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Commandos rescue 2 abducted Italians in bloody ambush

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Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives yesterday in a daring ambush and gun battle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured -- one of them seriously -- Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed by a landmine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

The two Italians, who were described by Defence Minister Arturo Parisi in Rome as working for the Sismi intelligence service, disappeared along with their two Afghan colleagues Saturday. They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said the fact that the two were intelligence agents posed an "imminent danger," which required the rescue.

Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnappers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brig.-Gen. Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

"There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," he said. "It's a success story because it was very quickly solved."

The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnappers had started heading south from Farah yesterday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gun battle that killed at least nine of the kidnappers.

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said. The other had broken his shoulder and left collarbone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

Both had been beaten by their captors, said Afghan Gen. Jalandar Shah.

Maj. Charles Anthony, a spokesperson for the NATO force in Afghanistan, said it was not clear if the Italian hit by gunfire was wounded by his kidnappers or Italian forces.

The Italians' Afghan translator was also wounded, and another Afghan, apparently their driver, was killed, Parisi said. Anthony hinted the driver might have aided in the kidnappings.

Earlier, Italian Defence Ministry undersecretary Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri said a "criminal band" had taken the Italians, and officials were afraid they would be sold to other groups. A Taliban spokesperson told the Associated Press it was not responsible for the capture of the Italians.

Several high-profile abductions have been a boon for the Taliban this year. The insurgents had face-to-face negotiations with South Korean government officials for the release of 23 of their citizens kidnapped in July. The rebels also won the release of five Taliban prisoners in exchange for an Italian journalist kidnapped in March.

Independent gangs have now moved into the act. Criminals kidnapped a German aid worker from a Kabul restaurant in August; she was rescued a day later.

Afghan and western troops appear to be targeting the insurgents who took the Koreans, killing at least five Taliban commanders in Ghazni province since the captives were freed three weeks ago.

CANADIAN DIED BY SUICIDE, CORONER, MILITARY POLICE SAY

Meanwhile, the death of a Canadian soldier in Kabul last month has been deemed a suicide by military police.

Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul, 42 died Aug. 29.

The Forces' National Investigative Service says the evidence was analyzed by military police and officials with Ontario's chief coroner, which conducts autopsies on all soldiers killed overseas.

Harper takes big risk by ignoring climate change issue

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BYLINE: JAMES TRAVERS
SOURCE: TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
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Consultants, chief executives and, yes, Conservatives insist that you can't manage what you don't measure. But when it comes to climate change, Stephen Harper doesn't want to measure what he doesn't want to manage.

At the United Nations yesterday, as in Australia two weeks ago, the prime minister skirted hard facts in repositioning Canada from near bottom of the polluter pack to top of the heap of energy giants whose love of green extends beyond the Yankee dollar. That complements his Canada Day claim that, in every way that matters, Conservatives are putting this country back on the world stage.

Heck, it might even be tolerated as harmless hyperbole if so many scary measurements weren't being reported even as Harper promotes the hee-haw notion of managing climate change with aspirational targets.

For starters, it's pretty darned certain that Arctic sea ice is going the way of cubes in a cocktail glass. And because the ecumenical National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy says so, it's known that the Harper government is systematically exaggerating expectations for its latest, grudging, green plan.

If candour were to slow spin, the prime minister would admit that far from being back, Canada is backsliding in the international theatre where the climate drama is playing.

Almost as disturbing, this country is keeping bad company.

With notable variation but shared purpose, Canada is advancing with the U.S. and Australia a post-Kyoto protocol that will be more inclusive and accommodating by being less demanding.

More than a rubbery response to a concrete threat, that relaxed approach to safeguarding humanity's nest contrasts with the iron fist these countries are shaking at the far less existential danger of global terrorism.

Pity the former prime minister who has to autobiographically explain why compelling evidence of an environmental death spiral was ignored while the government was otherwise engaged in a war on a tactic that, no matter how vile, has no lasting power to knock confident democracies off course.

It will be even harder still to persuade grandchildren that their health and well-being weren't worthy of economic sacrifice or as important as protecting the ruling party's resource-rich base.

Just catching up with consensus would make those apologies unnecessary. A poll published hours before Harper's New York speech again demonstrates that government lags far behind voters on climate change. Unlike Liberals who mostly limited their effort to signing Kyoto and Conservatives who hope new rhetoric will erase old memories of climate change skepticism, Canadians are serious about protecting the planet.

Climate change now looms larger than health care or Afghanistan. More disquieting still for politicians juggling competing interests and prospects, the issue is no longer abstract, it's personal.

Among the interesting findings of the Harris/Decima polls is that an overwhelming majority, 68 per cent, report experiencing the effects of climate change.

Politicians put themselves at risk by shirking responsibility when public concerns become personal worries. Harper took that chance in New York by casting his government in a supporting role, leaving the lead to technological advances and market forces.

No doubt both are essential. But this prime minister, burdened as he is with a spotty record and inclined toward the easy way forward, needs to prove before the next election that he's willing to measure and to manage what Canadians agree is most important.

James Travers writes on national affairs.

Afghanistan decision can wait: MacKay

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Despite political pressure for a quick answer, the Canadian government says it has until April to announce whether it will extend its combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada must deliver an answer at that month's NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania.

"There is a NATO meeting in April 2008," MacKay told a news scrum yesterday. "It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting."

MacKay reaffirmed the Conservatives' support for the mission, but he added that a final decision will be made in Parliament.

"There has never been any wavering on the part of this government -- or this prime minister -- vis-à-vis the support for the mission in Afghanistan," he said.

"The mission has a parliamentary mandate to go until February of 2009. We've also been equally clear in saying that anything beyond that has to have the support -- the majority support -- of the Parliament of Canada."

Khadr's charges reinstated

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Omar Khadr is accused of killing an American soldier and injuring another in Afghanistan in 2002. This photo was taken before he was imprisoned three years ago. ;
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
SOURCE: Record news services
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 407

A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon yesterday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled a military court set up by the U.S. administration was the proper venue for deciding whether Khadr is an "unlawful enemy combatant" and trying him on terrorism charges.

The ruling reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunal system created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees, unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

That ruling threatened to force the Pentagon to start over with tribunals for a number of detainees. Pentagon officials argued the June 4 ruling was just a matter of semantics and insufficient to dismiss the case.

Yesterday's decision, the first ever by the newly formed appeals court, agreed.

The appeals judges, who are military officers, said the trial judge "erred in ruling he lacked authority . . . to determine whether Mr. Khadr is an 'unlawful enemy combatant' for purposes of establishing the military commission's initial jurisdiction to try him."

The court battle over the Khadr case represents the latest problem for the U.S. administration's military commissions system, which exists outside the traditional military and civilian rules of justice. In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled President George W. Bush's plan to try Guantanamo Bay detainees in military commissions violates U.S. and international law.

The White House persuaded the then-Republican-controlled Congress to weigh in with a law to legitimize the commissions. That law now faces court challenges.

Defence lawyers contend the "unlawful" designation is a critical element of guilt or innocence in what is a fundamentally flawed military tribunal system.

In August, they questioned the legitimacy of the court itself, saying officials didn't follow proper procedures when they set it up.

"This court was established on the fly," said Lt.-Cmdr. William Kuebler, who noted one of the judges questioned whether it was acceptable that he was appointed by a Defence Department deputy, instead of Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

"More could not be at stake," Kuebler said.

"This is about the credibility of the United States."

The Pentagon said in response to yesterday's decision: "We will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial."

Khadr was captured when he was 15 and faces charges of murder, conspiracy, spying and supporting terrorism counts. He is charged with tossing a grenade that killed one U.S. soldier and injured another in Afghanistan in 2002.

His trial would be the first full legal airing of a Guantanamo detainee, who include several "high-value" prisoners, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 2001 terror attacks on the U.S.

Commandos rescue 2 kidnapped Italian troops; Two intelligence operatives, taken Saturday in Afghanistan, freed in raid that leaves at least 9 of captors dead

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Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives yesterday in a daring ambush and gunbattle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

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Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed a landmine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

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Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnappers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brig.-Gen. Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

"There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," Lafontaine said. "It's a success story because it was very quickly solved."

The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnappers had started heading south from Farah yesterday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gunbattle that killed at least nine of the kidnappers.

Commandos rescue 2 kidnapped Italian troops; Two intelligence operatives, taken Saturday in Afghanistan,

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said. The other had broken his shoulder and left collarbone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

Both had been beaten by their captors, said Afghan Gen. Jalandar Shah.

Maj. Charles Anthony, a spokesman for the NATO force in Afghanistan, said it was not clear if the Italian hit by gunfire was wounded by his kidnapers or Italian forces.

The Italians' Afghan translator was also wounded, and another Afghan, apparently their driver, was killed, Parisi said. Anthony hinted the driver might have aided in the kidnappings.

The rescue operation "was a heavy defeat for the kidnapers and therefore a warning for the future," Prodi said in New York, where he is attending the UN General Assembly.

"We did not have one moment of hesitation in giving the mandate to those who were in the field to act with the utmost determination," Prodi said.

Afghan deadline to be set by April: MacKay

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(Moncton)
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Canada will announce by next April whether it plans to extend its combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada must deliver an answer at that month's NATO summit in Romania

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the current mission and the opposition Liberals have been pressuring Prime Minister Stephen Harper to warn the allies of Canada's plans. If the minority government collapses this fall, which is a possibility, Afghanistan seems poised to become a key election issue.

The Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want an end to the mission once Canada's international commitment elapses in February 2009, and New Democrats want Canadian troops withdrawn even sooner.

8th Canadian Hussars see changes, accomplishments

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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Times & Transcript (Moncton)
WORD COUNT: 646

September 2007 brings to New Brunswick the changes of command of many Army Reserve units across the province, and the one that is in Moncton at month's end is with the 8th Canadian Hussars (Princess Louise's).

It is an important event for the military to recognize the pinnacle of one's achievements in the service to our country and also one of the most rewarding in terms of leadership challenges and job satisfaction.

It's kind of a sad day handing over command of your unit to a fellow officer, but it does free one from the responsibilities that command brings.

I jokingly compare it to buying and selling a boat. Your happiest day is when you buy a boat, and the next happiest day is when you sell it.

In 2004, the year of the last Change of Command, the 8th Hussars had 145 soldiers and it seemed quite a challenge to interest others to join.

A few processes were changed and we had huge success in recruiting, particularly around the Moncton area and today the unit has over 210 soldiers. Perhaps it's the cool uniform or the attraction to drive the Mercedes Benz G Wagon while getting paid for it.

Maybe it's the workplace challenges or camaraderie, which makes it interesting.

Everyone has a different perspective on the reasons for joining, but it is one of the most rewarding employment opportunities for our youth.

For the first time since the Second World War, the 8th Hussars sent soldiers into a war zone to conduct operations. In January and February, some nine soldiers left for Task Force Afghanistan Rotation 3. They did an amazing job over there in tough conditions, working in many cases 15 to 20 hour days, seven days per week. When you ask them questions like "are we doing well over there"? their answers were always yes, that we are having a tremendous impact on the area, and benefiting the people in ways that most of us cannot understand until you have been there.

Most of us in Canada have no appreciation of what that means for someone in Afghanistan. It isn't uncommon for someone to spend half their day finding drinking water and when a well is dug in a village, it makes basic living much better very quickly for local Afghans. This is an example of what we are doing over there.

Our soldiers have returned home safely and another group of five went over with soldiers from Land Force Quebec Area. I know they are doing a great job and wish them all the best in their deployment. Their task is

one of the more challenging in that region. Convoy escort duties, dealing with ambushes and explosive devices are just a few of the tasks they will face.

A while back, the unit began using the G-Wagon for reconnaissance purposes. We were the first armoured Reserve unit in Canada to fire the machine gun from that vehicle. Now that is something to see.

It marked a plateau in the crew skills training of our soldiers. The guys at work at my civilian job are always amazed at the things I do on the weekend for which I get paid.

I'd like to close by saying the soldiers in the 8th Hussars are second to none. Some say that today's youth are spoiled and lazy, but I have to disagree. You should see young soldiers in the 8th Hussars develop, become young leaders and train others. To see them work hard and bring all aspects of their lives together usually through getting an education or a job and having time for family is quite a lot to ask and great to see. Thanks so much for the support and see you at the change of command on Saturday.

n At Ease is a monthly column written by members of the military community in Metro Moncton which focuses on different aspects of the region's military presence. This month's column was written by Lieut.-Col. Scott Craft, commanding officer of the 8th Canadian Hussars (Princess Louise's). At Ease appears on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

Commandos free Italians, kill captors

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Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives Monday in a daring ambush and gunbattle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured -- one of them seriously -- Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

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They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

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Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnapers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brig.-Gen. Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

"There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," Lafontaine said. "It's a success story because it was very quickly solved."

The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnapers had started heading south from Farah on Monday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gunbattle that killed at least nine of the kidnapers.

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said.

The other had broken his shoulder and left collarbone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

The prognosis on prosthetics; No bionic people yet, but wars in Iraq and Afghanistan fuel limb advancements

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SECTION: Health

PAGE: C8

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Chris Morris

PHOTO: The Canadian Press

DATELINE: FREDERICTON

ILLUSTRATION: Adele Fifield's new \$50,000 artificial limb has a microprocessor which allows the hydraulic joint to instantly change pace when Fifield slows down or speeds up.

WORD COUNT: 842

As she grew up, Adele Fifield was keenly aware that her artificial leg was more than a few steps behind the bionic marvels portrayed in popular science fiction shows.

The old hydraulic version she used in earlier years worked fine at a slow, steady stroll, but got balky if she changed her speed.

"The knee had pistons or cylinders, like the pistons in a car," says Fifield, 41, head of the National Amputee Centre for The War Amps in Ottawa.

"They would compress and help swing the leg forward. But ... anytime I would change my speed, I would have to wait for the leg to catch up to me."

Fifield lost most of her left leg when she was 13 years old to the same kind of bone cancer that claimed the life of Canadian hero, Terry Fox.

She has spent the past 28 years as an advocate for Canada's amputees and she has experienced first-hand the technological revolution that is making the loss of a limb, or limbs, much less difficult for an individual to bear.

Fifield was one of the first amputees in Canada to be fitted with a so-called C-leg, referring to the computerized microprocessor in the knee which makes the leg much more responsive and natural.

"The microprocessor has a sensor down into the shin and at the knee and 50 times a second it is sending messages back to the hydraulic unit to open and close the valves instantly to reflect whether I'm speeding up or slowing down," Fifield says.

"It's a significant change. You don't have to think about how you're walking."

Welcome to the brave new world of cybernetics.

The technology of artificial limbs has come a long way from the peg leg and the hook and, thanks to the cruel reality of modern warfare, there's growing impetus for even more advancements.

The prognosis on prosthetics; No bionic people yet, but wars in Iraq and Afghanistan fuel limb advancements

In the United States and Canada, government interest in developing better prosthetic limbs has grown as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Improvements in body armour and in battlefield medical practices have helped lower the number of casualties from those conflicts, but the side effect has been a significant increase in the number of amputees.

Prosthetic advancements range from complex, thought-controlled devices to the simple, yet elegant design that has allowed sprinter Oscar Pistorius of South Africa to become famous as the fastest man on no legs.

The carbon-fibre blades that Pistorius uses to run on have forced Olympic officials to consider his qualification for the games, and they worry the technology of his prosthetics may give him an unfair advantage over sprinters using their natural legs.

"It's a very exciting time," says Fifield, adding that The War Amps has about 18,000 Canadians registered for its services.

"In my job here, I speak to hundreds of amputees every year. It is very encouraging to be able to say to the parents of a child born without a limb ... the sky is the limit."

Fuelling that optimism are scientists like Kevin Englehart and Peter Kyberd at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, home to one of North America's most advanced prosthetic research facilities. UNB's Institute of Biomedical Engineering has been awarded contracts on two major initiatives sponsored by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, the U.S. military's research and development wing. One of the areas of research Englehart is involved in is developing ways to extract information not only from a person's remaining muscles, but also from the nerves and the brain itself.

The science is being applied to thought-controlled prosthetic arms in which nerves are surgically relocated from a missing limb to muscles that are seldom used by an amputee, such as those in the chest.

When an amputee wishes to close the prosthetic hand, signals from the brain travel down the nerves but, instead of reaching a dead end at the missing limb, are re-routed to the chest muscles, causing them to contract.

Electrodes sense this activity, and send a signal to a tiny computer embedded in the artificial limb. The prosthetic hand then closes, allowing the individual to hold a glass or tie a shoe.

Thinking "lift" will contract another part of the muscle, allowing the person to raise the prosthetic arm.

Englehart says he knew his research was valuable when one of the people being tested with the arm praised the ease of movement it offered.

"He said, 'I don't have to learn how to use this. This thing learns how to use me,'" Englehart says.

"It validated the 15 years of research we've been doing."

Kyberd, whose research is focused on creating a more dexterous prosthetic hand, says the main hurdle to significant advances in artificial limbs is funding.

He says it is difficult to imagine that any of the latest high-tech designs will be rendered cheap enough for the average Canadian amputee to afford.

Fifield's C-leg, for instance, costs in excess of \$50,000 and funding for such products is not always available

The prognosis on prosthetics; No bionic people yet, but wars in Iraq and Afghanistan fuel limb advancement

from insurance companies or public health care programs.

"That's what we're interested in – developing prosthetic devices that will be affordable for Canadians," Kyberd says.

Whatever advances the future holds for amputees, researchers are not promising to create bionic men and women.

In fact, it's more likely the world would see human limb cloning before it would see the perfect mechanical replication of lost limbs.

"The means by which you control an intact limb is unbelievably complex both in the sense of the number of motor neurons that descend into the arm but also the number of sensory neurons that go back and regulate how you control that limb," Englehart says.

"The next five to 10 years will see some exciting advances in prosthetic devices, but nowhere in the distant future is there any way that we are going to approach that level of sophistication artificially. We'll be able to regrow a limb before we'll be able to reproduce it technologically."

Canada urged to help Afghan peace bid; Appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has chance of success, think-tank says

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig-Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B2

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Murray Brewster

DATELINE: Ottawa

WORD COUNT: 388

Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai break the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, says an international think-tank.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that's conducted extensive research in war-torn southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, a Vancouver lawyer and council president, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and al-Qaida supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency and reduce its offensive capacity.

It's time for Canada to take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy, she says.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation, and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times," MacDonald said yesterday at the beginning of a day-long conference meant to explore policies that could lead to peace.

This so-called fast-track for peace and stability should also include keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan past the February 2009 deadline, she said, and opposition to a U.S. demand that opium poppies be eradicated with aerial spraying.

The strategy of driving wedges between various insurgent factions is a cornerstone of U.S. policy in Iraq, where it has convinced Sunni tribesmen to fight terrorists.

In Afghanistan, NATO has been using economic development projects to pry committed Taliban fighters – who are often foreign jihadists – away from poor, unemployed farmers who are often coerced or enticed to take up arms. The strategy has met with limited success.

MacDonald says actively supporting Karzai's peace bid by rallying other NATO countries would also help the Conservatives sell the mission among Canadians who've complained there is too much emphasis on fighting at the expense of development, reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

The debate in Ottawa over the war this fall needs to be about more than whether Canada stays or withdraws from Afghanistan at the appointed end of the mission, she said.

Canada urged to help Afghan peace bid; Appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has chance of success, think-tank

"I believe Canadians instinctively understand why we are in Afghanistan, but they don't understand what the government's plan is for success for our military and I think they're angry the political system is turning them against each other."

MacDonald said she believes the opposition has "shown some willingness to fall in line behind a proper, well-thought-out plan."

Commandos pull off daring rescue; Two kidnapped Italian intelligence officers extricated from Afghanistan

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B2

SOURCE: The Associated Press

BYLINE: Alisa Tang

PHOTO: Rahmat Gul/The Associated Press

DATELINE: KABUL

ILLUSTRATION: A car, found packed with explosive materials, burns after it was destroyed by U.S. soldiers in the city of Jalalabad, Afghanistan, yesterday. Earlier in the day, commandos freed two kidnapped Italian operatives from Afghanistan.

