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Australia takes key role in U.S. strategy

IDNUMBER 200709150036
PUBLICATION: The Record (Kitchener, Cambridge And Waterloo)
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Insight
PAGE: A17
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: ASSOCIATED PRESS / Australian Prime Minister JohnHoward makes a joint appearance with U.S. President George W. Bush in 2005, to affirm their defensive alliance. ; Photo: ASHOK KAPUR ;
BYLINE: ASHOK KAPUR
SOURCE: FOR THE RECORD
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 966

The George W. Bush government recently signed two important defence trade co-operation treaties — the first with the United Kingdom on June 27 and the second with Australia Sept. 5.

These treaties establish privileged access and co-operation between the United States, the U.K. and Australia, eliminating bureaucratic delays in regard to billions of dollars in military sales. As well, they will mean big business for the military establishments of the three countries and their domestic defence industrial companies.

The two deals have great economic and strategic significance. Just as Bush is caught in the Iraqi quagmire, his administration had added a new leg to develop Asia's security architecture. Australia's importance has grown in the new scheme because Asia is now more important to the U.S., which is unable to manage Asian affairs on its own.

Australia provides a strategic location giving the U.S. unimpeded access for its military, commercial and political requirements in Asia — from the U.S. to Australia and the South Pacific, and from Australia to Asia.

The Aussies share Western cultural and political values, they have an internationalist outlook, and have a solid record as a reliable U.S. ally — despite Bush's unpopularity with a segment of the Australian population.

Subtle shifts in U.S.–U.K.–Australia links have led to the elevation of Canberra's role as an American ally. The U.K., no doubt, remains important for Washington as a member of the United Nations Security Council, where it uses its considerable diplomatic skills and vast international experience to craft UN resolutions and build consensus for them, often fronting for Washington. London remains an effective interlocutor for Middle Eastern and Commonwealth affairs and in Africa. It has functioned as a junior military partner, most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, and it has continuous access to Middle Eastern political establishments, using its defence trade links with key countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf kingdoms to promote its own and broader Western interests.

Privileged U.S.–U.K. defence industrial co-operation is key to maintain access to Middle Eastern political establishments and markets that are hungry for high technology military goods that serve insecure political regimes living in a volatile region.

The June 27 treaty expresses a special relationship, but is not simply a sign of an ongoing government-to-government relationship. It points as well to the growing importance of defence industrial links and private defence firms among nations.

Since 2003, for example, Iraq has given Bush many political headaches, but the volatility within Iraq and the region has been a blessing for U.S. military contractors. The insurgency may have wrecked Iraq's economy but it has fattened the bottom lines of American energy and defence companies. For America, Iraq has meant bad news for the politicians and good news for the business community.

Nonetheless, the U.K.'s importance in Asian strategic affairs has declined. During the Second World War the U.K.-U.S.-Soviet partnership defeated Hitler in Europe, and then the U.S. and U.K. turned Germany around into a modern, democratic ally. In the Cold War the U.K.-U.S. partnership kept NATO going to contain Moscow's threats.

Also during the Second World War both worked together to check Japan's military expansion into the Far East and Southeast Asia. The U.K.'s Lord Louis Mountbatten was the Supreme Allied Commander in the Burma-Southeast Asia theatre. But the fall of Singapore to Japan's military advance ended the British claim as keeper of the peace and signalled the end of its empire.

Later, the U.S. alone bore the brunt of the deadly fight in the Pacific with Japanese forces. It defeated Japan and turned it around into a modern, industrial and a democratic ally of the West. As the senior partner, it negotiated transfer of important Pacific islands from U.K. to U.S. control and acquired strategic Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean — bases that continue to serve as vital communication facilities and platforms for U.S. bombers.

With the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997, the British presence in Asia was effectively finished.

Japan became the cornerstone of U.S. alliances in Asia and served as a platform for U.S. military presence in the region, as a source of military supplies during the Korean and Vietnam wars, and as a partner to check North Korean and Chinese expansionist tendencies. Japan and the U.S. have adopted military guidelines to safeguard the security of Taiwan and the integrity of the region's open sealanes.

With this recent deal, Canberra now becomes the bigger kid on the block, having served as a junior kid in the past. Washington is pushing its Australia links for several reasons. China is pushing its presence into Southeast Asia through energy acquisitions and trade deals, and it is pushing its navy into the Pacific and the Indian oceans. Beijing is promoting itself as a peaceful neighbour, but its neighbours are on guard by interacting with it and by building their economic and military capacities just in case Beijing's intentions become aggressive.

Russia, too, is asserting itself in the Far East. With a triangular U.S.-Japan-Australia relationship, and with the U.K. in the background to help on the diplomatic front, Australia is well positioned to assert itself in the Southwest Pacific and to expand its presence by building military links with India as well.

Recently the U.S., India and Australia held joint military exercises in the Bay of Bengal, off the Myanmar coast where China is building naval facilities. With the uncertainty in Japanese politics as a result of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's decision to resign, Canberra's — and New Delhi's — importance is likely to grow as the American search for strong allies continues.

Ashok Kapur is a distinguished professor emeritus of the University of Waterloo.

Dion loyalists charge byelection sabotage; But Ignatieff's supporters deny trying to erode support for leader by waging losing campaign

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald

DATE: 2007.09.15

SECTION: News

PAGE: A3

BYLINE: Stephen Maher Ottawa Bureau

ILLUSTRATION: Liberal Leader Stephane Dion listens to Jocelyn Coulon at a news conference in Montreal on July 20, after the party picked Coulon to run in the riding of Outremont. (Peter McCabe / CP)

WORD COUNT: 622

OTTAWA – Michael Ignatieff supporters are sabotaging Liberal efforts in the Outremont byelection in hopes of weakening Liberal Leader Stephane Dion, Dion loyalists say.

A poll in La Presse of Montreal on Friday suggests the NDP may win a historic breakthrough in the riding on Monday. That would be a disaster for Mr. Dion, who personally selected international affairs expert Jocelyn Coulon as the Liberal candidate in what should be a safe seat in downtown Montreal.

Dion loyalists suspect Liberal organizers who support Mr. Ignatieff have been undermining the campaign, hoping that a loss would force Mr. Dion out of the leadership once Liberals realized that he couldn't deliver seats in Quebec.

"I only know what I see, and I see some suspicious stuff," said one Liberal worker on the ground.

The Dion people say organizers in the riding have made a series of bizarre, counterproductive moves.

"There's one of two options," said one source close to Mr. Dion. "There's some folks there who are either grossly incompetent or intentionally malicious."

