

Fear of torture unfounded

'Humanitarian' concern could derail Afghan mission

By PETER WORTHINGTON, TORONTO SUN

What gives with these so-called "humanitarian" groups that seek to prevent our military from doing their job in Afghanistan?

Never mind that Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan are fighting a war against the Taliban (the Vandoos, at the moment, to be replaced this winter by the Princess Pats -- again), and at the same time are rebuilding schools, giving aid and medical treatment, and trying to restore order and security.

For our home-grown "humanitarians," this apparently isn't enough.

Right now, a federal court is being asked to rule on an injunction forbidding the transfer of "detainees" (i.e. Taliban prisoners) to Afghan prisons for fear they may be tortured.

Not that prisoners are being tortured or abused, or will be tortured, but that they "may" be so abused.

What a bunch of horsefeathers!

In a sworn affidavit on behalf of the Harper government, Brig.-Gen. Andre Deschamps (chief of staff in Afghanistan, responsible for combat operations) says being forbidden to hand over prisoners could curtail the whole Canadian mission in Afghanistan.

Canada is not (one hopes) going to establish a Canadian-run prison camp in Afghanistan -- and thereby violate Afghan sovereignty.

Nor, as Deschamps warns, are Canadians likely to release combatants they capture, or release them on their bond that they'll be good chaps, or that Canadian soldiers will simply back off fighting and not indulge in combat operations that risk capturing prisoners.

No, an order not to turn captured enemy over to the Afghan control -- as Amnesty International Canada and the B.C. Civil Liberties Association advocate -- is likely to have a far more disastrous effect than the do-gooders expect.

In other wars, when there have been no arrangements for clearing prisoners, the result has often been that no prisoners are taken. Those who surrender are simply shot. Is this what humanitarian groups want -- thereby unleashing a scandal of a different sort?

Canadian soldiers, as a given, do not torture prisoners. Yes, it can happen, and did happen in Somalia -- and look at the fuss that resulted.

Eventually, the government shut down the Somalia inquiry before it determined who was responsible for the torture-murder of Shidane Arone.

In Afghanistan, Canadians already carry out inspections of prisons where Taliban fighters they've captured are incarcerated. These prisons are not like federal prisons in Canada. The Afghan tradition is rougher than our customs. So what? Again, it's their country and our troops, NATO and U.S. troops are there to provide security and order for the Afghan people, not to administer welfare or social services to the Taliban (or al-Qaida) who seek

to impose a theocratic, oppressive dictatorship as they once did.

Giving humanitarian busy-bodies the benefit of doubt and assuming their intentions are well-intended, the reality is that if the courts okay their injunction the very people they seek to help will be more vulnerable.

If they want a western-style prison in Afghanistan, let them pressure the UN to establish one -- a pathetic cure-all for captured Taliban extremists, but par for the course for those with soft hearts and softer heads.

Don't expect Canadian soldiers to run such a foolish facility. How Taliban prisoners who've been killing Canadians in open battle or by roadside bombs are being treated is a low priority for most Canadians.

And forget about Geneva Conventions -- which don't (or shouldn't) apply to an enemy that ignores or rejects them.

Our guys may kill those trying to kill them, but we don't torture them. Nor does our military encourage torture. Period. That's good enough for most of us who support our troops and their Afghan mission, which steadily is being won.