WORD COUNT: 594

Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives yesterday in a daring ambush and gunbattle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured – one of them seriously – Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed in a landmine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

The two Italians, who were described by Defence Minister Arturo Parisi in Rome as working for the Sismi intelligence service, disappeared along with their two Afghan colleagues Saturday. They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said the fact that the two were intelligence agents posed an "imminent danger," which required the rescue.

Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnapers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brig.–Gen. Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

"There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," Lafontaine said. "It's a success story because it was very quickly solved."

The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnapers had started heading south from Farah yesterday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gunbattle that killed at least nine of the kidnappers.

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said. The other had broken his shoulder and left collarbone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

Both had been beaten by their captors, said Afghan Gen. Jalandar Shah.

Maj. Charles Anthony, a spokesman for the NATO force in Afghanistan, said it was not clear if the Italian hit by gunfire was wounded by his kidnappers or Italian forces.

The Italians' Afghan translator was also wounded, and another Afghan, apparently their driver, was killed, Parisi said. Anthony hinted the driver might have aided in the kidnappings.

The rescue operation "was a heavy defeat for the kidnappers and therefore a warning for the future," Prodi said in New York, where he is attending the UN General Assembly.

"We did not have one moment of hesitation in giving the mandate to those who were in the field to act with the utmost determination," Prodi said.

Earlier, Italian Defence Ministry undersecretary Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri said a "criminal band" had taken the Italians, and officials were afraid they would be sold to other groups. A Taliban spokesman told The Associated Press the Taliban was not responsible for the capture of the Italians.

Several high-profile abductions have been a boon for the Taliban this year. The insurgents had face-to-face negotiations with South Korean government officials for the release of 23 of their citizens kidnapped in July. The rebels also won the release of five Taliban prisoners in exchange for an Italian journalist kidnapped in March. Independent gangs have now got in on the act. Criminals kidnapped a German aid worker from a Kabul restaurant in August; she was rescued a day later. And criminals are believed to have seized a German engineer in Wardak province.

Afghan and western troops appear to be targeting the insurgents who took the Koreans, killing at least five Taliban commanders in Ghazni province since the captives were freed three weeks ago.

Commandos rescue kidnapped agents

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: B1

COLUMN: In brief

WORD COUNT: 71

Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives yesterday in a daring ambush and gunfight in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured – one of them seriously – Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

G–G honours soldiers; Humanitarian aid weakens Taliban, colonel reports

PUBLICATION: Kingston Whig–Standard (ON)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: Front

PAGE: 1

BYLINE: Ian Elliot

ILLUSTRATION: Col. Frederick Lewis says the Taliban don't have widespread backing.

WORD COUNT: 527

One of four soldiers from Kingston honoured with Meritorious Service Decorations from the Governor General says the Canadian Forces are beginning to win over the hearts and minds of the Afghan people.

Col. Frederick Lewis, who was deputy commander of Task Force Afghanistan between March 2006 and February of this year, said the Taliban are losing the Afghans' support, as the Canadian Forces' emphasis on humanitarian aid, as well as combat, is turning the tide.

"In the province I was in, there were about two million people and I would have to say that perhaps 500 of them were Taliban," he said. "They don't enjoy widespread support there, in part because every time there's an attack, they kill Afghan civilians. If the Taliban had as much support as they think they do, why don't they wait two years and get elected?"

Lewis, an engineer, was recognized by the Governor General with a Meritorious Service Medal for helping to shape the development of a "cohesive, confident and well–prepared task force that excelled at both intensive close combat and humanitarian efforts" in Kandahar.

He describes his time in Afghanistan as "the pinnacle" of his military career, having arrived just in time for Operation Medusa, in which Canadians scored a decisive military victory over the insurgents and followed through with reconstruction and other humanitarian efforts.

"It was quite a tour and we saw some huge successes there," Lewis said. "But even though I'm being honoured, it was all about the troops – they were the ones who did all the work."

He said Medusa was a watershed for Canadians, as they inflicted major losses on the Taliban and demonstrated they were a fighting force to be reckoned with.

"They tested our mettle and they found out that Canadians won't back down and that we were there for the long haul," he reflected.

But, he added, the low point – the most difficult part of any officer's job – was dealing with the deaths of soldiers.

Lewis was one of four local soldiers among a group of 25 honoured by Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean, the commander–in–chief of the armed forces, for distinguished military service or valour in combat. The officers will receive their decorations at a ceremony at Rideau Hall later this year.

The other local military members to receive the commendations were: Major François Bisailon, who was deputy commander of a team that helped train the Afghan army for combat. The light infantry commander's

"tactical insight and exceptional leadership skills" were rewarded with a Meritorious Service Medal;

Lt.-Col. David Anthony Patterson, who was deployed to Ethiopia in 2006 as part of the Darfur Task Force. His planning helped the United Nations create a plan to intervene in the civil war-torn country and the Governor General noted his "outstanding leadership and dedication brought great honour to the Canadian Forces and to Canada";

And Maj. Matthew Bruce Sprague, who commanded a company with the Royal Canadian Regiment's 1st Battalion in Afghanistan between August 2006 and February 2007. Severely wounded early in his tour, he was returned to Canada but insisted on going back to his troops and finishing his rotation there. "His devotion to duty and expertise in combat operations has left a lasting legacy in Kandahar Province," the Governor General noted.

ielliott@thewhig.com

Honouring a fallen soldier's contribution; Community college scholarship created in name of late reservist

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: Metro

PAGE: B4

BYLINE: Cathy Von Kintzel Truro Bureau

ILLUSTRATION: Cpl. Kevin Megeney, 25, whose family lives in Stellarton, was shot in the chest in his tent at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan on March 6. (CP); Cpl. Kevin Megeney, 25, whose family lives in Stellarton, was shot in the chest in his tent at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan on March 6. (CP)

WORD COUNT: 407

STELLARTON – The mother of dead reservist Cpl. Kevin Megeney says it's heartwarming someone thought enough of her son to donate \$50,000 for a new college scholarship bearing his name.

"Kevin was really, really all about helping people, so now even in his death he'll continue to help people through the kind efforts of this person," Karen Megeney said Monday during a telephone interview from her family's home in Stellarton.

Cpl. Megeney, 25, was shot in the chest in his tent at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan on March 6.

"It's keeping him alive in the world. Every year someone will remember Kevin because they'll be getting this scholarship."

The \$2,000 annual Kevin Megeney Memorial Award will be officially launched at the Nova Scotia Community College's Pictou campus in Stellarton at 10 a.m. today.

Beginning this year, it is available to full-time, first-year students who demonstrate community involvement.

What's more, the donor wants to remain anonymous and even the Megeney family doesn't know his or her identity.

"The whole town is abuzz saying what a wonderful gift, what a beautiful memorial," said Ms. Megeney.

Her family has been overwhelmed by support from the public and military during the past six months, and touched by accolades given to her son.

The new bursary will celebrate Cpl. Megeney's contributions to community and country. As well, on Oct. 4, the First Nova Scotia Highlanders Authie Company of the Canadian Forces Army Reserves will dedicate a wall in his honour in the junior ranks mess at the Pictou Armouries.

Ms. Megeney said it all helps the family get through the tough times, but friends and relatives won't really be able to begin the healing process until they know exactly what happened to Cpl. Megeney.

"We know nothing about that day," said the mother who believes an answer is coming soon, but doesn't know exactly when.

She's been content to let investigators do a thorough job and says the military has been a crutch and great support.

"They've been wonderful. We would have been totally lost without the military. They're constantly keeping us in touch with any little things they know and calling to see if we're OK."

NSCC president Joan McArthur–Blair said in a news release the award will help students overcome the financial demands of post–secondary education, while encouraging community involvement.

"Helping students reach their academic goals, while supporting the communities where those students live and learn, is vitally important to the NSCC," she said. "The college is truly honoured to be selected as the post–secondary institution that will keep the memory of such a proud Nova Scotian alive, year after year."

Ms. Megeney said that her son, who volunteered for his mission in Afghanistan, was dedicated to his work and loved the people he met, especially the children.

"When he came home in January . . . all he did was talk about the people," she said.

"We asked him if he was afraid to go back. He said, 'No, my buddies are over there.' "

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Honouring a soldier's contribution; Community college scholarship created in name of late reservist

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle–Herald

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: NovaScotia

PAGE: B1

BYLINE: Cathy Von Kintzel Truro Bureau

ILLUSTRATION: Cpl. Kevin Megeney, 25, whose family lives in Stellarton, was shot in the chest in his tent at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan on March 6. (CP); Cpl. Kevin Megeney, 25, whose family lives in Stellarton, was shot in the chest in his tent at Kandahar Airfield in Afghanistan on March 6. (CP)

WORD COUNT: 416

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Terror charges reinstated against Canadian at Guantanamo Bay

PUBLICATION:	The Chronicle–Herald
DATE:	2007.09.25
SECTION:	World
PAGE:	A8
SOURCE:	Our Wire Services
ILLUSTRATION:	Omar Khadr, a Canadian detainee at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was captured when he was 15 and faces life in prison on charges of murder, conspiracy, spying and supporting terrorism.(CP)
WORD COUNT:	402

WASHINGTON – A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon on Monday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled a military court set up by the U.S. administration was the proper venue for deciding whether Khadr is an "unlawful enemy combatant" and trying him on terrorism charges.

The ruling reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunal system created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

That ruling threatened to force the Pentagon to start over with tribunals for a number of detainees. Pentagon officials argued the June 4 ruling was just a matter of semantics and insufficient to dismiss the case.

Monday's decision, the first ever by the newly formed appeals court, agreed.

The appeals judges, who are military officers, said the trial judge "erred in ruling he lacked authority . . . to determine whether Mr. Khadr is an 'unlawful enemy combatant' for purposes of establishing the military commission's initial jurisdiction to try him."

The court battle over the Khadr case represents the latest problem for the U.S. administration's military commissions system, which exists outside the traditional military and civilian rules of justice.

In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled President George W. Bush's plan to try Guantanamo Bay detainees in military commissions violates U.S. and international law.

The White House persuaded the then–Republican–controlled Congress to weigh in with a law to legitimize the commissions. That law now faces court challenges.

Defence lawyers contend the "unlawful" designation is a critical element of guilt or innocence in what is a fundamentally flawed military tribunal system.

In August, they questioned the legitimacy of the court itself, saying officials didn't follow proper procedures when they set it up.

"This court was established on the fly," said Lt.–Cmdr. William Kuebler, who noted one of the judges questioned whether it was acceptable that he was appointed by a Defence Department deputy, instead of

Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

"More could not be at stake," Kuebler said.

"This is about the credibility of the United States."

The Pentagon said in response to Monday's decision: "We will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial."

"The timeline is up to the judge. He decides when we will be back in the courtroom."

"The court's ruling outlined what must be done to establish jurisdiction."

Khadr was captured when he was 15 and faces life in prison on charges of murder, conspiracy, spying and supporting terrorism.

He is charged with tossing a grenade that killed one U.S. soldier and injured another in Afghanistan in 2002.

His trial would be the first full legal airing of the Guantanamo detainees, who include several "high-value" prisoners, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 2001 terror attacks on the United States.

Commandos rescue 2 in Afghanistan; Italian military, NATO forces used Predator drone to track kidnappers

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: World

PAGE: A4

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Alisa Tang

ILLUSTRATION: U.S. soldiers inspect a car after it was destroyed in a controlled explosion by U.S. soldiers in the city of Jalalabad, Afghanistan, on Monday. The car was found packed with explosive materials. (RAHMAT GUL / AP)

WORD COUNT: 420

KABUL – Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives Monday in a daring ambush and gun battle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured – one of them seriously – Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed in a landmine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

The two Italians, who were described by Defence Minister Arturo Parisi in Rome as working for the Sismi intelligence service, disappeared along with their two Afghan colleagues Saturday. They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said the fact that the two were intelligence agents posed an "imminent danger," which required the rescue. Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnappers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brig.-Gen. Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

"There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," Lafontaine said. "It's a success story because it was very quickly solved." The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnappers had started heading south from Farah on Monday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gun battle that killed at least nine of the kidnappers.

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said. The other had broken his shoulder and left collarbone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

Both had been beaten by their captors, said Afghan Gen. Jalandar Shah.

Maj. Charles Anthony, a spokesman for the NATO force in Afghanistan, said it was not clear if the Italian hit by gunfire was wounded by his kidnapers or Italian forces.

The Italians' Afghan translator was also wounded, and another Afghan, apparently their driver, was killed, Parisi said. Anthony hinted the driver might have aided in the kidnappings.

The rescue operation "was a heavy defeat for the kidnapers and therefore a warning for the future," Prodi said in New York, where he is attending the UN General Assembly.

Canada has until April to reach Kandahar decision MacKay

PUBLICATION: The
Chronicle–Herald
DATE: 2007.09.25
SECTION: Canada
PAGE: A4
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
BYLINE: Alexander Panetta
WORD COUNT: 285

OTTAWA – Despite political pressure for a quick answer, the Conservative government says it has until April to announce whether it will extend Canada's combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Opposition parties are demanding an announcement in next month's throne speech but Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada has until a NATO summit next year in Bucharest, Romania.

That statement drew a scornful response from the opposition and warnings that government foot-dragging could help provoke an election.

The pressure on Canada to decide, coupled with the prospect of an election campaign, suggests Afghanistan is about to become the focus of an even more heated debate.

"There is a NATO meeting in April 2008," MacKay told a news scrum Monday. "It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting."

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the current mission. The Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want an end to the mission once Canada's international commitment concludes in February 2009, and New Democrats want Canadian troops withdrawn even sooner.

All opposition parties are demanding that the government include a clear statement on Afghanistan in the policy-setting throne speech, which will be the subject of a confidence vote next month. And if Prime Minister Stephen Harper refuses?

"It's over and out for him," said Bloc Quebecois MP Claude Bachand. He repeated his leader Gilles Duceppe's weekend warning that the Bloc is prepared to trigger an election.

"We will vote against the throne speech. It's one of our five conditions. He can accept all our other four conditions – and not that one – and we will still vote against the throne speech."

All three opposition parties would need to oppose the government to defeat it in a confidence vote, and none have offered any indication that they are preparing to support the Tories.

The Liberals say NATO must be given notice now so that an orderly transition can take place.

Canada should back new peace plan for Afghanistan think-tank

PUBLICATION: The Chronicle-Herald
DATE: 2007.09.25
SECTION: Canada
PAGE: A4
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
BYLINE: Murray Brewster
WORD COUNT: 401

OTTAWA – Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai break the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, says an international think-tank.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that's conducted extensive research in war-torn southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, a Vancouver lawyer and council president, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and al-Qaida supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency and reduce its offensive capacity. Canada must take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy, she said.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times," MacDonald said Monday at the beginning of a daylong conference exploring policies that may lead to peace.

This fast track for peace and stability should also include keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan past the February 2009 deadline, she said, and opposition to a U.S. demand that opium poppies be eradicated with aerial spraying. The strategy of driving wedges between various insurgent factions is a cornerstone of U.S. policy in Iraq, where it has convinced Sunni tribesmen to fight terrorists. In Afghanistan, NATO has been using economic development projects to pry committed Taliban fighters – who are often foreign jihadists – away from poor, unemployed farmers who are often coerced or enticed to take up arms. The strategy has met with limited success.

MacDonald said actively supporting Karzai's peace bid by rallying other NATO countries would also help the Conservatives sell the mission among Canadians who've complained there is too much emphasis on fighting at the expense of development, reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

The debate this fall in Ottawa needs to be about more than whether Canada stays or withdraws from Afghanistan at the appointed end of the mission, she said. "I believe Canadians instinctively understand why we are in Afghanistan, but they don't understand what the government's plan is for success for our military and I think they're angry the political system us turning them against each other."

Canada has until next April to announce Kandahar decision, defence minister says

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: Canada

PAGE: A8

SOURCE: THE CANADIAN PRESS

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 146

Despite political pressure for a quick answer, the Conservative government says it has until April to announce whether it will extend Canada's combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

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Canada should support Afghan president's Taliban peace bid, think tank says

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: Canada

PAGE: A8

SOURCE: THE CANADIAN PRESS

BYLINE: Murray Brewster

DATELINE: OTTAWA

WORD COUNT: 364

Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai fracture the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, an international think-tank charged Monday.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that's conducted extensive research in war-torn southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less-dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, a Vancouver lawyer and council president, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and Al-Qaeda supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency and reduce its offensive capacity.

It's time for Canada to take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy, she said.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times," MacDonald said at the beginning of a day-long conference meant to explore policies that could lead to peace.

This so called fast track for peace and stability should also include keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan past the February 2009 deadline and opposition to a U.S. demand that opium poppies be eradicated with aerial spraying.

The strategy of driving wedges between various insurgent factions is a cornerstone of U.S. policy in Iraq, where it has convinced Sunni tribesmen to fight terrorists.

In Afghanistan, NATO has been using economic development projects to pry committed Taliban fighters – who are often foreign jihadists – away from poor, unemployed farmers who are often coerced or enticed to take up arms.

The strategy has met with limited success.

MacDonald says actively supporting Karzai's peace bid by rallying other NATO countries would also help the Conservatives sell the mission among Canadians who've complained there is too much emphasis on fighting at the expense of development, reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

The debate over the war this fall in Ottawa needs to be about more than whether Canada stays or withdraws from Afghanistan at the appointed end of the mission, she said.

"I believe Canadians instinctively understand why we are in Afghanistan, but they don't understand what the government's plan is for success for our military and I think they're angry the political system is turning them against each other."

We need a new Canadian stand

PUBLICATION: The Guardian (Charlottetown)
DATE: 2007.09.25
SECTION: Editorial
PAGE: A6
COLUMN: Letter to the editor
WORD COUNT: 339

Editor:

Alan Holman in his Sept. 22, 2007, column 'Liberals need a clear stand on Afghanistan' stated that we need to look at who is making the "Kool-Aid". We need a new Canadian stand, not just a Liberal stand, on Afghanistan. From my perspective, Canada needs to consider if we want to be involved in a larger Middle East conflict. Having our military leave soon can avoid that prospect.

We know the Americans are focusing on Iran as another country threatening them with its weapons. At the same time international columnists are speculating about the Americans' secret mining of the water-transportation routes of the Iranian oil companies. I speculate it will not be long before we hear escalating anti-Islamic terrorist rhetoric and weapons scares about Iran prior to complete closure of the Iranian oil routes and thus another invasion for oil. Canada is in Afghanistan to backfill for the Americans who moved on to invade Iraq. Canadians gave widespread support for this mission to free Afghan citizens from the powers of terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists. We were not there to secure a Middle East platform for the fight for oil.

It has been five years since we joined the cause of Afghan citizens and we can now see a democracy in Afghanistan with co-operating war-lords in communities throughout the country. Life is better for the people who have taken back their country. Our Canadian military should be replaced by increasing aid for education, communication, infrastructure construction, community building and governance support to further strengthen the citizens and their country.

Afghanistan is a country where internal political issues and religious difference can be solved using these internal democratic, allied supported, Afghanistan means. Our military, however, can and should leave the region before we are forced to backfill for the Americans in Iraq and thus drink more American-made Kool-Aid for the whole region.

Dianne Porter, Argyle Shore

No quick answers on Kandahar; Canada has until next April to announce decision: MacKay

PUBLICATION: The Telegram (St. John's)

DATE: 2007.09.25

SECTION: National/World

PAGE: A7

SOURCE: The Canadian Press

BYLINE: Alexander Panetta

DATELINE: Ottawa

ILLUSTRATION: Peter MacKay

WORD COUNT: 449

Despite political pressure for a quick answer, the Conservative government says it has until April to announce whether it will extend Canada's combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Opposition parties are demanding an announcement in next month's throne speech but Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada has until a NATO summit next year in Bucharest, Romania.

That statement drew a scornful response from the opposition and warnings that government foot-dragging could help provoke an election.

The pressure on Canada to decide – coupled with the prospect of an election campaign – suggests Afghanistan is about to become the focus of an even more heated debate.

"There is a NATO meeting in April 2008," MacKay told a news scrum Monday.

"It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting."

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the mission.

The Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want an end to the mission once Canada's international commitment concludes in February 2009, and New Democrats want Canadian troops withdrawn even sooner.

