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Helping Afghans is a vital goal

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SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A10
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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 377

Along with its military engagement in Afghanistan, Canada is strongly committed to humanitarian aid and reconstruction projects to help the people of the struggling country. To that end, Ottawa has pledged more than \$1 billion in aid over 10 years.

However, disturbing questions have been raised recently about what's happening or not happening to the money Canada is donating to the impoverished Kandahar province.

The Senlis Council, a respected international think-tank whose president and founder is Canadian lawyer Norine MacDonald, says it has found little evidence of how Canadian aid is helping people in the main hospital or a refugee camp in the province. It also questions whether tonnes of food have reached its targets there.

In a report released last week, Senlis said: "This apparent lack of impact on the suffering of the Afghan people in Kandahar not only neglects our humanitarian obligations, it creates a climate that fuels the insurgency and undermines the already dangerous work of Canada's military in this hostile war zone."

MacDonald said in a news conference that her group visited the Mirwais Hospital on numerous occasions and could find no evidence that about \$3 million in Canadian aid, channelled through the International Red Cross Committee, had even been received. What they did find were overcrowded beds for starving children and a doctor who complained the hospital does not have the beds, equipment, medicine or staff to properly treat patients.

"It's shocking," said MacDonald.

At the refugee camp, her team was told about a lack of clean water, food and medical care for residents.

Bev Oda, Canada's development minister, said the allegations are simplistic, taken out of context and lacking information. However, to confuse things, she later said in a television interview: "I can't say whether they're right or they're wrong."

What's at stake is not only accountability and effective monitoring and use of Canadian aid, but the battle to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. And if there is substance to the issues raised by Senlis, Oda needs to provide greater clarity on its findings and to take whatever remedial action may be necessary.

To be fair, it appears Canadian aid to Afghanistan has already produced some positive results. But we can't afford to falter in the very province where our troops are fighting.

We need the people on side, for everybody's sake.

Canadian mission targets bomb makers

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PUBLICATION: The Record (Kitchener, Cambridge And Waterloo)
DATE: 2007.09.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Front
PAGE: A7
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN
SOURCE: Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 393

Canadian soldiers used the cover of darkness early yesterday morning to sweep through an Afghan village where they thought enemy insurgents had regained a foothold.

It was a relatively uneventful mission, much to the relief of military officials.

But the mission was an example of what Canadian soldiers are up against in this sun-baked expanse of sand and rock in southern Afghanistan.

Last year at this time, Canada took the lead in a major NATO offensive called Operation Medusa, driving the Taliban out of strategic positions around Kandahar city and the surrounding area.

It was an offensive that cost a dozen Canadian lives.

NATO secured much of the area and later turned it over to Afghan government forces. Now, however, insurgents have returned to several areas previously won by NATO, and Canadian troops have had to sweep the area again.

"The intent was to disrupt IED makers," Capt. Josee Bilodeau, a spokesperson for the Canadian Forces, said of yesterday's mission. "They found nothing, so it was a success."

Improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, are the biggest threats for international troops in Afghanistan.

Of the 70 Canadian soldiers who have died in the war in Afghanistan, 38 were killed by roadside bombs, mines or suicide attacks.

Operation Balye Deweh — which means Operation Light Candle in English — began at 4:30 a.m. yesterday morning in the area around Patrol Base Wilson, about 25 kilometres west of Kandahar city. By 7:35 a.m. soldiers had swept through the sleepy village of Makuan without encountering any enemy combatants.

But Zhari district, along with the Panjwahi district to the south, have been traditional Taliban strongholds and the insurgents have made a violent return, launching attacks against NATO forces and civilians alike.

About 20 kilometres from Makuan, Forward Operating Base Gundy Ghar came under mortar fire as Operation Balye Deweh was taking place. Canadian troops were too far away to respond.

The Canadians took the base back from the Taliban just last week in an operation that cost the lives of two soldiers and an Afghan interpreter killed by a mine.

After taking control of much of the Zhari district last year, international forces turned control over to Afghan security forces.

Canada is helping to train tens of thousands of Afghan army soldiers and police with the aim of eventually withdrawing and leaving them in charge.

But the Afghan security forces are plagued with problems. Ill-equipped, understaffed and underpaid, they struggle to establish the authority of the Afghan government in many parts of the country.

Yesterday, Afghan police officers who were out of uniform accidentally fired on Canadian troops en route to participate in Operation Balye Deweh, prompting an exchange of fire at a highway checkpoint.

No Canadian soldiers were injured. There were minor injuries to an unspecified number of Afghan police, but none was described as life-threatening.

Federal Tories lose credibility

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PUBLICATION: Times & Transcript (Moncton)
DATE: 2007.09.04
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: D5
BYLINE: Alec Bruce In Focus
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Times & Transcript
(Moncton)
WORD COUNT: 706

In one of the strangest displays of misplaced bravado since Canada acquired its "new" government 19 months and one day ago, the federal Tories have announced \$110,000 in funding for a new residential subdivision in the tiny town of Miscouche, P.E.I.

According to the press release, Peter MacKay, Minister of National Defence and of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, is "proud to partner in projects that strengthen the social and economic well-being of Island communities. Our government is pleased to invest close to \$110,000."

Is he kidding? I can understand -- even welcome -- public support for convention centres, theatre troupes, sports facilities, libraries and the like. But spending more than a hundred grand to pave the way for 14 private homes strikes me as an indefensible use of taxpayer's money. What's next? A new fund to offset the cost of yearly landscaping?

As the summer fades to fall, and Canadians remain oddly ambivalent towards the government they elected to, if nothing else, refrain from embarrassing itself, Harpertown seems determined to undermine its credibility.

How else should we interpret the news that millions of dollars worth of aid to Afghanistan has simply gone missing? A new report by the Senlis Council, an international think tank, concludes that only \$5 million of the \$18.5 million in economic development funding has actually found its mark in the benighted country. In response, Bev Oda, Minister of the Canadian International Development Agency, all but accused the council of pursuing its own agenda last week before conceding in a television interview that she really has no idea "whether they're right or wrong."

If that doesn't crack your funny bone, what about the bizarre spectacle of Conservative Party riding representatives suing Elections Canada for reimbursement of campaign expenses they may not have properly incurred in the first place? According to the Globe and Mail, "During the last election campaign, as federal Conservatives were vehemently attacking Liberal misdeeds, they were apparently resorting to highly irregular ploys to pay for their expenses. Party officials transferred money to local constituencies and then requested the return of that money to pay for regional advertising buys."

Said one former Tory MP, Jean Landry, the party deposited \$26,000 into his campaign account and then promptly spent it on promotional materials not directly related to his bid for office. "It wasn't for me," he declared unequivocally. Now, the Commissioner of Elections Canada is investigating to determine whether such shenanigans violated the law of the land. As for the lawsuit, which had been filed at the behest of 34 Tory supporters (of which only two remain listed), one of the plaintiffs stipulated last week that she had no idea her name had been used.

Exquisite, yes? No more so, perhaps, than the prime minister's appointment of former P.E.I. premier, and loyal supporter, Pat Binns as Canada's new ambassador to Ireland. The announcement last Thursday generated howls of derision, and charges of patronage, from many who noted that Harper came to office on a platform of accountability, transparency and due process. In fact, a year ago, he told a group of senior civil servants that he would establish a public appointments commission that would "ensure that qualified people are appointed based on a fair process, and that politically appointed positions are eliminated wherever they are unnecessary."

As for Binns' qualifications, he served as a Conservative MP in prime minister Brian Mulroney's government between 1984 and 1988, campaigned for Harper in the 2006 election, and led his provincial Tories to a crushing defeat at the hands of the Grits in last May's general poll. About his appointment, Binns — who takes over from Christopher Westdal, a former ambassador to Russia — had this to say: "It's a great honour . . . My grandfather actually immigrated from County Monaghan in Ireland."

And so it goes. All of which leaves me with one yawning question: Does credibility in public office mean anything anymore?

n Alec Bruce is a Moncton-based writer. His column appears in this space every Tuesday and Thursday. He may be reached via www.thebrucereport.com

Canadian soldiers sweep village

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(Fredericton)
WORD COUNT: 378

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Canadians search for enemy insurgents; Mission more uneventful than similar one Canadian forces ran a year ago

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: World

PAGE: A4

ILLUSTRATION: An Afghan boy is helped by a man as he arrives early morning to the market to sell fresh–from–oven bread in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Monday. (RAFIQ MAQBOOL / AP)

WORD COUNT: 374

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Canadian soldiers used the cover of darkness early Monday morning to sweep through an Afghan village where they thought enemy insurgents had regained a foothold. It was a relatively uneventful mission, much to the relief of military officials.

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Council a pain to those selling Afghan war

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.09.04
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
BYLINE: Scott Taylor
WORD COUNT: 684

LAST WEEK, representatives of the Senlis Council breezed into Ottawa and promptly drop-kicked the Canadian International Development Agency yet again for failing to follow through with promised relief projects in southern Afghanistan.

When Senlis – an international think-tank specializing in security and development policy– held a news conference on Parliament Hill back in May, it called for the replacement of CIDA with an independent non-governmental organization that could better deliver aid to the places it is needed most. As Senlis, which has an office in Ottawa, is one of the few, and possibly the only, Canadian NGOs still operating "outside the wire" in southern Afghanistan, one assumes it wanted to fill that role itself.

Taunted by the challenge to its authority, CIDA invited the Senlis researchers to revisit the war-torn Kandahar region to get a better look at the progress being made with Canada's aid money. Having accepted that invitation, Senlis officials took their cameras and went out to re-examine CIDA's work. The results presented at the news conference in the national capital last Wednesday earned the CIDA reps was another F.

One of the hospitals CIDA had targeted for relief still had some 28 children sharing a filthy eight-bed ward with no air conditioning. Video footage of a bridge construction project sponsored by CIDA revealed child labourers toiling in the heat while adults lounged about. Despite CIDA's promises to redirect food aid to Kandahar, people are still starving just kilometres away from the massive NATO base. Inside that base are approximately 14,000 NATO troops – including 2,500 Canadians – and a grand total of three CIDA representatives responsible for organizing reconstruction projects. The latest Senlis report clearly illustrated the imbalance of resources allocated to military operations compared to humanitarian relief efforts. However, to be fair to CIDA, the failure to complete specific projects in specific regions stems largely from the fact that the majority of the Canadian resources donated through the agency are transferred to much larger multinational agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Food Program.

On top of this, the three CIDA reps in Kandahar monitor a small amount of project money. For instance, everyone who visits Kandahar will see that the community garbage cans are a Canadian donation. Old oil drums painted bright yellow are adorned with a red Maple Leaf and the hand-scrawled words "courtesy of the Canadian International Development Agency."

For those powers that continue trying to sell the war in Afghanistan, the Senlis Council is a perpetual pain in the butt. As long as nobody goes "outside the wire," we have to take the military's word – and CIDA's as well – that large-scale reconstruction projects are underway. With the exception of Taliban attacks on our troops, we believe that all the good work accomplished to date more than offsets the lives that are lost.

Having travelled with the Senlis researchers as they risked their lives conducting surveys last January, I can attest to the fact that they walk the ground upon which they provide analysis. The Taliban are an underground insurgency, and the Pashtun peasants of Kandahar reject President Hamid Karzai's regime in Kabul as a puppet of foreign occupiers. The information gleaned by the Senlis Council is an invaluable insight into the

mindset of the average Afghan.

We do not need Senlis to advise us that security remains problematic. The mounting casualties attest to that.

It is also completely understandable that constructive development is not possible until the violence is curtailed.

The aid Canada provides is distributed through international agencies to those regions where it is safe to deliver it – not where it is most needed.

The Senlis Council's criticism of CIDA is simply a statement of the obvious. Unfortunately, those who are trying to spin the minimal progress made to date into something substantial are only ensuring the current cycle of failure will continue.()

How long do we stay hopeless course?

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: Editorial

PAGE: A6

COLUMN: Letter to the editor

WORD COUNT: 62

Editor:

This is in response to Mr. Payne's letter ("Snap end to war will bring chaos, death," Aug 29, 2007).

According to that letter, Mr. Payne claims that Afghanistan will only topple and return to its usual state if Canadian troops pull out.

This in effect, is a very supportable claim.

But, using that theory, should the Canadian troops stay in Afghanistan to peace-keep for years on end while the death toll only steadily climbs?

Cory Stevenson, Springton

Canada should pull troops from Afghanistan: Layton

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: Canada

PAGE: A5

SOURCE: CP

DATELINE: TORONTO

WORD COUNT: 73

Federal NDP Leader Jack Layton is repeating his call for Canada to safely and securely withdraw its troops from Afghanistan now, and take the lead in forging peace talks to end the bloodshed there.

Layton tells The Canadian Press today the military mission, which is scheduled to run out in February 2009, isn't accomplishing increased security in Afghanistan.

He wants to see Canada take the lead in a comprehensive peace process that brings all sides together.

Deep grief

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: Canada

PAGE: A5

ILLUSTRATION: Unidentified relatives of Major Raymond Ruckpaul embraced during a repatriation ceremony in Trenton, Ont., on Sunday. Ruckpaul died in action in Afghanistan.
Canadian Press photo

Canada should pull troops from Afghanistan now:Layton

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: National

PAGE: B5

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Pat Hewitt

DATELINE: Toronto

WORD COUNT: 669

Federal NDP Leader Jack Layton is repeating his call for Canada to safely and securely withdraw its troops from Afghanistan now and take the lead in forging peace talks to end the bloodshed there.

Layton told The Canadian Press on Monday in Toronto where he attended the Labour Day parade that the military mission, which is scheduled to run out in February 2009, isn't accomplishing increased security in Afghanistan. He said he wants to see Canada take the lead in a comprehensive peace process.

"Canada's voice and reputation as a country that can lead in peace negotiations and discussions should be used here instead of using the approach that emerged from the White House," said Layton.

"That's what should be happening now so that we can work towards a ceasefire so that aid and reconstruction can actually happen, and not be undone shortly after it's been accomplished."

Layton reacted after Defence Minister Peter MacKay told CTV's "Question Period" on Sunday "As far as the signal that has been sent already, our current configuration will end in February 2009, obviously the aid work and the diplomatic effort and presence will extend well beyond that, and the Afghan compact itself goes until 2011."

MacKay said a vote will be taken in Parliament if there is to be any extension of the military mission and he expects this discussion will take place in the House of Commons this fall.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion has said he will introduce a motion in the Commons setting February 2009 as a firm end to Canada's combat role in Afghanistan.

