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Troops to stay in Zhari; Canadian commander in Afghanistan says local security forces not ready to stand on their own

PUBLICATION: The Sunday Herald
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BYLINE: Dene Moore
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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – Ultimately, it will be up to Afghan forces to maintain security for the Afghan people, says the deputy commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

But until they are ready to take on that responsibility, Col. Christian Juneau said Saturday, Canada will maintain its presence in the dangerous Zhari district of Kandahar province.

After that, Canadian troops may be able to reinforce Afghan forces on occasion "but certainly we're looking at them to provide the security for the population in Zhari–Panjwaii," Juneau said while touring a newly established checkpoint along a road that was, until recently, in the hands of the Taliban.

Juneau admitted Canadians did have control over the area at one point. Then they were redeployed elsewhere and left the district in the hands of the Afghan army and police.

"The Afghan security forces were supposed to look after this piece of ground," Juneau said at Checkpoint Miller. "I think what we have done is we have over–estimated their capacity at that point in time and when the fighting season came back this spring, the bad guys had the opportunity to regain some of the ground."

But Juneau suggests that won't happen again. "I think we're going to stay until they're ready, whatever it takes, because there's no point in us going out and coming back again next spring."

Canadian troops will man the checkpoint, as they do other forward operation bases in the district, alongside Afghan national security forces. An army mentoring program has been in place for some time and a similar police mentoring program is getting underway.

How long will it be before Afghan forces can stand on their own?

"It's condition–based, not timeline–based, but we're looking probably at a few months," Juneau said.

Most would say that seems optimistic. While the Afghan National Army has made some progress, the national police force is largely seen as corrupt, uneducated, poorly equipped and ill–trained.

Extortion by police officers is common, as are tribal divisions within the force and alliances with local warlords.

Troops to stay in Zhari; Canadian commander in Afghanistan says local security forces not ready to stand on

"There's some big challenges," Juneau allowed.

Canadians only recently re-established their presence in the heart of the Zhari district during Operation Keeping Goodwill, which cleared two roads and dismantled Taliban checkpoints.

Juneau said there is a lot of insurgent activity in the area right now – "not very well organized, little groups who are firing a few shots and running away."

For now, Canadian efforts will remain focused on the Zhari and Panjwahi districts, he said.

"We cannot be everywhere."

Amnesty: Don't hand detainees over; Red Cross questions why Canada doesn't build facility to house Afghans

PUBLICATION: The Sunday Herald
DATE: 2007.09.16
SECTION: NovaScotia
PAGE: A6
BYLINE: Clare Mellor Staff Reporter
WORD COUNT: 558

Amnesty International Canada is still fighting to prevent Canadian Forces members in Afghanistan from turning over individuals they capture to Afghan security forces.

Changes made in May to the Canada–Afghanistan agreement on detainees give Canada full access to monitor the welfare of the transferred detainees, but there are insufficient safeguards to prevent them from being tortured in the first place, says Hilary Homes, an international justice and human rights campaigner with Amnesty International Canada in Ottawa.

"Torture can be inflicted with devastating precision in just a few minutes," she said.

Ms. Homes was speaking in Halifax on Saturday at a conference on international humanitarian law at Dalhousie University. The one–day conference, which included a panel discussion on Canada's responsibility for detainees in Afghanistan, was organized by the Canadian Red Cross and the Social Activist Law Association.

The detainee issue faded from headlines after the Canadian government announced a change to its agreement with Afghanistan earlier this year. But Amnesty International is not giving up on its quest to stop Canada's transfer of detainees and is pursuing a case in Federal Court against the Canadian government, Ms. Homes said.

"Some people have said to us, 'Why are you defending those detainees in Afghanistan when others are more worthy?' " she said. "But from our perspective it is about prevention of torture, and from our perspective everyone is worthy when it comes to that. Protection from torture is an absolute right."

Amnesty International has long had concerns about the torture of detainees by Afghan security forces and has been raising the issue with the Canadian government since early 2002. Several human rights organizations and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission have documented pervasive torture in the war–ravaged country as a result of corruption, a frail judicial system, crumbling corrections system and inadequate training.

Ms. Homes questioned recent assurances by the Afghan government that groups such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission will be able to monitor detainees.

"Organizations like (this) are resource–poor," she said. "They are literally a few people. . . . They cannot, despite various promises, have access when they want access."

Torture is not acceptable under any circumstances, but the changes made in May to the detainee agreement at least allow Canada to comply with its own legal obligations, said William Fenrick, a Dalhousie University

Amnesty: Don't hand detainees over; Red Cross questions why Canada doesn't build facility to house Afghans

law professor who was also part of the panel discussion.

"Exactly how it works in practice, I don't know; I can't say. But there is certainly a legal framework in place that allows us to comply in full with all of what our legal obligations are," said Mr. Fenrick, who teaches international criminal law and humanitarian law at Dalhousie's law school.

The International Committee of the Red Cross visits detainees in Afghanistan, working quietly behind the scenes to prevent torture and improve conditions, said Isabelle Daoust, a lawyer with the Canadian Red Cross Society in Ottawa.

But Ms. Daoust, also part of the panel, said it is not the responsibility of the committee to report back to the Canadian Forces or any other country's military about the welfare of detainees it has transferred to Afghan forces.

"I would argue there is a residual responsibility on the part of the Canadian government to do its job and get the concrete assurances to the treatment of (detainees)," she said.

Ms. Daoust said she doesn't understand why Canada opts against keeping its own prisoners in its own facility or a jointly operated UN facility in Afghanistan.

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Canadians to remain in dangerous district until Afghan forces ready

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DATE: 2007.09.16

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PAGE: A5

COLUMN: Defence

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Dene Moore

DATELINE: Kandahar, Afghanistan

ILLUSTRATION: A Canadian soldier rests his head on the stock of his rifle as he rides in the back of an armoured vehicle from the Panjwaii district of Afghanistan's Kandahar province on his way to the Kandahar Air Field in this file photo. – Photo by The Associated Press

WORD COUNT: 331

Ultimately, it will be up to Afghan forces to maintain security for the Afghan people, says the deputy commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

But until they are ready to take on that responsibility, Col. Christian Juneau said Saturday, Canada will maintain its presence in the dangerous Zhari district of Kandahar province.

After that, Canadian troops may be able to reinforce Afghan forces on occasion "but certainly we're looking at them to provide the security for the population in Zhari–Panjwaii," Juneau said while touring a newly established checkpoint along a road that was, until recently, firmly in the hands of the Taliban.

Juneau admitted Canadians did have control over the area at one point. Then they were redeployed elsewhere and left the district in the hands of the Afghan army and police.

"The Afghan security forces were supposed to look after this piece of ground," Juneau said at Checkpoint Miller.

"I think what we have done is we have over-estimated their capacity at that point in time and when the fighting season came back this spring, the bad guys had the opportunity to regain some of the ground."

But Juneau suggests that won't happen again.

"I think we're going to stay until they're ready, whatever it takes, because there's no point in us going out and coming back again next spring."

Canadian troops will man the checkpoint, as they do other forward operation bases in the district, alongside Afghan national security forces.

An army mentoring program has been in place for some time and a similar police mentoring program is getting underway.

How long will it be before Afghan forces can stand on their own?