All opposition parties are demanding that the government include a clear statement on Afghanistan in the policy-setting throne speech, which will be the subject of a confidence vote next month.

And if Prime Minister Stephen Harper refuses?

"It's over and out for him," said Bloc Quebecois MP Claude Bachand. He repeated his leader Gilles Duceppe's weekend warning that the Bloc is prepared to trigger an election.

"We will vote against the throne speech. It's one of our five conditions. He can accept all our other four conditions – and not that one – and we will still vote against the throne speech."

All three opposition parties would need to oppose the government to defeat it in a confidence vote, and none have offered any indication that they are preparing to support the Tories.

The Liberals say NATO must be given notice now, so that an orderly transition can take place.

The party's defence critic accused the Tories of setting a distant, artificial deadline specifically to position themselves for an election. Liberal critic Denis Coderre also dismissed the April deadline as arbitrary.

"So just because there's going to be an announcement at a conference in Romania in 2008, does this mean now that Canadians shouldn't talk about it among themselves and decide for themselves?" Coderre said. "This is nothing more than domestic politics."

So far in the Afghan mission, 70 Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed and the cost to Canadian taxpayers is expected to be more than \$6 billion by 2009.

But Afghan President Hamid Karzai has warned his country could slip deeper into chaos if Canada leaves, threatening his citizens while providing a staging ground for anti-Western terrorists.

A senior NATO commander in southern Afghanistan – Canadian Brig.-Gen Marquis Hainse – has said the military alliance is already planning for post 2009 operations, and those plans include Canada staying put.

One military analyst said MacKay has added some certainty to the debate by laying out a timeline – and the troops will appreciate it. "Soldiers – being soldiers – like it when decisions are made, so I think they'll welcome this," said Alex Morrison, president of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies.

Ban on military recruiters irks students; UVic student society to let members have last say at annual meeting next month

IDNUMBER 200709250060
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Capital & Van. Isl.
PAGE: B1 / FRONT
BYLINE: Louise Dickson, with files from Kim Westad
SOURCE: Times Colonist
WORD COUNT: 582

University of Victoria students are protesting a decision by their student society to ban active Canadian Forces recruiting at a career fair in their building.

The outcry, which includes a 350-member protest group on Facebook, has forced the UVic Student Society to let students have the final say on the issue. A motion will be brought forward at the student body's annual general meeting Oct. 18 and the decision will be binding. The fair is Jan. 30.

"There's such strong feeling about it on both sides," said Tracy Ho, chair of the UVSS board of directors. "That's why we're bringing it to the students."

At the Sept. 10 board meeting, Ho cast the deciding vote in favour of the ban, breaking a 6-6 deadlock. Some students are concerned about the recruiting practices of the military, she explained. They believe the military does not give students information about the psychological, mental and physical effects soldiers face when they return from service. Others don't want the military in the Student Union Building, where the fair will be held.

"The Student Union Building is truly the only space on campus that is for students and run by students," said Ho. "They feel strongly about not having the military in their space actively recruiting them in their own space."

"This issue touches home for a lot of students. A lot of people feel very passionately about the issue. I'm very happy it has sparked this debate. This is what university is all about."

Many students are unhappy by what they perceive as a lack of debate. Pamphlets and posters handed out on campus yesterday argue UVSS has no rights telling students whether they should join or not join the Canadian Armed Forces.

"I feel somewhat insulted that some members of the board think I'm incapable of making a decision on my own," said Jordan Dilba, a fourth-year economics student. "I think regardless of how people feel about the war, students are in favour of people making their own decisions."

Fourth-year history student John Fox said he was extremely upset by UVSS's actions.

Ban on military recruiters irks students; UVic student society to let members have last say at annual meeting

"The Canadian Forces provides funding for many UVic students," said Fox. "There are people I know who wouldn't be able to go to university without the funding they get. One of the primary missions of UVSS is to lower tuition fees and here we have a group that's helping students and they want to kick them out."

"The UVSS has essentially declared the Armed Forces are criminals. Their reasoning is incredibly flawed. It's completely preposterous they're making these claims."

"You should be exposed to all information," said Max Bakken, a fourth-year philosophy student. "We are students. We are here because we are intellectual. We can make that decision."

Shannon Lucy, a third-year anthropology student, supports the UVSS decision.

"I'm not for censorship," said Lucy. "But since the Canadian Armed Forces is doing illegal things, they don't really have any business on a public site. We can't be endorsing them."

About 200 students packed a UVSS meeting last night, which continued at press time. Emotions grew heated as students debated UVSS's motion, with wide-ranging discussion about everything from whether Canada should be in Afghanistan to privilege, censorship and class.

In Vancouver, navy Lieut. Rand Freeman of Canadian Forces Recruiting was reluctant to comment on the dispute.

"The Canadian Forces is very mission-oriented and so is Canadian Forces Recruiting," he said. "Our mission is to attract people. We will continue with our mission."

Jennifer Margison, manager of UVic Career Services, said the student society is within its right to determine what kind of events take place in its building — and she respects that.

"We will just make some alternate arrangement for the military to speak to students who wish to speak to them. That's not really going to be a problem," she said.

Kidnapped Italian agents freed in Afghanistan

IDNUMBER 200709250039
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
COLUMN: World Briefing
DATELINE: KABUL
SOURCE: Reuters
WORD COUNT: 101

Two Italian military intelligence officers kidnapped in Afghanistan were freed yesterday during a raid by NATO-led troops in which nine kidnappers and an Afghan hostage were killed, Italy's defence minister said.

The officers were wounded during the raid to free them in southwestern Farah province and were taken to hospital, Arturo Parisi told the Italian parliament. One of them was in a serious condition with gunshot wounds. Both men went missing two days ago in neighbouring Herat province.

There were no injuries reported among the Italian and British rescue troops, Parisi said. It was not clear who the abductors were.

Officer's death ruled suicide

IDNUMBER 200709250021
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
COLUMN: Canada Briefing
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 60

OTTAWA – The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service has ruled the death of a Canadian officer in Kabul, Afghanistan, was as the result of a suicide. Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul died as the result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, the CFNIS said in a release yesterday.

The death occurred Aug. 29. at his living quarters in the Afghan capital.

Decision on Afghan mission by April: MacKay

IDNUMBER 200709250020
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
COLUMN: canada BRIEFING
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 80

OTTAWA – Canada must decide by April whether to extend its military mission in Afghanistan, Defence Minister Peter MacKay said last night. He said the decision will have been made before the NATO summit to be held that month in Romania.

The federal Liberals and the Bloc Québécois are demanding that the mission not be renewed beyond February 2009, when its mandate is due to expire. The NDP advocates an immediate withdrawal of Canadian troops.

Pentagon given green light to prosecute Khadr

IDNUMBER 200709250015
PUBLICATION: Times Colonist (Victoria)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Omar Khadr: Dealt setback;
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 202

WASHINGTON -- A U.S. military appeals court dealt Canadian Omar Khadr a major legal setback yesterday, overturning a decision to throw out murder and terrorism charges against the alleged al-Qaeda operative.

The decision by the U.S. Court of Military Commission Review means the Pentagon once again has the green light to put the 21-year-old on trial before a war-crimes tribunal at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"We welcome the court's decision and will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial," Pentagon spokesman Jeffrey Gordon said last night.

Khadr's case had been thrown into legal limbo last June when army Col. Peter Brownback ruled the Bush administration's war crimes tribunals lacked jurisdiction to try Khadr because the U.S. government had not determined whether the Canadian was an "unlawful enemy combatant."

In that ruling, the military judge said Khadr had been deemed an "enemy combatant," leaving open the possibility he was legally engaged in battle with American troops.

Khadr is accused of throwing a grenade that killed U.S. army Sgt. Christopher Speer in the summer of 2002 during a firefight between American forces and al-Qaeda fighters near Khost, Afghanistan.

He was 15 years old at time.

Dennis Edney, one of two Canadian lawyers representing Khadr before the tribunals, said the decision confirmed his view that the Pentagon has stacked the legal deck against his client.

Khadr dealt legal setback; U.S. court overturns decision to throw out charges

IDNUMBER 200709250148
PUBLICATION: Vancouver Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final C
SECTION: News
PAGE: F5
KEYWORDS: CANADIANS; PRISONERS OF WAR; INTERNATIONAL LAW; TERRORISM
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 404

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"The timeline is up to the judge. He decides when we will be back in the courtroom."

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In that ruling, the military judge said Khadr had only been deemed an "enemy combatant," leaving open the possibility he was legally engaged in battle with American troops.

Khadr is accused of throwing a grenade that killed U.S. army Sgt. Christopher Speer in the summer of 2002 during a firefight between American forces and al-Qaida fighters near Khost, Afghanistan. He was 15 years old at time.

In its ruling against Khadr on Monday, the military appeals court agreed there was a significant distinction between a detainee's status as a lawful or unlawful enemy combatant.

But it found that Col. Brownback, the war crimes tribunal judge, erred by refusing to hear evidence that Pentagon lawyers said would prove Khadr was an unlawful combatant at the time of his capture.

The Pentagon was "ready to present evidence to affirmatively establish the military commission's jurisdiction over Mr. Khadr, but was summarily denied," wrote navy Capt. John W. Rolph, the deputy chief judge of the military appeals court.

Dennis Edney, one of two Canadian lawyers representing Khadr before the tribunals, said the decision confirmed his view that the Pentagon has stacked the legal deck against his client.

"It astounds me that this [U.S.] administration goes to such gymnastics to avoid giving this young man due process in an ordinary court of law with proper rules of evidence," Edney said Monday night.

Edney said he is worried the Pentagon will now rush Khadr to trial without giving his defence team proper time to prepare an appeal.

"They have said they wish to expedite this matter," he said. "That causes me concern. They are going to try to get Khadr out of the way because he has becoming a bit of a nuisance."

In recent weeks, the lawyers have questioned the legitimacy of the appeals court. The three-person court was only assembled after the charges against Khadr were thrown out in June.

Pentagon gets go-ahead to prosecute Khadr

IDNUMBER 200709250085
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: World
PAGE: D8
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Khadr;
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 536

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In recent weeks, the lawyers have questioned the legitimacy of the appeals court. The three-person court was only assembled after the charges against Khadr were thrown out in June.

The decision represents a significant victory for the Bush administration, which had faced the prospect of having to once again rewrite the rules for trying detainees held at Guantanamo on terrorism charges. Last year, the administration had to scrap an earlier version of the military commissions after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled they violated international law.

The Pentagon has said it plans to prosecute as many as 80 Guantanamo detainees, including 14 high-value detainees such as alleged 9-11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.

Khadr is believed to be the last western citizen detained at Guantanamo. He is represented before the war crimes tribunal by two Canadian lawyers, Edney and fellow Canadian Nate Whitling, and a U.S. military lawyer, Lt.-Cmdr. William Kuebler.

The lawyers have been lobbying the Canadian government to seek Khadr's transfer to Canada to face trial.

In a speech last week, Kuebler accused Canada of treating Khadr's case with "reckless indifference."

Afghan mission needs clear goal

IDNUMBER 200709250025
PUBLICATION: The StarPhoenix (Saskatoon)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Forum
PAGE: A6
COLUMN: Don Martin
BYLINE: Don Martin
SOURCE: Calgary Herald
WORD COUNT: 725

Many Canadian soldiers were pledging a return to Afghanistan even before they left the last lethal rotation, tempted by combat pay premiums of about \$3,000 a month as much as they were motivated by the mission's merits.

Some media colleagues of mine are also volunteering for another military tag-along tour of Afghanistan into 2008. But there's little or no danger pay, so it's either driven by professional intrigue or, in my been-there-done-that view, mental instability.

The past weekend began Canada's 500-day countdown to its mission-ending February 2009 deadline. That sounds like a long way off, except this week also marks Stephen Harper's 600th day as prime minister and he still calls his government "new."

But while those who are actually on the ground in the war zone are locking in their combat-or-coverage intentions, federal leaders still quibble in circular rhetoric on what role, if any, Canada will play as it seeks a retreat with honour from the Kandahar battlefield.

Last week could have brought clarity on three fronts, but matters only got muddier.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay did a grin-and-go tour of our chicken-clucking allies in Europe, trying to scare up combat replacements for our troops from among those who deploy their soldiers for sunbathing duty in northern regions.

He returned without a hint of help, left to sniffle about rolling out the red carpet for terrorism if we withdraw, while taking some increasingly cheap shots at the Liberal letdown of an under-equipped military that's been his party's responsibility for 20 months.

Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier tried to be heard over howls from hecklers at a Montreal luncheon crowd as he declared that "Canada cannot, without losing all credibility in the international arena, simply go back on its word and abandon such a crucial mission."

Funny, then, how our 600-day prime ministerial wonder still can't articulate how Canada will pull back from the mission politically without appearing to cut and run militarily. Of course, there's a couple strategic reasons the Conservatives are deliberately waffling over a new "configuration" of our duties in Afghanistan.

They didn't want to go hawkish on the eve of last week's byelections in Quebec. And they hope their vagaries will lure the Liberals into a boxed position, letting them define themselves into trouble while the success or

failure of the mission remains uncertain.

The Liberals, of course, will have nothing to do with clarifying their position.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion ended his very bad week by delivering his party's foreign policy, a world where Canada would be guided by multilateral accords and peace would derive magically from "non-violent conflict resolution" — just the sort of Pollyanna view of war you'd expect from a guy who learned about counter-insurgency conflict from inside libraries instead of LAVs.

Given that Afghanistan will be the defining foreign policy question of our time, Dion could've done better than pledge to serve notice of our military pullout in 16 months, followed by some sort of humanitarian or redevelopment role.

How Canada could deliver effective help without a thick security blanket is beyond me. Whenever Canada's reconstruction troops venture out into the villages of Kandahar province, they do so under heavy military escort. Even then, they spend a good deal of their time trapped on base due to security problems outside the walls.

If nobody replaces us militarily, what little security exists will deteriorate and Canada's ability to deliver even a bags of rice or shovels will be compromised.

Dion did land one fine punch, however, although it's probably too obscure for most voters to appreciate.

"There will not be three to four times as many Defence public affairs officers in Kandahar as there are Canadian International Development Agency personnel, as is the case today," he noted.

That's a killer observation because it's so true that Canada's mostly bad military spokespeople outnumber good-government Samaritans over there. But as realistic Afghanistan policy, the Liberals continue to falter and the Conservatives persist in wavering, with no date for a debate or decision in the offing.

Despite its small size, the Senlis Council, a think-tank founded by Canadian Norine MacDonald, offers about the only bear-witness independent take of how Canada functions in Kandahar. And while it applauds our military deployment, the council is calling on Canada to work with Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai on a peace process that would include negotiations with the political arm of the Taliban.

Harper supporting peace talks with the Taliban assassins of so many Canadian soldiers? Not bloody likely.

But at least it's a radical idea coming from people with ties to the region. That's refreshingly different from politicians who only have eyes for re-election.

Redefining Afghan goals

IDNUMBER 200709250052
PUBLICATION: The Leader-Post (Regina)
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Letters
PAGE: B7
BYLINE: Zimran Chowdhary
SOURCE: The Leader-Post
WORD COUNT: 377

Defence Minister Peter MacKay dived into the thick of NATO's looming crisis over troop strength in Afghanistan with a rapid tour of Canada's allies in Europe.

But Canada's policy in Afghanistan needs a drastic shift. The beleaguered war-torn nation needs help to stabilize, rebuild and reconstruct parts of the country, not further death and destruction.

Vital to understanding our role there is the nature of the problems, which are often not apparent. Hamid Karzai, the western puppet president summoned from his residence in the U.S. to lead the country, and Mullah Naqib obviously want western troops to stay as long as they possibly could, because they control less than 10 per cent of the territory and need their help to retain authority.

The sad reality is that Afghanistan's many tribes and ethnic factions have been fighting each other for centuries. The Northern Alliance formed by as many as six ethnic groups to defeat the Taliban has bitter differences among these groups. The Taliban are often portrayed as terrorist, but are not synonymous with "al-Qaida", the global terrorist organization. Granted that Taliban have such antiquated views about the order of society that they should have been living 100 years ago, but their counterparts in the Northern Alliance are only marginally better. We tend to ignore their views because they are with the western alliance.

The need of the hour is to rebuild the nation, alleviate poverty by creating work and educate its masses. We need to bring back our troops and send in more aid instead. Almost US \$40 billion has been spent on the war effort and less than a tenth of that for rebuilding.

The current emphasis of fighting Taliban is misdirected. They are not decreasing in strength. Foreign troops bring out strong emotions from the locals and are not liked by anyone but a few.

The policy of allowing the farmers to grow opium to support themselves is in contradiction of our aims. The middleman, mainly Taliban, makes money to support the war against our troops, from the profits of the sale of heroin.

It would make more sense to either destroy the poppy fields or restrict and regulate their cultivation with the government buying their produce and selling it internationally for medicinal purposes.

Zimran Chowdhary

Regina

THE CANADIAN PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.24
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 679

OTTAWA _ Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai break the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, says an international think-tank.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that's conducted extensive research in war-torn southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, a Vancouver lawyer and council president, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and al-Qaida supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency and reduce its offensive capacity.

It's time for Canada to take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy, she says.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times," MacDonald said Monday at the beginning of a day-long conference meant to explore policies that could lead to peace.

This so-called fast-track for peace and stability should also include keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan past the February 2009 deadline, she said, and opposition to a U.S. demand that opium poppies be eradicated with aerial spraying.

The strategy of driving wedges between various insurgent factions is a cornerstone of U.S. policy in Iraq, where it has convinced Sunni tribesmen to fight terrorists.

In Afghanistan, NATO has been using economic development projects to pry committed Taliban fighters _ who are often foreign jihadists _ away from poor, unemployed farmers who are often coerced or enticed to take up arms. The strategy has met with limited success.

MacDonald says actively supporting Karzai's peace bid by rallying other NATO countries would also help the Conservatives sell the mission among Canadians who've complained there is too much emphasis on fighting at the expense of development, reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

The debate over the war this fall in Ottawa needs to be about more than whether Canada stays or withdraws from Afghanistan at the appointed end of the mission, she said.

"I believe Canadians instinctively understand why we are in Afghanistan, but they don't understand what the government's plan is for success for our military and I think they're angry the political system us turning them against each other."

MacDonald said she believes the opposition has "shown some willingness to fall in line behind a proper, well-thought-out plan."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper said last summer that he wouldn't extend the combat mission in Kandahar unless there was consensus in Parliament. But he recently qualified that position by stating he wouldn't put the issue before the House of Commons until he had the winning conditions.

On Monday, Defence Minister Peter MacKay said Canada will deliver an answer to NATO next April on whether it plans to continue the combat mission in Kandahar.

He also poured cold water on the notion that any faction of the Taliban is seriously ready to talk peace.

“Unless we see a sea of change in terms of attitude from those who are engaged in the insurgency, these negotiations won't be successful,” he said.

It's up to the Afghan government to decide who it wants to negotiate with, he added.

A request for comment from Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier, who attended a closed-door meeting at the United Nations Sunday on the future of Afghanistan, was turned down.

Bernier has in the past rejected the idea of Ottawa participating directly in peace talks with the Taliban, saying “Canada does not negotiate with terrorists, for any reason.”

A spokesman for Bernier dismissed Monday's criticism, saying the Senlis Council “with its focus on opium legalization and negotiating with the Taliban, seeks to distract from the real successes are being realized in Afghanistan.”

Neil Hrab said Canada supports the reconciliation program already underway in Afghanistan. That program encourages Taliban to lay down their arms _ sometimes in exchange for cash _ and rejoin society without fear of prosecution.

Bloc Quebecois defence critic Claude Bachand, who attended the Senlis conference, says it's already too late to salvage the current Canadian mission politically.

“The support for this mission has been dropping since it started,” he said.

Last winter, Bachand and the rest of the Commons defence committee met with NATO's former commander in Afghanistan, British Lt.-Gen. David Richards, who warned them that peace could not be achieved through military means alone.

“We're losing the war because there is no diplomacy,” said Bachand.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 621

OTTAWA _ Despite political pressure for a quick answer, the Conservative government says it has until April to announce whether it will extend Canada's combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Opposition parties are demanding an announcement in next month's throne speech but Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada has until a NATO summit next year in Bucharest, Romania.

