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Japan's ruling party picks dovish leader

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Japan's troubled ruling party chose dovish veteran politician Yasuo Fukuda as its pick for prime minister yesterday, turning to an experienced hand to battle the resurgent opposition in parliament and reverse a steep slide in public support.

Fukuda, the 71-year-old son of a prime minister and a former right-hand man to two other prime ministers, easily won the vote for president of the Liberal Democratic Party, a post that ensures his election as prime minister in parliament tomorrow.

But Fukuda, who would replace Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, faces daunting challenges: The upper house of parliament is dominated by the opposition, and sentiment is growing in favour of snap elections that could endanger the Liberal Democrats' grip on the lower house.

Fukuda acknowledged the difficulties ahead.

"My appointment comes at a very challenging time," he told reporters hours after his election. "I will strive toward reviving the LDP, regaining the public's trust and making progress on policy."

The new party president charted a moderate course for his term in office: he pledged to improve ties with Asia, maintain Japan's pro-U.S. foreign policy by extending a naval mission in support of forces in Afghanistan and provide assistance to rural areas left behind by the economic recovery.

He also vowed after the vote to rebuild the party's popularity, which has plunged in a year of scandals and policy missteps by Abe, who has been hospitalized with stress-related stomach problems since announcing Sept. 12 that he would resign.

Fukuda was seen as a symbol of stability after the uncertainty of the Abe administration, though some were worried the new leader would be too old-guard.

Pilot who killed Canadians loses lawsuit

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A federal judge has ruled against a U.S. pilot who sued the air force for allegedly ruining his reputation in a friendly fire bombing in Afghanistan that killed four Canadian soldiers.

Maj. Harry Schmidt filed a civil lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Springfield in April 2006 claiming the military violated the federal Privacy Act by disclosing parts of his military record without his permission.

The suit said military officials should not have released to the public a scathing letter of reprimand.

On April 18, 2002, Schmidt and another pilot were flying F-16s when they spotted muzzle flashes near Kandahar airport. The Canadians were firing weapons on a training range but Schmidt mistook them for Taliban forces and dropped a 225-kilogram laser-guided bomb, killing Cpl. Ainsworth Dyer, Sgt. Marc Leger, Pte. Richard Green and Pte. Nathan Smith.

The four were the first Canadians to die in combat since the Korean War. Eight others were injured.

U.S. District Judge Jeanne Scott ruled in favour of the air force on Thursday, writing that "the competing public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs Schmidt's privacy interest."

"The release of Schmidt's reprimand gave the public, in the United States, and around the world, insight into the way in which the United States government was holding its pilot accountable. Thus considering all of the circumstances, the disclosures at issue were clearly warranted," Scott said.

Two Italians believed abducted in Afghanistan

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Two Italian military personnel were believed to have been kidnapped in western Afghanistan, and police yesterday said they were searching for the pair and their two Afghan staff.

At a meeting at the UN, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told participants he had information about where the Italians were and would pass the information to Italian authorities, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

In northeastern Afghanistan, meanwhile, NATO helicopters fired on a group of suspected insurgents in response to a rocket attack. Four Afghans died and 12 were hurt, the alliance said.

NATO also said a soldier was killed by gunfire in eastern Afghanistan yesterday. The soldier's nationality was not released, though most troops in that region are American.

The two missing Italians, with their Afghan driver and translator, drove through a police checkpoint in the Shindand district of Herat province Saturday, and they have not had any contact with anyone since, said Gen. Ali Khan Hassanzada, chief of criminal investigations in western Afghanistan.

An official from the Italian Embassy said the Italians last spoke with officials at their base Saturday night during "routine contact."

"We believe they have been kidnapped together with two Afghans," the Italian Defence Ministry said. "The personnel were carrying out liaison activities with local civilian authorities."

Canadian program aims to help Afghan widows

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CANADIAN PRESS / Sediqa Mousawey of Kabul is learning carpentry through a program funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. ;
DATELINE: KABUL
SOURCE: Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 485

Sediqa Mousawey takes shelter from the hot afternoon sun and measures carefully the width of a cabinet. Like any good carpenter, she measures twice and cuts once.

Like her fellow students, all widows like herself, she has studied many times over the western numbers on the tape measure and what they mean.

With a long red scarf covering her head and wearing the traditional shalwar kameez, Mousawey makes an unlikely carpenter. But as the mother of three fatherless children, there are few options for her in Afghanistan.

In a country where many women still cover their faces with burqas and few work outside the home, she relies on a CARE International food distribution program funded by the Canadian International Development Agency to feed her children.

Now, through a related program, she is learning this most unlikely of trades.

"It's a good career," Mousawey, 31, says through a translator.

Her husband was a shopkeeper killed by the Taliban. Life has not been easy following his death but Mousawey has a quiet confidence.

"It depends on the person," she says of life in this land of widows. "The person who has patience and makes strong decisions, they can do anything."

Fatima Akbary, 42, agrees.

Also a widow, Akbary learned carpentry in Iran more than a decade ago.

"It's not, traditionally, a woman's career," she admits. But "I decided to support my family."

At her school she has a total of 60 students and she hopes to employ many of them making furniture for sale locally.

Sylvie Dupuis arrived in Afghanistan from Montreal a few weeks ago to head up a new CARE program that will take on 1,800 Afghan widows for vocational training. It will cost \$4.5 million over three years, funded by

CIDA.

With jobs hard to come by in this war-torn country, everything is game. There will be schools for traditional vocations such as tailoring, wool-spinning, farming and health care. There will also be training for jobs not traditionally open to women in Afghanistan -- like truck driving, carpentry, photography and information technology.

In addition to vocational training, the women will get training in marketing, negotiation and sales. The idea is for them to be able to open their own micro-businesses for the local market and, eventually, maybe even the export market.

Part of the program will be an educational campaign for the families and local communities to overcome the social stigma attached to women in the workforce.

"It's a challenge but it's a challenge we have to take on," says Fazila Banu Lily, manager of the food distribution program and the existing training by the Humanitarian Assistance for the Widows of Afghanistan, operated by CARE with funding from CIDA.

"Many women are not ready to take this step but some are."

Since 1996, an average of 10,000 women a month have received food through the food distribution program. This year, that has been reduced to roughly 3,000 women.

The HAWA program also runs literacy campaigns for Afghan women.

The need is huge, says Banu Lily, who hails from Ottawa. "War has been going on for the past 22 years. . . . It is a very desperate situation for many widows."

Since November 2005, more than a thousand widows have received training through the assistance program.

"A few of them are doing quite well, earning \$60 to \$80 a month, which we consider good money," Banu Lily says.

She says she's seen changes in the individual lives of participants, even if the progress is sometimes slow.

Dupuis says the possibility of changing the lives of some of the most marginalized people convinced her to come to Afghanistan despite the dangers.

"For sure we have to be careful. By the same token, if we think we can make a difference here, that takes priority."

Opposition won't vote down throne speech: analysts

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Bloc Qu b cois Leader Gilles Duceppe says he isprepared to vote against the prime minister's throne speech. He listed five "non-negotiable" demands over the weekend. ;

DATELINE: OTTAWA

SOURCE: Canadian Press

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WORD COUNT: 408

Opposition parties are muttering that they might defeat the government on its throne speech next month if they don't like what they hear, but some analysts say that's a long shot.

After all, no minority government in Ottawa has ever fallen after a vote on the throne speech, which is normally a very general outline of government plans.

Of the 10 minorities since Confederation, only five were defeated on the floor of the House of Commons, and they all went down over money bills or a motion of censure or non-confidence.

The only Canadian government to fall on a throne speech was the Ontario Tory administration of Frank Miller, which lost a vote at the end of the throne speech debate in 1985 and resigned in favour of Liberal David Peterson.

Peter Gaefe, a professor of political science at McMaster University in Hamilton, says the federal opposition parties today appear to be of several minds about the throne speech, which will open the second session of this Parliament on Oct. 16.

While they're working on shopping lists for the speech, they also seem leery of precipitating an election. In this game of political chicken, someone could flinch.

"In the current context, the parties are trying to figure out if there's a kind of morality around the throne speech, whether they should just pass it as a statement of intentions and then criticize the government on a policy-by-policy basis, or whether they should really try to make that a key point of trying to get their ideas into the government's agenda," says Gaefe.

The game heated up on the weekend as Bloc Qu b cois Leader Gilles Duceppe set out five "non-negotiable" demands for Stephen Harper's Tory government, including a greener environmental policy and a formal guarantee that Canadian combat troops will pull out of Afghanistan by February 2009.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion and NDP Leader Jack Layton have also signalled that environmental and Afghan policy are key issues in deciding whether they will try to bring down the Tories and force a fall election.

But Allan Tupper, a political scientist at the University of British Columbia, suggested turfing out a government over a throne speech may not be easy.

"It's a difficult thing to deal with in a sense that it has no major legislative initiatives . . . what would you really sort of say? It doesn't have something, so we move non-confidence?"

He points out that the opposition parties know there's likely to be a general election sooner rather than later, and may be reluctant to be seen supporting government policy, even in theory.

"They don't want to be tarred with this idea that they actually are in agreement with the major Conservative priorities."

Two Italian troops missing; Soldiers disappeared while on patrol, last spoke with base Saturday night

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Two Italian soldiers on a weekend patrol disappeared in western Afghanistan, and police said yesterday they were searching for the pair and their two Afghan staff.

In northeastern Afghanistan, NATO helicopters, responding to a rocket attack at an Afghan army base, fired on a group of suspected insurgents, killing four and wounding 12 others in what may have been a case of mistaken identity, the alliance said yesterday.

NATO, meanwhile, said a soldier was killed yesterday by gunfire in eastern Afghanistan. No other details, including the soldier's nationality, were released, though most troops in that region are American.

An official from the Italian Embassy in Kabul said the two missing soldiers last spoke with officials at their base Saturday night during "routine contact." The Italian military in Herat is trying to reach them again.

The two Italians, their driver and a translator drove through a police checkpoint in the Shindand district of Herat province Saturday, and they have not contacted anyone since, said Gen. Ali Khan Hassanzada, chief of police criminal investigations in western Afghanistan.

Hassanzada said it was not yet known if the four were kidnapped: "We have launched an investigation in the area."

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi told The Associated Press that he did not immediately know if Taliban militants kidnapped the four.

The embassy official said: "They have patrols like that, weekend patrols. They just disappeared after a while." The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of embassy policy.

The official said the two are warrant officers who were travelling "with a government interpreter on a military mission."

In March, five Taliban prisoners were freed in exchange for the release of a kidnapped Italian journalist. The head of the Italian aid agency Emergency has said the Rome government also paid a \$2 million ransom last year for a kidnapped Italian photographer -- a claim Italian officials did not deny.

Tories unlikely to fall on throne speech: analysts; No federal minority government has ever fallen after vote on throne speech

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Opposition parties are muttering that they might defeat the government on its throne speech next month if they don't like what they hear, but some analysts say that's a long shot.

After all, no minority government in Ottawa has ever fallen after a vote on the throne speech, which is normally a very general, even vague outline of government plans.

Of the 10 minorities since Confederation, only five were defeated on the floor of the House of Commons, and they all went down over money bills or a motion of censure or non-confidence.

The only Canadian government to fall on a throne speech was the Ontario Tory administration of Frank Miller, which lost a vote at the end of the throne speech debate in 1985 and resigned in favour of Liberal David Peterson.

But in that case, the Liberals and NDP had already signed an agreement to work together after Miller was out and simply took the first opportunity to extinguish the government.

Peter Gaefe, a professor of political science at McMaster University in Hamilton, says the federal opposition parties today appear to be of several minds about the throne speech, which will open the second session of this Parliament on Oct. 16.

While they're working on shopping lists for the speech, they also seem leery of precipitating an election. In this game of political chicken, someone could flinch.

"Or maybe the cars crash, which they don't want," said Gaefe.

"In the current context, the parties are trying to figure out if there's a kind of morality around the throne speech, whether they should just pass it as a statement of intentions and then criticize the government on a policy-by-policy basis, or whether they should really try to make that a key point of trying to get their ideas into the government's agenda."

The game heated up on the weekend as Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe set out five "non-negotiable" demands for Stephen Harper's Conservative government, including a greener environmental policy and a formal guarantee that Canadian combat troops will pull out of Afghanistan by February 2009.

Tories unlikely to fall on throne speech: analysts; No federal minority government has ever fallen after vote on

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion and NDP Leader Jack Layton have also signalled that environmental and Afghan policy are key issues in deciding whether they will try to bring down Harper's government and force a fall election.

But Allan Tupper, a political scientist at the University of British Columbia, suggested that turfing out a government over a throne speech may not be easy.

"It's a difficult thing to deal with in a sense that it has no major legislative initiatives, it promises things and so on, but what would you really sort of say? It doesn't have something, so we move non-confidence?"

Gaefe points out, though, that the opposition parties know there's likely to be a general election sooner rather than later in any event, and thus may be reluctant to be seen supporting government policy, even in theory.

"They don't want to be tarred with this idea that they actually are in agreement with the major Conservative priorities."

On the other hand, many see the next election as a question mark, with no guarantee that anybody can win a majority government.

"It's unclear to me which, if any, of the three opposition parties in the House would have an electoral advantage now," says Tupper. "It doesn't seem like there's been any decisive shift."

Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto, suggested there are ways for the opposition to both support and oppose a throne speech.

"We're going to have the same winking and nodding that we had on the first budget," he said, predicting an array of possibly conflicting amendments.

"Here's my amendment — I know you can't vote for it — and then your amendment's coming up and there's no way I can vote for that.

"Thus the government is sustained because the opposition parties vote against each other's amendments."

14:51ET 23-09-07

Police search for missing Italians who are serving in Afghanistan

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Two Italian military personnel were believed to have been kidnapped in western Afghanistan, and police Sunday said they were searching for the pair and their two Afghan staff.

At a meeting at the United Nations, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told participants he had information about where the Italians were and would pass the information to Italian authorities, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

In northeastern Afghanistan, meanwhile, NATO helicopters fired on a group of suspected insurgents in response to a rocket attack.

Four Afghans died and 12 were wounded, the alliance said, and officials were investigating whether the dead and wounded were Afghan police or civilians targeted mistakenly.

NATO also said a soldier was killed by gunfire in eastern Afghanistan on Sunday. The soldier's nationality was not released, though most troops in that region are American.

The two missing Italians, with their Afghan driver and translator, drove through a police checkpoint in the Shindand district of Herat province Saturday, and they have not had any contact with anyone since, said Gen. Ali Khan Hassanzada, chief of police criminal investigations in western Afghanistan.

An official from the Italian Embassy in Kabul said the Italians last spoke with officials at their base Saturday night during "routine contact."

The Italian military in Herat was trying to reach them again.

"We believe they have been kidnapped together with two Afghans," the Italian Defence Ministry said. "The personnel were carrying out liaison activities with local civilian authorities."

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi told The Associated Press that he did not immediately know if Taliban militants kidnapped the four.

Kidnappings by independent criminal gangs have increased around Afghanistan in recent months following reports that foreign governments have paid large ransoms to free kidnapped citizens.

In Rome, the kidnapping prompted calls by a few Communist legislators for Italy to withdraw its 2,160-strong force.

Military wives get pampered; Women get respite from going it alone

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BYLINE: Ian Elliot

PHOTO: Mark Bergin/The Whig–Standard

ILLUSTRATION: Marilyn Lucy at Dolce Bella Spa on the Rideau on Saturday during a military wives day. Fitzgerald's husband will be returning to Afghanistan this week.

WORD COUNT: 584

There are probably few people in Kingston more entitled to a day at a spa than Tammy Fitzgerald.

On Tuesday, she gave birth to her second child, a healthy baby boy, with her husband by her side. He had flown in from his ongoing duty as part of the military mission in Afghanistan to be with her for the event, and was preparing to fly back to Afghanistan to resume his tour.

Fitzgerald was one of about 25 military wives from CFB Kingston, whose partners are deployed, to be given a day at the Dolce Bella Spa on Cataraqui Street by the Kingston Military Family Resource Centre. It was meant as a way to take a break from the pressures and stress of keeping the home fires burning.

"It can be tough," said Fitzgerald on Saturday.

"You're basically the mom and the dad when he's away and you just have to deal with things as they come along. I think this is going to be tougher on him though – he's come home but now it's starting to sink in that he's going to have to leave and go back to Afghanistan."

While the Canadian Forces serving overseas get most of the media attention, the families they have left behind soldier on in their own way.

For Carole Matiowsky, whose husband is on a peacekeeping mission in the Congo, one of the most difficult things is taking on the chores that he normally handles.

"It's funny because he takes care of the car while he's here, he's the computer technician if anything goes wrong and you really come to appreciate how much he does," she said.

"It's not a case of man's work versus woman's work, it's just the way you split up responsibility.

"But all of a sudden something goes wrong with the car and you can't tell the mechanic what it is, or you need to mow the lawn and you're asked 'What kind of gas does it take?' and you're like, 'I don't know – it's a lawnmower. I never use it.' "

Miriam Saumer of the base family support centre says the spa day was a first, but it is one of a number of services offered to the spouses of military members posted overseas.

Besides the stress of suddenly finding themselves running a household singlehandedly, there is the added worry of knowing their husbands may find themselves in harm's way, and the event on the weekend, complete with free child care, was an attempt to give the women a few hours of respite.

"They deserve it and they need a break," she said. "It's a nice treat for them."

She noted that foreign deployments usually come with a three-month training period beforehand requiring the soldier to leave town for courses, so the time alone for the other spouse is far longer.

"It's a lot to deal with," she said. "All of a sudden they have to take on the roles of both parents."

Helen Tanguay's husband is also posted in the Congo and will be back in five weeks.

"We're counting the days," she said as spa staff did her nails.

She said time away from each other and from children is a fact of life for military families, given the nature of deployments, but never becomes easy.

"I think it's harder on him than it is on us," she said. "He's missing the girls growing up, he's missing the daily events that they're going through, and I think he's really feeling that."

Patricia English is the wife of a lieutenant-colonel seconded for a year to the U.S. State Department. Michael English works in the Middle East, in the West Bank, trying to broker a peace in that troubled region. She said the one consolation for military wives is that their husbands are doing something that may improve the situation in a far-away country, even though it comes at a cost to their families.

"I feel happy that he's doing something that is tangible and something that could make a difference," she said.

"I don't think he ever wakes up in the morning wondering if what he is doing is a good use of his time."

Education best weapon we can give Afghans

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BYLINE: Scott Taylor
WORD COUNT: 752

LAST TUESDAY, in a carefully managed public relations exercise, Afghan President Hamid Karzai met with a delegation of Canadian journalists in Kabul. The handful of reporters were part of the Defence Department's embedded journalist program in Afghanistan and they had been flown up from Kandahar in military transport aircraft to meet Karzai.

The message Karzai wished to convey was that Canada should renew its military commitment beyond February 2009. If Canada was to abandon the mission, it would set in motion a domino effect that would ultimately result in worldwide anarchy and widespread terrorism. Or so Karzai would have us believe.

Lost in the gushing coverage of Karzai's appeal for limitless foreign military resources was the fact that the international community has already spent six years propping up this fledgling Afghan democracy. Add to this the fact that February 2009 is still 18 months away and it would seem Karzai has little faith in his own political abilities to win over his people in that time frame.

Everyone now claims that the best exit strategy is to invest in the training and equipping of the Afghan security forces so they can become self-sustaining and competent. In a perfect world, a modern equipped, well-trained and well-disciplined Afghan army could gradually replace the U.S.-led coalition forces and ensure the stable environment necessary for international civilian aid workers to assist in the rebuilding of this war-ravaged country. Unfortunately, whenever the training of either the Afghan military or police force is demonstrated to the western media, it reveals the nearsighted and imperialistic manner in which we are approaching this program.

Representative of Afghan society, more than 60 per cent of the Afghan recruits are illiterate. While Afghan National Army recruits receive a mere three months of basic training, police trainees are processed in as little as two weeks. Recent news footage of Afghan police recruits being trained by Canadians showed a group of grinning volunteers wielding plastic shields and riot batons.

The army battalions – or kandaks – that are processed through the Kabul Military Training Centre under international supervision are grouped together without consideration of Afghanistan's diverse linguistic or ethnic identities. The initial instruction is given in English and then translated into both Dari and Pashto, the two primary languages spoken in Afghanistan. However, for Tajiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen or other minorities, there are no provisions made for separate instruction.

The uniforms provided are surplus U.S. Cold War-era combat clothing with a wide variety of footwear and helmets. While standardized berets are the official headgear of the Afghan National Army, the manner in which these soldiers wear them is anything but standard. The weaponry provided to the army is mostly old worn-out Soviet-style assault rifles and rocket launchers. While there are now a few artillery units, the mainstay of the army is light infantry units equipped with unarmoured trucks for transportation.

The police fare even worse when it comes to uniforms and equipment. For the most part, they report to either local governors or tribal chiefs, often don't wear any uniforms and all too frequently use their authority to abuse the local citizenry.

Given the lack of both resources and commitment to establishing credible Afghan security forces, our troops could end up in Afghanistan forever. However, if we are serious about turning this demoralized rabble into an effective fighting force, we must begin by investing in education.

That's right. Let's bring in educators and ensure that every one of these recruits can read and write with a basic knowledge of fundamental skills at a secondary school level. Teach them in their own language a history curriculum that will instill a collective pride in their Afghan heritage. In our old British imperial history texts, the Afghan tribes were denounced as "fuzzy-wuzzies," but even Rudyard Kipling saw fit to immortalize their unparalleled fighting prowess.

Before simply training them to wield plastic shields and batons or assault rifles, we need to take the time to make them understand what they are fighting for.

