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A campaign to reconnect with the citizens of Kabul

By Captain Mark Gough

CAMP JULIEN – A few years ago U.S. Marine Corps General Charles Krulak coined the phrase “three-block war” when referring to the evolution of modern military operations. He argued that the soldiers of today’s conventional armies could find themselves embroiled in three very different types of operations, all in the span of three city blocks.

On the first block of the three-block war, soldiers could be delivering humanitarian aid or assisting others governmental or non-governmental agencies in doing that. On the second, soldiers could be called upon to conduct stabilization or peace support operations in fledging nations. On the third, soldiers could be engaged in high-intensity warfare against a well-trained and well-equipped enemy. General Krulak argued that conventional armies must be ready to conduct these operations simultaneously; possibly very close to one another and they must be prepared to conduct them in large urban centres and over complex terrain.

Nowhere is this model more applicable than in Afghanistan today. While the high-intensity combat subsided following the fall of the Taliban regime, coalition nations are still very committed to the first and second blocks of the three-block war model.

The Canadian soldiers deployed on *Operation ATHENA* know all too well how this theory applies to their work in support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in and around the capital of Afghanistan.

As a result of operating within these two blocks, Canadian soldiers deployed in Kabul have enjoyed a relatively positive relationship with the Afghan citizens living in the vicinity of Camp Julien, the home of the Canadian Forces in Kabul.

However, two tragic incidents claimed the lives of three Canadian soldiers and are a constant reminder there are still elements in Kabul that do not want to see ISAF and the Government of Afghanistan succeed in the rebuilding of the country.

While the security situation has greatly improved since Canadians first deployed to Kabul in July 2003, a credible terrorist threat still remains in the city. In answer to this threat, Task Force Kabul (TFK), Rotation III (Roto III), developed and implemented a campaign plan to hinder terrorist activities in the areas of Police District Six and Seven (PD 6 and 7), the sectors of Kabul City across which Camp Julien straddles, encompassing almost 81 square kilometres.

The plan was organized as a means to re-connect with Afghans living in PD 6 and 7 with a focus on improving the force protection of Canadian soldiers by building on existing relationships with local leaders and the general population. The successful execution of this plan would clearly demonstrate that the Canadian military is committed to helping them rebuild their country.

There were three themes associated with this campaign plan – stability, protection and deterrence.

“A stable local government, supported by a strong and healthy civil



Master Corporal Fraser Lupton (second from right), a Section Commander with the Task Force Kabul (TFK) Force Protection Company (FP Coy), leads radio operator Private Trevor Holt (first from left), medical technician Corporal Kyle Meery (first from right), second-in-command Private Brad Davidson (second from left) and C-9 gunner Corporal Christian Begley (center) through Qal’ey-ye Moslem, a village south of Camp Julien, during a foot patrol on 10 July.

Photo: Corporal Gaétan Racine, Task Force Kabul Roto 3 Photographer



service base and a private enterprise base are aspects of democracy that we Canadians cherish and seek to develop in Afghanistan, as an aspect of our national foreign policy," said Colonel Walter Semianiw, Commander of TFK Roto III. "In the end, public and private sector reform are inextricably linked to security sector reform."

Col Semianiw explained that the plan was aimed at protecting local Afghans from a variety of threats, including unexploded ordnance, disease, corruption and terrorist influence. The activities associated with the plan were designed to improve the quality of life of the people living in PD 6 and 7 and further develop positive relations, thereby deterring them from aiding and abetting terrorist groups in the city.

"The ultimate aim of this plan is to defeat the factions within Kabul that want to see a return to the oppression of previous regimes," said Col Semianiw. "By building a trusting relationship with the people of PD 6 and 7 we remove the foundation upon which terrorism is based; therefore these elements will fail in their attempts to disrupt the rebuilding process that so many Afghans and other nations are working so intensely to complete."

To do this, TFK organized five separate lines of operations to address issues and concerns in five separate realms needed to create a safe and secure environment for the 600,000 Afghans living in the neighbourhoods around Camp Julien.

The first operation consisted of increased patrolling throughout PD 6 and 7 by the Force Protection Company (FP Coy) on three separate occasions. The scope of this operation included soldiers patrolling on foot and by armoured vehicle. The FP Coy also established vehicle checkpoints and observation posts to counter potential terrorist activity in the area.

"This increased presence in the community clearly demonstrated to the residents of PD 6 and 7 our resolve to improve the physical security of the area and to deter terrorist activity," said Major Peter Scott, the Officer Commanding the FP Coy. "Our success has been measured by the increased acceptance by local Afghans. They want us here."

One key indicator that Afghanistan is re-establishing itself and improving life for its citizens is the establishment of a competent and impartial police force and its acceptance by the public. To assist the local Kabul City Police (KCP) in this matter, TFK implemented a second operation in which members of the Military Police Platoon (MP PI) mentored their Afghan counterparts.

"While most of the KCP officers are very competent, they lack many of the skills we take for granted back home," said Captain Dan Perron, Officer Commanding the MP PI.

Members of the MP PI regularly visited the KCP headquarters in PD 6 and 7, providing invaluable advice and sharing information amongst the two police forces. Over the course of ten visits, the Canadian MPs provided capability demonstrations on everything from how to set up vehicle check points, how to search individuals and vehicles for suspicious material and how to take comprehensive statements from witnesses and suspects. The MP PI also collected a large quantity of basic essential items, like pens, paper, desks, clothing, and donated them to the KCP headquarters.

"We've developed excellent relationships with the KCP, from the highest ranks right down to the patrolmen, and they are very appreciative of the work we are doing with them," said Capt Perron. "This sharing of information is very similar to the kind of work we would do back in Canada with other police services, such as the RCMP or provincial police."

