

# Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan

Ву

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn from Afghanistan

Canada fought for a decade in Afghanistan, its troops sustaining casualties and inflicting them. The war became progressively more unpopular at home, even while Canadian troops, well trained and well equipped, scored successes in the field. But what were the lessons of the war for Canada's leaders? Did we secure more influence with our Alliance friends? Were there factors that made battlefield success more difficult to achieve? Were there flaws in the government's organizational structure? In the goals it sought?

Canada first went to Afghanistan in December 2001, dispatching some forty members of its secret Joint Task Force 2 to operate against al Qaeda. Early in 2002, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry began serving in Kandahar Province with a United States Army division and after six months returned home. In July and August, 2003, the Canadian Forces began to return to Afghanistan in force with some 2000 troops, becoming the largest troop contributor to the Kabul Multinational Brigade under the stillnascent International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), operating in the Afghan capital while the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom had operational control in the rest of Afghanistan. The Canadian role there would last for over two years, and it included key leadership positions in ISAF Headquarters.

In late 2003-04 policymakers in Ottawa began to consider a transfer of Canadian troops as part of ISAF's expansion out of Kabul to cover all of Afghanistan with either civilian- or military-run Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The PRTs would be accompanied by NATO troops tasked to secure them and to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In general, ISAF's PRT mission aimed to improve the lot of rural Afghans and thus to build closer relations between the people and the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul. Another component of the effort to improve Afghan governance was the SAT-A, the Canadian-provided Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan that from 2005 to 2008 placed Canadians in key advisory roles with Afghan government ministries.

For a variety of reasons, including advice from the Canadian diplomatic, aid, and military leadership in Kabul, the Departments of National Defence and Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa believed that Canada ought to establish a Battle Group and PRT presence in Kandahar, beginning in 2006, in order to play a more central, more visible role in Afghan reconstruction. There were some dissenters and the two lead departments jockeyed for control over the Afghan file – and where DND, providing the boots on the ground, including the vast majority of those in the PRT, naturally enough assumed that there should be no contest. But there was general agreement that, with this deployment, Canada would raise its profile in the international community and among its NATO partners (especially the United States) and signal an end to the "human security agenda" period of the Chrétien government. For the Army leadership as well, the Kandahar commitment provided the opportunity to strike squarely at the mythology of peacekeeping.

Nonetheless, the desire to help Afghanistan and to achieve political and status gains may have overridden the fact that the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan was wide open and the Taliban insurgency was beginning to grow in Kandahar and Helmand provinces by late 2005. This was largely ignored until Canada took its first casualty in the new campaign on January 15, 2006 – even before the Canadian area of operations moved south - when diplomat Glyn Berry, who was to run the Canadian PRT from Camp Nathan Smith in a northern suburb of Kandahar City, died in a suicide bomb attack. In total, some 157 Canadian servicemen and women have been killed in Afghanistan, along with an undeclared, but large, number of soldiers wounded.

What does seem clear at this time is that the army learned what was needed as the deployment went on and adapted to the requirements of the job. The Government of Canada, under both Liberals and Conservatives almost always provided the necessary equipment regardless of cost, and the training system in Canada produced soldiers who knew what they faced and how to deal with the enemy.

Canada's combat mission in Kandahar ended in the summer of 2011. Until 2014 Canadian troops will train members of the ANSF. But although it will take many years before Canadians can begin to evaluate the performance of their troops in Afghanistan, it will probably not be many years before Canada is asked by NATO, the United Nations, or a "coalition of the willing" to commit its armed forces to some other dangerous part of the world.

When that happens, Canada's involvement in Kabul and Kandahar should provide a guide to the political, diplomatic, and military considerations to be taken into account when making a decision whether or not to commit troops. If the decision to do so is made, such a guide might help Ottawa determine how to provide the best possible civilian leadership for the mission, how to protect Canadian interests, and particularly how to ensure that members of the Canadian Forces are protected militarily, politically, and diplomatically when operating under overall alliance command, whether under another nation or another agency. In other words, what can we learn from the experience of Canada's long war in Afghanistan that should be taken into consideration the next time the nation considers a major military intervention?

The lessons we should learn, in no particular order of importance, are:

- 1) Operational success in "whole of government" missions is achieved through the early injection of well trained, well equipped, prepared, experienced civilian and military personnel in adequate numbers with clear goals. These individuals must have both preparatory and ongoing real-time access, and the skills to process, political, military and cultural intelligence about the area of conflict garnered from all possible domestic and international sources throughout the life of the mission.
- 2) Political and military objectives must be clearly defined by all the active partners to a mission. This entails a capability on the part of the government and bureaucratic leadership to understand the changing tactical, operational and strategic contexts in which its troops will operate and the ability to communicate these to both the military and the public in a concise and timely fashion.
- 3) There must be clear, consistent and persistent lines of command and communication within and between the military, the government and the bureaucracy, before any deployment of Canadian Forces members in potential combat environments is undertaken. The Prime Minister, if necessary, must ensure that bureaucratic infighting does not jeopardize the achievement of the mission's objectives.
- 4) NATO is divided both politically and militarily and any national caveats which limit the alliance's ability to succeed politically and militarily in any conflict must be clearly enunciated by all partners at the outset and taken into consideration in Canadian mission planning. Canadian decision makers should think long and hard before entering into any coalition to which national caveats have been attached.

The war in Afghanistan was a just war, and Canada was right to participate. The Canadian Forces served with great distinction and, though our soldiers paid a heavy price, they fought with honour and courage. The Army's leadership for the next generation was forged in Kandahar, and significant military lessons were learned and, we trust, mastered there. But

unless our politicians and bureaucrats also learned the lessons of the Afghan War, the price paid by Canada and Canadians will have been far too high.

#### SOMMAIRE

Des leçons apprises ? Ce que le Canada devrait apprendre de l'Afghanistan

Le Canada s'est battu une décennie en Afghanistan, alors que ses troupes subissaient des pertes et en infligeaient aussi. La guerre est devenue progressivement de plus en plus impopulaire au pays, alors même que les troupes canadiennes, bien entraînées et bien équipées, connaissaient des succès sur le terrain. Mais quelles ont été les leçons de la guerre pour les dirigeants canadiens? Avons-nous acquis plus d'influence auprès de nos amis de l'Alliance? Y a-t-il eu des facteurs qui ont rendu les succès sur le champ de bataille plus difficiles à réaliser? Y a-t-il eu des lacunes dans la structure organisationnelle du gouvernement? Dans les buts que celui-ci recherchait?

Le Canada est d'abord allé en Afghanistan en décembre 2001, en dépêchant quarante membres de sa Force opérationnelle interarmées 2 (JTF2) contre al-Qaïda. Au début de 2002, le 3<sup>e</sup> bataillon de la Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry a commencé à servir dans la province de Kandahar avec une division de l'armée américaine et, six mois plus tard, rentrait au pays. En juillet et en août 2003, les Forces canadiennes commencèrent à retourner en force en Afghanistan, avec quelque 2 000 soldats et devinrent le plus important contributeur de personnel militaire à la Brigade multinationale de Kabul sous l'égide de la Force internationale d'assistance à la sécurité (FIAS), encore naissante, qui opérait dans la capitale afghane alors que l'opération Enduring Freedom des États-Unis avait le contrôle opérationnel du reste du pays. Le rôle du Canada là-bas allait durer plus de deux ans, et il comprenait des postes de leadership clés aux quartiers généraux de la FIAS.

Fin 2003, début 2004, les responsables de politiques à Ottawa commencèrent à considérer un transfert de troupes canadiennes hors de Kabul dans le cadre de l'expansion de la FIAS pour couvrir l'ensemble de l'Afghanistan avec des équipes provinciales de reconstruction (PRT) dirigées par des civils ou des militaires. Les PRT seraient accompagnées par des troupes de l'OTAN chargées de leur sécurité et de l'entraînement des forces de sécurité nationale afghanes (ANSF). En général, les missions PRT de la FIAS avaient pour but d'améliorer la vie des Afghans ruraux et, par là, de bâtir des relations plus étroites entre le peuple et le gouvernement d'Hamid Karzai à Kabul. La SAT-A, Équipe consultative stratégique-Afghanistan, d'origine canadienne, qui, entre 2005 et 2008, a placé des Canadiens dans des rôles de conseillers clés auprès des ministères du gouvernement Afghan, est une autre composante de l'effort déployé pour améliorer la gouvernance afghane.