All of this education may take more time and cost more money than the international community wishes to dispense in the creation of an Afghan security force. However, if we don't begin by laying a solid foundation first, whatever we churn out on the quick and cheap is bound to collapse the minute we stop propping it up.

In other words, we can't afford not to.()

Two Italian military personnel, staff kidnapped

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle-Herald
DATE: 2007.09.24
SECTION: World
PAGE: A4
WORD COUNT: 196

KABUL (AP) – Two Italian military personnel were believed to have been kidnapped in western Afghanistan, and police Sunday said they were searching for the pair and their two Afghan staff.

At a meeting at the United Nations, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told participants he had information about where the Italians were and would pass the information to Italian authorities, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

In northeastern Afghanistan, meanwhile, NATO helicopters fired on a group of suspected insurgents in response to a rocket attack. Four Afghans died and 12 were wounded, the alliance said, and officials were investigating whether the dead and wounded were Afghan police or civilians targeted mistakenly.

NATO also said a soldier was killed by gunfire in eastern Afghanistan on Sunday. The soldier's nationality was not released, though most troops in that region are American.

The two missing Italians, with their Afghan driver and translator, drove through a police checkpoint in the Shindand district of Herat province Saturday, and they have not had any contact with anyone since, said police spokesman Gen. Ali Khan Hassanzada.

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi told The Associated Press that he did not immediately know if Taliban militants kidnapped the four.

Program teaches trades to 'desperate' Afghan widows

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: World

PAGE: A3

BYLINE: Dene Moore

ILLUSTRATION: Fazila Banu Lily is program manager of the Humanitarian Assistance for Afghan Widows program, which distributes food and offers literacy and vocational training to thousands of Afghan widows. (DENE MOORE / CP)

WORD COUNT: 611

KABUL – Sediqua Mousawey takes shelter from the hot afternoon sun and measures carefully the width of a cabinet. Like any good carpenter, she measures twice and cuts once.

Like her fellow students, all widows like herself, she has studied many times over the western numbers on the tape measure and what they mean.

With a long red scarf covering her head and wearing the traditional shalwar kameez, Mousawey makes an unlikely carpenter. But as the mother of three fatherless children, there are few options for her in Afghanistan.

In a country where many women still cover their faces with burkas and few work outside the home, she relies on a CARE International food distribution program funded by the Canadian International Development Agency to feed her children.

Now, through a related CIDA program, she is learning this most unlikely of trades.

"It's a good career," Mousawey, 31, says through a translator.

Her husband was a shopkeeper killed by the Taliban. Life has not been easy following his death but Mousawey has a quiet confidence that will not be deterred.

"It depends on the person," she says of life on her own in this land of widows. "The person who has patience and makes strong decisions, they can do anything."

Fatima Akbary, 42, agrees.

Also a widow, Akbary learned carpentry in Iran more than a decade ago.

"It's not, traditionally, a woman's career," she admits. But "I decided to support my family."

At her school she has a total of 60 students and she hopes to employ many of them making furniture for sale locally.

"This is hard work," Akbary says, also through a translator. "But they have promised me we will continue and we will support our families through this career."

Sylvie Dupuis arrived in Afghanistan from Montreal a few weeks ago to head up a new CARE program that will take on 1,800 Afghan widows for vocational training. It will cost \$4.5 million over three years, funded by CIDA.

With jobs hard to come by in this war-torn country, everything and anything is game. There will be schools for traditional vocations such as tailoring, wool-spinning, farming and health care. There will also be training for jobs not traditionally open to women in Afghanistan – like truck driving, carpentry, photography and information technology.

"It's limited," Dupuis says of the options for Afghan women.

In addition to vocational training, the women will get training in marketing, negotiation and sales. The idea is for them to be able to open their own micro-businesses for the local and, eventually, maybe even the export market.

Part of the program will be an educational campaign for the families and local communities to overcome the social stigma attached to women in the workforce.

"It's a challenge but it's a challenge we have to take on," says Fazila Banu Lily, manager of the food distribution program and the existing training by the Humanitarian Assistance for the Widows of Afghanistan, operated by CARE with funding from CIDA.

"In any society like Afghanistan, where women have not traditionally worked outside the home, it's a big challenge. Many women are not ready to take this step but some are."

Since 1996, an average of 10,000 women a month have received food through the food distribution program. This year, that has been reduced to roughly 3,000 women.

The HAWA program also runs lit-eracy campaigns for Afghan women.

The need is huge, says Banu Lily, who hails from Ottawa. "War has been going on for the past 22 years here. . . It is a very desperate situation for many widows."

Since November 2005, more than a thousand Afghan widows have received training through the HAWA program.

"A few of them are doing quite well, earning \$60 to \$80 a month, which we consider good money," Banu Lily says.

Of the carpenters in this class, "less than 50 per cent will get carpentry work," she admits. "It's very hard to get a job at a man's carpentry workshop."

But she says she's seen changes in the individual lives of participants, even if the progress is sometimes slow.

The abundant criticism of development programs in Afghanistan can't be of concern to those who dedicate their lives to it, she adds.

"If we considered it, we wouldn't be able to move on."

Dupuis says the possibility of changing the lives of some of the most marginalized people convinced her to come to Afghanistan despite the dangers.

"For sure we have to be careful. By the same token, if we think we can make a difference here, that takes priority." 'A few of them are doing quite well, earning \$60 to \$80 a month, which we consider good money.'

Saving lives in a house of mud; For N.S. doctor, rough conditions, animosity part of Afghan reality

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: Front

PAGE: A1

BYLINE: Kelly Shiers Staff Reporter

ILLUSTRATION: Two Afghan women with the health department wait outside a house to administer polio drops in Helmad, Afghanistan, on Thursday. A doctor from Nova Scotia who volunteers at a clinic in the strife–torn country is dealing with people who are desperately short of proper medical care. (ABDUL KHALEQ / AP); Two Afghan women with the health department wait outside a house to administer polio drops in Helmad, Afghanistan, on Thursday. A doctor from Nova Scotia who volunteers at a clinic in the strife–torn country is dealing with people who are desperately short of proper medical care. (ABDUL KHALEQ / AP)

WORD COUNT: 928

A Nova Scotia doctor works in a faraway land ravaged by poverty and violence.

Her patients travel hours, sometimes days, over dirt roads to get treated in a remote mountainous village. There are no ambulances. Seldom do they drive. Malnourished children, women in labour, the elderly and the sick walk. They're carried. They ride on donkeys. One or two have been pushed in wheelbarrows.

And she and her colleagues treat them the best way they can. Without X–rays or CT scans, no running water and limited supplies, she's even called on co–workers to roll up their sleeves to donate life–saving blood.

She doesn't want you to know her name, or exactly where she is, precautions she's taking at the request of the humanitarian organization behind the 22–bed hospital and outpatient clinic where thousands of people come for help each year.

This is Afghanistan.

"Sensible precautions" in a country where there's a threat of kidnapping and violence mean she doesn't walk alone outside their village.

And there's no forgetting that there are people here who'd rather she and her colleagues pack up and move on.

Stop treating. Stop educating. Stop helping.

"There are those for whom it serves their purposes better to keep the country in a state of lawlessness, lack of education, etc. They don't want us here. It's because of these sorts of people, who I must say are the minority in the country, but a big enough group to do a lot of damage, that we try to keep a low profile."

Corresponding by e–mail, she described life in the rural community that's a two–day drive over dirt roads to the country's capital of Kabul.

The people, she said, are hospitable; the countryside, beautiful.

"The vast majority of people here are not terrorists. They're normal, friendly people with challenges just like we have – different challenges, but still relationship issues, work issues, fears and anger, but also laughter and love and dreams."

The 34-year-old first came to Afghanistan in 2004, working for an agency that focuses on health and development projects. She doesn't get a wage, but family and friends cover her expenses and provide a small living allowance through a charity.

One of three doctors here, she shares a home with colleagues. There's no running water, but they have satellite Internet access and solar power for lights and computers. They use kerosene heaters in the winter, shunning the alternative of heating with dried animal dung.

"Our houses, like the hospital and clinic buildings, are made of mud, like all the local houses. Though it sounds bad, once they're painted and have carpet on the floor, they look pretty reasonable inside, and the 18-inch-thick (45 centimetres) mud walls provide much better insulation during our –30 degree winters than would concrete buildings."

Although she's an obstetrics and gynecology specialist, she treats men and children as well, performs operations and teaches Afghan nurses, lab tech and vaccinators.

The patients are among the poorest people in the country. Their lack of education (in this region, only six girls in 1,000 attend school) or any understanding of health issues are some of the biggest obstacles.

Days ago, doctors saw a three-year-old who was knocked unconscious after falling from a roof. She had a concussion and was vomiting, but her family didn't seek help until they saw a bruise.

"It was the bruise that concerned them more than the far more serious symptoms," she wrote. "Likewise, we see many malnourished children, not so much because of the lack of available food as because of a lack of knowledge about how to appropriately wean and feed children."

Illnesses like pneumonia are the result of poor health. Living in crowded conditions creates the risk of tuberculosis and drinking dirty water brings on diarrhea, worms and typhoid fever. Sometimes traditional remedies are worse than the disease.

"Village women traditionally push on the mother's abdomen during labour to 'help' her deliver," she said, but that may kill her baby and cause a life-threatening rupture of her uterus.

Many patients have had many pregnancies. A 16-year-old at the hospital made the six-hour journey after a three-day labour. Her baby died and she was left with a hole between her bladder and vagina that continuously leaks urine.

The lifetime risk of dying in pregnancy or childbirth is one in eight, she said. Many lose babies.

"The worst I have seen so far had 21 pregnancies, 19 deliveries – the other two were miscarriages – and had only two (living) children."

While women do work outside their homes in the cities (and one of the MPs for the region, she said, is female), most of the rural women she treats don't.

"Most of the women I've spoken with have been beaten at some point in their lives. . . . Some of the women I see are beaten quite badly – but then, that happens at home, too."

She said things that might be considered oppressive – like wearing a veil – are instead seen by the women as being protective.

"Our nurses don't understand why I look forward so much to going home and not having to have my head covered for a few weeks. For them, the head covering is a normal part of their wardrobe, a part that gives them protection from men's eyes."

She said she's especially glad to experience a different culture and encourages others who can't do what she's done to befriend someone from another country, so they can experience a different culture, as well. She has committed to work in Afghanistan until March 2009 and may stay even longer.

After all, she has been blessed by a loving family, good education and life, at home, in a country that's free and safe in ways so many others don't know, she wrote.

"This is my chance to pass some of that blessing onto others, hoping that my presence here will bring blessing to them in some way – improved health, the opportunity for education, an awareness that someone cares."

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Doctor's low profile keeps her on job in Afghanistan; "Sensible precautions' never far from N.S. woman's daily plans

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: Front

PAGE: A1

BYLINE: Kelly Shiers Staff Reporter

ILLUSTRATION: Two Afghan women with the health department wait outside a house to administer polio drops in Helmad, Afghanistan, on Thursday. A doctor from Nova Scotia who volunteers at a clinic in the strife-torn country is dealing with people who are desperately short of proper medical care. (ABDUL KHALEQ / AP); Two Afghan women with the health department wait outside a house to administer polio drops in Helmad, Afghanistan, on Thursday. A doctor from Nova Scotia who volunteers at a clinic in the strife-torn country is dealing with people who are desperately short of proper medical care. (ABDUL KHALEQ / AP)

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Our forces support the Afghan war

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: Editorial

PAGE: A6

COLUMN: Letters to the editor

WORD COUNT: 182

Editor:

Larry Lawson of Tignish in a critique ("The troops don't have a choice, " Sept 19, 2007) of a previous letter of mine to The Guardian is a little loose with the facts.

Our Island troops, men and women, (not boys) of the militia/reserves are in Afghanistan because they volunteered to do so. They are not conscripts nor draftees. I commend these fellow Islanders for their integrity and compassion. They are citizens who have put on hold their careers and education to serve others: Canadians and the Afghan people.

Similarly most Canadian veterans of the Second World War joined the armed forces voluntarily. Parents and spouses of those killed in action in Afghanistan on our behalf believe in their loved ones' reasons for serving. If we support our troops, surely we support their decision to serve, otherwise we are hypocrites.

Every soldier's comment I have read or heard first-hand endorses the war on terrorism and the liberation of men, women and children from tyranny. It is terribly unfortunate that some Canadians, blinded by naive notions, do not have the same motivation and commitment.

Garth E. Staples, Charlottetown

Dion says he'll hold vote until throne speech read; Afghanistan mission, environment key issues on deciding the fate of Harper government

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: The Province/Canada

PAGE: A5

SOURCE: THE CANADIAN PRESS

DATELINE: SHERBROOKE, Que.

ILLUSTRATION: Stephane Dion

WORD COUNT: 191

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion says he won't decide whether to bring down the Tory government until he sees next month's throne speech.

Dion said he'll assess Prime Minister Stephen Harper's plans for the environment and Afghanistan before deciding how Liberals will vote. "We'll see what's in the throne speech," Dion told reporters Sunday. "There's no question of rejecting the throne speech without seeing it."

The Liberals want the Tory government to make a firm commitment to withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan in early 2009 and to reintroduce clean air legislation that failed to make it into law during the last session.

Without these elements and plans to combat poverty, "you can understand we will not be able to rise to support such a throne speech," Dion said.

Harper needs the votes of at least one opposition party to survive a confidence vote on the Oct. 16 speech.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe set out five non-negotiable demands for Bloc support on the weekend, including an end to the Afghan mission, the elimination of the federal spending power in provincial jurisdictions and compliance with the Kyoto Protocol.

The Conservatives have already said they won't be bowing to the Bloc ultimatum.

The Tory government has relied on Bloc support to survive three confidence votes since early 2006.

BQ lays out conditions to keep Tories alive; Duceppe says government must meet five conditions or throne speech defeated

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: Front

PAGE: A1

SOURCE: THE CANADIAN PRESS

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 186

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe set off a game of parliamentary chicken on Saturday, laying down five "non-negotiable" conditions for supporting the minority Conservative government's throne speech next month.

But Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Tories gave no sign of bowing to the Bloc's ultimatum while Liberals and New Democrats continued to stand by their own conditions for supporting the speech. Unless one of the parties blinks, Duceppe's ploy increases the chances that the country will be plunged into a fall election.

During a campaign-like speech in Rimouski, Que., on Saturday, Duceppe listed five "non-negotiable" conditions the Conservative government must meet to earn his party's support.

He called for the elimination of the federal spending power in provincial jurisdictions, the Tory government to respect the Kyoto Protocol and the continuation of supply management in the agricultural sector.

He also wants promises of help for Quebec's forest industry and a clear commitment that Canadian soldiers will pull out of Afghanistan when the current mission ends in February 2009.

There's little chance Harper will even pretend to try to meet those conditions. A spokesman for the prime minister urged Duceppe to reconsider whether he wants to force an election.

Two military personnel believed kidnapped in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: International

PAGE: D4

SOURCE: The Associated Press

DATELINE: Kabul

WORD COUNT: 301

Two Italian military personnel were believed to have been kidnapped in western Afghanistan, and police Sunday said they were searching for the pair and their two Afghan staff.

At a meeting at the United Nations, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told participants he had information about where the Italians were and would pass the information to Italian authorities, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

In northeastern Afghanistan, meanwhile, NATO helicopters fired on a group of suspected insurgents in response to a rocket attack. Four Afghans died and 12 were wounded, the alliance said, and officials were investigating whether the dead and wounded were Afghan police or civilians targeted mistakenly.

NATO also said a soldier was killed by gunfire in eastern Afghanistan on Sunday. The soldier's nationality was not released, though most troops in that region are American.

The two missing Italians, with their Afghan driver and translator, drove through a police checkpoint in the Shindand district of Herat province Saturday, and they have not had any contact with anyone since, said Gen. Ali Khan Hassanzada, chief of police criminal investigations in western Afghanistan.

An official from the Italian Embassy in Kabul said the Italians last spoke with officials at their base Saturday night during "routine contact." The Italian military in Herat was trying to reach them again.

"We believe they have been kidnapped together with two Afghans," the Italian Defence Ministry said. "The personnel were carrying out liaison activities with local civilian authorities."

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi told The Associated Press that he did not immediately know if Taliban militants kidnapped the four. Kidnappings by independent criminal gangs have increased around Afghanistan in recent months following reports that foreign governments have paid large ransoms to free kidnapped citizens.

In Rome, the kidnapping prompted calls by a few Communist legislators for Italy to withdraw its 2,160-strong force from Afghanistan – appeals rejected by other legislators.

Meeting brings countries together to promote peace

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.24

SECTION: International

PAGE: D4

SOURCE: The Associated Press

DATELINE: United Nations

ILLUSTRATION: Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan (left) and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon speak to reporters after a high-level meeting on Afghanistan at UN Headquarters Sunday. – Photo by The Associated Press

WORD COUNT: 262

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and Afghan President Hamid Karzai co-chaired a high-level meeting Sunday of key countries whose support is needed to help bring peace and stability to Afghanistan including the United States and neighbours Iran and Pakistan.

The 24 participants are members of a board established to implement the Afghanistan Compact, a five-year blueprint adopted by the Afghan government and the international community in January 2006 to help the country build a stable future after two decades of war.

It sets out benchmarks to promote security, good governance, the rule of law, human rights and economic and social development in Afghanistan as well as to fight the drug trade. The participants included U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, and the French, Japanese, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian and Turkish foreign ministers.

The meeting took place against a backdrop of escalating violence and terrorist activities against Karzai's western-backed government by Afghanistan's former Taliban rulers, al-Qaida terrorists, illegally armed groups, and narcotics traffickers.

Last week, the UN Security Council extended the mandate of the NATO-led force in Afghanistan, which has been increased to almost 40,000 in the face of the emboldened insurgency led by the Taliban. The United States maintains about 13,000 troops in a separate counterinsurgency force.

Tom Koenigs of Germany, the top UN envoy in Afghanistan, said Friday that the UN supports peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban and is prepared to help mediate.

He said negotiations will not produce "a quick result" but are essential "because the insurgency cannot be won over by military means only."

Generals shouldn't be selling war

IDNUMBER 200709240040
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Letters
PAGE: A11
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: CanWest News Service / Chief of Defence Staff Gen.Rick Hillier is promoting the military with a \$23-million budget, a letter-writer says. ;
BYLINE: Carol Cornish
SOURCE: Times Colonist
WORD COUNT: 138

I watched the CBC documentary Selling the Mission with dread and a growing sense of anger.

Gen. Rick Hillier is the architect of a campaign to sell the Armed Forces and its new war-fighting role. It is outrageous that the Canadian military has 500 public relations staff and a budget of \$23 million.

This is a propaganda budget, not an information service, which goes against Canadian values regardless of how people feel about the Afghan mission.

In Afghanistan there are four times as many staff there to create an image of development as there are actually working on development.

We are being "managed," manipulated and told we are not patriotic if we question the information we are being force fed.

I resent this and believe that in a democracy the military should never be permitted to dominate public policy.

Hillier is quoted as saying, "We are changing the culture, we are changing the mind set."

Who gave a general the mandate to change Canadian culture? I prefer a peaceful, honest Canada that does more good than harm.

Carol Cornish,

Parksville.

Toughest foes are Chechens, infantryman says; Growing contingent of foreigners bolsters ranks of Taliban insurgents

IDNUMBER 200709240028
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A8

ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Finbarr O'Reilly, Reuters / Canadian soldiers of India Company from the NATO-led coalition move through a vineyard during a battle against Taliban fighters in southern Afghanistan in July. ;

DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

BYLINE: Matthew Fisher

SOURCE: CanWest News Service

WORD COUNT: 559

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time forward deployed in the Panjwei/Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies sometimes call Information Warfare.

"There are also lots of fighters coming out of the Pakistani schools. The best training camps are all across the border. Other Islamic forces have been pouring in here. They are helping Afghans with IEDs (improvised explosive devices), small unit tactics, any form of violence you can think of.

"We're dealing with all kinds of insurgents. With Chechens, Egyptians, Saudis, Pakistanis, guys from the Yemen. It isn't one group more than the next." Asked whether he had personally encountered foreigners on the battlefield, the sergeant, a veteran of six previous Canadian overseas missions who was only allowed to give his name as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not interacted verbally with them."

The trend toward more foreign fighters here was confirmed by Brig.-Gen. Marquis Hainse, Canada's top-ranking soldier in Afghanistan and deputy commander for NATO in what is its main combat theatre, Sector South.

"We see an increase in foreign fighters," the general, who has been based in Kandahar since May, said, although he cautioned that there were not huge numbers of them.

"This may be because less people from Afghanistan are joining the fight. They are not getting the numbers they need here. They are not regenerating forces. What is their pool? It is not extremists but people who feel they don't have a choice. And that pool is reducing."

Toughest foes are Chechens, infantryman says; Growing contingent of foreigners bolsters ranks of Taliban i

In separate interviews, the general and the Information Operations sergeant both also noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters," the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have a ideology and that ideology is Islamic fundamentalism. They try to use that to control the Afghans.

"The Taliban is trying to recruit here, but what they get mostly is cannon fodder. They are not that well-trained."

"My assessment is that they (the enemy) do not have that degree of sophistication," said Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron, the Canadian who is NATO's top intelligence officer in Afghanistan. "The leadership outside has access to such information, but I don't believe that they use that to deliberately co-ordinate plans to target Canada. Generally, their interest is to target NATO collectively."

That is also the assessment of the sergeant responsible for befriending tribal elders in the hot conflict zone to the west of Kandahar City.

"Some of the insurgents are adept at high-tech means, and they do use this at a higher level, which is ironic as this was strictly banned during the time of the Taliban," Sgt. Pete said.