It is estimated that Afghanistan is littered with thousands of tons of explosive remnants of war (ERW). Millions of mines, unexploded bombs and other ordnance can be found in every corner of the country and throughout its major centres, including Kabul.

To counter this threat, TFK organized a third operation in which the Field Engineer Squadron (Fd Eng Sqn) went out into PD 6 and PD 7 and conducted collections of ERW. Two separate collection days were

MWO Steve Goupil (left), of the Health Service Support Company (HSS Coy), of Task Force Kabul (TFK), hands Lt Corrie Hunter, Canadian-donated medical supplies at the Esteqal Hospital in Kabul, Afghanistan. The hospital is a 400-bed facility that services western Kabul and all areas of the city.

Photo: Sgt Frank Hudec, Canadian Forces Combat Camera



Maj Kevin Winiarski (left) from Toronto, Ont., and Capt Martin Anderson from London, Ont., Reservists with the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) team of Task

advertised in advance and the local population was invited to turn in any ERW they had in their homes or the local area. While the turnout for the first collection day was relatively low, several hundred rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and dozens of mortars from a suspected terrorist weapons cache were turned over on the second day. Once collected, the engineers organized the safe destruction of this ordnance.

Force Kabul (TFK), pitch tents to be used as outdoor classrooms at the Abdul-Ali-Mustaghni Boys School in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Photo: Sgt Frank Hudec, Canadian Forces Combat Camera

"We've seen an increase in the number of weapons caches and ordnance turned over to ISAF soldiers, including Canadians, by Afghan civilians since we arrived in February," said Major Nicolas Pilon, Officer Commanding the Fd Eng Sqn. "It is clear to us that this is a demonstration of their commitment to make their country a safer place."

The health care system in Afghanistan is in dire need of improvement. While the situation has greatly improved since the fall of the Taliban, there is still a great deal of work to be done. With this in mind, TFK organized a fourth operation to assist the local hospitals and clinics in order to provide health care assistance to the people of PD 6 and PD 7.

"Through this effort we hoped to raise the level of health care available to local Afghans," said Lieutenant-Colonel Jim Kile, Officer Commanding the Health Service Support Company (HSS Coy).

Members of the HSS Coy went out to the clinics and hospitals and provided invaluable training and advice to the medical staff in addition to delivering medical equipment, supplies and books collected back in Canada by medical professionals concerned about the situation in Afghanistan.

"The provision of resources can only be made on a small scale and sustainability of support over the long term is an over-riding concern," said LCol Kile. "Therefore, the best asset we have available revolves around peoples' skills and passing on this knowledge to our Afghan colleagues."

A great deal of Afghanistan, and particularly Kabul, was destroyed over the past three decades of conflict. Most of the basic infrastructure that Canadians take for granted back home ceased to exist in this war-torn country. As a result, since arriving in August 2003, Canadian soldiers have initiated several projects to help rebuild some of this infrastructure. The main projects included support to schools and orphanages, as well as the construction of wells.

"Thousands of children in Kabul live in squalor in over-crowded orphanages and many lack access to schools or their schools have next to nothing in terms of basic supplies – desks, pencils, paper," said Major Kevin Winiarski, the Officer Commanding the Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) team.

The fifth operation TFK Roto III embarked on was a continuation of the work started by past rotations and an expansion to try and assist even more Afghans in the areas around Camp Julien. With donations from concerned Canadians, as well as \$100,000 from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the TFK CIMIC team went out in the communities of PD 6 and 7 and coordinated with local leaders to determine where the projects were most needed. Once these assessments were completed they began work right away to build these improvements to basic infrastructure.

While separate TFK units organized the five operations, there was a great deal of coordination required to assist one another in the completion of their tasks. It was identified from the beginning that these five lines of operations needed to be synchronized, as it was apparent that units would have to pool resources to accomplish the aim. To achieve their goals, the different units sat down each month to evaluate the progress, combine resources to meet the aim and to determine where best resources should be focused. For example, members of the Fd Eng Sqn Support Troop assisted CIMIC in to improve a local school by using a backhoe to dig out large ditches to allow for heavy rainfall to drain out of the schoolyard. On another occasion, during a delivery of hospital supplies, members of the FP Coy accompanied the HSS Coy, providing security as well assisting in the distribution of the medical goods.



Sapper Darrin Davis from Welland, Ont., a Combat Engineer from Task Force Kabul (TFK), places detonation cord around 122mm rockets prior to an ordnance disposal near Nazer Kala, Afghanistan.

Photo: Sgt Frank Hudec, Canadian Forces Combat Camera

While it is difficult to evaluate the success of the campaign plan it is clear that differences have been made in the lives of the Afghans living in PD 6 and 7.

During a vehicle checkpoint as part of a FP Coy patrol, a journalist asked an Afghan man how he felt about Canadian soldiers stopping him and looking through his car. The man responded that he was happy that the Canadians and ISAF were here in Afghanistan because he feels safer and he knows that without them Afghanistan would return to the harsh regimes that have ruled the country in the past.

"Through the efforts and demonstration of our good intentions, we believe that the Afghans living in PD 6 and PD 7 see that we are truly and genuinely here to assist them, and that our efforts will benefit them both in the short and long term," said Col Semianiw.

Afghanistan is slowly moving from reforms within the security sector, such as creating a viable national army and credible police forces, to public and private sector improvements. As the country becomes more secure, Afghans are able to improve their quality of life and rebuild an economy so that they can play a more significant role in the region.

The TFK campaign was designed to help them accomplish this goal. While this aspiration might be a long ways off, Afghans are taking the first steps down that road and Canada is committed to helping them in their journey.

Capt Gough is a Public Affairs Officer with Task Force Kabul.

Date Modified: 2006-09-25