Pour une variété de raisons, dont les conseils des dirigeants des milieux canadiens de la diplomatie, de l'aide et des forces armées à Kabul, les ministères de la Défense nationale et des Affaires étrangères et Commerce international, à Ottawa, croyaient que le Canada devait établir un groupe tactique et une présence de PRT à Kandahar, à compter de 2006, afin de jouer un rôle plus central et plus visible dans la reconstruction de l'Afghanistan. Il y avait quelques contestataires et les deux ministères responsables se livraient à une course pour savoir qui prendrait le contrôle du dossier Afghanistan – et où le MDN, qui fournissait les bottes sur le terrain, y compris la vaste majorité du personnel des PRT, assumait naturellement qu'il ne devrait y avoir aucune course. Mais il était généralement convenu que, avec ce déploiement, le Canada rehausserait son profil dans la communauté internationale et auprès de ses partenaires de l'OTAN (particulièrement les États-Unis) et signalerait la fin de la période de l' « agenda de sécurité humaine » du gouvernement Chrétien. Pour les dirigeants de l'Armée également, l'engagement à Kandahar offrait l'occasion de porter carrément un coup à la mythologie du maintien de la paix.

Néanmoins, le désir d'aider l'Afghanistan et de réaliser des gains politiques et des gains de statut peut avoir primé sur le fait que la frontière entre l'Afghanistan et le Pakistan était toute

grande ouverte et que l'insurrection des Talibans commençait à prendre de l'ampleur à dans les provinces de Kandahar et Helmand à la fin de 2005. Ce fait était largement ignoré jusqu'à ce que le Canada subisse sa première perte dans la nouvelle campagne, le 15 janvier 2006 – même avant que le domaine des opérations du Canada descende vers le sud – quand le diplomate Glyn Berry, qui devait diriger la PRT canadienne à partir du camp Nathan Smith, dans une banlieue nord de Kandahar, meure dans une attaque suicide à la bombe. Au total, quelque 157 militaires canadiens, hommes et femmes, ont été tués en Afghanistan, ainsi qu'un nombre non déclaré mais important, de soldats blessés.

Ce qui paraît clair à ce moment-ci, c'est que l'armée a appris ce qui était nécessaire au fur et à mesure du déploiement et s'est adaptée aux exigences du travail à faire. Le gouvernement du Canada, tant sous les Libéraux que sous les Conservateurs, a presque toujours fourni l'équipement nécessaire quel qu'en soit le coût, et le système d'entraînement, au Canada, a produit des soldats qui savaient ce à quoi ils faisaient face et comment se comporter face à l'ennemi.

La mission de combat du Canada à Kandahar a pris fin à l'été 2011. Jusqu'en 2014 les troupes canadiennes feront l'entraînement des membres des Forces de sécurité nationale afghanes (ANSF). Mais, même s'il faut plusieurs années avant que les Canadiens puissent commencer à évaluer la performance de leurs troupes en Afghanistan, il ne faudra probablement pas bien des années avant que l'OTAN, les Nations Unies ou une « coalition de consentants » demandent au Canada d'engager ses forces armées dans une autre partie dangereuse du monde.

Quand cela se produira, l'implication du Canada à Kabul et à Kandahar devrait servir de guide aux considérations politiques, diplomatiques et militaires dont il faudra tenir compte en prenant la décision d'engager ou non des troupes. Si la décision de le faire est prise, un tel guide pourrait aider Ottawa à déterminer comment fournir le meilleur leadership civil possible pour la mission, comment protéger les intérêts canadiens et, particulièrement, comment faire en sorte que les Forces canadiennes soient protégées, aux points de vue militaire, politique et diplomatique, lorsqu'elles fonctionnent sous un commandement général d'alliance, soit d'un autre pays, soit d'une autre agence. Autrement dit, que pouvons-nous apprendre de l'expérience de la longue guerre du Canada en Afghanistan, qu'il faudrait prendre en considération la prochaine fois que le pays considérera participer à une intervention militaire majeure ?

Les leçons que nous devrions apprendre, sans ordre d'importance particulier, sont :

- 1) Le succès opérationnel dans des missions « pangouvernementales » s'acquiert grâce à l'injection précoce de personnel civil et militaire bien entraîné, bien équipé, préparé et expérimenté en nombre suffisant et avec des objectifs clairs. Ces individus doivent avoir un accès en temps réel, préparatoire et continu, et les compétences nécessaires pour traiter les renseignements politiques, militaires et culturels portant sur l'aire de conflit et provenant de toutes les sources possibles intérieures et internationale , pendant la vie entière de la mission.
- 2) Les objectifs politiques et militaires doivent être clairement définis par tous les partenaires actifs d'une mission. Cela suppose une capacité de la part du gouvernement et de la haute direction de la bureaucratie de comprendre les contextes tactiques, opérationnels et stratégiques changeants dans lesquels nos troupes vont opérer et la capacité de communiquer ceux-ci à la fois aux militaires et au public d'une façon concise et en temps opportun.
- 3) Il doit y avoir des lignes de commandement et de communication cohérentes et persistantes, à la fois à l'intérieur des instances militaires, gouvernementales et

bureaucratiques et entre celles-ci, avant que tout déploiement de membres des Forces canadiennes vers des environnements de combat possibles ne soit entrepris. Le premier ministre, si nécessaire, doit faire en sorte que les querelles bureaucratiques internes ne mettent pas en péril le but visé par les objectifs de la mission.

4) L'OTAN est divisée aux plans politique et militaire, et toute restriction nationale qui limite la capacité de l'alliance de réussir politiquement et militairement dans un conflit doit être, d'entrée de jeu, énoncée clairement par tous les partenaires et prise en considération dans la planification d'une mission canadienne. Les décideurs canadiens devraient réfléchir mûrement et sérieusement avant de se joindre à toute coalition à laquelle des restrictions nationales auront été attachées.

La guerre en Afghanistan a été une guerre juste et le Canada a bien fait d'y prendre part. Les Forces canadiennes ont servi avec grande distinction et, même si nos soldats ont payé un lourd tribut, ils se sont battus avec honneur et courage. C'est à Kandahar que les dirigeants de l'Armée de la prochaine génération ont été forgés, et d'importantes leçons militaires ont été apprises et, nous en sommes sûrs, maîtrisées là-bas. Mais, à moins que nos politiciens et nos bureaucrates aient aussi appris les leçons de la Guerre d'Afghanistan, le prix payé par le Canada et les Canadiens aura été beaucoup trop élevé.

# **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

ANSF Afghan National Security Forces
ASIC All Source Intelligence Centre
CADPAT Canadian Pattern [military clothing]

CDS Chief of the Defence Staff CENTCOM Central Command [US]

CF Canadian Forces

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

CIDA Canadian International Development Agency

CMTC Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre
CSIS Canadian Security Intelligence Service

DFAIT Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

DND Department of National Defence IED Improvised Explosive Device

ISAF International Security Assistance Force ISI Inter-Services Intelligence [Pakistan]

JTF2 Joint Task Force 2

J2 Intelligence [Canadian Forces]
NDHQ National Defence Headquarters
OEF Operation Enduring Freedom [US]

PCO Privy Council Office
PMO Prime Minister's Office

PPCLI Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry

PRT Provincial Reconstruction Team
RCR Royal Canadian Regiment

SACEUR Supreme Allied Commander in Europe SAT-A Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan

TF Task Force

UNAMA United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

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#### INTRODUCTION

Canada first went to Afghanistan in December 2001, dispatching some forty members of its secret Joint Task Force 2 to operate against al Qaeda. Early in 2002, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry began serving in Kandahar Province with a United States Army division and after six months returned home. <sup>1</sup> "Early in, early out," or so one account put it. <sup>2</sup> In July and August, 2003, the Canadian Forces began to return to Afghanistan in force with some 2000 troops, becoming the largest troop contributor to the Kabul Multinational Brigade under the still-nascent International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), operating in the Afghan capital while the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom had operational control in the rest of Afghanistan. The Canadian role there would last for over two years, and it included key leadership positions in ISAF Headquarters.