But in an e-mail from Dion's office Monday, the Liberals said a vote would not be needed if the Harper government would now tell NATO and the government of Afghanistan that the combat mission in Kandahar will end in February 2009.

MacKay told The Canadian Press in an earlier interview the minority Conservative government wants a vote in the Commons, but wouldn't say whether it would consider such a vote a confidence measure that could force an election.

Layton is accusing MacKay of confusing things and trying to "bamboozle" Canadians.

"I think it shows they can't really be trusted on this issue of the war. They secured the two-year extension to 2009 with the support of many Liberals and now even the Bloc is supporting the 2009 date," said Layton.

"It's only the NDP that's saying look if it's the wrong mission in 2009, it's the wrong mission now. And we should be recalling our troops and playing a completely different role to help the people of Afghanistan," said Layton.

Since Canada deployed troops to the wartorn country in 2002 after the U.S.-led invasion ousted the Taliban from power, 70 Canadian soldiers and one diplomat, Glyn Berry, have been killed – more than half by roadside bombs, mines or suicide attacks.

Layton says it's clear that with civilian deaths on the rise, reports that aid isn't getting through and mounting deaths of Canadian soldiers, that there "absolutely should be a debate, and in fact it should be under continuous review in the House."

Last week the Senlis Council, an international policy think-tank, released a report suggesting there is an appalling lack of evidence that Canadian aid is easing suffering at Kandahar's main hospital or in one of the region's largest refugee camps.

"Things are not improving. I think it's time for Mr. MacKay to come clean on what's really happening. We have to learn from organizations like the Senlis Council that the aid that they constantly talk about is not actually getting through into the war zone," said Layton.

International development minister Bev Oda said last week more than \$1 billion to be spent in aid to Afghanistan by 2011 is going to experienced partners on the ground who are accountable for it through regular public reports.

"Canadians understand that as long as there's a search and destroy war effort underway, it's not going to be possible to rebuild communities with any sense of security," said Layton.

Layton said if a conflict continues, it will go on for many years and the people in Afghanistan will continue to live in a very insecure and difficult environment.

"The only avenue that offers any hope here is a comprehensive peace process that brings sides together. After all, some of these sides did come together in the formation of the Karzai government. "It was a start," said Layton.

Canadian soldiers sweep Afghan village; Hunt for insurgent bomb makers

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: World

PAGE: A7

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Dene Moore

DATELINE: Kandahar, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 418

Canadian soldiers used the cover of darkness early Monday morning to sweep through an Afghan village where they thought enemy insurgents had regained a foothold.

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Capt. Josee Bilodeau, a spokeswoman for the Canadian Forces, speaking about Monday's mission

Back from Afghanistan; Former soldier still grappling with the horrors of wartime

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.04

SECTION: Front

PAGE: A1

BYLINE: Holly Hill

ILLUSTRATION: Chad Kinden, 25, back home and out of the army, talks about his experiences in Afghanistan. – Submitted photo; Alpha Section, 7 Platoon of Charlie Company during the Afghanistan mission. – Submitted photo

WORD COUNT: 555

It's been a year since Chad Kinden experienced his first firefight in Afghanistan.

But while the 25-year-old former corporal may be out of the army now, he thinks about his seven-month tour of duty in Afghanistan every day.

"No one knows – no one in Canada or North America has any idea how bad it is for the people who have been there," he said.

"People hear about it, but unless they see it, they can't relate to it."

In December, Kinden told the army he would be leaving. July 8 was his last day.

Growing up in Lewisporte, his childhood dream was to become a fireman. But at age 20, he joined the Forces.

He was sent to Bosnia for five months when he was 21, and then to Afghanistan when he was 24.

The Afghanistan tour really hit home.

"I think about my friends still over there and guys who are going over in six months," Kinden said.

Some days, the flashbacks and constant reminders of Afghanistan are worse for Kinden, but he's managed to cope so far, thanks to supportive relatives and friends.

"In Afghanistan, whenever someone was having a bad day or someone (recalled) something, (we'd) talk about it together because we've all gone through the same thing. Now that I'm out, I can only tell about my experiences. I don't have anyone saying, 'Yes, I know what you mean.'"

"But that's something I just have to deal with."

Kinden said talking about his experiences over there has made the transition to home life a little easier.

"You have to talk about stuff like this," he said.

"My mom was my little vent. She went through what I went through, because I would tell her everything."

Rough stuff

Kinden said parts of the tour are indescribable.

The first time he got shot at was Sept. 3, 2006.

"When you first get shot at – holy shit," Kinden said, searching for the words to describe his experience.

The shot barely missed Kinden's vehicle and was the start of an attack on his platoon and the rest of Charlie Company, who lost four men that day.

The firefight lasted more than three hours and is etched in Kinden's memory.

Warrant Officers Richard Francis Nolan (of Mount Pearl) and Frank Robert Mellish, Sgt. Shane Stachnik and Pte. William Jonathan James Cushley died in the attack.

Kinden was a gunner in the light armoured vehicle (LAV) next to Nolan's jeep.

Only 10 to 15 minutes into the battle, Kinden knew some of his fellow soldiers had been hit, but he had to keep fighting.

"Once we heard what had happened over the radio, it struck home," he recalled.

"But then you take a second to pause and then go back at what you are doing.

You just hope and pray that everyone is all right."

Soldiers ran to help the injured. Others shouted orders.

But no one stopped doing their job for a second, Kinden said.

"Everything ran so smoothly that it was beautiful, it really was, how everybody came back to their training and did what they had to do, even though we knew we had men injured," he said.

"We trained for two years before we went over to Afghanistan, but when you get there you just zone in. You forget that people are dying, getting hurt and that there are rounds coming by your head." Kinden said that day was his worst in the infantry.

"That experience alone pretty much explains how horrible Afghanistan can be," he said.

"But I know we made a difference."

Kinden said his family and friends also felt the heat while he served his tour.

"I called home whenever I could, but sometimes it would be two or three weeks before you could get a call out," he explained.

Not always options

And calling home wasn't the only luxury soldiers sometimes had to do without. Food and sleep weren't always options if they were in battle.

"There would be times when you said, 'OK, I will eat in five minutes,'" he said.

"Then, all of a sudden – bang! You are in a firefight and five hours later you are starving, but you can't go have something to eat now. "So you ate, slept and did whatever you could when you weren't fighting."

Still, Kinden said he's glad he went through the experience and became friends with the soldiers in his platoon.

You start out as acquaintances before the tour and chances are you'll be best friends by the time you leave, he said.

"It's funny how everyone seems a little more open when there's stress put on a person, so you get to know a person," he said.

"You get to see that person every day. And if you don't, you know something bad happened."

These days, Kinden isn't saying he'll never return to the Forces, but he's adamant he'll never rejoin the infantry.

He hopes to finish school and start his own business in mining or construction.

"I have a different attitude and I feel a little more grown up now," he said.

"I quit the army, but I would go back. It was my life for five years and I don't know anything else right now."

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Invisible Afghan casualties

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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
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It's often noted that each death of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan erodes public support for the war. What is infrequently noted is the way, with each death, the Canadian media seems to ratchet up its support for the war.

On one level, the media's approach seems understandable. Canadians are deeply moved by these deaths, and the media accurately records this grief.

But something else happens in the process. There's an almost irresistible inclination to suggest that the death hasn't been in vain.

Late last month, Canadian soldiers Mario Mercier and Christian Duchesne were killed in Afghanistan. Both men were fathers of three children, making their deaths particularly heartbreaking.

The only possible comfort is the notion the men died for a worthy cause. To suggest otherwise seems to dishonour them.

The agony of each death can only be tolerated if it's deemed to be for a cause worthy enough to send more soldiers to their deaths.

The problem is that each killing then provides fresh momentum for continuing the war.

In order to honour the dead, the war is elevated to a noble cause; criticism of the war is discouraged.

This partly explains how the U.S. stayed in Vietnam until some 57,000 American soldiers were killed.

A similar process is underway in Iraq.

One way to prevent this pro-war momentum from setting in here would be for us to demand that the casualties we inflict on Afghans also be treated with some attention and respect.

Instead, our government and media celebrate the number of "Taliban" we kill, without any understanding of who these individuals are and whether they are simply local villagers fighting – as Afghans have done throughout their history – to resist foreign armies. Whether we admit it or not, we are a part of a foreign army over there.

More surprising is the disrespectful way our government and media treat even Afghan civilian casualties.

There's been minimal coverage here of the repeated pleas from Afghans – including President Hamid Karzai – for an end to the U.S. and NATO bombings that have killed countless Afghan civilians. (And they are

literally countless; we don't bother counting them.)

As part of the NATO force over there, Canada is surely complicit in these war deaths.

Yet our media tend to make short shrift of them, even raising doubts about whether they really take place. Last week, the CBC reported that Afghan elders "alleged" that up to 18 civilians were killed by coalition troops in Helmand province.

The CBC quoted a NATO spokesperson who charged that the civilian casualties were being deliberately exaggerated by the Taliban for propaganda purposes.

But how do we know NATO isn't playing down the casualties for propaganda purposes? How does NATO even know who's being killed in its bombing raids?

Incidentally, that same day the New York Times reported that in a telephone interview, Afghan elder Hajji Agha Muhammad said the air strikes had killed 12 civilians, including six children ages 3 to 6 (and injured an additional 12).

Surely, this is not a story to be passed over quickly – as the CBC did – with a brisk denial from NATO. If true – and why should we assume that "Afghan elders" are lying? – it is a story of immense importance, and not only because it raises questions about the prospects of us ever winning popular support in Afghanistan.

More importantly, it raises questions about whether what we're doing over there is really all that noble – or even justifiable.

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Victory is ours ... soon ... maybe

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BYLINE: Slinger
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September Song; dirge-like thoughts on Afghanistan

Are you going to believe your lying eyes? Listen instead to our military commanders and our blood-and-guts commentators. They swear to us that victory is within our grasp. How long will it take? That's when they get a little vague. But to even imagine pulling out in 2009 is defeatism; there is every likelihood we will be no closer to victory then than we are now. According to the Prime Minister it could take until 2019.

How are we doing so far? The weekend brought stories about how Canadians are mostly fighting to take territory that other Canadians had fought for and taken before. It had been lost in between when it got turned over to the hopeless Afghan police, or because the Taliban were able to sneak back in under the cover of confusion during the Van Doos' takeover.

Mission creepy. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan to eliminate Osama bin Laden; payback for the attacks of 9/11. When the U.S. decided it would rather go and play in Iraq instead, Paul Martin volunteered Canadian troops, the hope being that George W. Bush would no longer regard us as wusses.

Since most Canadian voters were cool to the idea of war for war's sake, Ottawa devised a noble-sounding sales pitch: reconstruction. Leaving aside the riddle of how you "re"construct a country that was never noticeably constructed, our forces, in between ducking for cover and returning fire, have been cheerily promoting freedom and liberty to Afghans while sweating to rebuild their schools and hospitals.

You have to wonder how appreciative we would be if somebody's army invaded Canada to bring us the benefits of their version of freedom and liberty and fix up our sad-assed social welfare system. While armies can wage wars, and occasionally impose peace, they're lousy diplomats. It's because of all those guns they have. And tanks. And bombs.

Add to this the report last week that two-thirds of Canadian aid money, some \$12 million, appears to have vanished.

How will we know when we've won? Hands up all you people who think that given a few more firefights, and a few more improvised explosive devices exploding, and a few more hearses rolling down the Highway of Heroes, and a little more effort expended in persuading its farmers to switch from opium to soybeans, that a trip across Afghanistan will be like a trip across Highway 7 from, say, Woodbridge to Omemee.

Dying in vain. Listen carefully and you'll hear a relentless chorus in the background: If we pull out now, or in 10 years, or possibly ever, without turning Afghanistan into a democracy fit for membership in the European Union, the Canadian soldiers killed there will have died in vain.

Canadians are not accustomed to losing wars. We've been lucky that way even if we have picked our wars pretty carefully. So it would be a new and unhappy experience for us. Even unhappier when you reflect that every soldier who's ever been killed in a conflict that their side lost died in vain. It is a mathematical truth of warfare.

Stephen Harper's futile gesture. The Prime Minister has asserted that he will heed the will of Parliament and pull Canadians back from the pointy end in 2009 (if that turns out to be Parliament's will) to busy themselves with nation- building.

This sounds like a commitment, but it is mostly political buzzfuzz. Don't be surprised if Canada's troops end up getting pulled all the way home. That's because on Jan. 20, 2009, George Bush is leaving office. As Bush goes, so goes the NATO occupation.

Slinger's column appears Tuesday and Thursday.

'Selling' Afghan mission critical

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BYLINE: Barbara Yaffe
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VANCOUVER — Canadians will witness a new communications strategy on Afghanistan this fall, because the one the Harper government has peddled to date has been a bust.

Canadians are less gung-ho about militarism than Americans, whose history is replete with battles that yielded new territory and colourful heroes.

In the U.S., people are war-proud, and soldiers are treated to special airport lounges and endless discounts. There's a glorification factor utterly absent in this country.

My own theory: Canadians are no less proud of their fighting folk than Americans. But north of 49, two major home-based military experiences have been sources of guilt and controversy rather than achievement.

I'm speaking of the 1759 battle on the Plains of Abraham in which the English defeated the French and have been trying to make up for it ever since. And the widely condemned 1970 invocation of the War Measures Act, when, during the so-called FLQ crisis, Quebecers were rounded up and arrested without charge and soldiers trooped through the streets of Montreal.

Moreover, becoming a soldier has always been viewed in Canada less as an illustrious career opportunity than a source of last-resort employment in regions where jobs are scarce. A disproportionate number of soldiers come from Quebec and Atlantic Canada.

So, the faraway, deadly Afghan mission was never going to be an easy sell for Canadians. That goes double for Quebecers, now watching their own come home in body bags.

The Van Doo — the Royal 22nd Regiment from Valcartier — was dispatched to Kandahar in July; in a three-day period last week Simon Longtin, Christian Dushesne and Mario Mercier were killed.

Since the 2002 start of the mission, six Quebecers — among 70 Canadians — had been killed (as of Friday). Polls show one Quebecer in three supports remaining in Afghanistan beyond Canada's February 2009 NATO commitment, compared to one in two elsewhere in Canada.

Predictably, last week's round of casualties triggered renewed political debate.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper needs Quebec if he's to win a majority government. But he's on the wrong side of the Afghan issue while his two main opponents in Quebec, the Bloc Quebecois and Liberals, are more in tune with Quebec opinion.