"It's condition-based, not timeline-based, but we're looking probably at a few months," Juneau said.

Most would say that seems optimistic.

While the Afghan National Army has made some progress, the national police force is largely seen as corrupt, uneducated, poorly equipped and ill-trained.

Extortion by police officers is common, as are tribal divisions within the force and alliances with local warlords.

"There's some big challenges," Juneau allowed.

Canadians only recently re-established their presence in the heart of the Zhari district during Operation Keeping Goodwill, which cleared two roads and dismantled Taliban checkpoints.

Juneau said there is a lot of insurgent activity in the area right now – "not very well organized, little groups who are firing a few shots and running away."

A mortar screamed into the checkpoint Friday night, shortly after Juneau's arrival.

For now, Canadian efforts will remain focused on the Zhari and Panjwaii districts, he said.

"We cannot be everywhere."

Canadians to remain in dangerous district until Afghan forces ready

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (CP) _ Ultimately, it will be up to Afghan forces to maintain security for the Afghan people, says the deputy commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

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Ottawa should consider opening Cdn detention centre in Afghanistan: Red Cross

DATE: 2007.09.15

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE POLITICS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 234

HALIFAX (CP) _ Ottawa should examine whether Canada needs its own detention facility in Afghanistan, a legal adviser with the Canadian Red Cross said Saturday.

“I'm not saying that it's ideal that our country detains, but it should be an option,” said Isabelle Daoust during a panel discussion.

The discussion, which focused on Canada's role regarding the treatment of detainees in the war-torn country, was part of a one-day humanitarian conference at Dalhousie University.

Daoust, who's based in Ottawa, said the federal government must find a way to ensure the rights of detainees in Afghanistan are being upheld.

“That's a political decision that needs to be taken by our government,” she said in an interview following the panel discussion.

There have been allegations that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were abused after being transferred to Afghan jails.

In response to the claims, Ottawa renegotiated its prisoner transfer agreement with Afghanistan to give Canadian officials access to the detainees once they were transferred to Afghan authorities.

Amnesty International has launched a court challenge to bar Ottawa from transferring any more prisoners to the Afghan jails.

Hilary Homes, a campaigner with the human rights group, said NATO countries ultimately have to decide how to handle detainees.

“These countries have together to decide can they do something jointly,” Homes, who also took part in the panel discussion, said in an interview.

“If they do that, can it also involve some Afghan officials and be part of that long-term reconstruction that needs to take place? ... There is the capacity, if they choose to have it, to detain somebody in the right conditions.”

Refugee soccer team with Nike sponsorship wins season opener

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KEYWORDS: SPORTS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 511

ATLANTA (AP) _ The volunteer coach of a soccer team made up of refugee children had to fight to find a field for practice less than a year ago.

On Saturday, Nike officials were on hand near the field to present the Fugees with a \$100,000 donation of cash, green-and-yellow uniforms and equipment before the under-19 team's season opener.

The Fugees won 2-1.

It was the culmination of a publicity blitz that started with a New York Times story last January and earned the team a multimillion-dollar movie rights deal _ an unlikely turn for some 120 children, all refugees from the world's most troubled spots.

"When we handed the uniforms and cleats, they couldn't believe it," said coach Luma Mufleh, 32, who immigrated from Jordan to attend Smith College. "One of the players said, 'Do I have to give it back next week?'"

A smattering of TV cameras and photographers tracked their warm-ups. The players seemed focused on what the team has represented for them _ acceptance and empathy from other children who've had traumatizing experiences.

"Kids in school used to call me African, then when I started going to Fugees they didn't make fun of me," said 13-year-old Josiah Saydee of Liberia. "Nobody makes fun of you. Everybody has fun."

Saydee was one of the first Fugees _ short for refugees. Mufleh recruited him in 2004 while he was playing street soccer in Clarkston, Ga., after she had grown tired of the pretentious competitiveness of a girls team she had coached in a nearby affluent suburb.

"I wanted to remember what I loved about the game," she said.

For many of the 10- to 18-year-old players on three boys teams and a newly formed girls team, the Fugees are much more than a sporting group. They have found family and understanding among their teammates, Mufleh and the two dozen volunteers who tutor them in academics.

The players come from 14 war-torn African countries as well as Albania, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Cuba and Iraq. Most of them have lost at least one parent and have lived in refugees camps, Mufleh said.

Even if their English is sometimes halting, Mufleh encouraged the players not to group along ethnic lines. The Fugees have learned how to speak to each other while chasing a soccer ball.

Their outside environment hasn't always been so welcoming. One in three residents of Clarkston is now foreign-born, many admitted to the United States as refugees because of persecution in their own countries. That influx has created some friction.

Even finding a place to practice wasn't easy, with the town's park made off-limits to soccer last summer. Now the Fugees have won approval to use a park through December, and Mufleh said she hoped the fame the team has gained will put pressure on those who might not want them there.

“It's really good,” David Duot said of the recent fame.

Duot, a lanky 16-year-old who fled Sudan with his mother and three siblings after his father was killed, plans to attend college and return to Africa to work for children's rights.

Karnue Biah, 16, also plans to go to college, study English literature, and return to his native Liberia.

His grandmother and other relatives still live in a refugee camp. They can talk only occasionally, so they haven't heard yet about all the new goodies he received from his famous sponsor.

“When I tell them, they will be happy,” said Biah, his deep voice resonating with pride.

Leading candidate in Japan PM ballot backs extension of Afghan mission

DATE: 2007.09.15
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE
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WORD COUNT: 635

TOKYO (AP) _ The front-runner to succeed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe vowed Saturday to extend Japan's support for U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan, adding he would not pray at a war shrine vilified by Asian neighbours. Ruling party veteran Yasuo Fukuda also said he would take a softer line with North Korea over its past abduction of Japanese nationals, a row that has threatened to upset negotiations over the communist country's nuclear weapons.

The Sept. 23 Liberal Democratic Party ballot to replace Abe will pit the liberal Fukuda against the more hawkish former Foreign Minister Taro Aso.

Both candidates have said Japan cannot afford to drop out of the global war on terrorism and pledged to push to extend the country's naval mission in the Indian Ocean.

"Our mission is highly regarded by the international community. We must win understanding for the need to extend," Fukuda told a joint press conference Saturday.

Since 2001, Japan's navy has been providing fuel for U.S.-led coalition forces in Afghanistan under an anti-terrorism law that has already been extended three times.

But the country's main opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan, is against a further extension, saying coalition operations there have not been properly approved by the United Nations.

"We must not forget that Japanese nationals were also among victims of the terrorist attacks on the U.S.," Aso said. "We have the responsibility to participate in the global war on terror."

Twenty-four Japanese citizens were killed in the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States.

Abe had staked his job on pushing through a military extension. But he resigned abruptly on Wednesday, leaving the future of the mission in limbo and triggering political confusion in the world's second-biggest economy.

The premier was later hospitalized for exhaustion and stress-related stomach problems.

Aso, 66, a high-profile member of the Abe administration, initially emerged as the front-runner to replace Abe. But support for Fukuda, 71, a critic of Abe, has jumped after several party heavyweights said they will back him.

Fukuda also led Aso in a public opinion poll conducted by Kyodo News agency released late Friday.