The Canadian approach is rather different.

"We try to create a relationship so we can see how we can help them solve their problems," Pete said. "We never lie. We always try to treat them the same. We never give them anything of monetary value. We speak directly to them and try not to get in the way of their culture or their religion."

Two Italian soldiers feared captured in Afghanistan

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COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: ROME
SOURCE: Reuters
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ROME – Two Italian soldiers are believed to have been kidnapped while on patrol in western Afghanistan, Italy's Defence Ministry said yesterday.

The ministry said they had gone missing along with two Afghans.

Italy has 2,200 troops in Afghanistan. Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi rejected calls by leftists in Italy for a troop withdrawal.

"It is clear that this does not change the Italian government's position on the mission in Afghanistan," he told reporters at the United Nations.

Afghan effort could become war on drugs; Canadian troops might be drafted into a drug-eradication campaign

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Stephen Chernin, Getty Images / Hamid Karzai, left, seen here yesterday at a news conference with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, said Canada "has given a lot [to his country]. It has given the lives of its sons and daughters." ;

DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS

BYLINE: Steven Edwards

SOURCE: CanWest News Service with files from Reuters and AFP

WORD COUNT: 446

UNITED NATIONS -- Canada and other countries agreed yesterday to back stepped-up operations to counter drugs production in Afghanistan -- a move that some say will lead to Canadian troops being drawn into controversial drug-eradication and interdiction activities.

At a high-level meeting on the country, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier put Canada's name to a communiqué that expresses "great concern" at the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

The production of heroin-producing opiates reached a "frighteningly new level" last year, according to a recent UN survey, and Canada is among countries that say profits of the illicit drug trade are funding the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But drug eradication is controversial because poor farmers also cultivate poppies, saying it's the only way they can make a living.

While Canada's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan are currently not involved in drug eradication, the communiqué adds the "participants agreed to collectively support increased Afghan government efforts to fight the menace of poppy cultivation."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai praised Canada after emerging from the meeting, attended also by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon.

"It has given a lot. It has given the lives of its sons and daughters," Karzai said.

Meanwhile, it's expected that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will once again taunt U.S. President George W. Bush tomorrow -- this time on U.S. soil -- in a visit to the UN General Assembly at a moment of high tensions between the two countries.

It has been two years since Ahmadinejad made his presence felt on the world stage with his first appearance at the UN, and since then icy relations between Washington and Tehran have worsened.

The UN Security Council has imposed two resolutions against Iran for its refusal to renounce its disputed nuclear program. And Ahmadinejad will make his speech as Bush pushes the Security Council for tougher sanctions against Tehran.

Ahmadinejad defends his country's nuclear program as solely designed to generate electricity.

But Bush warns that Iran is seeking to build an atomic arsenal and that Ahmadinejad, who has called for the destruction of Israel, could use the bomb against Washington's close ally.

Newsweek magazine is reporting today that U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney has considered provoking an exchange of military strikes between Iran and Israel in order to give the United States a pretext to attack Iran.

But the weekly said the steady departure of neoconservatives from the U.S. administration over the past two years had helped tilt the balance away from war.

A few months before he quit recently, David Wurmser, Cheney's Middle East adviser, said Cheney had been mulling the idea of pushing for limited Israeli missile strikes against the Iranian nuclear site at Natanz — and perhaps other sites — in order to provoke Tehran into lashing out, the magazine reported, citing two unnamed "knowledgeable sources."

The Iranian reaction would then give Washington a pretext to launch strikes against military and nuclear targets in Iran, Newsweek reported.

Dion says he'll wait for throne speech before judging fate of government

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KEYWORDS: POLITICS

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 187

SHERBROOKE, Que. _ Liberal Leader Stephane Dion says he won't decide whether to bring down the Tory government until he sees next month's throne speech.

Dion said he'll assess Prime Minister Stephen Harper's plans for the environment and Afghanistan before deciding how Liberals will vote.

``We'll see what's in the throne speech," Dion told reporters Sunday. ``There's no question of rejecting the throne speech without seeing it."

The Liberals want the Tory government to make a firm commitment to withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan in early 2009 and to reintroduce clean air legislation that failed to make it into law during the last session.

Without these elements and plans to combat poverty, ``you can understand we will not be able to rise to support such a throne speech," Dion said.

Harper needs the votes of at least one opposition party to survive a confidence vote on the Oct. 16 speech.

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe set out five non-negotiable demands for Bloc support on the weekend, including an end to the Afghan mission, the elimination of the federal spending power in provincial jurisdictions and compliance with the Kyoto Protocol.

The Conservatives have already said they won't be bowing to the Bloc ultimatum.

The Tory government has relied on Bloc support to survive three confidence votes since early 2006.

Afghan leader tells UN he is working to bring Taliban `back to the fold'

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KEYWORDS: INTERNATIONAL POLITICS DEFENCE

PUBLICATION: cpw

WORD COUNT: 482

UNITED NATIONS _ Afghan President Hamid Karzai said Sunday his government is working very hard on peace talks with the Taliban that would bring the insurgents and their supporters ``back to the fold."

Karzai said the government and an independent national commission have been trying to bring back those Taliban supporters who are not part of al-Qaida and were ``forced or found in a position to leave Afghanistan or to pick up guns."

``It is extremely important that this process will go on," he said after a high-level meeting of 24 of the country's supporters and neighbours, which he co-chaired with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Ban said participants in the three-hour private meeting agreed ``there should be more efforts by President Karzai and Afghan leaders in promoting inclusive political dialogue for national reconciliation."

Asked what the government is doing to bring the Taliban into the mainstream, the Afghan leader said: ``We are trying very hard to bring them back to the fold, to make them return and participate in the making of the country."

He said identifying who should participate in peace talks is easy.

``Deeds will tell and deeds do tell," Karzai said.

``Those who are willing to come and participate and take part in building a stronger, better, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan, are the good ones. Those who continue to fight are, of course, the bad ones.

``We are already in contact...with those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaida and terrorist networks, who are really in the majority...and we would like to add to this process as the opportunity presents itself."

Karzai said Pakistan's contribution ``is very, very important," adding a four-day ``peace jirga" in August which he and Pakistan's President Gen. Pervez Musharraf attended was ``an important step in the right direction."

At that meeting, Musharraf said Afghanistan faces a great danger from fringe groups that preach hate and radicalism. He also admitted Taliban fighters seek safe haven in Pakistan before crossing the border to launch attacks.

Pakistan's UN Ambassador Munir Akram said the meeting produced ``a reinvigorated commitment" to address the three major challenges facing Afghanistan _ security, drugs and governance.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and a former U.S. envoy to Afghanistan, said it has to be seen over time whether the government can reach out to the Taliban.

There are hardliners who some would say cannot be reconciled and others who can, he said ``but the question of openness to those who are willing to enter the political process and stop killing each other _ that's welcomed."

The meeting included U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki and the French, Japanese, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian and Turkish foreign ministers.

At a time of heightened tensions between the United States and Iran over its nuclear program and alleged interference in Iraq and Afghanistan, participants said the U.S. and Iranian delegations were seated across the room from each other.

Khalilzad said there was ``no discussion, no interactions between the two delegations." Pakistan's Akram said there were no accusations of interference and ``the issues that could have been controversial were not raised."

US-Cda-Afghan-Bombing

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SPRINGFIELD, Illinois -- A judge in Illinois has ruled against a U-S pilot who sued the Air Force in connection with a friendly fire bombing in Afghanistan that killed four Canadian soldiers.

Major Harry Schmidt filed a civil lawsuit in Springfield in April 2006 claiming the military violated the U-S Privacy Act by disclosing parts of his military record without his permission.

The suit said military officials should not have publicly released a scathing letter of reprimand.

On April 18th, 2002, Schmidt and another pilot spotted muzzle flashes near Kandahar airport.

Canadian troops were firing weapons on a training range but Schmidt mistook them for Taliban forces. A laser-guided bomb killed Corporal Ainsworth Dyer, Sergeant Marc Leger, Private Richard Green and Private Nathan Smith.

The four were the first Canadians to die in combat since the Korean War.

U-S District Judge Jeanne Scott ruled in favour of the Air Force last week, saying public interest in disclosure of the rerimand cleared outweighed Schmidt's privacy interest.

(The Associated Press-The Canadian Press)

bjk

Bloc–Throne–Speech–Roundup

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KEYWORDS: POLITICS

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 447

Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe has laid down five "non-negotiable" conditions for supporting the minority Conservative government's throne speech next month.

But Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Tories are giving no sign of bowing to the Bloc's ultimatum.

The Liberals and New Democrats, meanwhile, continue to stand by their own conditions for supporting the speech.

The Commons resumes sitting October 16th with a throne speech launching a new session of Parliament.

And unless one of the parties blinks, Duceppe's ploy increases the chances that the country will be plunged into a fall election.

During a campaign-like speech yesterday in Rimouski, Quebec, Duceppe listed five conditions the Conservative government must meet to earn his party's support.

He called for elimination of the federal spending power in provincial jurisdictions, for the Tory government to respect the Kyoto Protocol and for the continuation of supply management in the agricultural sector.

He also wants promises of help for Quebec's forest industry and a clear commitment that Canadian soldiers will pull out of Afghanistan when the current mission ends in February 2009.

(Tories)

There's little chance Prime Minister Harper will even pretend to try and meet the Bloc's conditions.

A spokesman for the prime minister is urging Bloc leader Gilles Duceppe to reconsider whether he wants to force an election.

Dimitri Soudas says "Quebecers were clear in the byelections -- they do not want an election now."

Soudas says "the Bloc should listen and not be reckless."

But Duceppe insists he'll stick to his guns and live with the consequences.

He told reporters following his speech yesterday, "If it means an election, it means an election."

(Bloc–Byelections)

It was last Monday's three Quebec byelections that has prompted the belligerent new tone from Gilles Duceppe, whose party has helped Prime Minister Harper's Tories survive three confidence votes since January, 2006.

The Bloc was defeated by the Tories in its onetime bastion of Roberval and barely hung on Saint Hyacinthe–Bagot.

Its share of the vote in the former Liberal fortress of Outremont collapsed, enabling the NDP to claim victory.

Since then, Bloc M–P's have complained that the party has lost relevance with voters because it's seen as doing little other than propping up the Tories.

(Liberals)

Montreal Liberal M–P Denis Coderre says Gilles Duceppe appears to be panicking over what he calls the Bloc's ``crisis of relevance."

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion has spelled out his own conditions for supporting the throne speech — including revival of the Clean Air Act and a commitment to a 2009 exit date from Afghanistan.

Dion has warned the Liberals won't hesitate to vote the government down if the throne speech falls short.

And Coderre says his party won't support the throne speech just to avoid an election.

He says it will weigh the speech carefully and decide whether it merits Liberal support or opposition.

(NDP)

Thomas Mulcair, the N–D–P victor in last Monday's byelection in Outremont, is scoffing at what he calls Gilles Duceppe's ``chest–thumping.

Mulcair doubts whether the Bloc leader is serious about forcing an election, given the Bloc's dismal prospects.

He says he thinks Duceppe is ``trying to build up his street cred a little bit in Quebec."

If Duceppe wants to avoid an election, Mulcair says, he will either have to back down or hope the Liberals, who are reeling from a similarly dismal showing in the byelections, will bail him out.

N–D–P Leader Jack Layton has warned his party will vote against the throne speech unless it contains a ``complete change of direction" on the environment and the Afghanistan mission.

(The Canadian Press)

bjk

Election tempts federal Conservatives

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BYLINE: Chantal Hebert
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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
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Ottawa With only weeks to go to a confidence-testing Speech from the Throne, election fever is running at an all-time high within the ranks of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's minority government.

Fresh from taking the seat of Roberval-Lac-Saint-Jean from the Bloc Quebecois and finishing a close second in Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot, the Conservative cabinet has turned into a nest of election hawks.

This would seem to fly straight in the face of national polls that place the Conservatives a fair distance from majority territory.

And while the by-elections did bode well for the party in Quebec they also underscored one of its lingering liabilities.

In Outremont – the only urban riding at play last Monday – the Conservatives finished a distant fourth, with less than 10 per cent of the vote.

An election this year could find Harper once again shut out of Canada's big cities.

But for the Conservatives, those two significant caveats are offset by the changing dynamics of the opposition.

Both the Bloc and the Liberals are reeling from the by-elections results.

Harshly criticized for his support of the minority government, Gilles Duceppe is in damage control mode, scrambling to put more distance between his party and the Conservatives.

As for the Liberals, the anecdotal evidence on the ground is that their support is too soft for comfort.

With an emboldened NDP going aggressively after Liberal votes in the next campaign, Harper also stands to benefit from the gift of a divided left.

Still it is one thing for the cabinet to feel that the fruit of an election is just about ripe and another to reach out for it.

Whether the election comes now or later, Harper is going to be campaigning on a centrist platform. That means that the Speech from the Throne will be designed to expand his party's base not narrow it just to give the opposition a compelling reason to defeat the government.

Of course, given the lines in the sand that have already been drawn by the opposition parties, the government may not need to go to any great length to set itself up for a fall.

Fresh from its victory in Outremont, the NDP leader may be at least as anxious as the Conservatives to go to the polls while the Liberals are wounded. Jack Layton is not about to stop calling for an immediate Canadian pullout from the south of Afghanistan and that is clearly not in the cards.

The Bloc has no appetite for an election but no stomach for continuing to extend the life of the government. As for Dion, in a CBC interview 10 days ago, he listed a resurrection of the Clean Air Act – as rewritten by the opposition parties to meet the objectives of the Kyoto protocol – as one of his absolute conditions for supporting the government next month.

The chances of that happening are virtually non-existent.

Since then, Dion has toned down his election rhetoric somewhat. But if he props up the government this fall, what will he do when Harper brings in an election budget in the spring?

With an eye to his future electoral prospects, the Prime Minister has no compelling interest to make it harder for the opposition parties to support the Oct. 16 throne speech, but nor does he need to make it easier for one of them to do so.

Chantal Hebert's national affairs column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Musharraf's push to talk with rebels frustrating exercise; Analysts are skeptical Afghan leader's overture will alter Taliban policy

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BYLINE: Sonya Fatah
SOURCE: SPECIAL TO THE STAR
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
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As Canadian policymakers debate the possibility of a negotiated settlement to the Afghanistan conflict, the experience of neighbouring Pakistan in dealing with the Taliban offers a lesson in political realities.

When Afghan President Hamid Karzai summoned Canadian journalists to his palace in Kabul last week, he made a point of stressing the need to talk to the Taliban. Despite contradictory comments by purported Taliban members quoted in the media – such as preconditions that all foreign troops must first depart – Karzai insisted that reliable communication channels are opening up.

But in Pakistan, analysts remain skeptical that Karzai's overtures are anything more than routine rhetoric, or that the Taliban are in a position to speak with one voice at a time when the battlefield remains in a state of flux.

Indeed, the Pakistani experience in negotiating with Afghan players along the border – diehard Taliban or ethnic Pashtun – has been an exercise in frustration.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf has been pushing direct negotiations for the past few years but with no concrete results to show for his efforts. A Pakistan–Afghanistan peace jirga (conference) held in Kabul over four days in early August was meant to decrease tensions on either side of the border.

That such a jirga was organized has been seen as a positive development, but critics say such efforts are superficial. Moreover, Karzai's talks suggestion seems difficult to orchestrate given the response from Taliban representatives. Any dialogue is dependent upon the withdrawal of foreign armies, including 2,500 Canadian troops, Taliban elements have told the media. Such a withdrawal appears highly unlikely in the current setting.

"There is a lot of unnecessary excitement about Karzai's comments," said Rahimullah Yusufzai, a veteran journalist, who heads the Peshawar bureau of the English daily, The News. "There is nothing new in these proclamations."

A month after the Kabul jirga, little has been done to push the bilateral peace process. A 50–member joint committee remains unformed. Neither Pakistan nor Afghanistan has nominated the 25 representatives that

Musharraf's push to talk with rebels frustrating exercise; Analysts are skeptical Afghan leader's overture will

were to be a part of the reconciliation process.

"There is no change in Taliban policy," said Yusufzai. "There is no change in Karzai's policy. The peace jirga was just a political gathering with no real outcome."

Moreover, critics say the meeting was something of a sham. A real jirga, they note, is a democratic process that can take anywhere from 15 to 30 days to conclude.

In Afghanistan, the meeting was seen as a positive step but many criticized the overtly Pashtun nature of the jirga, which excluded other ethnic groups.

"I think the jirga shows that everyone has realized that the best way to solve the current problem is through negotiations," said Misbahullah Abdul Baqi, associate professor at International Islamic University, Islamabad. "Even the Pashtun nationalists who were at the table were saying they were for talks."

One reason for Karzai's interest in discussions has been tied to his Pashtun ethnicity. He is under considerable pressure to address the issue and to be seen as more than just Kabul's ruler. And while Afghanistan deals with a more resilient insurgency, Pakistan is facing its own problems as recruits from the tribal areas head east into the country to set off suicide bombs.

In both countries now, the targets are government officials who are seen to be pro-Western.

"It's not just the Taliban," said Misbahullah. "If you look at Pakistan – the entire tribal region from Darra Adam Khel onwards is filled with Taliban sympathizers. They have used military solutions in Waziristan (tribal area) but that has not worked. So, I feel there is a change in mentality because all other options have been exercised and have failed."

What that means in terms of real concrete steps is difficult to ascertain. Long-time insiders say that Pakistan's hands are tied because of its allegiance to the United States.

"There is no independent Pakistan policy on Afghanistan at the moment," says retired Gen. Hameed Gul, former chief of the Inter Services Intelligence, Pakistan's top spy agency that has been credited for creating and encouraging the Taliban to further Pakistan's policy of strategic depth in the region.

A combination of military solutions and negotiations have served to swell the rising tide of extremism within Pakistan, increasing the number of suicide attacks and anger towards the Pakistani government, says Gul, who believes the Taliban have been alienated as a result of Musharraf's policies.

Six years later, Pakistan has little power to negotiate with the Taliban, who now view its government as an extension of the American war on terror. "The Taliban simply don't trust Pakistan anymore," says Gul. "They are looking less and less towards Pakistan, and instead developing some kind of a relationship with Iran."

Sonya Fatah is a freelance journalist based in South Asia

Karzai urges talks with Taliban; They are not all linked to Al Qaeda, Afghan leader tells UN meeting seeking greater role in country

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ILLUSTRATION: OZIER MUHAMMAD The New York Times Afghan leader Hamid Karzai, left, and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon greet delegates in New York yesterday. ;
BYLINE: Allan Woods
SOURCE: Toronto Star
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 528

Afghan President Hamid Karzai wants to forge peace in his country through talks with the "majority" of Taliban who have no links to Al Qaeda or terrorism.

Far from writing them off as villains and thugs as have many Western nations, including Canada, Karzai distinguished between the Taliban who are taking civilian hostages and planting roadside bombs and the Taliban who have been "forced" to flee the country or take up arms.

The Afghan president and UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon yesterday co-chaired a high-level meeting of key countries whose support is needed to help bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.

The 24 participants are members of a board established to implement the Afghanistan Compact, a five-year blueprint adopted by the Afghan government and the international community last year to help the country build a stable future after two decades of war.

Karzai told reporters yesterday that along with Afghanistan's national peace and reconciliation process, "there is ... this effort going on to bring onside all those Taliban who are not part of Al Qaeda, who are not part of terrorist networks.

"We are working hard on that. We are trying very hard to bring them back to the fold, to make them return and participate in the making of the country. It's extremely important this process will go on."

The Taliban has dismissed offers to negotiate with Karzai's government, saying all foreign troops – there are about 50,000 – must first leave the country.

Karzai says those demands are unrealistic, but he is determined to reach out to his opponents by making the distinction that has not been recognized by the governments that are spending money, lives and political capital to support him.

Just last week, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier warned, "security is still threatened by the Taliban, who want to bring back their totalitarian regime.

Karzai urges talks with Taliban; They are not all linked to Al Qaeda, Afghan leader tells UN meeting seeking greater role in country

"Democracy and political stability cannot exist in a climate of terror," Bernier said.

NDP Leader Jack Layton has been ridiculed for his insistence that direct negotiations with the Taliban, not continued fighting, offer the road to peace in Afghanistan.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice scoffed at the suggestion when she visited Canada last year. "What's to negotiate?" she asked.

But Karzai said there is room to talk with those committed to the country's future, including Taliban, warlords and others who have profited from the violence that has plagued Afghanistan for 30 years.

"One just has to "identify the good from the bad," he said. "Those who are willing to ... take part in building this stronger, better, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan are the good ones. Those who continue to fight are, of course, the bad ones."

Participants at the meeting included Rice and the French, Iranian, Japanese, Italian, Dutch and Turkish foreign ministers.

A communique issued after the meeting said it was vital to break the link between drug production from Afghanistan's abundant poppy fields and the financing of "terrorist" activities. It also "unequivocally condemned terrorist and other illegal activities, which hindered the establishment of the rule of law and the provision of basic services to the Afghan people."

Ban expressed hope Afghan leaders "will continue to focus their efforts on good governance and eradicating corruption, drug trafficking." Ban also highlighted an increase in the number of UN offices operating in the country, from nine to 17, but admitted the poor security situation in the south, where Canadian troops are based, prevented his agency from doing more.

With files from Star wire services

Progress is slow but sure, colonel says; Redevelopment efforts in restive Kandahar need patience and 'a commitment for the long-term'

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BYLINE: Bruce Campion-Smith
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Lt.-Col. Bob Chamberlain is asking Canadians for a little patience.

