

Table of Contents

<u>Canadians vigilant as Ramadan begins with Taliban threat in Afghanistan</u>	1
<u>75 killed in fighting across Afghanistan</u>	3
<u>Allies compare technology and tactics; aim to reduce friendly fire casualties</u>	4
<u>Cda-Friendly-Fire</u>	6
<u>Afghan-Cda-Ramadan</u>	7
<u>Afghan-Cda-Ramadan-Update (Canadians prepared for worst)</u>	8
<u>It's decision time: Are we in or out of Afghanistan?</u>	9
<u>Apparent suicide blast kills 15 Pakistani troops</u>	11
<u>NATO chief praises German Afghan contribution</u>	12
<u>Germans staying out of south</u>	13
<u>Canadians vigilant as Ramadan dawns; Taliban expected to use Muslim holy month to intensify bombings, suicide attacks</u>	14
<u>Test Taliban 'peace' bid</u>	16
<u>Regaining trust of Canadians</u>	17
<u>Pakistan blast kills 15 elite soldiers; Latest suicide attack coincides with visit of American deputy state secretary</u>	19
<u>Seriously, folks Thanks to our military success, Canada's gaining world's respect</u>	21
<u>Taliban said ready to increase attacks</u>	23
<u>Effort aims to cut friendly fire casualties goal</u>	24
<u>Bloody Ramadan in Afghanistan</u>	25
<u>Friendly fire under attack</u>	26
<u>Troops gear up for Ramadan attacks</u>	27
<u>Nations fight friendly fire</u>	28
<u>Aid is achieving results in Afghanistan</u>	29

Table of Contents

<u>Prepare for a lot of hot air and a lack of clarity on Afghanistan.....</u>	30
<u>Terror suspect arrested.....</u>	32
<u>Countries take aim at friendly fire.....</u>	33
<u>BATTLE OF THREE QUEBEC RIDINGS Tories seek a breakthrough in by-elections As Harper begins drive for a majority in Quebec, Bloc Quebecois defends sovereignty while Liberals defend Stephane Dion.....</u>	34
<u>Where are our allies? Where is Germany?.....</u>	37
<u>Troops set for Ramadan; Sensitivity promoted during holy fast days, while staying vigilant.....</u>	39
<u>Windsor warmth, support brightened soldier's visit.....</u>	41
<u>Military cemetery 'a beacon of remembrance'; Veterans' graves to get same respect as those of combat casualties.....</u>	42
<u>Sticker debate takes 'sad' political turn; Both sides lament what's happened to Support Our Troops decal issue.....</u>	44
<u>PM's Afghan mood swings.....</u>	46
<u>Bomb blast targets Pakistani commandos; Attack during meal kills 15, wounds 11 at high-security camp.....</u>	48
<u>Troops briefed on holy month behaviour; Cards advise sensitivity for Ramadan.....</u>	49
<u>France antes up.....</u>	51
<u>Dion stumbles on war; In attacking Afghan mission, he's drawing attention to Liberals' role in the war.....</u>	52
<u>Pakistan: Suicide blast kills 15.....</u>	54
<u>Timing right for a debate.....</u>	55
<u>Suicide bombing at camp kills 15 elite commandos; Pakistani president reaffirms country's commitment to U.S.....</u>	56

Canadians vigilant as Ramadan begins with Taliban threat in Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.09.13
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 396

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP) _ The Muslim holy month of Ramadan began Thursday in Afghanistan with a reported call from the Taliban for increased attacks on international forces.

Canadian troops say they are prepared for the worst but won't curb any planned operations because of the threat.

Lt. Derrick Farnham, spokesman for the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team at Kandahar Airfield, said the threat may be increased at a time when the Taliban are trying to convince insurgents to die as suicide bombers.

"It could be a time that's utilized by the insurgents to be more aggressive, so we will prepare for that worst-case scenario," Farnham said.

Indeed, according to an unsourced report by the Al-Jazeera news network, the Taliban have said it will launch a new operation during the holy month involving suicide bombings, ambushes and other attacks.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan has said insurgents increased attacks during Ramadan last year and that the same may happen this year.

Coalition officials said Thursday that more than 75 people, including 45 suspected Taliban militants, had died in fierce fighting in various parts of Afghanistan. No Afghan or coalition soldiers were wounded or killed in the recent fighting.

Farnham said the Taliban threat won't curb Canadian operations in Afghanistan.

"We will be more vigilant as we do them, but we will continue with our plans," he said.

Capt. Philippe Zongia Mbali of the provincial operations centre said there is no particular alert among Canadian troops, who are always prepared for insurgent attacks.

"We're prepared for everything," Zongia Mbali said. "That's our responsibility. That's our job."

During Ramadan, which occurs this year from Sept. 13 to Oct. 12, Muslims around the world fast from sunrise to sunset to mark the time the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

This year, Canadian soldiers have been issued cards explaining what Ramadan is and setting out some rules of conduct.

"We will do things like be aware that because they're fasting, they will be hungry. We will not eat in front of them, if at all possible. We will not drink in front of them, smoke or chew gum," Farnham said.

Just as Ramadan started, Canadian troops in Afghanistan wrapped up Operation Keeping Goodwill.

Despite a few firefights and a roadside bomb explosion that wounded two soldiers, the joint mission by Canadians and Afghan national security forces established two permanent checkpoints along a stretch of road running through so-called Taliban country, in the Zhari district west of Kandahar city.

Insurgents had established their own checkpoints, which were dismantled.

The aim of the operation was to re-establish the international presence in the Zhari district, driving insurgents out of what has been a stronghold.

A total of about 700 Canadian soldiers and Afghan security forces were involved in the operation.

75 killed in fighting across Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.09.13
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE POLITICS
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 297

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) _ Heavy fighting in Afghanistan killed at least 75 people as the Muslim holy month Ramadan began, including 45 suspected Taliban militants who died in air strikes and Afghan army gunfire, officials said.

In the southern province Uruzgan, insurgents attacked a joint Afghan army and U.S.-led coalition patrol with rocket-propelled grenades and gunfire Wednesday, the coalition said in a statement.

Afghan soldiers ``cleared" Taliban fighters from firing positions within the village Aduzay, while attack aircraft destroyed some fighting positions, it said. The coalition said more than 45 Taliban were killed.

Fighting has increased dramatically in the last several weeks in Afghanistan, with more than 300 suspected Taliban fighters killed since late August, the U.S.-led coalition said.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force said insurgents increased attacks during Ramadan last year and the same may happen this year.

In fighting elsewhere in the country, an Afghan-NATO patrol discovered and defused three roadside bombs Wednesday in the Zhari district of Kandahar province and shortly after was ambushed by Taliban fighters. A helicopter gunship joined the ensuing battle, which left 12 militants dead, said Syed Agha Saqib, the provincial police chief said Thursday.

In Zabul province, 11 Taliban fighters were killed during a battle with NATO and Afghan soldiers Wednesday, said Gulab Shah Alikhail, the governor's spokesman said Thursday.

Three police were killed in Herat province during a five-hour fight Wednesday and one Afghan soldier was killed in Farah province Thursday, officials said. Two civilians were killed by a bomb hidden in a cart that exploded near a police station in Takhar province, in the north.

Police in Helmand province shot and killed a would-be suicide bomber before he could detonate his explosives Thursday, said Gen. Mohammad Hussein Andiwai, the provincial police chief.

More than 4,300 people _ mostly militants _ have died in insurgency related violence this year.

Allies compare technology and tactics; aim to reduce friendly fire casualties

DATE: 2007.09.13
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 556

OTTAWA (CP) _ Most of the countries fighting in Afghanistan are comparing technology and ideas this week in the Nevada and California deserts in the first large-scale multinational effort to reduce friendly fire casualties.

Canada's contribution to the demonstration involves three CF-18 fighter jets and a handful of soldiers and fighting vehicles from 1st Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, based in Petawawa, Ont.

It comes just a few weeks after investigations in both Canada and the United States determined better training, equipment and co-ordination could have prevented the accidental strafing of a company of Canadian soldiers last year.

The split-second mistake, by the pilot of an American A-10 Thunderbolt, left Pte. Mark Graham dead and 30 other members of Charles Company wounded at Ma'sum Ghar, about 40 kilometres west of Kandahar.

It was the second deadly air-to-ground friendly fire attack in Afghanistan since 2002. Four Canadians were killed and eight wounded after a U.S. F-16 fighter mistook a training exercise at Tarnack Farms for a real attack.

"We're all very, very motivated to find solutions to the continued scourge of fratricide," said Lt.-Col. Peter Neilsen, who's in charge of the 25 member Canadian team.

Aside from Canada and the U.S., ground units and aircraft from Australia, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain are taking part in the trials until Sept. 22.

There are 37 countries fighting in Afghanistan, each of them with their own communications equipment and procedures for recognizing friend from foe.

U.S. Air Force Col. Lou Durkac said the demonstration, taking place simultaneously at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada and at the ground combat training school in Fort Irwin, Calif., gives the allies a chance to look at each other's technology and figure out what works best.

They'll also get a look at state-of-the-art target identification devices for vehicles and soldiers, as well as software systems for aircraft that parse the battlefield for pilots.

Neilsen said a secondary objective of the session is to find ways to reduce civilian casualties in air strikes, which has been a huge issue in Afghanistan, one that has seen support for NATO plummet in the war-torn country.

"The technologies we're demonstrating here will aid the commander and the shooter in the battle space in identifying not only friend from foe, but neutrals as well and that's a very critical capability," he said.

Neilsen didn't elaborate on how the system is able to do that.

The Americans, as the leaders in air strike technology, are not pressuring other countries to buy specific systems, Durkac stressed during a conference call Thursday with defence reporters.

The confusion and occasional tragedy that have resulted from mixing different equipment and procedures, as bullets and rockets are flying, has been a source of frustration for NATO commanders in Afghanistan and U.S. generals overseeing coalition operations in Iraq.

“We figure if we can inter-operate to a higher degree, then fratricide reduction will be a direct result,” Durkac said.

Some of the allies fighting in Afghanistan held a small conference in Britain a couple of years ago, but the demonstration going on this week is the first concerted effort at co-ordination, Neilson said.

A board of inquiry report into the friendly fire incident at Ma'sum Ghar blamed the unidentified U.S. pilot, concluding that he mistook a garbage fire lit by Canadian troops for a Taliban target just bombed on the other side of the Arghandab River.

The pilot's squadron commander has yet to decide whether there will be any disciplinary action.

The investigation also found that Canadian troops who direct air strikes need to be better trained _ a recommendation the army is already acting on by doubling the qualifying time for controllers.

Cda-Friendly-Fire

DATE: 2007.09.13
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 131

OTTAWA -- Canada and its allies in Afghanistan are conducting the first large-scale multinational effort to reduce friendly fire casualties.

The U-S-hosted exercise is under way in the deserts of Nevada and California.

A contingent of 125 troops from C-F-B Petawawa, Ontario are taking part, along with three C-F-18 fighter jets and fighting vehicles.

Ground units and aircraft from Australia, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain are also taking part.