In late 2003-04 policymakers in Ottawa began to consider a transfer of Canadian troops as part of ISAF's expansion out of Kabul to cover all of Afghanistan with either civilian — or military-run Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The PRTs would be accompanied by NATO troops tasked to secure them and to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). In general, ISAF's PRT mission aimed to improve the lot of rural Afghans and thus to build closer relations between the people and the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul. Another component of the effort to improve Afghan governance was the SAT-A, the Canadian-provided Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan that from 2005 to 2008 placed Canadian Forces officers (and a few public servants) in key advisory roles with Afghan government ministries.

For a variety of reasons, including advice from the Canadian diplomatic, aid, and military leadership in Kabul, the Departments of National Defence and Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa believed that Canada ought to establish a Battle Group and PRT presence in Kandahar, beginning in 2006, in order to play a more central, more visible role in Afghan reconstruction. There were some dissenters, something not at all unusual in the bureaucracy-ridden environs of the Ottawa mandarinate where the two lead departments jockeyed for control over the Afghan file — and where DND, providing the boots on the ground, including the vast majority of those in the PRT, naturally enough assumed that there should be no contest.<sup>3</sup> But there was general agreement that, with this deployment, Canada would raise its profile in the international community and among its NATO partners (especially the United States) and signal an end to the "human security agenda" period of the Chrétien government. For the Army leadership as well, the Kandahar commitment provided the opportunity to strike squarely at the mythology of peacekeeping. We're the Canadian Forces, the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Rick Hillier, famously said. "We kill people."

Nonetheless, the desire to help Afghanistan and to achieve political and status gains may have overridden the fact that the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan was wide open and the Taliban insurgency was beginning to grow in Kandahar and Helmand provinces by late 2005. This was largely ignored until Canada took its first casualty in the new campaign

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Toronto, 2011), pp. 420-1, for a brief account of the 2002 deployment.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Janice Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto, 2007), p.2.
<sup>3</sup> Paul Chapin interview, July 5, 2011; Stephen Thorne, "The Caves and Graves of Tora Bora," *Legion* (September, 2003).

on January 15, 2006 — even before the Canadian area of operations moved south — when diplomat Glyn Berry, who was to run the Canadian PRT from Camp Nathan Smith in a northern suburb of Kandahar City, died in a suicide bomb attack.<sup>4</sup> In total, some 157 Canadian servicemen and women have been killed in Afghanistan, along with an undeclared, but large, number of soldiers wounded.

The war in Afghanistan became Canada's third largest military effort, passing the Korean campaign in numbers of troops deployed and length of commitment. Although the troops appear to have acquitted themselves well in their work in Kabul and their campaign in Kandahar province, virtually all of the evidence now available about the performance of the Canadian Forces is anecdotal or comes from personal memoirs or the media. There has been some "third party" evidence and several attempts by Canadian analysts to recount and evaluate the military performance, but a full accounting must await the emergence of historical records such as war diaries, after action reports, interviews with participants, surveys of the soldiers, and message logs. Certainly there is a wealth of material already being gathered and evaluated by the "lessons learned" cell of the Canadian Forces whose job it is to keep the cycle as small as possible between events in the field and lessons circulated back to the field. However, it will be many years before such information is freely available to the public. We have pored over Wikileaks telegrams, seen some Canadian documentation, read email discussions where key participants discussed their roles, and conducted interviews, almost all without any restrictions on use, with many of the soldiers, politicians, diplomats, and bureaucrats who helped make the decisions. Nonetheless, we recognize the obvious: much more needs to be done before this is anything more than an interim account. We acknowledge as well that we have not attempted to cover some important issues. We have omitted the failures and successes of the Canadian aid efforts, for example. The controversial question of the treatment of detainees is not examined here, nor are strategy and tactics on the battlefield.

What does seem clear at this time is that the army which initially went into Afghanistan in 2002 with the wrong uniforms (temperate woodland CADPATs rather than desert uniforms) and deployed a light infantry battalion without armoured vehicles learned what was required as the deployment went on and adapted to the requirements of the job. The Government of Canada, under both Liberals and Conservatives almost always provided the necessary equipment regardless of cost, and the training system in Canada produced soldiers who knew what they faced and how to deal with the enemy.<sup>5</sup>

Canada's combat mission in Kandahar ended in the summer of 2011. Until 2014 Canadian troops will train members of the ANSF. But although it will take many years before Canadians can begin to evaluate the performance of their troops in Afghanistan, it will probably not be many years before Canada is asked by NATO, the United Nations, or a "coalition of the willing" to commit its armed forces to some other dangerous part of the world.

When that happens, Canada's involvement in Kabul and Kandahar should provide a guide to the political, diplomatic, and military considerations to be taken into account when making a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> On Berry's killing, we benefited from seeing a sensitive account by one of his DFAIT colleagues. Confidential email, June 17, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> A useful survey is Chris MacLean, "Protecting Our Soldiers," *FrontLine* (no.3, 2009), pp. 8ff.

decision whether or not to commit troops. If the decision to do so is made, such a guide might help Ottawa determine how to provide the best possible civilian leadership for the mission, how to protect Canadian interests, and particularly how to ensure that members of the Canadian Forces are protected militarily, politically, and diplomatically when operating under overall alliance command, whether under another nation or another agency. In other words, what can we learn from the experience of Canada's long war in Afghanistan that should be taken into consideration the next time the nation considers a major military intervention?

#### THE KABUL EXPERIENCE

The Canadian Forces were badly overextended in February 2003 when the government of Jean Chrétien announced that Canada would send 1900 troops to Kabul in August of that year. 6 This decision, widely believed to be aimed at ending pressure from the United States for Canada to participate in the forthcoming invasion of Iraq, <sup>7</sup> led to the resignation of MGen Cameron Ross, the Director General of International Security Policy at National Defence Headquarters in Ottawa. It was not because this deployment foreclosed participation in Iraq, Ross said later in explanation of his resignation, but because the government had failed to provide the Canadian Forces with the resources it needed. The CF was at "the tail end of the decade of darkness and there was no light on the horizon for increased government funding." The operational tempo was hectic, "the number of missions and the number of troops we had overseas," and the possibility existed of the CF being called on for further deployments to, for example, Africa or the Israel-Palestine borders. Then "out of the blue the government decided to send 2000 troops overseas [to Afghanistan]. Where would we be going to get the resources for that?" 8 Ross was not alone in the CF in opposing the Kabul deployment, but he was the only senior officer to resign.9

And yet, with its can-do spirit the Army found the troops and deployed to Kabul in mid-2003. forming a large part of ISAF's Kabul Multinational Brigade that patrolled "the egg," or Kabul city up to the surrounding hills. The rest of Afghanistan was nominally the purview of the United States' Operation Enduring Freedom but the US troops were chasing Osama bin Laden on the Pakistan border and most of the country was controlled by warlords. There was neither much communication nor much trust between the American and ISAF forces, perhaps correctly as the early ISAF was a jerry-built structure. 10 The Taliban had not yet become a force again, but there was still much bloodshed from warlords and Hezb-i Islami fighters.11

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> In December 2002, the CF had 2488 personnel on deployment in 11 missions. "Strategic Outlook—the next 18 months", power point, December 2002, provided by MGen (ret'd) Cameron Ross.

Hon John Manley suggested in an interview that the Kabul commitment was NOT made to foreclose on one in Irag. (Interview, June 13, 2011). Cf. Manley's comment in Stein and Lang, p. 68. LGen Andrew Leslie recalled that Jean Chrétien had told him in 2003 that we were in Afghanistan because it was right and because the US was there and the US matters to Canada; it was UN and NATO sanctioned; and it would get the US off his back

after Iraq. Interview, July 5, 2011.

8 MGen Cameron Ross interview, May 31, 2011. Ross briefed the Minister of National Defence to this effect in December 2002: his powerpoint, "Strategic Outlook—the next 18 months".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Stein and Lang, pp. 41ff. See also Wikileaks 03OTTAWA629, "Defence Minister McCallum and the Canadian Forces," June 3, 2003.

