in Helmand was, "For God's sake do not bring back the Afghan police.

"The police would stop people driving on motorcycles, beat them and take their money," said Mohammad Gul, a village elder. He pointed to two compounds where pre-teen children had been abducted by police to be used for the local practice of "bachabazi," or sex with pre-pubescent boys. "If the boys were out in the fields, the police would come and rape them," he said. "You can go to any police base and you will see these boys."

When the Taliban arrived in the village 10 months ago and drove the police out, local people rejoiced, said Mohammad Rasul, an elderly farmer. "The Taliban never bothered us," he said.

Parliament's Foreign Affair Select Committee has heard evidence from David Loyn and Sunday Times journalist Christine Lamb that the '60% of Afghan Police are addicted to heroin', and many of them are deeply involved in facilitating the drug trade. Few are paid and most are Uzbek remnants of the loathed Northern Alliance. Their role is to enrich themselves by theft and extortion. All the main parties in the House of Commons spout the fiction that Karzai's Gestapo will win over hearts and minds.

British lives are being lost to maintain Karzai as president. His record on human right includes his refusal to pardon a young man sentenced to 20 years in prison for accessing an internet article on women's rights, while pardoning a group of young men guilty of gang-raping a 13 year old girl. A suspended Afghan woman MP and human rights' prize winner Malalai Joya said that the rights of women in Afghanistan now are worse than under the Taliban.

Of the $25 billion aid poured for Afghanistan, only 20 per cent reached its intended recipients.

The increase in the number of new Afghan millionaires and billionaires in Kabul include members of President Karzai's family. Meanwhile poverty is deepening among other Afghanis. After eight years of generous Western aid, Afghanistan has the world's third highest child mortality rate and the world's second highest maternity mortality rate.

More troops mean more targets for IEDs and more deaths. More helicopters could mean that British casualties would be reported not as single deaths but in groups of thirties and forties.

We should dunp the illusions of victory and devise an exit strategy to consolidate the few gains made and avoid the bloodbath of the panic retreat of the Americans from Saigon.

Clinging to myths is a deadly distraction. Afghans say that 'Truth is like the sun. When it rises it is impossible to hide it'.

It will be some time before truth dawns in our Parliament.