Liberals want troops replaced by another NATO contingent in early 2009 while Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe is insisting on a firm end date to the mission. The NDP wants an immediate troop withdrawal.

Harper has good reason to move on this issue. First, three Quebec byelections, scheduled for Sept. 17, will provide a reading on Conservative popularity in Quebec and will give the party momentum, or not.

Second, Harper is likely to launch a new session of Parliament this fall to re-energize his government with a throne speech -- which potentially could be followed by a non-confidence motion. Such a motion could topple the government if the three opposition parties join hands. (It's difficult to see why they would, given that polls show none stands to gain much from an early election.)

Any early confidence vote in Parliament would be an unpalatable prospect for Conservatives with dead soldiers being repatriated every week.

The Conference of Defence Associations (CDA), a lobby group on defence and security issues, lamented last week that what Canadians know best about the Afghan mission are casualty figures. The CDA, in a news release, notes a plan is afoot to have government officials deliver media briefings on Afghanistan starting today. The organization wants the briefings to be held weekly.

Harper well understands the political pickle the Kandahar deployment represents. That's why he shuffled his cabinet a few weeks ago to put two loquacious, photogenic ministers -- Peter MacKay from the Atlantic region and Maxime Bernier from Quebec -- front and centre, to sell the assignment.

He alerted U.S. President George W. Bush to his plight at the Aug. 20 Montebello summit, getting a statement out of the president that the Canadians already have done "brilliant" work in Afghanistan.

The PM also has begun shifting his messaging, pledging troops won't stay beyond 2009 without opposition sanction and that more focus would be put on reconstruction.

Count on it. Harper is not prepared to lose an election over Afghanistan.

– Yaffe writes for the Vancouver Sun.

Focus on Afghanistan puts Canada at risk: report

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BYLINE: David Pugliese
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OTTAWA — The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention or priority it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier and leaked to the Ottawa Citizen.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run.

The 62-page report produced in January for Hillier, details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public. The transformation process was officially launched with much fanfare 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve how the military works.

But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is that Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, which has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," the report says.

In addition, the report found there has been duplication or triplication of efforts among the various commands since few of the new procedures or specific responsibilities involved in the transformation process were ever written down.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command (COM), which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would also provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations.

"With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada COM is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report says.

"Canada COM remains very much a command in waiting for, while the command has executed over 40 operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the command's overall capability," the study adds.

"Like all, the Team hopes that those tests will come in the form of planned domestic operations, and not in the form of a crisis response!"

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the Command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

CEFCOM staff interviewed for the report noted they have "little or no time to think" and have been unable to work on doctrine, policies, processes and procedures.

"CEFCOM assesses that the command is stretched thin, not really sustainable over the longer term, and that many of its personnel are facing personal burnout," the report adds.

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

"What you take away from this report is that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of planning and foresight put into this (transformation) proposal," said Kenny.

He noted that transformation was supposed to streamline the military leadership structure and make it more efficient but instead has created more organizations that need more staff, who are now duplicating each other's efforts.

"Before all this started we had a system that worked pretty good," he added, referring to the position of the deputy chief of the defence staff that, along with other offices, handled many of the responsibilities taken over by the new commands. "Clearly this report is questioning whether there has been a benefit to transformation."

But Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

He acknowledged the report notes Canada Command is not getting as much attention from Hillier, as well as the necessary resources, because of the focus on Afghanistan. But he added: "I don't believe that you will have seen anything in there that suggests it is getting insufficient attention to meet the requirements."

"We know there are things we need to continue to work on, to shape, that we still aren't as good as we can be to responding in Canada," Christensen added. "To get to that we need to continue to work on Canada Command, its structure, resourcing and command relationships."

He said that since the report was delivered, Canada Command has been involved in dealing with forest fires in British Columbia. It is now heavily involved in security planning for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

'Crimson Maple Leaf' misguided

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BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
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The Canadian government is considering issuing a new medal for military personnel wounded by enemy action — our version of the U.S. Purple Heart, awarded to those who are wounded or killed by the enemy.

Several groups of veterans have been lobbying for this. A letter by Gordon O'Connor shortly before he was replaced as defence minister seems to confirm that a design is already being created.

If authorized, such a medal seems bound to provoke controversy. As well as being a sort of "monkey see, monkey do" copycat of the Purple Heart, it puts those wounded in Afghanistan on a pedestal higher than those wounded in the Second World War and Korea, where casualties were greater.

Presently, those wounded wear a embroidered gold wound stripe on the left sleeve of their uniform.

Terry Herrett, president of the Surrey, B.C. chapter of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association (CPVA) submitted a proposed design for the wound medal to his MP, Mark Warawa, who forwarded it to then-defence minister O'Connor.

Herrett proposes calling the medal the "Purple Cross," with a purple ribbon flanked by white and red stripes, with the purple embossed on the cross.

O'Connor wrote to Herrett: "Creating a new medal is the right thing to do. You will be pleased to know that upon taking office I directed the Canadian Forces to begin working on the creation of a new medal to replace the Wound Stripe."

PROPOSALS

DND and the Governor General's office are reviewing proposals.

O'Connor's successor in defence, Peter MacKay, is unlikely to second-guess his predecessor on this issue, since O'Connor is a retired brigadier-general.

Murray Sinnot, an ex-soldier and retired Windsor, Ont., police officer has lobbied veterans groups, MPs and even Don Cherry about the wound medal, which he suggests could be called the "Crimson Maple Leaf."

While there's wide support to honour those killed or wounded in Afghanistan (Herrett proposes that those killed in action get the new medal posthumously), veterans of WWII and Korea were often bemused at the American custom of awarding a medal to those wounded.

Canadian soldiers used to feel it was better not to be wounded.

Ray Kekkonen, vice-president of the CPVA, says his organization has made no official decision about the wound medal, and that Herrett's design "is purely personal." The Royal Canadian Legion is also noncommittal. Vince Courtenay, a Korean veteran and publisher of Koreavetnews.com has "no argument with the concept" but dislikes calling it the copycat "Purple Cross," and prefers the medal not to be in the form of a cross, "which usually denotes valour."

Cliff Chadderton, chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations (56 member organizations) who lost a leg in WWII while an officer with the Winnipeg Rifles in Holland, thinks awarding a medal for getting wounded "is heading in the wrong direction."

SLIGHTED

To award a medal to the wounded of Afghanistan could be interpreted as a slight to those thousands who were casualties in WWII, Korea and on UN peacekeeping missions. Such a medal would almost have to be awarded retrospectively to the wounded of past wars — a huge bureaucratic nightmare. And, again, imitating the Americans.

Canada already dishes out more service medals than in WWI, WWII and Korea combined. Our soldiers have always tried not to get wounded, and kept casualties low. If a medal is authorized for being wounded, that tradition may be about to end, with some individuals seeking light wounds in order to get a medal.

Enemy underfoot Insurgents sly in hiding improvised explosive devices

SOURCETAG 0709040285
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.09.04
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PAGE: 11
BYLINE: RICHARD LATENDRESSE
WORD COUNT: 434

Canadian soldiers here in Afghanistan have to keep a sense of humour — even if it's a sick sense of humour.

I found that out on our latest patrol.

We were the closest we could get to sectors infested with the Taliban — between two forward operating bases, Ma'Sum Ghar and Sperwan Ghar, in southern Afghanistan.

All along the way, soldiers were on constant lookout. But not the arched-neck type of lookout, scouting around to see who might be creeping up behind them.

No, the soldiers aboard this light armoured vehicle weren't afraid of armed insurgents or a surprise attack. Their eyes were down.

At the tiniest of culverts along the dusty road, they carried out the same ritual again and again. Soldiers from the first LAV would disembark and meticulously check the ground, one step at a time, looking for clues — any indications of an IED, or an improvised explosive device.

Not an easy job. IEDs are made out of explosives and random pieces of household materials, or garbage. The clue could be a barely visible wire, or an old scrap of rubber. An innocuous remnant can serve as a detonator for these roadside bombs.

Watching the soldiers made me shudder. Wearing only a flak jacket and a helmet, they were hunting for home-made explosives in the bottom of a ditch.

SLITHER

Others had to slither along the ground to find out what was under a blanket. It looked like it had been tossed there haphazardly. But there was no way of knowing for sure unless someone lifted it.

It should take about 20 minutes to travel this stretch of road, but it took us more than two hours. That's how long it takes to search out a sly killer.

But the troops don't always have the luxury of being fastidious. And for those times, they've come up with an expression: "Human cannonball.

As they go over a ditch they didn't have time to inspect, they squeeze their legs together and keep their bodies stiff.

The thinking is, if a bomb goes off under the vehicle, they'd fly into the air, becoming human cannonballs, and at least have a chance, albeit a slim chance, of surviving.

Just like the method itself, the humour is a form of self-preservation. It's fatalism based on grim reality.

So far, the IEDs have been the most effective weapon against the Canadians in Afghanistan. Over the past seven months, 22 of the 25 Canadians killed here were killed by explosions.

The bomb-makers are getting smarter and smarter. The Canadian military won't divulge details about what they know about the tactics, but they did show us examples of some IEDs.

A coffee pot was the trap. An old rubber tire was the detonator and a kitchen pot was brimming with explosives. Driving over the rubber to check out what the coffee pot was, there were enough explosives in that pot to rip a hole through a tank.

The task of outsmarting IEDs is never over.

MILITARY SECRETS

A small group of experts dismantles the ones that are unearthed.

They are well-trained, and well-equipped, and because they are so familiar with the enemies' tactics, they are now personal Taliban targets. Their identities remain military secrets.

As terrifying and deadly as the IEDs are, they are evidence of how the enemy can learn and adapt in its environment — and Canadian soldiers are doing the same.

The proof: Three out of four IEDs are successfully dismantled by Canadian troops.

Yet another imaginative countermeasure driven by self-preservation.

Richard Latendresse is a correspondent for Sun Media's sister network TVA

'Crimson Maple Leaf' misguided

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BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
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At the tiniest of culverts along the dusty road, they carried out the same ritual again and again. Soldiers from the first LAV would disembark and meticulously check the ground, one step at a time, looking for clues — any indications of an IED, or an improvised explosive device.

Not an easy job. IEDs are made out of explosives and random pieces of household materials, or garbage. The clue could be a barely visible wire, or an old scrap of rubber. An innocuous remnant can serve as a detonator for these roadside bombs.

Watching the soldiers made me shudder. Wearing only a flak jacket and a helmet, they were hunting for home-made explosives in the bottom of a ditch.

SLITHER

Others had to slither along the ground to find out what was under a blanket. It looked like it had been tossed there haphazardly. But there was no way of knowing for sure unless someone lifted it.

It should take about 20 minutes to travel this stretch of road, but it took us more than two hours. That's how long it takes to search out a sly killer.

But the troops don't always have the luxury of being fastidious. And for those times, they've come up with an expression: "Human cannonball.

As they go over a ditch they didn't have time to inspect, they squeeze their legs together and keep their bodies stiff.

The thinking is, if a bomb goes off under the vehicle, they'd fly into the air, becoming human cannonballs, and at least have a chance, albeit a slim chance, of surviving.

Just like the method itself, the humour is a form of self-preservation. It's fatalism based on grim reality.

So far, the IEDs have been the most effective weapon against the Canadians in Afghanistan. Over the past seven months, 22 of the 25 Canadians killed here were killed by explosions.

The bomb-makers are getting smarter and smarter. The Canadian military won't divulge details about what they know about the tactics, but they did show us examples of some IEDs.

A coffee pot was the trap. An old rubber tire was the detonator and a kitchen pot was brimming with explosives. Driving over the rubber to check out what the coffee pot was, there were enough explosives in that pot to rip a hole through a tank.

The task of outsmarting IEDs is never over.

MILITARY SECRETS

A small group of experts dismantles the ones that are unearthed.

They are well-trained, and well-equipped, and because they are so familiar with the enemies' tactics, they are now personal Taliban targets. Their identities remain military secrets.

As terrifying and deadly as the IEDs are, they are evidence of how the enemy can learn and adapt in its environment — and Canadian soldiers are doing the same.

The proof: Three out of four IEDs are successfully dismantled by Canadian troops.

Yet another imaginative countermeasure driven by self-preservation.

Richard Latendresse is a correspondent for Sun Media's sister network TVA

Ex-hostages say Taliban beat them for not converting

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PAGE: C11

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Lee Jae-Won, Reuters / Released hostage YooKyung-shik speaks to reporters in Seoul as relatives of the two men killed in Afghanistan by Taliban members hold portraits of Sim Seong-min, left, and Bae Hyong-kyu. ;

DATELINE: SEOUL

SOURCE: Agence France-Presse

WORD COUNT: 479

SEOUL (AFP) -- Some of the South Korean Christian aid workers held hostage by Afghanistan's Taliban said they were beaten for refusing to convert to Islam and for protecting female captives, a hospital chief said yesterday.

"We found through medical checks that some male hostages were beaten," Cha Seung-Gyun told reporters after the 19 freed aid workers -- 14 women and five men -- underwent examinations at a hospital outside Seoul.

They had returned home Sunday after six weeks in captivity.

"They said they were beaten at first for refusing to take part in Islamic prayers or for rejecting a demand to convert," Cha said.

The disclosure was likely to increase public sympathy for the ex-hostages, mostly in their 20s and 30s, following increasing criticism of what was seen as a reckless trip to a war-torn devoutly Islamic nation.

President Roh Moo-Hyun ordered yesterday that the former captives repay some of the costs of their rescue, which followed a deal between South Korean government negotiators in Afghanistan and the hardline Islamic insurgents.

The hospital chief said two male hostages, Je Chang-Hee and Song Byung-Woo, were beaten or threatened with death when they refused to move out of a dugout shelter and leave some of their female colleagues behind.

But Cha said medical checks on the women showed no signs of rape, and they did not report having been sexually assaulted.

The aid workers repeatedly apologized after arriving home early Sunday. They were taken to Sam Anyang General Hospital south of the capital for check-ups.

Cha said the men had fully recovered and no longer showed external signs of their beatings. He did not say how many of the hostages had been assaulted.

A pastor from the Saem–Mul Presbyterian church, which organized the ill–fated mission, said Sunday that some male hostages had been "severely beaten" for refusing to embrace Islam.

The pastor, Park Eun–Jo, also said some of the women had been "at risk of being sexually assaulted."

Cha said six or seven female hostages showed symptoms of insomnia and depression, and expressed worries about their lives after being released from hospital.