Dion loyalists are leaning toward the second option. They say Mr. Ignatieff's supporters have refused offers of help from out-of-town volunteers and tried to stop high-profile Liberals like Ken Dryden and Justin Trudeau from campaigning in Outremont. They also tried unsuccessfully to block a rally tonight that will feature Mr. Dryden, Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Dion.

Mr. Ignatieff was not available for comment Friday.

Denis Coderre, a Quebec Liberal MP and key organizer in the province who supported Mr. Ignatieff for the leadership, said Friday that Quebec Liberals are united behind Mr. Dion.

"There's no way" the party is divided, he said. "We are working hard. There's one team and that's Team Liberal, and tell them to try something else."

The Dion people have no proof that Mr. Ignatieff is orchestrating events, but they fear he is pushing Quebec Liberals to throw the byelection and then demand that Mr. Dion step down.

Dion loyalists charge byelection sabotage; But Ignatieff's supporters deny trying to erode support for leader

"If you're going to do a putsch, the next step is somebody calling for Dion's head," said a source close to Mr. Dion. "One might find that Michael himself is making calls."

Another Dion loyalist compared what's happening to the internal battles between former leaders Jean Chretien and Paul Martin.

"It's frustrating," the party worker said. "I had a moment of hope at the convention that that kind of internal division is behind us. Obviously that was a naive and silly thing to hope."

Friday's poll shows NDP candidate Thomas Mulcair leading Mr. Coulon in Outremont by six points, just within the margin of error. Mr. Mulcair was the provincial Liberal environment minister until he fell out with Premier Jean Charest. Bilingual, well-known and media-savvy, he is likely the best candidate the NDP has ever run in Quebec.

The NDP has only ever won a seat in Quebec once, in a 1990 byelection. But the party has been making a concerted effort, and Jack Layton is the first NDP leader with roots in the province.

The Liberals are alarmed at the prospect of the NDP winning the seat.

"Our concern is that if they get a riding in Montreal, then there's a risk that they're like a cancer" and will spread, said one senior party official.

There are two other byelections taking place in rural Quebec on Monday: in Roberval-Lac-St-Jean and Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot.

The La Presse poll suggests that the Bloc is ahead in Saint-Hyacinthe but the Tories have a slight lead in Roberval, formerly the seat of deputy Bloc leader Michel Gauthier.

Political strategists expect that if the Tories take that seat from the Bloc, it will strengthen the hand of Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the fall session of Parliament, which begins Oct. 16 with a new speech from the throne.

The Bloc has threatened to vote against the speech from the throne unless the Tories promise to withdraw Canadian troops from Afghanistan by 2009. But it may be harder for Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe to take a hard line if he has lost a seat to the Tories.

And if the NDP wins the traditionally Liberal riding of Outremont, it may make Liberals hesitant to vote to bring down the government. Strategists suggest Mr. Harper would then be less likely to compromise with the opposition parties, who are all pushing for a Canadian withdrawal from Kandahar province in Afghanistan.

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Dion loyalists charge byelection sabotage; But Ignatieff's supporters deny trying to erode support for leader

Helping Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200709150054
PUBLICATION: The Leader-Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Letters
PAGE: B7
BYLINE: Keith Picard
SOURCE: The Leader-Post
WORD COUNT: 179

I just love to read our opposition MPs speak out on the Afghan mission. Don't you? Every time I pick up the paper, it seems they're all demanding the government get our troops out of Afghanistan.

Well, let's see. We go in with a coalition of other countries and kick out a government we considered bad. We help set up another government, which is new and needs help to stay in power.

So what are our goals in Afghanistan and how do we achieve them? I think we should help this government -- elected by its own citizens -- stay in power. This means combat troops on the ground.

First, we help keep the Taliban from taking over this country again.

Then, we help train and equip its new army, police and border guards so they can protect their own elected government from harm.

When these goals are achieved, this new Afghan government can protect the rights of all its citizens.

Is this a honorable mission? I think it is. As for Stephane Dion, Gilles Duceppe and Jack Layton, "the Three Stooges" should stop playing eastern politics with our troops. And we all should put yellow ribbons on our vehicles to show support for the troops.

Lest we forget.

Keith Picard

Dalmeny

By Kozo Mizoguchi

DATE: 2007.09.14
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 738

TOKYO (AP) _ The scramble to replace Japan's hospitalized prime minister settled on Friday into a contest between a dovish ruling party stalwart who favours warmer relations with Asia, and a stout conservative with ties to the outgoing government.

Taro Aso, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's hawkish foreign minister until a Cabinet reshuffle last month, declared his candidacy at ruling party headquarters Friday. Just hours earlier, senior politician Yasuo Fukuda announced he would run in this ``emergency situation."

Aso, 66, a comic book buff whose acerbic comments about China have drawn protests from Beijing, had been the presumed front-runner. But Fukuda, 71, a dovish critic of Abe's government, gathered enough support Friday from key ruling party figures to mount a serious challenge.

Abe, 52, abruptly announced on Wednesday he would resign, shocking his own party and throwing Japanese politics into confusion. The uncertainty spiked on Thursday when he was hospitalized for psychological stress and exhaustion.

Aso and Fukuda are running for ruling Liberal Democratic Party president on Sept. 23. The winner of that contest is assured election as prime minister by the parliament because of the LDP's vast majority in the powerful lower house.

It was unclear if any other ruling party members would run.

``This is an emergency situation, so I will do what I must do," Fukuda told supporters at a Tokyo hotel. ``I have a strong sense that I should do this for the country to move Japanese politics forward."

Aso, meanwhile called for an ``open election," referring to criticism that the selection of the next prime minister was essentially a matter of negotiation between ruling party factions, rather than democratic contest.

``We want to announce our policies to the people of Japan and the members of the party," Aso told supporters. ``It is my duty to shed the image that the LDP is going backward."

The two are battling to lead a ruling party in crisis.

Abe took office a year ago with a bold plan to boost Japan's global role and roll back the country's postwar pacifist policies, but his government quickly foundered on a series of scandals and gaffes.

Four of his Cabinet ministers had to quit, and one committed suicide. The LDP lost big in July 29 elections, ceding control over the upper house of parliament to the opposition led by the Democratic Party of Japan.

The prime minister also jumped ship ahead of a major struggle in parliament over the extension of the country's naval mission to the Indian Ocean to refuel ships in support of U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan. The mission expires Nov. 1.

Aso and Fukuda have some things in common: both are longtime LDP officials and both come from a line of politicians. Fukuda's father was Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, and Aso's grandfather was Shigeru Yoshida, a pivotal premier from the 1950s.

Ideologically, however, they tread different paths.

Aso hews to sharply conservative views, and once suggested that Taiwan benefited from being colonized by Japan in the first half of the 20th century. He angered Beijing by saying that China was a military threat.