That statement drew a scornful response from the opposition and warnings that government foot-dragging could help provoke an election.

The pressure on Canada to decide _ coupled with the prospect of an election campaign _ suggests Afghanistan is about to become the focus of an even more heated debate.

``There is a NATO meeting in April 2008," MacKay told a news scrum Monday.

``It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting."

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the current mission.

The Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want an end to the mission once Canada's international commitment concludes in February 2009, and New Democrats want Canadian troops withdrawn even sooner.

All opposition parties are demanding that the government include a clear statement on Afghanistan in the policy-setting throne speech, which will be the subject of a confidence vote next month.

And if Prime Minister Stephen Harper refuses?

``It's over and out for him," said Bloc Quebecois MP Claude Bachand. He repeated his leader Gilles Duceppe's weekend warning that the Bloc is prepared to trigger an election.

``We will vote against the throne speech. It's one of our five conditions. He can accept all our other four conditions _ and not that one _ and we will still vote against the throne speech."

All three opposition parties would need to oppose the government to defeat it in a confidence vote, and none have offered any indication that they are preparing to support the Tories.

The Liberals say NATO must be given notice now so that an orderly transition can take place.

The party's defence critic accused the Tories of setting a distant, artificial deadline specifically to position themselves for an election. Liberal critic Denis Coderre also dismissed the April deadline as arbitrary.

``So just because there's going to be an announcement at a conference in Romania in 2008, does this mean now that Canadians shouldn't talk about it among themselves and decide for themselves?" Coderre said.

“This is nothing more than domestic politics.”

MacKay appeared to agree that Afghanistan will remain at centre stage in Canadian politics.

“I expect fully that there will be a lot of discussion about this over the fall _ just as we're seeing in other parliaments,” he said.

MacKay reaffirmed the Conservatives' support for the mission, but he added that a final decision will be made in Parliament.

The government hasn't said whether it intends to call a vote, but MacKay noted that the opposition can also table an Afghanistan motion and force a vote if it wants to.

“There has never been any wavering on the part of this government _ or this prime minister _ vis a vis the support for the mission in Afghanistan,” MacKay said.

“The mission has a parliamentary mandate to go until February of 2009. We've also been equally clear in saying that anything beyond that has to have the support _ the majority support _ of the Parliament of Canada.”

So far in the Afghan mission, 70 Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have been killed and the cost to Canadian taxpayers is expected to be more than \$6 billion by 2009.

But Afghan President Hamid Karzai has warned that his country could slip deeper into chaos if Canada leaves, threatening his citizens while providing a staging ground for anti-Western terrorists.

A senior NATO commander in southern Afghanistan _ Canadian Brig.-Gen Marquis Hainse _ has said that the military alliance is already planning for post 2009 operations, and those plans include Canada staying put.

One military analyst said that MacKay has added some certainty to the debate by laying out a timeline _ and that the troops will appreciate it.

“Soldiers _ being soldiers _ like it when decisions are made, so I think they'll welcome this,” said Alex Morrison, president of the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies.

“It's been discouraging for them to listen to the Liberals saying they should be withdrawn in February 2009 when it was the Liberals who put them there. It's been discouraging to hear the NDP say that they should be withdrawn now and we should negotiate.”

THE CANADIAN PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.24
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OTTAWA _ Veteran overseas correspondent Matthew Fisher is the recipient of the 2007 Ross Munro Media Award for defence reporting.

The Conference of Defence Associations and the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute cited Fisher, who has worked on behalf of several Canadian newspaper groups, for his long career covering Canadian military operations.

He currently is the Middle East correspondent for CanWest News and now on his 12th trip to Afghanistan.

Born and raised in northwestern Ontario and Ottawa, Fisher is the son of parents who both served with Canadian Forces in Europe during the Second World War.

He was the unanimous selection for his ``superb battlefront coverage that has for years enlightened Canadians about the world they_and their servicemen and women_inhabit. "

Described by the committee as ``a brave warrior in his profession whose reporting has been a model for others," Fisher has travelled to 153 countries and reported on every Canadian Forces mission overseas since the mid-1980s.

He has covered 14 wars, including Chechnya and both Gulf wars, and was embedded with a marine combat unit during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. He has returned to Iraq six times since then.

The award, which includes a \$2,500 prize and a bronze trophy depicting former Canadian Press war correspondent Ross Munro, was initiated in 2002 to recognize outstanding contributions in defence reporting.

It will be presented at the institute's annual Vimy Award Dinner on Nov. 16 at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

Anonymous donor sets up \$50,000 scholarship in honour of killed N.S. soldier

DATE: 2007.09.24
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE EDUCATION
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 169

PICTOU, N.S. _ The Nova Scotia Community College's Pictou campus will launch a new student award in memory of a Nova Scotia reservist who was killed while serving in Afghanistan earlier this year.

First-year students at the college will be eligible for the Kevin Megeney Memorial Award _ a \$2,000 bursary to be awarded every year for students who demonstrate a commitment to community involvement.

“The college is truly honoured to be selected as the post-secondary institution that will keep the memory of such a proud Nova Scotian alive, year after year,” said college president Joan McArthur Blair.

The award was made possible by a donation of \$50,000 by an anonymous donor.

Megeney, 25, of Stellarton was shot in the chest in his tent at the Kandahar airfield on March 6.

His mother, Karen Megeney, said Monday it's heartwarming that someone thought enough of her son to donate so much money in his memory.

“Kevin was really, really all about helping people so now, even in his death, he'll continue to help people through the kind of efforts of this person,” she said in an interview.

“It's keeping him alive in this world.”

The school will hold a ceremony Tuesday to officially launch the award.

(New Glasgow News-Halifax Chronicle Herald)

BC-Cda-News-Digest

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WORD COUNT: 946

OTTAWA _ Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai break the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, says an international think-tank.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that's conducted extensive research in war-torn southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, a Vancouver lawyer and council president, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and al-Qaida supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency and reduce its offensive capacity.

It's time for Canada to take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy, she says.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times," MacDonald said Monday at the beginning of a day-long conference meant to explore policies that could lead to peace.

This so-called fast-track for peace and stability should also include keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan past the February 2009 deadline, she said, and opposition to a U.S. demand that opium poppies be eradicated with aerial spraying.

The strategy of driving wedges between various insurgent factions is a cornerstone of U.S. policy in Iraq, where it has convinced Sunni tribesmen to fight terrorists.

Air India inquiry hears of Parmar confession, but remains skeptical

OTTAWA _ The prime suspect in the 1985 Air India bombing admitted to a role in the attack years later under questioning by Indian police, a public inquiry has been told.

But Talwinder Singh Parmar, head of the militant Sikh separatist group Babbar Khalsa, reportedly insisted, during his 1992 interrogation, that he was a minor player and that others took the lead in hatching the plot that cost 329 lives.

The claims, contained in a summary of the affair presented Monday by the Punjab Human Rights Organization, were taken with a grain of salt by former Supreme Court justice John Major, the head of the inquiry.

He noted that although he was allowing the material to be entered in evidence he wasn't making any call at this point on how credible it might be.

"It's a document that forms part of this record," said Major. "It may be true, it may not be true."

Mark Freiman, chief counsel for the inquiry, also cautioned against drawing any "hasty conclusions," while the RCMP maintained there was little it hadn't already seen in its long-running effort to bring the bombers to justice.

Insp. Lorne Schwartz testified the Mounties first became aware of the supposed Parmar confession in 1997 and spent years pursuing the leads it provided _ even though they suspected that anything Parmar had told police in the Punjab was extracted under torture.

No evidence magnets dull pain despite widespread use, researchers conclude

TORONTO _ They're embedded in everything from mattresses to insoles for shoes to wrist bands _ but there is no definitive scientific evidence that static magnets actually relieve chronic pain, researchers say.

Products that incorporate static magnets are a multibillion-dollar business worldwide and many chronic pain sufferers are drawn to the promise they hold for alleviating such nagging conditions as arthritis, fibromyalgia and low back discomfort.

The theory from proponents is that the device's magnetic field increases blood flow, causing increased oxygen, nutrients, hormones and painkilling endorphins to be distributed to tissues in the affected area.

So researchers at the Complementary Medicine, Peninsula Medical School, at the Universities of Exeter and Plymouth decided to search the medical literature to determine whether there is any proof magnets can actually reduce pain.

In their analysis of nine randomized trials comparing products containing magnets with those containing either no magnet or very weak ones, the researchers found that the data did not support the use of the alternative therapy for pain control.

"There is no definite grounds of being absolutely sure that a magnet works or not," lead author Dr. Max Pittler, a complementary medicine specialist, said Monday from Exeter, England.

"The evidence does not support the use of static magnets for pain relief and therefore magnets cannot be recommended as an effective treatment," he said. The analysis is published in Tuesday's Canadian Medical Association Journal.

Union wants changes after one in five border guards flunk firearms course

FREDERICTON _ The union representing Canada's border guards says it is concerned about the relatively high number of officers who are flunking the firearms training program.

Ron Moran, national president of the Customs and Excise Union, said slightly more than 20 per cent of the guards who have taken the course on precision shooting have failed, possibly jeopardizing their careers with the Canada Border Services Agency.

"As it stands now, a little more than one in five don't pass," Moran said in an interview.

"It's a huge concern for those who are next in line for those classes and basically see their employment hanging in the balance."

Moran said the union has hired an expert to review the training program, which he described as a condensed version of the same course given to RCMP recruits.

The border guards are being asked to master precision shooting in just eight days, compared with the 16 weeks RCMP recruits have to achieve the same level of accuracy, he said.

—

crop

THE CANADIAN PRESS

EDMONTON _ A devastating disease called clubroot is threatening Alberta's \$3-billion-a-year canola crop and forcing government officials to ban dozens of farmers from growing the oilseed.

"It could be a very huge threat unless we can get a handle on how to prevent the expansion of areas being infected," says Rod Scarlett, executive director of Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, Alberta's largest farm group.

"If it impacts a tremendous amount of land, that will limit the opportunities for growing canola in Alberta and Western Canada."

Agriculture Minister George Groeneveld says clubroot could have a terrible impact in Alberta.

"We're working with the canola people and saying, 'Hey, this is a big problem and let's not drag our feet. Let's pull out all the stops.'"

Clubroot is spread through spores in the soil and is most often found in vegetable crops such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and turnips. Outbreaks are most often found in market gardens in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec and the Atlantic provinces.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
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KABUL _ Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives Monday in a daring ambush and gunbattle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured _ one of them seriously _ Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed a landmine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

The two Italians, who were described by Defence Minister Arturo Parisi in Rome as working for the Sismi intelligence service, disappeared along with their two Afghan colleagues Saturday. They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said the fact that the two were intelligence agents posed an ``imminent danger," which required the rescue.

Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnapers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO ``very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brig.-Gen. Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

``There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," Lafontaine said. ``It's a success story because it was very quickly solved."

The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnapers had started heading south from Farah on Monday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gunbattle that killed at least nine of the kidnapers.

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said. The other had broken his shoulder and left collarbone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

Both had been beaten by their captors, said Afghan Gen. Jalandar Shah.

Maj. Charles Anthony, a spokesman for the NATO force in Afghanistan, said it was not clear if the Italian hit by gunfire was wounded by his kidnapers or Italian forces.

The Italians' Afghan translator was also wounded, and another Afghan, apparently their driver, was killed,

Parisi said. Anthony hinted the driver might have aided in the kidnappings.

The rescue operation ``was a heavy defeat for the kidnappers and therefore a warning for the future," Prodi said in New York, where he is attending the UN General Assembly.

``We did not have one moment of hesitation in giving the mandate to those who were in the field to act with the utmost determination," Prodi said.

Earlier, Italian Defence Ministry undersecretary Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri said a ``criminal band" had taken the Italians, and officials were afraid they would be sold to other groups. A Taliban spokesman told The Associated Press it was not responsible for the capture of the Italians.

Several high-profile abductions have been a boon for the Taliban this year. The insurgents had face-to-face negotiations with South Korean government officials for the release of 23 of their citizens kidnapped in July. The rebels also won the release of five Taliban prisoners in exchange for an Italian journalist kidnapped in March.

Independent gangs have now got in on the act. Criminals kidnapped a German aid worker from a Kabul restaurant in August; she was rescued a day later. And criminals are believed to have seized a German engineer in Wardak province.

Afghan and western troops appear to be targeting the insurgents who took the Koreans, killing at least five Taliban commanders in Ghazni province since the captives were freed three weeks ago.

The Afghan and Italian governments were heavily criticized in March after five Taliban prisoners were freed in exchange for the release of newspaper journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo _ a step many observers feared would encourage more kidnappings.

The head of an Italian aid organization, Emergency, said the Rome government also paid \$2 million for the release of an Italian photographer kidnapped last year, a claim the government didn't deny.

The explosion that killed the soldiers with the Spanish contingent occurred as they were returning from a patrol at the head of a column of five vehicles near the town of Shewan, said Defence Minister Jose Antonio Alonso in Madrid.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.24
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 165

MADRID, Spain _ Two soldiers serving with the Spanish contingent in Afghanistan have died in a landmine explosion.

Spanish Defence Minister Jose Antonio Alonso says an Iranian interpreter travelling with the Spaniards also died in the attack.

Three other Spanish soldiers were seriously wounded.

The attack occurred near the town of Shewan while the soldiers were returning from a patrol mission at the head of a column of five vehicles.

One of the dead soldiers was Spanish and the other was an Ecuadorian serving with the Spanish contingent. Spain allows people from some Latin American countries to serve in its military forces while retaining their native nationality.

Alonso says Spain remains committed to the United Nations–led mission in Afghanistan, to which it has contributed some 700 troops and will go ahead with plans to ask Parliament to send 52 more Spaniards to help train Afghan forces.

In February, an attack on a Spanish military convoy killed a female soldier and wounded two other troops.

A Peruvian soldier serving with Spanish forces in Afghanistan was killed in an attack on a Spanish convoy in July of last year. Four other soldiers were wounded.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DATE: 2007.09.24
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PUBLICATION: cpw
WORD COUNT: 286

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) _ Ambushes and gunbattles around Afghanistan killed at least 26 people, including 12 government employees and unarmed police killed by gunmen in the relatively calm north, officials said Monday.

Three unidentified gunmen opened fire on a vehicle carrying the police and government employees in a remote area of northeastern Badakhshan province, killing 12 people Sunday, said police chief Gen. Agha Noor Kemtuz.

The attack killed seven police and five government employees. They were travelling to Kabul, Kemtuz said.

The police were being transferred to new posts and so were not armed, he said, adding that the violence could have been sparked by a personal conflict between the attackers and the officers.

Militant attacks are relatively uncommon in northern Afghanistan, though the area has seen a handful of suicide bomb attacks this year.

Gunfire killed a NATO service member Sunday in eastern Afghanistan, the alliance said in a statement. It did not provide any details, including the victim's nationality, though the majority of soldiers in the east are American.

Insurgency-related violence has left more than 4,400 dead so far this year, most of them militants, according to an Associated Press tally of figures from Afghan and Western officials.

In western Farah province, insurgents dressed in police uniforms ambushed a supply convoy escorted by private security guards on Sunday. The subsequent gunbattle left one guard and 12 militants dead, said provincial Gov. Muhaidin Baluch.

He said several guards were missing, but it was not clear if they were captured or if they had fled and were lost in unfamiliar territory.

An Interior Ministry statement gave a higher death toll of 21 militants and three security guards killed. It was not possible to independently verify the reports.

In the south, a suicide bomber on foot blew himself up near an Afghan army convoy on Sunday in Helmand province, wounding three soldiers, said Gereshk district chief Abdul Manaf Khan.

INDEX:Defence, Education, International

DATE: 2007.09.24

KEYWORDS: DEFENCE EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

PUBLICATION: bnw

WORD COUNT: 93

PICTOU, N.S. – The Nova Scotia Community College is setting up a student bursary named after a Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan earlier this year.

The college's campus in Pictou is setting up the Kevin Megeney Memorial Award, a \$2,000 bursary that will be given out every year.

Megeney, a 25-year-old reservist from Stellarton, N.S., died on March 6 in an accidental shooting at the NATO base in Kandahar.

The award, funded by a \$50,000 anonymous donation, will be given to a full-time student who demonstrates a commitment to community involvement.

The first award will be handed out later this year or early 2008.

Member's of Megeney's family will participate in a ceremony to dedicate the award on Tuesday.

(The Canadian Press)(CJFX)

INDEX:Defence, International, Politics

DATE: 2007.09.24
KEYWORDS: DEFENCE INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
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WORD COUNT: 121

ORLEANS, Ont. – Canada will announce by next April whether it plans to extend its combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada must deliver an answer at that month's NATO summit in Bucharest, Romania

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the current mission and the opposition Liberals have been pressuring Prime Minister Stephen Harper to warn the allies of Canada's plans.

If the minority government collapses this fall – which is a possibility – Afghanistan seems poised to become a key election issue.

The Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want an end to the mission once Canada's international commitment elapses in February 2009, and New Democrats want Canadian troops withdrawn even sooner.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion has said NATO must be given notice now so that an orderly transition can take place.

(The Canadian Press)

INDEX:Media, Defence, Politics

DATE: 2007.09.24
KEYWORDS: MEDIA DEFENCE POLITICS
PUBLICATION: bnw
WORD COUNT: 147

OTTAWA – Veteran overseas correspondent Matthew Fisher is the recipient of the 2007 Ross Munro Media Award for defence reporting.

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He currently is the Middle East correspondent for CanWest News and now on his 12th trip to Afghanistan.

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Described by the committee as `a brave warrior in his profession whose reporting has been a model for others,' Fisher has travelled to 153 countries and reported on every Canadian Forces mission overseas since the mid–1980s.

(The Canadian Press)

Appeals court orders Khadr to face trial for murder; Overrules judge who said he lacked authority

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BYLINE: Michelle Shephard
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COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 183

An appeals court has put the trial against Omar Khadr back on track, overruling a military judge who threw out the Canadian's murder charge this summer.

Khadr is accused of tossing a grenade that killed a U.S. soldier during a firefight in Afghanistan in July 2002. He was 15 at the time.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled a judge at the U.S. naval detention centre at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, does have the jurisdiction to hear Khadr's case.

"This decision does not change anything. Omar Khadr is still subjected to the same tainted process that is designed to make a finding of guilt," Khadr's Canadian lawyer Dennis Edney said last night.

The ruling, the first for the newly created appeals court, reversed the military judge's decision that he did not have the authority to try Khadr because he had not been classified as an "unlawful enemy combatant."

"We'll proceed expeditiously to get military commission cases back to trial in Guantanamo," Pentagon spokesperson Jeffrey Gordon said last night. "The timeline is up to the judge. The court's ruling outlines what must be done to establish jurisdiction and we will follow that direction."

Canadian exit won't make Afghanistan better off

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BYLINE: Richard Gwyn
SOURCE: Toronto Star
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WORD COUNT: 555

The meeting on Afghanistan organized by the United Nations this week of representatives from 18 countries, produced, as UN meetings usually do, fine words but precious little action.

Those taking part, including Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier, agreed on a communique that condemned "terrorism ... which hindered the establishment of the rule of law and the provision of basic services to the Afghan people."

There was one reason for paying any attention. This meeting served as a reminder that military intervention in Afghanistan, including Canada's, is sanctioned by the UN.

According to the latest poll by Ipsos-Reid, two in three Canadians polled (68 per cent) want us to pull out when our mission there reaches its agreed deadline of February 2009 but a majority (56 per cent) wants our troops out even earlier.

At a glance, those results seem to make it certain we will be gone from Afghanistan relatively soon.

The stage for this has been set already by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. He has declared the decision to stay or go will have to be made by Parliament, rather than just by his government alone.

How MPs actually vote will be influenced by what Canadians say they want done

most especially since an early election is so likely.

Except that none of these feelings showed in recent by-election results in Quebec, the most strongly anti-war region in the country. Although the New Democrats, who favour an immediate withdrawal, did win the Montreal riding of Outremont, the Conservatives, overall, were the big winners.

Also noteworthy is the fact that one principal reason why many Canadians today oppose our involvement in Afghanistan will have vanished by the February departure date.