"Some patients require a close look and intensive care and treatment," he said, adding they are still suffering from shock after learning upon their release that two male hostages were slain in July.

The ex–hostages need about two weeks of treatment, he said.

The church group undertook the trip in defiance of Foreign Ministry warnings.

"By ignoring the government's warning and rashly carrying out a mission in a politically unstable Muslim country, the captives have laid a great burden on their country," JoongAng Ilbo newspaper said.

"By violating international principles and directly negotiating with a terrorist group, our country has invited censure from other countries. Korean churches cannot escape the scathing criticism that their aggressive missionary work put the lives of several innocent young people in dire jeopardy."

The group was abducted on July 19. The Taliban killed two men last month to press their demands that some Taliban prisoners be freed in exchange for the Koreans, a condition rejected by Kabul.

After starting talks with Seoul officials, the Taliban on Aug. 13 released two women. They freed the remainder of the hostages last Wednesday and Thursday.

Seoul agreed in return to withdraw its 210 non–combat troops by year–end, as previously scheduled, and to stop trips by its missionaries to Afghanistan.

It has denied foreign media reports that a ransom was paid to the Taliban.

Forces' focus on war leaves gap at home, report finds; Command that protects country, responds to crises, is being neglected

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: David Pugliese
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 611

OTTAWA -- The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run.

The 62-page report, produced in January for Hillier, details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public. The transformation process was launched 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to improve how the military works.

But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is that Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, that has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," the report says.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations. It also has yet to be put to the test. "While the command has executed over 40 operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the command's overall capability," the study adds.

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, such as "scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the findings as "chilling."

"What you take away from this report is that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of planning and foresight put into this [transformation] proposal," said Kenny.

But Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

He acknowledged the report notes Canada Command is not getting full attention from Hillier because of the focus on Afghanistan. But he added: "I don't believe that you will have seen anything in there that suggests it is getting insufficient attention to meet the requirements."

He said that since the report was delivered, Canada Command has been dealing with forest fires in British Columbia. It is now involved in security planning for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

Christensen also said the issues outlined in the report are being dealt with. He noted that CEFCOM's skilful handling of the Afghanistan mission is an example of the successes of the transformation process.

Will PM prorogue Parliament?; Major implications if Harper delays return

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KEYWORDS: PRIME MINISTERS; POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: Juliet O'Neill
SOURCE: Ottawa Citizen; CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 401

OTTAWA – The political calculations are coming fast and furious as Prime Minister Stephen Harper keeps MPs, senators and hundreds of employees on tenterhooks about whether he is about to prorogue Parliament and start a new session.

If Harper does go to the Governor General for a proclamation to prorogue Parliament, the big political question is whether he is doing it simply to get a fresh start or because he hopes to trigger defeat of his minority Conservative government so he can call an election to seek a majority. Would he be taking a risk or making a dare?

"Maybe the difference there is pretty subtle," Liberal House leader Ralph Goodale said. "But if Mr. Harper has plans to continue in that hostile style that has characterized his prime ministership up to now, it is at some point likely to provoke a confrontation."

While the government has done little to fuel or to quell speculation, Goodale suspects the decision is largely made, but Harper is not saying anything official "to leave himself maximum flexibility to change his mind."

One report has the Tories at work on a throne speech that would make the environment the top priority, followed by the economy and Afghanistan.

Proroguing Parliament would end the current session of Parliament, which is scheduled to resume from summer adjournment Monday,

Sept. 17, and set a new date, probably soon after the Oct. 10th Ontario election, to start a new session of Parliament with a speech from the throne. All but private members bills would die and committee work would come to a halt. It's a process that would heighten the risk of defeat of the government and of an election because it requires a vote of confidence.

What are the pros and cons of proroguing? While the government is saying little, Goodale and his predecessor, Don Boudria, have the benefit of experience on both sides of the Commons to analyze the factors at play.

Each say proroguing Parliament can be a method for a government to delay or to avoid a Commons sitting if it is having trouble moving legislation through the system or for one with no new policies to offer.

Goodale is affronted that the Conservatives have not engaged the official opposition in any parliamentary planning since the adjournment. He says Harper governs as though he has a majority, "probably more than any minority government in Canadian history." And a "civilized" majority government, he notes, should engage the opposition in parliamentary planning and negotiation.

Afghanistan drains DND priorities; Hillier plans to modernize armed forces a casualty of war, report says

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Agence France–Presse, Getty Images, File / Canadiansoldiers on patrol in a volatile area of Kandahar province. The war is burning out overworked personnel, says a DND report. ; Photo: Journal Stock / Rick Hillier ;

KEYWORDS: OLYMPICS; VANCOUVER/WHISTLER; CANADA

DATELINE: OTTAWA

BYLINE: David Pugliese

SOURCE: Ottawa Citizen

WORD COUNT: 786

OTTAWA – A leaked report from the Department of National Defence outlines in blunt terms the failure of General Rick Hillier's plan to transform the Canadian Forces for the future.

Hillier had planned to radically change the military into a super efficient, streamlined, highly mobile force ready to be used at a moment's notice around the world. The report, produced for the Chief of the Defence Staff by three retired generals hired to examine the transformation, suggests the process has been derailed by the Afghanistan war.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel in charge of the Afghanistan mission are so overworked and burnt out their organization is probably unsustainable in the long run, says the 62–page report.

The report details the progress of Hillier's ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces, a process that was officially launched with much fanfare 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve military operations.

But the Afghanistan mission began heating up at around the same time and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

The Afghanistan mission, combined with attempts to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchase of major pieces of new equipment, created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm."

In addition, the report found there has been duplication or triplication of efforts among the various commands since few of the new procedures or specific responsibilities involved in the transformation process were ever written down.

The study outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing domestic operations, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace

and responding to a crisis at home, such as providing support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations, says the report.

"Canada COM remains very much a command in waiting for, while the command has executed over forty operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the command's overall capability," the study says.

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although the so-called CEFCOM has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the Command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

CEFCOM staff interviewed for the report noted they have "little or no time to think" and have been unable to work on doctrine, policies, processes and procedures.

"CEFCOM assesses that the command is stretched thin, not really sustainable over the longer term, and that many of its personnel are facing personal burnout," the report says.

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

"What you take away from this report is that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of planning and foresight put into this (transformation) proposal," said Kenny.

"Before all this started we had a system that worked pretty good," he added, referring to the position of the deputy chief of the defence staff which, along with other offices, handled many of the responsibilities taken over by the new commands.

"Clearly this report is questioning whether there has been a benefit to transformation."

But Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

"We know there are things we need to continue to work on, to shape, that we still aren't as good as we can be to responding in Canada," Christensen added. "To get to that we need to continue to work on Canada Command, its structure, resourcing and command relationships."

He said that since the report was delivered, Canada Command has been dealing with forest fires in British Columbia and is now heavily involved in security planning for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

Christensen also said CEFCOM's skillful handling of the Afghanistan mission is an example of one of the successes of the transformation process.

The report also highlights the success of the Canadian Operational Support Command.

Afghanistan drains DND priorities; Hillier plans to modernize armed forces a casualty of war, report says

The command is responsible for support to military missions at home and abroad, transporting equipment, supplies and troops and well as providing military engineers, health services and military police.

The report points out the command's response to international operations has proved its capability to move critical stocks of supplies and equipment across Canada. But it also adds that, because of the pressures of current operations, the command has not been able to develop doctrine or procedures, key elements of a well-functioning military organization.

CanWest News Service

'Crimson Maple Leaf' misguided

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BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 509

The Canadian government is considering issuing a new medal for military personnel wounded by enemy action — our version of the U.S. Purple Heart, awarded to those who are wounded or killed by the enemy.

Several groups of veterans have been lobbying for this. A letter by Gordon O'Connor shortly before he was replaced as defence minister seems to confirm that a design is already being created.

If authorized, such a medal seems bound to provoke controversy. As well as being a sort of "monkey see, monkey do" copycat of the Purple Heart, it puts those wounded in Afghanistan on a pedestal higher than those wounded in the Second World War and Korea, where casualties were greater.

Presently, those wounded wear a embroidered gold wound stripe on the left sleeve of their uniform.

Terry Herrett, president of the Surrey, B.C. chapter of the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association (CPVA) submitted a proposed design for the wound medal to his MP, Mark Warawa, who forwarded it to then-defence minister O'Connor.

Herrett proposes calling the medal the "Purple Cross," with a purple ribbon flanked by white and red stripes, with the purple embossed on the cross.

O'Connor wrote to Herrett: "Creating a new medal is the right thing to do. You will be pleased to know that upon taking office I directed the Canadian Forces to begin working on the creation of a new medal to replace the Wound Stripe."

PROPOSALS

DND and the Governor General's office are reviewing proposals.

O'Connor's successor in defence, Peter MacKay, is unlikely to second-guess his predecessor on this issue, since O'Connor is a retired brigadier-general.

Murray Sinnot, an ex-soldier and retired Windsor, Ont., police officer has lobbied veterans groups, MPs and even Don Cherry about the wound medal, which he suggests could be called the "Crimson Maple Leaf."

While there's wide support to honour those killed or wounded in Afghanistan (Herrett proposes that those killed in action get the new medal posthumously), veterans of WWII and Korea were often bemused at the American custom of awarding a medal to those wounded.

Canadian soldiers used to feel it was better not to be wounded.

Ray Kekkonen, vice-president of the CPVA, says his organization has made no official decision about the wound medal, and that Herrett's design "is purely personal." The Royal Canadian Legion is also noncommittal. Vince Courtenay, a Korean veteran and publisher of Koreavetnews.com has "no argument with the concept" but dislikes calling it the copycat "Purple Cross," and prefers the medal not to be in the form of a cross, "which usually denotes valour."

Cliff Chadderton, chairman of the National Council of Veteran Associations (56 member organizations) who lost a leg in WWII while an officer with the Winnipeg Rifles in Holland, thinks awarding a medal for getting wounded "is heading in the wrong direction."

SLIGHTED

To award a medal to the wounded of Afghanistan could be interpreted as a slight to those thousands who were casualties in WWII, Korea and on UN peacekeeping missions. Such a medal would almost have to be awarded retrospectively to the wounded of past wars — a huge bureaucratic nightmare. And, again, imitating the Americans.

Canada already dishes out more service medals than in WWI, WWII and Korea combined. Our soldiers have always tried not to get wounded, and kept casualties low. If a medal is authorized for being wounded, that tradition may be about to end, with some individuals seeking light wounds in order to get a medal.

Taliban to increase kidnappings

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DATE: 2007.09.04
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PAGE: 7
BYLINE: REUTERS
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 98

Afghanistan's Taliban plan to abduct and kill more nationals from foreign countries whose troops serve under NATO and the U.S. military in the country, a spokesman for the Islamic movement warned yesterday.

The vow comes just days after the Taliban released 19 South Korean hostages after their government struck a deal that critics said sets a dangerous precedent that could spur more kidnappings.

"We consider it (kidnapping) as an arm that can help us in imparting a blow to the enemy," Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Yousuf said the group would not target nationals from foreign countries who have no troops in Afghanistan.
KEYWORDS=WORLD

Suicides rare in Canadian military

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DATE: 2007.09.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
BYLINE: ANDREW HANON, SUN MEDIA
DATELINE: EDMONTON
WORD COUNT: 280

As the family of Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul waits in an agony of doubt to find out what happened to him, one thing is certain -- suicide in the Canadian military is extremely rare.

Ruckpaul, a 42-year-old married father of two, became the 70th Canadian soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002 after he was found in his barracks with a gunshot wound on Aug. 29. He died about an hour after being discovered.

Military brass right up to Defence Minister Peter MacKay have been resolutely tight-lipped about the circumstances surrounding his death, saying only there was no enemy involvement, fueling speculation about suicide and murder.

An autopsy will be performed in Toronto today, but Ruckpaul's cousin Leona said, "it will be a very long time before we really know the truth."

The incident comes on the heels of a U.S. military report that suggests the stress from long tours of fighting a shadowy enemy in Afghanistan and Iraq have led to one of the highest suicide rates among American military personnel in nearly three decades.

But Canada's military is not on the same trajectory, with suicide rates remaining constant -- and much lower than their American counterparts, say Canadian officials.

In 2006, the report says 99 U.S. soldiers died by their own hands, for a rate of 17.3 per 100,000. While last year's figures weren't available, the average number of suicides in the Canadian military from 2000 to 2005 was 9.8 per year, with rates hovering in the 11 to 13 per 100,000 range.

"I've never known anyone in the military who's committed suicide," said a veteran Edmonton-based soldier, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"In fact, I've never even heard of anyone doing it."

In fact, said Lt. Col. Theresa Girvin, a psychiatrist at the Edmonton Garrison, the suicide rate among Canadian Forces personnel is lower than the civilian population, which, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association's website, is 15 per 100,000. **KEYWORDS=NATIONAL**

Afghanistan mission weakens military command at home: report; And Forces personnel are burning out, officers advise chief

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PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
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PAGE: A1 / FRONT
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Mike Blanchfield, CanWest News Service / Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier established four new commands 18 months ago. ;
KEYWORDS: OLYMPICS; VANCOUVER/WHISTLER; CANADA
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: David Pugliese
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 743

OTTAWA — The military command that would help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention it needs because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run, says the report.

The 62-page report produced in January for Hillier details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public. The transformation process was officially launched with much fanfare 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve how the military works.

But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is that Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, that has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters.

It has affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," says the report, which was obtained by the Ottawa Citizen.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would also provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations. "With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada Com is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report says.

"Canada Com remains very much a command in waiting for, while the command has executed over 40 operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the command's overall capability," the study adds.

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the Command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

CEFCOM staff interviewed for the report said they have "little or no time to think" and have been unable to work on doctrine, policies, processes and procedures.

"CEFCOM assesses that the command is stretched thin, not really sustainable over the longer term, and that many of its personnel are facing personal burnout," the report adds.

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

"What you take away from this report is that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of planning and foresight put into this [transformation] proposal," said Kenny.

"Before all this started we had a system that worked pretty good," he added, referring to the position of the deputy chief of the defence staff that along with other offices, handled many of the responsibilities taken over by the new commands. "Clearly this report is questioning whether there has been a benefit to transformation."

But Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation coordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

He acknowledged the report notes Canada Com is not getting as much attention from Hillier, or necessary resources, because of the focus on Afghanistan. But he added: "I don't believe that you will have seen anything in there that suggests it is getting insufficient attention to meet the requirements."