Fukuda, meanwhile, favours tighter relations with Japan's Asian neighbours, while opposing prime ministerial visits to the Yasukuni war shrine, which critics such as Beijing accuse of supporting militarism.

It is unclear whether the two would approach the Afghan mission differently, since the policy was begun under Abe's predecessor, Junichiro Koizumi, whom Fukuda served as chief Cabinet secretary.

While Aso had been considered the front-runner, Fukuda collected support from Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura, and reportedly from Koizumi, who still commands a loyal following in the party. Finance Minister Fukushima Nukaga gave up his own plans to run to throw his backing to Fukuda.

The leadership upheaval comes as the ruling party is facing increasing calls for snap elections in the lower house.

Democratic Party of Japan leader Yukio Hatoyama said it was fruitless at this point to allow the LDP to choose the next premier on its own.

“The prime minister will not have the mandate of the people,” Hatoyama told reporters. “We should hold elections as soon as possible to judge the will of the public.”

Fifty percent of respondents to an Asahi newspaper poll also favoured a lower house election — up 11 percentage points from a previous poll at the end of July. The poll of 1,029 people said 41 percent supported the opposition, and 33 percent favoured the LDP.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Kaoru Yosano, meanwhile, attempted to calm jitters by assuring reporters that Abe would hold power until a successor takes charge, despite spending the next couple of days in the hospital.

“Although Mr. Abe has expressed his intention to resign, the current Cabinet is responsible for affairs until the new prime minister is inaugurated,” Yosano said. “So this means Mr. Abe remains in office until a new prime minister is chosen.”

Iraq hearings bring lessons in democracy; Canadians could learn from this week's drama in Washington, where surprise substance trumped style

IDNUMBER 200709150170
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: Ideas
PAGE: ID01
ILLUSTRATION: JASON REED REUTERS New York senator, and Democratic presidential frontrunner, Hillary Clinton listens as U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, gives his assessment of the state of the conflict in that country while testifying at a Senate hearing in Washington this week. ;
BYLINE: Tim Harper
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 848

Canadians watching the "war over the war" in Washington might want to file this week away for future reference when the country is inevitably immersed in its own debate over the fate of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

There are lessons to be learned from the congressional hearings into the Iraq war, from the role of the Prime Minister to the nature of parliamentary debate.

No matter how decorated, how brave, how intelligent, U.S. Gen. David Petraeus was never going to be able to pad his resume by being a front man for a discredited president. As career moves go, it was the political equivalent of diving on a grenade.

But behind the political posturing, the fevered rhetoric and the presidential jockeying here this week, some answers broke out.

Some honesty and candour snuck into the assessment of the war in Iraq and some legislators – certainly not all – tucked away their ambitions and tendency to preen and asked tough questions meant to illicit understanding, not sound bites.

And here's where Canada could benefit from the U.S. system.

As former U.S. diplomat David Jones, who was posted to Ottawa during the 1990s noted, the U.S. committee system is a "serious opportunity to ask serious questions of serious leaders who have to answer them," – something that should be intrinsic to Question Period, but is not.

George W. Bush has, over the years, provided a textbook example of how to squander support for a military mission, something which should be studied, then studied again, at 24 Sussex Dr.

But, even though Bush has never been knocked off course, the Washington debate has revealed a political system that works when it comes to oversight, accountability and the extraction of information for both

Iraq hearings bring lessons in democracy; Canadians could learn from this week's drama in Washington, where

Congress and the public.

Certainly, positions on the war have not moved here, but if you're paying attention, you are able to at least make an informed choice.

Petraeus may yet suffer the debilitating collateral damage endured by Colin Powell when he was pushed by Bush to sell the war at the United Nations, but the top military commander in Iraq did provide invaluable input to an important debate.

There is a third lesson as well, but this is one that goes beyond Iraq and Afghanistan and has always been a military truism.

It is much easier to commit troops to a war than it is to bring them home.

If the first lesson is Bush's failure to communicate, it is not through lack of exposure.

Eight times since 2003, he has gone on prime time television to first sell his war, then plead for time. He deals with Iraq at regular press conferences, in weekly radio addresses, in his annual State of the Union speech and in every media availability with a visiting leader.

But you can't sell a war on deception, turn every new phase of a conflict into a new bumper sticker slogan, bluff your way through with bully boy, frat-house pronouncements and change your war rationale with each setback.

Paul Frazer, a former Canadian ambassador who is now a Washington consultant, points to another area where Bush lost support.

"In Canada and the U.S., support has always been solid for the troops, but here the president was not seen to be supporting them by providing them with proper armour and equipment," Frazer said.

Frazer said Prime Minister Stephen Harper's government must always provide the best possible tools for Canadian soldiers if he wants to maintain voter support.

"You're asking young Canadian to make the ultimate sacrifice," Frazer said. "Give them the tools to do the job."

Frazer also says Canadian ministers must get out of the theatre of Question Period, leave Ottawa, and sell the mission as a Canadian commitment to NATO, not a George W. mission.

"Keep the goal as clear as possible and communicate it, communicate it, communicate it, because you don't reach everybody at the same time."

Nowhere in the world could a war be more surgically dissected and debated than it is in Washington, with expert opinion and emotional pleas swirling around this capital daily.

In the U.S., congressional committee hearings play the role of daily Question Period in Ottawa. In their newly-released book *Uneasy Neighbors*, former MP David Kilgour and former U.S. diplomat Jones call Question Period one of "the great parliamentary institutions," at least in the abstract.

The two men also concede the lack of a Question Period spares Americans "puerile exchanges between cavorting jackanapes" which elicit insults, not answers.

Iraq hearings bring lessons in democracy; Canadians could learn from this week's drama in Washington, wh

During 13 hours of questioning over two days, legislators did get answers from Petraeus and the U.S. ambassador to Baghdad, Ryan Crocker. Crocker did not try to pretend there was political progress in Iraq where there was none.

"I've got to be honest," he said. "This is going to take more time."

He offered no assurance of success. When Republican John Warner, a World War II veteran and one-time navy secretary who will retire after 30 years as a Virginia senator, asked Petraeus whether the Iraq mission was making America safer, Petraeus admitted he didn't know.

From a distance – and indeed from this vantage point – it is tempting to write off the U.S. system as a failure because Democrats have been unable to end an unpopular war. But, in fact, the U.S. Congress may be reflecting an ambivalent electorate that knows Iraq is a mess now, but could be a bigger mess when Americans pull out.

"The intellectual challenge here has been that no one has been able to make a case for how to get out quickly, bloodlessly and efficiently," says Brookings Institution scholar Stephen Hess.

"We created this war. So now we have a responsibility to Americans who have died and certainly to Iraqis who have been killed."