By then, George W. Bush will no longer be president of the United States. Ever-increasing media attention to the U.S. presidential contest will cause more and more Canadians to realize global power decisions will soon be made by someone else – perhaps by a President Hillary Clinton, but certainly not Bush.

Though it's relatively easy to argue that it's best for us to leave Afghanistan, it's difficult, if not impossible, to argue that our doing so would leave Afghans better off.

"Afghanistan will fall back into anarchy," Afghan President Hamid Karzai told a group of Canadian journalists recently. "Leaving Afghanistan alone now will bring back all the evils that were here" under the Taliban.

Karzai put his finger on perhaps the most painful aspect of the decision. This is that our exit won't just leave the way open for "anarchy" to return to the area of our military operations in Kandahar; anarchy and old evils will return to all of Afghanistan.

Troops from more than 20 nations are in Afghanistan but fewer than half a dozen of these contingents fight directly against the Taliban – the Americans, the British, the Canadians, the Dutch and the Australians.

If we go, it's virtually certain the Dutch will go. If the Dutch go, the Australians have already said they will go.

In the words of a spokesperson for German Chancellor Angela Merkel, that has "consequences for the whole alliance and for the whole western world."

The solution of course would be a real contribution – a fighting one – by the major NATO nations like Germany, France, Spain and Italy.

A precondition for that solution to be possible would be for Canada to stay. No less so a precondition for Canada to stay would have to be for those nations, at last, to make serious contributions.

It's not about cutting and running. It's about standing back – we've more than contributed our share – and then watching, as the gap we'll leave behind turns into a huge hole into which the entire country eventually tumbles.

To say that's not the Canadian way is obvious. No less obvious, therefore, is that today's polls tell us nothing about what Canadians will decide they want.

Richard Gwyn usually appears on Tuesdays. Email: [gwyn @ sympatico.ca](mailto:gwyn@sympatico.ca)

Three Hills soldier to receive medal; One of five with ties to province to receive meritorious service honour

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PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
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SECTION: Cityplus/Alberta
PAGE: B5
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Journal Stock / Lt.-Col. Colin Keiver, recipient of meritorious service medal ;
KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=EDMONTON
BYLINE: Jamie Hall
SOURCE: The Edmonton Journal
WORD COUNT: 427

EDMONTON – Getting called to the boss's office can be a nerve-racking experience — even if you're a lieutenant-colonel in the Canadian military.

"I thought I was getting it, for sure," said Lt.-Col. Colin Keiver, laughing about the day he was summoned by his commanding officer, "especially when he told me not to bother sitting down."

What Keiver got was high praise from the country's commander-in-chief,

Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean, in the form of a citation read to him by his boss, telling him he'd been awarded a meritorious service medal.

The medal is in recognition of a military deed or activity performed in a highly professional manner, according to a high standard that brings benefit or honour to the Canadian Forces.

The deed in this case recognized Keiver's role in a six-month peacekeeping mission in Khartoum, Sudan, in 2005-06.

Pretty heady stuff for an Alberta boy who grew up in Three Hills.

"It's pretty cool," agreed Keiver, 39, in a phone interview from Winnipeg, where he's stationed.

"To stand in front of the Governor General and get a medal pinned on you isn't something that happens every day."

Keiver, then a major, was the air operations adviser for Task Force Addis Ababa in Khartoum from Nov. 28, 2005, to May 26, 2006.

His efforts to institute and maintain rigorous air safety standards "were instrumental in improving and maintaining the only viable means of allied transport in Sudan and directly contributed to the success of the mission," said information released Monday by the Governor General's office.

"Basically," said Keiver, "I was part of a mission, which is still ongoing, to keep peace in Darfur.

"I helped to set up processes and mechanisms to effectively use their air resources. The helicopters and transport aircraft were critical to moving people, equipment, and even food for the peacekeeping force in Darfur, which is large in area and very remote."

Four other soldiers with Alberta ties also will receive meritorious service medals: Maj. Andrew John Lussier of Denison, Capt. Steven Kelly MacBeth of Wainwright and Master Warrant

Officer Bradley William John Montgomery of Denwood for their work in Afghanistan, and Lt.-Col. Barry Marshall Southern of Calgary for his work in Jerusalem.

Keiver and his wife, Jennifer, will travel to Ottawa for the Oct. 12 ceremony.

His parents, Glen and Sandra, meanwhile, who still farm in Three Hills with his younger brother, Andrew, will head to Winnipeg to babysit their grandchildren, Micayla, 8, and William, 6.

By the time Keiver was his son's age, he already knew he wanted a career as a pilot. "I didn't always know I wanted to be in the military," said Keiver, "but I always wanted to be a pilot. I joined air cadets when I was young so I could get exposure to airplanes and that kind of logically led to the military."

He has travelled the world during his career and feels strongly about Canada's military presence in places like Sudan and Afghanistan, often the source of controversy.

"The truly important message here," said Keiver, "is that we're out there helping others so they can help themselves; I don't think we should ever give up on things like that."

jhall@thejournal.canwest.com

Canadians' toughest foes in Afghanistan are Chechens

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DATELINE: KANDAHAR, Afghanistan
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 372

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 in the Panjwei/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 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 allowed to give his name only as Pete, replied with a grin and classic military jargon: "I have not interacted verbally with them."

The trend towards more foreign fighters 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 host 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, but what they get mostly is cannon fodder. They are not that well-trained."

"My assessment is that 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."

Officer's death ruled suicide

IDNUMBER 200709250022
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
COLUMN: Canada Digest
KEYWORDS: SUICIDE
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 46

OTTAWA – The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service has ruled the death of a Canadian officer in Afghanistan was as the result of a suicide.

Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul died as the result of a self–inflicted gunshot wound, the CFNIS said in a release Monday.

The death occurred Aug. 29 at his living quarters in Kabul.

Mission's future known by April

IDNUMBER 200709250017
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
COLUMN: Canada Digest
KEYWORDS: POLITICAL PARTIES; POLITICIANS; OPPOSITION
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 123

OTTAWA – Canada will decide by April whether or not to extend its mission in Afghanistan, Defence Minister Peter MacKay said late Monday.

He said the decision would be made by the time of the NATO summit in Romania. "It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting," said MacKay.

The Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois are demanding the mission not be renewed beyond February 2009, when its mandate is due to expire. The New Democratic Party has demanded an immediate withdrawal.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has said he wants a consensus on Canadian troop deployment but also does not want to pull them out when he considers their job unfinished.

Canada has 2,500 troops in the south of the country helping Afghans fight against the resurgent Taliban. Since 2002, 70 Canadian troops have been killed in Afghanistan.

Pentagon gets OK to try Khadr for murder

IDNUMBER 200709250011
PUBLICATION: Edmonton Journal
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
KEYWORDS: CANADIANS; PRISONERS OF WAR; INTERNATIONAL LAW;
TERRORISM; MURDERS; CRIME; UNITED STATES
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 243

WASHINGTON – A U.S. military appeals court on Monday dealt Canadian Omar Khadr a major legal setback, overturning a decision to throw out murder and terrorism charges against the alleged al-Qaida operative.

The decision by the U.S. Court of Military Commission Review means the Pentagon once again has the green light to put the 21-year-old on trial before a war-crimes tribunal at Guantanamo Bay.

"We welcome the court's decision and will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial," Pentagon spokesman Jeffrey Gordon said Monday night.

Khadr's case was thrown into legal limbo last June when Army Col. Peter Brownback ruled the Bush administration's war crimes tribunals lacked jurisdiction to try Khadr because the U.S. government had made no determination whether the Canadian was an "unlawful enemy combatant."

Khadr is accused of throwing a grenade that killed U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher Speer in the summer of 2002 during a firefight between American forces and al-Qaida fighters near Khost, Afghanistan. He was 15 years old at time.

In its ruling against Khadr on Monday, the military appeals court agreed there was a significant distinction between a detainee's status as a lawful or unlawful enemy combatant.

Dennis Edney, one of two Canadian lawyers representing Khadr before the tribunals, said the decision confirmed his view that the Pentagon has stacked the legal deck against his client.

"It astounds me that this (U.S.) administration goes to such gymnastics to avoid giving this young man due process in an ordinary court of law with proper rules of evidence," Edney said Monday night.

Afghan culture big on battle

IDNUMBER 200709250026
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
KEYWORDS: WAR; TERRORISM; FOREIGN AID; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: KABUL
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 481

For residents of Afghanistan's bustling capital, the prospective departure of Canada's soldiers by February 2009 produces mostly quizzical looks. It seems inconceivable that NATO's International Security Assistance Force would withdraw its troops, leaving these war-weary people to the mercy of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Even the more benign alternative to a complete withdrawal -- training Afghan soldiers and police to look after security while western nations focus on humanitarian and development work -- is at best undesirable.

"What is the point of sending your army to Afghanistan if it isn't going to fight?" demands Muhammad Noor Sahak, director of the OMAR war museum and a graduate student in Pushtun literature.

"Given Afghanistan's famous warrior culture, most Afghans like ISAF but they will only continue liking ISAF if they think it is making their lives more secure.

And the only way to do that is to fight. If ISAF fails, the Russians, who don't want NATO here, could interfere.

So will Iran.

For Afghans, a pressing question is whether the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai will accept a Taliban offer to begin peace talks. The answer is an overwhelming yes, although not if it means accepting the Taliban's condition that ISAF's 36,000 troops must leave the country first. Karzai has already flatly rejected that proposal.

"I don't like ISAF. I love them. They are good people," said Balyaly, a 22-year-old carpet salesman.

"My guess is that at least 80 per cent of our people support them, although it may be more than that. The Taliban is very popular in a few places, but not many."

Using a variety of obscene hand gestures, Balyaly, who like many Afghans uses only one name, denounces the Taliban as "very dirty." He seemed genuinely shocked that Canada is considering withdrawing its 2,500 troops from the volatile south of Afghanistan and that the Netherlands is contemplating a similar pullout.

Mukhtar Subur, 19, who like many young Afghans does not have a job, was also adamant that the NATO forces must remain and continue to fight.

"Our whole country profits from the gifts of ISAF," Subur says. "If they leave, we all know the Taliban will come back and the Afghan people will have trouble again."

Hamid Fahim, who collects ancient Enfield rifles used by the mujahedeen in their holy war against the Red Army during the 1980s, observes that Afghanistan has been in a state of perpetual war for nearly three decades. By contrast, the Canadians, who first fought on the front lines in Kandahar in 2002, are relative newcomers. Seventy Canadian soldiers have died here — about the number of Afghans who die fighting on many days.

"They are not like the Russians who tried to take our whole country," Fahim said.

"ISAF comes to fight beside us, not against us. It is much better for us if they stay."

Hamid's father, Abdul Hadi, who thought he might be 57 years old but looked much older, also complimented ISAF and the Canadians, but said they must do more to bring security to Afghanistan.

"I don't like the Taliban at all. But I remember that, during the Taliban days, if someone was killed, the Taliban would kill his killer. I liked that because it meant that we were not afraid."

Canadian soldier's death ruled suicide

IDNUMBER 200709250025
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A9
KEYWORDS: !@DATELINE=OTTAWA
SOURCE: Agence France–Presse
WORD COUNT: 90

A Canadian soldier's recent death from a gunshot wound in the Kabul headquarters of the NATO–lead forces in Afghanistan has been deemed a suicide, the Canadian defense ministry said Monday.

After conducting a thorough investigation, the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service "has concluded that his tragic death was a result of a self–inflicted gunshot wound," the defense ministry said in a statement.

"His death has been ruled a suicide."

Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul succumbed to a gunshot wound in his living quarters within the secure compound of the ISAF headquarters in Kabul on Aug. 29.

Khadr ruling reversed; Pentagon given green light to prosecute

IDNUMBER 200709250018
PUBLICATION: Calgary Herald
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Omar Khadr;
KEYWORDS: CANADIANS; PRISONERS OF WAR; INTERNATIONAL LAW; TERRORISM
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 208

A U.S. military appeals court on Monday dealt Canadian Omar Khadr a major legal setback, overturning a decision to throw out murder and terrorism charges against the alleged al-Qaeda operative.

The decision by the U.S. Court of Military Commission Review means the Pentagon once again has the green light to put the

21-year-old on trial before a war-crimes tribunal at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"We welcome the court's decision and will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial," Pentagon spokesman Jeffrey Gordon said Monday night.

Khadr's case had been thrown into legal limbo last June when Army Col. Peter Brownback ruled the Bush administration's war crimes tribunals lacked jurisdiction to try Khadr because the U.S. government had made no determination whether the Canadian was an "unlawful enemy combatant." In that ruling, the military judge said Khadr had only been deemed an "enemy combatant," leaving open the possibility he was legally engaged in battle with American troops.

Khadr is accused of throwing a grenade that killed U.S. Army Sgt. Christopher Speer in the summer of 2002 during a firefight between American forces and al-Qaeda fighters near Khost, Afghanistan. He was 15 years old at time.

In its ruling against Khadr, the military appeals court agreed there was a significant distinction between a detainee's status as a lawful or unlawful enemy combatant.

Vandoos go beyond the wire

SOURCETAG 0709250378
PUBLICATION: The Winnipeg Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 11
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 516

When the Vandoos replaced the RCR battlegroup in Kandahar, many people -- a lot of them soldiers -- felt the Quebec unit would opt out of heavy fighting and concentrate on reconstruction, security and humanitarian work.

Unlike the Patricias and RCR, some felt they would try to avoid combat.

This assumption has proved ludicrously false.

For those who doubted the Vandoos willingness to emulate their Canadian predecessors in Kandahar, the opposite seems to be the case. Reports I get from Kandahar are that the Vandoos are not hesitant about going "beyond the wire," and at times the whole battlegroup has been deployed against the Taliban.

One whose reporting can be trusted, and who has spent more time in Afghanistan than any journalist, is Matthew Fisher of the National Post. Last week he reported that a Taliban ambush was not only thwarted, but that far from being intimidated the Vandoos cleaned out the enemy without incurring one casualty.

Although charged with security in an area that requires a brigade -- or three battalions -- to control, the Vandoos are upholding the legacy of their Canadian predecessors. This has to be good news for Canada, whose reputation and influence hinges on its military performance in Afghanistan.

MISCONCEPTION

A lot of the misconception was prompted by the political climate that's gained ground in Canada, including the belief that since the Afghanistan mission is unpopular in Quebec, the present Tory government risks losing votes (and a possible majority) by its hitherto strong support for the military. Liberal leader Stephane Dion has already pledged to withdrawing our troops from Afghanistan in 2009.

As well, Prime Minister Stephen Harper talks of changing the military mandate come 2009. All motivated by the hunger for Quebec votes.

The cynical view that the Vandoos might have sought to avoid combat and thus lower the risk of casualties during their six months in Kandahar, was prompted by their reputation among some in the military as being Canada's "Teflon" regiment on whom no wrong-doing sticks and which gets favoured treatment from Ottawa.

There's some substance to the "Teflon" accusation. In the gross bonding initiations that shocked the nation about the Airborne Regiment, it was the Vandoos commando (company) of the Airborne doing it; the Bakovici mental hospital scandal in Bosnia again included some Vandoos.

What's significant for Canadians in Afghanistan is that France's President Nicolas Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner seem ready to not only send fighter jets to help out in Kandahar, but also a battalion or even a brigade of French troops.

Not only that, France now sees the development of a nuclear threat from Iran as something that has to be curtailed, even if it means war. That's an enormous change. Even the respected Economist sees Iran as a threat and calls its dangerous leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "a Holocaust denier and a vicious anti-Semite."

If Iran develops nuclear weapons, will neighbouring Muslim countries be far behind? The British Spectator (in my view, the world's best news commentary magazine) bluntly says there's no way to avoid a war against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

As yet, our politicians haven't twigged to this possibility, but our soldiers know it. And the Vandoos are in the front line in Afghanistan, doing the main work of NATO and by their example may help moderate public opinion in Quebec.

Will we extend Afghan mission?

SOURCETAG 0709250577

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.09.25

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 32

BYLINE: CP

DATELINE: ORLEANS

WORD COUNT: 106

Canada will announce by next April whether it plans to extend its combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada must deliver an answer at the April NATO summit in Bucharest.

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the current mission, and the opposition Liberals have been pressuring Prime Minister Stephen Harper to warn the allies of Canada's plans.

If the minority government collapses this fall — which is a possibility — Afghanistan seems poised to become a key election issue.

The Liberals and Bloc Quebecois want an end to the mission once Canada's international commitment elapses in February 2009, and the NDP want Canadian troops withdrawn even sooner.

Liberal boss Stephane Dion has said NATO must be given notice now so that an orderly transition can take place. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Canada gets tanked

SOURCETAG 0709250576
PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 32
ILLUSTRATION: photo of HAMID KARZAI Afghanistan's president
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 61

Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai fracture the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, an international think-tank charged yesterday.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and al-Qaida supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency. **KEYWORDS=CANADA**

Khadr raps reinstated Court overrules judge who threw out terror charges against Canuck

SOURCETAG 0709250558

PUBLICATION: The Toronto Sun

DATE: 2007.09.25

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: 14

ILLUSTRATION: file photo by CP Canadian Omar Khadr, shown here in a photo taken before his arrest and imprisonment 3 years ago, had terror charges against him reinstated yesterday by a military appeals court in the U.S.

BYLINE: AP AND CP

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

WORD COUNT: 304

A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon yesterday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled a military court set up by the U.S. administration was the proper venue for deciding whether Khadr is an "unlawful enemy combatant" and trying him on terrorism charges.

The ruling reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunal system created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees, unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

That ruling threatened to force the Pentagon to start over with tribunals for a number of detainees. Pentagon officials argued the June 4 ruling was just a matter of semantics and insufficient to dismiss the case.

Yesterday's decision, the first ever by the newly formed appeals court, agreed.

TRIAL JUDGE 'ERRED'

The appeals judges, who are military officers, said the trial judge "erred in ruling he lacked authority ... to determine whether Mr. Khadr is an 'unlawful enemy combatant' for purposes of establishing the military commission's initial jurisdiction to try him."

Khadr, 21, was captured when he was 15 and faces life in prison on charges of murder, conspiracy, spying and supporting terrorism. He is charged with tossing a grenade that killed one U.S. soldier and injured another in Afghanistan in 2002.

80 DETAINEES

His trial would be the first full legal airing of the Guantanamo detainees, who include several "high-value" prisoners, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 2001 terror attacks on the United States.

Eventually, the U.S. government hopes to prosecute about 80 detainees, most picked up on battlefields in

Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Other western countries have insisted their citizens be brought home from Guantanamo to face justice but Ottawa has refused to intervene on Khadr's behalf.

"We're relying on the Canadian people to pressure the Canadian government to do what's right," said Dennis Edney, an Edmonton lawyer who also represents Khadr.

The Canadian Bar Association demanded in August that Prime Minister Stephen Harper start negotiating with U.S. authorities to send Khadr home.

Dozens of Canadian academics, opposition MPs and former politicians filed a brief with the U.S. Supreme Court. KEYWORDS=WORLD

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
TYPE : Sun Media Special
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

NATO short of troops

IDNUMBER 200709250061
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A17
COLUMN: Fast Track
KEYWORDS: ORGANIZATIONS; FOREIGN RELATIONS; DEFENCE; WAR; ARMED FORCES; AFGHANISTAN; BELGIUM
DATELINE: BRUSSELS
SOURCE: AFP; Reuters
WORD COUNT: 81

The NATO-led security force in Afghanistan needs more helicopters, troops and equipment to deal with booby-traps in its fight against a Taliban-led insurgency, a senior military officer said in Brussels, the NATO seat. Asked when the Afghan army would be able to stand on its own feet, Brig.-Gen. Vincent Lafontaine said the beginning of 2009. General Bismillah Khan, the Afghan army chief of staff, has said 2011.

Court rules against Khadr

IDNUMBER 200709250056
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A16
COLUMN: Fast Track
KEYWORDS: CANADIANS; PRISONERS OF WAR; INTERNATIONAL LAW;
TERRORISM;CRIME; CUBA; AFGHANISTAN
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
SOURCE: Washington Post; AFP; Bloomberg News; CanWest News Service;Reuters
WORD COUNT: 67

The new U.S. Court of Military Commission Review has ordered a military judge to reopen the terrorism case against 20-year-old Canadian Omar Khadr, accused of killing a U.S. serviceman in Afghanistan, ruling that the judge's decision this year to dismiss the case was in error. Khadr has been held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, five years.