David Wright interview, May 12, 2011. Wright was Ambassador to NATO.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> A number of senior Hezb-i Islami members had emigrated to Canada (!) and were, the former Ambassador in Kabul, Christopher Alexander said, debriefed. Interview, 10 May 2011. Alexander has now published The Long Way Back: Afghanistan's Quest for Peace (Toronto, 2011).

ISAF's headquarters was understaffed and makeshift in the summer of 2003 (the staff lived in tents), having been sent at short notice from Heidelberg, Germany. NATO had only decided to assume responsibility in April (after much urging from Canada),<sup>12</sup> and the Dutch-German Corps Headquarters that had previously directed the operation had pulled out and taken its equipment and files with it. No one in the first NATO ISAF headquarters, said BGen D. Craig Hilton, the Deputy Chief of Staff to LGen Gotz Gliemeroth, the German in command of NATO-run ISAF, knew anything about Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

What made the Canadian representation critical was that some of the participating nations in the Brigade, the Turks, for example, confined their activities to a few blocks of the city or, like the French, flatly refused to cooperate with ISAF; only the small British contingent would fight. The almost 2000 Canadians were equipped with some 16 light armoured vehicles, too few and barely adequate for the task, and too many of the wretched, unprotected Iltis jeeps. Nonetheless, led by BGen Peter Devlin, the Multinational Brigade commander from July 2003, they were the largest force of well-trained troops who could act toughly, though, it must be said, Ottawa's imposed caveats limited what could be done. Still, the level of violence in Kabul was relatively low at the time, and the troop strength on the ground automatically made Canada a key player. The same strength on the ground automatically made Canada a key player.

So too did the Deputy Commander of the International Security Assistance Force, MGen Andrew Leslie, an officer of intelligence, great energy, and one with substantial service in previous Canadian operations abroad. Leslie had read widely on Afghanistan before his posting to ISAF and, in both Ottawa and Kabul, he had made it a point to talk regularly to the relevant ambassadors and military attachés. Leslie handled the military side of ISAF, Gliemeroth (on his first operational deployment) dealing with the political-diplomatic aspects. Moreover, Leslie was triple-hatted (unlike his successors), combining his ISAF responsibility with the roles of Canadian Contingent commander and commander of Task Force Kabul.

Just as important as the military side of the Kabul contingent was the civilian Canadian representation. Canada's ambassador, newly appointed, was Christopher Alexander, an ambitious, intelligent young (35 years old) Foreign Service Officer posted in from his second tour in Moscow. The Canadian International Development Agency representative was Dr Nipa Banerjee, tough, able and intelligent and with a budget of \$150 million and relatively few controls from Ottawa on how the funds were spent. The aid money went to what the Canadians considered to be the best and most efficient Afghan government departments, for preparations for the presidential election of October 2004, and for the constitutional *jirga* in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> MGen (ret'd) Cameron Ross memorandum, April 19, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> BGen D. Craig Hilton interview, May 13, 2011. The Canadian government, however, was "quite well informed" about the "Big Picture" of Afghanistan-India-Pakistan from 2002 onward. Confidential email from an intelligence official, 14 August 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Hilton interview; Leslie interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> But Kabul was not peacekeeping, though many Canadians saw it that way. The battle group commander, LCol Don Denne of 3RCR, bluntly observed that whatever they were doing it wasn't peacekeeping. 'God, I hate it when they call us peacekeepers. We loathe the term, abhor it. Peacekeeping can turn into a general war situation in the snap of your fingers.' (J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed the Canadian Military?* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 173-4.) Another officer shared this view: the term 'peacekeeping' offended soldiers for its 'associated expectations and clichéd images.' Peacekeeping 'suggests a passive non-invasive presence operating in a benign environment....The reality is somewhat different.' Maj Tom Mykytiuk, "Company Command in the Three Block War...," in Col Bernd Horn, ed., *In Harm's Way: On the Front Lines of Leadership* (Kingston, 2006), pp. 141-2. There is a good account of 3RCR's operations in Kabul from August 2003 in Col Bernd Horn, *From Cold War to New Millennium: The History of the Royal Canadian Regiment*, 1953-2008 (Toronto, 2011), pp. 263ff.

December.16 "We mattered," remembered Alexander,17 though his ambition and close links to the Canadian military in Afghanistan stirred up concerns in the Pearson Building. As Paul Chapin, the Director General for International Security at the time later observed, he "generated envy and resentment...for being (a) young (b) enterprising (c) public and (d) successful. His reward for opening the mission in Kabul in adverse conditions and for earning the confidence of the Canadian Forces (as few diplomats had done in a generation) was to be denied promotion in Ottawa for his supposed administrative deficiencies...."18 Nonetheless, Alexander and Banerjee cooperated closely with Generals Leslie and Devlin they were all "inseparable," Leslie recalled 19 - pooled what they knew, and with the most effective large troop contingent in ISAF, they made Canada for a time the major player in the Afghan capital, the United States excepted. "We were a force to be reckoned with," LCol Don Denne of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment, said: "nobody was going to tangle with us, at least not head on." And Gen Leslie called the 3RCR his "800 pound gorilla."20 Big battalions really did have clout, the Canadians discovered, and Leslie and Co. demonstrated this when they took away the Afghan warlords' heavy weaponry through a combination of bluff, diplomacy and force. That the cantonments into which the tanks, missiles, and guns were stored were largely paid for with Canadian dollars seemed only fitting.<sup>21</sup>

Leslie, moreover, had previously served as the J6 (Coordination) at NDHQ, and understood the CF's intelligence and communications capabilities, and he brought with him an All Source Intelligence Centre (ASIC) that was entirely Canadian and was housed in Camp Julien with the Canadian contingent. The ASIC linked army signalers, RCMP, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and Communications Security Establishment assets in Kabul and collected intelligence from a substantial range of sophisticated electronic and, as they were developed and fostered, human sources.<sup>22</sup> This gave ISAF and the Canadians situational awareness and saved lives. The ASIC even built the cell phone towers in Kabul, and this too likely provided useful intelligence in surreptitiously allowing calls to be monitored. In addition, intelligence-sharing gave the Canadians credibility with their partners as they had more good information than any others except the Americans and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan — and the Americans, unlike the UN which was interested in restoring order and passed out its good information widely, were very careful in what they shared.<sup>23</sup> The Canadians and British in Kabul received more intelligence material from the US than other nations (so much so that one Dutch major-general on the ISAF staff angrily pronounced this a "conspiracy").24 But Canada did not get everything. The Central Intelligence Agency in Kabul ran its own show out of the US Embassy and would not share anything that was not heavily sanitized. After one incident, General Leslie had to draft a strong letter of protest that threatened "to name names", and the US Commanding General

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> A useful summary of Canadian aid can be found in a US Embassy Kabul cable on Wikileaks: http//wikileaks.f1/cable/2008/06/08/Kabul1492.html

Alexander interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Paul Chapin email, "Kandahar and all that," June 17, 2011; Peter Harder interview, June 14, 2011. Harder was Deputy Minister of DFAIT.

Leslie interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Alexander interview; Hilton interview; Leslie interview; Horn, *From Cold War to New Millennium*, pp. 270-1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Leslie interview; Alexander, Long Way Back, [ebook] pp.55-6, 60-1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> On the ASIC, see Maj G. Ohlke, "Army News—The All Source Intelligence Centre," *Canadian Army Journal* (Fall, 2007).

Alexander interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Hilton interview.

in Kabul finally prevailed on the CIA at least to inform ISAF Headquarters where and when its operations were going to take place so that accidents could be avoided.<sup>25</sup>

What does seem clear is that by posting able military and civilian officers and officials to Afghanistan, by equipping its troops adequately for the mission, and by maximizing the effort to collect and disseminate intelligence, Canada played a disproportionately important role in Kabul as part of ISAF. Canada's record in equipping its troops for the Kabul mission was mixed. On the one hand, Ottawa made an agreement with the US Marines to quickly acquire M777 155 mm artillery pieces. On the other hand, much patrolling in the early part of the mission was done in dangerous and highly vulnerable Iltis vehicles. But overall, good people, strength on the ground, and good intelligence are always important, and this was proven true once again.