The exercise is intended to give the allies a chance to look at each other's technology and figure out what works best.

They'll also get a look at state-of-the-art target identification devices for vehicles and soldiers, as well as software systems for aircraft.

The drill comes just weeks after investigations in both Canada and the U-S concluded that better training, equipment and co-ordination could have prevented the accidental strafing of a company of Canadian soldiers last year.

One Canadian died and 30 were wounded.

(CP)

sw

Afghan–Cda–Ramadan

DATE: 2007.09.13

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 60

INDEX: International, Religion, Defence, Social

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan are bracing for an increase in violence today -- the start of Ramadan.

Lieutenant–Colonel Claude Fournier, chief of operations for Joint Task Force Afghanistan, says most Afghans will be spending time with loved ones.

But he says a few may see the holiday as an opportunity to sacrifice themselves in suicide attacks.

Muslims mark the holy month of Ramadan with prayers, fasting and charity.

(BN)

LAK

Afghan-Cda-Ramadan-Update (Canadians prepared for worst)

DATE: 2007.09.13
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 140

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- The Muslim holy month of Ramadan began today in Afghanistan with a reported call from the Taliban for increased attacks on international forces.

Canadian troops say they're prepared for the worst but won't curb any planned operations because of the threat.

Lieutenant Derrick Farnham, spokesman for the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team, says the threat may be increased at a time when the Taliban are trying to convince insurgents to die as suicide bombers.

Al-Jazeera says the Taliban plan to launch a new operation during Ramadan involving suicide bombings, ambushes and other attacks.

Farnham says the Taliban threat won't curb Canadian operations.

He says the Canadians will be more vigilant but will continue with their plans.

Captain Philippe Zongia Mbali of the provincial operations centre says there's no particular alert among Canadian troops, who are always prepared for insurgent attacks.

Coalition officials say today more than 75 people, including 45 suspected Taliban militants, have died in fierce fighting in across Afghanistan.

No Afghan or coalition soldiers were killed.

(BN)

PTH

It's decision time: Are we in or out of Afghanistan?

IDNUMBER 200709140055
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Comment
PAGE: A22
COLUMN: Paul Willcocks
BYLINE: Paul Willcocks
SOURCE: Special to Times Colonist
WORD COUNT: 800

If Canadians are entitled to straight talk from their government on any issue, it's the war in Afghanistan. Instead, it feels like we are either being conned, misled or kept in the dark to suit the government's political agenda.

It's a poor way to approach such an important issue. Families are sending their loved ones off to war. They deserve clear answers from their government.

The basic question is simple: Does the government support continuing our military mission in Afghanistan once the current commitment ends in February 2009?

Getting a straight answer has proved impossible. It sounded like Defence Minister Peter MacKay was providing real information earlier this month in a television interview. He was asked if Canada should be telling NATO what our plans are — after all, the mission ends in less than 18 months.

"As far as the signal that has been sent already, our current configuration will end in February 2009," he said. "Obviously the aid work and the diplomatic effort and presence will extend well beyond that, and the Afghan compact itself goes until 2011."

Sounds pretty clear. The military mission is almost over. But within hours, a government spokesman said MacKay hadn't meant to say anything, certainly not that NATO had been told that we intended to end the mission as scheduled. He was just trying to sound like he was saying something. Which left Canadians in the dark about what the government believes should happen.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper was a little clearer this week. He says the future of the mission is up to Parliament. But Harper went on to say that the Conservatives won't allow a debate or vote on the mission until he's convinced that the Commons will extend the war commitment, which hardly seems consistent with the claim that the future of the mission is up to Canadians.

Harper's position also signals the continuation of an indefinite period of political jockeying, as he attempts to lock one of three opposition parties into supporting an extension of the combat mission.

That's unfair. Canadians deserve a full debate now. NATO deserves to know whether our troops will continue fighting after 2009, so it can plan the future of this campaign. Given the lead role Canadians have taken — and the reluctance of other countries to accept similar challenges — NATO will face some tough decisions if we end our combat role. And our troops deserve to know what their futures hold.

The Conservatives could argue they need more time to persuade Canadians of the progress being made and to sell the mission more effectively. But they have had 19 months to make the case. It's time for a debate and a decision.

Reaching a decision will be difficult, because the correct course is not obvious. There are good reasons for Canada to be at war in Afghanistan — to support the struggling government, prevent terrorists from using the country as a safe haven, improve the lives of citizens and block the return of the repressive Taliban regime.

But there are also good reasons to question the effectiveness of the mission, the chance of success and the high cost in Canadian lives.

Recent months have been discouraging. Canadians are fighting today to regain control of areas they secured earlier this year, which the Afghan police and army were unable to hold. They face an insurgent campaign that poses enormous tactical challenges. The enemy can avoid confrontation, harass Canadians with IEDs and wait for the chance to reclaim the territory once the NATO forces have moved on.

At the same time, the rising civilian death toll is reducing support for the NATO campaign. Independent reports suggest Canadian aid — at least in terms of some of the major projects touted by the government — has failed to translate into change on the ground. And the Afghan government and police remain corrupt and inefficient.

Canadians have weighed the evidence and decided our troops have done enough. A national Decima Research poll this summer found two out of three Canadians want the troops out of the fighting when this commitment ends. About 75 per cent of those surveyed did not believe our effort would produce real change in Afghanistan.

It's time for the Harper government to make its best case for a continued mission, and then listen to Canadians.

Footnote: The issue could come to a head when Parliament resumes in October. Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion has said the Liberals will introduce a motion calling on the government to inform NATO the mission would not be extended. Harper could choose to consider the vote a confidence motion, which would mean an election if the government is defeated. And all parties will be watching the results of three Quebec byelections Monday and considering what message they send about political support for the war.

willcocks@ultranet.ca

Apparent suicide blast kills 15 Pakistani troops

IDNUMBER 200709140041
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A17
COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: ISLAMABAD, Pakistan
SOURCE: New York Times
WORD COUNT: 97

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan / At least 15 soldiers from an elite commando unit were killed yesterday evening when a blast, apparently set off by a suicide bomber, tore through the dining hall of a military installation in northwestern Pakistan, military officials said.

At least 27 soldiers were wounded; six were in critical condition.

The attack took place about 80 kilometres outside the capital, Islamabad, at the brigade headquarters of the Special Operation Task Force. The unit has been set up with American aid to flush out al-Qaeda from the semiautonomous tribal areas straddling the border with Afghanistan.

NATO chief praises German Afghan contribution

IDNUMBER 200709140039
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A17
DATELINE: BERLIN
SOURCE: Bloomberg News
WORD COUNT: 175

BERLIN — NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, visiting Berlin, said he was a "realist" and didn't expect German troops to take up combat operations in Afghanistan.

"It would be unfair to criticize Germany," Scheffer said after talks with German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier yesterday. "The German contribution to the mission in Afghanistan is very, very important," he said, adding: "I am a realist."

Germany, which has more than 3,000 military personnel in mostly peaceful northern Afghanistan, has been criticized by British and Dutch lawmakers for keeping its forces out of Taliban strongholds in southern and eastern parts of the country, leaving the U.S., Britain, Canada and the Netherlands to do the bulk of the fighting.

Scheffer's visit came one month before lawmakers vote on an extension of the three mandates covering Germany's military engagement in Afghanistan. Chancellor Angela Merkel's coalition, facing growing domestic opposition to the deployment, is split on backing for one of those mandates, meaning some German troops may leave Afghanistan rather than reinforcements arrive.

Germans staying out of south

IDNUMBER 200709140086
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Met
SECTION: World And Comment
PAGE: AA09
SOURCE: Reuters
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 140

Germany, under pressure to send troops to Afghanistan's troubled southern regions, said yesterday it had no plans to change the mandate that confines its soldiers to the more stable north.

"We will maintain the predominance of our military presence in the north, and regarding the specific tasks, we will focus on training the Afghan army," Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier told reporters after meeting NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer.

The United States, Canada and other NATO allies are urging Germany to abandon the restrictions on deploying its soldiers to help fight Taliban guerrillas, who have enjoyed a resurgence over the last year.

Steinmeier said Germany's 3,000-troop contingent would continue to help out in emergency situations in southern Afghanistan, as well as with civilian aid and reconstruction work. Berlin also plans to continue surveillance flights over southern Afghanistan.

Canadians vigilant as Ramadan dawns; Taliban expected to use Muslim holy month to intensify bombings, suicide attacks

IDNUMBER 200709140082
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Met
SECTION: World And Comment
PAGE: AA01
BYLINE: Bruce Campion-Smith
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 514

Canadian commanders are braced for an increase in bombings and suicide attacks, fearing that Taliban insurgents may use the start of the holy Muslim month of Ramadan to incite followers to step up the violence.

"It's a definite possibility ... a worse-case scenario so that's the one we're preparing for," Lieut. Derrick Farnham said.

"It's an increased possibility the Taliban might utilize this as a time to increase suicide attacks, extra ambushes, perhaps lay more mines," he told reporters last night.

Ramadan began this week, a time of daylong fasting and reflection for Muslims around the world.

But commanders here fear that insurgent leaders may distort the spiritual meaning of the annual religious period and convince supporters that attacking allied troops is their ticket to heaven.

"The Taliban could use this special time to provoke those who don't know so well what Ramadan is, to convince them that it is a time they would want to die as a suicide bomber," Farnham said.

As Ramadan began, fighting killed 75 people, including 45 suspected Taliban militants who died in air strikes and Afghan army gunfire, officials said.

In the southern province of Uruzgan, insurgents attacked a joint Afghan army and U.S.-led coalition patrol Wednesday with rocket-propelled grenades and gunfire, the coalition said in a statement.

The coalition said no Afghan or coalition soldiers or civilians were wounded or killed in Uruzgan. It was not possible to confirm the death toll independently because of the remote location.

As well, Afghan police shot and killed a suspected suicide bomber in Helmand province.

Fighting has increased dramatically in the past several weeks in Afghanistan, with more than 300 suspected Taliban fighters killed since late August, according to the U.S.-led coalition.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force said insurgents increased attacks during Ramadan last year and that they could do the same this year.

Canadians vigilant as Ramadan dawns; Taliban expected to use Muslim holy month to intensify bombings, s

"On the eve of the holy month of Ramadan, the enemies of Afghanistan have shown they will shun peaceful coexistence in favour of attacking government forces," said Maj. Chris Belcher, a coalition spokesperson.

The worry of heightened attacks won't deter Canadians from going on patrol, Farnham said. But they'll be more vigilant each time they leave base, he said.

It was during this time last year that Canadians launched Operation Medusa, their biggest offensive in Kandahar, to disrupt insurgents reportedly massing to attack the city.

In the meantime, Canadian soldiers are being taught the history of Ramadan and the cultural dos and don'ts.

Each soldier has been issued a wallet-sized card with tips on how to interact with Afghans with "more respect and understanding," Farnham said.

The ground rules, as laid out on a card issued to the troops, include: "Do be aware that people will be tired, they will be hungry.

"Don't eat in front of them. Don't drink in front of them.