A cumbersome system sometimes appears to be set up for gridlock, but the stars do align to allow action when they must, Hess says.

"Sometimes it's painful to watch and it should be kept out of the view of small children, but the system ultimately works," he said.

Tim Harper is a former Star Ottawa

bureau chief

BODY COUNT: MOST OF THE PEOPLE KILLED ARE INSURGENTS AND CIVILIANS Kandahar's gatekeeper for the dead The morgue in southern Afghanistan is a busy place. Graeme Smith visits the man who takes care of the unclaimed corpses. 'I don't remember my dreams, thank God,' he says

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL
IDN: 072580130
DATE: 2007.09.15
PAGE: F3 (ILLUS)
BYLINE: GRAEME SMITH
SECTION: Focus
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN
WORDS: 977
WORD COUNT: 887

Graeme Smith KANDAHAR, AFGHANISTAN Flies buzz around smears of blood on the metal shelves in Kandahar's morgue. The smell is overwhelming, a fetid reek that seeps into the lungs and thickens, leaving a visitor gagging for air.

This is a choke point in the system that collects the human remains left behind by the rising violence in southern Afghanistan. Foreign soldiers in flag-draped coffins amount to perhaps 4 per cent of the 4,000 or more people who have died in the war this year. The bulk of the dead are insurgents and civilians, whose disposal is far less ceremonial.

Friends and relatives sometimes recover the bodies where they fall and give them a traditional burial. However, hundreds of others lie unclaimed and these corpses end up in the callused hands of Mohammed Shah.

The soft-spoken man guesses that he is 35 years old, but he looks decades older. He worked as a farm labourer until the end of last year, when the man formerly responsible for the morgue died of old age. Mr. Shah tells his relatives that he works as a clerk at Mirwais Hospital; it would be shameful to admit that he spends his days in the small white trailer where the bodies are kept, hidden in the foliage behind the hospital.

Racks inside the trailer can hold 20 corpses at a time and they often fill up during the worst of the fighting and bombings. The air conditioning cannot keep up with the summer heat, so Mr. Shah works amid the smell of rot. He complains of headaches.

"Sometimes they deliver the bodies at night, and I don't get any sleep," he says. "When I sleep, people say I talk in my dreams, I say very bad words. But I don't remember my dreams, thank God." Mr. Shah says he has handled more than 500 corpses since he started, but hospital officials admit that it's impossible to know the real figures because of shoddy record-keeping. A battered notebook, with the words "book of corpses" scrawled on the cover, contains a few details for some of them: name, place of origin, date admitted and a short description of how the person died.

BODY COUNT: MOST OF THE PEOPLE KILLED ARE INSURGENTS AND CIVILIANS Kandahar's gatekeeper

But hospital staff do not document the majority of cases and they blame the local police for failing to provide information about the bodies they drop at the morgue.

"We need a written record," says Sharifa Seddiqui, the hospital director. "Who is this dead person? A suicide bomber? A political prisoner? This is the problem. We don't know." Police are not the only ones who dump bodies on Mr. Shah's doorstep.

People bring the dead in pickup trucks, family sedans and donkey carts. The hospital's bare wards, lacking equipment and drugs, also send their share of corpses.

The most common cause of death appears to be gunshot wounds, Mr.

Shah says. Blast injuries are also common, usually a result of Taliban bombings and sometimes air strikes by foreign troops.

One of the corpses appears to be a Pashtun tribesman with a bushy black beard, his chest cut open and his eyes missing. Mr. Shah says the police told him that the man had died while in detention at Guantanamo, Cuba, but the claim could not be verified and it's unclear how he received the injuries.

Suicide bombers also end up at the morgue, and Mr. Shah has become an expert in the ways a bomb belt can rip a person apart. He crouches in front of a blackened heap of rags and flesh, and points to a bomber's gaping chest cavity. It was a small bomb, he says; no foreign troops were injured as the man blew himself up outside a Canadian troop carrier on the outskirts of the city.

A Taliban statement later identified the man as Jamaluddin, of Kandahar province, but in the morgue his remains lay unclaimed.

Insurgents are usually reluctant to pick up their comrades' bodies, but they do sometimes skulk inside the morgue.

The Taliban do not bother Mr. Shah; he was born in the insurgent heartland of Panjwai district and he occasionally recognizes the dead fighters or the dangerous men who arrive to collect them.

Those who are not collected get buried in a nearby graveyard.

Kabul authorities have reportedly decreed that suicide bombers will not receive an Islamic burial, saying they have violated a religious tenet by killing themselves.

Feelings about the Taliban are not so harsh in Kandahar, however, and Mr. Shah says he tries to treat every corpse with dignity. The only ritual denied the bombers is the customary washing of the body.

"We don't wash the suicide bombers," he said. "The body is broken.

You cannot wash it." The others get heaved onto a tiled table and rubbed clean. Mr.

Shah changes into a black outfit beforehand to avoid staining his clothes. The process takes an hour if he works alone, or half the time with an assistant. A woman washes the female bodies.

Mr. Shah wraps the clean bodies in white cloth and ties the bundles in three places, then lowers them into narrow plywood coffins. Tufts of raw cotton are packed inside to keep the loads from shifting, the boxes are shut and gravediggers take them away. They are dropped in shallow graves near the city's northern slums, under piles of gravel and dirt.

BODY COUNT: MOST OF THE PEOPLE KILLED ARE INSURGENTS AND CIVILIANS Kandahar12gatekee

Afterward, Mr. Shah takes a hot shower, changes into his regular clothes and goes home. The work is not pleasant, he says, but he can now afford to supplement his family's diet with occasional meals of meat.

He also seems to feel a quiet pride in his role as the gatekeeper for the dead. "It's hard work," he says. "But it's necessary." Graeme Smith is The Globe and Mail's correspondent in Moscow.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Kandahar

SUBJECT TERM: strife; deaths; bodies; morgues; biography

PERSONAL NAME: Mohammed Shah

BODY COUNT: MOST OF THE PEOPLE KILLED ARE INSURGENTS AND CIVILIANS Kandahar's gatekeeper

Canadians win back territory lost to Taliban during troop rotation

IDNUMBER 200709150007
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; BOMBINGS; FOREIGN AID; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: KABUL, Afghanistan
SOURCE: New York Times
WORD COUNT: 308

KABUL, Afghanistan – Canadian forces have regained control of roughly half of a strategic area outside the southern city of Kandahar that fell to the Taliban last month, according to Afghan and Canadian officials.

Four Afghan police officers died and two Canadian soldiers were wounded in an offensive that unfolded Sunday and Monday in the Zhare district, officials said. Seven hundred Canadians, backed by airstrikes and Leopard tanks, met little resistance from Taliban fighters.