Fukuda said Saturday he would stay away from a contentious war shrine if he becomes prime minister and seek better ties with Asian neighbours. Tokyo's Yasukuni shrine is vilified by critics because among the war dead honoured are Japanese executed for wartime atrocities in Asia. Abe's predecessor Junichiro Koizumi made repeated visits to the shrine, infuriating China and South Korea.

“There is no need to engage in actions resented by our neighbours. We must consider this issue very cautiously,” Fukuda said. He suggested that Japan set up a separate memorial to honour its war dead.

Fukuda said he would soften Tokyo's stance toward North Korea over its abductions of Japanese in the 1970s and 80s. Pyongyang returned five abductees in 2002, claiming the rest were dead.

Abe had demanded proof no more Japanese were in North Korea, and refused to give aid to the country under a regional disarmament deal earlier this year.

“Recent talks have become deadlocked, as if there is no room for further negotiation,” Fukuda said. “We must work to let our opponents know that we are ready to negotiate.”

Aso indicated he would retain Abe's hardline stance, saying Japan faced “the gravest threat from North Korea's nukes and missiles” and that “without pressure, there can be no dialogue.”

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

The winner of the ballot, involving LDP legislators and regional party representatives, is assured election as prime minister by parliament because of the party's majority in the powerful lower house.

The opposition has demanded snap lower house elections, arguing the LDP no longer holds the people's mandate and has no right to choose the prime minister.

The leadership contest follows a humiliating defeat for the LDP at polls for parliament's upper house in July.

Abe lasted only a year in office and suffered a series of setbacks over ministerial financial scandals and gaffes. Before Abe quit, his popularity ratings had sunk to about 30 per cent.

Afghan police kill 3 Taliban involved with South Korean kidnappings

DATE: 2007.09.15
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE
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KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) _ Afghan police have killed three Taliban commanders allegedly involved in the abduction of 23 South Koreans, the Interior Ministry said Saturday.

The ministry said the police operation took place Friday in the Qarabagh district of Ghazni province, where the insurgents seized 23 South Koreans on July 19.

“The commanders who were killed during this operation were directly involved in the kidnapping case of the Korean hostages,” the ministry said in a statement. It did not provide any further details or the identities of the slain Taliban.

Ghazni has seen several military operations since the captives' release Aug. 29 and Aug. 30, possibly reflecting a desire by the Afghan government to assert its authority on the rebellious region following the abductions.

Another Taliban commander behind the kidnapping of South Korean church workers, Mullah Mateen, was killed in an operation early this month.

Two of the Korean hostages were slain soon after the kidnapping. Two women were released later during the Taliban's negotiations with South Korea, and the remaining 19 were freed after Seoul repeated a long-standing commitment to withdraw its 200 soldiers here by year's end and prevent church workers from travelling to Afghanistan.

In other violence Friday, at least eight suspected Taliban were killed in separate Afghan army operations in Helmand province, while two Afghan soldiers lost their lives in insurgent violence in western Farah province, the Defence Ministry said.

More than 4,300 people _ mostly militants _ have died in insurgency-related violence this year, according to an Associated Press tally of figures from Western and Afghan officials.

Cda–Afghan–Detainees

DATE: 2007.09.15

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 104

HALIFAX -- A legal adviser with the Canadian Red Cross says Ottawa should consider setting up its own detention facility in Afghanistan.

Isabelle Daoust spoke during a panel discussion at a humanitarian conference today in Halifax.

Daoust, who's based in Ottawa, says the federal government must find a way to ensure the rights of detainees in Afghanistan are being upheld.

There have been allegations that some prisoners taken captive by the Canadian military were later abused after being handed over to Afghan authorities.

Amnesty International has launched a court challenge to bar Ottawa from transferring any more prisoners to Afghan jails.

Hilary Homes, a campaigner with the human rights group, says NATO countries should decide together how to handle detainees.

(CP)

RvA

Germany–Afghanistan

DATE: 2007.09.15
KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE
PUBLICATION: bnw
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BERLIN — Some five–thousand protesters demonstrated peacefully in Berlin today, calling for the withdrawal of German troops from Afghanistan.

At the same time, Chancellor Angela Merkel was defending the country's presence there as necessary to ensure security.

In her weekly video podcast, Merkel insisted that helping Afghans to rebuild their country is the only way to keep the country from again becoming a breeding ground for terrorists.

About three–thousand German troops are stationed in Afghanistan, mostly in the northern region of the country as part of the NATO–led peacekeeping efforts there.

Three separate mandates for Germany's involvement in Afghanistan are coming up for debate and renewal later this fall, and calls for an end to the mission continue to increase.

Opposition grew even louder earlier this month after authorities foiled alleged terrorist plots to bomb U–S and other targets in Germany.

The Berlin protesters insisted that efforts to help rebuild Afghanistan have fallen short and that international efforts are doing more harm than good.

(AP)

RxH

Iraq and Afghanistan two sides of same coin

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BYLINE: Haroon Siddiqui
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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
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On the sixth anniversary of 9/11, Canadians have been inundated with what are largely American concerns:

Is it time to scale back the annual commemoration at the World Trade Centre?

What to make of the week-long photo-op by Gen. David Petraeus, Ambassador Ryan Crocker and President George W. Bush?

How many troops can be pulled out of Iraq and when?

Why can't the Democratic Congress tame this White House?

Understandable as these preoccupations are, they blur the big picture that concerns Canadians.

Iraq is a doomed enterprise, arguably worse than Vietnam, its domino effect reaching the West in the form of terrorism, increasingly homegrown.

Iraq is the central but not the only element in the disastrous policies that have destabilized the Muslim world and unleashed civil wars.

Others are the failed War on Terror, the tottering mission in Afghanistan, the tragedy of the Israeli Occupied Territories and the increasing instability of Lebanon, plus Washington's war of words against Syria, Iran, even Pakistan.

On the domestic front – besides Guantanamo Bay, Maher Arar, etc. – Islamophobia is creeping up in Canada, Quebec in particular.

Ontario is not immune, as we saw during the so-called "sharia" debate and may see in the debate on John Tory's ill-advised idea of funding private schools, opposition to which is no longer driven by anti-Catholic bigotry but fear of Islamic schools, about which we'll no doubt be told some horror stories soon.

Whatever damage this does to that beleaguered minority, its greater danger is in rattling all of us to the point of irrationality, as illustrated by the furor over veiled women voters. Politicians are ordering the chief electoral officer to, in effect, break the law to favour mob rule.

This potential undermining of our democratic institutions is the inevitable outcome of the post-9/11 politics of fear, just as terrorism is of the wars on and in Muslim lands.

All this underscores the need for a holistic view of the world, difficult as it is amid the CNN-ization of our media and the Americanization of our politics under Stephen Harper.

America is mired in Iraq and we are mired in Afghanistan. Bush does not have a clear exit strategy there, nor does Harper in Afghanistan. The instincts of both are to keep the wars going and "win." Yet neither quite knows how.

There are other parallels, though the Afghan mission has the approval of the United Nations, and cannot be abandoned for fear of creating a failed state there.

Both missions are hobbled by similar man-made problems – an inability to provide security for parts of the population or the essentials of life; too much infrastructure destroyed; too many civilians killed; too much reliance on warfare, not all successful, as territory is won and territory is lost and must be re-won; too many suicide attacks and roadside bombs.