"Challenges are great. Expectations need to be managed," said Chamberlain, who heads the Canadian provincial reconstruction team here.

That could well be the motto of Canada's redevelopment efforts in Kandahar province. Charged with assisting one of the most troubled regions in Afghanistan, the team has run into flak over the pace of its efforts.

But Chamberlain fires back at critics, which include federal opposition parties, saying that Canada is making slow but steady progress in its mission.

And despite near weekly reports of Canadian convoys hit by bombs, Chamberlain said the security situation is improving, especially in the city. "Security incidents drop off year to year," he said, predicting a respite in the months ahead when winter arrives.

The tall, affable officer has been in the job for eight months and is quick to rhyme off examples of progress. There's no longer a curfew in Kandahar city; fresh fruit and vegetables are available on roadside stands and the endless rows of tiny shops now stock new goods, instead of the scavenged items they did before.

But even Chamberlain admits that the job ahead remains daunting, especially since the dodgy security means big parts of the province remain off limits.

"It can be overwhelming, the need in this country ... this takes time," he said.

His team, numbering over 300, includes representatives from foreign affairs, the Canadian International Development Agency, the RCMP, Corrections Canada as well as a large contingent of troops from the Quebec-based Royal 22nd Regiment (the Vandoos) for security.

The Canadians invest in "quick impact" projects such as irrigation canals, culverts and wells. But their real goal has been to build up the Afghan's ability to govern themselves, something that has been battered by years of conflict.

"We're not looking to build a building and walk away. In our view, it's not about building stuff," he said in a weekend briefing at the team's base at Camp Nathan Smith.

That means that instead of doing the work themselves, the Canadians will contract with Afghans, even if it means having to teach local residents the basics of signing a contract. That can delay projects by weeks and months.

"Every opportunity we want to ensure there's Afghan involvement at every possible level." He said the focus in Kandahar is "cops, courts, corrections and corruption."

"The end result is that if the bad guys do bad stuff, there's a system able to stop them," Chamberlain said.

But with reports of police on the take, a jail system riddled with abuse and a fledgling court system, the Canadians have their work cut out for them.

The focus on governance, slow to produce tangible results, has proven a tough sell in Canada.

Non-government agencies have accused the government of dragging its feet. The federal Liberals want a Commons committee to probe how CIDA is spending its cash in Afghanistan.

But Chamberlain insists it's the right approach and one that will have a lasting impact on this war-torn country.

"You don't measure concrete results the same as you would in Canada," said Chamberlain. "This is not a sprint. This is a marathon. It takes a commitment for the long-term."

Soldier's mom wants troops home

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BYLINE: Gail Swainson
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Her son has just returned from a tour of duty in Afghanistan and now a Canadian mother is laying the groundwork for her own military battle: to bring the rest of the troops home.

Andria Hill-Lehr of Canadian Military Communities Speak Out, a fledgling group of military families against Canada's presence in Afghanistan, makes it clear she unconditionally supports the troops.

"But that is not synonymous with supporting a warped political agenda," Hill-Lehr told a women's Steelworkers convention in Toronto yesterday.

"We do not support the mess in Afghanistan," she added. "We deplore the loss of life both in our military and of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire."

Hill-Lehr's son, 23-year-old Garrow Hill-Stosky, joined the military as a reservist at 16. He was deployed to Afghanistan on Dec. 8, 2006, returning June 30.

While the two don't always see eye-to-eye on the military's role in Afghanistan, "he respects my right to say what I believe.

"He says he is there fighting for his democratic rights," Hill-Lehr said in an interview later. "He embraces the ideals of peacekeeping."

New Democrat MP Peggy Nash (Parkdale-High Park) told the convention: "We ought to end this mission, we ought to bring our troops home."

Canada now has 2,300 troops serving primarily in Kandahar. Seventy Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed since 2002.

Dion sets stage for vital debate

IDNUMBER 200709240002
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Star
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Ont
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: AA06
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 452

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion got the message.

Stung by his party's dismal showing in Quebec's three by-elections, Dion has launched a concerted drive to reconnect with Quebec voters, and to rebrand himself as a strong leader with focused ideas who can give the Conservatives a run for their money in the next election.

If his foreign policy speech last week in Montreal is any indication, Dion is preparing the ground for a spirited, healthy clash of ideas when Parliament resumes on Oct. 16 with the throne speech.

In unusually blunt terms, Dion characterized Prime Minister Stephen Harper's foreign policy as mediocre, unambitious, American-driven and out of touch with public sentiment in this country. He faulted Harper for sending confusing signals on Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan, for bungling the issue of Afghan detainees and for not delivering enough aid.

And he accused Harper of slavishly following U.S. President George Bush's administration in abandoning the Kyoto pledge to cut greenhouse gases, undercutting civil liberties in the fight against terror and showing scant interest in Canada's tradition of mediating conflicts.

A Liberal government, Dion promised, would give allies notice that our combat role in Kandahar will end in February 2009. It would resume a leadership role on climate change. And it would play a more activist role internationally, promoting human rights and peace.

The speech was important as much for its style as its content.

After 10 months at the Liberal helm, Dion sees the need to bring more focus to an agenda that has seemed scattered. He recognizes he must project as a national leader, not merely a policy wonk, and that he must add fire to his oratory. It is a welcome awakening.

As well, Dion has taken a page from Jean Chretien's book, the "little guy from Shawinigan," in a bid to connect with Quebecers, many of whom regard him as a rigid, federal centralizer. He now speaks of himself as "a Quebec City kid" who will defend Quebec's constitutional rights and culture. Canada's "decentralized federation" is flexible enough to let Quebec promote its "values and interests on the world stage," he reminded his foreign policy audience. His next challenge is to articulate a Quebec agenda that can energize the party grassroots.

These are messages that Canadians, Quebecers and Liberals expect to hear from the leader of the federal Liberal party, delivered with conviction and focus. Certainly there is a market for them. The Harper Conservatives are no more popular today than when they first took office 20 months ago, and are vulnerable

on Afghanistan, the environment and health policy. Dion has just outlined some of the reasons why, more forcefully than he has in the past. It was good to see.

Canada called on to fight Afghan drug war

IDNUMBER 200709240094
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: D8
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Reuters file photo / Afghan Interior Ministry officials and police watch a pile of seized drugs burning on the outskirts of Kabul. On Sunday, Canada agreed to help operations aimed at controlling the drug trade in Afghanistan ;
DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS
BYLINE: Steven Edwards
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 264

UNITED NATIONS — Canada and other countries agreed Sunday to back stepped-up operations to counter drugs production in Afghanistan — a move that some say will lead to Canadian troops being drawn into controversial drug-eradication and interdiction activities.

At a high-level meeting on the country, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier put Canada's name to a communique that expresses "great concern" at the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

The production of heroin-producing opiates reached a "frighteningly new level" last year, according to a recent UN survey, and Canada is among countries that say profits of the illicit drugs trade are funding the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But drug eradication is controversial because poor farmers also cultivate poppies, saying it's the only way they can make a living.

"Breaking this linkage (between drugs production and insurgent financing) is vital to creating a stable, prosperous and democratic, Afghanistan . . ." says the communique, released after the closed-door gathering.

While Canada's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan are currently not involved in drug eradication, the communique adds the "participants agreed to collectively support increased Afghan government efforts to fight the menace of poppy cultivation."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai praised Canada after emerging from the meeting, attended also by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and numerous other ministers and top officials from countries and organizations involved in Afghanistan.

"It has given a lot. It has given the lives of its sons and daughters," Karzai said.

Much of the rest of the communique reflects talk on reconstruction that people at the meeting say took place.

But they add that inside, Bernier also highlighted actions Canada believes are necessary for speeding up development.

A central one was for the UN to send more staff to the country to better co-ordinate global aid efforts, according to one diplomat.

Chechen fighters toughest to battle: Canadian soldiers

IDNUMBER 200709240093
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: D8
DATELINE: KANDAHAR
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 297

KANDAHAR (CNS) — The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time forward deployed in the Panjwei/Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies sometimes call Information Warfare.

"We're dealing with all kinds of insurgents. With Chechens, Egyptians, Saudis, Pakistanis, guys from the Yemen. It isn't one group more than the next." Asked whether he had personally encountered foreigners on the battlefield, the sergeant, a veteran of six previous Canadian overseas missions who was only allowed to give his name as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not inter-acted verbally with them."

The trend towards more foreign fighters here was confirmed by Brig.-Gen. Marquis Hainse, Canada's top ranking soldier in Afghanistan and deputy commander for NATO in what in its main combat theatre, Sector South.

In separate interviews, the general and the Information Operations sergeant both also noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters?" the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have a ideology and that ideology is Islamic fundamentalism. They try to use that to control the Afghans.

"Some of the insurgents are adept at high tech means, and they do use this at a higher level, which is ironic as this was strictly banned during the time of the Taliban," the sergeant said.

Iranian support for Taliban in doubt: UN envoy; Top diplomat says Iran is not providing weapons

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PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: D8
DATELINE: MONTREAL
BYLINE: Mike Blanchfield
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 582

MONTREAL — A top United Nations diplomat is rejecting repeated claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan first surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border. If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said.

Some 70 Canadian soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, more than half from roadside bombs that have grown increasingly sophisticated and powerful in the last year.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, told CanWest News Service in an interview: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, where a reconstituted Taliban and al-Qaida insurgency — made up of foreign mercenaries from across the Islamic world — has mounted a renewed guerrilla insurgency in the last year and a half that has severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion. That means not saying that Iran is the principle source of arms shipments to the Taliban. That's simply not true," said Alexander, previously Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003, after the fall of the Taliban two years earlier.

Alexander noted that Iran actually opposes the Taliban and has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the country.

On Sunday, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country. "It's an important area between us and Iran," Karzai said, noting that 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

U.S. President George W. Bush tried to persuade Karzai during a visit to Washington last month that the

Iranians are "not a force for good as far as we can see," telling the Afghan president "they're a destabilizing influence wherever they are."

Karzai said little in his appearance with Bush. But before arriving in Washington, he told CNN's Late Edition in an interview, "we have had, very good, very close relations" with Iran and that "so far, Iran has been a helper and a solution."

Bush's comments came as U.S. military and intelligence officials have begun building a case that Iran is backing insurgents inside Afghanistan.

In Ottawa, the federal government has no additional corroboration beyond the initial reports of negative Iranian influence in Afghanistan, but if true, they would have serious implications for Canadians on the ground there, said Bernier, Canada's new foreign minister.

"We're deeply concerned about that," Bernier told CanWest News Service in an interview. "If it's true, such support will directly endanger the lives of Canadians and international forces and aid workers."

Asked if he had any information to substantiate the allegation against Iran, Bernier said he "didn't have any more detail on that."

Bernier added that he was "surprised and concerned" about the reports because Iran is a signatory to last year's Afghanistan Compact, the document that lays out the international community's commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Many, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, have hailed Alexander as an expert on Afghanistan.

(Ottawa Citizen)

Chechen foes the toughest: Canadians

IDNUMBER 200709240041
PUBLICATION: The Leader-Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: B8
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 761

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time forward deployed in the Panjwei/Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies sometimes call Information Warfare.

"There are also lots of fighters coming out of the Pakistani schools. The best training camps are all across the border. Other Islamic forces have been pouring in here. They are helping Afghans with IED's (improvised explosive devices), small unit tactics, any form of violence you can think of.

"We're dealing with all kinds of insurgents. With Chechens, Egyptians, Saudis, Pakistanis, guys from the Yemen.

"It isn't one group more than the next." Asked whether he had personally encountered foreigners on the battlefield, the sergeant, a veteran of six previous Canadian overseas missions who was only allowed to give his name as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not inter-acted verbally with them."

The trend towards more foreign fighters here was confirmed by Brig.-Gen. Marquis Hainse, Canada's top ranking soldier in Afghanistan and deputy commander for NATO in what in its main combat theatre, Sector South.

"We see an increase in foreign fighters," the general, who has been based in Kandahar since May, said, although he cautioned that there were not huge numbers of them.

"This may be because less people from Afghanistan are joining the fight. They are not getting the numbers they need here.

"They are not regenerating forces. What is their pool? It is not extremists but people who feel they don't have a choice. And that pool is reducing."

In separate interviews, the general and the Information Operations sergeant both also noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters?" the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have a ideology and that ideology is Islamic fundamentalism. They try to use that to control the Afghans.

"The Taliban is trying to recruit here, but what they get mostly is cannon fodder. They are not that well-trained."

What was always of primary interest to the Canadians was what Afghans wanted who lived in areas where fighting was worst.

"The answer is always the same. Security. That is always the main issue," the sergeant said. "Kandahar and Helmand have always been the worst for fighting. The Soviets had their biggest problems here. This is a place where they has been war for 30 years."

Several Pakistani Web sites keep a close eye on everything the Canadians are doing in Afghanistan, almost instantly posting stories about their operations after they appear in Canada. These sites also delight in highlighting political differences in Canada. However, the conclusion here is that little of this information has created problems for the troops.

"My assessment is that they (the enemy) do not have that degree of sophistication," said Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron, the Canadian who is NATO's top intelligence officer in Afghanistan. "The leadership outside has access to such information, but I don't believe that they use that to deliberately co-ordinate plans to target Canada. Generally, their interest is to target NATO collectively."

That is also the assessment of the sergeant responsible for befriending tribal elders in the hot conflict zone to the west of Kandahar City.

"Some of the insurgents are adept at high-tech means, and they do use this at a higher level, which is ironic as this was strictly banned during the time of the Taliban," Sgt. Pete said.

"But we are not affected by this at the tactical level. The insurgents communicate information through violence. This gets them some co-operation because for Afghans it becomes an issue of survival. The enemy get water, food and shelter through intimidation."

The Canadian approach is rather different.

"We try to create a relationship so we can see how we can help them solve their problems," Pete said. "We never lie. We always try to treat them the same. We never give them anything of monetary value. We speak directly to them and try not to get in the way of their culture or their religion."

Although the province of Kandahar, which they are responsible for, is huge, the Canadians have returned again and again to the same few villages and towns in Panjwai/Zahri.

"The concept of holding ground or facing an enemy that you can see is not here. This is a counter-insurgency," said General Hainse, the Canadian at Sector South headquarters. "This is about the getting the consensus of the indigenous people."

Sgt. Pete's approach was to "walk a lot. Our rotation is very pro-active.

"Anything we achieve is through having a presence. The only way to make progress is to keep boots on the ground.

Diplomat rejects claims by Bush

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PUBLICATION: The Leader-Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A7
DATELINE: MONTREAL
BYLINE: Mike Blanchfield
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 636

MONTREAL — A top United Nations diplomat is rejecting repeated claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border.

If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said.

Some 70 Canadian soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, more than half from roadside bombs that have grown increasingly sophisticated and powerful in the last year.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, told CanWest News Service in an interview: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, where a reconstituted Taliban and al-Qaida insurgency — made up of foreign mercenaries from across the Islamic world — has mounted a renewed guerrilla insurgency in the last year and a half that has severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion. That means not saying that Iran is the principle source of arms shipments to the Taliban. That's simply not true," said Alexander, previously Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003, after the fall of the Taliban two years earlier.

Alexander noted that Iran actually opposes the Taliban and has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the country.

On Sunday, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country.

"It's an important area between us and Iran," Karzai said, noting that 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

U.S. President George W. Bush tried to persuade Karzai during a visit to Washington last month that the Iranians are "not a force for good as far as we can see," telling the Afghan president "they're a destabilizing influence wherever they are."

Karzai said little in his appearance with Bush. But before arriving in Washington, he told CNN's Late Edition in an interview, "we have had, very good, very close relations" with Iran and that "so far, Iran has been a helper and a solution."

Bush's comments came just as U.S. military and intelligence officials have begun building a case that Iran is backing insurgents inside Afghanistan.

In Ottawa, the federal government has no additional corroboration beyond the initial reports of negative Iranian influence in Afghanistan, but if true, they would have serious implications for Canadians on the ground there, said Bernier, Canada's new foreign minister.

"We're deeply concerned about that," Bernier told CanWest News Service in an interview.

"If it's true, such support will directly endanger the lives of Canadians and international forces and aid workers."

Asked if he had any information to substantiate the allegation against Iran, Bernier said he "didn't have any more detail on that."

Bernier added that he was "surprised and concerned" about the reports because Iran is a signatory to last year's Afghanistan Compact, the document that lays out the international community's commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Many, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, have hailed Alexander as an expert on Afghanistan.

Alexander said that while Iran's pursuit of nuclear power is a serious issue that the UN and the international community must confront, it should not be confused with its relations with Afghanistan.

Intertwining the two issues and assuming that Iran bears ill will towards Afghanistan would only serve to undermine the international efforts to defeat the Taliban insurgency and rebuild the country, as well as the hamper the legitimate goal of curbing Tehran's nuclear ambitions, he said.

Alexander also said that Karzai and his government have nothing to gain by alienating Iran as a neighbour.

Ottawa Citizen

No proof Iran arms Taliban: UN official; Afghan forces intercept new weapons shipment from across border

IDNUMBER 200709240022

PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal

DATE: 2007.09.24

EDITION: Early

SECTION: News

PAGE: A4

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Agence France–Presse / Iranian President MahmoudAhmadinejad smiles during a press conference on Sunday at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport, prior to leaving for New York. Ahmadinejad is to speak to the United Nations and at Columbia University during his controversial visit. The U.S. has accused Iran of helping arm the Taliban in Afghanistan. ;

KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; IRAN; AFGHANISTAN

DATELINE: MONTREAL

BYLINE: Mike Blanchfield

SOURCE: CanWest News Service and Agence France–Presse

WORD COUNT: 591

MONTREAL – A top United Nations diplomat is rejecting repeated claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, Afghan security forces reported Sunday that for the second time this month they had recovered a shipment of weapons destined for Taliban insurgents that came from across the border. Some of the rockets shown to reporters carried Iran's coat of arms.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan first surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border.

If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, told CanWest News Service: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, where a reconstituted Taliban and al–Qaida insurgency — made up of foreign mercenaries from across the Islamic world — has mounted a renewed guerrilla insurgency in the last year and a half that has severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion. That means not saying that Iran is the principle source of arms shipments to the Taliban. That's simply not true," said Alexander, previously Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003.

Alexander said Iran opposes the Taliban and has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the country.

On Sunday, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country. "It's an important area between us and Iran," Karzai said, noting that 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

Iran has denied that it is doing anything to subvert the peace in Afghanistan. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said last month that his government fully supports the Karzai government.

The latest discovery of smuggled weapons occurred on Saturday, when Afghan authorities said they found about 40 Iranian- and Chinese-made mines and rocket-propelled-grenades in a vehicle abandoned by Taliban rebels in Herat province near the border.

Two weeks earlier, NATO soldiers deployed in Afghanistan seized in Farah province, also on the border, a significant convoy of explosives that came from the Islamic republic and also was apparently destined for the hardliners.

Afghan intelligence services say the weekend's haul of arms is definitely from Iran, but they don't know "if it is Tehran which helps," the deputy chief of border police for western Afghanistan, Samowal Hamidullah, told AFP.

When asked who might have dispatched the convoy found in early September, the top commander of NATO's International Security Assistance Force, U.S. General Dan McNeill, remained cautious.

"The geographic origin of that convoy was clearly Iran but take note that I did not say it's the Iranian government," he told AFP in a recent interview.

In Ottawa, Bernier said the federal government is "deeply concerned" about reports of Iran's involvement.

"If it's true, such support will directly endanger the lives of Canadians and international forces and aid workers," he told CanWest News Service. He added he had no further information to corroborate the reports.

In June, U.S. Defence Secretary Robert Gates and Assistant Secretary of State R. Nicholas Burns said weapons were being shipped into Afghanistan from Iran. Burns said there was "irrefutable evidence" that Iran's Revolutionary Guard was arming the Taliban.

Nations vow to tackle opium problem in Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200709240020
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: DRUGS; FARMERS & FARMING
DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS
BYLINE: Steven Edwards
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 199

UNITED NATIONS – Canada and other countries agreed Sunday to back stepped-up operations to counter drug production in Afghanistan — a move some say could lead to Canadian troops being drawn into controversial drug-eradication activities.

At a high-level meeting on the country's problem, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier put Canada's name to a communique that expresses "great concern" at the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

The production of heroin-producing opiates reached a "frighteningly new level" last year, according to a recent UN survey, and Canada is among countries that say profits of the illicit drug trade are funding the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But drug eradication is controversial because poor farmers also cultivate poppies, saying it's the only way they can make a living.

"Breaking this linkage (between drug production and insurgent

financing) is vital to creating a stable, prosperous and democratic, Afghanistan ...," says the communique, released after Sunday's closed-door gathering.

The communique adds the "participants agreed to collectively support increased Afghan government efforts to fight the menace of poppy cultivation."

Much of the rest of the communique reflects talk on reconstruction that people at the meeting say took place.

But they added that inside, Bernier also highlighted actions Canada believes are necessary for speeding up development.

A central one was for the UN to send more staff to the country to better co-ordinate global aid efforts, according to one diplomat.

NATO has feet of clay

SOURCETAG 0709240247
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 10
BYLINE: LORRIE GOLDSTEIN
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 272

What is the point of having NATO, supposedly the world's most powerful military alliance, if most of its member nations aren't willing to fight?

It is NATO, not the Taliban, which could easily become the next casualty of war in Afghanistan, given how many NATO countries are cynically prepared to offer President Hamid Karzai any assistance, short of help.

A handful of nations, including Canada, are doing the fighting for NATO in Afghanistan, while too many others such as France, Germany, Spain and Italy have effectively cut and run. They have troops in the country, but keep them away from combat.