"Do be more modest than you normally would."

The Canadians put that advice into practice yesterday when they had a meeting with the mayor of Kandahar.

"Normally ... we would present him with all sorts of teas and goodies. We didn't. We just had our meeting," Farnham said.

In fighting elsewhere in the country, an Afghan-NATO patrol discovered and defused three roadside bombs Wednesday in the Zhari district of Kandahar province and shortly after was ambushed by Taliban fighters.

A helicopter gunship joined the ensuing battle, which left 12 militants dead, according to Syed Agha Saqib, the provincial police chief.

In Zabul province, 11 Taliban fighters were killed during a battle with NATO and Afghan soldiers on Wednesday, Gulab Shah Alikhail, the governor's spokesperson said yesterday.

Meanwhile, three police were killed in Herat province during a five-hour fight on Wednesday, and one Afghan soldier was killed in Farah province yesterday, officials said.

Two civilians were killed by a bomb hidden in a cart that exploded near a police station in Takhar province, in the north.

With files from Associated Press

Test Taliban 'peace' bid

IDNUMBER 200709140028
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: AA06
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 344

Are the Taliban serious about launching peace talks with Afghan President Hamid Karzai's elected government, as a flurry of news reports suggested in the past week? Not yet, they aren't.

While Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi did spur hopes on Sunday by claiming his group is "fully ready for talks," by Tuesday he had added an impossible rider: 50,000 American, Canadian and other United Nations–sanctioned troops must leave the country before Taliban leader Mullah Omar and his men come to the table.

That isn't talking peace; it's demanding capitulation

That said, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has every reason to wish Karzai well as he presses not only people such as Omar but also Pushtun leaders and leaders of Taliban splinter groups to join talks designed to at least damp down the fighting. Karzai claims 5,000 fighters have put down their weapons and that elements of the Taliban want to break with Al Qaeda, lending credibility to the policy of engaging insurgents rather than dismissing them all as terrorists.

Canada's 2,500 troops stand to gain even if Karzai succeeds only partially, because serious talks would smooth Canada's possible pullout from Kandahar in February 2009.

Brokering any deal with the insurgents will be difficult. Apart from demanding that foreign troops leave, the Taliban also seek a role in the government, and want the Islamist constitution rewritten to reflect their narrow vision of religion. Given their repressive 1996–2001 rule and ties with Al Qaeda, a Taliban comeback raises real concerns. But ultimately, these are matters for the Afghan people to decide.

While Karzai beats the bushes for foes who are willing to talk, Canada and its allies should encourage Afghans from all factions to join in, and press Pakistan to deny the insurgents sanctuary.

At the same time, Harper must make it clear that our troops are in Afghanistan at the request of a freely elected government to bring some stability to this strife–torn nation. Canada should not take its marching orders from the people who gave Al Qaeda shelter after the 9/11 attacks. The Taliban and their allies should understand that.

Regaining trust of Canadians

IDNUMBER 200709140056
PUBLICATION: The Leader–Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Letters
PAGE: B11
BYLINE: Robert Pitzel
SOURCE: The Leader–Post
WORD COUNT: 417

Governments' countless acts of anti–democratic and unethical conduct within the past several years is beginning to become a sinkhole in which any government, regardless of its plans or promises, will be unable to regain the trust of Canadian citizens.

The potential for terrible consequence is unavoidable if those in positions of authority continue to act fascistic without consequence, and we, as Canadian citizens, continue to allow it.

The Liberal sponsorship scandal, the Arar case, the Security and Prosperity Partnership, the Trade Investment Labour Mobility Agreement, federal government opposition to Supreme Court rulings, the employment insurance surplus, Afghanistan, RCMP pension scandal, Pacific Northwest Economic Region, the Conservative party handbook on how to stall the Senate, collusion between business and government, and now provocateurs at Montebello. There is more, but should any more be needed to make a point?

There is not a reason of any kind why Canadians should have to seek accountability from their government.

Accountability from our leaders is instead a requirement, something to be viewed as a bare minimum for anyone acting as a Canadian citizen representative. Canadians need to be able to trust their government, period.

Worse yet, we have a prime minister being influenced by President George W. Bush, one of the most disapproved–of presidents in American history. Our PM allowed himself to be influenced by this president on every issue from trade to war. America's infrastructure is collapsing and its president wants to rebuild another country. Is this the model we Canadians want to follow? Bush has declared his government capable of seizing any American citizen without due process for suspicion of terrorist activity. Are these policies we want? We can, and most do, reassure ourselves that our government will never allow such things to happen in our country, but subtly, it is happening.

How can that be?

How many of the acronyms and issues in the third paragraph are you familiar with?

Where is the opposition? Scared, cornered, or posturing for power?

How can any Canadian vote for a party that favours posture over action? NDP, Bloc, Liberal and even the Green Party — four parties, and not one willing to go to bat for Canadians and not two that are able to come together for Canadians to at least make our current PM be accountable for the plans he and his party may have for our country and to ensure his plans are transparent and agreements democratic.

It's time our government started doing its job, serving its citizens -- not itself, and regain some of its integrity and ideals.

Robert Pitzel

Regina

Pakistan blast kills 15 elite soldiers; Latest suicide attack coincides with visit of American deputy state secretary

IDNUMBER 200709140076
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: B8
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Reuters / Pakistani army troops patrol near the site of a suicide bombing at an army building near Islamabad that killed at least 15 Pakistani soldiers Thursday. ;
KEYWORDS: TERRORISM; TERRITORIAL ISSUES; PRESIDENTS; FOREIGN RELATIONS
DATELINE: ISLAMABAD
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 459

ISLAMABAD – Fifteen elite commandos were killed in a suspected suicide blast at a high–security army camp on Thursday in the latest violence to rock crisis–hit Pakistan.

The commandos were eating in the north–western camp's mess hall when the attacker detonated his explosives outside, wounding another 11 people including six seriously, officials said.

The latest in a string of attacks on the military followed two days of deadly clashes in Pakistan's lawless tribal zone and coincided with the visit of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte.

Chief military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad confirmed the death toll but said authorities were still investigating the blast at the camp, about 70 kilometres north–west of Islamabad.

Pakistan has been beset by violence since troops stormed the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad in July.

Suicide attacks have killed nearly 250 people since then including 31 in the garrison city of Rawalpindi this month.

The violence has piled pressure on Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president and army chief and a key U.S. ally in the "war on terror" as he struggles with a political crisis ahead of general and presidential elections.

"Such cowardly acts of killing innocent people cannot be left unpunished," Musharraf said of the latest blast.

Pakistani troops backed by gunships have killed more than 70 militants in two days of heavy fighting in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, where the U.S. says al–Qaida chief Osama bin Laden may be hiding.

At least two soldiers also died in the latest clashes early Thursday, which erupted when Pakistani forces repelled a mass insurgent attack on a checkpoint in the North Waziristan area, the army said.

Musharraf told Negroponte during a two–hour meeting in Islamabad that "Pakistan's commitment should never be in doubt as it was in Pakistan's own national interest," a foreign ministry statement said.

He also spoke out against pending U.S. legislation that would tie aid payments to Pakistan's performance in fighting al-Qaida.

Negroponte has reiterated Washington's full backing for military ruler Musharraf and played down indications that the United States could launch unilateral strikes against militants on Pakistani soil.

In Pakistan's latest confrontation with the insurgents, troops fought off militants who attacked an army checkpoint in North Waziristan's Nawaz Kot district overnight, top military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad said.

The army said Pakistani helicopter gunships and artillery also pounded militant hideouts in part of the tribal zone of South Waziristan on Tuesday and Wednesday, killing up to 40 militants.

Dozens of Islamist fighters also attacked a checkpoint on Wednesday and kidnapped 12 troops in the country's northwest.

A militant spokesman warned on the same day that they would start killing more than 200 captive soldiers who surrendered in South Waziristan nearly two weeks ago.

Hundreds of al-Qaida and Taliban militants sought sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal belt after fleeing Afghanistan in the wake of the U.S. invasion that followed the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington.

Separately, in the violence-prone southern city of Karachi, six people were killed in a grenade-and-gun attack on a bus carrying members of the student wing of the fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami party.

Seriously, folks Thanks to our military success, Canada's gaining world's respect

SOURCETAG 0709140883
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 11
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 449

For as long as most Canadians have been alive, a succession of federal governments has sought to have Canada taken seriously as an influence on the world stage.

Frustratingly, this has largely been an unrequited yearning.

Nations of the developed world regarded Canada fondly, but patronizingly, more or less ignoring what we said.

We were "nice" people without clout who wanted to be loved — except when we played hockey, then we were brutes.

After 9/11 (starting with the previous Martin government) Canada, began to have impact in international matters — thanks almost entirely to our revitalized military in Afghanistan, doing both fighting and reconstruction.

Sadly, for purely political purposes, Prime Minister Stephen Harper now seems eager to pull back from the thankless task of imposing peace. Maybe a safer, more passive role. He says early 2009 is the date for withdrawal — by which time no one expects Afghanistan to be pacified.

Why this sudden change of mandate? It's surely not because our troops are unwilling to stay the course, or because Canadians want out.

No, it's because there's a political perception that Quebecers will not vote for a government that is resolved to stay in Afghanistan for as long as fighting soldiers are needed.

Harper so lusts for a majority government that he seems willing to trim our mandate in Afghanistan in hopes of winning Quebec votes. Like previous Tory parties, he bows to polls and listens to faint-hearts who fear a "conservative" agenda turns off voters.

We now have the unprecedented situation where Germany is "begging" (according to a Globe and Mail headline) Canada to continue in Afghanistan beyond 2009, with NATO echoing this theme.

Again, why is this?

Simple. It's because the Canadian army has been so damn good at its job that its continued presence is seen as essential if the volatile Kandahar region is to have a chance at achieving peace and security.

Germany sees this clearly — perhaps because Germany has chickened out of the heavy peacemaking process, and won't let its troops near the danger zones.

If Canada cuts and runs (and that's precisely what Harper is suggesting, prodded by the Dion Liberals and hopeless NDP) then others won't be far behind.

Pulling out too soon means every casualty and death incurred will be meaningless. Canada will again retreat into military torpor where few take us seriously, and our word is no longer our bond.

All because of conventional political timidity that (I think) does Quebecers a disservice and betrays our soldiers.

No one relishes casualties, or coffins unloaded at Trenton. But our staunchest citizens have been families of the fallen, who recognize that their loved ones volunteered, took pride in their job and realized they were fighting on behalf of people who had nothing.

CASUALTIES LIGHT

Although every death is a family tragedy, in global terms Canada's casualties have been relatively light.

And we are winning in Afghanistan — witness the Taliban resorting to roadside bombs.

If the Taliban win the subversive war that they lose on every encounter on the battlefield, what does that say of our resolve?

If the PM trusted the Canadian people, stayed the course and showed courage, confidence and leadership, maybe he'd be rewarded with the majority he seems to want more than standing up for principles.

In Afghanistan, for the first time since Suez, 1956, Canada, is being taken seriously by those who matter, thanks to our military.