The political rhetoric is also the same: We'll stand down in Iraq (Afghanistan) when Iraqis (Afghans) stand up. We are there to keep us safe from terrorists. Or, to spread democracy and liberate women.

Washington blames Nuri al-Maliki, Ottawa Hamid Karzai. But the two are not the real problem any more than Mahmoud Abbas in West Bank or Fouad Siniora in Lebanon. Bush blames Syria and Iran, and Harper Pakistan. Mischief-makers as those regimes are, they, too, are not the real problem.

The problems are the policies.

More and more allies understand. Distancing itself from Washington, Britain has abandoned Basra city to the mercies of Shiite militias. The Germans and other NATO allies won't join us in southern Afghanistan. Either they are cowards or they are smarter than us.

Unless Ottawa comes to grips with these realities, Harper will be spinning his wheels as much as Bush – at the expense of our troops, our international credibility and, more ominously, perhaps our security.

Haroon Siddiqui, the Star's editorial page editor emeritus, appears Thursday in the World & Comment section and Sunday in the A section.

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Humanitarian panel discusses handling of Afghan detainees

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Ottawa should examine whether Canada needs its own detention facility in Afghanistan, a legal adviser with the Canadian Red Cross said yesterday.

"I'm not saying that it's ideal that our country detains, but it should be an option," said Isabelle Daoust during a panel discussion.

The discussion, which focused on Canada's role regarding the treatment of detainees in the war-torn country, was part of a one-day humanitarian conference at Dalhousie University.

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"That's a political decision that needs to be taken by our government," she said in an interview.

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In response to the claims, Ottawa renegotiated its prisoner transfer agreement with Afghanistan to give Canadian officials access to the detainees once they were transferred to Afghan authorities.

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Canadian Press

Turning ragtag warriors into cops; Canada's new focus is on training willing but inept Afghans to handle the security mission

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A01

ILLUSTRATION: BRUCE CAMPION–SMITH toronto star A Canadian trainer instructs Afghan National Police officers at a joint checkpoint near Sangasar, west of Kandahar, where police honesty, discipline and organization are in short supply. ;

BYLINE: bruce campion–smith

SOURCE: Toronto Star

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WORD COUNT: 899

The sun has barely crept above the horizon when Capt. Marc–Andre Langelier assembles his class for morning lessons.

His pupils, Afghan police officers, gather around him, old Kalashnikovs slung over their shoulders.

At first glance, they might not look like a crack fighting force. But don't underestimate their capacity to do battle.

Having fought against the Russians and the Taliban, Langelier says many of the police officers are accomplished fighters, "warriors since they were born."

But as Canada has painfully learned in recent weeks, it takes more than a fighting spirit to be a good cop; it takes honesty, discipline, organization, all qualities in short supply with the Afghan police today.

So, as Canada looks to eventually turn over responsibility for Afghanistan's security to the country's own police and army, there's a lot riding on lessons like the one Langelier is teaching – the future of Ottawa's mission in Afghanistan.

Yesterday morning, Langelier was walking the Afghans through the basics of a foot patrol in a dusty field next to a joint Canadian–Afghan base in Zhari district near Sangasar, where Canadians have frequent contact with insurgents.

"In my country, we practise a lot before going out on a mission. That way we'll know how to react when we meet the enemy," he told the Afghans through an interpreter.

But the local police commander seems to take offence at the implication his men need lessons. He replies with a long speech that the officers know all that they need to know.

It's a frustrating two–step between the Afghans and the Canadians, complicated by the use of an interpreter. Langelier quickly turns from soldier to diplomat, assuring the commander that he's not questioning the ability

Turning ragtag warriors into cops; Canada's new focus is on training willing but inept Afghans to handle the

of his officers.

"I'm sure that us working with you we will be able to fight the enemy," said Langelier, of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment, based in Valcartier, Que.

"My aim is not to impose things on you but to try to understand better so we can work together."

The session ends with warm handshakes and no hard feelings. But despite the Afghan commander's assurance of his men's abilities, Langelier doesn't underestimate the job ahead of him in training the Afghans to handle their own security.

"To do the job will take years," he said in an interview. "They learn very slowly. Very few of them are literate.

"I explained some things to their commander, but I don't think he understood part of it. I will have to explain five or six times."

The story of this checkpoint offers a window into the frustrations and pitfalls of Canada's mission in Afghanistan.

Over the last year, the territory around the checkpoint has been won and lost. It's in Canadian and Afghan hands again; secured in an offensive earlier this month that cost Canadian lives.

But the see-saw battles show that Canada's goal of turning over security to a troubled Afghan National Police force won't happen anytime soon. The Canadians left the Afghans in charge of this region last fall only to see it lost to insurgents this year. Now, wary about leaving the Afghans in charge again, Canadian soldiers are helping to reinforce this checkpoint and another one nearby.

"We have overestimated their capacity ... and when the fighting season came back this spring, the bad guys had the opportunity to regain some of the ground," said Col. Christian Juneau, deputy commander of the Canadian task force in Afghanistan.

"How long the Canadians stay now depends on how long it takes to build up the capacity of the police force," he said during a visit to the checkpoint yesterday.

Training the Afghan police has become a new focus for the Canadians in Afghanistan. Soldiers are teaching the Afghan police defensive techniques. A new team of military police officers is providing lessons in policing.

Juneau estimates it will be several months before the Afghan police are ready to assume complete control of the checkpoint, in an area where insurgents remain active despite the recent offensive.

Canadians and Afghans routinely come under attack during their daily patrols around the fortified stronghold. And when Juneau's convoy arrived at the checkpoint Friday night, a loud boom rocked the air as an insurgent's rocket-propelled grenade smashed into a distant tree line.

"We're going to stay until they're ready because there's no point in us going out and coming back again next spring. The end state in this area really is for the Afghan security forces to have control," he said.

That's likely to take a while.

New recruits are pressed into service with no formal training. Instead, they're handed a gun, a uniform and for

Turning ragtag warriors into cops; Canada's new focus is on training willing but inept Afghans to handle the

now, will learn on the job. But the troubles run deeper than that.

While the Canadians report good progress in training the Afghan army, the police force – ultimately the real force that will provide security in the rural areas – remains a troubled agency feared even more than the Taliban in some parts.

The police chief in Zhari district is on his way out, in part because of Canadian complaints about his performance.

"He was probably more part of the problem than the solution," Juneau said.

There are widespread problems with corruption as police squeeze bribes from local residents. Some recruits are the very militants disarmed during recent government initiatives meant to quell violence, a problem Juneau acknowledges.

"It was pretty lax with some groups of individuals," he said, adding that screening the recruits is the job of the provincial government.

"They're the ones who can say who is a bad guy, who will make a good police officer," he said.

Even the honest ones face the prospect of being murdered at their posts by insurgents while working for the equivalent of \$70 a month, a salary that often goes months without being paid.

Still, officers like Saieed Mohammed are optimistic. The former army captain from Zhari district draws on a cigarette, cradles his AK-47 across his leg and says he's confident his force can handle security, even if it means making overtures to the insurgents.

"You are my brothers, come and give the hand with me to rebuild Afghanistan again," he said through an interpreter.

Mohammed admits the police force has trouble with "thieves, insurgents" in the ranks. But asked if his fellow officers can defeat the insurgents, he replies: "If they are really sincere and hard-working, they can."