"The Taliban tried to avoid combat," said Capt. Sylvain Chalifour, spokesman for the Canadian forces. "Every time, they could flee away, they did."

The fighting fit the pattern that has emerged in southern Afghanistan this summer, according to officials.

The Taliban generally have avoided direct clashes with heavily armed NATO forces and instead attacked lightly armed Afghan police forces or carried out suicide and roadside bomb attacks.

In the last year, Zhare and the neighbouring Panjwai district have emerged as bellwethers in the struggle between Canadian-led NATO forces and the Taliban in Kandahar province.

Last September, Zhare and Panjwai were the scene of the largest battle in Afghanistan since 2002. In weeks of fierce fighting, Canadian and American forces drove hundreds of Taliban fighters out of a network of trenches and bunkers in the two districts.

Hundreds of Taliban and 12 Canadians died in the fighting, which NATO declared a major victory and vowed to follow with reconstruction projects.

Instead, Taliban forces took back roughly two-thirds of Zhare and one-third of Panjwai after Canadian forces withdrew from the area during a troop rotation in August. The Taliban struck police posts and, in recaptured areas, began hanging civilians they declared "spies," according to Afghan officials.

Chalifour said the Canadians had "found out some lessons" and were establishing new, joint checkpoints with Afghan soldiers and police officers in Zhare. He said that Canadian forces were training Afghan police and soldiers and that they would not withdraw from the checkpoints until the Afghans could defend themselves.

Surgeon wants troops to stay put Afghanistan doctors and nurses are in danger from forces who want to topple government.

SOURCETAG: 0709150473

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.09.15

EDITION: Final

SECTION: City & Region

PAGE: B1

ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos 1. IN THE FIELD: Vivian McAlister operates in Afghanistan. 2. UP TO SNUFF: Vivian McAlister works in the operating room of the Number 1 Canadian Field Hospital. Even though the hospital is mobile because everything is housed in containers, it is equipped to the standards of a modern hospital in Canada. The military is very good at organization and supply.

BYLINE: JOHN MINER, SUN MEDIA

WORD COUNT: 237

A London surgeon has returned home from Afghanistan convinced it would be a disaster for the people there if Canada pulled its soldiers out.

"I don't think people understand that, what a terrible loss it will be to those people if we withdraw," Vivian McAlister said yesterday.

A 52-year-old general surgeon, McAlister worked during July and August at the NATO hospital in Kandahar, operating on both coalition soldiers and Afghanistan people injured by bullets and bomb blasts.

McAlister said he has been deeply affected by what he found there.

Afghanistan doctors and nurses are being targeted by the forces who want to undermine the government, the same tactic the Khmer Rouge used to destroy Cambodia, he said.

The result is there are areas of Afghanistan where there's no medical care. Both the Red Cross and Medecins Sans Frontieres have been forced to withdraw.

"It is not safe, nor is it effective, for unsupported medical volunteers to try to help in health-care reconstruction," McAlister said.

The medical care provided can only be done under the protection, he said.

McAlister said he was safe at the Kandahar base and never ventured outside where he would be at risk.

The real heroes there are the medics and soldiers who risk their lives outside the base, he said.

During his stay there, about 90 per cent of the people cared for at the hospital were Afghans, with the rest coalition soldiers. Only a few were Canadian.

In a six-month period, the hospital handled 400 patients, with most requiring several operations.

Surgeon wants troops to stay put Afghanistan doctors and nurses are in danger from forces who want to topple government.

McAlister said it was amazing to see the positive impact on everyone — friend and foe — of seeing the Canadians give compassionate expert care to all patients, even those considered to be enemy.

"The Canadian Forces are mentoring Afghan doctors and nurses to rebuild their health-care in secure hospitals. This work is essential if Afghan society is to be saved," McAlister said.

"Afghanistan is not a small place, far, far away. It is a lynch-pin to the entire region, from Iran to Pakistan," he said.

McAlister said he's willing to return to work in Afghanistan.

"It is one of the best things that I've ever done." KEYWORDS=LOCAL

Soldiers glad to be home Families relieved and proud

SOURCETAG 0709150731

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.09.15

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Jason Franson, Sun Media Brig.—Gen Mark Skidmore pins a Campaign Star Medal on Afghan war veteran Cpl. Carl Fedalizo during a ceremony at the Edmonton Garrison yesterday.

BYLINE: RENATO GANDIA, SUN MEDIA

WORD COUNT: 284

Whenever the death of a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan hit the news, Rosalie Fedalizo and her family were glued to the TV expecting the worst but hoping her son Cpl. Carl Fedalizo was safe.

At an Edmonton Garrison medal ceremony yesterday that honoured 90 soldiers of A Squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse, the proud mother could not take her eyes off her 21-year-old son as he gallantly paraded with the other veterans.

"I'm glad he's back and safe," said the mother, as tears rolled on her face. "We're happy to see him and that nothing had happened to him."

The Fedalizo family drove from Vancouver to Edmonton to witness the ceremony after the soldiers' almost seven-months-long tour of duty in Afghanistan.

The veterans returned early this week.

"You know what you have achieved," Brig.-Gen. Mark Skidmore, commander of Land Force Western Area, told the soldiers after he pinned medals of valour on each of them.

"I suspect the Taliban also know what you've achieved," he said.

Skidmore said while other Canadians have questioned the Armed Forces' mission in Afghanistan, what can't be doubted is the soldiers' commitment to Canada.

"You can tell yourself, 'I did my bit for Canada and the oppressed,' " he told the soldiers.

"Wear those stars proudly because they not only represent your service, but your fallen comrades as well."

Since Canada's involvement in Afghanistan in 2002, 70 soldiers have died.

Col. Jon Vance, commander of 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group, thanked families present at the ceremony for their sacrifices and commended the soldiers.

"Know that you're loved by your country, feared by the enemies and admired by fellow soldiers," he told them.

Vance led the gathered crowd to a standing ovation, cheers and applause.

"You made us all proud," Vance said. "We knew you'd do well."

Tristan Connauton, 10, tried to get a picture of his dad Master Cpl. Steve Connauton, who returned from his fifth tour of duty.

"He's very important and very brave," the boy said, adding he's proud of his dad. But he also said he misses his dad whenever he's away.

Fedalizo said it feels great to be able to relax again, but his Afghanistan experience is something he won't soon forget.

What he will remember the most was "driving the tanks around and being in the front lines pretty much the whole time."

He doesn't know whether he will be deployed to Afghanistan again, but if he does, he will willingly go and serve his country.