Soldier's death in Kabul a suicide

IDNUMBER 200709250048
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A14
COLUMN: Fast Track
KEYWORDS: WAR
DATELINE: OTTAWA
SOURCE: AFP; CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 37

Major Raymond Ruckpaul's death Aug. 29 from a gunshot wound in the Kabul headquarters of the NATO-lead forces in Afghanistan has been deemed a suicide, the Canadian defence ministry said yesterday.

Election? It's down to the Liberals, NDP says; Bloc's five conditions for supporting Tories won't be met: forecast

IDNUMBER 200709250009
PUBLICATION: Montreal Gazette
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A2
KEYWORDS: ELECTIONS; POLITICAL PARTIES; POLITICIANS; CANDIDATES; GOVERNMENT; UNITED STATES; VOTING
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: JULIET O'NEILL
SOURCE: CanWest News Service
WORD COUNT: 531

The Liberals will determine whether the minority Conservative government survives or an election is triggered, New Democrats predicted yesterday.

Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe's declaration of five conditions required to ensure his party will support Prime Minister Stephen Harper when Parliament resumes shifted the onus onto the Liberals and the NDP to prop up the government.

NDP House leader Libby Davies is predicting that neither Duceppe's "unrealistic" demands nor NDP leader Jack Layton's priorities will be addressed in the Oct. 16 speech from the throne, leaving the Liberals with the deciding vote.

The Liberals and NDP are not aligned on all of Duceppe's five conditions, however, and it would take a united vote by all three parties to bring down the government, which holds 126 of 308 seats in the Commons.

Here are Duceppe's conditions and what the other parties say:

Spending power: The Bloc is demanding the elimination of all federal spending powers in provincial jurisdictions. Davies said that condition is so vague as to be meaningless. Liberal whip Karen Redman, MP for Kitchener–Centre, said Liberals believe the federal government has a role to play in people's lives. She cited the 2004 federal program to share gas tax revenues with the municipalities as an example.

Environment: The government must respect the Kyoto Protocol, the Bloc says. The Liberals and NDP have the same position as the Bloc in support of the international environmental accord that the Conservative government has abandoned. If any issue has the potential to unite the opposition, this is it.

Afghanistan: The Bloc is seeking a clear commitment from the government that Canadian soldiers will leave Afghanistan when the current mission ends in February 2009. The Liberals have long called for the government to give NATO notice of that scheduled withdrawal. The NDP, however, has sought immediate withdrawal of troops and said it would not support a planned Liberal motion on the February 2009 withdrawal date when Parliament resumes.

Regional economics: The Bloc wants assistance for forestry workers and continuation of supply management in the agricultural sector. These are not the kind of big issues on which a minority government is likely to stand or fall.

Redman, who notes the Liberals have similarly called for federal assistance to the manufacturing sector, dismissed Duceppe's demands as "sabre rattling" and expressed skepticism about whether the Bloc leader would stick to his position.

"Mr. Duceppe has demonstrated all through this session that he is willing to make compromises and he is the one that has, more often than not, propped up this government," Redman said.

Asked if Duceppe's declaration increased pressure on the Liberals, Redman said her party's role remains unchanged.

"We will ... see what's in the speech from the throne before we start drawing these lines in the sand," she said.

Davies said she believes the onus will be on the Liberals for the deciding vote on the throne speech.

"I think it puts the Liberals in a position where they're going to have to make a decision and a choice about whether they mean what they say or are they going to try to wiggle out of it if they don't want an election."

Davies also said that if Harper does not want to risk an election, he may produce such a low-key speech from the throne that none of the hot-button issues comes to a head and he'll get enough support to survive a confidence vote.

Vandoos go beyond the wire

SOURCETAG 0709250287
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 15
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 516

When the Vandoos replaced the RCR battlegroup in Kandahar, many people -- a lot of them soldiers -- felt the Quebec unit would opt out of heavy fighting and concentrate on reconstruction, security and humanitarian work.

Unlike the Patricias and RCR, some felt they would try to avoid combat.

This assumption has proved ludicrously false.

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Khadr case thrown back to military court

SOURCETAG 0709250279
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 11
ILLUSTRATION: photo of OMAR KHADR Guantanamo Bay detainee
BYLINE: AP AND CP
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 187

A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon yesterday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled a military court set up by the U.S. administration was the proper venue for deciding whether Khadr is an "unlawful enemy combatant" and trying him on terrorism charges.

The ruling reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunals created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees, unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

That ruling threatened to force the Pentagon to start over with tribunals for a number of detainees. Pentagon officials argued the June 4 ruling was just a matter of semantics and insufficient to dismiss the case.

Yesterday's decision, the first ever by the newly formed appeals court, agreed.

The appeals judges, who are military officers, said the trial judge "erred in ruling he lacked authority ... to determine whether Mr. Khadr is an 'unlawful enemy combatant' for purposes of establishing the military commission's initial jurisdiction to try him."

The Pentagon said in response to yesterday's decision: "We will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial."

Eventually, the U.S. government hopes to prosecute about 80 detainees, most picked up in Afghanistan and Pakistan. KEYWORDS=WORLD

Vandoos go beyond wire

SOURCETAG 0709250463
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: A7
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 527

When the Vandoos replaced the RCR battle group in Kandahar, many people -- a lot of them soldiers -- felt the Quebec unit would opt out of heavy fighting and concentrate on reconstruction, security and humanitarian work.

Unlike the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the RCR, some felt the Vandoos would try to avoid combat.

This assumption has proved ludicrously false.

For those who doubted the Vandoos' willingness to emulate their Canadian predecessors in Kandahar, the opposite seems to be the case. Reports I get from Kandahar are that the Vandoos are not hesitant about going "beyond the wire," and at times the whole battle group has been deployed against the Taliban.

One whose reporting can be trusted, and who has spent more time in Afghanistan than any journalist, is Matthew Fisher of the National Post. Last week he reported that not only was a Taliban ambush thwarted, but also that far from being intimidated, the Vandoos cleaned out the enemy without incurring one casualty.

Although charged with security in an area that requires a brigade -- or three battalions -- to control, the Vandoos are upholding the legacy of their Canadian predecessors. This has to be good news for Canada, whose reputation and influence hinges on its military performance in Afghanistan.

A lot of the misconception was prompted by the political climate that's gained ground in Canada, including the belief that since the Afghanistan mission is unpopular in Quebec, the present Tory government risks losing votes (and a possible majority) by its hitherto strong support for the military. Liberal leader Stephane Dion has already pledged to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan in 2009.

As well, Prime Minister Stephen Harper talks of changing the military mandate come 2009. All motivated by the hunger for Quebec votes.

The cynical view that the Vandoos might have sought to avoid combat and thus lower the risk of casualties during their six months in Kandahar was prompted by their reputation among some in the military as being Canada's "Teflon" regiment on whom no wrongdoing sticks and which gets favoured treatment from Ottawa.

There's some substance to the "Teflon" accusation. In the gross bonding initiations that shocked the nation about the Airborne Regiment, it was the Vandoos commando (company) of the Airborne doing it; the Bakovici mental hospital scandal in Bosnia again included some Vandoos.

What's significant for Canadians in Afghanistan is that France's President Nicolas Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner seem ready to send not only fighter jets to help out in Kandahar, but also a

battalion or even a brigade of French troops.

Not only that, France now sees the development of a nuclear threat from Iran as something that has to be curtailed, even if it means war. That's an enormous change. Even the respected Economist sees Iran as a threat and calls its dangerous leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "a Holocaust denier and a vicious anti-Semite."

If Iran develops nuclear weapons, will neighbouring Muslim countries be far behind? The British Spectator (in my view, the world's best news commentary magazine) bluntly says there's no way to avoid a war against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

As yet, our politicians haven't twigged to this possibility, but our soldiers know it. And the Vandoos are in the front line in Afghanistan, doing the main work of NATO and by their example may help moderate public opinion in Quebec.

Canada should finish mission in Afghanistan

SOURCETAG 0709250462
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: A7
BYLINE: JIM HORNE, LONDON
COLUMN: Letters to the Editor
WORD COUNT: 77

Regarding your editorial NATO has feet of clay (Sept. 24), Lorrie Goldstein states that "if Afghanistan collapses into anarchy, the fault will not be Canada's. It will be NATO's, for waving the white flag of surrender".

I respectfully disagree. It will be Canada's fault for failing to demonstrate the mettle to carry on with the mission and the resolve to finish what it started.

Winston Churchill once said, "It's not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what is required."

Italian agents rescued in Afghan ambush

SOURCETAG 0709250455
PUBLICATION: The London Free Press
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 196

Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives yesterday in a daring ambush and gunbattle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured — one of them seriously — Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed in a landmine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

The two Italians, who were working for the Sismi intelligence service, disappeared along with their two Afghan colleagues Saturday. They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnappers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, a senior commander said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gunbattle that killed at least nine of the kid- nappers. **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

President rejects attack plans

SOURCETAG 0709250448

PUBLICATION: The London Free Press

DATE: 2007.09.25

EDITION: Final

SECTION: News

PAGE: A4

BYLINE: JOHN DANISZEWSKI AND EDITH M. LEDERER, AP

DATELINE: NEW YORK

WORD COUNT: 191

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said yesterday Iran would not launch an attack on Israel or any other country, and he does not believe the United States is preparing for war against Iran.

"Iran will not attack any country," Ahmadinejad told AP, when asked if his country would ever strike first against Israel.

Iran has always maintained a defensive policy, not an offensive one, he said, and has "never sought to expand its territory."

He said he did not believe the United States was preparing for war.

"I believe that some of the talk in this regard arises first of all from anger. Secondly, it serves the electoral purposes domestically in this country. Third, it serves as a cover for policy failures over Iraq."

Ahmadinejad dismissed statements by U.S. military officers and intelligence reports that Iran secretly provides weapons to insurgents fighting against U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly the shaped projectiles that have harmed U.S. troops in roadside attacks.

"Why would we want to do that?" Ahmadinejad declared. "This would really be inappropriate for us. We are friends with both Iraq and Afghanistan. Insecurity in Iraq and Afghanistan undermines our own national security; it basically goes against what we believe."

Instead, he described himself as "extremely unhappy with the situation prevailing in both Afghanistan and Iraq. It saddens us that people lose their lives in Iraq." **KEYWORDS=WORLD**

Italian commandos rescue hostages

SOURCETAG 0709250796
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 38
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 115

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Court rules Khadr charges stand

SOURCETAG 0709250786
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 26
BYLINE: CP AND AP
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 113

A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon yesterday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

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The ruling reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunal system created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees, unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

Khadr was captured when he was 15 and faces life in prison on charges of murder, conspiracy, spying and supporting terrorism counts.

He is charged with tossing a grenade that killed one U.S. soldier and injured another in Afghanistan in 2002.
KEYWORDS=WORLD

Vandoos go beyond the wire

SOURCETAG 0709250769
PUBLICATION: The Edmonton Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 11
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 516

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MISCONCEPTION

A lot of the misconception was prompted by the political climate that's gained ground in Canada, including the belief that since the Afghanistan mission is unpopular in Quebec, the present Tory government risks losing votes (and a possible majority) by its hitherto strong support for the military. Liberal leader Stephane Dion has already pledged to withdrawing our troops from Afghanistan in 2009.

As well, Prime Minister Stephen Harper talks of changing the military mandate come 2009. All motivated by the hunger for Quebec votes.

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There's some substance to the "Teflon" accusation. In the gross bonding initiations that shocked the nation about the Airborne Regiment, it was the Vandoos commando (company) of the Airborne doing it; the Bakovici mental hospital scandal in Bosnia again included some Vandoos.

What's significant for Canadians in Afghanistan is that France's President Nicolas Sarkozy and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner seem ready to not only send fighter jets to help out in Kandahar, but also a battalion or even a brigade of French troops.

Not only that, France now sees the development of a nuclear threat from Iran as something that has to be curtailed, even if it means war. That's an enormous change. Even the respected Economist sees Iran as a threat and calls its dangerous leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, "a Holocaust denier and a vicious anti-Semite."

If Iran develops nuclear weapons, will neighbouring Muslim countries be far behind? The British Spectator (in my view, the world's best news commentary magazine) bluntly says there's no way to avoid a war against Iran's nuclear ambitions.

As yet, our politicians haven't twigged to this possibility, but our soldiers know it. And the Vandoos are in the front line in Afghanistan, doing the main work of NATO and by their example may help moderate public opinion in Quebec.

Feds say war pullout statement can wait

SOURCETAG 0709250700
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 36
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 173

Despite political pressure for a quick answer, the Conservative government says it has until April to announce whether it will extend Canada's combat mission in southern Afghanistan.

Opposition parties are demanding an announcement in next month's throne speech, but Defence Minister Peter MacKay says Canada has until a NATO summit next year in Bucharest, Romania.

That statement drew a scornful response from the Opposition and warnings that government foot-dragging could help provoke an election.

The pressure on Canada to decide -- coupled with the prospect of an election campaign -- suggests Afghanistan is about to become the focus of a heated debate.

"There is a NATO meeting in April 2008," MacKay said.

"It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting."

The governing Conservatives are the only party that favours an extension of the current mission.

All Opposition parties are demanding the government include a clear statement on Afghanistan in the policy-setting throne speech, which will be the subject of a confidence vote next month.

And if Prime Minister Stephen Harper refuses?

"It's over and out for him," said Bloc Quebecois MP Claude Bachand.

He repeated his leader Gilles Duceppe's weekend warning the Bloc is prepared to trigger an election.

"We will vote against the throne speech. It's one of our five conditions. He can accept all our other four conditions -- and not that one -- and we will still vote against the throne speech."

KEYWORDS=NATIONAL

Kidnapped Italians rescued

SOURCETAG 0709250699
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 36
BYLINE: AP
DATELINE: KABUL
WORD COUNT: 89

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Canada urged to back Taliban peace bid

SOURCETAG 0709250698
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: 36
BYLINE: CP
DATELINE: OTTAWA
WORD COUNT: 127

Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai break the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, says an international think-tank.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that's conducted extensive research in war-torn southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, council president, says it's time for Canada to take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times." **KEYWORDS=NATIONAL**

Vandoos go beyond the wire

SOURCETAG 0709250673
PUBLICATION: The Calgary Sun
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: Editorial/Opinion
PAGE: 15
BYLINE: PETER WORTHINGTON
WORD COUNT: 516

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Chief's decal decision wins unanimous support

IDNUMBER 200709250074
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: City
PAGE: B5
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 133

Ottawa's police board yesterday unanimously backed Chief Vern White's decision to put "Support our Troops" stickers on police vehicles. Chief White came under fire over the decision because some critics say the stickers have become a political symbol of support for Canada's role in the war in Afghanistan. In its motion of support, the board said "the decals express support for the service and sacrifices of the military men and women serving our country at home and around the world in various missions, and do not express an opinion on a particular operation or campaign." Two weeks ago, council voted to put the stickers on all city owned vehicles, including buses.

Honoured for taking charge in deadly skirmish with Taliban

IDNUMBER 200709250064
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: City
PAGE: B1 / FRONT
ILLUSTRATION: Colour Photo: Sgt. Derek Fawcett is credited with saving the lives of fellow soldiers after they were surrounded on three sides by Taliban last year in Afghanistan. ; Photo: Tony Côté's ;
BYLINE: Tony Lofaro
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 540

It's a day that's painfully etched in Sgt. Derek Fawcett's memory.

It was Sept. 3, 2006, and Sgt. Fawcett was with Charles Company, First Battalion of the Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group on "Operation Medusa," in Afghanistan.

The early-morning operation was designed to take over a known Taliban stronghold at a school, about 10 kilometres from Kandahar, and secure the surrounding area.

But the plan went awry when the Taliban surrounded the Canadians on three sides and began firing with everything they had, including rocket-propelled grenades and small-arms fire.

Four Canadians died in that day's intense fighting, but Sgt. Fawcett is credited with saving the lives of many of his fellow soldiers when he took charge of a mass evacuation.

"It was dumb luck, I guess, that we were not hit," says Sgt. Fawcett, 38, whose vehicle was parked between two others that were struck that day by enemy fire.

"I feel very fortunate," he says.

Sgt. Fawcett grew up in Blackburn Hamlet and joined the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa in 1986 as a reservist, before joining the Royal Canadian Regiment in 1995. He had only been in Afghanistan a short time before the deadly attack.

Yesterday, Rideau Hall announced that Sgt. Fawcett has been named the recipient of the Medal of Military Valour for his display of gallantry and devotion to duty in combat.

In addition, 23 other Canadian Forces members will receive the Meritorious Service Cross and the Meritorious Service Medal.

The awards will be handed out at an Oct. 12 ceremony at the Governor General's residence.

"As soon as I realized we had taken casualties, I dismounted with two of my troops and we went to the

G-wagon to grab the two wounded," he recalls.

He says some of the soldiers had taken the wounded back to his vehicle, but he and another officer became trapped behind the G-wagon, where the body of Warrant Officer Rick Nolan lay on the ground.

"We were pinned down there," remembers Sgt. Fawcett.

He says it was painful to see the body of a close friend, but he had no choice but to carry on with the job of rescuing the others.

"At the time, you don't really think about it. You just do what you're trained to do and what you're expected to do," he says.

Since two of the warrant officers were killed in the line of duty and the company sergeant-major was also wounded, Sgt. Fawcett was forced to take charge and set up a casualty collection point for the dead and wounded. He says U.S. helicopters flew in to pick up the wounded and he was responsible for getting the remaining troops ammunition to continue the fight.

The Canadian soldiers were under fire for more than four hours before they withdrew to safer ground, he says.

The attack that day was the most intense battle he had experienced in Afghanistan. Previously, there had been only small skirmishes with the enemy.

Sgt. Fawcett doesn't like to talk about the incident that cost the lives of his friends.

"Only time heals," says Sgt. Fawcett, now stationed at the Land Forces Central Area Training Centre for the Canadian Army in Meaford, about 25 kilometres east of Owen Sound in southwestern Ontario.

"I'm not one to blow my own horn, but I appreciate getting the medal," says Sgt. Fawcett. "There's a lot of guys over there who haven't received anything yet. Hopefully, they will."

Other Winners

Other award recipients from Ottawa include: Lt.-Col. Simon Hetherington and Lt.-Col. Jean-Marc Lanthier (Meritorious Service Cross); Lt.-Col. Shane Brennan, Cmdr. Darren Hawco and Lt.-Col. Barry Southern (Meritorious Service Medal).

Online: Blog

'It's only a prostate, right?'

'I am sure that the lack of food pales in comparison with the chemicals I must ingest a few hours from now and then again tonight. They are designed to make sure there is absolutely nothing left inside. "Stay near the 'loo'," I was told ...'

To read Tony Côté's blog on his cancer experience go to blogroll at ottawacitizen.com

ottawacitizen.com

Tony Côté's Action Line will return.

Mr. Dion misses target

IDNUMBER 200709250057
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A12
COLUMN: Andrew Cohen
BYLINE: Andrew Cohen
SOURCE: Citizen Special
WORD COUNT: 742

It may have been just a coincidence that Stéphane Dion gave a major speech on foreign policy the week the Liberals lost three byelections in Quebec and his leadership came under fire.

Or, maybe it wasn't. Maybe Mr. Dion thought that savaging the government would remind critics just how tough, resilient and aggressive a leader he is. Well, he certainly tried.

Dipping into his thesaurus, Mr. Dion called the Conservative approach to the world "mediocre," "rigid," "simplistic," "incompetent," "amateurish" and "ineffective." He is against buying unwanted military equipment, "insulting" China, selling out on softwood lumber, abandoning mediation.

He reserved his harshest criticism for the war in Afghanistan, where the government's inconsistency has been "appalling" and "inexcusable."

And the reason for all this? Blame "the ideological kinship" between Stephen Harper and George W. Bush, he said. You see, Canada's foreign policy is made in Washington, inspired by "the American right."

