

Truth surprises CBC

Corporation's reporting from Afghanistan distorted reality

By [LICIA CORBELLA](#)

I had been back from Afghanistan for a few months when I saw a television news report on the CBC that had me screaming at the TV set.

Somehow, a veteran CBC reporter had found the proverbial needle in a haystack -- a Kabul shopkeeper who said he didn't like having foreign troops in Afghanistan.

When I got into the newsroom the next morning my phone rang almost immediately.

It was an angry Garth Pritchard, an independent and fearless documentary film maker from Alberta I first met in Kabul in December 2003.

Together we saw the wells Canadian soldiers had dug, the schools they built, the orphanages they supplied with food, cooking and heating oil, school supplies and hope and the resulting affection from Afghanistan's grateful citizens.

"Did you watch the CBC news last night?" asked Garth. "Do you believe what was reported? It's the exact opposite of what we know is the truth," he said.

In the two weeks I spent as a non-embedded reporter in Afghanistan I spoke to at least 10 Afghan adults a day and sometimes as many as 30. I asked all adults a variety of questions, but always one question remained the same: "What do you think about having foreign troops in your country?"

Of the about 200 Afghan adults I spoke with they all told me they appreciated our troops being there, that they didn't want them to leave and that their lives were vastly improved.

I have written that in at least 10 columns since I returned from that troubled country filled with hospitable, resilient and handsome people.

MORE ACCURATE

Turns out my informal 200-person poll conducted in Kabul and the northern town of Kholm, located 40 km south of the Uzbekistan border, was more accurate than the picture the CBC has been feeding Canadians for half a decade.

My writings about how the Afghan people view our troops being in their country has recently been proven correct by a CBC/Enviro-nics poll released last week.

The poll, which interviewed 1,600 Afghan men and women, found that 60% of those questioned said the presence of foreign troops in the country was a good thing, with only 16% saying it was bad.

CBC commentators told viewers last week that they would be "surprised" by the poll results. That's not surprising. After all, if those viewers get most of their news from the Corporation they would have been hearing the polar opposite.

I also asked virtually every adult what they thought about the Taliban. They used words like: I hate them, they are demons, they should be killed. That kind of thing.

Again, the poll backs up what I reported. Some 73% have a negative opinion of the Taliban.

More than 70% said they had a positive opinion of President Hamid Karzai's government.

"The CBC seemed shocked by this poll," said Pritchard yesterday. "But you have to wonder why. All they would have had to do to know the truth themselves is go out and talk to Afghans, like I have on five separate occasions.

"It's basic reporting. Ask a question and let people talk. Instead, I think they're going there with an agenda and only airing the views that back that agenda."

Jeff Keay, head of media relations for the CBC disagrees with that view.

"From the point of view of CBC news through long, broad and comprehensive coverage, we ensure that a range of views are represented both pro and con as reflects the situation," said Keay yesterday.

So, if that's the case, why the surprise, CBC?