His mom may not like the idea of redeployment, but she said the family is supportive of her son's chosen profession. KEYWORDS=EDMONTON

New report says NATO lacks troops

SOURCETAG 0709150625
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 25
BYLINE: REUTERS
DATELINE: BRUSSELS
WORD COUNT: 244

The NATO force in Afghanistan does not have enough troops or equipment to secure advances made against Taliban insurgents and to guarantee a successful end to its mission, a lawmakers' report concluded yesterday.

The findings of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which draws legislators from 42 countries, echoes recent complaints by NATO commanders that troop shortages are hampering operations and come as some allies face domestic pressure to pull troops out.

"The NATO mission still suffers from a lack of personnel and assets," the assembly's Defence and Security Committee concluded after a six-day tour of allied operations last week which included talks with local and national Afghan officials.

"Fundamentally, the delegation came away with a sense that current efforts are making significant incremental progress, but not at a rate that will ensure without doubt an acceptable end state to our mission there," it concluded.

The report did not recommend how many reinforcements were needed in addition to 50,000 troops currently under NATO and U.S. command. The most pressing needs included more helicopters, intelligence and reconnaissance assets and trainers to build up the Afghan security forces, it said.

NATO commanders say they have had success in wresting towns from the Taliban and handing them back to government control, only to watch them be re-taken by insurgents because of the weakness of local Afghan army or police forces.

NATO wants to accelerate efforts to train up the Afghan army but is facing resistance from many allies who refuse to send either troops or trainers into the southern heartlands of the Taliban. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Sense of Afghanistan never fully realized

IDNUMBER 200709150119
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Weekend Extra
PAGE: E4
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: A Thousand Splendid Suns;
BYLINE: Jenni Mortin
SOURCE: Special to The StarPhoenix
WORD COUNT: 431

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

By Khaled Hosseini

Penguin Canada, \$34

Khaled Hosseini began his writing career in English with *The Kite Runner*, a dazzling popular success. It introduced many western readers to fiction of Afghanistan, a country known better for war and political chaos.

Now Hosseini returns with *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which solves one of the problems of its predecessor — a dearth of solid female characters. This book focuses on two Afghan women of different generations and upbringings who marry the same violent man, and support each other through his brutality and other terrible experiences.

We first meet Mariam, the illegitimate daughter of a rich man, whose life of rural hardship is sustained by her father's weekly visits from nearby Herat and even more — though she does not recognize it — by the love and strength of her mother. She is forced by her father's several wives to marry much-older Rasheel from far-off Kabul. He is a widower eager for a son, and she suffers when she fails to give him one.

Then he takes a second wife, beautiful Laila, whose middle-class family has been killed in the ongoing bombing of Kabul and who found sanctuary with the couple as she recovered from her injuries. For her own reasons, and despite Mariam's anger, she agrees to marry the brute. Through her children, a girl and a boy, Laila turns Mariam into a friend and the two help each other through the mutual horrors of their husband and the overwhelming changes in their country.

Some of those horrors are graphically described, particularly the birth by Caesarean of Laila's son without anaesthesia by a female doctor defying the Taliban's rulings and operating without her burqa (and pretty well everything she needs to do the job properly). This is a very strong section.

A Thousand Splendid Suns has some strengths not always found in this genre of novels about oppressed, brutalized women who soldier on and eventually fight back. Its Afghanistan setting makes it somewhat different, but Afghanistan is never realized enough to offset the formula. There is lots of talk about the politics of the time, but somehow it never rings the bell.

Sadly, the book disappointed. Nowhere is there anything like the passion and fascination attached to the kites in *The Kite Runner*. Mariam and Laila are strong and interesting women living through dangerous times, but somehow their situation never seems entirely real. The other characters are even less well developed, and the ending predictable.

Mortin is a freelance writer.

Feminists fall silent

IDNUMBER 200709150047
PUBLICATION: National Post
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: National
SECTION: Issues & Ideas
PAGE: A30
COLUMN: Robert Fulford
BYLINE: Robert Fulford
SOURCE: National Post
WORD COUNT: 788

On the question of honour killing, defined as the murder of women to protect men's pride, the news from Jordan has recently grown slightly worse. Although it's among the most civilized and modern of Arab countries, Jordan hasn't come close to eliminating this repellent crime, a bizarre remnant of the region's tribal past. It was only five years ago that the penal code made honour killing clearly illegal. Till then it was rarely punished.

In August, five Jordanian men were charged with the premeditated murder of a 22-year-old woman whose crime was to have a love affair with the man she later married. When the pre-marital affair came to light, her father, three uncles and a fifth male relative made the solemn collective decision that family honour demanded her death. One uncle has confessed to shooting her five times in the head; the four other men are charged as co-conspirators.

On Tuesday the magazine Mideast Youth described the protocol now followed by Jordanian authorities when a woman believes her male relatives are about to kill her. The police move swiftly, taking her into protective custody. Unfortunately, the only place they can protect her is jail. She's sent there until the issue is resolved, but it may never be resolved and she may remain imprisoned for years. So the suspected planners of a killing remain free while their potential victim sits in jail until (unlikely possibility) a male family member comes forth to guarantee her safety.

Surely honour killing is the ultimate male oppression, being uniquely permanent and committed by close relatives in the name of an abstraction. It's among many anti-woman atrocities in the Arab world that should enrage feminists of the West and rouse them to urgent action -- mass rallies, pickets, boycotts, furious public debates and anything else they would do for, say, California grape pickers who have no right to health care. But no action of this kind ever materializes, which amounts to a grave abdication of responsibility. Feminism, after all, embodies the principle that women deserve the same rights and dignity as men. In the original discussions nobody said "except for Muslims."

A major reason for this failure is that feminism has generally made common cause with the left,

and the left has in most cases decided it favours the Arabic cause. The Arabs have virtue on their side because they are not Americans.

Phyllis Chesler, an American therapist and psychologist who often writes on women's issues, argues that attitudes grounded in thoughtless cultural "sensitivity" inhibit what should be the natural response of women. The result is that "instead of telling the truth about Islam and demanding that the Muslim world observe certain standards, you have Westerners beating their breasts and saying, 'We can't judge you, we can't expose

you, we can't challenge you." This reaches the level of absurdity when gay and lesbian activists support Palestinians "who, meanwhile, are very busy persecuting homosexuals, who in turn are fleeing to Israel for political asylum." The gay community in Tel Aviv contains a remarkable number of refugees from Palestinian homophobia.

Chesler became a feminist after her marriage to a fellow student who was an Afghan. She went to Afghanistan with him and discovered she was expected to be a typical Afghan wife, the prisoner of her husband and his family. Even the U.S. embassy assumed she had given up all her rights when she married. After great effort she escaped, and divorced.