Why, you have only to look at the Kyoto Accord, which Mr. Harper opposes, like Mr. Bush. Or Iraq, which Mr. Harper supported. And, most pointedly, Afghanistan, where Mr. Harper is imitating Mr. Bush in his "unilateral behavior," whatever that means in a NATO operation.

Mr. Dion isn't entirely wrong about Mr. Harper. Cancelling the public diplomacy program, cutting the budget of Foreign Affairs and closing consulates in Milan, St. Petersburg and Osaka was petty. The government's indifference to Africa is misguided.

As for Afghanistan, the parliamentary vote in 2006 on the extension of the mission was Machiavellian. And promoting human rights in China collapsed because Ottawa lacks the will to take on business, even as Ottawa has reached out, laudably, to Taiwan.

But let's return to Mr. Dion. He may believe that Washington is dictating our foreign policy, although, more likely, he has learned that differentiating ourselves from the Americans is good politics here. Like his predecessors, he knows the uses of anti-Americanism, however coded.

Of course, Canada should tell the U.S. when it is wrong, as we did with Vietnam and Iraq. But Mr. Dion seems to have a way of diminishing the Americans, given to saying that America is our "ally" not our "model," as if it were a failed state. Instinctively, he seems to see the U.S., which is moving beyond George Bush to a new liberalism, as an adversary more than an opportunity.

Contrast his dark view of the Americans with the affection of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Leading a country ill-disposed to the Americans, he nonetheless declares that "we are not simply allies. We are friends." He speaks unabashedly of his admiration for American dynamism and fluidity.

It would be hard to imagine Mr. Dion saying that.

Fortunately, there is more to Mr. Dion's view of the world than his suspicion of the Americans. Unfortunately, it is shrouded in amnesia.

When Mr. Harper declares that "Canada is back," Mr. Dion guffaws. "Where on earth was Canada before?" he asks. "Was it on another planet?"

It's a good question. Perhaps Mr. Dion could tell us of the bright, sunlight uplands of Canada's internationalism before the Dark Age of the Conservatives.

Under Jean Chrétien, our diplomacy was unfocused and our diplomats demoralized. Our military was under-manned and under-equipped. Our international assistance fell to the bottom ranks of donor nations.

Mr. Dion carries around his own glass house when he pillories the Conservatives for their approach to human rights in China, which Mr. Chrétien abandoned at the same time he ignored Taiwan.

As for Afghanistan, Mr. Dion forgets that the Liberals began that mission and he now leads a party divided on it. That we could do things differently in Afghanistan is a legitimate position, but to attack the Conservatives here is hypocritical.

And what does Mr. Dion offer in the world? Staking a claim in the Arctic. Multilateralism. Human rights. International law. Fresh water management.

It's all pretty thin, this. Had he thought a little more, Mr. Dion might have allowed that Canada lost its place in the world in the 1990s (largely because of deficits), acknowledged that the Conservatives have made some reasonable choices (such as rebuilding the military), and proposed a policy embracing a renewed internationalism.

For starters, he might have read the paper on foreign policy commissioned in 2006 by Thomas Axworthy on behalf of the Liberals. It included proposals from a panel of interested Canadians (personal disclaimer: I was one) on assisting the green revolution in Africa, establishing a democracy institute, and renewing the Canada Corps. It also discussed peacekeeping, UN reform, a robust international aid and international health policy.

But if Mr. Dion read that report, policy wonk that he is, he never asked to meet its authors.

So here is a leader in trouble, looking for a target. So he chooses to unburden himself on foreign policy. So he launches rhetorical rockets, traffics in clichés, glorifies the past. He makes his bad week worse.

Andrew Cohen is the author of *The Unfinished Canadian: The People We Are*. Email: andrewzcohen@yahoo.ca

Cracks in the Bloc

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
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SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 270

The irrelevance of the Bloc Québécois is becoming more and more apparent. Even the so-called five demands just issued by leader Gilles Duceppe, in exchange for his party's support of the Conservative throne speech, smack of a certain desperation, no doubt the product of last week's Quebec byelections.

The three byelection results have generated interest mainly in the failing fortunes of Stéphane Dion's Liberal party, which lost the riding of Outremont, but the Bloc was also humiliated, losing the Roberval riding once held by popular party house leader Michel Gauthier, and nearly losing another.

The weakening of the Bloc suggests an ebbing in Quebec's desire for sovereignty. As the trend continues, the Bloc will struggle to hold together its coalition of right and left-wing nationalists, and to do this he needs a unifying cause, a victory.

And so, with his list of throne speech demands, he is picking a fight with the Conservative government. Mr. Duceppe is insisting that the government: end the military mission in southern Afghanistan in 2009; begin implementing the Kyoto accord; support supply management programs for farmers; not spend money in provincial jurisdictions; and help the forestry industry in Quebec.

It's really not much of a challenge. There is enough room for the Conservatives to address these "demands" within their overall program. But even if Mr. Harper resists the Bloc's bullying, the opposition Liberals are hardly willing to bring the government down this fall.

In a way that's too bad, because a federal election would expose the Bloc's obsolete agenda and possibly start it on the road to a well-deserved oblivion.

Views of Ottawa

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Bloc demands too 'unrealistic' to unseat Tories; Duceppe's list unlikely to garner required three-party support, MPs say

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PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A5
BYLINE: Juliet O'Neill
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 545

The Liberals will determine whether the minority Conservative government survives or an election is triggered, New Democrats predicted yesterday.

Bloc Québécois leader Gilles Duceppe's declaration of five conditions required to ensure his party will support Prime Minister Stephen Harper when Parliament resumes shifted the onus onto the Liberals and the NDP to prop up the government.

NDP House leader Libby Davies is predicting that neither Mr. Duceppe's "unrealistic" demands nor NDP leader Jack Layton's priorities will be addressed in the Oct. 16 speech from the throne, leaving the Liberals with the deciding vote.

The Liberals and the NDP are not aligned on all of Mr. Duceppe's five conditions, however, and it would take a united vote by all three parties to bring down the government, which holds 126 of 308 seats in the Commons.

Here are Mr. Duceppe's conditions and what the other parties say:

- Spending power: The Bloc is demanding the elimination of all federal spending powers in provincial jurisdictions. Ms. Davies said that condition is so vague as to be meaningless. Liberal whip Karen Redman, MP for Kitchener–Centre, said the Liberals believe the federal government has a role to play in people's lives. She cited the 2004 federal program to share gas-tax revenues with municipalities as an example.
- Environment: The government must respect the Kyoto Protocol, the Bloc says. The Liberals and the NDP have the same position as the Bloc in support of the international environmental accord that the Conservative government has abandoned. If any issue has the potential to unite the opposition, this is it.
- Afghanistan: The Bloc is seeking a clear commitment from the government that Canadian soldiers will leave Afghanistan when the current mission ends in February 2009. The Liberals have long called for the government to give NATO notice of that scheduled withdrawal. The NDP, however, has sought immediate withdrawal of troops and said it would not support a planned Liberal motion on the February 2009 withdrawal date when Parliament resumes.
- Regional economics: The Bloc wants assistance for forestry workers and continuation of supply management in the agricultural sector. These are not the kinds of big issues on which a minority government

is likely to stand or fall.

Ms. Redman, who says the Liberals have similarly called for federal assistance to the manufacturing sector, dismissed Mr. Duceppe's demands as "sabre-rattling" and expressed skepticism about whether the Bloc leader would stick to his position.

"Mr. Duceppe has demonstrated all through this session that he is willing to make compromises and he is the one that has, more often than not, propped up this government," Ms. Redman said in an interview.

Asked if Mr. Duceppe's declaration increased pressure on the Liberals, Ms. Redman said her party's role remains unchanged.

"We will ... see what's in the speech from the throne before we start drawing these lines in the sand," she said.

Ms. Davies said she believes the onus will be on the Liberals for the deciding vote on the throne speech.

"I think it puts the Liberals in a position where they're going to have to make a decision and a choice about whether they mean what they say or are they going to try and wiggle out of it if they don't want an election."

Ms. Davies also said if Mr. Harper does not want to risk an election, he may produce such a low-key speech from the throne that none of the hot-button issues comes to a head and he'll get enough support to survive a confidence vote.

New U.S. court orders military judge to try Khadr; Panel decides previous ruling was in 'error' and Canadian is subject to trial on terrorism charges

IDNUMBER 200709250019

PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen

DATE: 2007.09.25

EDITION: Early

SECTION: News

PAGE: A4

ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Janet Hamlin, Reuters / A U.S. military panel lastnight issued a 25–page report ruling that 21–year–old Canadian Omar Khadr can be considered an 'unlawful enemy combatant.' ;

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

SOURCE: The Washington Post

WORD COUNT: 269

WASHINGTON – The new U.S. Court of Military Commission Review has ordered a military judge to reopen the terrorism case against 21–year–old Canadian Omar Khadr, accused of killing a U.S. serviceman in Afghanistan, ruling that the judge's decision earlier this year to dismiss the case was in error.

In a 25–page opinion issued last night, a three–member panel of the court decided that judges in military commissions can determine whether terror suspects are "unlawful enemy combatants" and are therefore subject to trial. A judge at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, ruled June 4 that Mr. Khadr's case could not go forward because a military tribunal had merely determined he was an "enemy combatant" and because the judge believed he could not determine "unlawful" status.

Mr. Khadr is accused of killing an army medic in a battle between U.S. troops and al–Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan in the summer of 2002 when he was 15.

The review court agreed that the military tribunals (Combatant Status Review Tribunals) did not determine whether Mr. Khadr was an "unlawful" combatant, a key distinction that U.S. law mandates for such cases to go to trial. But the court ruled last night that trial judges can hear evidence on a detainee's combatant status and therefore can proceed with the trials.

The decision is a victory for the Pentagon, as it means military prosecutors can move forward without having to convene new status tribunals.

"We ... look forward to getting back into court soon and presenting evidence to prove that Omar Khadr is an unlawful enemy combatant subject to trial by military commission," lead prosecutor Col. Morris Davis said last night.

Talk of pullout draws scorn from Afghans; 'If they leave, we all know the Taliban will come back'

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EDITION: Early
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
DATELINE: KABUL
BYLINE: Matthew Fisher
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 621

KABUL – For residents of the bustling Afghan capital, the prospective departure of Canada's soldiers by February 2009 produces mostly quizzical looks. It seems inconceivable that NATO's International Security Assistance Force would withdraw its troops, leaving these war-weary people to the mercy of the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

Even the more benign alternative to a complete withdrawal — training Afghan soldiers and police to look after security while western nations focus on humanitarian and development work — is, at best, undesirable.

"What is the point of sending your army to Afghanistan if it isn't going to fight?" demands Muhammad Noor Sahak, director of the OMAR war museum and a graduate student in Pushtun literature.

"Given Afghanistan's famous warrior culture, most Afghans like ISAF, but they will only continue liking ISAF if they think it is making their lives more secure. And the only way to do that is to fight. If ISAF fails, the Russians, who don't want NATO here, could interfere. So will Iran. Pakistan is already interfering."

For Afghans, an equally pressing question is whether the U.S.-backed government of President Hamid Karzai will accept a Taliban offer to begin peace talks. The answer is an overwhelming yes, although not if it means accepting the Taliban's condition that ISAF's 36,000 troops must leave the country first. Mr. Karzai has already flatly rejected that proposal.

"I don't like ISAF. I love them. They are good people," Balyaly, a 22-year-old carpet salesman, said.

Using a variety of obscene hand gestures, Balyaly, who, like many Afghans, uses only one name, denounces the Taliban as "very dirty." He seemed genuinely shocked that Canada is considering withdrawing its 2,500 troops from the volatile south of Afghanistan and that the Netherlands is contemplating a similar pullout.

Mukhtar Subur, 19, who, like many young Afghans, does not have a job, was also adamant that the NATO forces must remain and continue to fight.

"Our whole country profits from the gifts of ISAF," Mr. Subur says. "If they leave, we all know the Taliban will come back and the Afghan people will have trouble again."

Hamid Fahim, who collects ancient Enfield rifles used by the mujahedeen in their holy war against the Red Army during the 1980s, observes that Afghanistan has been in a state of perpetual war for nearly three

decades. By contrast, the Canadians, who first fought on the front lines in Kandahar in 2002, are relative newcomers. Seventy Canadian soldiers have died here — about the number of Afghans who die fighting on many days.

"They are not like the Russians who tried to take our whole country," Mr. Fahim said. "ISAF comes to fight beside us, not against us. It is much better for us if they stay."

Flush with aid money and cash from this year's bumper crop of illegal opium, Kabul appears far more prosperous and liberal than it was. Every day, more and more women shed the all-encompassing burqa and show their faces, something that always led to a beating when the Taliban ruled the capital.

But Kabul's confidence has been shaken by recent suicide bombings and a spate of kidnappings of businessmen. The government and ISAF seem unable to do anything about it.

Again and again, Afghans mentioned that many ISAF countries, such as Germany and Italy, have seemed more concerned with protecting themselves than sending out troops to attack the Taliban.

"If all the money being spent by those ISAF countries that don't fight here was spent on us, we would already have a bigger and better army," Sahak says as he shows a visitor around his museum. "We would also have better schools and more doctors and nurses and engineers."

Soldier's Death Ruled a Suicide

The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service has ruled the death of a Canadian officer in Kabul was a suicide.

Maj. Raymond Ruckpaul died as the result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, the investigation service said in a release yesterday.

The death occurred on Aug. 29. at the soldier's living quarters in Kabul.

Appeal court gives Pentagon green light to try Khadr; Canadian's lawyer attacks legal 'gymnastics' after ruling allows terrorism case to proceed

IDNUMBER 200709250016
PUBLICATION: The Ottawa Citizen
DATE: 2007.09.25
EDITION: Final
SECTION: News
PAGE: A4
DATELINE: WASHINGTON
BYLINE: Sheldon Alberts
SOURCE: The Ottawa Citizen
WORD COUNT: 317

WASHINGTON – A U.S. military appeals court dealt Canadian Omar Khadr a major legal setback yesterday, overturning a decision to throw out murder and terrorism charges against the alleged al-Qaeda operative.

The decision by the U.S. Court of Military Commission Review means the Pentagon once again has the green light to put the 21-year-old on trial before a war crimes tribunal at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

"We welcome the court's decision and will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial," Pentagon spokesman Jeffrey Gordon said last night.

"The timeline is up to the judge. He decides when we will be back in the courtroom."

The case was thrown into legal limbo last June when army Col. Peter Brownback ruled

the Bush administration's war crimes tribunals lacked jurisdiction to try Mr. Khadr because the U.S. government had made no determination whether the Canadian was an "unlawful enemy combatant." The ruling left open the possibility that Mr. Khadr was legally engaged in battle with American troops.

He is accused of killing an army medic in a battle between U.S. troops and al-Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan in the summer of 2002 when he was 15.

In its ruling against Mr. Khadr yesterday, the military appeals court agreed there was a significant distinction between a detainee's status as a lawful or unlawful enemy combatant.

But it found that Col. Brownback erred by refusing to hear evidence that Pentagon lawyers said would prove Mr. Khadr was an unlawful combatant at the time of his capture.

Dennis Edney, one of two Canadian lawyers representing Mr. Khadr before the tribunals, said the decision confirmed his view that the Pentagon has stacked the legal deck against his client.

"It astounds me that this (U.S.) administration goes to such gymnastics to avoid giving this young man due process in an ordinary court of law with proper rules of evidence," Mr. Edney said last night.

He said he is worried the Pentagon will now rush Mr. Khadr to trial without giving his defence team proper time to prepare an appeal.

Mr. Khadr's lawyers have questioned the legitimacy of the appeals court. The three-person court was only assembled after the charges against Mr. Khadr were thrown out in June.

Developments

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072680216

DATE: 2007.09.25

PAGE: A17

BYLINE:

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: STAFF AFP REUT

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE:

WORDS: 366

WORD COUNT: 350

Staff, Agence France–Presse, Reuters * NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan announced yesterday that two ISAF soldiers and an Afghan interpreter were killed and three ISAF soldiers were injured when their patrol hit a mine in western Afghanistan.

"It is a sad fact that ISAF troops, and the local population, contend with the threat of mine strikes on a daily basis; the work to reduce this threat goes on," said spokesman Major Charles Anthony. "ISAF extends its deepest condolences to the soldiers' families and friends." ISAF does not release a casualty's nationality until the government of the relevant country has made the information public.

* A Canadian soldier's recent death from a gunshot wound in the Kabul headquarters of the NATO–led forces in Afghanistan has been deemed a suicide, the Canadian Defence Department said yesterday.

After conducting a thorough investigation, the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service "has concluded that his tragic death was a result of a self–inflicted gunshot wound," the ministry said in a statement.

Major Raymond Ruckpaul succumbed to a gunshot wound in his living quarters within the secure compound of the ISAF headquarters in Kabul on Aug. 29.

* Two Italian military intelligence officers kidnapped in Afghanistan were freed yesterday during a raid by NATO–led troops in which nine kidnappers and an Afghan hostage were killed, Italy's Defence Minister said.

The officers were wounded during the raid to free them in southwestern Farah province and were taken to hospital, Arturo Parisi told the Italian parliament. One of them was in a serious condition with gunshot wounds to his head and chest.

* The NATO–led security force in Afghanistan needs more helicopters, troops and equipment to deal with booby traps in its fight against a Taliban–led insurgency, a senior military officer said yesterday.

"The means which is very important to give us more flexibility is helicopters," said Brigadier–General Vincent Lafontaine, chief of plans for the International Security Assistance Force.

He pointed to a shortfall in equipment to "counter IEDs" (improvised explosive devices) such as roadside bombs.

Gen. Lafontaine also underlined a shortage of international troops who are "embedded in Afghan battalions and help them to train and when necessary conduct operations."

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Afghanistan; Italy; Canada

SUBJECT TERM: strife; landmines; deaths; suicide; kidnapping

PERSONAL NAME: Raymond Ruckpaul

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

DEFENCE New timeline for Afghan mission? MacKay now says Ottawa will decide on future of deployment by April

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IDN: 072680154

DATE: 2007.09.25

PAGE: A17 (ILLUS)

BYLINE: ALAN FREEMAN

SECTION: International News

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Ottawa ONT

WORDS: 515

WORD COUNT: 487

ALAN FREEMAN OTTAWA Canada will advise NATO whether it will extend its combat mission in southern Afghanistan by April of next year, Defence Minister Peter MacKay says.

In the latest of a series of apparently conflicting pronouncements from members of the Harper government over the fate of Canada's participation in the NATO-led coalition fighting the Taliban, Mr.

MacKay told reporters that the government has to make up its mind before a NATO summit set for Bucharest next spring.

"There is a NATO meeting in April, 2008," Mr. MacKay said in Orleans, an Ottawa suburb. "It will be necessary to communicate a final decision before that meeting." The current mission, involving 2,500 troops based in Kandahar, is set to end in February, 2009. The Harper government favours an extension, but the NDP wants the mission ended now, and the Liberals want it radically changed and moved away from combat after 2009.

"I expect fully that there will be a lot of discussion about this over the fall, just as we're seeing in other parliaments," Mr. MacKay said. Last week, the minister made a rapid trip to the capitals of four North Atlantic Treaty Organization partners, including the Netherlands, which is to decide as soon as next month plans for its NATO contingent.

Earlier this month, Mr. MacKay told CTV that Canada's NATO partners had already been advised that they could not count on Canadian troops in their "current configuration" beyond February, 2009.

Within hours of Mr. MacKay's comment, a spokesman said the minister hadn't meant to say that a new signal had been sent to NATO, adding that Parliament would decide the mission's fate. On Sept. 9, Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he plans to delay a vote on the extension for as long as it takes to persuade Parliament to keep the troops in Afghanistan.

"The government has been all over the map on this," NDP defence critic Dawn Black said.

"They change their mind all the time," added Liberal defence critic Denis Coderre.

The Harper government also lashed out yesterday at The Globe and Mail over its disclosure that Canada still cannot account for at least 50 detainees who were turned over to Afghan authorities before the signature of a new detainee agreement in May.

In a letter to the editor, Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier called the article "irresponsible," "groundless" and "reckless," but did not respond to the substance of the allegations in the original article.

