

Canuck mission put in jeopardy

Bhutto's assassination could disrupt supply lines to Afghanistan

By KEVIN CONNOR, SUN MEDIA

The assassination of Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto has the potential to cause enough political chaos that Canadian military supply lines from Pakistan into Afghanistan would close, experts say.

"Canada's obvious concern is stability in Pakistan. Without proper supply lines through Pakistan we don't know what will happen with the already difficult mission in Afghanistan," said Robert Bothwell, a political scientist in international relations at the University of Toronto.

"Pakistan is one of three ways for the military to access Afghanistan. The other two are from Russia or Iran and NATO isn't on good terms with either of them."

Since Bhutto was shot to death by two bullets yesterday, it's not likely that the Pakistani election set for Jan. 8 will take place, Canadian Maj-Gen. Lewis MacKenzie said.

"The obvious response that comes to mind is that there will be emergency measures, military control established, to clamp down on security and protests," MacKenzie said.

"Whether the election proceeds is doubtful. Bhutto had 62% support. Even though she has a controversial (allegedly corrupt) past, she was the best of a bunch of bad possibilities."

MacKenzie had a run-in with Bhutto during the conflict in Sarajevo in the early '90s when he was head of the United Nations Protection Force.

"Against my direction she was smuggling children out," MacKenzie said.

Yesterday, the Toronto Police Service sent out a bulletin to heighten surveillance for any problems or protests around consulates.

"We may see an increase in radical activity in some pockets of the Canadian Pakistan community. The death of a female secularist may be seen as a great victory for radical Islamist," said Dave Harris, a former CSIS chief of strategic planning and president of an Ottawa-based national security consulting firm.

Bhutto's assassination is a loss for her family, but not for the Pakistan nation, said Teenaz Javat, a former journalist in Pakistan now living in Mississauga.

"She was a stooge for the West. Pakistan doesn't need her democracy. One size doesn't fit all, and Pakistan isn't ready yet. I feel more sorry for the people who died around her. It sounds crass, but that's the way it is," she said.

Javat doesn't see any problems arising from Bhutto's death in the Canadian Pakistan community.

"The people who came here are educated and they have left a lot of it behind them," Javat said.