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Afghan mission hurt by misleading spin campaign

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COLUMN: Susan Riley
BYLINE: Susan Riley
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
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The "take-away point" from a high-level media briefing on Afghanistan this past week — that is, the story we journalists were expected to transmit — is that, according to senior government officials, Afghans are being successfully positioned to take responsibility for their own security and prosperity.

Whether this is true (there are conflicting reports, to say the least), this is the new tactic in a recalibrated public relations offensive from the government. With new ministers in Defence, Foreign Affairs and the Canadian International Development Agency, a new parliamentary session to begin Oct. 16 and continuing public skepticism about the war, particularly in vote-rich Quebec, the language has changed.

No more dismissive accusations of "cutting and running." It is, increasingly, the Afghans' war — although we still seem to be running things.

For now. What we are asked to believe is that within an unspecified period — but presumably before February 2009, when Canada's combat role in Kandahar is expected to end — the Afghan army and police will be capable of containing drug lords, terrorists and the Taliban in the south, while western-trained judges (including some women) preside over scrupulously fair trials, local villagers brainstorm about municipal improvements, Kabul bureaucrats apply the fine points of "legislative drafting" gleaned from their Canadian coaches and the human rights of prisoners in Afghan jails are respected. (There are plans for a "fair and transparent mechanism for approving senior appointments," too — something we should maybe try here.)

Not to be churlish, but it requires a huge leap of faith to accept that this attractive fiction is anywhere close to realistic, especially given media reports of Afghan army recruits showing up fitfully and out of uniform, or, just last week, of accidentally exchanging fire with their Canadian mentors. If anything, the reputation of the Afghan police is worse (although Canada is funding a course in "mid-career professional skills development" for the notoriously corrupt local constabulary).

Adding to doubts that a poor, ethnically divided, war-torn and largely illiterate nation can transform itself within a few decades, never mind a few months, into "a country secure and at peace with itself" (in the words of one briefer), come reports that last year's military advances are now in doubt.

Military sources in Kandahar acknowledge that Quebec's Van Doos are fighting to secure territory supposedly won by their predecessors. There is "always back and forth," said Canada's ambassador in Kabul, Arif Lalani, who insists that Kandahar is noticeably more secure than it was a year ago. As for remaining pockets of Taliban resistance, ultimately that is a job for local police. "At the end of the day," said another official, "it is the Afghans who have to hold and maintain in the south."

On the controversial question of whether Canadian aid is getting to the impoverished people it is intended for, officials came to the briefing armed with lists of small projects — wells, roads, schools, immunization programs, all paid for with Canadian cash.

These small successes, they complain, are overshadowed, often by larger failings — including the deplorable state of Kandahar's largest hospital and reports of people starving near the Kandahar Airfield. One official said the UN's World Food Program would soon be delivering food near the Kandahar base — although officials later refused to say exactly who would be receiving the aid. That information will be given only to embedded reporters in Afghanistan, leading some to suspect the initiative has as much to do with feeding the media as the hungry.

For all that, helping Afghanistan police itself and run its own economy is a sensible course. Unlike the Americans, who are also trying to disentangle themselves from Iraq, Canada has no imperial ambitions and no pecuniary interests in Afghanistan. Nor does anyone doubt the bravery of our troops or the sincerity of the diplomats and public servants who are working around the clock to help Afghanistan rebuild.

As for the media, Ambassador Lalani suggested the public isn't getting "the full story." But it is getting, from correspondents on the ground, as full a story as they are allowed to provide, in reports that have been almost universally respectful of Canada's military. Media from other NATO countries, along with the few aid workers still in the country, also tell stories that are often at odds with the official version.

If there is cynicism around this complex mission, it can be found at the top, among politicians and their emissaries. They insist their policies aren't flawed, just the delivery. The real story isn't getting out. Then they offer a political script that is neither plausible, nor backed by tangible evidence.

Mercer show inspired by friend injured in Afghanistan

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BYLINE: Elizabeth Withey
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
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Rick Mercer has a gift for making people laugh. It's gift he wants to share with his friend, Master Cpl. Paul Franklin, who lost his legs in 2006 after a suicide bombing in Afghanistan.

At Franklin's request, Mercer is staging a one-time performance, Adventures in Canadian Television: An Evening with Rick Mercer, Sunday in Edmonton in support of the Northern Alberta Amputee Program. Franklin will also speak at the event.

"All I'm doing is helping a friend out, really," says Mercer. "The cause is great and this is going to be a fun, positive night. I kind of equate it to if a friend of yours asked you to move. There are certain people you'll help move, and he's one of them."

Mercer got to know Franklin in Afghanistan before the Edmonton soldier was seriously wounded on tour. The two bunked together on a Canadian military base with a bunch of other guys who were "in their early 20s and playing Play Station," Mercer says. Both men loved politics and comedy. They hit it off and stayed in touch.

Franklin even sent Mercer souvenirs and postcards from overseas.

"I left him 100 bucks U.S. and he really stretched it out. Every two months a package would show up with a book in it, or a prayer rug, or a clock that does the Muslim call to prayer every two hours."

Mercer's one-hour show is a mix of stand-up and storytelling featuring video clips of his illustrious television career, including This Hour has 22 Minutes, Talking to Americans and The Rick Mercer Report.

Edmonton Journal writer Liane Faulder recently wrote a book about Franklin's accident and recovery. The Long Walk Home: Paul Franklin's Journey from Afghanistan was published in August. Franklin will be signing books at Mercer's show.

Mercer calls Franklin a perfect example of the human spirit's ability to triumph over adversity. "The fact that he's walking at all is tremendous," he says. "Quite frankly I can't even imagine the inner strength it would take."

The television star is adamant about his support for the troops.

"It has everything to do with the individuals I've met," Mercer says.

"To me they personify public service. If we're going to have a Canadian Forces and we're going to ask them to go to the worst places on Earth and do the hardest jobs on our behalf, we have to support them."

Season five of the Rick Mercer Report starts Oct. 2, and Mercer's new book, Rick Mercer Report: The Book, comes out Sept. 25. The work is a compilation of material from his television show and blog.

"It's funnier than Paul's book," jokes Mercer. "We both have a book out, but mine's funnier. His may, may be more inspirational."

Canadian troops launch new offensive; Soldiers mount push to reclaim territory in Kandahar province, no Canadian casualties

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Andrew Mayeda, CanWest News Service / Canadiansoldiers build a new security outpost this week in the remote Afghan village of Howz-e-Madad. The fortified firebase is part of an effort to reclaim the area, which was overrun by the Taliban recently after being driven out earlier. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 330

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Canadian Forces launched their biggest combat operation in more than a month early yesterday, pushing into the Zhari district of Kandahar province to clear the way for Afghan security forces to reclaim recently lost ground.

Canadian troops exchanged fire with the Taliban and encountered a number of improvised explosive devices, said Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, Canada's chief of operations here.

However, no Canadian soldiers were killed or seriously injured in the early stages of Operation Khar Khovhail — Keeping Goodwill.

Fournier added a small number of Taliban were killed in the clashes, but he could not say how many.

"Of course, they tried to ambush us, but we were able to succeed in gaining the piece of ground that we had planned to [gain]," said Fournier.

He said Canadian troops, fighting alongside the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, secured a number of "key sectors" in the district, a traditional stronghold of the Taliban.

He said there were no reports of casualties among the Afghan security forces.

Canadian Forces, and in particular the ANP, had recently suffered losses in those sectors, said Fournier.

"It's an operation that will last for several weeks. Today was the first stage of the operation and it went very well."

Canadian Forces were believed to have secured much of Zhari, located to the west of Kandahar City, in a series of operations beginning last fall.

But the Afghan National Police, which has become notorious for its corruption and incompetence, was unable to hold a number of checkpoints in the district.

Over the next couple weeks, Canadian troops will train Afghan security forces while engineers build new checkpoints to be manned by the Afghans, said Fournier.

Canadian engineers have already been building such checkpoints for several weeks as part of a separate operation called Garanday Zmarny -- Strong Lion.

"We will continue in the same vein to ensure that our presence in this part of the province is well established and we put the right conditions in place so that the Afghan army and police can succeed," said Fournier.

It is hoped the deployment will allow reconstruction work in the district to resume, he added.

Canada has about 2,300 troops in Afghanistan in support of the NATO-led coalition that is trying to secure and rebuild the war-torn country.

Seventy Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed in Afghanistan since 2002.

Canada's military commitment here ends in February 2009.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said he will seek the consensus of Parliament before extending the mission.

Protesters take on NATO generals; High-level meetings inside Hotel Grand Pacific attract 200 for noon rally

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DATE: 2007.09.09
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SECTION: News
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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: John McKay, Times Colonist / SAYING NO TONATO: NATO protesters gather in front of the legislature before marching to the Hotel Grand Pacific, where NATO's Military Committee was meeting. Gen. Ray Henault said chiefs of defence from 26 member nations had "frank and open" discussions on the role of the military alliance. ; Colour Photo: Tony Austin, Special to the TC / Nude protester tows Scottish terriers, before being picked up by police. ;

BYLINE: Louise Dickson, with files from Richard Watts

SOURCE: Times Colonist

WORD COUNT: 677

Despite police fences surrounding the Hotel Grand Pacific, 200 noisy protesters managed to deliver a document to NATO officials yesterday accusing its generals of war crimes, crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The notice of summons "charged" North Atlantic Treaty Organization military committee members meeting inside the hotel with 36 counts of International Criminal Court crimes.

Lt.-Col. Tony White, a NATO public information officer, said he had received and read the summons and will pass it to NATO's legal team in Brussels when he returns in a few days.

"It will not be ignored," said White. "I read it was alleging war crimes in Yugoslavia. It would take a legal expert to give an opinion on it."

Protesters had earlier warned they would fight back if police tried to remove them from outside the hotel, but in the end, only one man was picked up by police — a protester riding his bike naked, towing two Scottish terriers in a yellow trailer.

Inside, where the high-level meetings were being held, chiefs of defence from NATO's 26 member nations had "frank and open" discussions on the role of the military alliance and its upcoming missions, said Gen. Ray Henault.

"The demand is there. I can assure you NATO has a lot of work to do," the Canadian general and chairman of NATO's Military Committee said at a press briefing yesterday afternoon.

Henault said the discussions largely focused on the future, although the topic of the mission in Afghanistan inevitably arose. "This is a very new NATO," he said. "It used to be a static NATO and one that was designed really to counter the Soviet threat that is no longer there."

Protesters take on NATO generals; High-level meetings inside Hotel Grand Pacific attract 200 for noon rally

"We are now in a NATO that knows it must have an expeditionary capability, and that expeditionary capability is very much embedded in the Afghanistan mission."

Meanwhile, a coalition of local peace groups chanted "NATO killers" as they marched from the legislature to the Hotel Grand Pacific. Although a few military men looked on from their waterfront balconies, no one came down to address the crowd.

Jodi Wood joined the rally to protest Canada's involvement in NATO. "We're a democratic nation and I think we should have a right as a civilian society to make the decision to pull Canada out of what is basically world terrorism," said Wood.

Marla Renn, an education student at Simon Fraser University, came to protest "atrocities" she said NATO is committing in Afghanistan. "There's an untold amount of civilian deaths and brutality for women over there. We're making things harder and worse over there."

Camosun student Shawn Haley questioned NATO's role in providing security. "Security against what?" asked Haley. "They are the most powerful entity in the world and they're using illegal weapons and killing people."

Many, like Haley, accused NATO of using prohibited weapons such as cluster bombs, white phosphorous and depleted uranium to kill and maim civilians. Raging Granny Fran Thoburn found pictures on the Internet of babies deformed by depleted uranium and had them laminated on posters.

"It's the hardest things I've ever done for the peace movement," said Thoburn. "We need to get our heads out of the sand and realize we are killing and maiming total populations, including our own."

Members of the military committee were surprised by the protest's focus on illegal weapons, said White. After consulting with senior officers, White told the press NATO does not use cluster munitions or depleted uranium in Afghanistan.

"Depleted uranium was an issue in Kosovo and Bosnia several years ago. Some nations were using it, but there was no proof it harmed people," said White, adding Canadian Forces are unlikely to have used depleted uranium because they don't have the airplanes to disperse it.

White argued that NATO is still relevant at 60, noting the United Nations, as representative of the international community, "is the one asking us to go to Afghanistan and Darfur."

"We're not imposing ourselves on other countries."

In the past five years, demands on NATO have been increasing, said White, who says the international community sees NATO as a highly successful, responsible and professional force.

"You have to go to Afghanistan to see the progress. The GDP [gross domestic product] is up 14 per cent. Young girls are in school. Afghanistan is much better off than it was two years ago. If they listen to our soldiers, they'll know we're doing a lot more good than bad."

[KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP)– Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar province. The military said Operation Keeping Goodwill in the...]

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DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: World

PAGE: A8

WORD COUNT: 593

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP) – Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar province.

The military said Operation Keeping Goodwill in the Zhari district, west of Kandahar City, was aimed at re-asserting control over an area that was previously won, but in recent months lost by Afghan National Police.

The joint operation with the Afghan army and police involved most of the Canadian battle group in Kandahar, with tanks, light armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers.

"The fact that in that specific region of Zhari we have suffered losses, especially on the ANP side, because they were not able to secure specific locations," Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, chief of operations, told CTV Newsnet.

"This is the reason why we had to go back there to make sure they were able to perform their duty as policemen and soldiers." NAGS HEAD, N.C. (AP) – Gabrielle became a tropical storm Saturday as it swirled toward North Carolina's Outer Banks, where residents and beach vacationers prepared for rain and the possibility of minor flooding.

"It's going to get a little gnarly," said 51-year-old Sharon Peele Kennedy, a lifetime resident of the Outer Banks.

The National Hurricane Center forecast called for Gabrielle to brush the Outer Banks on Sunday afternoon before curving back out into the Atlantic. Forecasters don't expect the storm to become a hurricane. ARUSHA, Tanzania (AP) – At least 27 people were killed in a bus accident Saturday in southwestern Tanzania, a senior police officer said.

A bus tried to overtake a car and crashed into a truck about 50 kilometres from the southwestern Tanzanian town of Mbeya, said Stephen Mwinamila, the regional traffic commander.

Mwinamila said two pedestrians were among those killed. Forty-three people were seriously injured and have been admitted to hospital. ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) – A booby-trapped car exploded at a barracks housing coast guard officials in Algeria on Saturday, killing at least 28 people and injuring many others, hospital authorities said. The explosion – the North African nation's second terror attack in less than 48 hours – ripped through the northern coastal town of Dellys, about 50 kilometres from Algiers, shattering many of the town's windows.

[KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP)– Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation

The attack came just two days after another bombing killed at least 20 in a crowd of people in eastern Algeria who were waiting to see visiting President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. WASHINGTON (AP) – First lady Laura Bush had surgery Saturday to relieve pain from pinched nerves in her neck. The White House said the procedure was successful.

The problem kept her from joining President George W. Bush on a trip to Australia this week for the annual meeting of the Asia–Pacific Economic Co–operation forum in Sydney.

Mrs. Bush underwent the 2 1/2 –hour procedure at the George Washington University Hospital. She returned to the White House in the afternoon and was said to be resting comfortably. While en route from Sydney to Hawaii, Bush telephoned his wife at the hospital and they spoke for two to three minutes, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino said.

SAN DIEGO (AP) – A 23–year–old woman who boarded a Southwest Airlines plane in a short skirt for a flight to Arizona says she was led off the plane for wearing an outfit that was considered too skimpy.

Kyla Ebbert said a Southwest employee asked her to leave her seat while the plane was preparing to leave this southern California city on July 3.

" "You're dressed inappropriately. This is a family airline. You're too provocative to fly on this plane," " she quoted the employee as saying.

Ebbert was eventually allowed back on the plane after offering to adjust her sweater but said she was humiliated and embarrassed.

A spokesman for the airline said the employee felt the outfit "revealed too much" but was placated after Ebbert made adjustments that included covering her stomach.

UN: Afghan suicide bombers recruited, trained in Pakistan

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DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: World

PAGE: A7

SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Chris Brummitt

ILLUSTRATION: An investigator collects debris after a suicide attack Friday in Kabul. (Saurabh Das / AP)

WORD COUNT: 404

KABUL – More than 80 per cent of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report Sunday that showed attacks running at record levels this year.

Most of the suicide bombers carrying out attacks are poor, young and uneducated, and many are Afghan nationals, according to the report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers, other militants and security officials.

But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers.

"The phenomenon of suicide attacks in Afghanistan is inherently linked to a variety of structures and institutions across the border in Pakistan," it said, noting that "over 80 per cent" of bombers passed through training facilities in the Waziristan region of the country.

"Without dedicated efforts to destroy safe havens and bastions of support across the border, violence in Afghanistan is unlikely to disappear," the report said.

Pakistan, which has also experienced a recent surge in suicide attacks, admits that Taliban fighters have sought refuge on its side of the border and the government has deployed tens of thousands of troops there to try and uproot them.

Last month, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders they must co-operate to find a solution to the region's growing violence.

"Afghanistan is not under fire alone now," Karzai told the leaders. "Unfortunately our Pakistani brothers are also under fire, and this fire, day by day, is getting hotter."

Suicide attacks – either from militants wearing bombs on their bodies or driving cars packed with explosives – have emerged as a key tactic in an increasingly bloody insurgency by Taliban militants against foreign troops and Karzai's U.S.-backed government.

In 2006, there were 123 recorded suicide attacks in Afghanistan, up from just 17 the year before, the report said. There were 103 attacks as of the end of August this year, putting 2007 on course to set a new benchmark, the UN said.

While the targets of such attacks have been exclusively military or government in nature, 80 per cent of the 183 victims until June this year were civilian, the report said. The report also said the bombs were not

claiming more lives per attack, suggesting little sustained innovation in technique.

The report's authors interviewed 23 jailed people who had been convicted or were awaiting trial in connection with attempted or failed suicide attacks. Twenty-one were Afghan nationals, although most had spent time as refugees in Pakistan.

Protesters target NATO; Group holds peaceful vigil outside B.C. hotel

PUBLICATION: The Sunday Herald

DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: NovaScotia

PAGE: A6

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Dirk Meissner

WORD COUNT: 494

VICTORIA – Protesters vowed Saturday to maintain a resistance vigil outside a fenced-off downtown hotel where 26 generals from the NATO military alliance were meeting.

About 300 protesters marched to the hotel chanting anti-NATO slogans, but there were no signs of violence or tensions that have erupted at other world gatherings involving military and political leaders.

"I'm here to say, 'no, to NATO,' so that Canada can maintain its peaceful reputation," said Janet Hawksley.

Hawksley, 86, said she attends every anti-war protest she can, because "it's the only world we've got."

She said she wore a green leaf over her nose to protect herself naturally from the sun.

"I've got Irish skin," said Hawksley.

Despite a heavy police presence, the mood remained peaceful except for the arrest of an elderly naked male cyclist on the front steps of the B.C. legislature.

Protesters stood outside the hotel fence calling on the generals to come out and speak to them. At one point, a man appeared on the hotel balcony, and the protesters, believing he was a NATO general, yelled, "jump, jump."

The protesters said they wanted to deliver a summons to the NATO leaders that said they've been convicted of international war crimes, but they had no luck getting the document inside the hotel. They chanted "bring down the generals" and "stop the NATO war machine."

They called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to pull Canada's troops out of Afghanistan, and one of the chants called Harper and U.S. President George Bush killers.

Many of the protesters carried placards accusing NATO of using weapons filled with depleted uranium and bombs filled with highly flammable white phosphorus.

The placards showed pictures of children grotesquely deformed by uranium and other children horribly scarred by phosphorus.

Sociologist Bo Filter called on the protesters to form alliances on the Internet in an effort to force NATO to disband.

The NATO leaders are believed to be mapping strategy to ease strains in the alliance over the increasingly bloody war in Afghanistan.

The protracted battle to put down the Taliban insurgency has Canada and the Netherlands questioning their deployment of combat troops in the region.

Gen. Ray Henault, chairman of NATO's military committee and former chief of Canada's defence staff, said earlier the alliance has not received formal notice from Ottawa that it intends to end its combat commitment as scheduled in February 2009.

He said the alliance anticipates there will be changes but has not begun the formal process of looking for replacement nations.

The opposition Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want Canadian troops pulled out of Kandahar when the mandate of the mission expires in 2009. The NDP have long demanded an immediate withdrawal.

Henault said he hopes Canada will stay because progress is being made, but added that the final decision rests with the government.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion said Canada should stand by its commitment in Afghanistan, but make it clear it is going home in February 2009.

Dion has said he will bring a motion into the House of Commons setting Feb. 9, 2009 as the firm end to Canada's combat role.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has said the government wants a vote in the Commons, adding that Dion wasn't big on Commons approval when he was part of the former Liberal government.

One Victoria protester said the show of force Saturday against NATO will do little to change the minds of the military leaders.

"I don't think this is really useful except as a feel good for the people who are here," said the woman who only provided her first name, Emily.

"They're obviously fencing us off. They're not listening," said the 26-year-old from California.

"They're just going to keep on doing what they're doing."

Canadian soldier laid to rest in Hamilton

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DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: NovaScotia

PAGE: A6

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

WORD COUNT: 172

HAMILTON – Military, family and even bystanders honoured Maj. Ray Ruckpaul Saturday at the Hamilton natives funeral. Ruckpaul, 42, was found shot in his barracks in Kabul, Afghanistan on Aug. 29 and died shortly after.

Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron said Ruckpaul was a fine officer and had a particular compassion for the children in Afghanistan and in Croatia, where he also had two tours of duty.

Bystanders outside Church of the Ascension watched silently and somberly from across the street as a rifle salute was given and Ruckpauls casket passed through a military honour guard, followed by his wife and children and his parents. The bystanders included a group of veterans holding Canadian flags lowered in his honour.

Ruckpaul, the 70th soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002, lived in Germany with his wife and two children.

The Hamilton native joined the armed forces prior to studying geology at McMaster University.

At the time of his death, he was serving at the headquarters of NATO's International Security Assistance Force.

In earlier media reports, Ruckpaul was described by friends and neighbours as a man with heartfelt dedication both to his job and to his family.

Protesters accuse NATO of war crimes; Generals gather to talk strategy

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Victoria Times Colonist, CanWest News Service/ Anti-NATO protesters march in downtown Victoria on Saturday. ;
KEYWORDS: ORGANIZATIONS; DEFENCE; FOREIGN RELATIONS; PROPAGANDA; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: VICTORIA
BYLINE: Louise Dickson
SOURCE: Victoria Times Colonist; CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 483

VICTORIA – About 200 noisy protesters delivered a symbolic summons Saturday to North Atlantic Treaty Organization generals as the officials discussed military strategy behind police fences at a downtown Victoria hotel.

The protesters accused NATO's military committee of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Lt.-Col. Tony White, public information officer for NATO's military committee, said he had received and read the protesters' document and would pass it to NATO's legal team in Brussels.

"It will not be ignored," White said.

Organizers had warned police they would fight back if officers tried to clear them from the Grand Pacific Hotel where the high-level meetings are being held by generals from the international military alliance, but a noon rally was peaceful.

The coalition of peace groups chanted "NATO killers" as they marched, followed by calls of "Bring Down the Generals." Although a few military men looked on from their waterfront balconies, no one came down to address the crowd.

Jodi Wood joined the rally to protest Canada's involvement in NATO.

"We're a democratic nation and I think we should have a right as a civilian society to make the decision to pull Canada out of what is basically world terrorism," said Wood.

Marla Renn, an education student at Simon Fraser University, came to protest what she called the atrocities being committed by NATO in Afghanistan.

"There's an untold amount of civilian deaths and brutality for women over there. We're making things harder and worse over there," said Renn.

Many protesters accused NATO of using prohibited weapons, such as cluster bombs, white phosphorous and depleted uranium to kill and maim innocent civilians.

Raging Granny Fran Thoburn found pictures on the Internet of babies she said were deformed by depleted uranium, and had them laminated on posters.

"We need to get our heads out of the sand and realize we are killing and maiming total populations," Thoburn said.

Members of the military committee were surprised by the protest's focus on illegal weapons, said White.

After consulting with senior officers, White told the media NATO is not using cluster munitions or depleted uranium in Afghanistan.

"Depleted uranium was an issue in Kosovo and Bosnia several years ago. Some nations were using it, but there was no proof it harmed people," said White. He also addressed the question of whether or not NATO is still relevant after being in existence for almost 60 years.

"It's relevant, because the United Nations, which represents the international community, is the one asking us to go to Afghanistan and Darfur," said White.

"We're not imposing ourselves on other countries." In the past five years, the demands on NATO have been increasing, said White.

"The international community sees NATO as a very responsible and professional force that is highly successful," said White.

"You have to go to Afghanistan to see the progress. The (gross domestic product) is up 14 per cent. Young girls are in school. Afghanistan is much better off than it was two years ago. If they listen to our soldiers, they'll know we're doing a lot more good than bad." The protest included a nude male cyclist towing two Scottish terriers in a yellow trailer. The man made it on to the lawn of the provincial legislature before being dressed in a pair of bright blue boxer shorts and placed in the back of a police car.

