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Interview with Ron Hoffmann

How would you describe 2008, working in Afghanistan?

As we reflect upon the year - which is drawing to a close - I am struck by just how momentous it was. I consider it a year which has laid the foundation for 2009 to begin to be a turning point for Afghanistan. My first thought, however, is for the families, loved ones and friends of our fallen soldiers and for the civilian Canadians who have given their lives for the cause of peace during 2008.

Notwithstanding a deterioration in security this past year, reflected by increased security incidents faced by coalition forces, greater attacks by the insurgency on the Afghan civilian population, and some notable incidents in Kabul itself, 2008 is a year in which much has happened to move Afghanistan forward and to illustrate the progress it is gradually making. It was also a transformative year for Canada's own engagement.

Reflecting on some of the more important developments, I think of the new hope and tone of Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, following the election of Pakistan's new President Zadari. Bilateral relations are at the highest point since 2001.

There was a decision by the Government of Afghanistan to increase the Afghan National Army by two-thirds before the end of 2011, increasing it from 82,000 to 134,000. Its development has reached an impressive tempo in 2008, with new army graduates reaching 2,500 a month. Further illustrating the progress the Afghan National Security Forces have made, this year the Government of Afghanistan took over responsibility for security in Kabul, also a first since 2001.

In the field of governance, we have seen President Karzai take his commitments to strengthened governance, captured by the Paris Conference declaration in June, seriously with some major concrete measures. The leadership of some pivotal ministries has been replaced by proven competent new ministers, notably at the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Interior. We have seen a renewed commitment to fight corruption, with the establishment of a new High Office for Anti-Corruption, and though there is still a great deal to do in this area, it is an encouraging start. The Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG), founded only at the end of last year, developed impressively in 2008 and holds the prospect of implementing some key initiatives to strengthen local governance across the country in 2009 - including some first steps in local level political reconciliation. We have also seen some tangible and ongoing progress in the fields of health, education, and infrastructure across the country in 2008.

On the international front, the Paris Conference held in June renewed the international community's commitment to Afghanistan, with some 60 countries pledging over \$20 billion for reconstruction and development. Countries within the region itself have set out to re-energise a dialogue process. The G8 has positioned Afghanistan, and increasingly its neighbours and near neighbours, as a priority for the period ahead. The UN has in Kai Eide a new Special Representative in Afghanistan. And, of course, the new President-Elect of the United States has pledged a dramatic increased in development and military resources for 2009 and beyond.

Canada, meanwhile, has transformed its own strategy by rebalancing its diplomatic and development efforts to realise concrete and accelerated improvements in governance and in services delivery for the people of Kandahar. To support this effort, a significant boost in civilian deployments has been underway, effectively tripling our commitment in the second half of 2008, especially in Kandahar but

*Government of Canada*Ron Hoffmann
Canada's Ambassador to Afghanistan
December 2008

also at the Embassy in Kabul. Our civilian staff are also working intimately with their Canadian Forces counterparts to align our resources to a common purpose.

What do you see for 2009?

The combined impact of these investments by the international community, of a re-energised Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship, of further advancements in Afghanistan's own security forces and institutions of governance, suggest to me that 2009 could emerge as a turning point in Afghanistan's history. The presidential and provincial council elections scheduled for 2009, in particular, represent a major opportunity to consolidate the country's democratic development and strike a blow against the forces of extremism who are trying to turn the clock back on Afghanistan's progress.

The year ahead therefore holds the potential to be a decisive one for Afghanistan and the region. There is real reason for hope and growing confidence, but there will be many challenges and risks facing this still fragile country. Extremist elements in Afghanistan and in the broader region may continue to step up efforts to thwart the aspirations of the Afghan people to live in peace and rebuild their nation. I remain confident, however, that if Afghanistan is to succeed, it will be through the continued and determined efforts of Afghans and the world community working hand in hand. And Canadians can be proud of the significant role our country will be playing in 2009 to help make this vision a reality.

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Interview with Elissa Golberg

2008 has been a big year for Canadians in Kandahar. From your perspective, what have been some of the key moments?

I would have to start with the Manley Report, which provided some clear recommendations to the Government in terms of how it should move forward with the mission. This was followed up with a parliamentary resolution, which in turn provided some very specific direction – which we have spent the better part of the last nine months implementing.