# THE STRATEGIC ADVISORY TEAM-AFGHANISTAN

The Canadian influence increased further in February 2004 when Lieutenant General Rick Hillier, the Chief of Land Staff, became the ISAF Commander for a six months stint. Hillier was a reader and he too had studied up on Afghanistan before he took over at ISAF. Before taking command, he had visited Pakistan and met senior army officers, and he had flown by helicopter over the Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas to examine infiltration routes used by various Pakistani-supported terrorist elements, not least the Taliban.<sup>26</sup> Hillier hid his intelligence behind folksiness, but he was a shrewd, political, and charismatic leader who quickly established a close personal relationship with President Karzai.

Hillier's main task was to manage ISAF's expansion out of Kabul, something that was critical for NATO, still searching for a role in the post-Cold War world, and something of great interest to the United States that sought more involvement in the War Against Terror from its European (and Canadian) allies. Hillier had served with the US Army as a deputy corps commander, he had many friends there, and he was trusted completely by the Americans, something that was important as ISAF spread its wings.<sup>27</sup> The planning for the expansion had been underway before Hillier's assumption of command, but planning and implementation both moved more quickly once he arrived, and he received credit for this from Karzai who recognized that NATO and ISAF were subject to less criticism from his countrymen than the US.

Hillier's staff also prepared a roadmap to unify development, governance, and military action and to bring together the Alliance's efforts on a strategic level, in effect an attempt to create an integrated effort in Afghanistan. But the time was not yet right, and this was rejected by NATO — and by Ottawa.<sup>28</sup>

Nothing if not persistent, Hillier nonetheless remained focused on the need to assist the Afghan government in creating effective departments of government and training the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid.; Leslie interview. In Ottawa, intelligence officers received substantial information from Canadian diplomatic posts in the region and "lots of intel and analysis, [but] no diplomatic reporting" from allies. Intelligence officers from Ottawa, as well as High Commission staff from Islamabad, travelled regularly into areas near the Afghan border. The Pakistan ISI gave briefings to the High Commission staff but these were PR spin, not truth. Confidential email from an intelligence official, 14 August 2011.

Alexander, Long Way Back, [ebook] pp. 61ff., includes an account of Hillier's Pakistan visit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Wright interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Col George Petrolekas, "It Didn't Have to be This Way," *On Track* (Spring, 2009), p. 21.

bureaucrats to run them. "It was teaching them the ABCs of responsible government," he said, and he used some twenty members of his military planning staff at ISAF Headquarters, led by LCol Ian Hope, as a strategic planning team in Kabul.<sup>29</sup> Karzai liked this, recognizing that his ministers needed help, and Hillier tried to get the international community, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to buy into the idea. But when he returned to Ottawa, he took his team with him and no one stepped forward to fill the gap. Then when Hillier, now Chief of the Defence Staff, visited Afghanistan in 2005, Karzai asked that the advisory team be re-created.

Hillier took the request back to Ottawa, told Foreign Affairs that the Canadian Forces was going to take on this task, and won grudging support for the plan, though many in DFAIT were unhappy with this decision.<sup>30</sup> In August, 2005, therefore, the CF established what it now called the Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan.31 Led by gunner Colonel Michael Capstick, the original SAT-A was made up of fifteen members, twelve military, two civilian public servants of the Department of National Defence, and one from CIDA. The military members were a mix from the three components - air, naval, and land - and were both Regular Force and Reserve members. One of the public servants was an operational research scientist, whereas the other was a strategic planner from the central staff; all were expert planners, able to offer instruction and advice not on agriculture or taxation, for example, but on how to organize and plan. The SAT-A had complete cooperation from Alexander and Banerjee, the senior Canadian public servants in Afghanistan, but faced some hostility in Kabul from other governments' representatives, who saw Canada horning in. There was, however, almost none within the Afghan bureaucracy, desperate for assistance and willing to trust the Canadians to be expert, impartial, and not looking for a national advantage. In Chris Alexander's view similar trust could not have been shown American advisers.32

The first SAT-A rotation played a major role in developing the Afghanistan National Development Strategy. 33 Staying out of the limelight, the Canadians on the SAT-A could be portrayed in almost melodramatic fashion when they were (very rarely) noticed. "Sometimes jokingly called 'the Hillier Gang,'" CBC's Brian Stewart said, "these officers help play out and execute key government recovery efforts, rules of government, civil service reform, even the most crucial sector of all, the National Development Strategy. What's unique in this is no military operation before has actually embedded itself within a host nation's governing circles."34

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<sup>30</sup> Col Mike Capstick email, 7 July 2011; Chapin interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Kimberley Marten, "From Kabul to Kandahar: The Canadian Forces and Change," *American Review of Canadian Studies* (XL, no.2, 2010), p.222.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Gen Rick Hillier, *A Soldier First* (Toronto, 2009), pp. 423ff. See also LCol M.-H. St Louis, "The Strategic Advisory Team in Afghanistan—Part of the Canadian Comprehensive Approach to Stability Operations," *Canadian Military Journal* (IX, no. 3, 2009), pp. 58ff; Col Mike Capstick, "A military solution to fostering civil service capacity," *Vanguard* (May 2007); Col Mike Capstick, "Strengthening the Weak: The Canadian Forces in Afghanistan," *International Insights* (III, no. 5, 2006); Christie Blatchford, "Small strategic team making big difference," *Globe and Mail*, May 8, 2006; Roy Thomas, "Origins of the Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan," *On Track (Spring, 2009)*, pp. 27ff.; and Sean Maloney, "Canada's New and Dangerous Mission in Afghanistan," *The Transatlantic Quarterly* (Fall/Winter/Spring 2005-06), pp. 15-16. Marten, pp. 222-4, provides a good analysis of the SAT-A's achievements and problems.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander interview.

<sup>33</sup> St Louis, op cit.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Brian Stewart, CBC Newsworld, March 8, 2007.

The Afghans clearly benefited from the SAT-A, President Karzai fulsome in his praise. What did Canada get out of it? There was no direct intelligence benefit. Col Capstick noted that in the first SAT-A rotation "we did not actively collect intelligence on the Afghan government and its major personalities. My instructions from General Hillier were very clear — I was there to work for the Afghan Government and was to refer any apparent differences between Canadian and Afghan [policies]...that could involve SAT-A directly to him. Based on this direction." he said, "I made the conscious decision not to collect intelligence and not to forward information to the J2 staff at NDHQ as we needed to build trust with the Afghans. If we were perceived to be an intelligence resource, building that trust would have been impossible." This was surely true, but Capstick "did prepare periodic reports that were widely circulated in NDHQ, DFAIT and CIDA. These covered the strategic situation, trends, concerns and the team's activities." He added, however, that "No one on my team was ever formally debriefed upon completion of the mission."35 That Canadian self-denial likely went too far, throwing away a valuable opportunity to collect extremely useful information. Nonetheless, Canada learned much about the Afghan government and its key figures, and the SAT-A helped to create the rudiments of good governance in a country that had never had it.

It was probably inevitable, therefore, that the SAT-A be killed — in Ottawa. After Alexander's departure from the Embassy in Kabul (and from DFAIT), his successors did their best to close down the SAT-A and reduce the intimate cooperation Alexander had established with the CF.<sup>36</sup> Some Non-Governmental Organizations in Afghanistan were hostile, Bill Graham, the Defence Minister under Paul Martin recalled: they didn't like the military, and they didn't like the idea of the military being involved in providing expertise to the Afghan government.<sup>37</sup> The critics were spurred on in Ottawa by DFAIT and the Privy Council Office out of what General Hillier called "straight jealousy." They simply didn't want the CF to get the credit, and although they promised to provide Canadian bureaucrats to do the job, they could not come through — there were few strategic planners in the public service, he said, and almost no public servants wanted to risk the dangers and discomforts of Kabul and Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup>

The DFAIT view of the 2008 decision to close the SAT-A was very different. According to Peter Harder, the Deputy Minister from 2003 to 2007, the CF personnel on the SAT-A got so involved in Afghan affairs that some forgot that they were working for Canada. Their value to the Afghans shrank over time and there was a different, better civilian presence in the government by 2008. There was also no coordination — and substantial resistance to the Embassy's efforts to impose it. Some SAT-A officers, Harder said, actually opposed Canadian policy.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, Col Serge Labbé, SAT-A's last commander, saw himself as serving the Afghan government on a kind of secondment and objected to the notion that he

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Capstick email. Col Capstick kindly provided a copy of his "Commander's Report to the CDS and Comd CEFCOM," covering the period 15 Aug 05-17 Aug 06. Paul Chapin believed "the intelligence spin-off potential was huge." Interview. One intelligence specialist said he had never debriefed SAT-A members, but he did debrief "the Ambassador when he was in Ottawa and some of his officers." Confidential email from an intelligence official, August 14, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Capstick email and Confidential emails.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Hon Bill Graham interview, May 11, 2011, transcript by Jack Cunningham, Graham's research assistant (who kindly provided a copy).