Last week, a worried Karzai granted an exclusive interview to Canadian journalists to appeal directly to Canadians, asking us to keep our 2,500 soldiers in Kandahar past their scheduled departure date of February, 2009.

He warned Canada's withdrawal could set off a domino effect inside NATO.

One that could lead to his government's collapse and the resurgence of the Taliban -- who would turn Afghanistan into a terrorist training camp for attacks against the West, as it was before 9/11.

Karzai's right. Securing Afghanistan will take decades, not a few more years.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has been saying the right things about the importance of Canada's NATO partners stepping up to the plate.

But the political reality is that Prime Minister Stephen Harper, while he may personally support extending the mission, has promised not to do so without Parliament's consent. The three opposition parties, which control the majority of seats, are against it, as are most Canadians.

While regrettable, their position is understandable. By early 2009, our troops will have been fighting -- and dying -- helping to free and rebuild Afghanistan for seven years, the last three in deadly Kandahar.

Unlike others in NATO, Canada answered the call. Our soldiers should be proud of all they have accomplished and all they will continue to accomplish as long as we ask it of them.

But if Afghanistan collapses into anarchy, the fault will not be Canada's.

It will be NATO's, for waving the white flag of surrender.

War against brutality NATO boss urges Canada to stay course

SOURCETAG: 0709240244
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo by Kathleen Harris, Sun Media NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer says Canadian troops are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and he would like for that to continue. 2. photo of HAMID KARZAI Weeding good from bad
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 534

Canada should keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back to an era of brutality, says the head of NATO.

Urging Canada to extend its military mission past the current February 2009 mandate, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Sun Media it is "simply not possible" that any country would withdraw troops.

"Canada has suffered a lot of casualties, but take Canada's history and let's try to answer the question: Do we abandon people to brutality? Because that's basically what this is about," he said in an interview. "Then I think every Canadian, in uniform or out of uniform, given your history, given that Canadians traditionally came a long way from home to defend others ... that is something that would appeal to Canadians."

De Hoop Scheffer said Afghanistan was "on its way to the Middle Ages" when the Taliban ruled, and warned that abandoning the country could mean a return to the failed state of 2001 that flouted human rights and harboured terrorist training camps.

"They were among the worst human rights violators the world has seen -- no women's rights, public executions. Do not forget our opponents, our enemy, is burning people, hanging teachers from trees, burning schools, beheading women," he said. "It is such a different moral category these opponents, these Taliban, that I say abandoning people to brutality is simply something we can not afford."

De Hoop Scheffer came under fire last week for urging the Dutch to remain deployed -- a move denounced by some as meddling in domestic politics. But he insists that while he will respect the decision of any sovereign nation, like Canada, it's his job to try to influence the politicians and public opinion.

"This is their decision. In the run-up to these decisions, they should hear my voice."

DANGERS IN KANDAHAR

Conceding that Canada's high casualty count is evidence Afghanistan's south is "tough," de Hoop Scheffer is not warm to the idea that Canadian troops could stay but only if rotated to the less volatile north. Canadians are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and should stay put, he said.

"No NATO secretary-general and no military commander will every be happy with caveats," he said. "I know that completely caveat-free is difficult, but still I make my pitch for lesser and lesser caveats, a diminishing of the caveats. I would hope that would also be relative for Canada."

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he wants to continue talks with the Taliban, but de Hoop Scheffer would not weigh in to say if such talks might undermine the military mission.

"This is a sovereign nation, and a sovereign nation and only that sovereign nation and its government decides if and when there will be peace process negotiations and with whom," he said. "That is really not up to us, not up to NATO, and quite honestly, not up to the international community."

De Hoop Scheffer said he has not yet had any formal notification from Canada about a withdrawal. But he hopes no news is good news.

"I hope I'm not hearing anything, but it is crystal clear that for military planning purposes you can't do that overnight," he said. "No nation can withdraw its forces overnight, they're pretty far away. Logistically, that is complicated. But military planners in NATO they can't act overnight as well, but I say again, I do not hope to hear anything of the kind." KEYWORDS=CANADA

Karzai welcomes Taliban talks

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DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
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BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 259

Taliban fighters with ties to terrorism are in the minority and negotiations are key to bringing lasting peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan, says President Hamid Karzai.

Speaking at UN headquarters in New York yesterday, Karzai suggested Taliban with links to terrorist groups are in the minority, and insisted it won't be tough to weed the good from the bad for talks.

"We are already in contact through a peace and reconciliation process with those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaida and not part of terrorist networks, who are really in the majority," he said. "

Karzai said many have been forced or found themselves in a position to leave Afghanistan or pick up guns, and his government is trying "to bring them back to the fold."

It is easy to identify the good from the bad for the negotiations process, he added.

"Deeds will tell and deeds do tell, so that identification is simple. Those who are willing to come and participate and take part in building a stronger, better, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan are the good ones," he said.

Karzai also praised Canada as one of the "great contributors" to Afghanistan.

PRAISED CANADA

"It has given us a lot, it has given the lives of its sons and daughters in Afghanistan. We are grateful for it and we will support Canadian efforts in bringing more resources to Afghanistan, be that military or financial and reconstruction."

Karzai's remarks came after a high-level meeting he led with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said the international community stands behind Afghanistan during its transition.

"While we agreed that the challenges are enormous and difficult, we also hope that the Afghanistan government, under the leadership of President Karzai, continue to focus their efforts in good governance, eradicating corruption, eradicating opium cultivation and drug trafficking and promoting education and sanitation," he said. **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

Karzai welcomes Taliban talks

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DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
BYLINE: KATHLEEN
HARRIS
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 259

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War against brutality NATO boss urges Canada to stay course

SOURCETAG: 0709240393
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo of HAMID KARZAI Weeding good from bad 2. photo by Kathleen Harris, Sun Media NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer says Canadian troops are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and he would like for that to continue.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 534

Canada should keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back to an era of brutality, says the head of NATO.

Urging Canada to extend its military mission past the current February 2009 mandate, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Sun Media it is "simply not possible" that any country would withdraw troops.

"Canada has suffered a lot of casualties, but take Canada's history and let's try to answer the question: Do we abandon people to brutality? Because that's basically what this is about," he said in an interview. "Then I think every Canadian, in uniform or out of uniform, given your history, given that Canadians traditionally came a long way from home to defend others ... that is something that would appeal to Canadians."

De Hoop Scheffer said Afghanistan was "on its way to the Middle Ages" when the Taliban ruled, and warned that abandoning the country could mean a return to the failed state of 2001 that flouted human rights and harboured terrorist training camps.

"They were among the worst human rights violators the world has seen -- no women's rights, public executions. Do not forget our opponents, our enemy, is burning people, hanging teachers from trees, burning schools, beheading women," he said. "It is such a different moral category these opponents, these Taliban, that I say abandoning people to brutality is simply something we can not afford."

De Hoop Scheffer came under fire last week for urging the Dutch to remain deployed -- a move denounced by some as meddling in domestic politics. But he insists that while he will respect the decision of any sovereign nation, like Canada, it's his job to try to influence the politicians and public opinion.

"This is their decision. In the run-up to these decisions, they should hear my voice."

DANGERS IN KANDAHAR

Conceding that Canada's high casualty count is evidence Afghanistan's south is "tough," de Hoop Scheffer is not warm to the idea that Canadian troops could stay but only if rotated to the less volatile north. Canadians

are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and should stay put, he said.

"No NATO secretary-general and no military commander will every be happy with caveats," he said. "I know that completely caveat-free is difficult, but still I make my pitch for lesser and lesser caveats, a diminishing of the caveats. I would hope that would also be relative for Canada."

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he wants to continue talks with the Taliban, but de Hoop Scheffer would not weigh in to say if such talks might undermine the military mission.

"This is a sovereign nation, and a sovereign nation and only that sovereign nation and its government decides if and when there will be peace process negotiations and with whom," he said. "That is really not up to us, not up to NATO, and quite honestly, not up to the international community."

De Hoop Scheffer said he has not yet had any formal notification from Canada about a withdrawal. But he hopes no news is good news.

"I hope I'm not hearing anything, but it is crystal clear that for military planning purposes you can't do that overnight," he said. "No nation can withdraw its forces overnight, they're pretty far away. Logistically, that is complicated. But military planners in NATO they can't act overnight as well, but I say again, I do not hope to hear anything of the kind." KEYWORDS=CANADA

Canada backs increased drug eradication in Afghanistan

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PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM
DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS
BYLINE: Steven Edwards
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 238

Canada and other countries agreed Sunday to back stepped-up operations to counter drug production in Afghanistan -- a move that some say will lead to Canadian troops being drawn into controversial drug-eradication and interdiction activities.

At a high-level meeting on the country, Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier put Canada's name to a communique that expresses "great concern" at the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

The production of heroin-producing opiates reached a "frighteningly new level" last year, according to a recent UN survey, and Canada is among countries that say profits of the illicit drugs trade are funding the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But drug eradication is controversial because poor farmers also cultivate poppies, saying it's the only way they can make a living.

"Breaking this linkage [between drugs production and insurgent financing] is vital to creating a stable, prosperous and democratic, Afghanistan..." says the communique, released after the closed-door gathering.

While Canada's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan are currently not involved in drug eradication, the communique adds the "participants agreed to collectively support increased Afghan government efforts to fight the menace of poppy cultivation."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai praised Canada after emerging from the meeting, also attended by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

"It has given a lot. It has given the lives of its sons and daughters," Karzai said.

Much of the rest of the communique reflects talk on reconstruction that people at the meeting say took place. But they add that inside, Bernier also highlighted actions Canada believes are necessary for speeding up development.

Canadian soldiers facing more foreign fighters; Canada's Van Doos -- fighting in Afghanistan -- battle all kinds of insurgents, veteran infantryman says

IDNUMBER 200709240011
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: WAR; FOREIGN AID; TERRORISM; AFGHANISTAN; CANADA
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 355

The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans, but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time forward deployed in the Panjwai/Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies sometimes call Information Warfare.

"We're dealing with all kinds of insurgents. With Chechens, Egyptians, Saudis, Pakistanis, guys from the Yemen. It isn't one group more than the next." Asked whether he had personally encountered foreigners on the battlefield, the sergeant, a veteran of six previous Canadian overseas missions who was only allowed to give his name as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not interacted verbally with them."

The trend towards more foreign fighters here was confirmed by Brig.- Gen. Marquis Hainse, Canada's top ranking soldier in Afghanistan and deputy commander for NATO in what is its main combat theatre, Sector South.

In separate interviews, the general and the Information Operations sergeant both noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters?" the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have a ideology and that ideology is Islamic fundamentalism. They try to use that to control the Afghans.

"The Taliban is trying to recruit here, but what they get mostly is cannon fodder. They are not that well-trained."

"My assessment is that they [the enemy] do not have that degree of sophistication," said Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron, the Canadian who is NATO's top intelligence officer in Afghanistan. "The leadership outside has access to such information, but I don't believe that they use that to deliberately co-ordinate plans to target Canada. Generally, their interest is to target NATO collectively."

That is also the assessment of the sergeant responsible for befriending tribal elders in the hot conflict zone to the west of Kandahar City.

A promise to help cut Afghan poppy crop; Canadian troops might be drawn into eradication efforts

IDNUMBER 200709240045
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A21
KEYWORDS: DRUGS; FARMERS & FARMING; VETERANS; WORLD WAR I; BOTANY
DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS
BYLINE: STEVEN EDWARDS
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 195

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"Breaking this linkage (between drugs production and insurgent financing) is vital to creating a stable, prosperous and democratic, Afghanistan," says the communiqué, released after the closed-door gathering.

Dutch-based Transnational Institute, which brings together activist-scholars, is expected to say in a report today the UN and Western countries are "over-reacting" to the jump in drugs production in Afghanistan. It warns violence could increase as a result of dramatically increasing counter-narcotics operations.

Chechens are Canadians' toughest foes in Afghanistan

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EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: FOREIGN AID; TERRORISM; WAR; AFGHANISTAN; CANADA
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: MATTHEW FISHER
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 256

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The general and the Information Operations sergeant noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters?" the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have an ideology and that ideology is Islamic fundamentalism."

Asked how progress could be measured in a war without fronts and where the enemy melted into the regular population in a second, Sgt. Pete replied: "Success is sometimes geography-based. Sometimes it is result-based or clan-based. It is based on information we receive although we certainly do not believe everything we are told."

No evidence Iran supplies arms to Taliban, UN says

IDNUMBER 200709240004
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
KEYWORDS: TERRORISM; NUCLEAR POWER; NUCLEAR REACTORS; FOREIGN AID; URANIUM; NUCLEAR WEAPONS; IRAN; AFGHANISTAN
BYLINE: MIKE BLANCHFIELD
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 614

A top United Nations diplomat is rejecting repeated claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan first surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border.

If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said.

Seventy Canadian soldiers and one Canadian diplomat have lost their lives in Afghanistan, more than half from roadside bombs that have grown increasingly sophisticated and powerful in the last year.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, told CanWest News Service: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, where a reconstituted Taliban and Al-Qa'ida insurgency has mounted renewed guerrilla attacks in the last 18 months that have severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

The insurgents are comprised of foreign mercenaries from across the Islamic world.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion," Alexander said.

"That means not saying that Iran is the principle source of arms shipments to the Taliban. That's simply not true."

Alexander, who was Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003, after the fall of the Taliban two years earlier, said Iran actually opposes the Taliban.

He said Iran has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the country.

Yesterday, Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country.

"It's an important area between us and Iran," Karzai said, noting 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

President George W. Bush tried to persuade Karzai during a visit to Washington last month that the Iranians are "not a force for good as far as we can see" and told the Afghan president "they're a destabilizing influence wherever they are."

Karzai said little in his appearance with Bush. But before arriving in Washington, he told CNN: "We have had very good, very close relations" with Iran and that "so far, Iran has been a helper and a solution."

Bush's comments came as U.S. military and intelligence officials have begun building a case that Iran is backing insurgents inside Afghanistan.

"We're deeply concerned about that," Bernier, Canada's new foreign minister, told CanWest News Service. "If it's true, such support will directly endanger the lives of Canadians and international forces and aid workers."

Asked if he had any information to substantiate the allegation against Iran, Bernier said he "didn't have any more detail on that."

Bernier added he was "surprised and concerned" about the reports because Iran is a signatory to last year's Afghanistan Compact, the document that lays out the international community's commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Many, including Prime Minister Stephen Harper, have hailed Alexander as an expert on Afghanistan.

Alexander said while Iran's pursuit of nuclear power is a serious issue that the UN and the international community must confront, it should not be confused with its relations with Afghanistan.

Intertwining the two issues and assuming Iran bears ill will toward Afghanistan would only serve to undermine the international efforts to defeat the Taliban insurgency and rebuild the country, as well as to hamper the legitimate goal of curbing Tehran's nuclear ambitions, he said.

"This comes back to the question of the higher order coherence of our policies. To be successful in Afghanistan, the international community has to have a consistent policy not just with Afghanistan, but with its neighbours," Alexander said.

Iran is spending about \$50 million a year on aid in Afghanistan, "which is spent in very efficient ways on education, on capacity building, on roads, on electricity, on some irrigation," he said.

Ottawa Citizen

Latest developments ITALIAN SOLDIERS ABDUCTED

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IDN: 072670162

DATE: 2007.09.24

PAGE: A17

BYLINE:

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: REUT AP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 90

WORD COUNT: 103

Two Italian soldiers are believed to have been abducted while on patrol in western Afghanistan, Italy's Defence Ministry said yesterday.

The ministry said they were believed to have been kidnapped together with two Afghans but said the situation was still not clear. It said it had lost contact on Saturday with the two soldiers. At a meeting at the United Nations, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told participants he had information about where the Italians were and would pass the information to Italian authorities, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Italy

SUBJECT TERM: strife; kidnapping

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

Latest developments COURT RULES AGAINST PILOT

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072670161

DATE: 2007.09.24

PAGE: A17

BYLINE:

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: AP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 97

WORD COUNT: 110

A federal judge has ruled against a U.S. pilot who sued the Air Force for allegedly ruining his reputation in a friendly fire bombing in Afghanistan that killed four Canadian soldiers. Major Harry Schmidt filed a civil lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Springfield, Ill., in April 2006, claiming the military violated the federal Privacy Act by disclosing parts of his military record without his permission.

U.S. District Judge Jeanne Scott ruled in favour of the Air Force on Thursday, writing that "the competing public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs Schmidt's privacy interest."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: United States; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: damage suits; privacy; air strikes; accidents; death

PERSONAL NAME: Harry Schmidt

ORGANIZATION NAME: Air Force

Latest developments VACCINATORS GIVEN SAFE PASSAGE IN AFGHANISTAN

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IDN: 072670160

DATE: 2007.09.24

PAGE: A17

BYLINE:

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: AP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 71

WORD COUNT: 93

Afghan elders have given safe passage to thousands of volunteer vaccinators immunizing children against polio in Afghanistan's violent south, a region health workers haven't worked in for months, Unicef said. The vaccinators are working in violent areas of Kandahar and Helmand provinces through the help of Kandahar's governor and local elders, who worked to ensure the health workers could travel safely, said Catherine Mbengue, Unicef representative in Afghanistan.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM:health care; children; vaccination; strife

THE AFGHAN MISSION: A JOURNALIST IN THE DANGER ZONE

Chronicle of a roadside attack

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IDN: 072670159
DATE: 2007.09.24
PAGE: A17
BYLINE: DENE MOORE
SECTION: International News
SOURCE: CP
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: MA'SUM GHAR, AFGHANISTAN
WORDS: 476
WORD COUNT: 360

DENE MOORE The Canadian Press MA'SUM GHAR, AFGHANISTAN The logistics convoy, carrying rations and other supplies to two of Canada's forward operating bases in Kandahar province, rolls through the gates and out the relative safety of Kandahar Air Field around 7:30 p.m. Friday.

A short way into the trip, the vehicles are sidelined by a mechanical problem into Camp Nathan Smith in Kandahar City. For the next couple of hours soldiers cool their heels at the base of the provincial reconstruction team.

The problem fixed, the convoy rolls out just shy of midnight.

The stars are shining far overhead in a big Afghan sky.

A half-hour later, most of the oddball mix of soldiers, civilians, interpreters and journalists are half asleep in the back of the convoy's Bison. It seems it will be a long and boring night but this is Afghanistan, and the sands shift quickly.

* 12:31 a.m.: A loud boom vibrates the Bison. "We've got contact," yells a voice from the back of the rig. An RG-31 has been hit. One person was thrown through the hatch. Three others, at least, are unconscious inside.

* 12:47 a.m.: There is one "priority 2" injury, meaning it's serious but not life-threatening.

* 12:49 a.m.: A second boom hits in front of the Bison. "They found an RPG not far away. Awfully close," says one voice in the dark, referring to a rocket-propelled grenade.

* 12:57 a.m.: It comes over the radio that there are possible enemies in the area.

* 1:12 a.m.: The Bison moves down the highway to create a safety cordon while the injured are treated.

* 1:20 a.m.: The Bison moves again, about 150 metres down the road.

* 1:35 a.m.: The radio says it will be 60 minutes for a medivac.

The conditions of the injured change constantly as they're assessed and reassessed.

- * 1:37 a.m.: "Everybody inside. Let's go," yells a voice. The hatch of the Bison slams shut with a bang.
- * 2:08 a.m.: We'll be heading to the forward operating base at Ma'sum Ghar for medivac.
- * 2:29 a.m.: We arrive at the base just as the first of the helicopters heads in to retrieve the injured.
- * 2:50 a.m.: The helicopters are headed for Kandahar, loaded with two Canadian soldiers and an Afghan interpreter injured in the blast. Two other Canadian soldiers are treated for minor wounds in Ma'sum Ghar and released.

Military officials said none of the injuries was life threatening.

Improvised explosive devices, or IEDs, have become the weapon of choice for Taliban insurgents as they increasingly turn to guerrilla tactics. A conservative estimate is that one vehicle a week is hit with a roadside bomb. More often, the bombs are discovered and defused by Canadian troops.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; bombs; chronology

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

MILITARY Air force to upgrade design of Chinooks, sources say

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL
IDN: 072670144
DATE: 2007.09.24
PAGE: A4
BYLINE: MURRAY BREWSTER
SECTION: National News
SOURCE: CP
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: Ottawa ONT
WORDS: 630
WORD COUNT: 624

MURRAY BREWSTER Canadian Press OTTAWA Canada's air force wants to upgrade the design of its planned CH-47 Chinook battlefield helicopter and is offering Boeing a limited contract to construct a couple of prototype aircraft, defence sources say.

The Chief of Air Staff, Lieutenant-General Angus Watt, confirmed project staff have asked for changes, but would not discuss the specifics of the negotiations under way with the Chicago-based aircraft giant.

He said he's confident the continuing talks and the redesign will not affect the delivery date of the 16 medium-lift helicopters, which the army has identified as essential in getting Canadian troops off the bomb-strewn roads of southern Afghanistan.

But air force observers are worried the request, made earlier this year, will knock the project off schedule, pushing the arrival of the aircraft out past 2011.

Much like vehicles coming off the assembly line, helicopters can come with a variety of different features and Lt.-Gen. Watt compared the impending \$4.7-billion purchase to buying a pickup truck or SUV.

"We don't want a basic truck," he said in an interview. "Because we have a relatively small fleet without all of the additional bells and whistles and extra capabilities, we want that fleet to be more than a basic truck so it can do those missions in a little more demanding circumstances." One of the most important upgrades the air force wants to see is better armour and weapons so the choppers can perform casualty evacuation.