Afghans young and old eager to master reading, writing skills; Ultra-conservative leaders and war have kept citizens illiterate

IDNUMBER: 200709090022
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: AFP/Getty Images / Mehrajuddin, a 65-year old Afghanman, writes during a class in Kabul on Thursday. The country has one of the lowest rates of literacy in the world — 71 per cent of the population is illiterate. ;
KEYWORDS: LITERACY; EDUCATION
DATELINE: KABUL
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 552

KABUL – Mahjan, a 40-year-old Afghan woman, says her husband did not want their daughters to leave the house to go to school. "So, while he was at work, I opened the courtyard of the house to a literacy class so that they, my neighbours and myself can learn to read and write," she says proudly.

For two hours a day for a year, Mahjan and her two teenage daughters have sat on the small patio behind high, old walls in central Kabul with about 20 other students. They are among the teachers and pupils trying to eat away at Afghanistan's enormous illiteracy rate, which the United Nations' children's group UNICEF puts at 71 per cent, with 86 per cent of women illiterate.

Thirty years of war in this mountainous country of extreme climatic conditions and a ruined infrastructure has kept Afghanistan on the margins of the world. This was at no time more evident than during 1996 and 2001, when the country was under the power of the ultra-conservative Taliban, which barred girls and women from going to school.

The pupils of Fakhria Sidiqi, some of them holding babies in their arms, hang on to her words as she stands next to a blackboard on the edge of the patio.

Sidiqi is paid by the government which, with the help of mainly UN agencies, has pumped millions of dollars into improving literacy in Afghanistan, above the education budget, says the sector head Hamed Huma Nooristani.

Nearly 276,000 adults have learned to read and write in more than 10,000 literacy centres since the pro-Western government of President Hamid Karzai was established, Nooristani says.

Their efforts will be marked on the UN's International Literacy Day on Saturday.

But this is a drop in the ocean for a country of around 26 million people who lack — despite the help of scores of non-governmental organizations — many of the basics of education such as classrooms, teachers and supplies.

Afghans young and old eager to master reading, writing skills; Ultra-conservative leaders and war have kept

UNICEF has this year trained about 13,000 teachers, says spokeswoman Roshan Khadivi.

Thirty-year-old Najiba has been teaching for four years and says she "manages okay" in front of her students — eight men aged between 20 and 65 years. They learn in a tiny room paid for by the state, in a building in Kabul, and Najiba seems particularly dedicated.

One of her pupils, Mehrajuddin, 65, has driven a truck for 43 years but admits to never having been able to decipher the road signs.

"Now that I have the time — my children are married — I am committed to my studies," says the white-haired man, with a beard and cap, clutching a book and pencil.

Another student is Mohammad Nazir, a cook aged 40, with nine children. He says he did not hesitate a second when he found out that he could learn to read and write for free.

"I have always wanted to study. For five or six months since I joined this course, I have come every day," he says smiling.

"There is no age for learning," agrees Abdul Habib, 50.

In the north of Kabul, Raheella lets girls into a traditional mudbrick building that stands next to a hill. "There is no school here," says the 50-year-old, who has worked for the government for 22 years.

"Even under the Taliban, I gave classes in secret and without being paid," she says.

One student, Zarifa, 14, says she was deprived of an education because of the Taliban.

She has been coming here for three years with her sister, convinced that it would allow their father to help them find "good husbands." "My children will really have to go to school a lot earlier than me because it really is very difficult," sighs Zahra, 19, as she gets up to go to the board to do a sum.

Afghan police fail to protect posts; Territory gained by Canadians overrun by Taliban fighters

IDNUMBER 200709090009

PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal

DATE: 2007.09.09

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A3

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Andrew Mayeda, Canwest News Service / Canadiansoldiers build a new security outpost this week in the remote Afghan village of Howz-e-Madad, part of an operation aimed at reinforcing checkpoints. ;

KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS

DATELINE: HOWZ-E-MADAD, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 575

HOWZ-E-MADAD, Afghanistan – Leaning on his rickety bicycle at the side of the road, Ainadeen shrugs when asked where the explosions came from. All he knows is that they kept coming, that's why he and other villagers fled to the relative calm of the desert.

"The police couldn't provide security," said Ainadeen, who like many Afghans goes by a single name.

Around last Christmas, Canadian Forces rolled into this sparse but strategically located village without much resistance from the Taliban.

But now, residents and police say a small cell of Taliban fighters has entrenched itself in the grape fields behind the crumbling mud walls.

As recently as last month, the black-and-white flag of the Taliban could be seen flying above the village. Until Canadian combat engineers arrived this week to build a new security outpost, there were daily firefights between Taliban fighters and police, said the village's deputy police chief, Hafiz Ullah.

The failure of Afghan security forces to hold villages, such as Howz-e-Madad, underscores the challenges that Canada and its NATO allies face as they try to pacify the unruly southern province of Kandahar with a limited number of troops.

During last fall's Operation Medusa, the biggest and bloodiest offensive that Canada fought in Afghanistan, Canadian troops flushed the Taliban out of its stronghold in Panjwaii district, west of Kandahar City.

The operation prompted the governor of Kandahar to declare that the Taliban had been "eliminated" from Panjwaii and parts of neighbouring Zhari district to the north.

Meanwhile, Canadian Forces set up police checkpoints along Highway 1, a well-travelled road that links Kandahar with Kabul to the northeast, and Herat to the northwest.

But many of the checkpoints have either been abandoned by the Afghan National Police or overrun by the Taliban. At Howz-e-Madad, for example, British and Canadian soldiers built a checkpoint last winter that was to be manned by the ANP.

But Ullah, the deputy police chief, said his small team of 15 officers has struggled to hold the Taliban at bay.

"I have only one magazine and when I reach for the second I have nothing. I cannot provide security in this way," he said through an interpreter.

With few men and little firepower, the police have had their hands full with a group of about 20 Taliban fighters believed to have found refuge in the village.

Ullah said the situation is comparable at many of the checkpoints along Highway 1. He said seven police officers at a nearby checkpoint were killed recently -- some of them kidnapped and beheaded -- by the Taliban.

"Some of the checkpoints were lost. There were so many of them with so few ANP and that probably caused them to be lost," said Capt. Daniel Morin, second in command at Patrol Base Wilson, a forward operating base farther east toward Kandahar City.

As a result of the collapse of the ring of security along Highway 1, Canadian Forces have launched Operation Garanday Zmarny (Strong Lion). Under the operation, Canadian soldiers have been reinforcing checkpoints in the region that were lost or abandoned.

This week, engineers began building an encampment that will serve as a small Afghan National Army (ANA) base.

Canada's top military commander in Afghanistan, Brig.-Gen. Guy Laroche, said recently the checkpoints will eventually be protected by a combination of Afghan police, soldiers and Canadian troops.

The hope is that the operation will choke off the Taliban's freedom of movement in the district and prevent it from staging attacks on Kandahar City.

But the need for joint checkpoints is a troubling admission of the ANP's inadequacy at a time when NATO troops are stretched thin.

The Canadian military has been training and mentoring the Afghan National Army for some time, and military commanders say the ANA has made progress toward becoming a reliable force.

By contrast, the Afghan National Police is widely seen as underequipped, incompetent and corrupt.

Canadian commanders say the goal is to eventually hand over the country to Afghan forces, but refuse to say when that might happen.

Combat push aims to regain lost ground; Canadian troops clash with Taliban to clear way for Afghan security forces

IDNUMBER 200709090001
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Graham Thomson, the Journal, File / Lt.-Col. Wayne Eyre, right, of Edmonton patrols with members of the Afghan National Army in the Zhari district of Kandahar province over a week ago. Troops have launched a big combat push in the area to reclaim ground lost to the Taliban. ;

KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 377

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Canadian Forces launched their biggest combat operation in more than a month early Saturday, pushing into the Zhari district of Kandahar province to clear the way for Afghan security forces to reclaim recently lost ground.

Canadian troops exchanged fire with the Taliban and encountered a number of improvised explosive devices, said Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, Canada's chief of operations here.

However, no Canadian soldiers were killed or seriously injured in the early stages of Operation Khar Khowhai — Keeping Goodwill.

Fournier added a small number of Taliban were killed in the clashes, but he could not say how many.

"Of course, they tried to ambush us, but we were able to succeed in gaining the piece of ground that we had planned to (gain)," said Fournier. He said Canadian troops, fighting alongside the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, secured a number of "key sectors" in the district, a traditional stronghold of the Taliban. There were no reports of casualties among the Afghan security forces, he added.

Canadian Forces, and in particular the ANP, had recently suffered losses in those sectors, said Fournier.

"It's an operation that will last for several weeks. Today was the first stage of the operation and it went very well."

Canadian Forces were believed to have secured much of Zhari, located to the west of Kandahar City, in a series of operations beginning last fall.

But the Afghan National Police, which has become notorious for its corruption and incompetence, was unable to hold a number of checkpoints in the district.

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Over the next couple weeks, Canadian troops will train Afghan security forces while engineers build new checkpoints to be manned by the Afghans, said Fournier.

Canadian engineers have already been building such checkpoints for several weeks as part of a separate operation called Garanday Zmarny -- Strong Lion.

"We will continue in the same vein to ensure that our presence in this part of the province is well established and we put the right conditions in place so that the Afghan army and police can succeed," said Fournier. It is hoped the deployment will allow reconstruction work in the district to resume, he added.

Canada has about 2,300 troops stationed in Afghanistan in support of the NATO-led coalition that is trying to secure and rebuild the wartorn country. Seventy Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed in Afghanistan since 2002.

Canada's military commitment here ends in February 2009. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said he will seek the consensus of Parliament before extending the mission.

Canadian Forces launch new Afghan offensive

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: World

PAGE: A12

COLUMN: Defence

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda

DATELINE: Kandahar, Afganistan

WORD COUNT: 336

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Military, family pay respects at funeral for Canadian soldier

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: National

PAGE: A8

COLUMN: Defence

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

DATELINE: Hamilton, Ont.

WORD COUNT: 151

Military, family and even bystanders honoured Maj. Ray Ruckpaul Saturday at the Hamilton natives funeral.

Ruckpaul, 42, was found shot in his barracks in Kabul, Afghanistan on Aug. 29 and died shortly after.

Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron said Ruckpaul was a fine officer and had a particular compassion for the children in Afghanistan and in Croatia, where he also had two tours of duty.

Bystanders outside Church of the Ascension watched silently and somberly from across the street as a rifle salute was given and Ruckpaul's casket passed through a military honour guard, followed by his wife and children and his parents.

The bystanders included a group of veterans holding Canadian flags lowered in his honour.

Ruckpaul, the 70th soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002, lived in Germany with his wife and two children.

The Hamilton native joined the armed forces prior to studying geology at McMaster University.

At the time of his death, he was serving at the headquarters of NATO's International Security Assistance Force.

In earlier media reports, Ruckpaul was described by friends and neighbours as a man with heartfelt dedication both to his job and to his family.

Peaceful protesters gather in Victoria; Vow to resist NATO generals

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.09

SECTION: Provincial/National

PAGE: A4

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Dirk Meissner

DATELINE: Victoria

WORD COUNT: 502

Protesters vowed Saturday to maintain a resistance vigil outside a fenced-off downtown hotel where 26 generals from the NATO military alliance were meeting.

About 300 protesters marched to the hotel chanting anti-NATO slogans, but there were no signs of violence or tensions that have erupted at other world gatherings involving military and political leaders.

"I'm here to say, 'no, to NATO,' so that Canada can maintain its peaceful reputation," said Janet Hawksley.

Hawksley, 86, said she attends every anti-war protest she can, because "it's the only world we've got."

She said she wore a green leaf over her nose to protect herself naturally from the sun. "I've got Irish skin.

Despite a heavy police presence, the mood remained peaceful except for the arrest of an elderly naked male cyclist on the front steps of the B.C. legislature.

Protesters stood outside the hotel fence calling on the generals to come out and speak to them. At one point, a man appeared on the hotel balcony, and the protesters, believing he was a NATO general, yelled, "jump, jump."

The protesters said they wanted to deliver a summons to the NATO leaders that said they've been convicted of international war crimes, but they had no luck getting the document inside the hotel. They chanted "bring down the generals" and "stop the NATO war machine."

They called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to pull Canada's troops out of Afghanistan, and one of the chants called Harper and U.S. President George Bush killers.

Many of the protesters carried placards accusing NATO of using weapons filled with depleted uranium and bombs filled with highly flammable white phosphorus.

The placards showed pictures of children grotesquely deformed by uranium and other children horribly scarred by phosphorus.

Sociologist Bo Filter called on the protesters to form alliances on the Internet in an effort to force NATO to disband.

NATO said they'd address the media late Saturday afternoon.

The NATO leaders are believed to be mapping strategy to ease strains in the alliance over the increasingly bloody war in Afghanistan.

The protracted battle to put down the Taliban insurgency has Canada and the Netherlands questioning their deployment of combat troops in the region.