A key element was the decision that Canada will remain in Afghanistan until 2011, and agreement that the nature of that engagement will change. This has led, over the past several months, to the identification of the six priority areas and the Government's determination to augment the number of civilians that are deployed here in Kandahar, so that we can greatly increase the scope and number of development and governance projects in Kandahar, working with Kandaharis.

The second major area is the degree to which we have enhanced the cooperation between civilians and Canadian Forces working as part of Task Force Kandahar. We've evolved into a highly integrated Civilian-Military team demonstrating the clear added value that the civilians can bring to the mission. So much so that in many ways we're a model for other countries... the Brits, the US, we are all thinking along similar lines, but I think Canada is perhaps the furthest ahead in this regard. We have the most civilians at any PRT in the country at the moment, and we're able as a result to execute and achieve results for Afghans in a very different way than other countries are doing.

We've also developed leaner, quicker program response mechanisms over the past year. We are faster at dispersing funds so that we can react to events on the ground, but also proactive on the kinds of things that we want to pursue with our Afghan and international partners.

If you were to think of some key challenges, and opportunities, over the past year – what comes to mind?

Well, the obvious one is Sarpoza. There's no question it was a set back. But I really think we turned it around. From that event that came the Kandahar City Security Plan, which the Afghans have successfully executed on a number of occasions. From that also came the opportunity to rebuild the security perimeter at the prison, and do things that we wanted to do before, and couldn't. It provided the opportunity to do more systematic and advanced training with Sarpoza senior management and the prison guards that we wanted to do. But yes, there's no question that having such a large number of prisoners escape is not a good news story. And that subsequently led to some insecurity in other parts of the city. That's a fact.

Developing a strategy and beginning to make concrete progress on strengthening police capacity has been another challenge and opportunity this past year. The police have so much further to come than the army does, but they are critical to our success here. The police are often the first, most direct face of the Afghan government to Kandaharis. Over the past eight months we have seen important improvements with more than 900 police in Kandahar going through basic professional development

*Gouvernement du Canada*Elissa Golberg
Representative of Canada in Kandahar
Décembre 2008

training, and then mentoring by both Canadian civilian police and Canadian Forces Police Mentors. We have provided critical infrastructure and equipment support, as well as some specialized training on things such as counter-IED, which has been timed to coincide with the return of graduates from the Focused District Development program and has made a big difference. And yet, we know that more police will have been killed in 2008 than ever before. We still must overcome illiteracy, corruption, and insufficient numbers of police for the province.

Governance and figuring out “how do you advance governance?” has also been a challenge. How do you make systems of government work? How do you help Kabul link to its provinces? And then how do you make the province link down to the districts? This is not something that’s traditionally happened out here. So it’s new for everybody. And again, I think we’ve started to see a lot of progress. You know, the work that we’ve seen recently with the wheat seed distribution, getting the Department of Agriculture staff out to the districts; the work that we’re seeing in Zharey and Panjwaji and Arghandab with line ministries attending Shuras and trying to understand what communities want – that’s really significant. That’s about reducing the gap between the people and their government. And that’s very hard to do. The governance stuff is hard work, and it’s not always easy to put your finger on it. It’s not necessarily the most visible, but the implications of poor governance are tremendously visible to the people of Kandahar.

Trying to encourage more partners to work in Kandahar has been a challenge, international partners in particular. This is a difficult security environment. As much as I’ve been amazed at how incredible my staff have been at keeping things going, and expanding the nature of what we’re doing, it’s not an easy environment to do that in. It’s a risk for both NGOs and IGOs to come down here, and even for private sector companies, who are traditionally more risk tolerant. So that for sure is a challenge, but one we are addressing creatively and head on.

Finally, our decision to push our staff further out into the districts – we had to make some hard choices. We had to put in place the right security parameters. But that takes us in a very new -- and I think positive -- direction in advancing governance and development objectives to realize concrete results for Kandaharis and Canadians...

So that’s a new opportunity for Canada?

The growth of the civilian footprint is both an opportunity and a challenge. It’s one thing to say that you’re going to really push forward on development and governance programming – it’s another to do that in a period of five months. And find accommodation and office space for all these new people! And identify them, recruit them, train them, and get them out here – and make sure they all get along not only with each other but integrate effectively with the military in the middle of a conflict zone. That is not obvious, and that was a huge challenge.