Don't blow it.

Taliban said ready to increase attacks

SOURCETAG 0709140312
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN
WORD COUNT: 196

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan began yesterday in Afghanistan with a reported call from the Taliban for increased attacks on international forces.

Canadian troops say they are prepared for the worst, but won't curb any planned operations because of the threat.

Lt. Derrick Farnham, spokesperson for the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team at Kandahar Airfield, said the threat may be increased at a time when the Taliban are trying to recruit suicide bombers.

"It could be a time that's utilized by the insurgents to be more aggressive, so we will prepare for that worst-case scenario."

According to an unsourced report by the Al-Jazeera news network, the Taliban has said it will launch a new operation during the holy month involving suicide bombings, ambushes and other attacks.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan said insurgents increased attacks during Ramadan last year and the same may happen this year.

Canadian soldiers have been issued cards explaining what Ramadan is and setting out some rules of conduct.

"We will do things like be aware that because they're fasting, they will be hungry. We will not eat in front of them, if at all possible. We will not drink in front of them, smoke or chew gum," Farnham said.

Coalition officials said yesterday more than 75 people, including 45 suspected Taliban militants but no Afghan or coalition soldiers, had died in fierce fighting recently. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Effort aims to cut friendly fire casualties goal

SOURCETAG 0709140311
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 127

Most of the countries fighting in Afghanistan are comparing technology and ideas in the Nevada and California deserts in the first large-scale multinational effort to reduce friendly fire casualties.

Canada's contribution involves three CF-18 fighter jets and a handful of soldiers and fighting vehicles from 1st Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, based in Petawawa.

It comes just a few weeks after investigations in both Canada and the U.S. determined better training, equipment and co-ordination could have prevented the accidental strafing of Canadian soldiers last year by the pilot of an American A-10 Thunderbolt. Pte. Mark Graham was killed and 30 others wounded.

It was the second deadly friendly fire attack in Afghanistan since 2002. Four Canadians were killed and eight wounded after a U.S. F-16 fighter mistook a training exercise for a real attack. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Bloody Ramadan in Afghanistan

SOURCETAG 0709140629

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.09.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 42

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Rahmat Gul, AP Afghan police check out their damaged vehicle yesterday after it was hit by a controlled bomb in the Kot distirct of Nangarhar province, east of Kabul, Afghanistan.

BYLINE: AP

DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan

WORD COUNT: 225

Heavy fighting in Afghanistan killed at least 75 people as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan began, including 45 suspected Taliban militants killed in air strikes and Afghan army gunfire, officials said.

In the southern province of Uruzgan, insurgents attacked a joint Afghan army and U.S.-led coalition patrol with rocket-propelled grenades and gunfire.

Afghan soldiers "cleared" Taliban fighters from firing positions within the village Aduzay, while attack aircraft destroyed some fighting positions, the coalition said. It said more than 45 Taliban were killed.

Fighting has increased dramatically in the last several weeks in Afghanistan, with more than 300 suspected Taliban fighters killed since late August, the U.S.-led coalition said.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force said insurgents increased attacks during Ramadan last year and the same may happen this year.

In fighting elsewhere in the country, an Afghan-NATO patrol discovered and defused three roadside bombs in the Zhari district of Kandahar province and shortly after was ambushed by Taliban fighters. A helicopter gunship joined the ensuing battle, which left 12 militants dead.

In Zabul province, 11 Taliban fighters were killed during a battle with NATO and Afghan soldiers, Gulab Shah Alikhail, the governor's spokesman said yesterday.

Three police were killed in Herat province during a five-hour fight and one Afghan soldier was killed in Farah province yesterday, officials said.

Two civilians were killed by a bomb hidden in a cart that exploded near a police station in Takhar province, in the north.

Police in Helmand province shot and killed a would-be suicide bomber before he could detonate his explosives yesterday, said Gen. Mohammad Hussein Andiwai, the provincial police chief.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

Friendly fire under attack

SOURCETAG 0709140628
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 42
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 188

Most of the countries fighting in Afghanistan are comparing technology and ideas this week in the Nevada and California deserts in the first large-scale multinational effort to reduce friendly fire casualties.

Canada's contribution to the demonstration involves three CF-18 fighter jets and a contingent of soldiers and fighting vehicles from 1st Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, from Petawawa, Ont.

It comes just a few weeks after investigations in both Canada and the United States determined better training, equipment and co-ordination could have prevented the accidental strafing of a company of Canadian soldiers last year.

The split-second mistake, by the pilot of an American A-10 Thunderbolt, left Pte. Mark Graham dead and 30 other members of Charles Company wounded at Ma'sum Ghar, about 40 km west of Kandahar.

It was the second deadly air-to-ground friendly fire attack in Afghanistan since 2002.

Four Canadians were killed and eight wounded after a U.S. F-16 fighter mistook a training exercise at Tarnack Farms for a real attack.

"We're all very, very motivated to find solutions to the continued scourge of fratricide," said Lt.-Col. Peter Neilsen, who's in charge of the 125-member Canadian team.

Aside from Canada and the U.S., ground units and aircraft from Australia, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain are taking part in the trials until Sept. 22. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Troops gear up for Ramadan attacks

SOURCETAG 0709140758
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 25
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
WORD COUNT: 144

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan began yesterday in Afghanistan with a reported call from the Taliban for increased attacks on international forces.

Canadian troops say they're prepared for the worst, but won't curb any planned operations because of the threat.

Lt. Derrick Farnham, spokesman for the Canadian Provincial Reconstruction Team at Kandahar Airfield, said the threat may be increased at a time when the Taliban are trying to convince insurgents to die as suicide bombers.

"It could be a time that's utilized by the insurgents to be more aggressive, so we will prepare for that worst-case scenario," Farnham said.

Indeed, according to an unsourced report by the Al-Jazeera news network, the Taliban have said it will launch a new operation during the holy month involving suicide bombings, ambushes and other attacks.

During Ramadan, which occurs this year from Sept. 13 to Oct. 12, Muslims around the world fast from sunrise to sunset to mark the time the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Nations fight friendly fire

SOURCETAG 0709140756
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 25
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 194

Most of the countries fighting in Afghanistan are comparing technology and ideas this week in the Nevada and California deserts in the first large-scale multinational effort to reduce friendly-fire casualties.

Canada's contribution to the demonstration involves three CF-18 fighter jets and a handful of soldiers and fighting vehicles from 1st Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment, based in Petawawa, Ont.

It comes just a few weeks after investigations in both Canada and the U.S. determined better training, equipment and co-ordination could have prevented the accidental strafing of a company of Canadian soldiers last year.

The split-second mistake, by the pilot of an American A-10 Thunderbolt, left Pte. Mark Graham dead and 30 other members of Charles Company wounded at Ma'sum Ghar, about 40 km west of Kandahar.

It was the second deadly air-to-ground friendly-fire attack in Afghanistan since 2002. Four Canadians were killed and eight wounded after a U.S. F-16 fighter mistook a training exercise at Tarnack Farms for a real attack.

"We're all very, very motivated to find solutions to the continued scourge of fratricide," said Lt.-Col. Peter Neilsen, who's in charge of the 25-member Canadian team.

Aside from Canada and the U.S., ground units and aircraft from Australia, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain are taking part in the trials until Sept. 22. **KEYWORDS=NATIONAL**

Aid is achieving results in Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200709140048
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: A11
COLUMN: Sound Off
KEYWORDS: FOREIGN AID; WAR; AFGHANISTAN
BYLINE: Robert Greenhill
SOURCE: Special to the Sun
WORD COUNT: 229

Canadian aid efforts are making a positive difference in the lives of the Afghan people.

Unfortunately, the Senlis Council has presented an inaccurate view of our development activities in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a country ravaged by decades of war. Its people are poor and its hospitals are not up to Canadian standards. But they are getting better.

When I visited Mirwais Hospital, I saw children being vaccinated against polio and measles thanks to Canadian aid. With Canada's help, UNICEF has trained health-care workers and is working to build a maternal waiting home.

Not only are services at that hospital improving, we are helping to improve the health of Afghans across Kandahar.

Polio cases are down 77 per cent in Afghanistan this year. Since the fall of the Taliban, child mortality across Afghanistan has dropped by more than 20 per cent, saving 40,000 children every year.

In Kandahar, week after week, real successes are being realized. More than 190 km of rural roads have been repaired and more than 1,200 new wells installed.

More than 5,600 people are receiving literacy training and some 200,000 people have benefited from food aid. In addition, more than 420,000 square metres of land have been cleared of mines since March 2005, benefiting more than 10,000 people.

We are achieving real results in Kandahar by working closely with some of the strongest, most experienced and respected agencies in the world, such as the World Food Program, the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

Together, we are helping the Afghan people build a better future for themselves and their families.

Robert Greenhill is president of the Canadian International Development Agency.

Prepare for a lot of hot air and a lack of clarity on Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200709140046
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: A11
COLUMN: Barbara Yaffe
KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA
BYLINE: Barbara Yaffe
SOURCE: Vancouver Sun
WORD COUNT: 590

Canadians must prepare for a war of words on this country's combat mission in Afghanistan before Parliament resumes in mid-October.

They need to prepare because the verbal battleground will be muddied by explosive partisanship, in the same manner as health care once was. And in the end it will be difficult to know where the political parties truly stand.

By the time politicians had fully debated medicare -- public versus private and what those terms meant -- Canadians reached the conclusion that no party knew what the hell to do about the health care crisis and it was tough to distinguish respective positions.

The same fuzzification is taking place regarding the role of troops in Afghanistan. Each party is trying to gain an advantage by disparaging the other's position, fomenting confusion.

Canada to date has lost 70 soldiers and one diplomat in this mission. It's too important a matter to allow partisanship to obscure thinking about our forces' future direction.

It's worth noting that, in dollar terms, the mission by 2009 will have cost Canadians some \$4.3 billion. And by 2011, Canada will have donated \$1.2 billion in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, with a chunk of the cash presumably destined for unsavoury pockets. Citizens need to be informed.

So, here's a primer to help separate fact from political fiction.

Former PM Jean Chretien first announced in November 2001 that Canadian soldiers would be sent to Afghanistan for a short-term, humanitarian-type, UN-sanctioned mission.

Currently, Canada has 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, as part of a NATO-led assignment. NATO has 26 member countries, though 36 nations in total have troops in Afghanistan.

Our contribution accounts for six per cent of all foreign troops stationed in the whole of Afghanistan, same as the Italians. Only Germany, Britain and the U.S. have deployed a greater share of troops.

The concern is that, for whatever reason, our troop losses have been vastly out of proportion to all other nations'.

Since July 2005, Canada's soldiers have been working in the most dangerous part of the country, around Kandahar. This followed a less aggressive engagement in Kabul.

With respect to Canada's future commitment in Afghanistan -- beyond the February 2009 date when the Kandahar deployment expires, it's impossible to tell precisely where the minority Conservative government stands.

Its past rhetoric has been marked by bravado about not cutting and running, and standing by the long-term objective of stabilizing and bringing democracy to Afghanistan.