Gen. Ray Henault, chairman of NATO's military committee and former chief of Canada's defence staff, said earlier the alliance has not received formal notice from Ottawa that it intends to end its combat commitment as scheduled in February 2009.

He said the alliance anticipates there will be changes but has not begun the formal process of looking for replacement nations.

The opposition Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want Canadian troops pulled out of Kandahar when the mandate of the mission expires in 2009. The NDP have long demanded an immediate withdrawal.

Henault said he hopes Canada will stay because progress is being made, but added that the final decision rests with the government.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion said Canada should stand by its commitment in Afghanistan, but make it clear it is going home in February 2009.

Dion has said he will bring a motion into the House of Commons setting Feb. 9, 2009 as the firm end to Canada's combat role.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has said the government wants a vote in the Commons, adding that Dion wasn't big on Commons approval when he was part of the former Liberal government.

One Victoria protester said the show of force will do little to change the minds of the military leaders.

"I don't think this is really useful except as a feel good for the people who are here," said the woman who only provided her first name, Emily.

"They're obviously fencing us off. They're not listening," said the 26-year-old from California. "They're just going to keep on doing what they're doing."

Taliban victim bid tearful farewell

IDNUMBER 200709090029

PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald

DATE: 2007.09.09

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A13

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Getty Images / TALIBAN VICTIM BID TEARFUL FAREWELL: A South Korean woman, right, who held hostage by the Taliban in Afghanistan, cries at the funeral service for Christian pastor Bae Hyung-kyu, killed by the Taliban, at a church on Saturday in Sungnam, South Korea. Bae, 42, was found dead on July 25, six days after he and 22 other church aid workers were kidnapped in Kandahar. ;

KEYWORDS: 0

SOURCE: Calgary Herald

WORD COUNT: 4

NO TEXT

Canadian troops launch big push against Taliban; Mission to help Afghan forces regain lost ground

IDNUMBER 200709090022
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 343

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bc-CCN-ON-GOV-INT

DATE: 2007.09.08

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 358

^DND: NATO Chiefs of Defence Conclude their Conference in Canada@<

September 08, 2007

VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA---(Marketwire – Sept. 8, 2007) – Chiefs of Defence from the 26 NATO member nations early this evening wrapped up two days of discussions and a seminar focused on planning, preparing and conducting NATO operations.

"Delivering more capability for NATO operations is the intent," said Gen. Ray Henault, Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, and NATO's top officer. "We examined how we deliver operations, how we assign resources and how we train, as three important and inter-related themes central to our work."

"The seminar was successful in illustrating that personnel and resource challenges are shared by all Allies, and that by taking a longer-term approach to operational planning, we will improve our ability to obtain the right capabilities, from more Allies, at the right time," added Gen. Henault.

The Military Committee also exchanged ideas and views to tailor and sustain NATO's high readiness forces, and how the NATO Command Structure – the people and infrastructure of the in-place NATO headquarters – can be organized to be more deployable and more efficient. General John Craddock, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, had opened the conference with an overview of NATO's ongoing operations.

"This meeting was an excellent venue for the NATO Chiefs of Defence and NATO's two Strategic Commanders to discuss issues face-to-face, and to decide on how to take our work and change agenda forward," said Gen. Henault. "We have committed to a number of activities to help shape, guide and inform the Alliance's decision making process. For example, two of the areas where we intend on moving with speed are to develop a NATO-wide lessons learned policy, and to develop better criteria to measure progress and effectiveness for operations including Afghanistan."

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News and information is routinely placed on the NATO website. This includes audio files, transcripts and high resolution photographs, which are posted as soon as possible after events of media interest. Check the 'What's New' file.

INDUSTRY: Government – International, Government – Local, Government – National, Government – Security (law enforcement, homeland etc), Government – State

SUBJECT: INT

NEWS RELEASE TRANSMITTED BY Marketwire

Canadian forces launch new operation in troubled Afghan district

DATE: 2007.09.08
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 179

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP) _ Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar province.

The military said Operation Keeping Goodwill in the Zhari district, west of Kandahar City, was aimed at re-asserting control over an area that was previously won, but in recent months lost by Afghan National Police.

The joint operation with the Afghan army and police involved most of the Canadian battle group in Kandahar, with tanks, light armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers.

“The fact that in that specific region of Zhari we have suffered losses, especially on the ANP side, because they were not able to secure specific locations,” Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, chief of operations, told CTV Newsnet.

“This is the reason why we had to go back there to make sure they were able to perform their duty as policemen and soldiers.”

Capt. Josee Bilodeau, a military spokeswoman, earlier described Saturday's operation as a success, saying the Canadians achieved their objective “within 12 hours, without any casualties.”

In September of last year, the Canadian military carried out Operation Medusa in Zhari and Panjwai districts. That operation saw the Canadian military involved in some of its toughest combat since the Korean War.

NATO chief says Afghanistan mission is tops, but not make or break for NATO

DATE: 2007.09.08

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS SOCIAL

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 113

VICTORIA (CP) _ Military success in Afghanistan is the No. 1 mission for NATO, but success there is not a make or break issue for the military alliance, says the chief of NATO's military committee.

Gen. Ray Henault, a Canadian, says Afghanistan is NATO's top job, but the survival of the organization does not hinge on Afghanistan.

He says the chiefs of defence of NATO's 26 member nations are in Victoria to map strategy for future and current NATO plans.

Henault says the defence chiefs are aware that Canada is considering pulling out of Afghanistan in 2009.

But he did not say anything about replacement nations if Canada decides to withdraw its troops.

About 300 protesters gathered outside the fenced-in hotel where the NATO chiefs were meeting, chanting anti-NATO slogans and calling for Canada to get out of Afghanistan.

Former South Korean hostages mourn at funeral for pastor slain in Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.09.08

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL RELIGION

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 214

SEONGNAM, South Korea (AP) _ South Koreans freed from six weeks of captivity in Afghanistan mourned at the funeral Saturday of a church pastor who was one of two in their group shot to death by Taliban militants.

Five former hostages wept, prayed and sang hymns along with hundreds of black-clad mourners during the funeral service for pastor Bae Hyung-kyu at their Presbyterian Saemmul Community Church in Seongnam, just south of Seoul.

Video footage of Bae was also shown during the service, prompting sobs and wails from mourners.

Bae, 42, was found dead with multiple gunshot wounds on July 25, six days after he and 22 other aid workers from a South Korean church were kidnapped from a bus on their way to the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

He was the first of two killed in the six-week standoff. The second victim, Shim Sung-min, 29, was slain on July 31.

Bae's body was flown home on July 30, but the family delayed his funeral until the other hostages were freed, in a show of solidarity with victims' relatives and to appeal for their safe release.

The two deaths came as negotiations with the captors stalled over a Taliban demand that insurgent fighters be freed.

The Taliban released two of the remaining hostages in mid-August as a goodwill gesture after beginning direct talks with South Korea's government. All 19 others were freed later last month and returned home on Sept. 2.

The ex-hostages have since received treatment at a hospital.

UN says most Afghan suicide attackers are recruited and trained in Pakistan

DATE: 2007.09.08

KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 584

KABUL (AP) _ More than 80 per cent of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report Sunday that showed attacks running at record levels this year.

Most of the suicide bombers carrying out attacks are poor, young and uneducated, and many are Afghan nationals, according to the report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers, other militants and security officials.

But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers.

“The phenomenon of suicide attacks in Afghanistan is inherently linked to a variety of structures and institutions across the border in Pakistan,” it said, noting that “over 80 per cent” of bombers passed through training facilities in the Waziristan region of the country.

“Without dedicated efforts to destroy safe havens and bastions of support across the border, violence in Afghanistan is unlikely to disappear,” the report said.

Pakistan, which has also experienced a recent surge in suicide attacks, admits that Taliban fighters have sought refuge on its side of the border and the government has deployed tens of thousands of troops there to try and uproot them.

Last month, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders they must co-operate to find a solution to the region's growing violence.

“Afghanistan is not under fire alone now,” Karzai told the leaders. “Unfortunately our Pakistani brothers are also under fire, and this fire, day by day, is getting hotter.”

Suicide attacks _ either from militants wearing bombs on their bodies or driving cars packed with explosives _ have emerged as a key tactic in an increasingly bloody insurgency by Taliban militants against foreign troops and Karzai's U.S.-backed government.

In 2006, there were 123 recorded suicide attacks in Afghanistan, up from just 17 the year before, the report said. There were 103 attacks as of the end of August this year, putting 2007 on course to set a new benchmark, the UN said.

While the targets of such attacks have been exclusively military or government in nature, 80 per cent of the 183 victims until June this year were civilian, the report said.

The report also said the bombs were not claiming more lives per attack, suggesting little sustained innovation in technique. It said this contradicted a widely repeated assessment that expertise from Iraqi insurgents was being imported into Afghanistan, making bombs more sophisticated and potentially lethal.

The report's authors interviewed 23 jailed people who had been convicted or were awaiting trial in connection with attempted or failed suicide attacks. Twenty-one were Afghan nationals, although most had spent time as refugees in Pakistan.

Many of the interview subjects said they had been angered by the behaviour of U.S. and other NATO forces, who they perceive as being occupying forces, and by Karzai, who they said was a western puppet.

“All affairs are done by the Americans and other foreigners,” said Munir, a 19-year-old Afghan quoted in the report who said he was arrested after planning a car bomb attack. “They are invaders. The war against them is jihad.”

Another prisoner, 16-year-old Ghulam, said he was drugged and offered money to take part in a mission. “They kept saying I would not be killed,” he was quoted as saying. “They also said that if I didn't do what they say I would go to hell.”

The report urged western forces to prevent civilian casualties, avoid humiliating property searches and, if possible, deploy troops from Muslim countries as ways to blunt support for the Taliban.

“The first line of defence consists of understanding and removing 'root causes' that create demand for terrorism,” the report said.

INDEX:Defence, Politics

DATE: 2007.09.08
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE POLITICS
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 87

CALGARY – A Support Our Troops rally in downtown Calgary fizzled out when only 16 people showed up.

Ald. Ric McIver has led the effort to have city council put yellow–ribbon decals on city vehicles.

But despite Saturday's poor turnout, McIver says he's convinced Calgarians back his initiative.

He says the issue is not support for the war in Afghanistan, but saying thank you to the troops who have put themselves in harm's way.

Council defeated McIver's motion in July, opting instead to sell the ribbons at city facilities with proceeds going to military families.

Rally organizer Merle Terlesky says he held the event to try and convince council to change their minds.

(Calgary Sun)

Afghan–Suicide–Bombers

DATE: 2007.09.08
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 133

KABUL — The United Nations says that more than 80 per cent of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in Pakistan.

In a new report, the U–N says most are poor, young and uneducated and many are Afghan nationals.

The report also stresses that refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan are playing a significant role.

Last year, there were 123 recorded suicide attacks in Afghanistan, up from just 17 the year before.

There were 103 attacks as of the end of August this year, putting 2007 on course to set a new benchmark.

While the targets of such attacks have been exclusively military or government in nature, 80 per cent of the 183 victims until June this year were civilian.

The report urged western forces to prevent civilian casualties, avoid humiliating property searches and if possible, deploy troops from Muslim countries in order to blunt support for the Taliban.

(AP)

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INDEX:Defence, International

DATE: 2007.09.08
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 128

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar province.

The military says operation 'Keeping Goodwill' in the Zhari district west of Kandahar City is aimed at re-asserting control over an area that was previously won, but in recent months lost by Afghan police.

The joint operation with the Afghan national army and police involves most of the Canadian battle group in Kandahar, with tanks, light armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers.

Captain Josee Bilodeau describes today's operation as a success, saying the Canadians achieved their objective 'within 12 hours, without any casualties.'

In September of last year, the Canadian military carried out Operation Medusa in Zhari and Panjwai districts — that operation saw the Canadian military involved in some of its toughest combat since the Korean War.

INDEX:Defence, International, Social

DATE: 2007.09.08
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 117

BRUGGE, Belgium -- Thirteen members of the Canadian Forces took a march back in time today.

Dressed in combat fatigues, they walked 32 kilometres, retracing the steps of Second World War soldiers who liberated Belgium from Nazi occupation.

They were accompanied by some of their spouses, Belgian para-commandoes and civilians.

Lt.-Col. Don Denne, a veteran of Afghanistan, says it's important to keep alive the memory of Canadian sacrifices of over 60 years ago.

Denne says the people of Belgium want to remember and to thank Canadians.

Eight hundred Canadian soldiers died during September and October of 1944 in battles to liberate Belgium.

Master Warrant Officer Norm Rooker says Belgium is in a part of Europe that is very pro Canadian.

He says it was "neat" to see all the Canadian flags on the home.