And it’s not part of traditional civil service culture –

No – not at all. We’ve never done this before. Not like this. Sure, Canada’s Foreign Service, CIDA officers and even Canadian civilian police have deployed to difficult environments – Haiti, Lebanon, Sudan which were not easy places to live – but we’ve never done it in the midst of a war zone the way we’re doing with this deployment. We’ve never had to so deliberately develop a counter-insurgency strategy and programming in the middle of an insurgency. This is absolutely new for us, and that is a huge challenge. There are lessons that we can pull from other places, but the reality is that, at best, some of that stuff applies. We’re all really learning this as we go, with the Afghans and with other partners that are here, in a short amount of time.

What’s in store for 2009?

To start with, a new RoCK – which is great. He’s going to take it to the next level. I think we’ve established a solid base. We have a Kandahar Action Plan, which is a multi-national and multi-agency strategy. This sets a clear direction in terms of where we want to go. It builds on what the Afghans have told us. It builds on what the Canadian and US governments have said they want to do. So that’s good news.

A lot of the work that previous colleagues have pursued, over the previous 18 months, set the ground

work and is now going to bear fruit. I would say, as I look ahead to the next 12 months, it's really pretty exciting times. As exciting as this last year was, and it was phenomenal – we've come so far compared to where we were – the Dahla Dam, the education and literacy work - it is all going to roll out and accelerate... Some great things are going to happen on small and medium sized enterprise development, and work that we're going to do on financial systems in the province. And some of the things that we'll see in terms of advancing the Governor's office, district leaders and key line Ministries; it's going to be exciting to see things roll out in Kandahar.

The significant US footprint that's going to arrive in Kandahar and in the South as a whole is going to change the dynamic. It will increase the likelihood that there will be kinetic activity, as we pressure insurgents in different ways. It also provides important opportunities to deepen the hold of the Afghan government and demonstrate to its citizens that it can deliver - that they can and should chose to side with their government rather than the insurgents to try and build a viable country.

But I honestly think that we're kind of at the precipice of building up – we have momentum, and we're going to see over the next year that it gets pushed forward, provided of course that we can continue to roll with unexpected events - which *are* going to continue to happen. There are still going to be these high profile suicide bombings, IEDs and the continued tragic loss of lives - Canadian and Afghan; there's still going to be unexpected changes of personalities within the province. But the team and the plan are solid enough that they should be able to adapt and deliver.

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Interview with David Mulrone

What were some of the highlights and challenges on the Afghanistan file during 2008 from your perspective?

This was a particularly significant year for Canada's military-civilian engagement in Afghanistan. Guided by the advice included in the Manley Report, and following the motion passed by the House of Commons in March, the Government of Canada undertook some far-reaching changes in the design and execution of its military and civilian activities. We transformed our mission in Afghanistan from one that was focussed heavily on military operations to one that is an integrated and joint civilian-military partnership, with a focus on reconstruction. We've added more soldiers and equipment, and have tripled our civilian footprint in Kabul and Kandahar – we will soon have 100 civilian officials working there – which is an extraordinary effort that really demonstrates our resolve and commitment.

At the same time, we've made changes to how we coordinate the various Ottawa-based departments and agencies engaged in Afghanistan. This shift has helped us to move beyond the old "3D" approach of defence, development, and diplomacy, to a truly coherent whole-of-government approach and one that is managed by a committee of Ministers – the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan – coordinated by the Afghanistan Task Force created within the Privy Council Office.

In June, we focussed our effort by announcing six priorities and three "signature projects" to improve the lives of Afghans and, in particular, the residents of Kandahar province. We then set out benchmarks and elaborated a compelling but realistic vision for the Kandahar of 2011. We also introduced quarterly reports, where we clearly report to Parliament and to Canadians, where we have made progress, or not as the case may be.

We are doing ambitious but practical things like training soldiers and police, building schools, rehabilitating irrigation systems and helping to deliver basic health care. Every project is judged in terms of its ability to transfer capability and ownership to Afghan partners, and is carefully consulted with them. We want Afghans to see and feel the difference in their lives.

Canada's soldiers and civilians in Kandahar, Kabul and Ottawa are at work, all focussing on the same ultimate goal. But unfortunately 2008 also reminded us that commitment comes with a cost. These individuals and their families are making a significant sacrifice but in doing so they are also making a remarkable contribution.

2008 was not without challenges. As we said in both our quarterly reports – the security situation has deteriorated. Incidents like the attack on Sarpoza prison, the loss of Canadian Forces soldiers and the death of two Canadian aid workers are evidence of this. That said, we continue to train soldiers, build schools, vaccinate against polio, and work to help Afghanistan and Pakistan to better manage their shared border.

