



Time to quit Afghanistan

PM acknowledges a war can't be won, so what are Canadian troops still doing there?

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It's taken far too long for Prime Minister Stephen Harper to finally admit the war in Afghanistan cannot be won. Better late than never. Kudos to Harper for facing facts and telling Canadians the truth.

If the war can't be won, why risk lives of Canadian troops for nothing? Why stay in harm's way a day longer when the writing is on the wall in Afghanistan? President Barack Obama, who is sending 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan, ought to be asking himself the same questions.

We must think hard about waging an increasingly bloody war against lightly-armed mountain tribesmen who face the 24/7 lethal fury of the U.S. air force's heavy bombers, strike aircraft, helicopter and AC-130 Spectre gunships, killer drones and heavy artillery. Do we really want a test of wills against men who have the courage to endure cluster bombs with thousands of sharp fragments, white phosphorus that burns through flesh to the bone, fuel/air explosives that burst the lungs and tear apart bodies? Will Canada's use of Soviet helicopters and Israeli drones win Afghan hearts and minds?

Our propaganda brands these Pashtun tribesmen as "Taliban terrorists." They call themselves warriors fighting occupation by the western powers and their local Communist, Tajik and Uzbek allies.

Al-Qaida's few hundred members long ago vanished.

Fatuous claims we occupy Afghanistan to protect women are belied by the continued plight of Afghan females under western rule. A British report just concluded 100,000 Indian women are burned alive each year for their dowries. Will we now send troops to India?

Only the first step

Admitting the U.S. and NATO cannot bludgeon the Afghan resistance into submission is only the first step. If the war can't be won, then Canadian soldiers should remain in their bases, stop aggressive patrolling and cease attacks on Taliban supporters and civilians. Other NATO members are doing so.

The next step is to understand that wars are waged for political objectives, not simply to kill your enemies.

The U.S.-led forces in Afghanistan have no coherent political objectives. The U.S.-installed Karzai regime in Kabul has no political legitimacy and commands no respect or loyalty. It is engulfed by corruption and massive drug dealing. The Obama administration is casting about for a new puppet, but so far can't find one who could do any better than poor Karzai. You can't make a puppet into a real national leader.

Worse, as Kabul flounders and the Taliban and its allies are on the offensive, events in neighbouring Pakistan are going from awful to calamitous. The West cannot wage war in Afghanistan without the support of Pakistan's army, air bases, intelligence service and logistical infrastructure. That means keeping a government in power in Islamabad responsive to U.S. demands and that will continue renting its army to Washington.

But Pakistan is in political chaos. After easing former discredited dictator Pervez Musharraf out of power, Washington eased into power Pakistan People's Party leader, Asif Ali Zardari, widower of Benazir Bhutto. His popularity ratings are rock bottom.

Zardari recently got his stooges on the corrupt Supreme Court to ban Pakistan's most popular democratic opposition leader, Pakistan Muslim League chief Nawaz Sharif, from running for office. Nawaz's brother, Shabaz, also was judicially deposed as minister of Punjab, Pakistan's largest state.

Violent demonstrations against Zardari's dictatorial ploy are shaking Pakistan. It would be surprising if the unpopular Zardari, who is dogged by grave corruption charges, manages to cling to power. But Nawaz also has plenty of skeletons in his closets. The army -- Pakistan's other government -- is watching the nation's descent into bankruptcy and political chaos with mounting concern.

The military fortunes of the U.S. and NATO in South Asia thus rest on political quicksand in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Plans by the U.S. to arm tribes on Pakistan's North-West Frontier are sure to bring even more violence and chaos.

NATO, which has no strategic interest in the region, would be wise to get its troops out of this boiling mess.

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