The Harper government has expressed no interest in a recommendation by the respected non-governmental organization, the Senlis Council, to legalize Afghanistan's poppy growing industry.

This industry, according to a 2006 World Bank report, accounts for a third of Afghanistan's economy and counterproductively empowers drug warlords. The Harperites have been onside with U.S.-led efforts to eradicate poppy fields.

The Liberals favour a pilot project to test the viability of legalized poppy-growing for morphine production.

Liberals also are firm that, as of February 2009, another NATO country should replace Canada in Kandahar. They want our soldiers in a less volatile neighbourhood in Afghanistan, focusing on rebuilding and humanitarian efforts.

For this seemingly reasonable position, Stephane Dion has been labelled by Stephen Harper as "pro-Taliban."

New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton stated in August 2006 that troops should be brought home no later than February of 2007. "Our role in Afghanistan is through humanitarian aid, reconstruction, and a comprehensive peace process, not a George Bush-style counter-insurgency war."

The Bloc Quebecois most recently has stated it wants a full troop withdrawal by February 2009. But, like the Conservatives, it hasn't been clear in its position.

"I'm not going for the Layton option which says a withdrawal, plain and simple," leader Gilles Duceppe has been quoted. "That is to be irresponsible." The Bloc has called for more public debate on the combat mission and a "rebalancing" of the Canadian Forces effort.

Unfortunately, the Afghan mission has become political football, especially in Quebec with the July deployment of soldiers from Valcartier. The public needs to run with the facts and consider all rhetoric as interference.

byaffe@png.canwest.com

Terror suspect arrested

IDNUMBER 200709140010
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A3
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Fred Chartrand, the Canadian Press /;
DATELINE: MONTREAL
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 180

Canadian authorities have arrested a man they believe is linked to international threats to bomb targets outside Canada.

Said Namouh, 35, is to appear in court today charged with conspiracy in connection with online threats against targets in Austria and Germany. He was picked up Wednesday morning in Maskinonge, Que., northeast of Montreal.

Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, left, said: "It's disturbing that this type of thing could have been going on with a Canadian component ... But it's encouraging that the alleged attempts ... appear to have been averted."

Austrian authorities rounded up three alleged al-Qaeda sympathizers earlier this week -- two men and a woman, all Austrian citizens in their 20s and of Arab origin. They believe the three are tied to a video threatening to attack Germany and Austria unless both countries withdrew personnel from Afghanistan.

An Austrian spokesman described the Quebec suspect as a man with African roots who appeared to be planning to leave Canada.

An RCMP spokesman emphasized that the man was allegedly "plotting to explode (a device) outside of Canada ... The investigation ... has never found a direct threat to Canada."

Countries take aim at friendly fire

IDNUMBER 200709140007
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A3
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 176

Most of the countries fighting in Afghanistan are comparing technology and ideas this week in the Nevada and California deserts in the first large-scale multinational effort to reduce friendly fire casualties.

The exercise comes just a few weeks after investigations determined better training, equipment and co-ordination could have prevented the accidental strafing of a company of Canadian soldiers last year.

The split-second mistake, by the pilot of an American A-10 Thunderbolt, left Hamilton native Private Mark Graham dead and 30 other members of Charles Company wounded. It was the second deadly air-to-ground friendly fire attack in Afghanistan since 2002 when four Canadians were killed and eight wounded after a U.S. F-16 pilot mistook a training exercise for an attack.

Aside from Canada and the U.S., ground units and aircraft from Australia, France, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Britain are taking part in the trials until Sept. 22.

A secondary objective of the session is to find ways to reduce civilian casualties in air strikes, which has been a huge issue in Afghanistan, one that has seen support for NATO plummet.

BATTLE OF THREE QUEBEC RIDINGS Tories seek a breakthrough in by-elections As Harper begins drive for a majority in Quebec, Bloc Quebecois defends sovereignty while Liberals defend Stephane Dion

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072570245

DATE: 2007.09.14

PAGE: A4 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: BILL CURRY, RHEAL SEGUIN AND BRIAN LAGHI

SECTION: National News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 1116

WORD COUNT: 1005

BILL CURRY, RHEAL SEGUIN and BRIAN LAGHI MONTREAL, ROBerval, QUE . and OTTAWA
The federal Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois have issued all-points bulletins for party volunteers to converge on a pair of Quebec by-elections in which losses could foreshadow a significant change in the province's federal scene.

In separate calls to arms, Bloc organizers and their Liberal counterparts have asked for volunteers from outside the ridings to help get out the vote on Monday to stave off defeats in their respective political heartlands.

Should these 11th-hour efforts fail, the beneficiaries could end up being the governing Tories, who have been courting Quebec in an effort to build a majority government, and the NDP, whose members are hoping to crack the Liberal stronghold of Outremont in urban Montreal. The big losers could be Liberal Leader Stephane Dion and support for Quebec sovereignty.

"The by-election in Outremont next Monday is going to be a tough fight, and we're trying to gather as many e-day volunteers from Ottawa as possible," Denise Brunson, a senior Liberal official, said in an e-mail. The sense of urgency is similar in the Bloc-held riding of Roberval-Lac-Saint-Jean, where, sources said, the Bloc has urgently called on hundreds of its party workers, and others from the Parti Quebecois throughout Eastern Quebec, to help candidate Celine Houde take on Tory Denis Lebel.

The Bloc is somewhat more confident of holding onto Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot in the third by-election. In both Bloc-held ridings, the Tories are thought to be the challenger.

"A Bloc defeat in Roberval-Lac-Saint-Jean would further show that the sovereignty cause was in trouble, and that the Bloc was in an uphill battle," said Jean-Herman Guay, a political scientist with the University of Sherbrooke. "Now we will see if Stephen Harper can reap what he sowed in Quebec, especially with respect to his historic recognition of Quebec as a nation." The federal Tories would no doubt argue that victory in the riding means their problems with the lack of support in Quebec for the military mission in Afghanistan, and their environmental policies, are overstated – particularly outside Montreal. There may even be enough support outside Montreal for the seats they need to crack a majority.

In his riding office in a Montreal strip mall, Liberal candidate Jocelyn Coulon said he's well-aware that his performance has larger implications for his party. "The pressure is on my shoulders," he acknowledged in an interview.

Yesterday, Mr. Dion's wife, Janine Krieger, was in the riding helping out, and Mr. Dion himself was there earlier this week as well. Defeat could mean substantial criticism for the leader, elected just nine months ago.

"Coulon is sort of Stephane Dion's alter ego," said Antonia Maioni, a political scientist at Montreal's McGill University. "He's like Stephane. An academic, quite reserved, very well spoken. And so in many ways, this is not only a by-election, but it's also a referendum on Stephane Dion because he's chosen someone who resembles him the most." In an interview, Mr. Coulon said his main competition comes from Bloc Quebecois candidate Jean-Paul Gilson, a Belgian-born psychoanalyst.

Others say the race will be between Mr. Coulon and NDP candidate Thomas Mulcair.

Tayeb Tetoia, an Algerian immigrant cab driver, said he has driven many Liberal voters who don't like Mr. Coulon as a candidate. He said anti-Liberal sentiment is still strong in Montreal over the sponsorship scandal, which is helping the NDP.

"The NDP is starting to move. They're still clean," he said, predicting Mr. Mulcair will win the riding.

The Conservative candidate is former diplomat Gilles Duguay, who is seen to be running third or fourth.

In the other riding up for grabs, the Bloc feels confident that it can hold the constituency through its candidate Eve-Marie Thai Thi Lac.

Conservative Party candidate Bernard Barre has emerged as a controversial figure.

According to a source close to the Conservative Party who asked not to be named, Action democratique du Quebec Leader Mario Dumont pressed the federal Conservatives to name Mr. Barre as their candidate.

Mr. Barre, who ran for the ADQ in the 2003 provincial election, angered voters with what was perceived to be an overconfident manner.

The Liberal candidate in the riding is Jean Caumartin, while Brigitte Sansoucy is representing the NDP. The battlegrounds of Quebec Outremont The federal riding of Outremont is a sprawling, extremely diverse constituency north of Montreal's downtown core.

At its centre is Outremont proper, an upper-middle-class neighbourhood where BMWs commonly scoot around amid the many picturesque bistros and cafes. It is home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the country.

However, the riding also includes two entirely different areas.

To the east is Mile End, a quasi-industrial part of Montreal that is quickly moving upscale with the opening of modern condominiums.

To the west, the riding includes part of Cote-des-Neiges, a highly diverse area that is home to many newly arrived immigrants.

Bill Curry SAINT-HYACINTHE-BAGOT Located about 60 kilometres east of Montreal, the federal riding of Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot is one of the province's major agriculture centres. At least a quarter of all jobs in

the riding are linked to the food industry.

Despite its proximity to Montreal, few immigrants live in this predominantly francophone riding. Conservative values and an appreciation of no-nonsense politics are hallmarks of the region.

With its 56,000 people, the city of Saint-Hyacinthe remains the riding's only urban community, and is reputed for its veterinarian school and its research centre in the field of food processing.

Like other rural regions in the province, the riding's population is aging and its economy is stable.

Rheal Seguin Roberval-Lac-Saint-Jean The riding of Roberval-Lac-Saint-Jean is spread across more than 60,500 square kilometres with many of its 37 communities dotted along the huge inland sea known as Lake Saint-Jean.

The region was colonized by francophone Quebeckers in the mid-19th century, and the demographics of its inhabitants have changed little since.

The entire Lac-Saint-Jean region has fallen on hard times in recent years. Since 2002, the riding has lost nearly 3,000 jobs in the forestry sector alone, with no end in sight for the crisis facing the industry.

The riding's three main communities of Roberval, Saint-Felicien and Dolbeau, whose populations range from 12,000 to 15,000, have been struggling for their economic survival. Rheal Seguin

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Quebec

SUBJECT TERM:by-elections; political; list

ORGANIZATION NAME: Bloc Quebecois; Conservative Party of Canada; Liberal Party

Where are our allies? Where is Germany?

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072570238

DATE: 2007.09.14

PAGE: A25 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: MARCUS GEE

SECTION: Comment Column

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 769

WORD COUNT: 777

MARCUS GEE The Germans would like us to know they are sincerely, profoundly grateful.

"I want to say how much we appreciate what Canada is doing," Chancellor Angela Merkel's foreign-policy spokesman told The Globe's Doug Saunders, speaking of Canada's role in Afghanistan. "We know that, for instance, about 100,000 Canadian soldiers lie in the European soil, [soldiers] that fought in two world wars begun by Germany. And it was never a question for Canada to defend our common values where it was needed," said Eckart von Klaeden.

Well, danke , Herr von Klaeden, but Canada doesn't need German gratitude.

It needs German help. Canadians have been bleeding in southern Afghanistan for five years while German soldiers huddle in the much safer north.