Canadian troops wounded in battle in Afghanistan are currently airlifted to hospital in specially outfitted U.S. Blackhawks. The modifications being requested would not upgrade the Chinooks to a full Medevac role, which would require the installation of a suite of life-saving equipment, but would allow for the timely airlift of most wounded soldiers.

Lt.-Gen. Watt said there are other design changes meant to allow the Chinooks to operate in bad weather and fly over vast distances – necessary features if the aircraft are to be useful to the army in the Arctic during the summer. The air force also wants the CH-47 to act as a backup search-and-rescue helicopter for the sometimes troubled Cormorant.

When the medium–lift helicopter program was announced, former defence minister Gordon O'Connor said he expected delivery of the first aircraft in 2010 or 36 months after a contract was signed.

Yet, over a year after the Conservative government invoked an advanced contract award notice, citing national security and Boeing as the only company capable of delivering the required aircraft, it has yet to strike a formal contract. The delay, coupled with the possibility Canada's combat role in Afghanistan could end in February, 2009, has military experts nervous and wondering about the future of the program.

Alex Morrison, president of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, said it's possible to analyze a program to death.

"I think they have to very quickly settle on what they want," Mr. Morrison said. "My strategic concern is that if we do leave Afghanistan, if we stop engaging in combat in Afghanistan at the end of February, 2009, and contracts aren't signed, there's an awful temptation to say, 'We don't need these things.' " Air force planners say 16 helicopters are the minimum needed to do the job required, but documents released by the project office suggest the fleet size could eventually grow to 35.

Defence sources said that offering Boeing a so–called risk–reduction contract to build a couple of helicopters to Canadian specifications would be a way to move the project forward.

Lt.–Gen. Watt said planners are "looking at all possibilities," but they're confident they can meet the stringent guidelines demanded when you fast track a contract."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: defence contracts; helicopters

ORGANIZATION NAME: Air Force; Armed Forces

Dion's Quebec disconnect

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND
MAIL
IDN: 072670139
DATE: 2007.09.24
PAGE: A19
BYLINE: LYSIANE
GAGNON
SECTION: Comment
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE:
WORDS: 687
WORD COUNT: 643

LYSIANE GAGNON What's wrong with Stephane Dion? Why is the Liberal leader unable to restore his party's fortunes in his own province? Why have the Tories replaced the party of Laurier, Trudeau and Chretien as the first federalist party in Quebec? These questions are more timely than ever, after the abysmal performance of the Liberal Party in last week's Quebec by-elections.

Not only did the Liberal Party lose its historical stronghold of Outremont – a multicultural riding in which, as the saying went, anything red, a pole or a pig, would be automatically elected – it ended up with less than 10 per cent of the vote in the French-speaking ridings of Roberval and St-Hyacinthe.

The Liberal establishment argues that by-elections don't mean much. Wrong. In this case, they do. By-elections usually bring out a protest vote and thus favour the opposition party; but this time around, the governmental party was the overall winner. The Tories won a landslide in the Bloc Quebecois bastion of Roberval, and substantially increased their share of the vote in St-Hyacinthe. Even the victory of the NDP candidate Thomas Mulcair in Outremont is good news for the Tories, since the Liberal Party and the NDP compete for the left-of-centre vote.

The prospects for the Liberals in Quebec are bleak. A Leger Marketing poll a few days before the by-elections shows that among francophone voters, the Liberal Party, with 16 per cent of the vote, is trailing the Bloc (43 per cent) and the Tories (25 per cent). While 26 per cent of Quebec voters chose Stephen Harper as the best man for prime minister, only 9 per cent (and 7 per cent of francophones) chose Mr. Dion, who even comes far behind NDP leader Jack Layton (18 per cent).

The Liberal establishment argues that the party's misfortune in Quebec is a sequel to the sponsorship scandal. Wrong again. This scandal is history. Practically nobody talks about it, and in any case, Mr. Dion was not personally linked to the sponsorship operation.

The simple truth is that Mr. Dion is not liked in Quebec and that francophone voters don't identify with him.

At the outset, when he ran for the leadership, Mr. Dion had very little support in Quebec. Most delegates sided with Michael Ignatieff.

After becoming leader, he was unable to rally Mr. Ignatieff's partisans.

Many Quebec Liberals are staying on the sidelines, waiting for a general election and a change of leadership.

The sovereigntists still hate Mr. Dion for having been such a staunch adversary of their cause, and Mr. Dion has been unable to connect with the soft nationalists who make up the larger group of francophone voters. At best, the non-sovereigntist francophones are indifferent to him.

The Liberal Leader's new image as an environmentalist serves him well, but only up to a point. He comes across as stubborn and arrogant, and his policies are hard to follow. On Afghanistan, for instance, his relentless insistence that the government fix a precise date for a retreat of the troops seems needlessly quarrelsome.

The Liberal leader is increasingly alienated from his home province.

Either because he wanted it this way or because he couldn't find anybody reliable to work with, he is almost exclusively surrounded by anglophone advisers from Ontario. His rare francophone advisers – people like former cabinet minister Marcel Masse, press secretary Robert Asselin or Marc Lavigne, who was in charge of the organization for Quebec – resigned one after the other, allegedly because Mr.

Dion wouldn't take any advice about how to deal with the province.

"The boss doesn't listen to anybody," an insider says, "and that's a problem, especially when one doesn't have a great deal of political instinct." As if to confirm this judgment, the day after his party's beating in the Quebec by-elections, Mr. Dion couldn't find anything better to do than to champion the cause of Omar Khadr, a terrorism suspect whose family had links with al-Qaeda.

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ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Quebec

SUBJECT TERM:by-election; political

PERSONAL NAME: Stephane Dion

ORGANIZATION NAME: Liberal Party

No Pax Romana in Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL
IDN: 072670138
DATE: 2007.09.24
PAGE: A19
BYLINE: BILL THOMAS
SECTION: Letter to the Edit
EDITION: Metro
DATELINE: Surrey, B.C.
WORDS: 92
WORD COUNT: 99

Bill Thomas Surrey, B.C.

Canadians would be more inclined to support the project in Afghanistan (Canada Must Stay The Course – editorial, Sept. 22) if there were a greater likelihood of success.

Most of us know how this sort of thing has been done since Roman times: First impose a military governor and get the smaller country under control. There's plenty of time to introduce Western institutions once things are safe and secure. Instead of which, they're propping up this Afghan government which can't even muster enough support from its countrymen to defend itself.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Canada

SUBJECT TERM:foreign policy; strife; government

THE AFGHAN MISSION: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS High-level UN meeting urges Kabul to root out terrorism, corruption

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072670092

DATE: 2007.09.24

PAGE: A17 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: GERARD AZIAKOU

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: AFP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS

WORDS: 505

WORD COUNT: 531

GERARD AZIAKOU Agence France-Presses UNITED NATIONS Participants at a UN-sponsored high-level meeting yesterday condemned increased "terrorist activities" by the Taliban in Afghanistan and urged Kabul to do more to spur good governance and root out corruption and drug trafficking.

A joint communique issued at the end of the three-hour meeting at the United Nations "unequivocally condemned terrorist and other illegal activities, which hindered the establishment of the rule of law, the provision of basic services to the Afghan people." UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who co-hosted the meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, said participants expressed hope that Afghan leaders "will continue to focus their efforts on good governance and eradicating corruption, drug trafficking." Eighteen countries took part in the meeting which focused on "the increase in violent and terrorist activities by the Taliban, al-Qaeda, illegal armed groups, criminals and those involved in the narcotics trade." Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan have waged a bloody insurgency which has claimed thousands of lives since their ouster from power.

Asked about direct talks between Kabul and the ousted Taliban, Mr.

Karzai noted that his government is already in contact through a peace and reconciliation process with those Taliban who were not part of "foreign terrorist networks" such as al-Qaeda.

The communique also expressed "great concern at the expansion of poppy cultivation, as well as heroin production, over the past year, underlining the link between the production and trafficking of illegal drugs and the financing of terrorist activities." Participants reviewed progress toward implementing the so-called Afghanistan Compact, a five-year development blueprint launched in January, 2006, by Kabul and some 70 foreign partners.

Under the deal, Afghanistan promised to take specific steps in the areas of security, governance, rule of law and human rights, and economic and social development in return for military and economic support.

Asked whether he was satisfied with the level of international aid to his country, Mr. Karzai replied: "If you are asking whether we will ask for more, we are grateful for what has been given to us already. If more is given, of course we will be very, very grateful." After the 2001 fall of the Islamist Taliban regime, Afghanistan was in tatters, which led the world community to spend billions of dollars on development and

THE AFGHAN MISSION: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS High-level UN meeting urges Kabul to root out te

send in tens of thousands of troops to fight a growing Taliban insurgency.

Voicing concern about increased violence and terrorism in Afghanistan, the UN Security Council last Wednesday voted overwhelmingly to extend for one year the mandate of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force. The UN-mandated ISAF is, at 39,000 people from around 37 nations, its most powerful since 2001, even though original estimates of troops and equipment requirements still have not been met. ISAF operates alongside a U.S.-led coalition of about 15,000 and the fledgling Afghan security forces.

In October, 2001, U.S.-led forces toppled the Taliban, which was funded by and sheltered the al-Qaeda extremist network, after they refused to hand over Osama bin Laden.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; terrorism; illegal drugs; political; conferences

PERSONAL NAME: Hamid Karzai

ORGANIZATION NAME: Taliban; United Nations

FEDERAL POLITICS Liberals stay mum on Throne Speech Dion's refusal to commit dampens election speculation

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072670012

DATE: 2007.09.24

PAGE: A1

BYLINE: STEVEN CHASE

SECTION: National News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Ottawa ONT

WORDS: 891

WORD COUNT: 857

STEVEN CHASE With a report from Canadian Press OTTAWA Liberal Leader Stephane Dion, still smarting from last week's by-election losses in Quebec, says he's undecided about whether his party will vote to defeat the Harper government by opposing its upcoming fall Throne Speech.

Mr. Dion's comments appeared geared toward cooling frenzied speculation about a fall election after the Bloc Quebecois signalled it would no longer provide the Conservative minority government the support that has allowed it to survive key confidence votes.

Speaking to reporters in Sherbrooke, Que., Mr. Dion said he will decide what to do once he reads the Oct. 16 Throne Speech. "We'll see what's in the Throne Speech. There's no question of rejecting the Throne Speech without seeing it." It is rare for the Official Opposition to vote in favour of a governing party's Throne Speech – which outlines its agenda – in part because the rival MPs are supposed to style themselves as a government-in-waiting.

Before Mr. Dion spoke, some Conservative strategists had put the odds of a fall election as high as 50–50. But his comments may have lowered the odds of a ballot – and political analysts caution against leasing a campaign plane just yet because negotiations about whether the Throne Speech will pass may have just begun.

University of Windsor political scientist Heather MacIvor said Mr. Dion is leaving the door open for compromise with the Conservatives if they want to avoid a fall election.

"It's a signal . . . to Harper that, 'Look, I am not going to make any decision until after I have read it, so this is your chance to throw me a bone on something and give me a chance to climb down from a confrontation,' " she said.

The Harper government needs the backing of at least one opposition party to stay in power, but seemingly impossible Throne Speech demands by both the NDP and the Bloc suggest those two are unwilling to play that role.

NDP Leader Jack Layton, who has already said he would be hard-pressed to support the Throne Speech, wants Canadian combat troops withdrawn from Afghanistan immediately.

Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe, under pressure from his own party to act tougher in Ottawa, on the weekend unveiled a list of five "non-negotiable" conditions for the Bloc to support the Throne Speech, including eliminating all federal spending powers in provincial jurisdictions and complying with the Kyoto Protocol's tough greenhouse-gas-emission reduction targets.

The Prime Minister's Office accused the Bloc of trying to force an election with its demands. "Quebeckers were clear in the by-elections: they do not want an election now. The Bloc should listen to them instead of being reckless," PMO spokesman Dimitri Soudas said.

The Liberals have also called for things they want to see in the speech, but have not labelled their conditions non-negotiable. Mr.

Dion has asked for an early 2009 exit date from Afghanistan, a reintroduction of clean-air legislation that died in the last session of Parliament, and a plan to combat poverty. Otherwise, he said, "you can understand we will not be able to rise to support such a Throne Speech." Mr. Dion's move puts the onus back on the Prime Minister to decide whether a fall vote is triggered, analysts say.

"If [Mr. Harper] wants an election, he won't feel inclined to make any deals," said Peter Donolo of the Strategic Counsel.

A senior Tory official declined to say whether the Throne Speech is open to negotiation, but said the government doesn't want an election and vowed it would not insert items into the speech deliberately calculated to alienate the opposition and trigger an election. Still, analysts say the idea must be tempting for the Conservatives, given their well-organized election machine, the results of the Quebec by-election where they stole a seat from the Bloc, and Mr. Dion's leadership troubles.

While the Conservatives and Liberals appear nearly tied for support, according to a Strategic Counsel survey in August, the same research found Mr. Harper has built up political capital with Canadians, strengthened his position in Quebec and gained support in the 905 area code around Toronto and in Southwestern Ontario.

Still, analysts warn that an election would be risky for Mr. Harper, especially if Liberals could steal back votes from the New Democrats using the threat of a Conservative majority.

"It's not as if the Conservatives are miles ahead of their opposition.

It's a very tricky situation," Mr. Donolo said.

With a report from Canadian Press Death by Throne Speech * No minority government in Ottawa has ever fallen after a vote on the Throne Speech.

* Of the 10 minorities since Confederation, only five were defeated on the floor of the House of Commons, and they all went down over money bills or a motion of censure or no-confidence.

* The only Canadian government to fall on a Throne Speech was the Ontario Tory administration of Frank Miller, which lost a vote at the end of the Throne Speech debate in 1985 and resigned in favour of Liberal David Peterson. But in that case, the Liberals and NDP had already signed an agreement to work together after Mr. Miller was out and simply took the first opportunity to extinguish the government.

The Canadian Press

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: government; political; speech from the throne

PERSONAL NAME: Stephane Dion

ORGANIZATION NAME: Liberal Party

Chechens complicate Afghan war; Canadians are seeing more foreign fighters

IDNUMBER 200709240015
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: FOREIGN AID; WAR; TERRORISM; AFGHANISTAN; CANADA
DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 564

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time forward deployed in the Panjwai–Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hardcore. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies sometimes call information warfare.

"We're dealing with all kinds of insurgents. With Chechens, Egyptians, Saudis, Pakistanis, guys from Yemen. It isn't one group more than the next."

Asked whether he had personally encountered foreigners on the battlefield, the sergeant, a veteran of six previous Canadian overseas missions who was allowed to give only his name as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not interacted verbally with them."

The trend toward more foreign fighters in Afghanistan was confirmed by Brig.-Gen. Marquis Hainse, Canada's top ranking soldier in Afghanistan and deputy commander for NATO in what is its main combat theatre, Sector South.

"We see an increase in foreign fighters," the general, who has been based in Kandahar since May, said, although he said there were not huge numbers of them.

"This may be because less people from Afghanistan are joining the fight. They are not getting the numbers they need here. They are not regenerating forces. What is their pool? It's not extremists but people who feel they don't have a choice. And that pool is reducing."

In separate interviews, the general and the Information Operations sergeant both noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters?" the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have an ideology and that

ideology is Islamic fundamentalism. They try to use that to control the Afghans.

"The Taliban is trying to recruit here, but what they get mostly is cannon fodder. They are not that well-trained."

What was always of primary interest to the Canadians was what Afghans wanted who lived in combat-heavy areas.

"The answer is always the same: security. That is always the main issue," Pete said.

Several Pakistani websites keep a close eye on everything the Canadians are doing in Afghanistan, almost instantly posting stories about their operations after they appear in Canada. These sites also delight in highlighting political differences in Canada. However, the conclusion here is that little of this information has created problems for the troops.

Although the province of Kandahar, which they are responsible for, is huge, the Canadians have returned again and again to the same few villages and towns in Panjwai-Zahri.

"The concept of holding ground or facing an enemy that you can see is not here. This is a counter-insurgency," said Hainse, the Canadian at Sector South headquarters. "This is about the getting the consensus of the indigenous people."

Pete's approach was to "walk a lot. Our rotation is very proactive. Anything we achieve is through having a presence. The only way to make progress is to keep boots on the ground."

Asked how progress could be measured in a war without fronts and where the enemy can melt into the regular population in a second, he replied: "Success is sometimes geography-based. Sometimes it is result-based or clan-based. It is based on information we receive, although we certainly do not believe everything we are told.

"What we get at first is a guarded response. We do not encounter open hostility except, of course, when we are getting shot at."

UN diplomat rejects claims that Iran is arming Taliban; Pakistan border a bigger concern: envoy

IDNUMBER 200709240002
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1 / FRONT
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; IRAN; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: MONTREAL
BYLINE: Mike Blanchfield
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 522

MONTREAL – A top United Nations diplomat is dismissing claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan first surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border. If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, told CanWest News Service: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour.

A reconstituted Taliban and al-Qaeda insurgency is believed to be using Pakistan to mount a renewed guerrilla insurgency in the past year and a half that has severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion. That means not saying that Iran is the principle source of arms shipments to the Taliban. That's simply not true," said Alexander, previously Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003, after the fall of the Taliban two years earlier.

Alexander noted that Iran actually opposes the Taliban and has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the country.

Some 70 Canadian soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, more than half from roadside bombs.

On Sunday, Afghan President Hamid Karzai praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country.

"It's an important area between us and Iran," Karzai said, noting that 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

U.S. President George W. Bush tried to persuade Karzai during a visit to Washington last month that the Iranians are "not a force for good as far as we can see," telling the Afghan president "they're a destabilizing influence wherever they are."

Karzai said little in his appearance with Bush. But before arriving in Washington, he told CNN's Late Edition in an interview, "we have had, very good, very close relations" with Iran and that "so far, Iran has been a helper and a solution."

Bush's comments came as U.S. military and intelligence officials have begun building a case that Iran is backing insurgents inside Afghanistan.

In Ottawa, the federal government has no additional corroboration beyond the initial reports of negative Iranian influence in Afghanistan, but if true, they would have serious implications for Canadians on the ground there, said Bernier, Canada's new foreign minister.

"We're deeply concerned about that," Bernier told CanWest News Service in an interview. "If it's true, such support will directly endanger the lives of Canadians and international forces and aid workers."

Asked if he had any information to substantiate the allegation against Iran, Bernier said he "didn't have any more detail on that."

Bernier added he was "surprised and concerned" about the reports because Iran is a signatory to last year's Afghanistan Compact, the document that lays out the international community's commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.

Confidence vote on hold: Dion

SOURCETAG 0709231329
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 8
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: SHERBROOKE, Que.
WORD COUNT: 92

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion says he won't decide whether to bring down the Tory government until he sees next month's throne speech.

"We'll see what's in the throne speech," Dion said yesterday. "There's no question of rejecting the throne speech without seeing it."

The Liberals want the Tory government to make a commitment to withdrawing combat troops from Afghanistan in early 2009 and to reintroduce clean air legislation.

Without these elements and plans to combat poverty, "you can understand we will not be able to rise to support such a throne speech," Dion said.

Harper needs the votes of at least one opposition party to survive a confidence vote on the Oct. 16 speech.
KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Karzai welcomes Taliban talks

SOURCETAG: 0709231318
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 3
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 259

Taliban fighters with ties to terrorism are in the minority and negotiations are key to bringing lasting peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan, says President Hamid Karzai.

Speaking at UN headquarters in New York yesterday, Karzai suggested Taliban with links to terrorist groups are in the minority, and insisted it won't be tough to weed the good from the bad for talks.

"We are already in contact through a peace and reconciliation process with those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaida and not part of terrorist networks, who are really in the majority," he said. "

Karzai said many have been forced or found themselves in a position to leave Afghanistan or pick up guns, and his government is trying "to bring them back to the fold."

It is easy to identify the good from the bad for the negotiations process, he added.

"Deeds will tell and deeds do tell, so that identification is simple. Those who are willing to come and participate and take part in building a stronger, better, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan are the good ones," he said.

Karzai also praised Canada as one of the "great contributors" to Afghanistan.

PRAISED CANADA

"It has given us a lot, it has given the lives of its sons and daughters in Afghanistan. We are grateful for it and we will support Canadian efforts in bringing more resources to Afghanistan, be that military or financial and reconstruction."

Karzai's remarks came after a high-level meeting he led with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said the international community stands behind Afghanistan during its transition.

"While we agreed that the challenges are enormous and difficult, we also hope that the Afghanistan government, under the leadership of President Karzai, continue to focus their efforts in good governance, eradicating corruption, eradicating opium cultivation and drug trafficking and promoting education and sanitation," he said. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

War against brutality NATO boss urges Canada to stay course

SOURCETAG: 0709231316

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun

DATE: 2007.09.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 3

ILLUSTRATION: 1. photo by Kathleen Harris, Sun Media NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer says Canadian troops are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and he would like for that to continue. 2. photo of HAMID KARZAI Weeding good from bad

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

DATELINE: NEW YORK

WORD COUNT: 534

Canada should keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back to an era of brutality, says the head of NATO.

Urging Canada to extend its military mission past the current February 2009 mandate, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Sun Media it is "simply not possible" that any country would withdraw troops.

"Canada has suffered a lot of casualties, but take Canada's history and let's try to answer the question: Do we abandon people to brutality? Because that's basically what this is about," he said in an interview. "Then I think every Canadian, in uniform or out of uniform, given your history, given that Canadians traditionally came a long way from home to defend others ... that is something that would appeal to Canadians."

De Hoop Scheffer said Afghanistan was "on its way to the Middle Ages" when the Taliban ruled, and warned that abandoning the country could mean a return to the failed state of 2001 that flouted human rights and harboured terrorist training camps.