Turning ragtag warriors into cops; Canada's new focus is on training willing but inept Afghans to handle the

Commander looks ahead to stronger Afghan role

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BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 242

Ultimately, it will be up to Afghan forces to maintain security for the Afghan people, says the deputy commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

But until they are ready to take on that responsibility, Col. Christian Juneau said yesterday, Canada will maintain its presence in the dangerous Zhari district of Kandahar province.

ARMY AND POLICE

After that, Canadian troops may be able to reinforce Afghan forces on occasion "but certainly we're looking at them to provide the security for the population in Zhari-Panjwairi," Juneau said while touring a newly established checkpoint along a road that was, until recently, firmly in the hands of the Taliban.

Juneau admitted Canadians did have control over the area at one point. Then they were redeployed elsewhere and left the district in the hands of the Afghan army and police.

"The Afghan security forces were supposed to look after this piece of ground," Juneau said at Checkpoint Miller.

"I think what we have done is we have over-estimated their capacity at that point in time and when the fighting season came back this spring, the bad guys had the opportunity to regain some of the ground."

But Juneau suggests that won't happen again.

"I think we're going to stay until they're ready, whatever it takes, because there's no point in us going out and coming back again next spring."

Canadian troops will man the checkpoint, as they do other forward operation bases in the district, alongside Afghan national security forces.

An army mentoring program has been in place for some time and a similar police mentoring program is getting underway.

OPTIMISTIC

How long will it be before Afghan forces can stand on their own?

"It's condition-based, not timeline-based, but we're looking probably at a few months," Juneau said.

Most would say that seems optimistic.

While the Afghan National Army has made some progress, the national police force is largely seen as corrupt, uneducated, poorly equipped and ill-trained. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Afghan ways deserve our respect

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SECTION: News
PAGE: 30
BYLINE: MARTIN FORGUES
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
COLUMN: In Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 713

As the members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team enter Islam's holy month of Ramadan, we are reminded that we face another type of enemy on a daily basis — our own preconceived ideas.

Everybody has them, no matter what they are or where they come from.

So, as the population of Kandahar — hence all of our local employees — embark on a month-long period of fasting and prayer, we will have to adapt to their rites. We will abstain from eating and/or drinking in their presence, and we will adjust our meeting schedules according to the rules of what is one of Islam's five pillars.

Our reality here makes one think a lot about our cultural rift, and how difficult it can be not to pass ill-thought judgements on such seemingly irreconcilable differences. So I wanted to take this occasion to shed some light on some customs particular to Afghans.

THE WAY THEY SEE WORK

Afghans have a very different approach to work than we do. First, their concept of time is much more blurry than ours, so such a thing as a fixed schedule seems a bit exotic — although they have had to adapt to our own operational tempo. Second of all, they don't have an actual allocated break area, so any tiny spot with a bit of shade will do — construction sites with sleeping workers lying around in a disorderly fashion are a fairly common sight. Chatting incessantly while performing tasks is something that is also often seen.

To the average Westerner such behaviour would come off as laziness, a lack of organization and maybe a complete absence of personal integrity. But it's important to put such working philosophy in its local context, where the heat would make anyone run for the shadows as soon as possible, after exhausting even the toughest worker at a ludicrous speed.

Speaking of which, if there's one common personality trait among Afghans, it's certainly toughness. They work from dusk until dawn with resources reminiscent of a New Testament-era carpenter's tool kit and methods defying modern conceptions of logic, physics and work safety. How many times have we witnessed a welder working only with fake Oakley glasses, or throwing a few hundred bricks one by one, one floor up?

They may work differently, but the quality of their construction is incredible given their methods — one has to remember that some of the buildings here have stood for centuries now.

NO TEA PARTY

How many times has anyone declined an invitation to tea, coffee, a drink or a meal? For us Westerners, such an answer isn't much of an insult. Here, it's a totally different matter.

Afghans have a strong sense of honour. This is particularly true for Pashtuns, who have their own — very strict — code called the Pashtun Wali. A lot of Afghans have invited us to share tea over the past couple of months. Declining is very much frowned upon and refusal is seen as questioning their sense of hospitality, hence a violation of Pashtun Wali.

Afghans care deeply about how other people see them and they perceive themselves as putting much effort in accommodating others, so passing on a simple cup of tea can be interpreted as outright insulting. On the other hand, accepting usually leads to a pleasant exchange of views between hosts, creating bonds only strengthened by the desire to know more about one another. Still, many Afghans remain very conservative and much close-minded to Western customs, but a lot are very curious about an outside world that has just started opening to them.

A WAR OF WORDS

Of course, incidents do happen and they act to cool relations down, if only temporarily. For example, asking an Afghan about how his family is doing can be perceived as questioning his capability as head of his family. Also, addressing his wife in his presence is interpreted as a lack of respect to the husband.

Such cultural faux pas go both ways: Their views on gender equality are very offending according to Western standards. And blind acceptance of other people's views is far from being the goal here.

It is, after all, a matter of mutual respect.

Master Cpl. Martin Forgues is a 26-year-old journalism and political science major at Concordia University in Montreal, and a serving member of the Canadian Army Reserve since 1999 at the Montreal-based Regiment de Maisonneuve. He's in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City. KEYWORDS=WORLD

NATO forces intercept Iranian arms for Taliban; Shipment included munitions used to make deadly roadside bombs

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BYLINE: Robin Wright, — With files from Griff Witte in Islamabad, Pakistan
SOURCE: The Washington Post
WORD COUNT: 675

WASHINGTON — An Iranian arms shipment destined for the Taliban was intercepted Sept. 6 by the international force in Afghanistan in what appears to be an escalating flow of weaponry between the two former enemies, according to officials from countries in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force.

The shipment included armour-piercing bombs known as explosively formed projectiles, the sources said, which have been especially deadly when used as roadside bombs against foreign troops in Iraq.

Canada has about 2,500 soldiers in Afghanistan. Seventy have been killed, most by roadside bombs.

The NATO-led force interdicted two smaller shipments of similar weapons from Iran into southern Helmand province April 11 and May 3.

"It's not the fact that it's qualitatively different, but this was a large shipment which got people's attention," a U.S. official in Washington said of the most recent interception.

This time, the arms were shipped into the western province of Farah, a vast but sparsely populated area, the sources said, indicating an attempt to find routes less likely to be discovered.

"They're clearly trying to vary their routes and not get caught," the U.S. official said on condition of anonymity because the interdiction has not been formally publicized.

A senior Iranian official called the allegation baseless. "We have no interest in instability in Iraq or Afghanistan. We have good neighbourly relations with the heads of state, who have praised Iran recently. Why should we send weapons to the opposition?" the official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized by the Iranian government to comment on the allegation.

Iran, a predominantly Shiite Muslim country, has long opposed the Taliban, a Sunni Muslim group with different ideas about society, government and religion.

But their co-operation is based on common opposition to foreign, and particularly western, troops in Afghanistan, according to the United States and officials from other countries in the international force.

NATO forces intercept Iranian arms for Taliban; Shipment included munitions used to make deadly roadside

"They're playing with the enemy. They have no love lost for the Taliban. The Taliban killed several Iranian diplomats. We believe it's about hurting the Americans and the international community," an official from one of the participating countries said on condition of anonymity, citing the sensitivity of the intelligence.