<sup>38</sup> Gen Rick Hillier interview, May 31-June 1, 2011; Hillier, pp.425-6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Peter Harder interview, June 14, 2011; Confidential interview. There was some effort to persuade NATO to take over the Canadian role when the CF was "forced" to terminate it. Letter from Gen Egon Ramms, JFCommand HQ Brunssum to SACEUR, June 27, 2008, confidential source.

should aim to achieve what he saw as DFAIT objectives in his work.<sup>40</sup> That distinction was precisely as defined by General Hillier for Col Capstick in 2005 and what made SAT-A attractive to the Karzai government,

Whatever the reasons, good and bad, one of the most effective Canadian assistance programs to the Afghan government was killed because of Ottawa bureaucratic politics.

# **CANADA'S OVER-RELIANCE ON NATO**

Gen Rick Hillier will long be remembered as one of the most dynamic and influential Chiefs of the Defence Staff (CDS) to lead the Canadian Armed Forces since the end of the Second World War. As Army commander and then CDS, he was a major actor in Canada's involvement with ISAF from the very beginning of the NATO take-over in late 2003. He left the military in 2008 and published his memoirs a year later, his observations regarding NATO's performance in Afghanistan devastating: "It had become increasingly clear to me [by early 2008] that NATO was set up to do almost anything but run an operation like that in Afghanistan....NATO is based on consensus...that kind of consensus is simply not possible when you're trying to win an up-close and personal battle like the one in Afghanistan."41 Hillier's nominal NATO headquarters, Allied Joint Force Command, was in Brunssum, The Netherlands, but he did not get on with the bureaucratically-minded commander, a German general, and when necessary simply ignored him. 42 The Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR), the NATO commander, could also be ignored, but less obviously. As Hillier wrote in his memoirs, "It was quickly evident that NATO was going to be both our main support and our biggest headache...It was crystal clear from the start that there was no strategy for the mission....no clear articulation of what they wanted to achieve, no political guidance and few forces. It was abysmal."43

Canada had re-entered Afghanistan in 2003 as the key player in the hand-over of the International Security Assistance Force from UN to NATO auspices. Canada has been a member of NATO from its very beginning and in the early Cold War years at least, made substantial military contributions to the Alliance. When the Cold War ended Canada withdrew its by then small land and air contingents in Germany but remained a NATO member even though the Alliance's primary mission of protecting Western Europe from the USSR was no longer needed. In the mid-1990s Canada embraced NATO more tightly when it sent forces to participate in NATO's Implementation Force in Bosnia and its later iteration, the Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact, Canada's had imposed severe caveats on its troops in the Balkans at the very start of their joining the initial UN mission there. Hillier recalls in his memoirs that Canadian troops in Croatia and Bosnia, scattered in pennypackets, had been so restricted in what they could and could not do that other military missions dubbed the Canadian formations Can'tbat 1 and Can'tbat 2 instead of Canbats (Canadian battalions) 1 and 2.44 Those caveats, the resulting lack of influence, and the strain on overstretched troops and obsolescent equipment in a tight fiscal environment had soured

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Marten, p. 224.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Hillier, p. 472

lbid., pp. 291-2; Graham interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Hillier, pp.287-9. This dark view of NATO was shared by Hon Bill Graham (Interview); Hon John Manley interview, June 13, 2011, and Peter Harder (interview). See also Petrolekas, "It Didn't Have to be This Way," pp. 20ff.

<sup>20</sup>ff.
44 Hillier, p.159

the Canadian Forces, and even the Liberal Government of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, on UN operations because of the organization's failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and elsewhere. NATO offered Canada opportunities to participate in collective security through an organization that Ottawa believed had the necessary muscle and the command and logistical strengths to avoid disaster. Canada's renewed commitment to NATO, and its growing distance from the UN, was most dramatically demonstrated with Canadian participation in the 1999 air war against Serbia, a NATO campaign to end Serb suppression of Muslim Kosovars that did not receive UN sanction.

It thus appeared natural that Canada would team up with NATO in ISAF in 2003. Apparently not too many decision makers in Ottawa realized how hard it had been for US General Wesley Clark, double-hatted as the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), NATO's top soldier, and also Commander of US European Command to coordinate the Kosovo air war. Clark laid out his troubles in his book *Waging Modern War*, published two years after the air war ended. Basically, leading NATO into its first ever combat mission had been like herding cats. Problems ranged from different national caveats to different capabilities, rules of engagement, and standard operating procedures. Gen Clark was kept busy dealing with constant interference from different NATO governments in matters that ought to have been purely military. NATO appeared to win that conflict in just a few months, with no casualties and entirely through air power, but Russia's role in bringing Serbia to heel was almost entirely ignored in the west. The many political, military, and diplomatic flaws in NATO's operations in the air war seem to have been quickly forgotten.

When NATO took responsibility for the security of Kabul in the late summer of 2003, few of the problems that had arisen in Kosovo in 1999 appeared particularly serious. After all, ISAF was essentially doing a robust variant of peace enforcement in Kabul while the US was hunting al Qaeda and dealing with sporadic Taliban and warlord activity elsewhere in Afghanistan. The national contingents in Kabul were restricted to the capital region and were all engaged in essentially the same mission, though there were, as we have seen, substantial variants.

Exactly as it had done in the Balkans, Ottawa had imposed caveats from the very beginning of the Afghan operation. During the initial deployment of 3PPCLI Battle Group under LCol Pat Stogran in early 2002, any mission which might risk collateral damage had to be approved by Ottawa before it was undertaken. In other words, Stogran's ability to deploy and employ his troops was significantly restricted by the government's caveats. And although he was supposed to clear his Canadian troops' operations with VAdm Greg Maddison, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff in Ottawa, MGen Andrew Leslie in Kabul in 2003-04 did so only when he believed it absolutely necessary: it was, he said, better to act first rather than to be trapped on the telephone. That he could so act marked a major change from the troubled Balkan missions of the 1990s when CF officers need to check with

48 Leslie interview.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> David P. Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, "NATO at War: Understanding the Challenges of Caveats in Afghanistan", a paper delivered at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Toronto, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat (* New York, 2001).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Auerswald & Saideman paper; Hillier, pp. 257-8.

headquarters — and the Judge Advocate General — before almost every action. <sup>49</sup> But when he became ISAF commander shortly thereafter, Gen Hillier realized that he simply could not use his Canadian troops as his "go-to guys" because the contingent commander, faced with NDHQ's tightening of the caveat rules, needed Ottawa's approval "of almost every detail," a process that took 12 to 72 hours. <sup>50</sup> This would change: one hard lesson learned in Afghanistan was that an able enemy and the threat of casualties demanded quick action, innovation, and risk-taking. <sup>51</sup> Though the caveats were removed when Canada deployed to Kandahar in early 2006, Ottawa ought to have been completely aware of the difficulties that national caveats could cause in multilateral missions.

The notion that ISAF ought to expand beyond Kabul was floated early. James Dobbins, the US Special Envoy to Afghanistan, discussed it with Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld in December 2001. Dobbins estimated that a force of some 20,000 might suffice to keep the peace in the rest of the country. The British were eager to lead the expansion; Lakhdar Brahimi, the former Algerian Foreign Minister who had been appointed special representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan, proposed to the UN Security Council that ISAF be extended to the rest of Afghanistan at a meeting on February 6, 2002. But Rumsfeld was utterly opposed to ISAF expansion or a peacekeeping force for the rest of the country. The US would keep 8,000 or so troops in Afghanistan to hunt Taliban and al Qaeda and work with the warlords to keep peace in the rest of the country. This was the inauguration of the "light footprint" policy – the first serious mistake of the US effort there and the one that had the most serious long-term consequences. The country of Dobbins and Indian Policy – the first serious mistake of the US effort there and the one that had the most serious long-term consequences.