"They were among the worst human rights violators the world has seen -- no women's rights, public executions. Do not forget our opponents, our enemy, is burning people, hanging teachers from trees, burning schools, beheading women," he said. "It is such a different moral category these opponents, these Taliban, that I say abandoning people to brutality is simply something we can not afford."

De Hoop Scheffer came under fire last week for urging the Dutch to remain deployed -- a move denounced by some as meddling in domestic politics. But he insists that while he will respect the decision of any sovereign nation, like Canada, it's his job to try to influence the politicians and public opinion.

"This is their decision. In the run-up to these decisions, they should hear my voice."

DANGERS IN KANDAHAR

Conceding that Canada's high casualty count is evidence Afghanistan's south is "tough," de Hoop Scheffer is not warm to the idea that Canadian troops could stay but only if rotated to the less volatile north. Canadians are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and should stay put, he said.

"No NATO secretary-general and no military commander will every be happy with caveats," he said. "I know that completely caveat-free is difficult, but still I make my pitch for lesser and lesser caveats, a diminishing of the caveats. I would hope that would also be relative for Canada."

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he wants to continue talks with the Taliban, but de Hoop Scheffer would not weigh in to say if such talks might undermine the military mission.

"This is a sovereign nation, and a sovereign nation and only that sovereign nation and its government decides if and when there will be peace process negotiations and with whom," he said. "That is really not up to us, not up to NATO, and quite honestly, not up to the international community."

De Hoop Scheffer said he has not yet had any formal notification from Canada about a withdrawal. But he hopes no news is good news.

"I hope I'm not hearing anything, but it is crystal clear that for military planning purposes you can't do that overnight," he said. "No nation can withdraw its forces overnight, they're pretty far away. Logistically, that is complicated. But military planners in NATO they can't act overnight as well, but I say again, I do not hope to hear anything of the kind." KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

NATO has feet of clay

SOURCETAG 0709240318
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: A7
BYLINE: LORRIE GOLDSTEIN
WORD COUNT: 272

What is the point of having NATO, supposedly the world's most powerful military alliance, if most of its member nations aren't willing to fight?

It is NATO, not the Taliban, that could easily become the next casualty of war in Afghanistan, given how many NATO countries are cynically prepared to offer President Hamid Karzai any assistance, short of help.

A handful of nations, including Canada, are doing the fighting for NATO in Afghanistan, while too many others such as France, Germany, Spain and Italy have effectively cut and run. They have troops in the country, but keep them away from combat.

Last week, a worried Karzai granted an exclusive interview to Canadian journalists to appeal directly to Canadians, asking us to keep our 2,500 soldiers in Kandahar past their scheduled departure date of February 2009.

He warned Canada's withdrawal could set off a domino effect inside NATO.

One that could lead to his government's collapse and the resurgence of the Taliban -- who would turn Afghanistan into a terrorist training camp for attacks against the West, as it was before 9/11.

Karzai's right. Securing Afghanistan will take decades, not a few more years.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has been saying the right things about the importance of Canada's NATO partners stepping up to the plate.

But the political reality is that Prime Minister Stephen Harper, while he may personally support extending the mission, has promised not to do so without Parliament's consent. The three opposition parties, which control the majority of seats, are against it, as are most Canadians.

While regrettable, their position is understandable. By early 2009, our troops will have been fighting -- and dying -- helping to free and rebuild Afghanistan for seven years, the last three in deadly Kandahar.

Unlike others in NATO, Canada answered the call. Our soldiers should be proud of all they have accomplished and all they will continue to accomplish as long as we ask it of them.

But if Afghanistan collapses into anarchy, the fault will not be Canada's.

It will be NATO's, for waving the white flag of surrender.

Canada in talks to upgrade planned CH-47s

SOURCETAG 0709240309
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: OTTAWA
COLUMN: News Digest
WORD COUNT: 151

Canada's air force wants to upgrade the design of its planned CH-47 Chinook battlefield helicopters and is offering Boeing a limited contract to construct a couple of prototype aircraft, defence sources have told The CP. The chief of air staff, Lt.-Gen. Angus Watt, confirmed project staff have asked for changes, but would not discuss the specifics of the negotiations underway with the Chicago-based aircraft giant. He said he's confident the ongoing talks and the redesign will not affect the delivery date of the 16 medium-lift helicopters, which the army has identified as essential in getting Canadian troops off the bomb-strewn roads of southern Afghanistan. But air force observers are worried the request, made earlier this year, will knock the project off schedule. KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Afghan president prepared to talk with 'good' Taliban Hamid Karzai wants Taliban with no terrorist ties to come "back to the fold."

SOURCETAG 0709240296

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.09.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A2

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Kathleen Harris, Sun Media HOLDING TALKS: Afghan President Hamid Karzai is at United Nations headquarters in New York for high-level meetings on Afghanistan.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, SUN MEDIA NATIONAL BUREAU

DATELINE: NEW YORK

WORD COUNT: 227

Taliban fighters with ties to terrorism are in the minority and negotiations are key to bringing lasting peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan, says the country's president, Hamid Karzai.

Speaking after a high-level meeting on Afghanistan at the United Nations headquarters in New York yesterday, Karzai suggested not all Taliban have links to terrorist groups and insisted it wouldn't be tough to weed the good from the bad for talks.

"We are already in contact through a peace and reconciliation process with those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaida and not part of terrorist networks, who are really in the majority," he said. "This process is going on and we would like to add to this process as it presents itself."

Karzai said many Taliban have been forced or found themselves in a position to leave Afghanistan or pick up guns and his government is "trying very hard to bring them back to the fold."

It is easy to identify the good from the bad for the negotiations process, he added.

"Deeds will tell and deeds do tell, so that identification is simple. Those who are willing to come and participate and take part in building a stronger, better, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan are the good ones.

"We are working hard on that, we are trying very hard to bring them back to the fold, to make them return and participate in the making of the country. It's extremely important this process go on."

Karzai also praised Canada as one of the "great contributors" to Afghanistan in both military support and financial aid to his country. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Canada urged to carry on NATO's secretary general points to Taliban brutality as a reason to continue the battle in Afghanistan.

SOURCETAG 0709240292
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A1
ILLUSTRATION: photo of JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER Lauds Canada's history.
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, SUN MEDIA NATIONAL BUREAU
DATELINE: NEW YORK
TYPE : Special Report
WORD COUNT: 489

Canada should keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back into an era of brutality, says the head of NATO.

Urging Canada to extend its military mission past the current February 2009 mandate, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said it is "simply not possible" that any country now deployed would withdraw troops.

"Canada has suffered a lot of casualties, but take Canada's history and let's try to answer the question: Do we abandon people to brutality? -- because that's basically what this is about," he said.

"Then I think every Canadian, in uniform or out of uniform, given your history, given that Canadians traditionally came a long way from home to defend others . . . that is something that would appeal to Canadians."

De Hoop Scheffer said Afghanistan was "on its way to the Middle Ages" when the Taliban ruled and warned that abandoning the fragile country could mean a return to the failed state of 2001 when the government flouted human rights and harboured terrorist training camps.

"They were among the worst human rights violators the world has seen -- no women's rights, public executions," he said.

"Do not forget our opponents, our enemy, is burning people, hanging teachers from trees, burning schools, beheading women.

"It is such a different moral category, these opponents, these Taliban, that I say abandoning people to brutality is simply something we can not afford."

De Hoop Scheffer came under fire last week for urging the Netherlands to remain deployed -- a move denounced by some as meddling in domestic politics.

But he insists that while he will respect the decision of sovereign nations, it's his job to try to influence the politicians and public opinion.

Canada urged to carry on NATO's secretary general points to Taliban brutality as a reason to continue the battle

"This is their decision. In the run-up to these decisions, they should hear my voice," he said.

Conceding that Canada's high casualty count is evidence Afghanistan's south is "tough," de Hoop Scheffer is not warm to the idea that Canadian troops could stay under a so-called caveat that would rotate them to the less-volatile north. Canadians are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and should stay put, he said.

"No NATO secretary general and no military commander will ever be happy with caveats. . . . I make a strong plea for a caveat-free operation. I know that completely caveat-free is difficult, but still I make my pitch for lesser and lesser caveats, a diminishing of the caveats."

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he wants to continue talks with the Taliban, but de Hoop Scheffer would not weigh in to say if such talks might undermine the military mission.

"This is a sovereign nation and a sovereign nation and only that sovereign nation and its government decides if and when there will be peace process negotiations and with whom," he said. "That is really not up to us, not up to NATO and quite honestly not up to the international community."

De Hoop Scheffer said he has not had any formal notification from Canada about a withdrawal.

But he hopes no news is good news.

"I hope I'm not hearing anything, but it is crystal clear that for military planning purposes, you can't do that overnight," he said. "No nation can withdraw its forces overnight, they're pretty far away. Logistically, that is complicated. But military planners in NATO, they can't act overnight as well, but I say again, I do not hope to hear anything of the kind." KEYWORDS=WORLD

Italians missing in Afghanistan Suspected kidnapping a growing concern

SOURCETAG 0709240513
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 44
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 256

Two Italian military personnel were believed to have been kidnapped in western Afghanistan, and police yesterday said they were searching for the pair and their two Afghan staff.

At a meeting at the United Nations, Afghan President Hamid Karzai told participants he had information about where the Italians were and would pass the information to Italian authorities, said U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

In northeastern Afghanistan, meanwhile, NATO helicopters fired on a group of suspected insurgents in response to a rocket attack. Four Afghans died and 12 were wounded, the alliance said, and officials were investigating whether the dead and wounded were Afghan police or civilians targeted mistakenly.

NATO also said a soldier was killed by gunfire in eastern Afghanistan yesterday.

The soldier's nationality was not released, though most troops in that region are American.

The two missing Italians, with their Afghan driver and translator, drove through a police checkpoint in the Shindand district of Herat province Saturday, and they have not had any contact with anyone since, said Gen. Ali Khan Hassanzada, chief of police criminal investigations in western Afghanistan.

An official from the Italian Embassy in Kabul said the Italians last spoke with officials at their base Saturday night during "routine contact." The Italian military in Herat was trying to reach them again.

"We believe they have been kidnapped together with two Afghans," the Italian Defence Ministry said.

"The personnel were carrying out liaison activities with local civilian authorities."

Taliban spokesman Qari Yousef Ahmadi told The Associated Press that he did not immediately know if Taliban militants kidnapped the four.

Kidnappings by independent criminal gangs have increased around Afghanistan in recent months.

This is due to following reports that foreign governments have paid large ransoms to free kidnapped citizens.

In Rome, the kidnapping prompted calls by a few Communist legislators for Italy to withdraw its 2,160-strong force from Afghanistan — appeals rejected by other legislators. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Air force wants Chinooks changed

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PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 26
BYLINE: THE CANADIAN PRESS
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 223

Canada's air force wants to upgrade the design of its planned CH-47 Chinook battlefield helicopters and is offering Boeing a limited contract to construct a couple of prototype aircraft, defence sources have told The Canadian Press.

The chief of air staff, Lt.-Gen. Angus Watt, confirmed project staff have asked for changes, but would not discuss the specifics of the negotiations underway with the Chicago-based aircraft giant.

He said he's confident the ongoing talks and the redesign will not affect the delivery date of the 16 medium-lift helicopters, which the army has identified as essential in getting Canadian troops off the bomb-strewn roads of southern Afghanistan.

But air force observers are worried the request, made earlier this year, will knock the project off schedule, pushing the arrival of the aircraft out past 2011.

Much like vehicles coming off the assembly line, helicopters can come with a variety of different features and Watt compared the impending \$4.7 billion purchase to buying a pickup truck or SUV.

"We don't want a basic truck," he said in an interview. "Because we have a relatively small fleet without all of the additional bells and whistles and extra capabilities, we want that fleet to be more than a basic truck so it can do those missions in a little more demanding circumstances."

One of the most important upgrades the air force wants to see is better armour and weapons so the choppers can perform casualty evacuations.

Canadian troops wounded in battle in Afghanistan are currently airlifted to hospital in specially outfitted U.S. Blackhawks. **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

War against brutality NATO boss urges Canada to stay course

SOURCETAG: 0709240483

PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun

DATE: 2007.09.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: photo by Kathleen Harris, Sun Media NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer says Canadian troops are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and he would like for that to continue.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

DATELINE: NEW YORK

WORD COUNT: 534

Canada should keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back to an era of brutality, says the head of NATO.

Urging Canada to extend its military mission past the current February 2009 mandate, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Sun Media it is "simply not possible" that any country would withdraw troops.

"Canada has suffered a lot of casualties, but take Canada's history and let's try to answer the question: Do we abandon people to brutality? Because that's basically what this is about," he said in an interview. "Then I think every Canadian, in uniform or out of uniform, given your history, given that Canadians traditionally came a long way from home to defend others ... that is something that would appeal to Canadians."

De Hoop Scheffer said Afghanistan was "on its way to the Middle Ages" when the Taliban ruled, and warned that abandoning the country could mean a return to the failed state of 2001 that flouted human rights and harboured terrorist training camps.

"They were among the worst human rights violators the world has seen -- no women's rights, public executions. Do not forget our opponents, our enemy, is burning people, hanging teachers from trees, burning schools, beheading women," he said. "It is such a different moral category these opponents, these Taliban, that I say abandoning people to brutality is simply something we can not afford."

De Hoop Scheffer came under fire last week for urging the Dutch to remain deployed -- a move denounced by some as meddling in domestic politics. But he insists that while he will respect the decision of any sovereign nation, like Canada, it's his job to try to influence the politicians and public opinion.

"This is their decision. In the run-up to these decisions, they should hear my voice."

DANGERS IN KANDAHAR

Conceding that Canada's high casualty count is evidence Afghanistan's south is "tough," de Hoop Scheffer is not warm to the idea that Canadian troops could stay but only if rotated to the less volatile north. Canadians are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and should stay put, he said.

"No NATO secretary-general and no military commander will every be happy with caveats," he said. "I know that completely caveat-free is difficult, but still I make my pitch for lesser and lesser caveats, a diminishing of the caveats. I would hope that would also be relative for Canada."

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai said yesterday he wants to continue talks with the Taliban, but de Hoop Scheffer would not weigh in to say if such talks might undermine the military mission.

"This is a sovereign nation, and a sovereign nation and only that sovereign nation and its government decides if and when there will be peace process negotiations and with whom," he said. "That is really not up to us, not up to NATO, and quite honestly, not up to the international community."

De Hoop Scheffer said he has not yet had any formal notification from Canada about a withdrawal. But he hopes no news is good news.

"I hope I'm not hearing anything, but it is crystal clear that for military planning purposes you can't do that overnight," he said. "No nation can withdraw its forces overnight, they're pretty far away. Logistically, that is complicated. But military planners in NATO they can't act overnight as well, but I say again, I do not hope to hear anything of the kind." KEYWORDS=CANADA

Karzai welcomes Taliban talks

SOURCETAG 0709240482
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
ILLUSTRATION: photo of HAMID KARZAI Weeding good from bad
BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 259

Taliban fighters with ties to terrorism are in the minority and negotiations are key to bringing lasting peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan, says President Hamid Karzai.

Speaking at UN headquarters in New York yesterday, Karzai suggested Taliban with links to terrorist groups are in the minority, and insisted it won't be tough to weed the good from the bad for talks.

"We are already in contact through a peace and reconciliation process with those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaida and not part of terrorist networks, who are really in the majority," he said. "

Karzai said many have been forced or found themselves in a position to leave Afghanistan or pick up guns, and his government is trying "to bring them back to the fold."

It is easy to identify the good from the bad for the negotiations process, he added.

"Deeds will tell and deeds do tell, so that identification is simple. Those who are willing to come and participate and take part in building a stronger, better, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan are the good ones," he said.

Karzai also praised Canada as one of the "great contributors" to Afghanistan.

PRAISED CANADA

"It has given us a lot, it has given the lives of its sons and daughters in Afghanistan. We are grateful for it and we will support Canadian efforts in bringing more resources to Afghanistan, be that military or financial and reconstruction."

Karzai's remarks came after a high-level meeting he led with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who said the international community stands behind Afghanistan during its transition.

"While we agreed that the challenges are enormous and difficult, we also hope that the Afghanistan government, under the leadership of President Karzai, continue to focus their efforts in good governance, eradicating corruption, eradicating opium cultivation and drug trafficking and promoting education and sanitation," he said. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

NATO has feet of clay

SOURCETAG 0709240575
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 14
BYLINE: LORRIE GOLDSTEIN
COLUMN: Editorial
WORD COUNT: 272

What is the point of having NATO, supposedly the world's most powerful military alliance, if most of its member nations aren't willing to fight?

It is NATO, not the Taliban, which could easily become the next casualty of war in Afghanistan, given how many NATO countries are cynically prepared to offer President Hamid Karzai any assistance, short of help.

A handful of nations, including Canada, are doing the fighting for NATO in Afghanistan, while too many others such as France, Germany, Spain and Italy have effectively cut and run. They have troops in the country, but keep them away from combat.

Last week, a worried Karzai granted an exclusive interview to Canadian journalists to appeal directly to Canadians, asking us to keep our 2,500 soldiers in Kandahar past their scheduled departure date of February, 2009.

He warned Canada's withdrawal could set off a domino effect inside NATO.

One that could lead to his government's collapse and the resurgence of the Taliban -- who would turn Afghanistan into a terrorist training camp for attacks against the West, as it was before 9/11.

Karzai's right. Securing Afghanistan will take decades, not a few more years.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay has been saying the right things about the importance of Canada's NATO partners stepping up to the plate.

But the political reality is that Prime Minister Stephen Harper, while he may personally support extending the mission, has promised not to do so without Parliament's consent. The three opposition parties, which control the majority of seats, are against it, as are most Canadians.

While regrettable, their position is understandable. By early 2009, our troops will have been fighting -- and dying -- helping to free and rebuild Afghanistan for seven years, the last three in deadly Kandahar.

Unlike others in NATO, Canada answered the call. Our soldiers should be proud of all they have accomplished and all they will continue to accomplish as long as we ask it of them.

But if Afghanistan collapses into anarchy, the fault will not be Canada's.

It will be NATO's, for waving the white flag of surrender.

NATO wants troops to stay put Alliance head says Canucks key to ending Afghan brutality

SOURCETAG: 0709240566

PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun

DATE: 2007.09.24

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 7

ILLUSTRATION: 2 photos 1. photo of JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER Tough mission 2. file photo Italian NATO soldiers stand guard on the outskirts of Kabul. The head of NATO is urging Canada to keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back to an era of brutality.

BYLINE: KATHLEEN HARRIS, NATIONAL BUREAU

DATELINE: NEW YORK

WORD COUNT: 372

Canada should keep troops deployed in the volatile southern region of Kandahar to ensure Afghanistan does not slip back to an era of brutality, says the head of NATO.

Urging Canada to extend its military mission past the current February 2009 mandate, NATO Sec. Gen. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer told Sun Media it is "simply not possible" that any country now deployed there would withdraw troops.

"Canada has suffered a lot of casualties, but take Canada's history and let's try to answer the question: Do we abandon people to brutality, because that's basically what this is about," he said.

"Then I think every Canadian, in uniform or out of uniform, given your history, given that Canadians traditionally came a long way from home to defend others ... that is something that would appeal to Canadians."

De Hoop Scheffer said Afghanistan was "on its way to the Middle Ages" when the Taliban ruled, and warned that abandoning the fragile country could mean a return to the failed state of 2001 that flouted human rights and harboured terrorist training camps.

"They were among the worst human rights violators the world has seen -- no women's rights, public executions ... Do not forget our opponents, our enemy, is burning people, hanging teachers from trees, burning schools, beheading women," he said.

"It is such a different moral category these opponents, these Taliban, that I say abandoning people to brutality is simply something we cannot afford."

De Hoop Scheffer came under fire last week for urging the Dutch to remain deployed -- a move denounced by some as meddling in domestic politics.

But he insists that while he will respect the decision of any sovereign nation such as Canada, it's his job to try to influence the politicians and public opinion.

"This is their decision. In the run-up to these decisions, they should hear my voice," he said.

Conceding that Canada's high casualty count is evidence Afghanistan's south is "tough," de Hoop Scheffer is not warm to the idea that Canadian troops could stay but only if rotated to the less volatile north. Canadians are doing "tremendous, A-1 work" in Kandahar and should stay put, he said.

"No NATO secretary general and no military commander will every be happy with caveats," he said.

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai says he wants to continue talks with the Taliban, but de Hoop Scheffer would not weigh in to say if such talks might undermine the military mission.

"This is a sovereign nation, and a sovereign nation and only that sovereign nation and its government decides if and when there will be peace process negotiations and with whom," he said.

De Hoop Scheffer said he has not yet had any formal notification from Canada about a withdrawal.

KEYWORDS=WORLD

Prez thinks terrorists in 'minority'

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PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 7
BYLINE: KATHLEEN
HARRIS
DATELINE: NEW YORK
WORD COUNT: 129

Taliban fighters with ties to terrorism are in the minority and negotiations are key to bringing lasting peace to war-ravaged Afghanistan, says President Hamid Karzai.

Speaking after a high-level meeting on Afghanistan at the UN headquarters in New York yesterday, Karzai suggested Taliban with links to terrorist groups are in the minority, and insisted it won't be tough to weed the good from the bad for talks.

"We are already in contact through a peace and reconciliation process with those Taliban who are not part of al-Qaida and not part of terrorist networks," he said.

"This process is going on, and we would like to add to this process as it presents itself."