Rooker says the Canadians prepared for today's commemorative march by taking long hikes to build up the calluses on their feet.

(CP)

mcw

How would Benazir Bhutto face down the Taliban?

IDNUMBER 200709090049
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
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SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A19
ILLUSTRATION: Benazir Bhutto;
BYLINE: Hugh Graham
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 791

As Benazir Bhutto comes closer to concluding a deal with President Pervez Musharraf, ending her British exile and re-entering political combat in Pakistan, one might ask how this secular, Washington-backed advocate of women's rights would take on radical Islam in a country in which radical Islam is spreading.

She has twice been prime minister yet, as Wilson John, a senior fellow with the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, says, Bhutto has "an assumed air of royalty and a gross misconception of power which (originally) pitted her against the army and its intelligence agencies."

The fact is, no one in Pakistan has ever been able to confront the ISI (the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency), the army, the alliances of religious parties or the Taliban, all of which are interlinked.

Not even Gen. Musharraf. As a voice in the wilderness, Bhutto has had an easy time criticizing Pakistan's army chief and president. His dictatorship, she says, has only provoked the spread of radical Islam and the proliferation of madrasas (religious schools) in which Islamism is bred. How, she asks, did the Islamist Red Mosque, which had to be taken by storm in July, end up right under the general's nose in Islamabad? He has, she believes, made too many deals with the Taliban and the Islamist parties, implying, of course, that she would never do the same.

So what's her strategy? Musharraf, weakened by an upsurge of Islamist violence, needs a friend. In a proposed power-sharing deal, he would step down as head of the army and Bhutto would help him win the upcoming elections. Then, the two would deal with the Taliban head-on. Sensing her advantage, she has refused to make any deal between her Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the MMA, the main alliance of religious parties; or even with the government religious party, the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). Real confrontation is also far enough away for her to say publicly that the spooks of the ISI were probably implicated in the radicalization of the Red Mosque.

But what would Bhutto do about the ISI in the real world? The intelligence agency, originally empowered by the CIA to train and fund the Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet Union, went right on to help form the Taliban itself. Engorged with riches, the ISI is said to have become a "state within a state," which continues, unofficially, to support Islamist groups throughout the country.

Bhutto should know. According to Wilson John, when she was first prime minister back in 1988, the ISI did to her what it has been doing ever since: organizing the anti-secular, Islamist parliamentary coalitions. The agency was also instrumental in bringing the mountain of corruption charges that eventually drove her from the country. It is widely held the ISI brokered the formation of the MMA and other parliamentary alliances that helped forge the "Legal Framework Order" that has shored up General Musharraf's dictatorship.

When Musharraf started to crack down on the Taliban, the uproar caused by the MMA, and presumably its ISI backers, seems to have driven the general to moderate his Taliban policies.

Another element that may well have pushed the general to make deals with the Taliban was the army itself, which had sustained heavy casualties fighting them.

The army, of course, is at the centre of political life in Pakistan and so we must ask again, what would Benazir do? During her first round as prime minister, she briskly purged the army of unfriendly elements only to find herself sidelined from all important military policy-making by its chief of staff, General Aslam Beg. To counter the army, she courted the very religious parties that helped in the formation of Al Qaeda. Pakistan, remember, was founded as a Muslim, religious state – you cannot avoid its myriad religious parties.

Back in 1996, during her second term as prime minister, she sensed the same thing about Afghanistan. The Taliban, a disciplined religious militia, seemed the key to the stable Afghanistan needed to link Pakistan to the new economies of Central Asia. And Bhutto helped them take power. Recently, she told the Independent that she came to regret it.

And what will she say to the religious parties if her backer, Washington, extends its clumsy War on Terror across the border and violates Pakistani sovereignty, as it has threatened to?

In Pakistan, it seems impractical to cold-shoulder even the most fanatical religious parties. Especially if there's a return to democracy.

Democracy, after all, is Bhutto's *raison d'etre*. And, as Winston Churchill pointed out, democracy is not pretty. Nor has it much use for "an assumed air of royalty," let alone "a gross misconception of power."

Hugh Graham is a Toronto writer and journalist, who has written extensively on foreign affairs.

Protesters keep vigil as NATO generals meet

IDNUMBER 200709090046
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.09
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SECTION: News
PAGE: A04
ILLUSTRATION: Deddeda Stemler cp About 300 demonstrators protest NATO meetings yesterday outside the Hotel Grand Pacific in Victoria, where the NATO conference is being held. They called on PM Stephen Harper to pull troops out of Afghanistan. ;
BYLINE: Dirk Meissner
SOURCE: Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 193

Protesters vowed yesterday to maintain a resistance vigil outside a fenced-off downtown hotel where 26 generals from the NATO military alliance were meeting.

About 300 protesters marched to the hotel chanting anti-NATO slogans, but there were no signs of violence or tensions that have erupted at other world gatherings involving military and political leaders.

"I'm here to say, 'no to NATO,' so that Canada can maintain its peaceful reputation," said Janet Hawksley, 86.

Despite a heavy police presence, the mood remained peaceful except for the arrest of an elderly naked male cyclist on the front steps of the B.C. legislature.

Protesters stood outside the hotel fence calling on the generals to come out and speak to them. At one point, a man appeared on the hotel balcony, and the protesters, believing he was a NATO general, yelled, "jump, jump."

The protesters said they wanted to deliver a summons to the NATO leaders that said they've been convicted of international war crimes, but they had no luck getting the document inside the hotel.

They called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to pull Canada's troops out of Afghanistan, and one of the chants called Harper and U.S. President George Bush killers.

The NATO leaders are believed to be mapping strategy to ease strains in the alliance over the increasingly bloody war in Afghanistan.

Pros, cons of talking peace with the Taliban; In the shifting sands of Afghanistan, it can be hard to see the lay of the political land

IDNUMBER 200709090036
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PAGE: A01
ILLUSTRATION: Musadeq Sadeq ap Taliban representatives Mullah Qari Bashir, left, and Mawlawi Nasrullah emerge from successful face-to-face negotiations with a South Korean delegation on the release of 19 South Korean hostages in Ghazni province. ;
BYLINE: Olivia Ward
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 1350

Images of war dominate news of Afghanistan: another soldier's death, the fear-filled faces of Taliban hostages.

But what's hidden from the cameras is the growing effort to find peace with the extremists whose black turbans symbolize unending warfare, but whom Western countries increasingly hope are the key to putting the battered country on the road to reconciliation.

The recent release of 19 kidnapped South Korean missionary aid workers came after a landmark deal between Seoul and the Taliban. The negotiations were appalling to some observers but did renew expectations that the militants were ready to do business.

"We do not negotiate with terrorists for any reason," said Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier, adding that "such negotiations, even if unsuccessful, only lead to further acts of terrorism."

His words were underscored by a Taliban vow to kidnap and kill more foreigners from countries with troops in Afghanistan. And, skeptics asked, even if the militants were willing to make a peace deal, are they united enough, and sincere enough, to make it stick?

But the war has so far cost the lives of 70 Canadian soldiers and one diplomat. As the list lengthens, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper seeks consensus on our future involvement in Afghanistan, a growing number of Canadians are connecting the dots between the continuing military conflict and the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

The urgency increases as NATO countries ponder cutting their troop contributions or holding back on making new ones.

Military analysts say the peak ratio of international soldiers on the ground in Afghanistan is one per 13 kilometres of territory, compared with Iraq's one for three kilometres.

Pros, cons of talking peace with the Taliban; In the shifting sands of Afghanistan, it can be hard to see the la

A NATO meeting this weekend in Victoria is aimed at finding a way of turning around the ever-bloodier conflict. But it is not expected to include any significant increases in boots on the ground in Afghanistan.

"The whole mission in Afghanistan is under-resourced," notes Col. Mike Capstick, who recently retired as commander of Canada's Strategic Advisory Team in Afghanistan.

"There are not enough NATO troops to be everywhere all the time. The national Afghan forces aren't ready yet to fill the gap. And everybody knows that the interior (police) ministry is the most corrupt in the country."

Some of Harper's opponents have accused him of losing the peace in Afghanistan by focusing on the war. NDP Leader Jack Layton has urged bringing the Taliban into the political process.

Polls show a majority of Canadians think he's right, and that negotiating is more realistic than it is reckless.

Even with a "surge" of troops into Afghanistan, history shows that military muscle alone is unlikely to bring long-term peace.

"Since World War II, is there one successful counter-insurgency?" asks Thomas Johnson, a professor of national security at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., and a U.S. adviser in Afghanistan. "The answer is none. This war will never be won militarily. I support the notion of negotiation, to the extent that we can negotiate."

But there's the rub.

While strategists regret the Western decision to expel and exclude the Taliban after the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai has spent five years talking to the extremists in an effort to bring the militants back into the political tent.

Under a 2002 amnesty program – bitterly criticized by Taliban victims – Karzai has persuaded hundreds to lay down their arms. Some of them were elected to the Afghan parliament and senate and one became governor of Uruzgan province. Yet in the past five years, the insurgency has escalated dramatically. The Taliban, Al Qaeda and other Islamist forces have made a comeback, many streaming over the porous border from Pakistan on motorbikes or state-of-the-art SUVs.

With a war-chest reportedly topped up by the vast Afghan drug trade, Pakistani supporters and Al Qaeda's international fundraisers – as well as by sympathizers in Arab states – the Afghan insurgency is not feeling a financial pinch from the international community's anti-terrorist financial laws.

NATO forces say some weapons have also been supplied by Iran and China.

Meanwhile, deals struck between the Western coalition and local Taliban agents to end violence in exchange for a limited voice in local affairs have collapsed, and fighting resumed in troubled areas including Kandahar and Helmand provinces.

Some of Pakistan's efforts to make deals with tribal leaders along its Taliban-populated borders have also failed. But there are new reports of quiet negotiations with the Taliban. And those who know the militants say the West could take advantage of splits in their ranks to forge new deals, isolate the most deadly elements and create areas of security that would win Afghan hearts and minds long enough to entrench peace.

"There is a timeline for secret three-party talks to establish teega (a Pashto word for a peace deal) between the Western coalition forces in Afghanistan, with Pakistan, the Afghan government and the anti-coalition insurgents of Afghanistan," wrote Syed Saleem Shahzad, Pakistan bureau chief for Asia Times Online.

Pros, cons of talking peace with the Taliban; In the shifting sands of Afghanistan, it can be hard to see the la

Shahzad, who was once detained by the Taliban while reporting on their organization, says that although "the Taliban are united under a single command of Mullah Omar, the Afghan insurgency is not simple."

And, he warns that the insurgency is far broader now than the Taliban alone. Although the militants use the same brand name, their numbers include "former warlords belonging to the late (Jalalabad-based) Moulvi Younus Khalis group of hezb-e-Islami, Gulbadin (Hekmatyar's) Hizb-e-Islami and (Gardez-based) Saifullah Masoor's group are all part of the insurgency."

After Osama bin Laden, the West's next "great Satan" is Taliban leader Mullah Omar – someone with whom the U.S. and others would not do business. But Shahzad says Omar doesn't "meddle" in local operations, giving the commanders leeway to make their own deals.

Taliban commander Jalaluddin Haqqani, said to be in charge of suicide bombing operations in Afghanistan, is a convert to the group who has been quietly approached to break away and lead a moderate movement.

He has so far resisted, but Shahzad judges him to be "a little disappointed with the Taliban command" after failing to receive the recognition he believes he deserves. That could be an opening for the coalition countries to make new overtures.

Shahzad also sees a "widening gap" between the homegrown Taliban and ultra-extreme Al Qaeda fighters who embrace Takfirism – the belief that "bad Muslims" are as much of an enemy as non-Muslims.

Loyal to Al Qaeda's second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, at least 40,000 foreign fighters poured into Pakistan's lawless North and South Waziristan, near the Afghan border. There, they waged global jihad and declared the Waziristans to be Islamic states.

But Pakistan made a deal reportedly offering local tribal leaders money and weapons to expel the foreigners. Violent fighting resulted and many of Al Qaeda's Arab and Central Asian recruits left for Iraq.

Are local Taliban leaders now ready to consider a truce? In the shifting sands of Afghanistan, it is often difficult to tell where the political landscape lies.

Canadian Chris Alexander, the UN deputy special representative in Afghanistan, told The New York Times that "the Taliban are vulnerable in many ways" after Pakistan's intervention and the loss of senior leaders.

He and others say some progress has been made.

"Within the Taliban movement, there is a lot of criticism for associating with bin Laden," says Tarique Niazi, an environmental sociologist at University of Wisconsin Eau Claire whose family hails from the Afghan-Pakistani borderland.

Niazi says a U.S.-brokered recent meeting of 50 tribal leaders from Afghanistan and Pakistan was a sign of progress, as the leaders called for talks with the Taliban.