Achieving our priorities and signature projects requires the concerted efforts of the entire international community, including Afghans. Canada alone cannot control outcomes in Afghanistan. It is the challenge of establishing a positive and self-sustaining social order that has brought the UN, the international community and Canada to Afghanistan. But Canada is steadfast in its support of the international mission to help Afghans reclaim their country by building a more democratic, free and

*Government of Canada*David Mulrone
Deputy Minister, Afghanistan Task
Force
December 2008

safe society.

Can you make some predictions about what is in store for 2009?

Last year a major focus of work was to define, or redefine if you will, how we would re-shape our overall effort in Afghanistan, including making difficult choices on where to focus our resources. 2009 is shaping up to be a watershed year in fully implementing that renewed sense of purpose and priorities.

Most importantly, next year will see Afghans reinforcing their country's ongoing democratic transition by holding presidential and provincial council elections, as well as parliamentary and district elections the year following. Canada will be an active participant and advocate in support of free and fair elections, elections led for the first time by Afghans.

We will continue to focus our military and civilian efforts to make the most of our contributions to Afghanistan's security, governance and development. Additional forces from the United States will be an important feature of moving forward faster on our priorities and signature projects, and to focus our work even more on the areas of development, infrastructure, health, education, training and governance. And, we will continue to deliver on our commitment to be accountable, frank and transparent.

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Interview with LGen Michel Gauthier

2008 was a big year for Canada in Afghanistan. Tell us about it.

We are making progress, but inevitably in Afghanistan it's three steps forward and two steps back. Kandahar City is secured by Afghans today — that's a huge success — enabled by our men and women, and many brave Canadian civilian police patrolling the streets with Afghan partners. A growing number of Canadian civilians (more than 70) are also making a big difference, with all of us guided by a clear set of government priorities.

I'm especially proud of the progress we have made in professionalizing the Afghan National Army. In 2006, there were virtually no ANA for us to work with. Today, we are mentoring a full brigade. They are our brothers in arms: they are greatly respected by Kandaharis and, with every day that passes, they play more of a leadership role on operations.

Together with our Afghan partners, we've certainly taken the upper hand with the insurgents. They will not stand up and fight us. Instead, they've reverted to terrorist tactics — IEDs, intimidation and targeted assassinations of prominent Afghans — all aimed at increasing fear and eroding the people's confidence in their government. The net effect of our high operational tempo and their asymmetric tactics has been an upsurge in violence.

Can you describe some of the key challenges of 2008?

In the security arena, the Afghan National Police is the key to Afghanistan's future. The ANA will never be large enough to secure the entire country, nor will there ever be enough international forces to do so. There are encouraging signs of police progress in Kandahar City, where almost 50 percent of the province's population lives. But effective police are also needed in hundreds of villages in rural Kandahar, and we are not close to that yet. There are far too few of them, and they are not all well led. As a result, many of them have bad habits that give them a bad reputation in the South. Effective mentoring is needed at all levels, and this task will become increasingly important for us and the international community.

We've learned over the past three years in the South that Afghan leadership is critical particularly at the village and district levels. "White faces" alone in violent conflict with insurgents do not engender the support of the local population. Dramatically increasing the number of Western troops in the South will work only if Afghans are at the forefront. Empowering them at all levels — building their capacity to govern, and to deliver justice, basic services and economic well being, free of self-serving corruption — is as important as augmenting security forces. And this is Canada's focus in Afghanistan.

What is in store for 2009?

We will continue to separate the insurgents from the people, but our broader focus has to be on the population — stabilizing in Kandahar City and building a stronger sense of security in the populated approaches to the city, while we support Afghan solutions and build their capacity to protect and look after their people. This will be the essence of our focus: where most Kandaharis live and sleep.

The addition of enablers recommended by the Manley Panel — three types of helicopters and a very capable UAV — will save lives and make a huge contribution to mission success. Likewise, the arrival of tens of thousands of US troops will help Afghan authorities control territory that is currently dominated by insurgents. This will mean more violence in the near term, but the insurgents will see

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Left: LGen Michel Gauthier
Commander CEFCOM
December 2008

their influence diminish gradually to irrelevance as Afghan leadership and confidence grow at the village and district levels.

Key to all this, of course, will be to ensure that Afghans are front and centre. Insurgencies are ultimately defeated by the people. In Kandahar, they must be prepared to take collective and individual ownership of the security and governance challenges, strongly enabled by a great Canadian team.

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