The Iranian arms shipments are a threat to the forces in Afghanistan but not enough to tip the balance in the Taliban's favour, the sources noted. But the explosively formed projectiles can also cause psychological and political damage because the loss of only two or three troops for some of the three dozen countries in the force could lead them to reconsider their commitment, the sources added.

U.S. officials began to publicly accuse Iran of aiding the Taliban several months ago. R. Nicholas Burns, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, said in June that there was "irrefutable evidence" Iran was using its elite Revolutionary Guard Corps to arm the Taliban.

At the time, other officials were more cautious about earlier intercepted arms shipments. U.S. army Gen. Dan K. McNeill, commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, said there was no concrete evidence that the Iranian government was backing the Taliban. But he said it was possible that some elements in Iran were aiding the Taliban as a way of hedging their bets in Afghanistan.

Secretary of Defence Robert Gates said then that it was likely that Iranian officials at least knew about the shipments. "I haven't seen any intelligence specifically to this effect, but I would say, given the quantities that we're seeing, it is difficult to believe that it's associated with smuggling or the drug business or that it's taking place without the knowledge of the Iranian government," he said in June.

About the same time that the officials made their statements, the NATO-led force in Afghanistan divulged for the first time that it had discovered an explosively formed projectile in Afghanistan. The bomb was found before it could detonate. Officials said they did not know the bomb's origins.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has played down accusations that Iran is seeking to undermine his government by supporting the Taliban. He has referred to the two countries as "brothers" and said Iran has taken on a constructive role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Better than a victory; Eskimos rookie linebacker's brother returns from tour of duty in Afghanistan

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ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Shaughn Butts, the Journal / The SiddeeqShabazz family, with daughter Salehah, 4, wife Sharlene and son Siddeeq, 3, had plenty of reasons to smile Friday. ;
KEYWORDS: 0
DATELINE: EDMONTON
BYLINE: Vicki Hall
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 566

EDMONTON – The biggest win for Siddeeq Shabazz on Friday did not come on the football field.

Sure, the Edmonton Eskimos linebacker was happy with his team's 47–28 stomping of the Montreal Alouettes.

He took pride shutting down Montreal tailback Jarrett Payton and quarterback Marcus Brady on the ground.

But Shabazz knows a thing or two about perspective.

The 26–year–old welcomed home his older brother after eight months as an American helicopter pilot in Afghanistan.

"Being a helicopter pilot, my brother wasn't down there where all the worst stuff was happening," Shabazz said in a quiet moment outside the Edmonton dressing room.

"But the whole time, you're just waiting for him to come home.

"You don't want him to be out there. Now, I can finally feel that relief of him not being there where anything can happen at any given time." The game of football is often compared to a war zone. The clash between offensive and defensive linemen is called the war in the trenches. Quarterbacks are referred to field generals. Deep passes are called long bombs. The list goes on and on.

To Shabazz, football is still just a game — even if it pays for the survival needs of his young family. The Eskimos could cut him today and he would find another job in one field or another.

Some American and Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan will never have that chance.

"I stopped comparing my life to my brother's a long time ago," said Shabazz, who was born in Germany but raised in the U.S.

"When I was in training camp for the NFL, he was in Virginia for his basic training. In a camp, you feel like your life is over at the end of the day, and you're just doing football the whole time. But he was going through some hellacious stuff.

"In the military, you're beating your body. You're marching all day. Your feet are bloody and you still have to push through it.

"And I'm writing home with my sob stories about my calves hurting and being cramped up. He had to push himself mentally. They kept him up all night -- just crazy kind of stuff." Shabazz comes from a blended family of 14 brothers and sisters. A seventh-round draft pick of the Oakland Raiders in 2003, the six-foot, 205-pounder keeps his football accomplishments in perspective.

One of his older sisters works as a doctor in Japan. His younger brother, Siju, is a boxer who came within a controversial decision of qualifying for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

"He probably won't get another chance," Shabazz said. "The time is coming for him to turn pro." A walk-on at New Mexico State, Shabazz has made NFL stops in Atlanta, Cincinnati, New Orleans and Miami.

After 11 games in the Canadian Football League, he finally feels comfortable with the three-down game. In a miserable year for the Eskimos, Shabazz is one of a precious few bright spots -- especially on defence.

"He gives us toughness, speed and versatility," said head coach Danny Maciocia. "And he has no shortage of character. He is so sharp. He sits at the front of meetings. He's taking notes and asking questions. You get the impression he's been in the league for a number of years with the questions he asks." In a perfect world, Shabazz would lead the Edmonton defence to a second-half revival and qualify for the playoffs via the East Division. From there, the Eskimos would represent the East at the Grey Cup in Toronto.

But if those plans fail, Shabazz knows life will go on. Football is important, but family is everything.

He plays a game. His brother helps protect the world.

"I'm glad he's not coming back with too many horror stories," Shabazz said. "I know other people who have come back and the whole experience has changed them for the worse.

"They have seen things they can never get out of their heads." Things that make war analogies in football seem ridiculous, if not insensitive.

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Harper's mixed messages on troop withdrawal help no one; Are we leaving in February 2009, or will we be there until we 'finish the job'?

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COLUMN: Susan Riley
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Harper;
KEYWORDS: WAR; IRAQ; ARMED FORCES; UNITED STATES
BYLINE: Susan Riley
SOURCE: Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 717

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.

Harper's mixed messages on troop withdrawal help no one; Are we leaving in February 2009, or will we be t

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 Bush is engaged in the same strategy in Iraq, and is 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 is a national affairs columnist for the Ottawa Citizen

Harper's mixed messages on troop withdrawal help no one; Are we leaving in February 2009, or will we be t

Stereotypes a hidden enemy

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COLUMN: In Kandahar
WORD COUNT: 770

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KANDAHAR — As the members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team enter Islam's holy month of Ramadan, we are reminded that we face another type of enemy on a daily basis — our own preconceived ideas. Everybody has them, no matter who they are or where they come from.

As the population of Kandahar — hence all of our local employees — embark on a month-long period of fasting and prayer, we will have to adapt to their rites. We will abstain from eating and/or drinking in their presence, and we will adjust our meeting schedules according to the rules of what is one of Islam's five pillars.

Being here makes one think a lot about the cultural rift, and how difficult it can be not to pass ill-thought judgments on such seemingly irreconcilable differences. So I wanted to take this occasion to shed some light on some Afghan customs.

Afghans have a very different approach to work than we do. First, their concept of time is much more blurry than ours, so such a thing as a fixed schedule seems a bit exotic — although they have had to adapt to our own operational tempo. Second, they don't have an actual allocated break area, so any tiny spot with a bit of shade will do — construction sites with sleeping workers lying around in a disorderly fashion are a fairly common sight. Chatting incessantly while performing tasks is something that is also often seen.

To the average Westerner such behaviour would come off as laziness and suggest a lack of organization and maybe a complete absence of personal integrity. But it's important to put such a working philosophy in its local context, where the heat would make anyone run for the shadows as soon as possible after exhausting even the toughest worker at a ludicrous speed. Speaking of which, if there's one common personality trait among Afghans, it's certainly toughness. They work from dusk 'til dawn with resources reminiscent of a New Testament-era carpenter's tool kit and methods defying modern conceptions of logic, physics and work safety. How many times have we witnessed a welder working only with fake Oakley glasses, or throwing a few hundred bricks one by one, one floor up?