"The story seeks to stretch the truth with innuendos and makes unfounded and irresponsible accusations based on unnamed sources," Mr. Bernier said. He went on to laud the agreement signed in May with Afghanistan regarding the treatment of prisoners, which has allowed Canadian officials to complete 10 unscheduled inspections of prison facilities so far.

The Globe article recounted the apparent disappearance of about 25 per cent of the detainees Canadian officials transferred to the Afghans before May. Mr. Bernier never deals with that in his letter.

A departmental spokeswoman had no further comment and National Defence referred all questions to Foreign Affairs.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada; Afghanistan

SUBJECT TERM: strife; foreign policy; defence; political; statements

PERSONAL NAME: Peter MacKay

ORGANIZATION NAME: Armed Forces

JUSTICE Military appeals court overrules decision on Khadr

PUBLICATION: GLOBE AND MAIL

IDN: 072680123

DATE: 2007.09.25

PAGE: A17

BYLINE:

SECTION: International News

SOURCE: AP CP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Washington DC

WORDS: 484

WORD COUNT: 447

Associated Press, with a report from The Canadian Press WASHINGTON A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon yesterday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled that a military court set up by the U.S. administration is the proper venue for deciding whether Mr. Khadr is an "unlawful enemy combatant" and trying him on terrorism charges.

The decision reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunal system created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees, unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

That ruling threatened to force the Pentagon to start over with tribunals for a number of detainees. Pentagon officials argued the June 4 ruling was just a matter of semantics and insufficient to dismiss the case.

Yesterday's decision, the first ever by the newly formed appeals court, agreed.

The appeals judges, who are military officers, said the trial judge "erred in ruling he lacked authority . . . to determine whether Mr. Khadr is an 'unlawful enemy combatant' for purposes of establishing the military commission's initial jurisdiction to try him." The court battle over the Khadr case represents the latest problem for the U.S. administration's military commissions system, which exists outside the traditional military and civilian rules of justice.

In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled President George W. Bush's plan to try Guantanamo Bay detainees in military commissions violates U.S. and international law.

The White House persuaded the then-Republican-controlled Congress to weigh in with a law to legitimize the commissions. That law now faces court challenges.

Defence lawyers contend the "unlawful" designation is a critical element of guilt or innocence in what is a fundamentally flawed military tribunal system.

In August, they questioned the legitimacy of the court itself, saying officials didn't follow proper procedures when they set it up.

"This court was established on the fly," said Lieutenant–Commander William Kuebler, who noted one of the judges questioned whether it was acceptable that he was appointed by a Defence Department deputy, instead of Defence Secretary Robert Gates.

"More could not be at stake," Cmdr. Kuebler said.

"This is about the credibility of the United States." The Pentagon said in response to yesterday's decision: "We will proceed in the most expeditious manner to get military commission cases to trial.

"The timeline is up to the judge. He decides when we will be back in the courtroom." Mr. Khadr was captured when he was 15 and faces life in prison.

He is charged with tossing a grenade that killed one U.S. soldier and injured another in Afghanistan in 2002.

His trial would be the first full legal airing of the Guantanamo detainees, who include several "high–value" prisoners, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 2001 terror attacks on the U.S.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Guantanamo Bay; United States

SUBJECT TERM:justice; prisoners of war; terrorism; suspects; canadians

PERSONAL NAME: Omar Khadr

THRONE SPEECH Opposition leaders gear up for confidence vote As parties lay out conditions for lending support to Harper government, PM dismisses political posturing as 'Parliamentary games'

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IDN: 072680017

DATE: 2007.09.25

PAGE: A4

BYLINE: GLORIA GALLOWAY

SECTION: National News

SOURCE: STAFF CP

EDITION: Metro

DATELINE: Ottawa ONT

WORDS: 559

WORD COUNT: 564

GLORIA GALLOWAY With a report from Bill Curry in New York and The Canadian Press OTTAWA Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who was in New York yesterday to address the United Nations on the subject of climate change, refused to discuss the political posturing going on back home.

"I'm just going to say, today, I'm here to discuss Canada's goals and Canada's interests in an international forum," Mr. Harper said in response to questions from reporters. "I'm not going to discuss Parliamentary games back in Canada. We'll have a chance to do that some time when I get back in Canada." The opposition will be given an opportunity to defeat Mr. Harper's Conservative minority in a confidence vote that must follow a Throne Speech on Oct. 11. So the opposition leaders have been spelling out minimum conditions for lending the government their support.

NDP Leader Jack Layton wants Canadian combat troops withdrawn from Afghanistan immediately. Bloc Leader Gilles Duceppe has unveiled a list of five "non-negotiable" conditions, including eliminating all federal spending powers in provincial jurisdictions and complying with the Kyoto Protocol's tough greenhouse-gas-emission reduction targets.

And, while Liberal Leader Stephane Dion has said he will not decide how to vote until he hears the speech, Liberal officials argue it would be very difficult for the party to offer a wholehearted endorsement of the government's agenda.

But there are ways to prevent an election for those who want to find them.

Jerry Yanover, a political adviser to the Liberals, pointed out yesterday that a confidence vote merely expresses Parliament's appreciation to the Governor-General for reading the speech.

It is possible, he said, for the opposition to move amendments to the speech before the confidence vote that do not have to be confidence matters themselves. "There have been several cases, especially in recent years, of the government accepting such amendments," Mr.

Yanover said.

THRONE SPEECH Opposition leaders gear up for confidence vote As parties lay out conditions for lending

If the opposition parties were to amend the speech and could argue that they made gains, they may well be willing to vote for it overall.

Conservative Whip Jay Hill also said yesterday he believes an election is avoidable.

"There are other options than either voting for or against the Throne Speech," he said. In 2005, "as a new Conservative Party in the role of Official Opposition during the short-lived Paul Martin [Liberal] government, we abstained on a budget vote. People seem to have forgotten that." Canadians don't want an election, and the onus to prevent one is on Mr. Dion, he said.

"Under our system, he is the only one that has any hope whatsoever to form a government," Mr. Hill said. "And I think that he, in particular, has a responsibility to take that very seriously." Meanwhile, if an election were to be called this fall, the Tories could run into a ballot-box backlash over a decision to use the name Republic of Macedonia in Canadian relations with the Balkan country generally referred to internationally as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

"We will, of course, voice our displeasure in the next federal election," said Sirios Sotiropoulos of the Greater Toronto Greek-Canadian Association. "Greek-Canadians in general view this as the ultimate brand confusion, if you will, on a cultural level." Greece is virulently opposed to the use of Macedonia, contending the name belongs to a province of Greece, not a Balkan republic.

ADDED SEARCH TERMS:

GEOGRAPHIC NAME: Canada

SUBJECT TERM: government; political

PERSONAL NAME: Stephen Harper

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

NATO ambush, gun battle frees kidnapped Italian intelligence agents

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DATE: 2007.09.25
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SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A9
DATELINE: KABUL
BYLINE: Alisa Tang
SOURCE: The Associated Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 646

Italian commandos, aided by other NATO forces and aircraft, rescued two kidnapped Italian intelligence operatives yesterday in a daring ambush and gun battle in western Afghanistan that left at least nine of the captors dead.

Although both freed Italians were injured -- one of them seriously -- Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi said the operation was a success and could put a dent in Afghanistan's rising kidnapping industry.

Violence elsewhere in Afghanistan killed at least 31 people. Among the dead were two NATO soldiers serving with Spain's contingent and an Iranian serving as their interpreter, all killed a land mine explosion. Three others were seriously wounded, the Spanish defence minister said.

The two Italians, who were described by Defence Minister Arturo Parisi in Rome as working for the Sismi intelligence service, disappeared along with their two Afghan colleagues Saturday. They were last seen at a police checkpoint in western Herat province.

Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema said the fact that the two were intelligence agents posed an "imminent danger," which required the rescue.

Parisi told parliament that Italian forces were aided in the rescue by British, German and U.S. forces, which were monitoring the movements of the kidnapers with a Predator drone aircraft and helicopters.

NATO "very quickly" began receiving intelligence reports on the Italians' location, enabling forces to launch the rescue mission, added French Brigadier-General Vincent Lafontaine, chief of planning for the 40,000 alliance troops in Afghanistan.

"There is a sort of window of opportunity if you achieve reliable intelligence," Lafontaine said. "It's a success story because it was very quickly solved."

The decision to launch the operation was made after coalition forces determined the kidnapers had started heading south from Farah yesterday morning in two cars, Parisi said.

Italian special forces ambushed the convoy in neighbouring Farah province, sparking a gun battle that killed at least nine of the kidnappers.

One of the Italians suffered serious bullet wounds and doctors were evaluating whether to operate, Parisi said. The other had broken his shoulder and left collar bone, but his injuries were not considered life-threatening.

Both had been beaten by their captors, said Afghan General Jalandar Shah.

Major Charles Anthony, speaking for the NATO force in Afghanistan, said it was not clear if the Italian hit by gunfire was wounded by his kidnappers or Italian forces.

The Italians' Afghan translator was also wounded, and another Afghan, apparently their driver, was killed, Parisi said. Anthony hinted the driver might have aided in the kidnappings.

The rescue operation "was a heavy defeat for the kidnappers and therefore a warning for the future," Prodi said in New York, where he is attending the UN General Assembly. "We did not have one moment of hesitation in giving the mandate to those who were in the field to act with the utmost determination."

Earlier, Italian Defence Ministry undersecretary Giovanni Lorenzo Forcieri said a "criminal band" had taken the Italians, and officials were afraid they would be sold to other groups.

A Taliban spokesman told The Associated Press it was not responsible for the capture of the Italians.

Several high-profile abductions have been a boon for the Taliban this year. The insurgents had face-to-face negotiations with South Korean government officials for the release of 23 of their citizens kidnapped in July. The rebels also won the release of five Taliban prisoners in exchange for an Italian journalist kidnapped in March.

Independent gangs have now got in on the act. Criminals kidnapped a German aid worker from a Kabul restaurant in August; she was rescued a day later. And criminals are believed to have seized a German engineer in Wardak province.

Afghan and western troops appear to be targeting the insurgents who took the Koreans, killing at least five Taliban commanders in Ghazni province since the captives were freed three weeks ago.

The Afghan and Italian governments were heavily criticized in March after five Taliban prisoners were freed in exchange for the release of newspaper journalist Daniele Mastrogiacomo -- a step many observers feared would encourage more kidnappings.

The head of an Italian aid organization, Emergency, said the Rome government also paid \$2 million for the release of an Italian photographer kidnapped last year, a claim the government didn't deny.

Canada should 'take diplomatic lead' in Afghanistan

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DATE: 2007.09.25
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SECTION: Canada/World
PAGE: A9
ILLUSTRATION: Photo: Rahmat Gul, the Associated Press / Anexplosives-laden car is burned by U.S. troops in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, yesterday. ;
DATELINE: OTTAWA
BYLINE: Murray Brewster
SOURCE: The Canadian Press
COPYRIGHT: © 2007 Torstar Corporation
WORD COUNT: 542

Canada is throwing away an opportunity to help Afghan President Hamid Karzai fracture the Taliban by not actively supporting his repeated peace overtures to moderate insurgents, an international think-tank charged yesterday.

The Senlis Council, a European-based agency that has conducted extensive research in southern Afghanistan, says the appeal to less-dogmatic Taliban has a good chance of succeeding if NATO countries throw their full support behind it.

Norine MacDonald, a Vancouver lawyer and council president, says separating hard-core Islamic fundamentalists and al-Qaeda supporters from moderates would weaken the insurgency and reduce its offensive capacity.

It's time for Canada to take the diplomatic lead and step out from the shadow of U.S. foreign policy, she said.

"We believe there are defining moments in every nation's history when there's an opportunity to demonstrate who we are as a nation and how we conduct ourselves in Afghanistan at this critical moment is one of those times," MacDonald said at the beginning of a day-long conference meant to explore policies that could lead to peace.

This so-called fast track for peace and stability should also include keeping Canadian troops in Afghanistan past the February 2009 deadline and opposition to a U.S. demand that opium poppies be eradicated with aerial spraying.

The strategy of driving wedges between various insurgent factions is a cornerstone of U.S. policy in Iraq, where it has convinced Sunni tribesmen to fight terrorists.

In Afghanistan, NATO has been using economic development projects to pry committed Taliban fighters — who are often foreign jihadists — away from poor, unemployed farmers who are often coerced or enticed to take up arms. The strategy has met with limited success.

MacDonald says backing Karzai's peace bid by rallying NATO countries would also help the Conservatives sell the mission among Canadians who've complained there is too much emphasis on fighting at the expense of reconstruction and humanitarian aid.

The debate over the war this fall in Ottawa needs to be about more than whether Canada stays or withdraws from Afghanistan at the appointed end of the mission, she said.

"I believe Canadians instinctively understand why we are in Afghanistan, but they don't understand what the government's plan is for success for our military and I think they're angry the political system is turning them against each other."

MacDonald said she believes the opposition has "shown some willingness to fall in line behind a proper, well-thought-out plan."

Prime Minister Stephen Harper said last summer he wouldn't extend the combat mission in Kandahar, unless there was consensus in Parliament, but recently qualified that position by stating he wouldn't put the issue before the House of Commons until he had the winning conditions.

A request for comment from Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier, who attended a closed-door meeting at the United Nations Sunday on the future of Afghanistan, was turned down.

But in talking points released by his office, Bernier dismissed the criticism saying the Senlis Council "with its focus on opium legalization and negotiating with the Taliban, seeks to distract from the real successes are being realized in Afghanistan."

Bernier has in the past rejected the idea of Ottawa participating directly in peace talks with the Taliban, saying "Canada does not negotiate with terrorists, for any reason."

The talking points say negotiations remain the responsibility of the Afghan government and that Canada supports the reconciliation program already underway in Afghanistan.

That program encourages Taliban to lay down their arms -- sometimes in exchange for cash -- and rejoin society without fear of prosecution.

Major Ruckpaul's death ruled self-inflicted, say military police

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Canadian military police have ruled the death of Major Raymond Ruckpaul, the 42-year-old Hamilton native who was found shot in his barracks in Kabul, Afghanistan, Aug. 29, a suicide.

The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service (CFNIS) issued a statement yesterday, concluding his death was a result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound, based on the evidence collected and analyzed by its investigators and the Ontario Office of the Chief Coroner.

Ruckpaul, who began his military career with the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (RHLI) and was serving as an armoured officer with the Royal Canadian Dragoons, had been based in Heidelberg, Germany, for the past few years, where he lived with his wife and two young children.

His parents still reside in Hamilton.

Ruckpaul's military funeral was held Sept. 8 at the Church of the Ascension in Hamilton.

Lieutenant-Colonel Steve Cadden, Commanding Officer of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, served with Ruckpaul in Germany from 1990 to 1992 when they were both lieutenants.

"Major Ray Ruckpaul was an outstanding officer whose professional life was defined by credos of 'lead from the front' and 'look after your troops,'" Cadden said yesterday. "(Dragoons) are the poorer for his passing."

CFNIS is an independent military police unit that investigates matters involving Canadian Forces personnel.

Ruckpaul grew up in Hamilton where he attended Barton Secondary School and later McMaster University, where he studied sciences.

jburman@thespec.com

905-526-2469

Court rules Khadr can face charges

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CP Wire WASHINGTON -- A U.S. military appeals court sided with the Pentagon on Monday, overruling a judge who threw out terrorism charges against Canadian Guantanamo Bay detainee Omar Khadr.

The U.S. Court of Military Commission Review ruled a military court set up by the U.S. administration was the proper venue for deciding whether Khadr is an "unlawful enemy combatant" and trying him on terrorism charges.

The ruling reverses a military judge's June 4 ruling that the tribunal system created by Congress did not have authority to try detainees, unless they were first determined to be unlawful enemy combatants.

That ruling threatened to force the Pentagon to start over with tribunals for a number of detainees. Pentagon officials argued the June 4 ruling was just a matter of semantics and insufficient to dismiss the case. Monday's decision, the first ever by the newly formed appeals court, agreed.

The appeals judges, who are military officers, said the trial judge "erred in ruling he lacked authority... to determine whether Mr. Khadr is an 'unlawful enemy combatant' for purposes of establishing the military commission's initial jurisdiction to try him." Khadr was captured when he was 15 and faces charges life in prison on of murder, conspiracy, spying and supporting terrorism counts.

He is charged with tossing a grenade that killed one U.S. soldier and injured another in Afghanistan in 2002.

His trial would be the first full legal airing of the Guantanamo detainees, who include several "high-value" prisoners.

-- AP-CP {Washington DC}

Taliban justice: swift, certain, brutal

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DataSpecials Aziz Ahmad Tassal GARMSEER, Afghanistan — It began as a dispute between two neighbouring farmers over water rights in this small village, about 30 kilometres from Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand province. It escalated when Mohammad Lal shot his neighbour to death.

That's when the Taliban stepped in to impose a form of justice that has won them fans all across the southern part of the country.

Within minutes of the shooting, their security services had taken Mohammad Lal into custody. By the next day, he had been brought before a Taliban judge, who found him guilty and sentenced him to death.

Within three days, the victim's family was told they could attend the execution.

In fact, the family would do much more than just witness the execution of a convicted murderer. Under Sharia, or Islamic law, the victim's family has the right to carry out a death sentence themselves.

Taliban representatives presented the victim's brother with a weapon. Without hesitating, he shot Mohammad Lal to death.

"I am very happy with the result," said the victim's brother, who asked that neither his nor the murder victim's name be used.

"If the government had been in charge, there would have been a lot of paperwork and who knows how it would have ended.

"But this is good. I was given a gun and I shot my brother's killer.

The government wouldn't let us do that. The Taliban decide cases very quickly, without wasting time. And they give people the right to carry out the punishment," he said.

Even where the government is able to exert control, many Afghans say they prefer the swift and certain justice meted out by the Taliban, even when it sometimes appears brutal.

Like many here, Gul Agha, a resident of Helmand province who works as a driver, sees the official government judicial system as hopelessly corrupt and inefficient.

"The government cannot resolve our cases," he said. "They do not punish criminals according to Islamic law. If they arrest a thief, they don't cut off his hand. And some of the criminals they arrest are set free to walk the streets." Mullah Abdullah Akhund, a local Taliban commander, insisted that his men always act in full accordance with Islamic law, if not with Afghanistan's written constitution.

"We do not accept the constitution," he said firmly. "Our constitution is the Qu'ran. We punish a murderer or adulterer according to Sharia, and this is done by the Ulema (Islamic scholars) in each district." Akhund made

it clear that he found the nation's penal code lacking when compared to the Taliban's code.

"There is nothing in the constitution about hair or beards, but shaving is prohibited by our law," he said. "And the constitution says that those who commit adultery should be imprisoned. But they should be killed." That's how Addul Manaaf, another Helmand province resident, thinks things should be. And he added that, unlike their government counterparts, Taliban magistrates are incorruptible.

"The Taliban issue rulings in accordance with Sharia, and they solve people's problems without taking bribes or putting other obstacles in people's way," he said.

Bashir Ahmad, another resident of the province, agreed.

"The decisions taken by the Taliban make people happy because the process does not take long," he said. "If we take our cases to the government courts, it can take months and months. They also ask for bribes. But the Taliban don't waste time," he said.

In areas that they control, the Taliban have set up a sophisticated judicial system to ensure justice is swift and certain.

According to Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, a Taliban spokesman, four judges are assigned to each district in a province.

"They are wise and educated people," he said. "They issue independent rulings, and locals who have problems can come to them for help.

They rule on cases such as murder, adultery, personal injury and so on." Mullah Ibrahim Akhund, a resident of Washir district, expressed mixed feelings about having a Taliban administration in charge.

"Taliban rule is good to an extent," he admitted. "There are no thieves and the courts don't take bribes. That's very good." But there's a down side as well, he noted.

"It is because the Taliban are here that foreigners are killing Afghan civilians," he said.

And, he noted, if the government ever does regain control of the province, "We will be in trouble." Aziz Ahmad Tassal is a journalist in Afghanistan who writes for The Institute for War & Peace Reporting, a nonprofit organization that trains journalists in areas of conflict.

— McClatchy–Tribune Information Services