He said that since the report was delivered, Canada Command has been involved in dealing with forest fires in British Columbia. It is now heavily involved in security planning for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver.

Seeing eye to eye on Afghanistan

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PAGE: A17
COLUMN: National Affairs
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: Chantal Hebert
SOURCE: Torstar News Service
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 454

Any day now, the government of the Netherlands is expected to chart the future of its deployment in the southern Afghan province of Uruzgan. One way or another, the decision will add fuel to the raging fire of the debate on Canada's role in the region.

If the Dutch pull out of the province at the end of their tour, they stand to trigger a domino effect that would almost certainly see Canada follow suit in early 2009.

In the absence of volunteer countries to step into the breach, the mission as currently configured by NATO would have to be put back on the drawing board.

If the Dutch choose to extend their stay, the burden of rocking the NATO boat by bailing out stands to fall squarely on Canadian shoulders.

The Netherlands' rotation in southern Afghanistan is slated to end in 12 months, but the country is under intense NATO pressure to sign up for another tour.

There, as in Canada, the external pressures to extend the mission are on a collision course with public opinion. A majority of Dutch is dubious as to the merit of the deployment and hostile to its extension.

Last week's 10th Dutch casualty in Afghanistan prompted headlines that have become familiar in Canada.

One newspaper wondered how many deaths the Netherlands public would tolerate before it lost all faith in the deployment.

Government officials scrambled to state there would be no premature end to the mission.

Like Paul Martin's former Liberal government, the Dutch government stressed the reconstruction aspects of the mission when it first signed its troops up for duties in 2006.

Ten casualties later, there are those who feel the case was deliberately misstated.

A Radio Netherlands program broadcast last month pointedly asked whether the Dutch had been "hoodwinked" into a combat role in Afghanistan.

That report and the range of views it presented could just as easily have been assembled in Canada.

When Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende visited Ottawa in June, the Dutch journalists on hand were almost exclusively concerned with the Afghan issue.

With his Canadian colleague watching, Balkenende fended off their questions by repeating that he would propose a follow-up plan to his parliament by the end of the summer.

It was shortly after that visit that Prime Minister Stephen Harper took to stressing that he would be guided by a parliamentary consensus in deciding the future of the Canadian deployment beyond February 2009.

Like the Harper government, the Dutch leadership sounds like it is leaning toward extending the deployment, possibly phasing out the country's presence over time rather than picking up stakes and leaving next summer.

The Dutch and Canadian debates are carbon copies of each other in many ways but one.

In contrast with Canada's Conservative government, the Dutch political leadership has been careful not to isolate itself in its pursuit of a high-risk military mission.

In February 2006, 125 of the 150 members of the Dutch Parliament — where 10 parties hold seats — endorsed the deployment.

It was a consensual outcome that stands in stark contrast with the narrow, divisive Canadian vote on the same matter last year.

As a result, the Dutch mission in Afghanistan — while it clearly is a lightning rod with the public — has not emerged as the wedge issue that it is here.

Chantal Hebert writes on national affairs.

Hey, that's no way to say goodbye

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PAGE: A16
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: McInnis;
BYLINE: David McInnis, Ancaster
SOURCE: The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 375

I was distressed to learn our government has chosen to name a portion of Highway 401 the "Highway of Heroes."

Dictionaries point to both the mythological and mundane definitions of the word. Heroes are both characters of legendary or mythical stature as well as "illustrious warriors" of everyday life. The problem is that Canada's national identity and common life is rooted in neither the myth nor practice of war. The last true "illustrious warriors" this country produced were the citizen soldiers of the Second World War, men and women who made enormous sacrifices to protect the world from oppression in what has since been called the last truly just war.

The conflict in Afghanistan is the creation of a political agenda not of Canada's making. Even though it is sanctioned by the United Nations, it is nevertheless clear that we are involved more as a means of protecting our economic relationship with the United States than protecting the world from oppression. As heinous as the Taliban were, they were principally a threat to their own people and were meant to have been dealt with locally.

Scholars have pointed recently to the frightening dimensions of militarization that have overtaken so many aspects of America's political and social identity and life. America has a truly professional military, a corps of people who have freely chosen to enlist themselves on behalf of their nation's political agenda. Let us make no mistake, in the modern world soldiering is a profession, and even if those who enlist are not paid handsomely, they are nevertheless paid to further that agenda. One can only assume that they truly believe in it.

Canada's military is professional as well. If men and women enlist and put their lives at risk for what they believe in, that is their choice. However, their choice would not be my choice, and their sacrifices do not make them illustrious nor does it make them heroes in my eyes.

Therefore, the naming of even a portion of a major highway in such an eponymous manner disturbs me in as much as it points to Canada's own willingness to embrace the military myth.

Soldier's family waits for answers; Everyone's in a state of shock

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PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Daniel Hayduk, the Hamilton Spectator / Major Raymond Ruckpaul's parents struggle with their grief at Sunday's repatriation ceremony. ;
BYLINE: Dana Borcea
SOURCE: The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 368

The body of Hamilton soldier Major Raymond Ruckpaul was returned to Canadian soil on Sunday and received by family, friends and officials in an emotional repatriation service at Canadian Forces Base Trenton.

The 42-year-old Hamilton native died last Wednesday shortly after he was found shot in his room at a secure compound in Afghanistan.

Ruckpaul's tearful parents Joan and Rudy along with his sister Linda watched as his flag-draped casket was carried by pallbearers in a slow march from the plane to a waiting hearse.

A single piper accompanied the procession while an honour guard looked on.

"It was heart-wrenching," said Ruckpaul's cousin John Ruckpaul, who travelled from Kingston for the ceremony.

John recalled a commanding officer at the ceremony described his cousin as "a very efficient officer who could always be counted on to carry out his duties and assignments." Fellow soldiers also described him as "always entertaining", he added.

Ruckpaul had been based in Heidelberg, Germany, for the past few years. His wife and two children are still there.

John said they were expected to travel to Canada this week for Ruckpaul's funeral scheduled for Saturday in Hamilton.

Military officials investigating Ruckpaul's death said he did not die from enemy fire but have not publicly ruled out homicide, accident or suicide.

Family members have reported that the military has offered no explanation as to how Ruckpaul died.

During Sunday's ceremony, Defence Minister Peter MacKay and Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier remained tight-lipped, offering no comment on the soldier's death.

Both men offered Ruckpaul's parents their condolences and addressed the dozens of civilians who had gathered to show their support and shook hands with them through a chain-link fence.

John said the family understands the investigation may take some time.

"They're in such a state of grief right now that they're not thinking about anything else," he said.

However, earlier Ruckpaul's cousin Leona said the family's struggle to come to terms with the soldier's death has been exacerbated by the military's silence.

"Everyone's in a state of shock," she said. "Nobody knows what happened. It will be a very long time before we really know the truth."

John added that a close friend had spoken with Ruckpaul about five days before his death.

The friend told relatives Ruckpaul seemed to be in good spirits and looking forward to a future visit home to Hamilton and a trip with friends to a cottage.

Ruckpaul grew up in Hamilton where he attended Barton Secondary School and later McMaster University where he studied sciences.

The career soldier had been stationed at bases across Canada and served with peacekeeping forces in Yugoslavia where he met his future wife, who was working as an interpreter.

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With files from The Canadian Press

Access to 'friendly fire' pilot denied

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Hamilton Spectator File Photo / Mark Graham killed by U.S. pilot. ;
BYLINE: Steve Buist
SOURCE: The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 648

A Canadian military board investigating the friendly fire incident in Afghanistan last year that killed Hamilton soldier Mark Graham was denied permission by the United States Air Force to interview the American pilot who pulled the trigger.

The revelation is contained in the 118–page final report of the Canadian Board of Inquiry that investigated the friendly fire incident, which took place just before dawn on Sept. 4, 2006.

Today marks the one year anniversary of Graham's death.

The report concluded that pilot error was solely responsible for the tragedy, which killed Graham and injured 35 other Canadian soldiers on a hillside in southern Afghanistan.

Two weeks after the Canadian board was convened last September, the inquiry's presiding officer sent a letter to the U.S. Air Force formally seeking access to the pilot, his wingman and the squadron commander. On Oct. 25, 2006, the board was advised that the USAF would not authorize access to the U.S. pilots. "The inability to access the Americans was a handicap," the board of inquiry report states.

The board was advised that it could submit written questions to the pilots but the questions would be vetted first by the USAF and then it would be up to the individual pilots to decide if they wanted to respond. The board was also advised that it would be given access to transcripts of the pilots' testimonies in front of a parallel investigation being conducted by a USAF board.

The Canadian board decided not to submit any questions at all to the pilots and elected to rely on the transcripts.

Despite the board's finding it was handicapped, Colonel Jean–Luc Milot, president of the Canadian Board of Inquiry, downplayed the significance of not being able to interview the American pilots.

"The Americans were very open to sharing the information that they gathered in the course of their own investigation," Milot said in an exclusive interview with The Spectator.

"After reading the transcript, I got answers to all my questions and more," he added. "In the end, it turned out to be quite acceptable."

Lieutenant-Colonel Jeffrey Cowan, the U.S. Air Force adviser assigned to the Canadian Board of Inquiry, declined to comment. The pilot responsible for the friendly fire has never been publicly identified. It's not known what sanctions, if any, are currently being faced by the pilot. A decision on the pilot's future will be made by his commander at the 81st Fighter Squadron, based in Spangdahlem, Germany. All that's known about the pilot is that he had previously flown 60 combat missions in Afghanistan and was considered highly experienced and competent. The USAF indicated the pilot is still on active duty.

A request by The Spectator to interview the pilot was denied by the USAF.

Milot acknowledged that the board encountered some anger from the Canadian soldiers who were interviewed as part of the inquiry.

"But it was not common," said Milot. "Warfare is a dangerous business and close air support is a very, very demanding business which leaves very, very little room for mistakes."

The pilot acknowledged his error over the radio seconds after the friendly fire incident happened, then immediately called for medical assistance to come to the Canadians' aid.

Captain Jeremy Hiltz, Graham's platoon commander at the time of the tragedy, said he holds no resentment against the pilot. "Our job is not easy, there's a lot of moving pieces," said Hiltz, who is back at CFB Petawawa. "Accidents do happen. A human being made a mistake. I would hold resentment if he said it's not my fault but because he owned up to it, to me it's like, well, he's a better man than most people."

Jordan Lobb, 26, of Dorchester, Ont., was one of the Canadian soldiers injured in the friendly fire incident. He took shrapnel in three places, including a piece on his spine. He said he doesn't know the pilot's name and he has no interest in speaking with him.

"Not even close," said Lobb, "and not because I don't like him, but I've got nothing to say to him."

"What would I say to him? Shake the hand of the guy who almost killed me? No, I don't want to do that."

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Farewell to a hometown soldier; Hamilton prepares to bury Kabul casualty ... as friendly-fire victim is mourned a year later

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Daniel Hayduk, the Hamilton Spectator / The body of Hamilton native Major Raymond Ruckpaul was returned to Canada from Afghanistan Sunday. ;
BYLINE: Dana Borcea
SOURCE: The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 185

Hamilton native Major Raymond Ruckpaul, the latest Canadian soldier to die in Afghanistan, will be buried in his hometown.

The 42-year-old officer was found shot in his barracks in a secure compound in Kabul last Wednesday and died shortly after. He had been based in Heidelberg, Germany, for the past few years where he lived with his wife and two young children.

He will receive a military funeral Saturday at 10 a.m. at the Church of the Ascension, 64 Forest Ave., said his mother Joan from her east Mountain home yesterday.

On Sunday, Joan and her husband Rudy, along with Ruckpaul's sister Linda, travelled by military escort from Hamilton to Canadian Forces Base Trenton in eastern Ontario for the repatriation ceremony.

The event was attended by family and close friends as well as Defence Minister Peter MacKay and Chief of Defence Staff General Rick Hillier.

They offered Ruckpaul's parents their condolences privately.

"They said they were sorry for what happened and said he was a good soldier," said Joan.

She described the day as "overwhelming" but added it was a fitting tribute. From Trenton, Ruckpaul's body was transported to Toronto for an autopsy.

Officials have not released details of the shooting that led to the career soldier's death other than to say they have ruled out enemy fire.

Ruckpaul is the 70th Canadian soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002.

RELATED STORY: A10

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Farewell to a hometown soldier; Hamilton prepares to bury Kabul casualty ... as friendly-fire victim is mourned a year later

905-526-3214

THE AFGHAN MISSION Eyes on the battlefield as a night operation unfolds

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BYLINE: CHRISTIE BLATCHFORD
SECTION: Column
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN
WORDS: 1129
WORD COUNT: 992

CHRISTIE BLATCHFORD KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN Operation Balye Deweh, or Light Candle, was what you might call a nice little op.

Except for a rough start — Afghan National Police officers, out of uniform as is often the case, fired at some Canadian troops, coming so close that one soldier was actually grazed, and were then naturally enough fired upon in self-defence with three receiving minor injuries — it went off pretty much without a hitch.

About four hours after it started, the boys in the Tactical Operations Centre, or TOC, here at the enormous coalition base at Kandahar Air Field had relaxed, and the senior ops officer, Major Eric Laforest, and I were having breakfast.

Before midnight on Sunday local time, 8 1/2 hours earlier in central Canada, Bravo Company, 3rd Battalion, the Royal Canadian Regiment was on the move.

The troops in their Light Armoured Vehicles left Patrol Base Wilson, their rudimentary home in Zhari district, which is their AO or Area of Operations, and moved about 10 kilometres east of the Canadian-built paved road called Route Summit, which links PBW, as it is universally called, and another base called Masum Ghar about 4 1/2 kilometres away.

It is about 10 clicks from my house in downtown Toronto to the Thornhill home of my best friend; I know because I ran it once.

I am the world's slowest and most inept runner but I ran it faster than an army convoy can travel the same distance in this part of southern Afghanistan.

Ten kilometres here is, or can be, equivalent to 100 almost anywhere else: There are few roads, fewer paved, which means they are ripe for buried bombs, and the alternatives are wadis, or dried-out river beds, which means a bumpy ride that plays hell with tires and suspensions and the like.

And always, of course, there is the possibility of Taliban.

The troops like to move under cover of darkness. As Major Laforest said, "Night is our friend," because it's cooler and sometimes safer.

But it also means navigating by Night Vision Goggles or NVG, and it has hazards (going the wrong way, taking a bad turn) all its own.