They may work differently, but the quality of their construction is incredible given their methods. One has to remember that some of the buildings here have stood for centuries now.

SENSE OF HONOUR

How many times has anyone declined an invitation to tea, coffee, a drink or a meal? For Westerners, such a refusal isn't much of an insult. Here, it's a totally different matter.

Afghans have a strong sense of honour. This is particularly true for Pashtuns, who have their own, very strict code called the Pashtun Wali. It's a list of obligations Pashtuns are required to submit to regarding notions of hospitality, honour, grace given to a vanquished enemy and even vengeance (to retrieve lost honour).

A lot of Afghans have invited us to share tea over the past couple of months. Declining is very much frowned upon and refusal is seen as questioning their sense of hospitality, hence a violation of Pashtun Wali. Afghans care deeply about how other people see them and they perceive themselves as putting much effort into accommodating others, so passing on a simple cup of tea can be interpreted as outright insulting. On the other hand, accepting usually leads to a pleasant exchange of views between hosts, creating bonds only strengthened by the desire to know more about one another.

Still, many Afghans remain very conservative and close-minded to Western customs, but a lot are very curious about an outside world that has just started opening to them.

Of course, incidents do happen and they act to cool relations down, if only temporarily. For example, asking an Afghan about how his family is doing can be perceived as questioning his capability as head of his family. Also, addressing his wife in his presence is interpreted as a lack of respect to the husband.

Such cultural faux pas go both ways: Their views on gender equality are very offensive by Western standards. And blind acceptance of other people's views is far from being the goal here.

It is, after all, a matter of mutual respect. In certain instances here, sharing differences through conversations has led to friendships and has opened some formerly narrow minds — on both sides.

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL; WORLD

Troops adapt to Ramadan

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SECTION: News

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BYLINE: MARTIN FORGUES

DATELINE: KANDAHAR science major at Concordia University in Montreal, and a serving member of the Canadian Army Reserve since 1999 at the Montreal-based Regiment de Maisonneuve. He's in Afghanistan as a member of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, based at Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City.

WORD COUNT: 262

As the members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team enter Islam's holy month of Ramadan, we are reminded we face another type of enemy on a daily basis -- our own preconceived ideas.

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THE WAY THEY SEE WORK

Afghans have a very different approach to work than we do.

Their concept of time is more blurry than ours, so such a thing as a fixed schedule seems a bit exotic -- although they have adapted to our own operational tempo.

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Chatting incessantly while performing tasks also is common.

To the average Westerner, such behaviour may seem odd.

However, it's important to put such work habits in its local context, where the heat would make anyone run for the shadows as soon as possible, after exhausting even the toughest worker at a ludicrous speed.

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They work from dusk till dawn with resources reminiscent of a New Testament-era carpenter's tool kit and methods defying modern mechanics or work safety.

How many times have we witnessed a welder working without proper safety glasses, or a worker throwing a few hundred bricks one by one, one floor up?

They may work differently, but the quality of their construction is incredible given their methods. Some of the buildings here have stood for centuries.

GUESS WHO'S COMING FOR TEA?

How many times has anyone declined an invitation to tea, coffee, a drink or a meal?

For Westerners, such an answer isn't an insult.

Here, it's a totally different matter. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Canada not leaving

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SECTION: News

PAGE: A9

ILLUSTRATION: photo by AP GERMAN PROTEST: A protester, dressed as a mock soldier, appears during a demonstration against Germany's Afghanistan policy yesterday in Berlin. About 1,000 demonstrators took part.

BYLINE: DENE MOORE, CP

DATELINE: KANDAHAR

WORD COUNT: 198

Ultimately, it will be up to Afghan forces to maintain security for the Afghan people, says the deputy commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

But until they are ready to take on that responsibility, Col. Christian Juneau said yesterday, Canada will maintain its presence in the dangerous Zhari district of Kandahar province.

After that, Canadian troops may be able to reinforce Afghan forces on occasion "but certainly we're looking at them to provide the security for the population in Zhari-Panjwaii," Juneau said at a newly established checkpoint along a road that was, until recently, firmly in the hands of the Taliban.

Juneau admitted Canadians did have control over the area at one point. Then they were redeployed elsewhere and left the district in the hands of the Afghan army and police.

"The Afghan security forces were supposed to look after this piece of ground," Juneau said at Checkpoint Miller.

"I think what we have done is we have overestimated their capacity at that point in time and when the fighting season came back this spring, the bad guys had the opportunity to regain some of the ground."

Canadian troops will man the checkpoint, as they do other forward operation bases in the district, alongside Afghan national security forces.

An army mentoring program has been in place for some time and a similar police mentoring program is getting underway.

How long will it be before Afghan forces can stand on their own?

"It's condition-based, not timeline-based, but we're looking probably at a few months," Juneau said.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

Canucks hang onto dangerous district

SOURCETAG 0709160429
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
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EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 39
ILLUSTRATION: photo of COL. CHRISTIAN JUNEAU Over-estimated Afghan forces
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
WORD COUNT: 307

Ultimately, it will be up to Afghan forces to maintain security for the Afghan people, says the deputy commander of Canadian troops in Afghanistan.

But until they are ready to take on that responsibility, Col. Christian Juneau said yesterday, Canada will maintain its presence in the dangerous Zhari district of Kandahar province.

After that, Canadian troops may be able to reinforce Afghan forces on occasion "but certainly we're looking at them to provide the security for the population in Zhari-Panjwayi," Juneau said while touring a newly established checkpoint along a road that was, until recently, firmly in the hands of the Taliban.

Juneau admitted Canadians did have control over the area at one point. Then they were redeployed elsewhere and left the district in the hands of the Afghan army and police.

"The Afghan security forces were supposed to look after this piece of ground," Juneau said at Checkpoint Miller.

"I think what we have done is we have over-estimated their capacity at that point in time and when the fighting season came back this spring, the bad guys had the opportunity to regain some of the ground."

But Juneau suggests that won't happen again.

"I think we're going to stay until they're ready, whatever it takes, because there's no point in us going out and coming back again next spring."

Canadian troops will man the checkpoint, as they do other forward operation bases in the district, alongside Afghan national security forces.

An army mentoring program has been in place for some time and a similar police mentoring program is getting underway.

How long will it be before Afghan forces can stand on their own?

"It's condition-based, not time line-based, but we're looking probably at a few months," Juneau said.

Most would say that seems optimistic.

While the Afghan National Army has made some progress, the national police force is largely seen as corrupt, uneducated, poorly equipped and ill-trained.

Extortion by police officers is common, as are tribal divisions within the force and alliances with local warlords.

"There's some big challenges," Juneau allowed.

Canadians only recently re-established their presence in the heart of the Zhari district during Operation Keeping Goodwill, which cleared two roads and dismantled Taliban checkpoints.

Juneau said there is a lot of insurgent activity in the area right now – "not very well organized, little groups who are firing a few shots and running away."

A mortar screamed into the checkpoint Friday night, shortly after Juneau's arrival.