He believes it "could serve as a key mechanism" for resolving conflicts across southwest Asia. And he points out that Pashtuns, who are in the majority in Afghanistan, have felt disenfranchised by Karzai's government, which has put members of the mainly Tajik Northern Alliance in dominant positions.

That has left the way open for the largely Pashtun Taliban to play the nationalist card.

Says Niazi: "It isn't mobilizing in the name of religion, but in the name of Pashtuns, who have 300 years of history fighting the Soviets, the British Raj, and now the Americans and Canadians."

Pros, cons of talking peace with the Taliban; In the shifting sands of Afghanistan, it can be hard to see the la

If the West wants peace, it might have to change its ideas of what success in Afghanistan looks like, Niazi says. It might have to abandon its blueprint for democracy in the face of a culture based on a "powerful collective ethic" rather than individual rights.

The deep conservatism of the Taliban springs from the same matrix.

In the near term, says Niazi, "history, culture and social structure should be the guideposts The country should have representatives from all the groups – Tajiks, Hazaras and Pashtuns. They should include the Taliban as one of the participants, but they must understand they're not the only one."

On the positive side, security is the main goal of most Afghans

"All the stakeholders need to sit down and set some minimum achievable goals, " says Niazi. "Those who won't give up violence will be separated."

Afghan debate needs more input

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Canada has come under pressure to "stay the course" in Afghanistan during meetings over the last several days in Ottawa and Victoria between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's top military officers. Concern is building that Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government, faced with flagging public support, may pull Canadian troops out of the country altogether, not just out of the tough Kandahar region where the troops are now deployed.

Gen. Ray Henault, the Canadian who heads NATO's military committee, says Ottawa has shown "enormous leadership" and hopes that Canada will hang in for the long term. Allies such as Germany are publicly echoing that sentiment.

While a wholesale Canadian military pullout from Afghanistan is unlikely, Parliament will have to weigh some kind of reconfiguration when Harper brings down his Speech from the Throne on Oct. 16. The government's survival may hang on his vision for what comes next when our combat mission in Kandahar ends in February, 2009.

By then, Canada's contingent of 2,500 troops will have served for three years in a volatile region, at a cost of some \$4 billion and of at least 70 lives. Barring Parliament's assent to keep them there, all or some of the troops will be rotated out. That need not be a crisis. NATO has 26 member states, including well-armed nations such as Germany, France and Italy. Yet for years, the Americans, British, Canadians and Dutch have faced most of the risk. It's time others did their part.

In the meantime, Parliament must weigh what our troops might usefully do next. If the decision is to stay in Afghanistan, a reconfigured Canadian contingent might bolster security in Kabul or other quieter regions, train the Afghan army or provide backup for other NATO/Afghan forces, to cite a few examples. And more focus should be put on delivering our \$1.2 billion in aid.

But for Parliament to have that debate, it must have the facts. In Ottawa this week Harper rolled out Canada's ambassador to Afghanistan, Arif Lalani, and other officials to counter criticism that Canadian aid is not getting to those who need it most. They insisted Afghans are receiving food relief, medical help, schooling and other benefits. While the details are sketchy, at least Ottawa finally acknowledges the need to hold these projects up for critical scrutiny.

The same scrutiny must be given Afghan President Hamid Karzai's security forces. The army claims to have 37,000 troops in nine "combat brigades," and aims for 70,000 troops in the next year or two. But only 500 are in Kandahar. Where are the other 36,500? And police, supposedly 62,000 today and building to 82,000, are equally shadowy.

When Col. Gary Rice prepared a report last year on Canada's military mission for the Conference of Defence Associations, he found "the actual deployed strength of the Afghan national security forces, army and police, could not be determined from available open sources."

Why not? How can Parliament have a serious debate when it does not even know how many Afghan troops are mobilized to fight the Taliban, and what turf, exactly, they are expected to police and hold?

In Washington last week, Sen. Hillary Clinton and other senior Democrats urged U.S. President George Bush to set up a bipartisan "Afghanistan Study Group" to provide credible information and advice on training the Afghan forces, reconstruction, co-operation with Pakistan against the Taliban, and reducing corruption.

It is a good idea, and one that Parliament should copy. A Canadian study group could provide our lawmakers with the hard data and policy options they now lack. And it is clear that the Afghan debate needs less rhetoric, and more fact-based analysis.

Afghan debate needs more input

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In the meantime, Parliament must weigh what our troops might usefully do next. If the decision is to stay in Afghanistan, a reconfigured Canadian contingent might bolster security in Kabul or other quieter regions, train the Afghan army or provide backup for other NATO/Afghan forces, to cite a few examples. And more focus should be put on delivering our \$1.2 billion in aid.

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Suicide bombs at record levels: UN

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DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 281

More than 80% of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report today that showed attacks running at record levels this year.

Most of the suicide bombers carrying out attacks are poor, young and uneducated, and many are Afghan nationals, according to the report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers, other militants and security officials.

ISLAMIC SCHOOLS

But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers.

"The phenomenon of suicide attacks in Afghanistan is inherently linked to a variety of structures and institutions across the border in Pakistan," it said, noting that "over 80%" of bombers passed through training facilities in the Waziristan region of the country.

"Without dedicated efforts to destroy safe havens and bastions of support across the border, violence in Afghanistan is unlikely to disappear," the report said.

Pakistan, which has also experienced a recent surge in suicide attacks, admits that Taliban fighters have sought refuge on its side of the border and the government has deployed tens of thousands of troops there to try and uproot them.

Last month, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders they must co-operate to find a solution to the region's growing violence.

KEY TACTIC

"Afghanistan is not under fire alone now," Karzai told the leaders. "Unfortunately our Pakistani brothers are also under fire, and this fire, day by day, is getting hotter."

Suicide attacks — either from militants wearing bombs on their bodies or driving cars packed with explosives — have emerged as a key tactic in an increasingly bloody insurgency by Taliban militants against foreign troops and Karzai's U.S.-backed government.

In 2006, there were 123 recorded suicide attacks in Afghanistan, up from just 17 the year before, the report

said. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Harper's ready to take us in a new direction

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BYLINE: SHEILA
COPPS
WORD COUNT: 479

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's move to prorogue Parliament and roll out a new throne speech could be the ultimate political sleight of hand.

In one fell swoop, mistakes can be forgiven and a new direction can be launched.

But the new Parliament runs the risk of replicating the old if the prime minister won't learn from his errors.

Harper needs to loosen his iron grip on the machinery of government and nurture the image of a capable team, not a one-man crusade.

In preparing for an election, Harper's advisers are hoping to set the stage for a showdown with Opposition Leader Stephane Dion.

With Afghanistan as their crucible, they want to portray Dion as weak on terror, believing his awkwardness will deliver a second Tory mandate.

But when it comes to Afghanistan, there are more Canadians backing Dion than Harper.

Opposition parties generally don't defeat governments, they do it to themselves. Dion may be the unwitting beneficiary of voter revolt against the ruling party, but he certainly will not be the key to Harper's re-election.

HONEST POLITICIAN

The Liberal leader may not be the most photogenic politician, but he oozes honesty.

Twenty months into his mandate, the PM has not connected with ordinary voters. His demeanour is cool and controlling, with a penchant for military bravado.

A law-and-order agenda, sprinkled with military manoeuvres, northern sovereignty and prime ministerial photo ops in combat gear, have solidified his Conservative base but done little to grow it. That Conservative image is exactly what prevents Harper from achieving the momentum needed to achieve a majority.

He has already squandered the period of "new" Conservative government by neglecting to broaden his base with moderate policies appealing to the majority of Canadians.

Instead, Harper has been unable to break out of his conservative mindset, making foolhardy political moves such as wiping out the Court Challenges Program.

The upcoming throne speech provides the PM with an chance to reverse that trend. Balance and solid deliverables could attract those who have not supported his party before, or calm voters concerned about Harper's potential right-wing majority agenda.

During the next six weeks, government economists, political scientists, public servants and key Harper advisers will be poring over proposals intended to provide some political traction.

Meanwhile, ministers and members of Parliament will be lined up to lobby for their pet local projects.

For what its worth, here is my five-point plan to move Harper toward the moderate middle. (As with any free advice, you get what you pay for.)

1. Significant new investment in the CBC. A major commitment would assuage the fears of many who think a Harper majority would close the place down.

Cut the GST

2. Strategic GST reduction. A move to prune the most hated tax in Canada sells to the masses. A 100% GST rebate to eligible hospital authorities, as proposed by the Association of Canadian Academic Healthcare Organizations, would hit the health hot button.

3. Major investment in post-secondary education. The baby boomers are spawning a whole new generation of students. Assistance to educate kids would resonate well with the middle-classes.

4. A substantial hike in international development assistance. Love him or hate him, U2's Bono has put world poverty on the map. More international aid appeals to Canadians' sense of fairness and balances the war agenda.

5. Significant seniors investment. Harper already has a good chunk of the seniors vote. Spending on those who came before us is a feel-good move that would counter the inevitable (and well-heeled) election assault on income trust changes by third party advertisers.

Whatever he thinks of those suggestions, there is one thing the prime minister should remember.

When it comes to a future Tory election victory, don't count on Stephane Dion to provide the winning conditions.

Afghan army, Canucks in new mission Joint operation regains lost area

SOURCETAG 0709090716
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 10
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
WORD COUNT: 260

Canadian soldiers have launched a new combat mission in southern Afghanistan in a joint operation with the Afghan army and police involving most of the Canadian battle group in Kandahar, with tanks, light armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers.

The military said Operation Keeping Goodwill in the Zhari district, west of Kandahar City, was aimed at re-asserting control over an area that was previously won, but in recent months lost by Afghan National Police (ANP).

"The fact is that in that specific region of Zhari we have suffered losses, especially on the ANP side, because they were not able to secure specific locations," Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, chief of operations, told CTV Newsnet.

'HAD TO GO BACK'

"This is the reason why we had to go back there to make sure they were able to perform their duty as policemen and soldiers."

Capt. Josee Bilodeau, a military spokesman, described yesterday's operation as a success, saying the Canadians achieved their objective "within 12 hours, without any casualties."

Last September, the Canadian military carried out Operation Medusa in Zhari and Panjwai districts. That operation saw the Canadian military involved in some of its toughest combat since the Korean War.

SUICIDE BOMBERS

Meanwhile, a report issued yesterday said more than 80% of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan.

Most of the suicide bombers carrying out attacks are poor, young and uneducated, and many are Afghan nationals, according to the UN report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers, other militants and security officials.

But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers. The report noted that "over 80%" of bombers passed through training facilities in the Waziristan region of Pakistan. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Fallen soldier honoured

SOURCETAG 0709090715

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.09.09

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 10

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo by Dave Chidley, CP Natasha Ruckpaul hugs her children, Benjamin and Mila, in Hamilton yesterday at the funeral for her husband, Maj. Ray Ruckpaul, who was found shot in his barracks in Afghanistan. 2. photo of RAY RUCKPAUL
Compassionate

BYLINE: CP

DATELINE: HAMILTON

WORD COUNT: 159

Military, family and even veterans among a crowd of bystanders honoured Maj. Ray Ruckpaul yesterday at the Hamilton native's funeral.

Ruckpaul, 42, was found shot in his barracks in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Aug. 29 and died shortly afterwards.

Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron said Ruckpaul was a fine officer and had a particular compassion for the children in Afghanistan and in Croatia, where he also did two tours of duty.

Bystanders outside Church of the Ascension watched silently and sombrely from across the street as a rifle salute was given and Ruckpaul's casket passed through a military honour guard, followed by his wife and children and his parents. The bystanders included a group of veterans holding lowered Canadian flags.

Ruckpaul, the 70th soldier to die in Afghanistan since 2002, lived in Germany with his wife and two children. The Hamilton native joined the armed forces prior to studying geology at McMaster University. He was serving at the headquarters of NATO's International Security Assistance Force at the time of his death.

KEYWORDS=CANADA

Pakistan said to train terrorists

SOURCETAG 0709090255
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
BYLINE: SUN MEDIA NEWS SERVICES
DATELINE: KABUL
COLUMN: News Digest
WORD COUNT: 76

More than 80 per cent of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report that shows attacks running at record levels this year. Meanwhile, two British soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack yesterday in southern Afghanistan and a number of other troops were wounded, Britain's Defence Ministry said. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Canadians refight for lost area

SOURCETAG 0709090254
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
BYLINE: SUN MEDIA NEWS SERVICES
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
COLUMN: News Digest
WORD COUNT: 59

Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar province. Operation Keeping Goodwill in the Zhari district, west of Kandahar City, is aimed at re-asserting control over an area that was previously won, but in recent months lost by Afghani police. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Hamilton soldier remembered

SOURCETAG 0709090252
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8
BYLINE: SUN MEDIA NEWS SERVICES
DATELINE: HAMILTON
COLUMN: News Digest
WORD COUNT: 77

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All's fair with good weather The Warriors' Day parade is a big hit, particularly after bad weather gave this year's Western Fair a rough start.