In the spring of 2002 the Taliban had reappeared in small numbers with attacks in Kandahar, Khost and Nangahar provinces. The US gradually increased its troops to about 20,000 by year's end, but with the build-up to the US-led war on Iraq essentially pushing Afghanistan to the sidelines, Rumsfeld began to reconsider his earlier objection to ISAF expansion under NATO auspices. In this way the US might keep its "light footprint" but would be able to count on its NATO allies to police the rest of Afghanistan while the Afghanistan National Security Forces were trained and equipped to do the job on their own. Rumsfeld revealed his plan at a meeting with Defence Minister John McCallum in Washington in early January 2003. He also told McCallum that he wanted Canada to take the lead when the German/Dutch forces then commanding ISAF ended their tenure in the late summer of that year. Within three months the Canadian government seized on the opportunity to join NATO in Kabul as a means of showing solidarity with the US in its "war on terror," even as Prime Minister Jean

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 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> David P. Auerswald, Stephen M. Saideman and Michael J. Tierney, "Caveat Emptor! National Oversight and Military Operations in Afghanistan", a paper delivered at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, Chicago, 2007.
 <sup>50</sup> Hillier, p. 308; Leslie interview. See Wikileaks, 05OTTAWA1410, "Canada on ISAF Caveats," May 10, 2005,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Hillier, p. 308; Leslie interview. See Wikileaks, 05OTTAWA1410, "Canada on ISAF Caveats," May 10, 2005, where DFAIT official Paul Chapin attributes the continuance of caveats for the Canadian troops in Kabul to "anxiety" at the ministerial level; ibid., 05OTTAWA1487, "NATO-Afghanistan: ISAF Caveats," May 17, 2005. <sup>51</sup> We are indebted to VAdm (ret'd) Larry Murray for making this point. He also noted that the CF's Operational Training Unit for Chinook helicopters was posted to Afghanistan along with armed Griffon helicopters because the need was urgent, something that would never have been considered when he was at NDHQ in the 1990s. Conversation, August 11, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Seth G. Jones, *In The Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York, 2009), pp 111-115. Anthony H Cordesman, "Why the US is losing in Afghanistan", <a href="www.atimes.com">www.atimes.com</a>, October 1, 2008.

Chrétien dramatically announced that Canada would not send troops to the looming war on Iraq.<sup>54</sup>

NATO took ISAF under its wing for a number of reasons: the US wanted NATO to join the Afghan mission to lend political credibility to it and to balance the significant opposition of many NATO nations to the US-led campaign in Iraq. NATO was also perceived as a militarily capable organization with a command structure proven in the 1999 air war and the Bosnian IFOR and SFOR operations. Unlike the UN, now perceived by the Canadian and other Western militaries as weak, indecisive and deficient in firepower, communications, intelligence and logistics, NATO was thought to be robust. Col Ian Hope, who commanded the first Canadian battle group deployed in Kandahar in early 2006 remembered: "We were very comfortable going in with NATO. We thought NATO [was] going to get everything the Americans have, which was not true....There is almost a default in a lot of senior officers I talk to in the Canadian Forces that it's all NATO. NATO is the only thing that's higher level and strategic and that the Americans follow NATO. Well they don't." 55

Canada also needed a partner if it was to lead the ISAF mission – apparently no one in the government had consulted the CF high command to find out if the Canadian Forces had the resources to lead ISAF by itself when the commitment to Kabul was first made. It simply did not. But no other country was stepping forward and, in any case, NATO was eager for the mission. MGen Cameron Ross would later observe: "NATO was looking for a job. Its raison d'etre had virtually disappeared with the Cold War gone." Gordon Smith, Canadian ambassador to NATO in the 1980s and retired Deputy Minister of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, remembers his reaction when NATO entered Afghanistan: "for me to see NATO would ...be involved in a shooting war, it was just astonishing, I was present at the beginning of the post-Cold War period when NATO was searching for a role as it became clear that it wasn't dealing with the Soviet Union as the enemy." Consequently on April 16, 2003, NATO announced that it would take responsibility for ISAF – with UN sanction – and thus partner with Canada.

NATO's entry into Afghanistan created problems from the start, even before it began its expansion from Kabul to most of the rest of the country. The US Forces operating in Afghanistan were under the command of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) which operated from Tampa, Florida. NATO forces in Afghanistan, including the US units that eventually came under its jurisdiction, were nominally commanded by Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum, but in reality by the Supreme Allied Commander in Brussels.<sup>59</sup> The difficulties that divided command might pose for the mission were apparently overlooked in the Kabul period of ISAF's mission and probably did not pose a serious challenge then: NATO, including the Canadian contingent, was in Kabul, while the Americans were primarily in the south and east.<sup>60</sup> They were fighting resurgent Taliban and al Qaeda along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border and in Helmand and Kandahar provinces, and they had begun

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Stein and Lang, pp. 44-95. See also Wikileaks 03OTTAWA435, "Canada to Provide Battalion and Brigade Headquarters for ISAF IV and V, February 13, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>55</sup> Col Ian Hope Interview, June 20, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Wikileaks, 03OTTAWA985, "ISAF: Canadian Reconnaissance Team Visit," April 4, 2003.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Ross Interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Gordon Smith Interview, May 31, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Hilton interview.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

to set up Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) to alleviate local poverty and disease with the aim of strengthening the national government's hold on rural areas. As Columbia University scholar Kimberly Marten put it, "The PRT was an experimental type of institution designed in the midst of the US intervention in Afghanistan, where US civilian economic and government assistance and police training would be supported in a dangerous environment by a cordon of US military troops. It...appeared to be a way of transitioning from combat to peace enforcement operations throughout Afghanistan." Thus the NATO mission in Kabul was supposed to be a more-or-less vigorous "peace building" operation while the US mission elsewhere was combat.

But as early as the winter of 2003-04, as the war in Iraq heated up, the US again changed its conception of how it wanted to operate in Afghanistan. Brahimi's original idea to expand ISAF outside Kabul to the entire country, with NATO commanding the ISAF mission, suddenly seemed much more palatable in Washington. And in Ottawa too. Jean Chrétien's commitment to ISAF and Kabul would expire after two rotations of six months each, and Canada would have to decide soon what it was going to do about Afghanistan. By late 2003 a Canadian, MGen Leslie, had been deputy commander of ISAF in Kabul and another Canadian, the newly minted Army commander LGen Rick Hillier, was due to take command of the mission in early 2004. In such circumstances, how could Canada walk out of Afghanistan? Both Foreign Affairs and National Defence pushed for mission extension in some form, and so McCallum announced at a NATO Ministerial meeting in Brussels in December, 2003 that Canada was willing to establish a PRT somewhere outside Kabul. 62

At this point no one had given much thought to a post-Kabul PRT mission. The new leader of the Liberal Party, Paul Martin, assumed office as Prime Minister on December 12, 2003, determined to distinguish his government from that of Jean Chrétien in almost every way possible, including in Afghanistan. He showed no deep interest in the country, being much more focused on Africa, notably Darfur and Congo, though he was acutely aware of how important it was for him to re-build a then souring Canada-US relationship.

Whatever Martin was thinking at the start of 2004, the transition of ISAF out of Kabul was already in full swing with nations vying for locations to establish PRTs (or take over US PRTs) in a counter clockwise rotation centred on the capital. In other words it was planned that the more stable areas of the country in the north and west would come under ISAF command first, followed by the south and east. One Canadian officer working with NATO Brunssum reported that "The desire of the US to declare a completion or victory in Afghanistan, coupled with Iraq pressures will drive the US to any accommodation which accelerates the process in which NATO appears to have full control of Afghanistan." This officer also reported that the US commander had been informed to expect a Canadian battle group and PRT in Afghanistan "beginning fall 05." It is clear, then, that the new Martin government was considering not just a PRT but a reinforced battalion of Canadian combat soldiers to go to Afghanistan within 24 months.