For now, Canadian efforts will remain focused on the Zhari and Panjwayi districts, he said. "We cannot be everywhere." KEYWORDS=WORLD

Afghan jails taken to task AdvisEr wants Canada to lock up its own prisoners

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SECTION: News
PAGE: 40
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: HALIFAX
WORD COUNT: 182

Ottawa should examine whether Canada needs its own detention facility in Afghanistan, a legal adviser with the Canadian Red Cross said yesterday.

"I'm not saying that it's ideal that our country detains, but it should be an option," said Isabelle Daoust during a panel discussion.

The discussion, which focused on Canada's role regarding the treatment of detainees in the war-torn country, was part of a one-day humanitarian conference at Dalhousie University.

Daoust, who's based in Ottawa, said the federal government must find a way to ensure the rights of detainees in Afghanistan are being upheld.

"That's a political decision that needs to be taken by our government," Daoust said in an interview following the panel discussion.

There have been allegations that some prisoners taken by the Canadian military were abused after being transferred to Afghan jails.

In response to the claims, Ottawa renegotiated its prisoner transfer agreement with Afghanistan to give Canadian officials access to the detainees once they were transferred to Afghan authorities. Amnesty International has launched a court challenge to bar Ottawa from transferring any more prisoners to the Afghan jails.

Hilary Homes, a campaigner with the human rights group, said NATO countries ultimately have to decide how to handle detainees.

"These countries have together to decide can they do something jointly," Homes, who also took part in the panel discussion, said in an interview. **KEYWORDS=NATIONAL**

Hidden enemy at war preconceived ideas

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PAGE: 30
BYLINE: MASTER CPL. MARTIN FORGUES
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
COLUMN: IN AFGHANISTAN
WORD COUNT: 422

As the members of the Provincial Reconstruction Team enter Islam's holy month of Ramadan, we are reminded that we face another type of enemy on a daily basis — our own preconceived ideas.

Everybody has them, no matter what they are or where they come from.

So, as the population of Kandahar — hence all of our local employees — embark on a month-long period of fasting and prayer, we will have to adapt to their rites. We will abstain from eating and/or drinking in their presence, and we will adjust our meeting schedules according to the rules of what is one of Islam's five pillars.

Our reality here makes one think a lot about our cultural rift, and how difficult it can be not to pass ill-thought judgments on such seemingly irreconcilable differences.

So, I wanted to take this occasion to shed some light on some customs particular to Afghans.

Afghans have a very different approach to work than we do. First, their concept of time is much more blurry than ours, so such a thing as a fixed schedule seems a bit exotic — although they have had to adapt to our own operational tempo.

Second of all, they don't have an actual allocated break area, so any tiny spot with a bit of shade will do — construction sites with sleeping workers lying around in a disorderly fashion are a fairly common sight.

Chatting incessantly while performing tasks is something that is also often seen.

To the average Westerner, such behaviour would come off as laziness, a lack of organization and maybe a complete absence of personal integrity.

But it's important to put such working philosophy in its local context, where the heat would make anyone run for the shadows as soon as possible, after exhausting even the toughest worker at a ludicrous speed.

A lot of Afghans have invited us to share tea over the past couple of months.

Afghans care deeply about how other people see them and they perceive themselves as putting much effort in accommodating others, so passing on a simple cup of tea can be interpreted as outright insulting.

On the other hand, accepting usually leads to a pleasant exchange of views between hosts.

Still, many Afghans remain very conservative and close-minded to Western customs, but a lot are very curious about an outside world that has just started opening to them.

Of course, incidents do happen and they act to cool relations down, if only temporarily.

For example, asking an Afghan about how his family is doing can be perceived as questioning his capability as head of his family. Also, addressing his wife in his presence is interpreted as a lack of respect to the husband.

Such cultural faux pas go both ways: Their views on gender equality are very offensive according to Western standards. And blind acceptance of other people's views is far from being the goal here.

It is, after all, a matter of mutual respect. In certain instances here, sharing differences through more or less lively conversations has led to several friendships and has opened wider some formerly narrow minds — on both sides.

These are the reasons why we must look past our own madeup ideas.

A curious, yet slightly fearful mind often lies beneath its own protective shell of stereotypical fallacies.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

Believe it or not: Interesting by-elections

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KEYWORDS: POLITICS; POLITICAL PARTIES; BYELECTIONS; POLITICIANS;SEPARATISM; CANADA; QUEBEC
SOURCE: The Gazette
WORD COUNT: 405

Something odd happened on the way to tomorrow's three federal by-elections in Quebec: They became interesting. Federal votes in Quebec more usually have followed a drearily familiar pattern. In earlier years, the only variation in outcome was the margin of victory for Liberal candidates.

Recently, the main difference has been any change in the number of candidates the Bloc Québécois sends off to Ottawa "to defend Quebec."

By-elections – called to fill vacancies created by incumbents withdrawing to take up other work or retiring because of ill health – have rarely elicited much interest in Quebec, including within the riding itself.

But this time out, instead of tedium we have high-stakes drama: The outcome of the three votes could have huge implications that might be felt across the country.

If the Liberals lose all three ridings – which polls suggest they might – Stéphane Dion's heretofore short life as Liberal leader could be shorter still. And the Liberals risk continuing their slide into oblivion in Quebec.

In a remarkable turn of events, NDP candidate Thomas Mulcair – fresh from shaking the dust of the provincial Liberals off his feet – has a chance of taking Outremont, long a Liberal fortress.

Mulcair, a popular figure in Montreal both for his pro-environment work as a Quebec cabinet minister and for his battle against spoiled ballots in the 1995 referendum, pulled ahead of the Liberals in the final days of campaigning, according to polls and news reports.

As for the Conservatives, if they take Roberval-Lac-Saint-Jean, deep in Quebec's sovereigntist heartland, Stephen Harper will look like a winner in the province. A victory, admittedly still unlikely, could be understood as meaning two things:

One, that even as Quebec soldiers are fighting and dying in Afghanistan, Harper remains popular among traditionally anti-war Quebecers. And two, if the Bloc can be defeated in its own fiefdom, specifically by a federalist party with a leader from the Rest of Canada, its star is falling fast.

Political campaigners, on the other hand, think that by-elections are more likely to turn on parties' abilities to mobilize their machines and get the vote out. This, too, will be put to the test tomorrow.

For so many years, political fortunes in Quebec have started and stopped with sovereignty, for or against. All other issues faded into the background.

But in the lead-up to tomorrow's vote, other issues have taken on a new urgency – everything from veiled Muslim voters and the commission on reasonable accommodation to street gangs and economic development.

This is a healthy, welcome development. It's exciting to see elections turn on issues other than independence.

Germans ponder Afghanistan

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KEYWORDS: FOREIGN AID; WAR; GERMANY; AFGHANISTAN; UNITED STATES
DATELINE: GOETTINGEN, Germany
SOURCE: AFP
WORD COUNT: 95

Germany's Green Party, which when in power helped launch their country's peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan, yesterday failed to agree a common line on the deployment of troops there.

A raucous party congress, aimed at bridging a deep rift over whether to pull out the military contingent, came five days before the parliament in Berlin is to discuss the issue.

A majority of the 800 delegates disavowed their leadership, rejecting a motion to unconditionally approve the planned extension of the troops' mandate.

Instead, they adopted a motion setting conditions for the participation of German troops in any military operations in Afghanistan.