Canada has lost 70 good men and women in this honourable fight and stands to lose more before the current mission runs out in February, 2009. Where are our allies? Where is Germany? Mr. von Klaeden praises Canada as "a role model for others" and talks of the dire consequences if Canada checks out after its current mission expires. If Canada is such a model, then why doesn't Germany follow? The answer is obvious and disappointing. Berlin is buttering us up because it fears that a Canadian exit from Afghanistan would put Germany on the spot. With Canada out, the pressure would be on Germany to send troops to the dangerous south. It's the kind of praise you hand out when you see someone gutting a fish, hoping you won't have to do it yourself. This is no way to treat a friend like Canada.

As Mr. von Klaeden suggests, Canadians fought in two great wars to defend freedom in Europe. It helped liberate Germany from nazism, rebuild Germany after the Second World War and defend Germany from the Soviet danger. Tens of thousands of Canadians were stationed in West Germany over the Cold War years, providing a security umbrella that allowed Germans to create the prosperity, democracy and unity they enjoy today.

It is time for Germany to show its thanks in more than cloying words. Germany is the most populous country in Europe. It has the third-biggest economy in the world. It is a leading member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which heads the Western effort to stabilize and rehabilitate Afghanistan. There is no reason why it could not help Canada fight the Taliban in the south.

But we are Germans, says Berlin. We have a history that makes us wary of sending soldiers outside our borders. The polls at home are bad. We have political issues. We have constitutional problems.

Excuses, every one.

Nobody much fears German militarism any more. It might still be dodgy sending uniformed Germans to (say) Poland, but Afghans have no particular dread of them. German troops have already shipped out to the Congo, Sudan and Djibouti. Since a 1994 supreme court ruling, it has been perfectly legal for German troops to serve outside NATO boundaries under a United Nations mandate.

The Afghan mission has a gold-plated one. In a series of widely backed resolutions, the UN Security Council has given NATO a broad commission to put Afghanistan back on its feet and to push back when someone tries to knock it down again. Only this week, Ms. Merkel herself said that the "danger of resurgence by the Taliban and al-Qaeda" must be "banished." How, Madam Chancellor? With a magic wand? A pamphlet campaign? The work that Germany's 3,000 troops are doing in the north – helping deliver aid, rebuilding schools, training Afghan police and soldiers – is well and good. Canadians are doing much of the same in the south. But what if someone steals the aid, torches the schools and kills the police? Is fighting back someone else's job? Why should Canadians do the dirty work while Germany nurses its delicate conscience? If the Germans are squeamish about seeing their soldiers in combat, well, so are Canadians. Many of us like to see our troops as peacekeepers.

But most of us have the sense to know that when they are up against fanatics like the Taliban, they sometimes have to stand and fight.

Canada and modern Germany share a commitment to democracy, to the rights of women and minorities, to the right of oppressed peoples to live in freedom from fear. What better place than long-suffering Afghanistan to stand together for those values? Rather than bathe us in wily compliments, Germany should join us on the battlefield and fight for Afghanistan's future.

mgee@globeandmail.com

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: foreign policy; foreign relations; defence; strife

Troops set for Ramadan; Sensitivity promoted during holy fast days, while staying vigilant

IDNUMBER 200709140055
PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A11

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Khan Wali Kamran, Agence France–Presse; Getty Images / REBEL DAMAGE: Major clashes between Taliban and security forces in Afghanistan this week have left 56 rebels dead while an Afghan soldier and a Bangladeshi aid worker were also reported killed, officials said Thursday. This police vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb in an eastern province. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Aghanistan

BYLINE: Matthew Fisher

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 450

KANDAHAR, Aghanistan – Canadian troops are bracing for a potential surge in violence during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which began with the appearance of a new crescent moon on Wednesday night.

Every Canadian soldier has been given a briefing on the significance of Ramadan to Muslims. They have also been ordered to carry with them a laminated pocket card with eight points about how they should behave during the fasting days and celebratory nights of the lunar month when the Qur'an was first revealed to the prophet Muhammad.

Soldiers have also been warned to be more vigilant during Ramadan because those who are fasting and not drinking any liquids during daylight, as demanded by the Qur'an of pious Muslims, "may be more irritable," said Lt. Derrick Farnham, of the Montreal's Black Watch Regiment.

"I can tell you we are preparing for an increase in activity," he said, adding that the threat may be higher because the Taliban could use Ramadan to provoke more of their fighters and sympathizers "to die as suicide bombers."

Pious Muslims fast during Ramadan, but some "holy warriors" may be given special dispensation by religious authorities to avoid fasting in order to stay strong.

The "Ramadan 2007 dos and don'ts" cards handed out to troops note: "When at all possible, never eat, drink or chew gum," when with Afghans during daylight hours. As Farnham explained, it would be unwise "to torment them with food." Children should also not be given candy during the Ramadan fast, the cards urge.

During this "especially sensitive" period, soldiers were also advised they should not "take as a sign of negative attitude" the fact that Afghans may be reluctant to converse with them or participate in events. Meetings should also be "avoided" after 3 p.m., as Muslims will by then be making preparations to break the fast at dusk.

BE PREPARED

While soldiers should be more attentive than usual to the possibility of threats during Ramadan, "our job is to be prepared for anything" and to "react to any situation," said Capt. Philippe Zongia Mgali, of Long Point, Que.

"We are attentive because it (Ramadan) only happens once a year and because it is happening when we are here."

The Canadian battle group, which is drawn largely from the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment, also known as the Van Doo, and the Afghan National Police took part in a rare firefight for 10 minutes with the Taliban on Wednesday on a disputed road to the west of Kandahar. No casualties were suffered by the Canadians, the Afghan police, or the few American troops who were there with them. The Taliban were believed to have suffered several casualties, but this was impossible to confirm.

Windsor warmth, support brightened soldier's visit

IDNUMBER 200709140039
PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: A9
BYLINE: Pte. Dennis McKellar
SOURCE: Windsor Star
WORD COUNT: 312

I was in the mayor's office for a visit in early April while on leave from Afghanistan. I am a Windsor native and have only been gone seven years from our beautiful city, which I miss dearly. I was given the opportunity to go anywhere in the world for my leave, and I chose to come home to the city where I was raised.

My time back home was exceptionally awesome and the reception from my fellow citizens made me realize why I'm so proud to say I'm from Windsor. Everyone I ran into, whether they were old friends or just everyday citizens, gave me warm wishes and encouraging words for a safe tour. Thanks to people from Provincial Chrysler, Lanex Manufacturing, two local bands (Intra Meridian and My Terminal Ritual) and to regular people on the street.

One guy from Purolator Courier offered to help my father-in-law with lawn care because I'm not here to do it for him. They all gave me the strength I needed to get through my six-month tour of duty.

I must say it was definitely easier knowing that I have the support of a whole city behind me helping me get through my time away, serving my country, my fellow man, and a foreign country.

I was given a city flag and I hung it on my bunk space proudly (despite some razzing from "the boys"). It reminded me of who I was and where I came from. It also gave me some privacy when I needed to be alone to reflect on the days events. I often thought of our gorgeous city and the excellent time I had on leave.

I just wanted to drop a line to say that I'm home in Oromocto, N.B., safe and sound. Thanks to the beautiful people of Windsor for the support they gave me and all our boys overseas during our deployment.

Pte. Dennis McKellar

Oromocto, N.B

Military cemetery 'a beacon of remembrance'; Veterans' graves to get same respect as those of combat casualties

IDNUMBER 200709140157
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: City
PAGE: F3
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Bruno Schlumberger, the Ottawa Citizen / Cpl. Craig Kennedy joins members of Encounters With Canada youth in the singing of O Canada at yesterday's dedication ceremony for the enlarged cemetery. ;
BYLINE: Dave Rogers
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 558

Canada's expanded National Military Cemetery at Ottawa's Beechwood Cemetery is finally keeping a 90-year-old government pledge to honour all those who have served in the military by including the graves of veterans.

Speaking at a ceremony yesterday marking the expansion, Jason Kenney, secretary of state for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity, said the inclusion of veterans' graves was the fulfilment of a promise made by Sir Robert Borden during the First World War.

"In dedicating the newly enlarged military cemetery, we are keeping a promise made by Sir Robert Borden," Mr. Kenney said. "In 1917, Sir Robert pledged that the dominion would consider it our first duty to honour services rendered to the country and empire.

"Like all Canadians, Borden was deeply moved by the sacrifices made, not only by the men who served and died in Flanders and in France under the flags of our empire and our dominion, but also those who returned home. No one, he said, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with those who fought and died for Canada."

The National Military Cemetery, created in 2001, has been expanded to include the Beechwood veterans' cemetery that opened in 1955, and Commonwealth war graves. Under the arrangement, veterans' graves will have flowers and will receive the same care as the graves in the military cemetery.

The cemetery is a partnership that includes Beechwood Cemetery, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada.

The three sections of Beechwood Cemetery designated for veterans have been annexed into Canada's National Military Cemetery. Former members of the Canadian Forces, the merchant navy, veterans of the Second World War and the Korean War can be buried there.

Before 2001, Canada didn't have a National Military Cemetery. Canadian war dead and those who died while serving in the military were usually buried in military cemeteries overseas.

Gen. Maurice Baril, the former chief of defence staff, wanted a Canadian cemetery like the American cemetery in Arlington, Virginia, where members of the military could be buried in their native soil. His last act as commander of the Canadian Forces was to open the cemetery on 8.9 acres of land at Beechwood.

Canadians who die while serving in the military can be buried in the national cemetery, but most are interred near their last home base, or near their family homes.

Mr. Kenney said the cemetery is also meant to honour those serving in Afghanistan. Only 13 of the 70 Canadian troops killed in Afghanistan are buried at the National Military Cemetery. The others lie in cemeteries scattered across Canada.

Mr. Kenney said the combined cemetery will provide perpetual care for the graves of veterans and those who are killed in combat. "In doing so, we are answering the silent command of the 2,600 graves that lie before us," he said.

"We are also setting the stage for a cemetery that will serve as a beacon of remembrance and honour for generations to come."

Grete Hale, president of the Beechwood Cemetery Foundation, said the expansion of the military cemetery to include veterans was a historic step. Mrs. Hale said combining the two cemeteries is a good thing because it was confusing to have two military cemeteries in Ottawa.

More than 120 high school students from across Canada placed poppies on veterans' graves during the dedication.

The students were with Encounters With Canada, a program that allows students from different regions of the country to spend a week

in Ottawa. More than 3,000 high school students a year participate in the 26-week program.

Sticker debate takes 'sad' political turn; Both sides lament what's happened to Support Our Troops decal issue

IDNUMBER 200709140156
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: City
PAGE: F3
BYLINE: Jake Rupert
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 408

A supporter and opponent of city council's decision to put "Support Our Troops" stickers on municipal vehicles say it's sad the gesture has become part of the debate over Canada's role in the war in Afghanistan.

That much they agree on, but they differ on how the issue should be handled.

Yesterday, Royal Canadian Legion spokesman Bob Butt said the city should be applauded for setting aside politics and making a statement about backing Canada's soldiers.

"The Royal Canadian Legion is most pleased when a city, or any other group, decides to carry decals that show support for our troops," he said.