SOURCETAG: 0709090240
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A2

ILLUSTRATION: 5 photos by Sue Reeve 1. **FRIENDS GREEN WITH ENVY:** Liana Knezevic, 19, of Woodstock, struggles to carry a giant frog which she won at the Western Fair. 2. **AIR SUPPORT:** The Canadian Harvard Aircraft Association presented a flypast during a ceremony, which followed the Warriors' Day Parade, including the missing man formation. 3. **CROWD PLEASER:** Frank Gaudio of London, a veteran of the Second World War, flashes the V for victory sign as he rides in a 1944 Ford Universal Carrier into the Western Fair during the 56th edition of the Warriors' Day parade. 4. **COMPUTING:** Hailey Ellis, 11 months, locks eyes on Rock-It-Robot with her grandmother Claudette Faulkner of London yesterday. The nine-foot robot features three computers in its head and two in its chest. 5. **GAME FACES:** Three-year-old Matthew Dykxhoorn of Ingersoll has lots of encouragement from carny Rob Tomberlin, left, and his dad, Steve, who gave him a lift as he played the Frogee game.

BYLINE: KATHY RUMLESKI, SUN MEDIA

WORD COUNT: 288

When Second World War veteran Frank Gaudio gave the victory sign yesterday during the Warriors' Day parade, the crowd watching erupted into cheers.

About 750 marched in the parade, organized by the Western Fair Association, including cadets, with veterans making up about one-third of the number.

The parade included Afghanistan vets for the first time.

When Gaudio gave the sign, "the crowd was (applauding) and saying, 'Way to go!' " said parade co-ordinator Jenny von Ruczicki.

Gaudio, an RCR sergeant, was riding in a 1944 Ford Universal Carrier along the route, which wound from Boyle Memorial Community Centre to the King Street entrance of the fair grounds and into the grandstand.

"He was so proud to be up there. He was beaming," said von Ruczicki, whose younger brother Andrew just returned from six months' duty in Afghanistan.

The Canadian Harvard Aircraft Association did a fly-by, including the missing man formation during the ceremony, which was part of activities on the second day of the Western Fair.

First-day fair attendance was 15,743, down about 1,600 from last year. Officials said the rain Friday likely kept some away.

All's fair with good weather The Warriors' Day parade is a big hit, particularly after bad weather gave this year's Western Fair a rough start.

But yesterday's warm weather and sunny skies is expected to boost attendance, once the numbers are counted

"I'm sure we'll make that up today and more," said spokesperson Heather Blackwell. "I can tell by the look of the midway that it's busy. You couldn't have asked for a better day."

Londoner Carla Tidmand was enjoying the fair with her 15-month-old son Aydan.

She competed in a water race in which participants use a water gun to hit a target to move a character. She won a stuffed TV character named Boots for Aydan.

"He loves Dora the Explorer," she said, which is the show in which Boots is featured.

Tidmand has been attending the fair for 20 years. She said she usually goes to the fair four or five days during its 10-day run.

A highlight in the Agriplex was the birth of a 3.6-kilogram lamb named Peaches.

"I've seen a baby horse, chick, baby cow, but I've never seen a baby lamb," said seven-year-old Jessica Giffen as she called her grandmother and mother over to take a look.

Her brother Sean said he liked the female lamb's name.

"It's very appropriate because of the colour," he said, which was golden yellow.

Activities today include a baby show, demolition derby and a Mustang horse show. The fair continues until Sept. 16.

IF YOU GO

What: 132nd Western Fair

When: Today, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Where: Western Fair grounds, 900 King St. and surrounding area.

Admission: \$10 at gate; kids 10-and-under, free

Grandstand: Dodge Rodeo, 1 p.m.; Demolition Derby, 7 p.m.; both are free

Rides: Fans can enjoy two rides for the price of one. KEYWORDS=LOCAL

All's fair with good weather The Warriors' Day parade is a big hit, particularly after bad weather ga04 this year

Suicide bombers train in Pakistan: UN report Many see NATO troops as occupiers of Afghanistan

SOURCETAG 0709090615
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 48
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 370

More than 80% of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report today that shows attacks running at record levels this year.

Most of the suicide bombers carrying out attacks are poor, young and uneducated, and many are Afghan nationals, according to the report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers, other militants and security officials.

But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers.

"The phenomenon of suicide attacks in Afghanistan is inherently linked to a variety of structures and institutions across the border in Pakistan," it said, noting that "over 80%" of bombers passed through training facilities in the Waziristan region of the country.

"Without dedicated efforts to destroy safe havens and bastions of support across the border, violence in Afghanistan is unlikely to disappear," the report said.

Pakistan, which has also experienced a recent surge in suicide attacks, admits that Taliban fighters have sought refuge on its side of the border and the government has deployed tens of thousands of troops there to try to uproot them.

Last month, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders they must co-operate to find a solution to the region's growing violence.

"Afghanistan is not under fire alone now," Karzai told the leaders. "Unfortunately our Pakistani brothers are also under fire, and this fire, day by day, is getting hotter."

Suicide attacks – either from militants wearing bombs on their bodies or driving cars packed with explosives – have emerged as a key tactic in an increasingly bloody insurgency by Taliban militants against foreign troops and Karzai's U.S.-backed government.

In 2006, there were 123 recorded suicide attacks in Afghanistan, up from just 17 the year before, the report said. There were 103 attacks as of the end of August this year, putting 2007 on course to set a new benchmark, the UN said.

While the targets of such attacks have been exclusively military or government in nature, 80% of the 183 victims until June this year were civilian, the report said.

The report also said the bombs were not claiming more lives per attack, suggesting little sustained innovation in technique.

The report's authors interviewed 23 jailed people who had been convicted or were awaiting trial in connection with attempted or failed suicide attacks. Twenty-one were Afghan nationals, although most had spent time as refugees in Pakistan. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Canucks take offensive Launch new Afghan combat operation to secure key points

SOURCETAG 0709090612
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 44
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 112

Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar.

The military says operation "Keeping Goodwill" is aimed at re-asserting control over checkpoints.

The joint operation with the Afghan national army and police involves most of the Canadian battle group in Kandahar, with tanks, light armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers.

The Canadians have been operating in Zhari district, west of Kandahar, a region Capt. Josee Bilodeau says is tough because of the number of improvised explosive devices in the area.

She says today's operation was a success, and the Canadians achieved their objective "within 12 hours, without any casualties."

In September, 2006, the Canadian military carried out Operation Medusa in Zhari and Panjwai districts. That operation saw the Canadian military involved in some of its toughest combat since the Korean War.

KEYWORDS=CANADA

Taliban attack kills two British soldiers

SOURCETAG 0709090605
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 38
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: LONDON
WORD COUNT: 113

Two British soldiers were killed in a Taliban attack yesterday in southern Afghanistan and a number of other troops were wounded, Britain's Ministry of Defence said.

Two of the wounded soldiers were in serious condition, the ministry said in a statement.

The soldiers were part of an operation to disrupt Taliban activity south of Garmsir in Helmand province, when their patrol was attacked, the ministry said.

"Sadly, the two soldiers were killed during the subsequent heavy firefight to repel the enemy and a number of Taliban were also killed," the statement said.

British troops have been engaged in fierce, and increasingly bloody, fighting against the resurgent Taliban in Helmand for the past few months. The ministry said 78 British personnel have been killed in Afghanistan since 2001. KEYWORDS=WORLD

NATO protesters vigilant in Victoria

SOURCETAG 0709090458
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 27
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: VICTORIA
WORD COUNT: 168

Protesters vowed yesterday to maintain a resistance vigil outside a fenced-off downtown hotel where 26 generals from the NATO military alliance were meeting.

About 300 protesters marched to the hotel chanting anti-NATO slogans, but there were no signs of violence or tensions that have erupted at other world gatherings involving military and political leaders.

"I'm here to say, 'no, to NATO,' so that Canada can maintain its peaceful reputation," said Janet Hawksley.

Hawksley, 86, said she attends every anti-war protest she can, because "it's the only world we've got."

Despite a heavy police presence, the mood remained peaceful except for the arrest of an elderly naked male cyclist on the front steps of the B.C. legislature.

Protesters stood outside the hotel fence calling on the generals to come out and speak to them.

At one point, a man appeared on the hotel balcony, and the protesters, believing he was a NATO general, yelled, "jump, jump."

The protesters said they wanted to deliver a summons to the NATO leaders that said they've been convicted of international war crimes, but they had no luck getting the document inside the hotel.

They chanted "bring down the generals" and "stop the NATO war machine."

They called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to pull Canada's troops out of Afghanistan. One of the chants called Harper and U.S. President George Bush killers. **KEYWORDS=NATIONAL**

Stolen portrait back in gallery

SOURCETAG 0709090457
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 27
ILLUSTRATION: photo of CHRISTOS KARIGIANNIS Slain Canadian soldier
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 134

The portrait of a slain Canadian soldier has been returned to its Ottawa gallery a month after it was stolen -- along with an apology note.

The portrait was of Sgt. Christos Karigiannis, who was killed in Afghanistan in June along with two other members of the Edmonton-based 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

News reports say the painting, slightly chipped, arrived at the Dale Smith Gallery on Wednesday, returned by the repentant thief through express post.

A one-line, hand-written note was scrawled on the box: "Je m'excuse," French for "I'm sorry."

Ottawa artist Heidi Conrod painted portraits of three fallen soldiers after reading about their deaths in the newspaper.

Karigiannis' portrait was stolen in August, just before it was to be picked up by a friend of the Karigiannis family.

Police are still investigating the theft.

The reports said the note included a return address, but gallery owner Dale Smith suspects the address is not that of the thief.

"I opened it up and it was like a treasure, seeing it in the bubble wrap in the box. It was a wonderful feeling," Smith said. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

New combat mission starts

SOURCETAG 0709090456
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 26
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
WORD COUNT: 130

Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan have launched a new combat operation in Kandahar province.

The military said Operation Keeping Goodwill in the Zhari district, west of Kandahar City, was aimed at re-asserting control over an area that was previously won, but in recent months lost by Afghan National Police.

The joint operation with the Afghan army and police involved most of the Canadian battle group in Kandahar, with tanks, light armoured vehicles and hundreds of soldiers.

"The fact that in that specific region of Zhari we have suffered losses, especially on the ANP side, because they were not able to secure specific locations," Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, chief of operations, told CTV Newsnet.

"This is the reason why we had to go back there to make sure they were able to perform their duty as policemen and soldiers."

Capt. Josee Bilodeau, a military spokeswoman, described the operation as a success, saying Canadians achieved the objective "within 12 hours, without any casualties." **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

UN report eyes suicide bombs

SOURCETAG 0709090455
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 26
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 148

More than 80% of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the UN said in a report yesterday that showed attacks running at record levels this year.

Most of the suicide bombers carrying out attacks are poor, young and uneducated, and many are Afghan nationals, according to the report, which was based on interviews with failed attackers, militants and security officials.

But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers.

"The phenomenon of suicide attacks in Afghanistan is inherently linked to a variety of structures and institutions across the border in Pakistan," it said, noting that "over 80 percent" of bombers passed through training facilities in the Waziristan region of the country.

"Without dedicated efforts to destroy safe havens and bastions of support across the border, violence in Afghanistan is unlikely to disappear," the report said. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Harper's ready to take us in a new direction

SOURCETAG 0709090445
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.09
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 20
BYLINE: SHEILA COPPS
WORD COUNT: 479

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's move to prorogue Parliament and roll out a new throne speech could be the ultimate political sleight of hand.

In one fell swoop, mistakes can be forgiven and a new direction can be launched.

But the new Parliament runs the risk of replicating the old if the prime minister won't learn from his errors.

Harper needs to loosen his iron grip on the machinery of government and nurture the image of a capable team, not a one-man crusade.

In preparing for an election, Harper's advisers are hoping to set the stage for a showdown with Opposition Leader Stéphane Dion.

With Afghanistan as their crucible, they want to portray Dion as weak on terror, believing his awkwardness will deliver a second Tory mandate.

But when it comes to Afghanistan, there are more Canadians backing Dion than Harper.

Opposition parties generally don't defeat governments, they do it to themselves. Dion may be the unwitting beneficiary of voter revolt against the ruling party, but he certainly will not be the key to Harper's re-election.

Honest politician

The Liberal leader may not be the most photogenic politician, but he oozes honesty.

Twenty months into his mandate, the PM has not connected with ordinary voters. His demeanour is cool and controlling, with a penchant for military bravado.

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Whatever he thinks of those suggestions, there is one thing the prime minister should remember.