They were headed for the village of Makuan, which, like all villages in the south, consists of a number of mud-walled compounds, each with an estimated eight to 10 people, and a single, smaller secondary compound not far away.

Makuan, which sits on the lush plain to the north of the Arghandab River, was picked because in the previous two weeks, intelligence led the Vandoos to believe that some of the Improvised Explosive Devices recently planted in Zhari, at least two to lethal effect for three members of the Vandoos, were made in this village.

Army ops always have "objectives," the particular piece of ground they want to take or cover. In an endearing display of their Quebecois roots, Makuan itself was called Smoke-Meat, the smaller compound Pork Chop.

It is at the TOC that all the moving parts of an operation are controlled – infantry, the big guns of the artillery, choppers and planes. And for all that the Vandoos's TOC is at the moment in temporary, rather plain quarters, it is nonetheless a mixture of high-tech and low.

The former comes in the digitization of the battle space – meaning all the information fed from the field via vehicle GPS and satellites and secure Internet lines is easily displayed and updated so commanders have unparalleled situational awareness of what's happening on the ground. It's a massive amount of information, ultimately designed, as Major Laforest says, to allow "one guy with one brain," the commander, to visualize the battlefield and make the best decisions he can.

But easily the most exciting thing in the control room is what's on one of three screens -- a live, real-time feed from the Spewer Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle.

The TUAV is a round little bit of a plane with a Bombardier snowmobile-sized engine that is so cute my first instinct, upon seeing it last year, was to want to blow on its belly.

But it punches much higher than its weight: The pictures it offers of the ground are in such astonishing detail it's hard to keep your eyes off it.

There are four components to situational awareness: Blue is for all the friendly forces, red for the bad guys (the ANP, circumstances depending, presumably can fit both categories), brown for "the ground which belongs to both" as Major Laforest said, and white for civilians.

In the room are planners, engineers, forward tactical air controllers and observation officers, signalers (the communications guys), logistics and intelligence officers and even a lawyer – Major Sebastien Bouchard from the Judge Advocate General, there to advise on the law of armed conflict and the rules of engagement.

"Arguing with a lawyer," Major Laforest said with a grin to Major Bouchard, "is like mud-wrestling with a pig: After a while, you find that the pig actually likes it." At 4.30 a.m. Monday local time, the two platoons from B Company and the ANP and Afghan National Army were in position, with the big guns with their enormous range a good distance away, providing what's called "overwatch," in case things went south.

A half-hour later, the troops began their advance. When they crossed the "line of departure" on foot – the point at which they were visible to any waiting potential enemy – the op officially began.

By 6 a.m., Objective Pork Chop was cleared; by 7:45, Smoke-Meat was 90-per-cent done. All was quiet, the only excitement coming when a little base, Gundy Ghar, about 20 klicks away, was mortared.

But Op Light Candle was swift, unsuccessful in that no bomb-making cell was found, but successful in that it was conducted peacefully.

At the TOC, despite its distance away and all the big brains in the room and the high-tech geegaws, it wasn't a bloodless exercise.

The two Canadians who were killed in the blast about two weeks ago were Master Corporal Christian Duchesne, a medic with 5th Field Ambulance, and Master Warrant Officer Mario Mercier.

Both were well known and loved, but MWO Mercier was also Bravo Company's sergeant-major; it means he was not only the right arm of Officer Commanding Major David Abboud, but also part of his soul.

The sergeant-major and the company OC are traditionally as close as brothers, and in this pairing, it was true.

Major Abboud was the man who gave the operation its name – Light Candle, in memory of those lost that day. And in the TOC, Major Laforest and the others all knew it.

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ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; defence

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

THE AFGHAN MISSION Tories getting wires crossed, Dion says

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BYLINE: CAMPBELL CLARK
SECTION: National News
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: Ottawa ONT
WORDS: 663
WORD COUNT: 651

CAMPBELL CLARK OTTAWA The Conservative government is muddying the debate on Afghanistan to assuage public opinion while hiding its true intentions, Liberal Leader Stephane Dion charged yesterday.

The government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper is sending signals and hints to suggest that it does not expect to extend the combat-heavy Kandahar mission past 2009, but refuses to make unequivocal official statements to its allies and Canadians, Mr. Dion argued.

The oft-repeated promise of a vote in Parliament on Canada's future on Afghanistan is particularly confusing because the Harper government will not say what the question will be, or even which side it will take, he said.

"How will they vote on their own vote?" Mr. Dion asked in an interview yesterday. "Why don't they say that today? "The Prime Minister wants this confusion. He's not clear at all, because he wants the extension. . . . What he would like to do is to have an open-war mission with no deadlines. But he has to cope with the public opinion of Canada, and they are a minority government." Both Mr. Dion and Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe have called for the government to notify its allies that Canada will not extend its mission leading NATO troops in Kandahar, in southern Afghanistan, past February of 2009.

On Sunday, Defence Minister Peter MacKay said in a television interview that Canada has signalled to allies that they cannot count on our troops fighting in the Kandahar region past 2009.

"The signal that has been sent already is that our current configuration will end in February, 2009. Obviously the aid work and the diplomatic effort and presence will extend well beyond that. The Afghan compact itself goes until 2011," Mr. MacKay said on CTV's Question Period .

"But the way the mission is currently configured, with respect to our presence in Kandahar, there is an expiration date that has been set." Mr. MacKay added that Parliament will vote on Canada's future role in Afghanistan after 2009. And a spokesman, Dan Dugas, said later that the Defence Minister had not meant that Canada has sent a new signal to NATO, but rather that allies know that the current mission ends in 2009, and that a new vote must be held in Parliament to decide what Canada will do after that.

Mr. Dion said Mr. MacKay's indication that our allies have been advised not to expect an extension of the Kandahar mission is an effort to hint to Canadians that it will end in 2009 – but without saying so unequivocally.

He noted that Mr. MacKay did not categorically rule out prolonging the Kandahar mission because he said a future role will be subject to a Commons vote.

"Why not do what I am suggesting? Not to signal – what a word – but to say officially to NATO and to the government of Afghanistan that the combat mission of Canada will end in February, 2009, and they need to plan for a replacement," Mr. Dion said.

"That's not what they're saying. They're saying there will be a vote, and before the vote, we will continue the ambiguity. A signal is an ambiguous word – it's a decision that they should make. And there is no decision made because this government is looking for a way to extend the mission." Yesterday, Public Works Minister Michael Fortier said that all options remain open, including the possibility that the House of Commons will vote on a different mission for Canada in Afghanistan after 2009.

"Any renewal of the mission in its current form or another form will be subject to the approval of the Parliament of Canada," Mr.

Fortier told Radio–Canada television.

"This renewal, or non–renewal, will take place in February, 2009.

We're in the fall of 2007. So we still have some time before making this decision." Today, the government will offer reporters in Canada a technical briefing on the situation in Afghanistan.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM:foreign policy; defence; strife; government; political; statements

PERSONAL NAME: Peter MacKay; Stephane Dion

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

CLARIFICATION

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PAGE: A2

BYLINE:

SECTION: News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 62

WORD COUNT: 68

The headline in yesterday's Globe and Mail, "We're out by February '09, Mackay says," referred to Defence Minister Peter MacKay's statement that Canada has signalled to allies that the current configuration of the Canadian Forces mission in Kandahar will end by that date.

Mr. MacKay did not rule out the possibility that Canadians would remain in Afghanistan after 2009.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

SUBJECT TERM:clarifications

ORGANIZATION NAME: Globe and Mail

Afghanistan taxes military 'Organizational perfect storm'

PUBLICATION: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.04

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SECTION: Canada Wire

WORD COUNT: 290

CNS David Pugliese OTTAWA — The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention or priority it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier and leaked to the Ottawa Citizen.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run.

The 62–page report produced in January for Hillier, details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public. The transformation process was officially launched with much fanfare 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve how the military works.

But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is that Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, which has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," the report says.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations.

— CanWest News Service

Proroguing an iffy proposition; PM risks raising ire if he delays Parliament return

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Chris Wattie, Reuters / COURTING CONFRONTATION: Prime Minister Stephen Harper may take a chance of triggering a defeat of his minority Tory government so he can call an election to get a majority. ;

DATELINE: OTTAWA

BYLINE: Juliet O'Neill

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 725

OTTAWA – The political calculations are coming fast and furious as Prime Minister Stephen Harper keeps MPs, senators and hundreds of employees on tenterhooks about whether he is about to prorogue Parliament and start a new session.

If Harper does go to the governor general for a proclamation to prorogue Parliament, the big political question is whether he is doing it simply to get a fresh start or because he hopes to trigger defeat of his minority Conservative government so he can call an election to seek a majority.

Would he be taking a risk or making a dare?

"Maybe the difference there is pretty subtle," Liberal House leader Ralph Goodale said. "But if Mr. Harper has plans to continue in that hostile style that has characterized his prime ministership up to now, it is at some point likely to provoke a confrontation."

While the government has done little to fuel or to quell speculation, Goodale suspects the decision is largely made but Harper is not saying anything official "to leave himself maximum flexibility to change his mind."

One report has the Tories already at work on a throne speech that would make the environment the top priority, followed by the economy and Afghanistan.

Proroguing Parliament would end the current session of Parliament, which is scheduled to resume from summer adjournment Monday, Sept. 17, and set a new date, probably soon after the Oct. 10th Ontario election, to start a new session of Parliament with a speech from the throne. All but private members' bills would die and committee work would come to a halt.

It's a process that would heighten the risk of defeat of the government and of an election because it requires a vote of confidence, says Liberal Leader Stephane Dion.

What are the pros and cons of proroguing? While the government is saying little, Goodale and his predecessor, Don Boudria, have the benefit of experience on both sides of the Commons to analyze the factors at play.

Each say proroguing Parliament can be a method for a government to delay or to avoid a Commons sitting if it is having trouble moving legislation through the system or for one with no new policies to offer. In this case, Boudria added, the Conservatives may want to help John Tory's Conservative campaign in Ontario, putting all hands on deck for him and having no distractions in Ottawa.

Proroguing Parliament simply may be an innocent and legitimate way to get a fresh start after governing since Jan. 2006.

"Typically if a Parliament goes on for awhile, the government wants to find ways to change the channel, turn the page, open a new chapter and, that can for a government, be a positive or a negative," Goodale said.

The opposition parties don't buy the idea Harper needs a new session of Parliament to do that. They say there is plenty of unfinished business from the last session to get on with. And new proposals can be announced in the Commons or at a news conference.

NDP Leader Jack Layton has called for Parliament to get back to work as scheduled.

An NDP official says proroguing would be a needless waste of precious parliamentary time because MPs would wrangle for days over confidence motions and, if the government survived, motions to restore bills that died on the order paper.

All legislation except private members' bills — including two private Liberal bills, one on the Kyoto environmental accord, and one on the Kelowna accord for help to native communities — would die on the order paper. The government can propose motions in the new session resurrecting the bills at the stage where they left off or they can abandon bills.

Among bills that would die are some law-and-order measures that were a big priority for the government and a long-awaited bill subjecting the Indian Act to human rights law. Perhaps the most important bill at stake is C-30, government environmental legislation that was substantially reworked by the opposition parties.

Dion has signalled the environment bill as one issue on which the opposition parties might be in agreement, posing a risk of defeat to the government. Goodale said the opposition parties will not be plotting together to "contrive" the government's downfall. Each will independently decide what they can and cannot support.

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe has said he could not support a throne speech which does not confirm the scheduled February 2009 end to the Canadian combat mission in Afghanistan — a policy with which the Liberals agree but over which Dion does not want to threaten defeat of the government.

Afghanistan effort draining priorities; Report finds other military needs not being addressed

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Reuters / PREOCCUPIED: Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier, shown in this file photo, ordered a report detailing the progress of the Afghan mission. ;
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: David Pugliese
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 573

OTTAWA – The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention or priority it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier and leaked to the Ottawa Citizen.

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But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is that Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, which has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," the report says.

In addition, the report found there has been duplication or triplication of efforts among the various commands since few of the new procedures or specific responsibilities involved in the transformation process were ever written down.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would also provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations. "With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada COM is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report says.

"Canada COM remains very much a command in waiting for, while the command has executed over 40 operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the command's overall capability," the study adds.

"Like all, the team hopes that those tests will come in the form of planned domestic operations, and not in the form of a crisis response!"

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

CEFCOM staff interviewed for the report noted they have "little or no time to think" and have been unable to work on doctrine, policies, processes and procedures.

Held hostage; Bowing to terrorists' demands

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SOURCE: Windsor Star
WORD COUNT: 600

The final few South Korean aid workers taken hostage by the Taliban were released Thursday after negotiations with the South Korean government, which means Canada and other nations working to stabilize Afghanistan should brace themselves for similar crises in the future.

The drama began July 19 when 23 South Koreans were taken hostage as they travelled between Kandahar and Kabul. Two hostages were killed and two hostages released before the Taliban reached a deal with the South Korean government last week.

South Korea maintains it offered no ransom for the release of the aid workers but the fact it negotiated with the Taliban at all, let alone agreed to some of its demands, is troubling and will lead to more such incidents down the road. The negotiated end to the crisis lends political legitimacy to the Taliban and will encourage terrorists to seize even more hostages and make even more demands.

"The Canadian position on dealings with terrorists is well-known to all those with even a passing familiarity with the subject," said Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier Thursday. "We do not negotiate with terrorists, for any reason. Such negotiations, even if successful, only lead to further acts of terrorism."

Such an unambiguous statement of Canada's position on negotiating with terrorists is welcome but that principle should be enshrined in law before the government is faced with its own hostage crisis. Because it is one thing to say Canada shouldn't negotiate with terrorists but quite another to remain steadfast in that belief when a Canadian citizen or several citizens are about to be killed by terrorists.

Capitulating to militants' demands, of course, only encourages more terrorist acts, setting in motion a vicious cycle of more kidnappings and more capitulations. But standing firm while a fellow citizen is murdered, or several citizens as could have been the case with the South Koreans, also carries with it a substantial risk.

Rather than blame the terrorists, voters may begin to resent the government that does nothing to prevent the murder of one of its citizens. Arguments against negotiations, though logical, will not seem nearly as persuasive as citizens are murdered or when footage of them crying or bound or being tortured is released by the terrorists over the Internet.

Eventually, especially if terrorists repeatedly target civilians from one country, a government might feel compelled, for political reasons in the face of public pressure, to negotiate with terrorists for the release of hostages.