She might well notice the silence of Canadian women on the war against the Taliban. Surely they should be the most passionate supporters of that struggle, but most of them are AWOL, even more indifferent than men like Jack Layton. "Stifle yourself, Edith," Archie Bunker, the chauvinist husband on *All in the Family*, used to tell his wife. No need to give that advice to women when this issue arises. They stifle themselves.

For feminism, these are the best of times and the worst of times. Throughout the West the success of women in the professions, business and the media has exceeded the dreams of those who launched a new wave of feminism at the end of the 1960s. Everywhere in the West, legislatures have passed laws to protect women's rights.

Today Islamic oppression should be the first item on the agenda of every women's organization in the country. Women should remember that their triumphs resulted from vigorous campaigning in the 20th century. But on the great feminist issue of the 21st century, feminism stands mute.

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KEYWORDS: POLITICIANS; POLITICAL PARTIES; GOVERNMENT; CANADA

The Taliban grow desperate

IDNUMBER 200709150044
PUBLICATION: National Post
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: National
SECTION: Editorials
PAGE: A28
SOURCE: National Post
WORD COUNT: 620

The deaths this week of more than 70 Taliban in fighting in Afghanistan points out a truth often overlooked in coverage of the war there: For the past year, the Taliban have been unable to fight conventional military battles.

Whenever the Taliban send their fighters into combat with NATO or Afghan troops, they lose, their commanders are killed or captured and their forces suffer scores of casualties. These oppressive Muslim extremists have recently stepped up their suicide bombings, car bombings, targeted assassinations of Afghan government officials, school burnings and kidnappings because they know they cannot win the war militarily. Instead, they are hoping increased NATO casualties through random roadside attacks and reports of chaos in the streets will convince Western nations that Afghanistan is a lost cause.

A battle near the southern village of Aduzay this week perfectly illustrates the pattern. In one of their largest concentrations of troops this year, the Taliban ringed Aduzay, intent on driving out NATO soldiers. Instead, coalition aircraft destroyed the Taliban's firebases from the air, and NATO infantry then cleared the town's perimeter. In all, 45 Taliban were killed, with no reports of NATO or Afghan army losses.

It has been the same everywhere since last September's Operation Medusa. In that mission, Canadian and other NATO forces successfully cleared the provinces of southern and western Afghanistan of their Taliban cells. Hundreds of insurgents perished, while allied losses were minimal.

Last winter, NATO also killed or captured several prominent Taliban commanders, leaving many of their forces with no one in charge.

That is why the Taliban have increasingly resorted to terrorism: They have started going after civilians because they are less likely to fire back. They also hope media coverage of the violence will prod Western nations to beat a hasty retreat.

It is true civilian deaths are up this year by 50%, to well over 1,000. But ironically, this is because of NATO's military success, not because the Western alliance is failing. Our troops' success in infiltrating the Taliban and disrupting their chain of command has compelled the insurgency to scatter its troops all over Afghanistan just to survive. They have taken violence with them.

These same civilian deaths also reflect the growing capability of the Afghan army, which has suffered fewer casualties this year than in the past. The Taliban are often leaving national army brigades alone — fearing they will come out the loser — while they murder shoppers, storekeepers, school children and humanitarian workers. According to Canadian commanders, much of the improvement seen in the Afghan army can be directly linked to improved training.

Indeed, more and more, the Afghan army is taking the lead in patrols and offensive campaigns. Their skills have improved remarkably. (Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Afghan police: As in Iraq, the constabulary has made fewer strides towards impartiality and professionalism than its military cousins.)

Ottawa should respond to the Taliban's new pattern of attacks. Having mastered the Taliban in the field, our priority now should be to reduce our forces' casualties from improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines and mortar attacks — weapons that often target our troops as they are moving from one fortified area to the next while on patrol or resupply missions. Our military is rushing bomb-detecting and detonating equipment to the front lines. But it also needs to send helicopters that can ferry our fighting men and women over IED trouble spots. If our soldiers' deaths from this insidious and murderous devices were to drop, then perhaps more Canadians would see our successes there more clearly.

KEYWORDS: AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY; AUTOMOBILES

Canada needs to set benchmarks in Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200709150054
PUBLICATION: The Hamilton Spectator
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Opinion
PAGE: A22
BYLINE: Richard Ring, Grimsby
SOURCE: The Hamilton Spectator
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 198

Prime Minister Stephen Harper plans a vote in Parliament but not until he gets enough support to "finish the job" in Afghanistan. That entails getting Afghan military and police forces to the point where they can supply security for their own country.

Given the history of that country, and seeing what is unfolding in Iraq as the White House and military try to put a positive spin on the chaos there, should we not be concerned about this latest shift in our PM's strategy? The U.S. has given up on victory in Iraq; stability is now the overall target.

Finishing the job and providing security are politically potent words, but Canadians and the opposition parties must insist on meaningful definitions of what the PM means before even considering any extension of the current 2009 commitment. Should this poorly defined, noble sounding strategy somehow be implemented, we will need our own set of benchmarks for having finished the job and provided security in a country that has withstood such lofty external ambitions for generations. I would hope that we never get to that stage.

Eyewitness to oppression; Photographer chronicles plight of Afghan women in new book

IDNUMBER 200709150149

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.09.15

EDITION: Final

SECTION: Arts

PAGE: F1 / FRONT

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: An image from photographer Lana Sleziec's newbook, Forsaken, shows Malalai, the first female police officer hired in Kandahar, who carries a gun under her head-to-toe burqa. ; Photo: This image from Lana Sleziec's Forsaken shows Zahra, who was burned during a marital dispute. ;

BYLINE: Paul Gessell

SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen

WORD COUNT: 623

Toronto photographer Lana Sleziec arrived in post-Taliban Afghanistan in 2004 expecting to see the women of that country throwing off their burqas, attending school, working at jobs and generally enjoying more freedom.

But that's not what she discovered. Instead, she found the continued oppression of women.

Sleziec's original plans to spend just a few weeks photographing Canadian soldiers for Canadian Geographic magazine turned into a two-year-long stay capturing the images and stories of Afghan women.

The result is *Forsaken*, a book being launched today in Toronto of haunting, unforgettable images of women still enslaved by cultural mores. As one young male Afghan taxi driver told Sleziec: "To beat a woman is to love a woman."

The oppression of Afghan women is so entrenched that even Malalai, the first female police officer hired in Kandahar, wears a head-to-toe burqa on the job. But she packs a pistol under the burqa when she chases criminals.

Sleziec's photograph of Malalai is simultaneously chilling and sad. (Sleziec has identified all the women in *Forsaken* by only one name and some of those names were changed for security reasons.)