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Ribbon rally falls flat at city hall McIver insists support is there

SOURCETAG: 0709090423

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.09.09

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 4

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Jack Cusano, Sun Media Bob Irving made his own stickers to show which side of the Yellow Ribbon debate he is on. Yesterday's rally backing the use of Support Our Troops decals on city vehicles -- organized by would-be alderman Merle Terlesky -- drew few people.

BYLINE: KATIE SCHNEIDER, SUN MEDIA

WORD COUNT: 234

Despite poor turnout at an afternoon rally, Ald. Ric McIver said citizens across the city back his initiative to adorn their vehicles with Support Our Troops decals.

The Ward 12 alderman was on hand at city hall for the rally yesterday in favour of the decals, one of only 16 in attendance.

"I know the support is there," he said.

While the city celebrates September as Yellow Ribbon Month, council is scheduled to debate giving city employees the choice to stick the ribbons on their municipal vehicles.

McIver, who first pushed the motion in July to allow the patriotic symbols on the city's fleet, reiterated the ribbons are a simple way for Calgarians and city employees, many of whom serve in the military, to show their gratitude.

"This isn't about Afghanistan, it's just about saying thank-you," he said.

"This is not about a particular type of action, this is about saying thank-you to those who put themselves in harm's way."

Council defeated McIver's motion in July, opting instead to sell the ribbons at city facilities with proceeds going to military families.

At the rally, McIver emphasized Canada's troops not only serve their country in military operations overseas, they often assist with city and provincial disasters like floods.

"The point is they are always there," McIver said.

Rally organizer Merle Terlesky, who plans on running for alderman in next month's election, said he hopes council changes its mind.

Lynn Scheuerman, who was one of the handful of people who attended the rally, said she agreed a thank-you is in order for the men and women who serve the country in many different ways.

"Our troops are all over the place," she said.

"They put their lives on the line and so for the families that paid the ultimate price, we need to support them."

Local comedian Cris Nannarone agreed the issue is about supporting the troops, not the war.

"I don't support war at all, but it's a sad fact it's going on and the kids are there now," he said.

KEYWORDS=ALBERTA

Most Afghan suicide bombers trained in Pakistan, UN says

PUBLICATION: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.09

PAGE: A9

SECTION: World Wire

WORD COUNT: 374

CP Wire Chris Brummitt KABUL — More than 80 per cent of suicide bombers in Afghanistan are recruited and trained in neighbouring Pakistan, the United Nations said in a report today that showed attacks running at record levels this year.

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But the report also stressed the role of refugee camps and Islamic schools in the tribal areas of northwestern Pakistan in the recruitment and training of the bombers.

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"Without dedicated efforts to destroy safe havens and bastions of support across the border, violence in Afghanistan is unlikely to disappear," the report said.

Surge Pakistan, which has also experienced a recent surge in suicide attacks, admits that Taliban fighters have sought refuge on its side of the border and the government has deployed tens of thousands of troops there to try and uproot them.

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"Afghanistan is not under fire alone now," Karzai told the leaders.

"Unfortunately, our Pakistani brothers are also under fire, and this fire, day by day, is getting hotter." Suicide attacks — either from militants wearing bombs on their bodies or driving cars packed with explosives — have emerged as a key tactic in an increasingly bloody insurgency by Taliban militants against foreign troops and Karzai's U.S.-backed government.

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While the targets of such attacks have been exclusively military or government in nature, 80 per cent of the 183 victims until June this year were civilian, the report said.

— Associated Press

Antiwar demo marked by peace

PUBLICATION: WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.09

PAGE: A7

SECTION: Canada Wire

WORD COUNT: 388

CP Wire Dirk Meissner VICTORIA -- Protesters vowed Saturday to maintain a resistance vigil outside a fenced-off downtown hotel where 26 generals from the NATO military alliance were meeting.

About 300 protesters marched to the hotel chanting anti-NATO slogans, but there were no signs of violence or tensions that have erupted at other world gatherings involving military and political leaders.

"I'm here to say, 'no to NATO,' so that Canada can maintain its peaceful reputation," said Janet Hawksley.

Hawksley, 86, said she attends every antiwar protest she can, because "it's the only world we've got." Despite a heavy police presence, the mood remained peaceful except for the arrest of an elderly naked male cyclist on the front steps of the B.C. legislature.

Protesters stood outside the hotel fence calling on the generals to come out and speak to them. At one point, a man appeared on the hotel balcony, and the protesters, believing he was a NATO general, yelled, "jump, jump." The protesters said they wanted to deliver a summons to the NATO leaders that said they've been convicted of international war crimes, but they had no luck getting the document inside the hotel.

They chanted "bring down the generals" and "stop the NATO war machine." They called on Prime Minister Stephen Harper to pull Canada's troops out of Afghanistan, and one of the chants called Harper and U.S. President George Bush "killers." Many of the protesters carried placards accusing NATO of using weapons filled with depleted uranium and bombs filled with highly flammable white phosphorus.

Sociologist Bo Filter called on the protesters to form alliances on the Internet in an effort to force NATO to disband.

The NATO leaders are believed to be mapping strategy to ease strains in the alliance over the war in Afghanistan.

The protracted battle to put down the Taliban insurgency has Canada and the Netherlands questioning their deployment of combat troops in the region.

Gen. Ray Henault, chairman of NATO's military committee and former chief of Canada's defence staff, said earlier the alliance has not received formal notice from Ottawa that it intends to end its combat commitment as scheduled in February 2009.

He said the alliance anticipates there will be changes but has not begun the formal process of looking for replacement nations.

One Victoria protester said the show of force against NATO will do little to change the minds of the military leaders.

"I don't think this is really useful except as a feel good for the people who are here," said the woman.

Afghan suicide attackers schooled in Pakistan: UN

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DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 213

KABUL, Afghanistan – The spiralling number of suicide attacks in Afghanistan are often carried out by young Afghan men who pass through religious schools in Pakistan, a United Nations report says.

Some attackers appeared driven by anger at the presence of international forces and the civilians being killed in their anti–Taliban operations, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan study says.

Others were motivated by religious zeal or were young boys who had been abducted and forced into the task or somehow persuaded they would survive and earn rewards such as cash, a motorcycle or a cellphone, it says.

There were 77 suicide attacks in the first six months of this year, about twice the number for the same period last year and 26 times higher than from January to June 2005, the survey says.

This year until June, suicide bombings killed 193 people, 121 of whom were civilians, even though three–quarters of the attacks were targeted at Afghan and international security forces, the report says.

Sixty–two Afghan security personnel and 10 international soldiers were also killed.

There were five between 2001 and 2005 -- and they jumped in 2006 to become today an "integral part" of the Taliban's strategy but also used by other Islamist anti–government groups.

Little was known about the attackers said the study, which was based on interviews with about two dozen men jailed in Kabul for failed suicide attacks, and analysis of data and media reports.

Canadian, Afghan forces launch bid to recoup lost ground; Biggest combat operation in more than a month 'went very well,' officer says

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Andrew Mayeda
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen; With files from Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 479

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Canadian Forces launched their biggest combat operation in more than a month early yesterday, pushing into the Zhari district of Kandahar province to clear the way for Afghan security forces to reclaim recently lost ground.

Canadian troops exchanged fire with the Taliban and encountered a number of improvised explosive devices, said Lt.-Col. Claude Fournier, Canada's chief of operations here.

However, no Canadian soldiers were killed or seriously injured in the early stages of Operation Khar Khowhai — Keeping Goodwill.

Lt.-Col. Fournier added a small number of Taliban were killed in the clashes, but he could not say how many.

"Of course, they tried to ambush us, but we were able to succeed in gaining the piece of ground that we had planned to (gain)," said Lt.-Col. Fournier.

He said Canadian troops, fighting alongside the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, secured a number of "key sectors" in the district, a traditional stronghold of the Taliban.

He said there were no reports of casualties among the Afghan security forces.

Canadian Forces, and in particular the Afghan National Police, had recently suffered losses in those sectors, said Lt.-Col. Fournier. "It's an operation that will last for several weeks. Today was the first stage of the operation and it went very well." Canadian Forces were believed to have secured much of Zhari, located to the west of Kandahar City, in a series of operations beginning last fall.

But the Afghan National Police, which has become notorious for its corruption and incompetence, was unable to hold a number of checkpoints in the district.

Over the next couple of weeks, Canadian troops will train Afghan security forces while engineers build new checkpoints to be manned by the Afghans, said Lt.-Col. Fournier.

Canadian engineers have already been building such checkpoints for several weeks as part of a separate operation called Garanday Zmarny — Strong Lion.

Canadian, Afghan forces launch bid to recoup lost ground; Biggest combat operation in more than a month 'went very well,' officer says

"We will continue in the same vein to ensure that our presence in this part of the province is well established and we put the right conditions in place so that the Afghan army and police can succeed," said Lt.-Col. Fournier.

It is hoped the deployment will allow reconstruction work in the district to resume, he added.

Yesterday, two British soldiers were killed in Afghanistan after being attacked by Taliban fighters during an operation, the Ministry of Defence in London said.

Two more are in a serious condition while an unspecified number of other troops were also wounded, though less seriously.

"The soldiers were taking part in a pre-planned operation to disrupt Taliban activity, south of Garmsir, southern Helmand province, when their patrol was attacked by enemy fighters," the ministry said in a statement.

"Sadly, the two soldiers were killed during the subsequent heavy firefight to repel the enemy and a number of Taliban were also killed." The injured troops have been taken to Camp Bastion and Kandahar airfield.

The deaths bring to 78 the number of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion of the country.

Canada has about 2,300 troops stationed in Afghanistan in support of the NATO-led coalition that is trying to secure and rebuild the war-torn country.

Seventy Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed in Afghanistan since 2002.

Canada's military commitment here ends in February 2009. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said he will seek the consensus of Parliament before extending the mission.

NATO mission in Afghanistan will eventually succeed: general; Victoria protesters challenge Canada's role in 'world terrorism'

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: John McKay, the Victoria Times Colonist / NATOprotesters gathered at the Cenotaph on the grounds of the B.C. legislature around noon before marching to the Grand Pacific Hotel to protest North Atlantic Treaty Organization conference in Victoria, B.C. ;

DATELINE: VICTORIA

BYLINE: David Pugliese and Louise Dickson

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen and The Victoria Times Colonist

WORD COUNT: 416

VICTORIA – Afghanistan is "job one" for NATO, and it will ultimately be successful in the south Asian country, says the Canadian general who heads the alliance's military committee.

Gen. Ray Henault said the meetings here of NATO's top military commanders went smoothly and progress was made on long-term planning issues for missions such as Afghanistan. He said, for instance, that NATO will develop better criteria to measure progress and effectiveness for operations including Afghanistan, as well as develop an alliance-wide policy of better understanding the lessons learned from such missions.

"Afghanistan is NATO's job one," said Gen. Henault as the senior officers wrapped up two days of discussions on planning, preparing and conducting NATO operations.

But the general said he doesn't share the perspective of some defence analysts that Afghanistan is a "make or break" mission for the alliance. "It's important, but it's evolutionary," he explained. "Yes, we'll succeed. I'm sure in the longer term you'll find that Afghanistan was one of those steps on the way to an even better NATO."

As NATO leaders discussed military strategy behind police fences at a downtown hotel, about 200 noisy protesters rallied outside, chanting

"NATO killers" as they marched, followed by calls of "Bring Down the Generals."

Jodi Wood joined the rally to protest Canada's involvement in NATO.

"We're a democratic nation and I think we should have a right as a civilian society to make the decision to pull Canada out of what is basically world terrorism," said Ms. Wood.

Many protesters accused NATO of using prohibited weapons such as cluster bombs, white phosphorous and depleted uranium to kill and maim innocent civilians.

Raging Granny Fran Thoburn found pictures online of babies deformed by depleted uranium and had them laminated on posters.

"We need to get our heads out of the sand and realize we are killing and maiming total populations," Ms. Thoburn said.

Members of the military committee were surprised by the protest's focus on illegal weapons, said Lt.-Col. Tony White, public information officer for NATO's military committee.

After consulting with senior officers, Lt.-Col. White told the media that NATO is not using cluster munitions or depleted uranium in Afghanistan. "Depleted uranium was an issue in Kosovo and Bosnia several years ago. Some nations were using it, but there was no proof it harmed people," he said.

In the past five years, the demands on NATO have been increasing, he said. "The international community sees NATO as a very responsible and professional force that is highly successful."

"You have to go to Afghanistan to see the progress. The (gross domestic product) is up 14 per cent. Young girls are in school. Afghanistan is much better off than it was two years ago. If they listen to our soldiers, they'll know we're doing a lot more good than bad."

Canadian Forces launch offensive; No casualties in 'Keeping Goodwill'

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KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: ANDREW MAYEDA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 246

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