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Afghanistan making progress: top general

By: Aldo Santin

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Gen. Walter Natynczyk (CNS VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST)

CANADA'S top military officer said an influx of 30,000 additional American troops into Afghanistan will bring greater security to an even larger area of that country.

Gen. Walt Natynczyk, Chief of Defence Staff, said there are large areas of Afghanistan that have not seen Western military forces, adding more American troops will bring stability to that troubled country sooner.

"There are large areas around Kandahar (where Canadian forces are fighting), to the north, that are not covered," Natynczyk told the *Winnipeg Free Press* Saturday night during a break at the Third Annual Yellow Ribbon Gala fundraising event at the Delta Hotel.

Natynczyk was the keynote speaker at the event, which raises funds for the Winnipeg Military Family Resource Centre, a charitable, non-profit group that provides programming for military families.

While some critics say that winning a war in Afghanistan is impossible, Natynczyk said that infrastructure and stability are being established there.

The Afghanistan that Canadian soldiers are fighting in today is much different than it was three years ago, Natynczyk said. In 2006, he said, there were no Afghanistan police or military presence. Today, he said Canadians have helped train police and five military battalions. He said in December, the Afghanistan military launched its own operation for the first time since the war began.

Natynczyk said when the Canadian military involvement there ends in 2011, he's confident Afghanistan will be a much different, stable country.

"There have been 200,000 Kandharans who are registered to vote in elections in August," Natynczyk said. "We're helping to build governing capabilities and institutions. When we leave, Afghanistan will be able to address these issues on their own."

During his speech, Natynczyk, who grew up in Winnipeg, repeatedly praised the city and the province, claiming he remains a loyal Blue Bomber fan and a fan of the Winnipeg Jets.

Natynczyk praised the family members who are left behind when soldiers are posted overseas, and the communities that support those families and the members of the Canadian military.

After the dinner, Natynczyk presented the Birchall Leadership Award to Gen. Raymond Henault (retired). The award honours the memory of Air Commodore Leonard J. Birchall and recognizes the recipients as having demonstrated extraordinary leadership qualities.

Natynczyk, who is married with three adult children serving in the navy, army and air force, joined the Canadian Forces in 1975. He was promoted to Chief of Defence Staff in July.

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