Other images show women bearing horrible scars from burnings and beatings caused by domestic disputes, women mourning female relatives who killed themselves to escape family violence, even prostitutes in what passes for brothels in Afghanistan.

In most cases, these are not women oppressed by the state but by their own family, communities and culture. It is difficult to see how decimating Taliban guerrillas, as the Canadian military is trying to do, would change the lives of these women.

Most Afghan women, especially in the rural areas, are illiterate, have little education and little access to news media, says Sleziec. That means, she adds, that these women do not even realize the extent of their oppression. In the cities, where education levels are higher, women are more aware of the injustices against them.

Forsaken is published in Canada by House of Anansi. Rights to the book have also been sold to publishers in the United States, The Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

Slezic will be in Ottawa Wednesday to speak about her experiences in Afghanistan.

The book could very well serve as an illustrated companion to the new blockbuster novel by Afghan author Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*.

Hosseini's first novel, *The Kite Runner*, made him an international superstar. His new novel deals with the harsh treatment suffered by two women married to the same cruel man in contemporary Afghanistan.

Slezic has read *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. She loved it and found it an accurate portrayal of the lives of Afghan women. "It's exactly how it is."

Since leaving Afghanistan, Slezic has been campaigning on behalf of the country's women, especially those with severe burn scars. Some women attempt suicide, to escape a life of family violence, by setting themselves on fire with cooking oil. Some succeed and others live, but horribly mutilated.

Such a story belongs to the woman in *Forsaken* identified only as Zahra. She was married at age 20 and suffered frequent beatings by her husband. At one point, she doused herself in cooking oil and lit a match, in an attempt to shock her husband into realizing how awful her life was. She had not actually intended to commit suicide but a gust of wind blew the flame of the match onto her clothing and she burst into flames. She barely survived.

Slezic's photograph shows a woman with horrific scar tissue that essentially cements her chin to her chest. It's a photograph Slezic uses in her presentations to plastic surgeons to try to convince them to offer assistance to women like Zahra. So far, Slezic says, that help has not been offered.

There is one happy story to tell. Slezic has helped Farzana, the young woman who served as her interpreter for 18 months, to leave Afghanistan to study journalism at Loyalist College in Belleville.

Farzana was 20 when Slezic hired her as her help-mate. Slezic first had to get the permission of Farzana's father.

Lana Slezic appears at the Château Laurier Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.

courtesy of Nicholas Hoare Books and the Ottawa International Writers

Festival. General admission is \$12.

Ignore the spin: NATO is losing the Afghan war; Diplomats in Kabul can't even walk the streets from building to building

IDNUMBER: 200709150083
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.15
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial / Op-Ed
PAGE: B7
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM
BYLINE: JOHN KIRIAKOU and RICHARD KLEIN
SOURCE: Los Angeles Times
WORD COUNT: 741

Former secretary of defence Donald H. Rumsfeld says in the current edition of GQ magazine that the war in Afghanistan has been "a big success," with people living in freedom and life "improved on the streets."

To anyone working in the country, there is only one possible, informed response: What Afghanistan is the man talking about?

In reality, Afghanistan – former Taliban stronghold, Al-Qa'ida haven and warlord-cum-heroin-smuggler finishing school – feels more and more like Sept. 10, 2001, than a victory in the war on terrorism.

The country is, plain and simple, a mess. Al-Qa'ida and its Taliban allies have quietly regained territory, rendering wide swaths of the country off limits to NATO and Afghan forces, international aid workers and journalists. Violent attacks against Western interests are routine. Even Kabul, which the White House has held up as a postcard for what is possible in Afghanistan, has become so dangerous that foreign embassies are in states of lockdown, diplomats do not leave their offices, and venturing beyond security perimeters requires daylight-only travel, armoured vehicles, Kevlar and armed escorts.

Fear reigns among average Afghans in Kabul. Street crime, virtually unheard of in Afghan culture, has increased dramatically over the past three years as angry, unemployed and often radicalized young men settle scores with members of other tribes and clans, steal and rob to feed their families and vent their frustration with a government that appears powerless to help them. Taking a chance by eating in one of Kabul's handful of restaurants or going shopping in one of the few markets left is a new version of Russian roulette.

For Western officials and diplomats, Kabul is simply a prison. Embassies are completely closed to vehicular and even foot traffic. Indeed, at the American Embassy, the consular section issues visas only to Afghan government officials. If an average Afghan wants a visa to the U.S., he or she must travel to Islamabad, Pakistan, to apply. To allow Afghans to stand in line for visas at the embassy in Kabul would invite terrorist attacks or attract suicide bombers.

Consider that an American embassy staffer going to the U.S. Agency for International Development office across the street is required to use an underground tunnel that links the two compounds. Even though the street is closed to all traffic other than official U.S. or UN vehicles and is patrolled and guarded by armoured personnel carriers, tanks and Kalashnikov-carrying security personnel with a safety perimeter of several

Ignore the spin: NATO is losing the Afghan war; Diplomats in Kabul can't even walk the streets from building to building

blocks, the risk from snipers, mortars and grenades is ever present.

Working in Supermax Afghanistan makes the USAID's performance all the more heroic. Since 2003, the agency has overseen the investment of more than \$4 billion in Afghanistan, has built more than 500 schools and an equal number of clinics and has paved more than 1,000 miles of roads, all while suffering about 130 casualties at the hands of the Taliban and Al-Qa'ida.

By some measures, Afghanistan should be a feel-good story by now – the Taliban is, officially at least, out of power, Al-Qa'ida has been chased to the wilds of the Afghan-Pakistani border and U.S. forces are on hand to consolidate and solidify a peaceful new order.

But the truth is very different. By any measure, this remains a "hot" war with a well-armed, motivated and organized enemy. Village by village, tribe by tribe and province by province, Al-Qa'ida is coming back, enforcing a form of Islamic life and faith rooted in the 12th century, intimidating reformers, exacting revenge and funding itself with dollars from massive poppy cultivation and heroin smuggling.

As Al-Qa'ida re-establishes itself, Osama bin Laden remains free to send video messages and serve as an ideological beacon to jihadis worldwide. The country's president, Hamid Karzai, meanwhile, is in effect little more than the mayor of Kabul. The war in Afghanistan is a political and military one-step-forward-two-steps-back exercise. The work there isn't just unfinished, it is more dangerous and less certain than policymakers in Washington and talking heads in New York studios can imagine.

Those suggesting otherwise are either naive or flogging a political agenda.

John Kiriakou, now in the private sector, served as a CIA counter-terrorism official from 1998 to 2004 and recently returned from Afghanistan. Richard Klein, a former U.S. State Department official, is managing director for the

Middle East and Arabian Gulf at Kissinger McLarty Associates in Washington.