Karzai said many have been forced or found themselves in a position to leave Afghanistan or pick up guns, and his government is "trying very hard to bring them back to the fold." **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Heroin an Afghan target, meeting at UN proclaims; Canada again calls for more support

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PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: C7
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Hamid Karzai;
DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS
BYLINE: Steven Edwards
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 404

UNITED NATIONS – Canada and other countries agreed Sunday to back stepped-up operations to counter drugs production in Afghanistan.

Some say that move could lead to Canadian troops being drawn into controversial drug-eradication and interdiction activities.

At a high-level meeting at the UN, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier put Canada's name on a communique that expresses "great concern" at the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

The production of heroin-producing opiates reached a "frighteningly new level" last year, according to a recent UN survey, and Canada is among countries that say profits of the illicit drugs trade are funding the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But drug eradication is controversial because poor farmers say poppies are the only way they can make a living.

"Breaking this linkage (between drug production and insurgent financing) is vital to creating a stable, prosperous and democratic, Afghanistan..." says the communique, released after the closed-door gathering.

While Canada's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan are currently not involved in drug eradication, the communique adds the "participants agreed to collectively support increased Afghan government efforts to fight the menace of poppy cultivation."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai praised Canada after emerging from the meeting, attended also by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and numerous other ministers and top officials from countries and organizations involved in Afghanistan.

"It has given a lot. It has given the lives of its sons and daughters," Karzai said.

Much of the rest of the communique reflects talk on reconstruction that people at the meeting say took place. But they add that, inside, Bernier also highlighted actions Canada believes are necessary for speeding up development.

A central one was for the UN to send more staff to the country to better co-ordinate global aid efforts, according to one diplomat.

The initiative on civil aid builds on calls by Defence Minister Peter MacKay for countries to help spread the military burden by contributing troops.

But Canadian policy in Afghanistan will also be challenged today as two respected think-tanks issue in-depth reports.

Dutch-based Transnational Institute, which brings together activist-scholars, will say the UN and Western countries are "overreacting" to the jump in drug production in Afghanistan. It warns violence could increase as a result of dramatically increasing counter-narcotics operations.

"The increased production is set to fall anyway because it represented an over-supply that world demand (for drugs) does not justify," said Martin Jelsma, head of TNI Drugs and Democracy Program.

The Canadian and European-based think-tank Senlis Council, in its report, will effectively say the government should go back to the drawing board.

The group, which has monitoring staff in the country, argues Canada needs to become much more robust in leading Afghan reconstruction efforts. It should also stop being what the council calls the U.S. "junior" partner.

Chechen factor

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PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: C2
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 89

The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time forward deployed in the Panjwei/Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies sometimes call Information Warfare.

Afghanistan–Iran link disputed; UN envoy doubts Washington's claim that Tehran arming insurgents

IDNUMBER 200709240072
PUBLICATION: The Windsor Star
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: C2
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Agence France–Presse, Getty Images photo: Shah Marai/ HARD TIMES: Burqa–clad Afghan women beg at a roadside in Kabul Sunday. ;
DATELINE: MONTREAL
BYLINE: Mike Blanchfield
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 499

MONTREAL – A top United Nations diplomat is rejecting repeated claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan first surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border. If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier said.

Some 70 Canadian soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, more than half from roadside bombs that have grown increasingly sophisticated and powerful in the last year.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, told CanWest News Service in an interview: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, where a reconstituted Taliban and al–Qaida insurgency — made up of foreign mercenaries from across the Islamic world — has mounted a renewed guerrilla insurgency in the last 1 1/2 years that has severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion.

"That means not saying that Iran is the principal source of arms shipments to the Taliban.

"That's simply not true," said Alexander, Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003, after the fall of the Taliban two years earlier.

TALIBAN OPPOSED

Alexander noted that Iran actually opposes the Taliban and has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the

country.

On Sunday, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country.

"It's an important area between us and Iran," Karzai said, noting that 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

U.S. President George W. Bush tried to persuade Karzai during a visit to Washington last month that the Iranians are "not a force for good as far as we can see," telling the Afghan president "they're a destabilizing influence wherever they are."

Karzai said little in his appearance with Bush.

But before arriving in Washington, he told CNN's Late Edition, that "so far, Iran has been a helper and a solution."

In Ottawa, the federal government has no additional corroboration beyond the initial reports of negative Iranian influence in Afghanistan, but if true, they would have serious implications for Canadians on the ground there, said Bernier, Canada's new foreign minister.

"We're deeply concerned about that," Bernier told CanWest News Service in an interview. "If it's true, such support will directly endanger the lives of Canadians and international forces and aid workers."

Asked if he had any information to substantiate the allegation against Iran, Bernier said he "didn't have any more detail on that."

Bernier added that he was "surprised and concerned" about the reports because Iran is a signatory to last year's Afghanistan Compact, the document that lays out the international community's commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan.

'Support Our Troops' decals debate to be revived at police board meeting

IDNUMBER 200709240073
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Final
SECTION: City
PAGE: C1 / FRONT
BYLINE: Alana Toulin
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 415

The debate over whether to affix controversial "Support Our Troops" decals to police vehicles rages on, with the Ottawa Police Services Board reviewing the matter tonight at the request of Councillor Alex Cullen.

Mr. Cullen was one of only two councillors to vote on Sept. 12 against putting the decals on all city-owned vehicles -- including buses, city garbage trucks, bylaw officer cars and snowplows -- after the idea was brought to council by Rideau-Goulbourn Councillor Glenn Brooks. The Bay Ward councillor says he believes they send a pro-war message.

However, in August, police Chief Vern White announced police cruisers would sport the decals.

In an Aug. 27 letter to Henry Jensen, chairman of the police services board, Mr. Cullen calls the mission in Afghanistan a "deeply divisive issue" among many Canadians and one that is out of the realm of the city's responsibilities.

"It is, in my view, not appropriate for public property to be used for political purposes," Mr. Cullen writes.

Calling Chief White's decision to place the decals on the city's 180 marked police vehicles "unilateral," Mr. Cullen attacked Chief White's justification of the decals as "operational in nature," and therefore exempt from the police services board's approval.

"I fail to see the 'operational nature' of these decals -- in my view, they have nothing to do with the daily requirements of police work," he wrote.

"At the very least, the chief should be asked by the police services board -- to whom he is accountable -- to justify the 'operational' attributes he claims these decals have."

Mr. Jensen said when the decision was announced that it was not the type of policy decision with which the body would deal.

Today's police services board meeting agenda shows the board will discuss the contents of Mr. Cullen's letter to the board.

Councillor and board member Eli El-Chantiry, who voted in favour of placing the decals on municipal vehicles, intends to submit a motion for the police services board to support and reinforce the chief's decision.

"The police services board does not have a policy in place about whether this is operational," the West Carleton–March councillor said in an interview.

"We don't have a policy in place, so it was up to the chief to take it on himself as an operational initiative and place the decals on vehicles.

"I have no problem with that and many of my colleagues have no problem with that," he said, pointing out that four of the seven board members, including himself, have already publicly declared their support for the decals.

"I don't expect there will be a lot of debate on the motion from the board members," Mr. El–Chantiry said.

To him, the "Support Our Troops" decals are not intended to act as a pro–Afghanistan statement.

"When we say support the troops and their families, we're not talking about a specific area like Afghanistan. We have members of the Canadian Armed Forces in many places abroad other than Afghanistan. This is not about the mission."

Staid veteran fends off hawkish rival to win PM's job

IDNUMBER 200709240023
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Itsuo Inouye, Getty Images /Seventy-one-year-old Yasuo Fukuda, who was yesterday elected leader of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, acknowledged his party faced 'huge difficulties.' ;
DATELINE: TOKYO
SOURCE: Agence France-Press
WORD COUNT: 228

TOKYO – Japan's ruling party yesterday chose centrist political veteran Yasuo Fukuda as the country's next prime minister, seeking safe hands after a disastrous year under conservative Shinzo Abe.

Mr. Fukuda, 71, a dour-looking, behind-the-scenes operator who openly admits he lacks charisma, easily fended off a challenge from hawkish former foreign minister Taro Aso in the race to lead the world's No. 2 economy.

Wearing his usual grey suit, Mr. Fukuda bowed before members of his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which he acknowledged was facing "huge difficulties."

"I want the LDP to be born again, so it regains the public trust and is able to steadfastly carry out policies," Mr. Fukuda said.

He quickly reached out to the opposition, which won control of one house of parliament in a landmark election victory in July and vowed to press the incoming prime minister to call a snap general poll.

At a news conference, Mr. Fukuda called for dialogue with the opposition on extending a naval mission supporting U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan, an issue on which Mr. Abe staked his job.

Mr. Fukuda will be Japan's oldest prime minister to enter office since 1991, a stark contrast to the 53-year-old Mr. Abe, who was Japan's youngest leader in recent times and faced criticism that he was too inexperienced.

Mr. Abe, an outspoken conservative who campaigned to build a "beautiful nation" freed from legacies of Second World War defeat, abruptly resigned Sept. 12 amid scandals, sliding approval ratings and opposition intransigence on the Afghan mission.

Canada backs call to step up fight against Afghan drugs

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.24
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: UNITED NATIONS
BYLINE: Steven Edwards
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 332

UNITED NATIONS – Canada and other countries agreed yesterday to back stepped-up operations to counter drug production in Afghanistan — a move that some say will lead to Canadian troops being drawn into controversial drug-eradication and interdiction activities.

At a high-level meeting on Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Maxime Bernier put Canada's name to a communiqué that expresses "great concern" at the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.

The production of heroin-producing opiates reached a "frighteningly new level" last year, according to a recent UN survey, and Canada is among countries that say profits from the illicit drug trade are funding the Taliban and other insurgent groups.

But eradicating drugs is controversial because poor farmers also cultivate poppies, saying it's the only way they can make a living.

"Breaking this linkage (between drugs production and insurgent financing) is vital to creating a stable, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan," the statement released after the closed gathering says.

While Canada's 2,500 troops in Afghanistan are not involved in drug eradication, the statement says the "participants agreed to collectively support increased Afghan government efforts to fight the menace of poppy cultivation."

The endorsement comes as drug-eradication efforts in Afghanistan will be challenged today, as two respected think-tanks issue in-depth reports.

Dutch-based Transnational Institute will say the UN and western countries are "overreacting" to the increase in drug production in Afghanistan. The report warns that stepping up counter-narcotics operations may lead to violence.

"The increased production is set to fall anyway because it represented an over-supply that world demand (for drugs) does not justify," Martin Jelsma, head of the institute's drugs and democracy program, said.

"Stepping up eradication could further deteriorate the already highly delicate security situation," Mr. Jelsma said.

An increase in anti-narcotics operations could require at least logistical support from international forces, Mr. Jelsma said. And he said a crackdown would increase corruption in the country, as tribal leaders with contacts in the Afghan government offer bribes to be spared.

"International troops are bound to get mixed up in all those power plays, and they would be seen as less neutral," he said.

Iran not arming Taliban, UN envoy says; Weapons come across border with Pakistan: top diplomat

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SECTION: News
PAGE: A6
DATELINE: MONTREAL
BYLINE: Mike Blanchfield
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen; with files from Agence France–Presse
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MONTREAL – A top United Nations diplomat is rejecting repeated claims from the Bush administration that Iran is supplying weapons to the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

The allegations of Iranian meddling in Afghanistan first surfaced in June, and gained momentum with senior U.S. intelligence and military officials accusing Iran of officially endorsing the shipment of armaments across its eastern border. If true, the implications for Canadian troops in Afghanistan would be serious, Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier said.

A total of 70 Canadian soldiers have died in Afghanistan, more than half from roadside bombs that have grown increasingly sophisticated and powerful in the last year.

Asked whether the UN has seen any evidence of Iranian weaponry reaching the Taliban insurgency, Chris Alexander, the deputy United Nations representative to Kabul, said: "None. It's the other border across which arms and weapons principally arrive."

Mr. Alexander was referring to Pakistan, Afghanistan's eastern neighbour, where a reconstituted Taliban and al-Qaeda insurgency — made up of foreign mercenaries from across the Islamic world — have mounted a renewed battle in the last year and a half that has severely challenged Canada and its NATO allies in southern Afghanistan.

"We are, quite frankly, trying to encourage everyone to recommit to having a sense of proportion, to putting the reality of the insecurity of Afghanistan into proportion. That means not saying that Iran is the principal source of arms shipments to the Taliban. That's simply not true," said Mr. Alexander, previously Canada's first ambassador to Afghanistan in 2003, after the fall of the Taliban two years earlier.

Mr. Alexander said Iran opposes the Taliban and has signed on as an international development partner that is committed to rebuilding Afghanistan, contributing tens of millions of dollars of aid to the country.

Yesterday, Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai praised Iran as an ally in the fight against the rampant opium trade that plagues his country. "It's an important area between us and Iran," Mr. Karzai said, noting that 3,000 Iranian security forces have lost their lives combating the drug trade.

U.S. President George W. Bush tried to persuade Mr. Karzai during a visit to Washington last month that the Iranians are "not a force for good as far as we can see," telling the Afghan president "they're a destabilizing

influence wherever they are."

As recently as Saturday, Iran was under scrutiny after Afghan security forces recovered a shipment of weapons destined for Taliban insurgents that came from across the border.

Afghan authorities said they found about 40 Iranian- and Chinese-made mines and rocket-propelled-grenades in a vehicle abandoned by Taliban rebels in Herat province, near the border.

Iran not arming Taliban, UN envoy says; Weapons come across border with Pakistan: top diplomat

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Italian soldiers feared kidnapped

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DATELINE: ROME
BYLINE: Gavin Jones
SOURCE: Reuters
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ROME – Two Italian soldiers are believed to have been kidnapped while on patrol in western Afghanistan, Italy's Defence Ministry said yesterday.

The ministry said they had gone missing along with two Afghans but added the situation was not yet clear.

Italy has 2,200 troops in Afghanistan. More than 600 are in western Afghanistan running the regional command of the NATO–led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi rejected calls by leftists in Italy for a troop withdrawal.

"It is clear that this does not change the Italian government's position on the mission in Afghanistan," he told reporters at the United Nations.

The ministry said it had lost contact on Saturday with the two soldiers, who were operating in the Shindand area of Herat province and were responsible for relations with civil authorities.

At the United Nations, Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said had he received personal assurances of help from Afghan President Hamid Karzai, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki.

The province where the two soldiers went missing borders Iran.

Mr. Karzai told a UN meeting he had information on the possible whereabouts of the Italians and would give it to Mr. D'Alema, participants at the session said.

Van Doos face 'hard core' guerrillas; Foreign fighters growing threat to Canadians in Afghanistan, intelligence official says

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DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 605

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan – The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans, but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnya.

That is the conclusion of a veteran Canadian infantryman who spends most of his time deployed in the Panjwaii/Zahri districts establishing relationships with tribal elders and making security assessments.

"The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face," said the soldier, a Montrealer who works in a secretive cell devoted to what the Canadian battle group calls Information Operations and what other armies call information warfare.

"We're dealing with all kinds of insurgents. With Chechens, Egyptians, Saudis, Pakistanis, guys from the Yemen. It isn't one group more than the next." Asked whether he had encountered foreigners on the battlefield, the sergeant, a veteran of six previous Canadian overseas missions who was only allowed to give his name as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not interacted verbally with them."

The trend toward more foreign fighters here was confirmed by Brig.- Gen. Marquis Hainse, Canada's top-ranking soldier in Afghanistan and deputy commander for NATO in what is its main combat theatre, Sector South.

"We see an increase in foreign fighters," the general, who has been based in Kandahar since May, said, although he cautioned that there were not huge numbers of them.

"This may be because less people from Afghanistan are joining the fight. They are not getting the numbers they need here. They are not regenerating forces. What is their pool? It is not extremists, but people who feel they don't have a choice. And that pool is reducing."

In separate interviews, the general and the Information Operations sergeant also noted what they regard as growing resistance on the part of Afghans to hosting foreign guerrilla fighters.

"Most Afghans dislike the Taliban, so imagine what they think of foreign fighters?" the sergeant said. "For the foreigners, unlike the Afghans, the war is not about nationalism. The foreigners have an ideology and that ideology is Islamic fundamentalism. They try to use that to control the Afghans."

"The Taliban is trying to recruit here, but what they get mostly is cannon fodder. They are not that well-trained."

What was always of primary interest to the Canadians was what Afghans wanted, especially those living in areas where the fighting was the worst.

"The answer is always the same. Security. That is always the main issue," the sergeant said. "Kandahar and Helmand have always been the worst for fighting. The Soviets had their biggest problems here. This is a place where there has been war for 30 years."

Several Pakistani websites keep a close eye on everything the Canadians are doing in Afghanistan, almost instantly posting stories after they appear in Canada about operations. These sites also delight in highlighting political differences in Canada. However, the conclusion here is that little of this information has created problems for the troops.

"My assessment is that they (the enemy) do not have that degree of sophistication," said Brig.-Gen. Jim Ferron, the Canadian who is NATO's top intelligence officer in Afghanistan. "The leadership outside has access to such information, but I don't believe that they use that to deliberately co-ordinate plans to target Canada. Generally, their interest is to target NATO collectively."

That is also the assessment of the sergeant responsible for befriending tribal elders in the hot conflict zone to the west of Kandahar City.

"Some of the insurgents are adept at high-tech means, and they do use this at a higher level, which is ironic as this was strictly banned during the time of the Taliban," Sgt. Pete said.

"But we are not affected by this at the tactical level. The insurgents communicate information through violence. This gets them some co-operation because for Afghans it becomes an issue of survival. The enemy get water, food and shelter through intimidation."

Moving the debate from fantasy to facts

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COLUMN: James Travers
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: James Travers
SOURCE: Toronto Star
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Stephen Harper wisely changed his defence minister this summer. Unwisely, his government is hesitating to change the Afghanistan channel this fall.

Peter MacKay, Gordon O'Connor's younger, more media-savvy replacement, is mouthing a familiar sound bite as he pleads for support. Reduced to its essence, the new defence minister is saying now what George W. Bush said before toppling governments first in Kabul, then Baghdad: Fighting them over there keeps us safe over here.

That the argument is suspect is no longer the point.

Watching complex plots unfold in two war zones is creating a more sophisticated North American audience.

Few today believe, as many did after the Taliban fled and Saddam Hussein fell, that decisive military victories are still possible.

Generals now compete with academics for airtime to argue for political solutions. Not just a tonal adjustment, accepting that accommodation is necessary alters the picture. Demonizing future negotiating partners no longer makes any more sense, or is any more convincing, than attacking the patriotism of those who question the mission.

Facing a debate and a decision on Canada's combat role after February 2009, this government needs to fast-forward its rhetoric to catch up to shifting reality. Canadians who knew next to nothing about Afghanistan in 2001 now know too much about the region to risk more lives and billions on the strength of the simplistic notion that killing Taliban insurgents will stop terrorism incubating.

Along with forgetting history and ignoring that extremists have many other nesting options — al-Qaeda festers in Africa's horn 20 years after embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania — the Conservative argument skips too lightly over what Canadians have learned since Liberals first sent troops to Afghanistan.

Endemic corruption, a booming opium trade and the duplicity of allies who leave borders open to enemies have stripped away the good versus evil illusions.

At home, it has become patently obvious the mission has layers of motives, ranging from reassuring Washington that Ottawa is serious about security to the military remaking its peacekeeping image as it re-arms.

Each element has a place in a public debate that to be complete must also include an unflinching look in the mirror. If politicians can find enough courage to face the reflection, Canadians will discover that, along with imperfections, there are notable improvements.

A mission dominated by the military but marketed as combining the three D's of defence, development and diplomacy is glacially morphing into a broader, more disciplined effort that accepts generals have agendas and writing aid cheques doesn't guarantee measurable improvements in impoverished lives.

That's progress. So is recognition that reconstructing failed states is painfully slow work with uncertain results.

Six years of watching the grimmest reality TV has better prepared Canadians to answer questions about what they are willing to do for Afghanistan when the current commitment ends.

Instead of looping fuzzy terrorism tapes, Harper and his new ministers need to make two new candid arguments in favour of a continuing role.

More time is needed to find a political compromise, one that inevitably includes the Taliban and excludes al-Qaeda. And development will only continue in the north as long as the military contains most of the insurgency in the south.

Along with moving the debate from fantasy to facts, that would finally change the channel from today's cartoon images to something more suitable for adults.

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Chinook design changes in works

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Bill Graveland, the Canadian Press / Canada's airforce wants to upgrade the design of its planned CH-47 helicopters. ;
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 103

Defence Department sources have told The Canadian Press that Canada's air force wants to upgrade the design of its planned CH-47 Chinook battlefield helicopters and is offering Boeing a limited contract to construct a couple of prototype aircraft.

The chief of air staff, Lieutenant-General Angus Watt, said he's confident the ongoing talks will not affect the delivery date of the 16 medium-lift helicopters, which the army has identified as essential in getting troops off the bomb-strewn roads of Afghanistan. But observers are worried the request will knock the project off schedule until 2011.

Dumping Tories unlikely: analyst

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Opposition parties are muttering that they might defeat the government on its throne speech next month if they don't like what they hear, but an analyst says that's a long shot.

Peter Gaefe, a professor of political science at McMaster University, says the federal opposition parties appear to be of several minds about the throne speech, which will open the second session of this Parliament Oct. 16.

While they're working on shopping lists for the speech, they also seem leery of precipitating an election. In this game of political chicken, someone could flinch.

The game heated up on the weekend as Bloc Qu b cois Leader Gilles Duceppe set out five "non- negotiable" demands for Stephen Harper's minority Conservative government, including a greener environmental policy and a formal guarantee that Canadian combat troops will pull out of Afghanistan by February 2009.