"It's doesn't say we support our troops in Afghanistan. It doesn't say anything about Afghanistan, and it's too bad some people have decided to politicize these things because of the war in Afghanistan."

Sean McKenny, president of the Ottawa District Labour Council, said he wishes there was some other way to show support for Canada's soldiers, and that he would support council's move if the stickers hadn't become symbols of support for Canada's role in Afghanistan.

But he feels they have, so it's inappropriate for council to order them onto vehicles union members will drive.

"These symbols, unfortunately, have become political because many people, including senior Canadian government people, have said you can't differentiate between support for our troops and support for the mission," he said. "So they are an inherent symbol of support for the mission in many people's eyes."

Therefore, he said, municipal governments shouldn't be putting them on vehicles people have no choice but to drive.

He said it also creates a slippery slope. He would love to see decals recognizing the hundreds of Canadians who die each year while at work, often due to dangerous, unsafe working environments, in city vehicles, too.

"I'm sure there are other good causes out there, too," he said.

Earlier this week, after making it clear they weren't endorsing Canada's role in the war in Afghanistan, city council voted 21-2 to put "Support Our Troops" stickers on all municipal vehicles.

Sticker debate takes 'sad' political turn; Both sides lament what's happened to Support Our Troops decal issue

Then council voted to back the police chief on his plan to put the same stickers on all the force's vehicles. But council was emphatic in stating that its decisions weren't to be seen as a vote in support of Canada's participation in the war.

City staff estimate it will cost about \$15,000 to put stickers on all city-owned vehicles, including buses.

Ottawa is not the only Canadian municipality to struggle with the issue.

In August, a private investment firm took out a newspaper ad asking that Calgary's city council reverse its July decision not to put stickers on city vehicles. That council has not revisited its decision.

In July, Toronto City Council reversed an earlier decision and endorsed the stickers on city vehicles.

Also in August, the Vancouver police decided to go ahead with the decals, but only after specifying that they are not a political statement about the war.

PM's Afghan mood swings

IDNUMBER 200709140065
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A14
COLUMN: Susan Riley
BYLINE: Susan Riley
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 731

Now I'm confused. Is our combat role in Kandahar ending in February 2009, as Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced in June, or are our troops staying until we "finish the job," as he implied last week? In a minority Parliament, he doesn't have the final say, but it would be helpful to know what, exactly, he thinks should happen next.

Instead, he accuses opposition parties of turning Afghanistan into a "political football" because they are demanding a clear statement of his intentions.

Yet he is the one who kicked the ball back into play this week. After conceding three months ago that the military mission won't be extended without the support of Parliament, he is now refusing to say when that vote will be held, if at all.

He goes from sounding realistic — accepting the lack of enthusiasm among opposition parties and voters for maintaining our combat role beyond the existing exit date — to sounding belligerent and partisan. In Australia last week, he told reporters he will only hold a vote in the unlikely event that he wins the support of at least one opposition party "to finish the job" — whatever that means.

In fact, if lukewarm public support for the mission in Afghanistan is the product of poor communications, rather than an ill-conceived policy — the Conservative line for months — then the prime minister himself deserves some blame.

Lately, he seems as keen on crushing (or dividing) the Liberals on the issue as he is on defeating the Taliban.

As a result, instead of unwavering leadership based on a reasonable grasp of what is possible, we get warlike posturing and mixed signals.

His reluctance to delegate and well-known tendency to control every file himself probably isn't helping, either. Alternately blunt and befuddled, former defence minister Gordon O'Connor was the designated scapegoat last spring, as if the unpopularity of the war was his fault.

But if O'Connor was sometimes in the dark, it may be that he couldn't keep up with the blizzard of directives from the PMO. So far, his replacement, Peter MacKay, has been circumspect and consistent — more so, arguably, than his boss.

MacKay caused a minor stir when he said recently that signals have been sent to NATO that "our current configuration" in Afghanistan will end in February 2009.

His aides later clarified (needlessly) that there has been no formal statement to NATO, which is already aware of the debate within Canada and understands that a vote in Parliament is required to extend the mission.

At least MacKay's remarks — he also emphasized a continuing role for Canada in reconstruction — was consistent with Harper's June declaration and with the message coming lately from senior government officials.

The goal, they now say, is to download the war and the future of that much-pummeled country to Afghanistan itself — although no one can say how long this ambitious reformation might take. This may explain Harper's coyness on an exit date: if your policy is based on wishful thinking, it is hard to establish concrete deadlines.

Initial efforts at bolstering rag-tag Afghan security forces have produced spotty results, at best. Last week, for example, about 700 Canadian soldiers were sent into Zhari district to retake checkpoints that had been secured last year.

The Afghan police, lacking armaments and numbers, were unable to hold the new ground and had to be rescued.

George W. Bush is engaged in the same strategy in Iraq and running into the same problems: an indigenous military force motivated by money, driven by sectarian grudges, with tenuous loyalty to the western-backed government it is supposed to be fighting for.

Bush's solution is to dress defeat as victory and begin to step away. Afghanistan is not a mirror image of Iraq, but there are enough similarities to wonder if that will be the ultimate end game for Canada, too.

There have been a few mildly hopeful signs from Afghanistan amid all the bad news — small, worthy aid projects, a business boom in Kabul, and, most important, rumours that the Afghan government is edging toward negotiations with the Taliban. We, apparently, don't approve — although an enduring peace will only be achieved with the consent of all of Afghanistan's warring factions. "We do not negotiate with terrorists," declared Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier.

Well, someone has to and, if unconfirmed reports are true, it will be the Americans and Harper's friend, Hamid Karzai.

As for the prime minister, if he has a plan — beyond winning a majority government and delivering sharp lectures on morality — he should share it. Will the majority of our 2,500 soldiers be out of Kandahar by 2009, or not?

Susan Riley's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Bomb blast targets Pakistani commandos; Attack during meal kills 15, wounds 11 at high-security camp

IDNUMBER 200709140039
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
DATELINE: ISLAMABAD
SOURCE: Agence France-Presse
WORD COUNT: 293

ISLAMABAD – Fifteen elite commandos were killed in a suspected suicide blast at a high-security army camp yesterday in the latest violence to rock crisis-hit Pakistan.

The commandos were eating in the northwestern camp's mess hall when the attacker detonated his explosives outside, wounding another 11 people including six seriously, officials said.

The latest in a string of attacks on the military followed two days of deadly clashes in Pakistan's lawless tribal zone, and coincided with the visit of United States Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte.

Chief military spokesman Maj.-Gen. Waheed Arshad confirmed the death toll, but said authorities were still investigating the blast at the camp 70 kilometres northwest of Islamabad.

Pakistan has been beset by violence since troops stormed the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad in July. Suicide attacks have killed nearly 250 people since then, including 31 this month in the garrison city of Rawalpindi.

The violence has piled pressure on Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president and army chief and a key U.S. ally in the "war on terror," as he struggles with a political crisis ahead of general and presidential elections.

"Such cowardly acts of killing innocent people cannot be left unpunished," Mr. Musharraf said of the latest blast.

Pakistani troops backed by gunships have killed more than 70 militants in two days of heavy fighting in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, where the U.S. says Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden may be hiding.

At least two soldiers also died early yesterday in the latest clashes, which erupted when Pakistani forces repelled a mass insurgent attack on a checkpoint in the North Waziristan area, the army said.

Mr. Musharraf told Mr. Negroponte during a two-hour meeting in Islamabad that "Pakistan's commitment should never be in doubt, as it was in Pakistan's own national interest," a foreign ministry statement said.

He also spoke out against pending U.S. legislation that would tie aid payments to Pakistan's performance in fighting al-Qaeda.

Troops briefed on holy month behaviour; Cards advise sensitivity for Ramadan

IDNUMBER 200709140038

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.09.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A9

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Shah Marai, Agence France–Presse, Getty Images/ Soldiers in Afghanistan have been told to be more vigilant during Ramadan, when devout Muslims fast until dusk and 'may be more irritable.' ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR

BYLINE: Matthew Fisher

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen

WORD COUNT: 492

KANDAHAR – Canadian troops are bracing for a potential surge in violence during the holy month of Ramadan, which began yesterday in most Muslim countries.

As part of the preparations for this period, every Canadian soldier has been given a briefing to sensitize them on the significance of Ramadan to Muslims. They have also been ordered to carry with them laminated pocket cards with eight points about how they should behave during the fasting days and celebratory nights of the lunar month, when the Koran was first revealed to the prophet Muhammad.

Soldiers have also been warned to be more vigilant during Ramadan because those who are fasting and not drinking any liquids during daylight, as demanded by the Koran of pious Muslims, "may be more irritable," said Lieut. Derrick Farnham of Montreal's Black Watch Regiment.

"I can tell you we are preparing for an increase in activity," he said, adding that the threat may be higher because the Taliban could use Ramadan to provoke more of their fighters and sympathizers "to die as suicide bombers."

The Taliban, like all pious Muslims, observe Ramadan, and many will fast during this period. Even so, holy warriors may be given special dispensation by religious authorities to avoid fasting in order to stay strong.

The "Ramadan 2007 dos and don'ts" cards handed out to troops note: "When at all possible, never eat, drink or chew gum," when with Afghans during daylight hours. As Lieut. Farnham explained, it would be unwise "to torment them with food." Children should also not be given candy during the Ramadan fast, the cards urge.

During this "especially sensitive" period, soldiers were also advised they should not "take as a sign of negative attitude" the fact that Afghans may be reluctant to converse with them or participate in events. Meetings should also be "avoided" after 3 p.m. as Muslims will by then be making preparations to break the fast at dusk.

No explanation was offered as to why Canadian troops were being given Ramadan cards this year and had not received similar instructions during Ramadan in 2006, a period marked by an increase in Taliban attacks.

While soldiers should be more attentive than usual to the possibility of threats during Ramadan, "our job is to be prepared for anything" and to "react to any situation," said Capt. Philippe Zongia Mgali of Long Point, Que.

"We are attentive because it (Ramadan) only happens once a year and because it is happening when we are here."

The Canadian battle group, which is drawn largely from the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment, also known as the Van Doo, and the Afghan National Police took part in a rare firefight with the Taliban on Wednesday on a disputed road to the west of Kandahar. The 10-minute engagement began when Taliban forces tried to ambush the Canadians and their Afghan allies, after police found a deadly improvised explosive device (IED) buried under the road that the Afghan and Canadian convoy was about to travel.

France antes up

IDNUMBER 200709140160
PUBLICATION: National Post
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: National
SECTION: Editorials
PAGE: A14
SOURCE: National Post
WORD COUNT: 353

For the last year, Canadian politicians have been trying to spread the pain in Afghanistan. While more than two dozen NATO countries have troops in the country, most of these national forces operate under restrictive mandates that preclude them from engaging in offensive combat operations. These include detachments from France, Germany, Italy and Spain, which are concentrated in the north of Afghanistan where the Taliban is weak and security is more assured. And so the Dutch, British, Canadians and Americans — which aren't limited to passive patrol duty — largely have been left to clear out Taliban strongholds such as the Helmand and Kandahar provinces on their own.