Legislation forbidding such negotiations, though, would accomplish two things. First, and most importantly, it would send a message to terrorists that violence and extortion won't enable them to achieve their goals. Secondly, it would spare leaders the gut-wrenching dilemma of choosing between policy objectives and the life of a fellow citizen. It would ensure they govern with common sense rather than emotion and it would

insulate them from any political fallout.

The South Korean government had a choice between bad and worse in the hostage crisis. It could have watched those aid workers die or it could negotiate their freedom knowing such negotiations would likely lead to even more kidnappings.

Canada, unfortunately, might one day be faced with the same grim choice. The best way to ensure we choose wisely is to eliminate the capacity for choice. The time to enact legislation prohibiting talks with terrorists is now, when no Canadians are being held hostage, so that logic rather than emotion can guide the debate. It will be too late once the crisis comes.

Probert scores big at soldier's homecoming

IDNUMBER 200709040003

PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star

DATE: 2007.09.04

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A1 / FRONT

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Nick Brancaccio, Star photo / HOMECOMING: Cpl. Tim Johnson, left, shows retired NHLer Bob Probert his regiment emblem Sunday during a welcome home party in Emeryville. Probert met Johnson when visiting troops in Afghanistan. ;

BYLINE: Sonja Puzic

SOURCE: Windsor Star

WORD COUNT: 306

Meeting his favourite hockey players has been on Tim Johnson's wish list since he was a kid.

He never imagined that wish would come true in the Afghan desert, amid insurgent attacks and grenades flying overhead.

For the 26-year-old corporal, meeting Bob Probert, the Windsor native who's a former Detroit Red Wing and Chicago Blackhawks, was one of the highlights of his six-month tour of duty in Afghanistan, otherwise marked by dangerous missions, sleepless nights and tragic losses of comrades and friends.

WATCHING 'PROBIE'

"All my life, I've been watching hockey and Probie. And there he was -- in Afghanistan," Johnson said Sunday at his father's Emeryville home, where family and friends threw a big homecoming party for the local soldier.

Johnson first met Probert when the retired player joined a group of National Hockey League alumni on a tour to visit Canadian soldiers stationed in Afghanistan in late April. Dan Daoust, Mike Pelyk, Dave Hutchison and Dave (Tiger) Williams also made the trip, among others. So did the Stanley Cup.

Probert did not forget Johnson. He attended Sunday's party to welcome him back to the area and wish him well.

"It's amazing what (the soldiers) go through," Probert said. "It was great to go and see that for myself. They just invited me to go back, so I'm looking forward to that."

Johnson returned home about 10 days ago, much to the relief of family members.

WORRY A LOT

"We worry a lot, of course," his father Steve said.

"But we keep in touch and he's been able to stay safe."

Johnson said the most difficult part of the mission was losing comrades and seeing his friends injured.

"I've had a few close calls," he said. "A couple of my friends got hurt pretty bad."

Growing up, Johnson was a successful competitive swimmer, but he knew his future was elsewhere.

He joined the Canadian army five years ago. In addition to Afghanistan, he also served a tour of duty in war-torn Haiti.

"It was something I always wanted to do," he said of his career as a soldier. "9-11 had a lot to do with it too."

As soon as he arrived in Afghanistan, he realized it would be nothing like the assignment in Haiti.

"We weren't getting shot at in Haiti. They're completely different worlds."

Returning home means sleeping in a real bed, escaping the hot desert weather and eating better food, Johnson said with a laugh.

But if he gets the call to return to Afghanistan, he's ready.

Until then, he plans to relax and enjoy being in Canada again.

Mission drains Forces; Focus on Afghanistan puts Canada Command on the backburner

IDNUMBER: 200709040001
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.04
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Reuters, File / Canadian soldiers move through a grape field during a battle against Taliban insurgents in southern Afghanistan in July ;
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: David Pugliese
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 533

OTTAWA -- The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention or priority it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier and leaked to the Ottawa Citizen.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run.

The 62-page report, produced in January for Hillier, details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public. The transformation process was officially launched 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve how the military works.

But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is the Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, which has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," the report says.

In addition, the report found there has been duplication or triplication of efforts among the various commands since few of the new procedures or specific responsibilities involved in the transformation process were ever written down.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would also provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not receiving the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations.

"With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada COM is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report says.

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the Command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: Scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chair of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

But Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the transformation process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

Not same chopper

IDNUMBER 200709040036
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EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
BYLINE: Peter MacKay
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 219

Re: More choppers, fewer casualties: senator, Aug. 30.

Senator Colin Kenny really should be asking why he and his Liberal colleagues chose not to equip the Canadian Forces with appropriate equipment.

It is unfortunate that Senator Kenny doesn't know his facts. The current mission requires a medium–lift helicopter to carry a sufficient number of personnel. The Griffon is neither intended nor capable to fill the role of a medium–lift helicopter.

The government is addressing the shortcomings of the Griffons through our planned purchase of 16 medium–to heavy–lift helicopters. This purchase not only delivers on our commitment to strengthen Canada's military, it also reinstates a vital capability that air crews and soldiers have done without for over a decade.

We are working alongside 36 other nations in Afghanistan at the request of the democratically elected government as part of a UN–sanctioned, NATO–led mission. The various military capabilities and equipment resources in Afghanistan provided by the contributing nations are considered NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) resources, and therefore are shared and tasked for use by the regional commanders. The current shared resources of medium–lift helicopters within ISAF Regional Command (South) where the Canadian Forces operate include Chinook helicopters from the U.S. and the Netherlands.

Senator Kenny should know this and not unfairly malign the Canadian Forces through innuendo.

Peter MacKay,

Ottawa

Minister of National Defence

To prorogue, or not to prorogue Parliament; A decision to end the current session could have major implications for Stephen Harper, writes Juliet O'Neill.

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
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PAGE: A4

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Dave Chan, Reuters / Prime Minister Stephen Harper, centre, received a standing ovation when he tabled the last speech from the throne on April 4, 2006. The Tories are reportedly already working on a new throne speech, which Mr. Harper could deliver if he decides to prorogue Parliament and begin a fresh session. Such a move, however, could spark an election. ;

BYLINE: Juliet O'Neill
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 941

The political calculations are coming fast and furious as Prime Minister Stephen Harper keeps MPs, senators and hundreds of employees on tenterhooks about whether he is about to prorogue Parliament and start a new session.

If Mr. Harper does go to the Governor General for a proclamation to prorogue Parliament, the big political question is whether he is doing it simply to get a fresh start or because he hopes to trigger defeat of his minority Conservative government so he can call an election to seek a majority.

Would he be taking a risk or making a dare?

"Maybe the difference there is pretty subtle," Liberal House leader Ralph Goodale said. "But if Mr. Harper has plans to continue in that hostile style that has characterized his prime ministership up to now, it is at some point likely to provoke a confrontation."

While the government has done little to fuel or to quell speculation, Mr. Goodale suspects the decision is largely made, but Mr. Harper is not saying anything official "to leave himself maximum flexibility to change his mind."

One report has the Tories already at work on a throne speech that would make the environment the top priority, followed by the economy and Afghanistan.

Proroguing Parliament would end the current session of Parliament, which is scheduled to resume from summer adjournment on Sept. 17, and set a new date, probably soon after the Oct. 10 Ontario election, to start a new session of Parliament with a speech from the throne. All but private member's bills would die and committee work would come to a halt.

It's a process that would heighten the risk of defeat of the government and of an election because it requires a vote of confidence, Liberal leader Stéphane Dion said.

To prorogue, or not to prorogue Parliament; A decision to end the current session could have major implications

What are the pros and cons of proroguing? While the government is saying little, Mr. Goodale and his predecessor, Don Boudria, have the benefit of experience on both sides of the Commons to analyse the factors at play.

Each says proroguing Parliament can be a method for a government to delay or to avoid a Commons sitting if it is having trouble moving legislation through the system or for one with no new policies to offer. In this case, Mr. Boudria added, the Conservatives may want to help John Tory's Conservative campaign in Ontario, putting all hands on deck for him and having no distractions in Ottawa.

Proroguing Parliament simply may be an innocent and legitimate way to get a fresh start after governing since January 2006.

"Typically, if a Parliament goes on for a while, the government wants to find ways to change the channel, turn the page, open a new chapter and, that can, for a government, be a positive or a negative," Mr. Goodale said.

The opposition parties don't buy the idea that Mr. Harper needs a new session of Parliament to do that. They say there is plenty of unfinished business from the last session to get on with. And new proposals can be announced in the Commons or at a news conference.

New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton has called for Parliament to get back to work as scheduled. An NDP official says proroguing would be a needless waste of precious parliamentary time because MPs would wrangle for days over confidence motions and, if the government survived, motions to restore bills that died on the order paper.

All legislation except private member's bills — including two Liberal-initiated bills, one on the Kyoto environmental accord, and one on the Kelowna Accord for help to native communities — would die on the order paper. The government can propose motions in the new session resurrecting the bills at the stage where they left off, or they can abandon bills.

Among bills that would die are some law-and-order measures that were a big priority for the government and a long-awaited bill subjecting the Indian Act to human rights law. Perhaps the most important bill at stake is C-30, government environmental legislation that was substantially reworked by the opposition parties.

Mr. Dion has signalled the environment bill as one issue on which the opposition parties might be in agreement, posing a risk of defeat to the government. Mr. Goodale said the opposition parties will not be plotting together to "contrive" the government's downfall. Each will independently decide what they can and cannot support.

Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe has said he could not support a throne speech that does not confirm the scheduled February 2009 end to the Canadian combat mission in Afghanistan — a policy with which the Liberals agree, but over which Mr. Dion does not want to threaten defeat of the government.

The throne speech, laying out the government's agenda, would require at least one and as many as three votes of confidence, because the opposition parties may add amendments to the main motion. If opposition parties team up, the government could be defeated on any of the motions, requiring dissolution of Parliament and an election.

Mr. Goodale is affronted that the Conservatives have not engaged the official opposition in any parliamentary planning since the adjournment. He says Mr. Harper governs as though he has a majority, "probably more than any minority government in Canadian history." And a "civilized" majority government, he notes, should engage the opposition in parliamentary planning and negotiation.

To prorogue, or not to prorogue Parliament; A decision to end the current session could have major implicat

"Minorities are very difficult by their very nature," he says. "They require some give and take, some real appreciation of what a parliamentary system is. It is not a republican system. It is not a presidential system. It is different. Parliament does matter.

"And Mr. Harper and his key ministers have just refused to acknowledge that. If you keep being rude and belligerent, thumbing your nose at your colleagues across the floor, it creates a certain atmosphere in that place."

Canadian troops in the hot zones; Toiling in obscurity in faraway places other than Afghanistan, men and women of the armed forces face tough, even dangerous, assignments that earn them little recognition, Richard Foot writes.

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Photo: Master Cpl. Robert Bottrill, Canadian Forces CombatCamera / Col. Larry Aitken, left, from Kingston, and Capt. Jean-François Dufour, from Trois-Rivières, Que., visit with young children at an orphanage sponsored by Canadians stationed in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, this past summer. The Congo is one of the

ILLUSTRATION: many dangerous postings for Canadians outside Afghanistan. ; Photo: Canada's contingent abroad includes, from left, Col. Acton Kilby, who is serving in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lt.-Col. Ron Allison, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to advise the African Union's mission in Darfur, and Lt.-Cmdr. Angus Topshee, aboard the HMCS Toronto, which is circumnavigating Africa. ;

BYLINE: Richard Foot

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen

WORD COUNT: 969

Col. Acton Kilby works in a war-torn land haunted by murder, fear and violence, its roads strewn with landmines, its border towns filled with refugees, and its people a fractious mix of tribal rivalries.

Just like Afghanistan.

Yet Col. Kilby is nowhere near Afghanistan. A seasoned Canadian infantry officer, he's in the midst of a year-long assignment as deputy chief of staff to the commander of the United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, arguably the most lethal and difficult conflict zone in the world today.

While Afghanistan hogs the headlines and the welfare of the 2,500 Canadian troops deployed there dominates public discourse at home, Canada does have other soldiers abroad, toiling in obscurity in forgotten corners of the globe, where the military challenges often equal those in Kandahar.

Since July, Col. Kilby has been stationed in the Congo with eight other Canadian soldiers as part of Operation Crocodile, a largely Indian-led UN mission to impose peace on what some have called "Africa's world war."

They are among the 128 Canadian troops posted overseas outside Afghanistan, from the slums of Haiti and the sandy wastes of the Sinai to the war-ravaged villages of Sudan. More than 200 sailors are also on a six-month mission, sailing the frigate HMCS Toronto with a NATO task force making the alliance's first circumnavigation of the African continent.

Such land and sea missions are a testament to Canada's small, but ongoing, contribution to international commitments beyond the Afghan imbroglio. And Col. Kilby is quick to point out that, in the Congo at least, the work is anything but traditional peacekeeping.

"I get involved in things here that are absolutely depressing human tragedies," says Col. Kilby in a telephone interview from Kinshasa, the Congolese capital. "It's demanding, and my days are long. But I've got a place to sleep and food to eat, which is better than half the population."

Once the commander of the 1st Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment in Petawawa, Col. Kilby now supports a multinational force of 17,000 soldiers charged with bringing law and order to a huge swath of equatorial Africa.

A 2003 ceasefire between the Congolese government and its opponents, including the armies of Rwanda and Uganda plus an array of home-grown jungle militias, ostensibly ended a five-year conflict that took four million lives, the deadliest conflict since the Second World War.

But Col. Kilby says murder, rape and bouts of ethnic cleansing remain common. Stemming such violence isn't easy, particularly when the Congolese army that the UN is trying to train and mentor commits its own abuses.

"We're dealing with a problem the magnitude of which the world just doesn't understand," says Col. Kilby. "Congo is the size of Europe. Each region is unique, which causes constant friction and violence. There are estimates of 600,000 internally displaced people, with another 100,000 outside refugees waiting to come back in. And the murder rate is about 100 to 200 a week."

Three thousand kilometres away in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, a dozen other Canadian soldiers are providing technical and logistical advice to the African Union's military mission to Darfur, where the population faces famine, genocide and war as it is preyed upon by militias and the Sudanese army.

The commander of the Canadian Forces in Sudan, Lt.-Col. Ron Allison, works out of the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

This is the first time Canadian soldiers have been dispatched to an African Union mission. They're advising Nigerian, Rwandan and Senegalese forces on how to run the mission. They are also providing airlift operations to fly food and people in and out of Darfur.