Fortunately, France's new President, Nikolas Sarkozy, appears to be listening to Canadian concerns. On Friday, France announced that it is relocating six Mirage fighter jets from Tajikistan to Kandahar, where our soldiers are based. Three of the fighter jets will be used to support ground troops, including Canadians, and the other three are geared for surveillance work, which will give Canadian ground commanders more eyes in the air. This may help reduce the number of incidents whereby Canadian soldiers are exposed to roadside bombs planted by the Taliban.

This is a small but important step by France that will help save the lives of NATO soldiers. It entails the commitment of millions of dollars and roughly 300 French personnel, who will be based alongside Canadians in Kandahar.

Certainly more needs to be done, but France deserves credit for this gesture of support. It also serves to apply more pressure on NATO allies that are now effectively sitting out the war. When are the likes of Germany, Spain and Italy going to remove restrictions that forbid their troops from taking on duties in the south?

The benefits that flow from ridding Central Asia of the Taliban menace will be shared in equal measure by all civilized nations. It would be appreciated if those nations were also willing to share the associated burdens as well.

KEYWORDS: WAR; FOREIGN AID; FRANCE; AFGHANISTAN; CANADA

Dion stumbles on war; In attacking Afghan mission, he's drawing attention to Liberals' role in the war

IDNUMBER 200709140056
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial / Op-Ed
PAGE: A21
COLUMN: L. Ian MacDonald
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: ALLEN MCINNIS, THE GAZETTE / Stéphane Dion campaigns for the Liberal candidate in the Outremont by-election. It could be a tight race. ;
KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA
BYLINE: L. IAN MACDONALD
SOURCE: The Gazette
WORD COUNT: 745

Barring a serious incident in Afghanistan in the next two days, Canada's mission there will not really be a ballot question in next Monday's three Quebec by-elections.

But Afghanistan was apparently very much on Stéphane Dion's mind on Wednesday as he held a news conference with Jocelyn Coulon, his handpicked candidate in Outremont. It was the Liberal leader's second appearance with Coulon in as many days. They previously hit the Outremont métro stop together in a successful photo-op.

The frequency of Dion's appearances in the riding are an indication of what's at stake on Monday. With the Liberals certain to finish well out of the race in the two other by-elections off the island of Montreal, winning Outremont is a must for Dion. A Quebec leader of the Liberal Party of Canada cannot go zero for three in his own province. Besides, Coulon isn't some guy who stole the nomination; Dion personally appointed him for his legitimate credentials on foreign policy.

However, it wasn't Coulon's foreign-policy views that made headlines yesterday, but Dion's slashing attack on Stephen Harper for "misleading" the House before the May 2006 vote extending the mission in Kandahar to February 2009. Moreover, Dion said the 24 Liberal MPs who supported the motion were wrong to have done so. "They believed the government," Dion explained.

In other words, not only were they wrong, they were duped.

This is a major unforced error on Dion's part. Among the 24 Liberal members who supported the motion were Bill Graham, the party's interim leader and former defence minister at the time of the deployment to Kandahar, and Michael Ignatieff, now deputy Liberal leader and lead voice on Afghanistan.

Hey, let's get Iggy on the phone and ask him if he was not only wrong, but stupid. As for Graham, don't get him started on that vote. When a Tory member crossed the floor to thank him for his support, Graham gestured behind him and said: "Some of those guys actually voted for this in cabinet."

That would be back in 2005, when the Martin government re-deployed Canada's mission from the street patrols of Kabul to the counter-insurgency against the Taliban in Kandahar province. One of the guys who

supported it was Stéphane Dion, then the minister of the environment.

In opposition a year later, three-quarters of the Liberal caucus, including Dion, did an about-face and voted against extending a mission they had authorized in government. At least Dion showed up for the vote, unlike his former leader, Paul Martin, who sent our troops into harm's way as prime minister and then couldn't be bothered to vote on extending a mission he had ordered.

Looking back on it now, Dion accuses the Conservatives of resorting to "unprecedented blackmail" in precipitating the vote after a one-day debate, without consulting NATO or the Afghan government.

"Canada was in an improvised situation because the government wanted to look strong in front of the opposition," Dion declared in a *Presse Canadienne* report yesterday. "For narrow, partisan reasons, it improvised an intervention such as that in Afghanistan without any negotiation with our allies."

An improvised intervention? Our troops were already there, sent there by Dion and his Liberal colleagues when they were in government. The May 2006 vote simply extended their presence for another two years. If NATO was not consulted, it was certainly grateful.

What got Dion so riled up? The immediate cause was a statement by Harper's Quebec lieutenant, Lawrence Cannon, that the Liberal government acted "irresponsibly" in authorizing the mission "without knowing the consequences."

Dion was also responding to Harper's statement in Australia last weekend that there was no need for an immediate debate and vote in the House on the fate of the mission in 2009. And this after the PM had been saying since last June that the mission wouldn't be extended further without a parliamentary consensus. This means no extension, since the Liberals, NDP and Bloc Québécois all want to leave Kandahar, though only the NDP wants to cut and run by quitting Afghanistan altogether.

But, presumably, there will be a vote on Afghanistan – in the throne speech, which is expected to outline the future of the mission. And that vote will pre-empt any opposition days and debate in the House.

So what was Harper saying last weekend? He was trying to flush out the Liberals, and Dion tumbled right into the trap. By angrily returning to the vote on the mission in 2006, Dion made it about its Liberal origins in 2005.

This isn't very smart.

www.lianmacdonald.ca

Pakistan: Suicide blast kills 15

IDNUMBER 200709140039
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A18
COLUMN: Fast Track
KEYWORDS: BOMBINGS; TERRORISM; EXPLOSIONS; VIOLENCE; DEATHS
DATELINE: ISLAMABAD
SOURCE: Reuters; AFP
WORD COUNT: 133

At least 15 elite commandos were killed in a suspected suicide blast in the dining area of a high-security army camp in north-west Pakistan. Eleven others were wounded, six seriously, in the explosion, which coincided with heavy fighting in Pakistan's tribal areas and the visit of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte. "The commandos were taking dinner in their mess at Tarbela town when a suspected suicide bomber blew himself up at its gate," a security official said. The blast at the camp, about 70 kilometres north-west of Islamabad, came as the military said it killed 70 Islamic militants in two days of intense fighting in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

Timing right for a debate

IDNUMBER 200709140059
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.14
EDITION: Final
SECTION: The Editorial Page
PAGE: A28
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS
SOURCE: Calgary Herald
WORD COUNT: 277

Prime Minister Stephen Harper picked a good time to demand a debate on Afghanistan policy, rather than when to pull Canadian troops out of the country.

Even as he was making those comments in Australia, a Taliban spokesman was laying down the basic prerequisites for negotiations to the government in Kabul that the NATO mission is supposed to be propping up — at the invitation of Afghan president Hamid Karzai.

Not that the Taliban preconditions are likely to lead to negotiations. Karzai could not possibly agree to demands such as the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops, and an Islamic democracy — however the Taliban understands that.

Still, Afghans are understandably weary of the war, and despite the western allies' considerable battlefield success, the Taliban are still capable of denying them peace.

Many of them wonder how the war can be brought to an end, and what kind of accommodation Kabul will ultimately be obliged to make with the Taliban.

As the Taliban are generally loathed outside the Pashtun areas of the country where Canadian forces are now confronting them, Karzai need not give them much — if he can hang on.

However, neither the Afghan National Army, nor the Afghan police, are yet able to provide his government adequate security against the kind of attacks the Taliban are capable of mounting.

This is changing, but more time — certainly longer than February 2009 when Canada's current commitment comes to an end — will be needed.

Harper should make it clear there are other options beyond staying or withdrawing, especially continuing to train units of the Afghan National Army to take over the country's essential security functions now handled by NATO forces.

Taliban conditions for peace talks should be seen for what they are — a propaganda ploy by a terrorist force that is trying to parlay bombings, kidnapping and murder into political power.

Suicide bombing at camp kills 15 elite commandos; Pakistani president reaffirms country's commitment to U.S.

IDNUMBER 200709140055

PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald

DATE: 2007.09.14

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A27

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Aamir Qureshi, Agence France–Presse, Getty Images /Pakistani commandos guard the site of a suicide bombing at an army camp Thursday. The country has been beset by violence since troops stormed the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad in July. ;

KEYWORDS: TERRORISM; TERRITORIAL ISSUES; PRESIDENTS; FOREIGN RELATIONS

DATELINE: ISLAMABAD

BYLINE: Rana Jawad

SOURCE: Agence France–Presse

WORD COUNT: 428

Fifteen elite commandos were killed in a suspected suicide blast at a high–security army camp on Thursday in the latest violence to rock Pakistan.

The commandos were eating in the northwestern camp's mess hall when the attacker detonated his explosives outside.

In addition to the dead, 11 people were wounded, six seriously, officials said.

The latest in a string of attacks on the military followed two days of deadly clashes in Pakistan's lawless tribal zone and coincided with the visit of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte.

Chief military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad confirmed the death toll but said authorities were still investigating the blast at the camp, about 70 kilometres northwest of Islamabad.

Pakistan has been beset by violence since troops stormed the radical Red Mosque in Islamabad in July. Suicide attacks have killed nearly 250 people since then including 31 in the garrison city of Rawalpindi this month.

The violence has piled pressure on Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's president and army chief and a key U.S. ally in the "war on terror" as he struggles with a political crisis ahead of general and presidential elections.

"Such cowardly acts of killing innocent people cannot be left unpunished," Musharraf said of the latest blast.

Pakistani troops backed by gunships have killed more than 70 militants in two days of heavy fighting in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, where the US says al–Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden may be hiding.

At least two soldiers also died in the latest clashes early Thursday, which erupted when Pakistani forces repelled a mass insurgent attack on a checkpoint in the North Waziristan area, the army said.

Musharraf told Negroponte during a two-hour meeting in Islamabad that "Pakistan's commitment should never be in doubt as it was in Pakistan's own national interest," a foreign ministry statement said.

He also spoke out against pending U.S. legislation that would tie aid payments to Pakistan's performance in fighting al-Qaeda.

The U.S. Deputy Secretary of State reiterated Washington's full backing for Musharraf and played down indications that the U.S. could launch unilateral strikes against militants on Pakistani soil.

In Pakistan's latest confrontation with the insurgents, troops fought off militants who attacked an army checkpoint in North Waziristan's Nawaz Kot district overnight, the top military spokesman said.

The army said Pakistani helicopter gunships and artillery also pounded militant hideouts in part of the tribal zone of South Waziristan on Tuesday and Wednesday, killing up to 40 militants.

Dozens of Islamist fighters also attacked a checkpoint on Wednesday and kidnapped 12 troops in the country's northwest.

A militant spokesman warned on the same day that they would start killing more than 200 captive soldiers who surrendered in South Waziristan nearly two weeks ago.

Hundreds of al-Qaeda and Taliban militants sought sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal belt after fleeing Afghanistan in the wake of the U.S. invasion that followed the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on New York and Washington.