"Going into Darfur you really are moving back in time," says Lt.-Col. Allison, who comes from Miramichi, N.B. "There's no state infrastructure. The temperature is 45 to 50 degrees. It's the Sahara desert. Things don't move quickly in the daytime. The facilities of the African Union are barely adequate to house, accommodate and sustain vehicles, troops and aircraft."

Lt.-Col. Chantal Cloutier enjoys many more comforts than her counterparts in Sudan. She and seven other Canadians are all that remains of Canada's once hefty contribution to the international forces in the former Yugoslavia.

Lt.-Col. Cloutier, who lives in Ottawa, runs the communication networks at NATO headquarters in Sarajevo, where she is on a six-month assignment.

Fewer than 3,000 NATO troops now remain in Bosnia, helping to ensure the stability of the government and

Canadian troops in the hot zones; Toiling in obscurity in faraway places other than Afghanistan, m~~86~~ and wo

reform its armed forces, in the hope that Bosnia itself can one day join the military alliance.

Lt.-Col. Cloutier says Sarajevo has come a long way from the terror of the early 1990s, when beleaguered Canadian troops hunkered down amid the crossfire of an urban war zone.

"Life here is pretty good these days," she says. "There's an enormous amount of reconstruction going on and we are free now to walk around downtown. The main shopping street could be in any European city."

Even so, she noted: "Most people here have lost their taste for conflict, but that doesn't mean there aren't lingering resentments and hostilities in the hearts of people who suffered."

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Lt.-Cmdr. Angus Topshee and 234 sailors on board HMCS Toronto, a Halifax-based frigate, are showing the Canadian flag on a historic 12,500-nautical-mile circumnavigation of Africa, along with five other warships with a NATO task force.

After leaving the Mediterranean in July, the fleet reached Cape Town this past weekend for exercises with the South African navy. Next, it is scheduled to push north up the Indian Ocean coast toward Somalia.

"It's an interesting part of the world to operate in," said Lt.-Cmdr. Topshee in a telephone interview from the ship. "We're sailing in waters notorious for piracy. If we come across anything suspicious, we're mandated to intervene."

While Lt.-Cmdr. Topshee has friends serving in Afghanistan, which remains in the spotlight, he says almost no one in Canada even knows about HMCS Toronto's historic voyage this year.

Still, he says, "I would not begrudge anyone in Afghanistan the support and attention they're receiving at home. They really are fighting on the front line."

Taliban vow to abduct, kill more foreigners

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DATELINE: KABUL
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 164

KABUL— Afghanistan's Taliban plan to kidnap and kill more nationals from foreign countries whose troops serve under NATO and the U.S. military in the country, a spokesman for the Islamic movement warned yesterday.

The vow comes just days after the Taliban released 19 South Korean hostages after their government struck a deal that critics said sets a dangerous precedent that could spur more kidnappings and make life even more dangerous for foreigners.

"We consider it (kidnapping) as an arm that can help us in imparting a blow to the enemy," Taliban spokes-man Qari Mohammad Yousuf told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

"Kidnapping ... and killing of (nationals) of those countries who have come for the annihilation of the nation of Afghanistan are works which suppress the enemy," he added.

A senior Taliban commander said on condition of anonymity on the weekend that the deal included a ransom payment of more than \$20 million, which would be used to buy weapons and fund suicide attacks. South Korean denies a ransom was paid.

Command performance; Mission has created 'organizational perfect storm'

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.04
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Finbarr O'Reilly, Reuters / Canadian soldiers make their way through a grape field during a recent skirmish with the Taliban in Sangsar, Afghanistan. According to a report prepared for Gen. Rick Hillier, Canadian Forces personnel in charge of the Afghan mission are feeling the effects of a heavy workload, and the command there is not 'sustainable over the longer term.' ;

BYLINE: David Pugliese
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 1041

EXCLUSIVE: Gen. Rick Hillier's plan to streamline the military with four new commands has been derailed by the war in Afghanistan, and the command in charge of protecting Canadians at home isn't getting the priority it should, a 'chilling' new DND report says

The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention or priority it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Gen. Rick Hillier and leaked to the Citizen.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run.

The 62-page report produced in January for chief of defence staff Gen. Hillier details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public.

The transformation process was officially launched with much fanfare 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve the way the military does its work.

But around the same time as the transformation process was launched, the Afghanistan war began heating up and that conflict has continued to dominate Canadian military and foreign affairs policy.

It is the Afghanistan mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, that has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm."

In addition, the report found there has been duplication or triplication of efforts among the various commands

since few of the new procedures or specific responsibilities involved in the transformation process were written down.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Gen. Hillier, outlines, in part, the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command. That command is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would also provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence data it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations.

"With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada COM is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report by the transformation validation team points out.

"Canada COM remains very much a command in waiting, for, while the command has executed over 40 operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the command's overall capability," the study adds.

"Like all, the Team hopes that those tests will come in the form of planned domestic operations, and not in the form of a crisis response!"

The war has also taken a toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the Command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

CEFCOM staff interviewed for the report said they have "little or no time to think" and have been unable to work on doctrine, policies, processes and procedures.

"CEFCOM assesses that the command is stretched thin, not really sustainable over the longer term, and that many of its personnel are facing personal burnout," the report adds.

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

"What you take away from this report is that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of planning and foresight put into this (transformation) proposal," said Mr. Kenny.

He noted that transformation was supposed to streamline the military leadership structure and make it more efficient, but instead has created more organizations that need more staff, that are now duplicating each other's efforts.

"Before all this started, we had a system that worked pretty good," he added, referring to the position of the deputy chief of the defence staff, which, along with other offices, handled many of the responsibilities taken over by the new commands. "Clearly, this report is questioning whether there has been a benefit to transformation."

But Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

He acknowledged the report notes Canada Command is not getting as much attention from Gen. Hillier, as well as the necessary resources, because of the focus on Afghanistan. But he added: "I don't believe that you will have seen anything in there that suggests it is getting insufficient attention to meet the requirements.

"We know there are things we need to continue to work on, to shape, that we still aren't as good as we can be to responding in Canada," Col. Christensen added.

"To get to that we need to continue to work on Canada Command, its structure, resourcing and command relationships."

He said that since the report was delivered, Canada Command has been involved in dealing with forest fires in British Columbia. It is now heavily involved in security planning for the 2010 Olympics.

Col. Christensen also said the issues outlined in the report are being dealt with. He said CEFCOM's skilful handling of the Afghanistan mission is an example of one of the successes of the transformation process.

In addition, the report highlights the success of the Canadian Operational Support Command, which is responsible for support to military missions at home and abroad, transporting equipment, supplies and troops and well as providing military engineers, health services and military police.

The report points out that the command's response to international operations has proved its capability to move critical stocks of supplies and equipment across Canada. But it also adds that because of the pressures of current operations, the command has not been able to develop doctrine or procedures, key elements of a well-functioning military organization.

Afghan mission taxing commanders: report; Generals Focused On War, Not On Homefront: Study

IDNUMBER 200709040006

PUBLICATION: National Post

DATE: 2007.09.04

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A2

ILLUSTRATION: Black & White Photo: Tim Fraser For National Post Archive /General Rick Hillier speaks in Toronto last May. A report produced for Hillier says Canada Command "is not getting the attention that might otherwise be the case." ;

DATELINE: OTTAWA

BYLINE: David Pugliese

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 584

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But around the same time, the Afghanistan mission began heating up.

It is that mission, combined with the military trying to recruit a large number of new troops and move quickly on the purchases of major pieces of new equipment, which has significantly taxed the Defence Department's Ottawa headquarters, affected the transformation process and created what the report calls "an organizational perfect storm," the report says.

The study, conducted by three retired senior officers at the request of Gen. Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to a crisis at home. The command would also provide support to civilian agencies in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster.

But the report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations. "With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada COM is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report says.

"Canada COM remains very much a command in waiting for, while the command has executed over forty operations during the past year, most have been fairly routine in nature and, thus, not a true test of the

command's overall capability," the study adds.

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, which is responsible for running international operations. Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

"The demands of Afghanistan have also precluded the Command from focusing on the other roles deemed to be inherent in CEFCOM's mandate: scanning the global environment, contingency planning, engaging strategic partners and shaping, synchronizing and sustaining operational capabilities."

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

"What you take away from this report is that there didn't seem to be a whole lot of planning and foresight put into this [transformation] proposal," Mr. Kenny said.

But Colonel Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, said the message to take away from the report is that the process is on track and that it is a lengthy undertaking with changes to be made along the way.

"I don't believe that you will have seen anything in there that suggests [Canada Command] is getting insufficient attention to meet the requirements."

"We know there are things we need to continue to work on, to shape, that we still aren't as good as we can be to responding in Canada," Col. Christensen added. "To get to that we need to continue to work on Canada Command, its structure, resourcing and command relationships."

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South Korea struck a good bargain

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Re: "No victory for the Taliban" (Editorial, Aug. 31).

You write that in return for the release of hostages held by the Taliban that South Korea will "authorize no more Christian missionaries to travel to Afghanistan." I wasn't aware the South Korean government ever authorized Christian missionaries to travel to Afghanistan. I was rather under the impression that South Korean missionaries were like Canadian missionaries: free to go wherever their passports were honoured without interference from their home government.

So it seems that all Seoul has done is promise to refrain from doing what it has never done (authorize missionaries) and agree to do what it already planned to do (recall its troops by the end of the year). Not bad bargaining.

Perhaps it's a good thing that the Taliban have such trouble grasping the principle of a secular state that exists largely to make it possible for citizens to do as they see fit rather than require them to do as the state wishes.

Peter Fraser

Montreal

Who will protect the helpers?; Nothing 'obvious' about aid without military presence

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Defence Minister Peter MacKay said little new when he told a CTV interviewer this country's NATO allies were already aware Canada's combat commitment in Afghanistan may not go past February 2009. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said more than once that an extension of the mission will depend on parliamentary approval.

With all three opposition parties pledged to vote against it, NATO planners will have already read those tea leaves.

However, a further comment of MacKay revealed the fundamentally conflicted, even hypocritical position, into which the opposition parties have forced Canada's government.

Having declared the signal duly sent that, "our current configuration will end in February 2009," MacKay continued, "Obviously the aid work and the diplomatic effort and presence will extend well beyond that."

Obviously? In the absence of basic security, it is not obvious at all. Without military protection, it is impossible to carry out even the most basic assistance, especially in embattled Kandahar province. To suggest Canadian aid workers will continue to work is merely to assume somebody else will assume the burden of protecting them that has become too distasteful for some Canadian politicians.

Is that what the opposition thinks Canadians want? Certainly, it is the position in which it leaves the government.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion hammers away at the government for a commitment to get Canadian troops out of Kandahar in February 2009.

NDP Leader Jack Layton doesn't want to wait that long.

And, the Bloc's Gilles Duceppe threatens to vote against the government if it prorogues Parliament, then opens a new session without a Throne-speech promise to end the mission by February 2009.

Here's the reality. The Taliban have burned enough clinics, blown up enough schools, murdered enough teachers, and sufficiently interrupted the flow of relief, to make clear the danger to aid workers in the field, and to those who take the risk of accepting their help.

Now, building upon their political coup in which the kidnapping of South Korean aid workers pried the Seoul government loose from the coalition, the Taliban have promised more of the same. The very weekend

MacKay spoke to the CTV, a spokesman for the movement promised there would be more kidnappings and killings of citizens belonging to NATO countries with troops in Afghanistan.

The danger to aid workers in Afghanistan, always extreme to the point of limiting their effectiveness, has just been elevated.

So whose job is it to protect these people?

Afghan government forces are not ready to assume the role. Discouraging reports say Taliban forces last month overwhelmed police stations garrisoning an area liberated earlier by Canadian troops. That these ill-equipped, poorly paid men died at their posts says volumes for their courage — but sadly, also that foreign workers are not yet safe in their care.

Fortunately, MacKay's careful choice of words leaves room for other possibilities.

Continuing aid could (and should) also mean existing efforts to train the Afghan National Army will not be abandoned in 2009. (The Afghan compact itself," he said, "goes until 2011.") Eventually, the ANA must be able to handle security now provided by NATO forces.

The opposition should come clean. Either it is for helping the people of Afghanistan live free, and will support protecting the aid workers Canada send; or, it sees an electoral opportunity in opposing combat operations in Afghanistan, in which case if Canadian troops are not to take the field, neither should Canadian aid workers be placed in harm's way. And of course, the Afghans can be left to sort out whatever destiny they can salvage for themselves.

It is not a pretty picture, when the fates of soldiers, aid workers and the Afghan people are driven by opportunism, not considered judgment. For the sake of Canada's reputation, couldn't the opposition aim a bit higher?

Afghan mission draining military resources: report; Intelligence efforts hampered by Mideast focus

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The military command whose job is to help Canadians at home in the event of a terrorist attack or natural disaster is not getting the attention or priority it should because the country's generals are focused on the Afghanistan war, according to a report produced for Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Rick Hillier and leaked to the Ottawa Citizen.

At the same time, Canadian Forces personnel assigned to another command in charge of the Afghanistan mission are burning out from too much work and their organization is not seen to be sustainable in the long run.

The 62-page report, produced in January for Hillier, details the progress of his ambitious plan to transform the Canadian Forces into an organization that is efficient, relevant and responsive to the needs of the government and public. The transformation process was officially launched 18 months ago with the establishment of four new commands designed to streamline and improve how the military works.

The study, done by three retired senior officers at the request of Hillier, outlines in part the impact of the Afghan war on some of the new organizations, including Canada Command, which is responsible for overseeing operations in Canada, keeping an eye on the coasts and airspace and responding to crises at home.

The report points out that Canada Command is not getting the intelligence it needs and is in competition for resources with other organizations.

"With the overwhelming and understandable emphasis on operations in Afghanistan, Canada COM is not getting the attention and priority that might otherwise be the case," the report says.

The war has also taken its toll on the Canadian Expeditionary Force Command which is responsible for running international operations.

Although CEFCOM, as it's called, has effectively managed the Afghan mission, it has been unable to focus on its other jobs, according to the report.

Liberal Senator Colin Kenny, chairman of the Senate's defence committee, described the report's findings as "chilling."

Col. Stephen Christensen, the director of transformation co-ordination, acknowledged the report's conclusions on Canada Command. But he added: "I don't believe that you will have seen anything in there that suggests it is getting insufficient attention to meet the requirements."

Forces too focused on war: report

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The military's focus on Afghanistan is shifting attention from vital needs here at home, according to a report leaked to the Ottawa Citizen.

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