Much has been written on how and why Canada chose Kandahar as the site of the Canadian PRT. (We will give our own interpretation of how the decision was made, and

62 Stein and Lang, p.115

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Marten, p. 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Confidential Report in the authors' possession, 18 January 2004.

what Canada then knew about Kandahar, in the next section.) As for the initial decision to leave Kabul in late 2003 and place a Canadian PRT and battle group somewhere in rural Afghanistan, that action was inextricably linked with the imminent expansion of NATO's ISAF to the rest of Afghanistan. As a member of NATO, Canada would stand by the Alliance in taking responsibility for whatever the Americans were not doing in Afghanistan. Canada expected NATO/ISAF to deliver the command, logistics, air support, and intelligence that the Americans enjoyed under their Operation Enduring Freedom, the backing it needed to carry out its mission successfully, wherever it decided to locate its PRT and Battle Group.<sup>65</sup> Canada was wrong.

Canada's difficulties with NATO ran the gamut from the question of national caveats to consistency of command to availability of resources and compatibility of equipment. But the most serious issue that NATO never resolved in Afghanistan was that of national caveats which had both political and military consequences. As ISAF prepared to take over its new areas of responsibility in Kandahar in November 2005, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly passed Resolution 336 calling on its member governments and Parliaments to "eliminate the use of undeclared caveats and allow the restrictions on a national contingent to be taken into consideration during the force planning process."66 Though not a call to eliminate caveats completely, it was obvious even before serious fighting broke out in Kandahar and Helmand Provinces that the patchwork quilt of caveats was going to make it very difficult for NATO commanders to coordinate ISAF movements and engagements. They denied the ability of an ISAF commander to use all the ISAF troops in any given sector in planning and executing most kinds of combat or even counter-insurgency operations.<sup>67</sup> BGen David Fraser, first commander of the ISAF multinational brigade in Regional Command South would later recall: "I don't think we had a full appreciation of what all the national caveats [meant]....I sat down for days with all the nations to create a smart book to figure out all the national caveats and I had a bank of lawyers and we wargamed it because it was the most complex thing I've ever seen in my life and that complexity wasn't understood by any of us on the ground and definitely not by people in Ottawa."68

Ottawa might have thought it was joining an ISAF force that would eventually reach some 40,000 soldiers, but in reality it was not. Unlike the soldiers of the United States, Britain, Canada, Denmark and some other countries who were not limited in the field by their governments – thus allowing their national commanders on the ground to determine the military actions they could take - many other nations were restricted by caveats in different ways. German troops had to stay in Kunduz in the North. Dutch troops were restricted to Oruzgan Province, north of Kandahar, though without a formal caveat. Other contingents were forbidden to leave their bases at night.<sup>69</sup> The caveat issue would prove both vexing and intractable and in 2008 would lead Canada to threaten to leave Kandahar and Afghanistan if additional troops were not forthcoming from other NATO nations.

In early February, 2006, as the transfer of the Canadian contingent from Kabul to Kandahar was taking place, a Canadian officer stationed at Brunssum reported after visiting

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Interview with MGen David Fraser, August 2, 2011; Hope interview. <sup>66</sup> NATO Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 336, on www.nato-pa.int

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> A good overview of NATO caveats and the grounds on which they were based is in Auerswald and Saideman, "NATO at War."

<sup>68</sup> Fraser Interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Auerswald and Saideman, "NATO at War.".

Afghanistan that "ISAF and by extension NATO is not intellectually ready to take on operations in region south. I am not certain as to the appetite for combat." This same officer also pointed out that there was still no specific NATO guidance and policy "with respect to detention...and policy seems to be an any given day thing."<sup>70</sup> Just months away from the NATO take-over in Kandahar, this was surely evidence that ISAF/NATO wasn't ready. But then, what was it readying for? Officially ISAF's extended mission was to be far closer to traditional peace building than to combat. The overall plan, such as it was, was that NATO would keep the rural areas stable while helping to develop them with PRTs. It was the Americans who would actually do whatever fighting was still necessary. In Kandahar, for example, Canada would take over the American PRT as Canada's primary mission and help build support for the Karzai government. The Canadian battle group would provide whatever security was necessary. The Minister of National Defence, Bill Graham, and Rick Hillier, Chief of the Defence Staff since February, 2005, did warn Canadians that casualties were to be expected because Kandahar was the home of the Taliban and its leader Mullah Omar, and there had been sporadic clashes between US troops there and rurally-based insurgents. But a full blown insurgency was not foreseen by NATO or Ottawa.

There was, however, mounting evidence long before ISAF expanded out of Kabul that the Taliban were coming back.<sup>71</sup> Attacks in Kandahar, Khost and Nangarhar provinces in April 2002 were followed a year later by a low level insurgency mounted from bases in Pakistan and a daring rocket attack on Karzai himself in September 2004 in Gardez, in eastern Afghanistan. Insurgents began to attack road convoys and kill aid workers. In July 2004 Médecins sans Frontières pulled out of Afghanistan after five of its workers were ambushed and executed in the northwestern province of Badghis. The Afghan National Security Council "began to get concerned about the insurgency in late 2003," Seth Jones wrote in his well-documented In The Graveyard of Empires, but the US "didn't see the Taliban as a strategic threat then."<sup>72</sup> Of course, the US was heavily involved in Iraq by late 2003; perhaps the wish was father to the observation. When LCol lan Hope, the commanding officer of 1PPCLI, flew to Afghanistan in August, 2005 with Gen Fraser to begin preparations to move Canadian troops to Kandahar later that year, they attended a briefing in Kabul in which they were told by US intelligence officers that the Taliban were on the strategic defensive but would reassert themselves. US Special Forces believed even then that the Taliban were actually beginning to form shadow governments in the south, the classic mark of insurgency.

The US Army, unfortunately, disagreed with these dark assessments and believed that the situation in the rural areas was stabilizing. But Hope received an even stronger warning in January 2006 when he and others were briefed by the commander of US Central Command, Gen John Abizaid, who told them that al Qaeda and the Taliban were going to surge into southern Afghanistan in the coming summer, coincident with the ISAF takeover. Hope would later remember that "he looked at the two battalion commanders in the room and said expect a hot summer, a violent summer, because they are going to surge." Hope recalls telling Abizaid that "if it's going to be a hot summer and we are going to transition to NATO, we might need to think about the retention of an aviation capability." Simply put, all of NATO combined could not even begin to match US aviation capabilities and, to make

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 $<sup>^{70}</sup>$  Confidential report in the authors' possession, 23 February 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Jones, pp. 148-149

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 149

<sup>73</sup> Hope Interview.

matters worse, NATO's airpower was not part of one centrally organized command and was subject to scarcities and national caveats.

When Kandahar Province, to give the example most cogent to Canada, transitioned from US Operation Enduring Freedom in July 2006 to NATO's ISAF, US firepower, unified command, logistics, aviation and resolve largely disappeared. In discussing NATO in Afghanistan, much of the attention from journalists, military analysts, and most importantly the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, headed by former Minister of Foreign Affairs John Manley and formed at the behest of Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the fall of 2007, was rightly focused on the myriad problems posed by the national caveats. The caveats not only restricted the raw numbers of troops that NATO could deploy across Afghanistan, they created a patchwork of capabilities. The ISAF commander in Kabul may have had so many tens of thousands of troops available on paper, but in reality he had two categories of troops – those with national caveats and those – like Canada's – without.

Yet caveats were not the only NATO problems. The Manley Commission report enumerated many serious issues. For example, NATO needed to "craft a much more unified and coherent security strategy...[with] practical, verifiable criteria for gauging and analyzing the course of that strategy."<sup>74</sup> But how could that be? It is clear from Seth Jones, US journalist Bob Woodward, and others that the US itself did not arrive at a coherent strategy for Afghanistan until late 2009.<sup>75</sup> From the very start of ISAF's expansion out of Kabul, the US/NATO effort against the Taliban was divided at the very top of the military chain of command. As we noted, US troops assigned to Operation Enduring Freedom were commanded by CENTCOM; ISAF's US and NATO troops were commanded out of Brunssum. 76 According to the Manley Commission, there were "harmful shortcomings in the NATO/ISAF counterinsurgency campaign" including insufficient forces in the field especially in the "high-risk zones in the south." a top heavy ISAF headquarters in Kabul, and inadequate coordination between civilian and military programs for "security, stabilization, reconstruction and development." Constant rotation of ISAF commanders in Kabul and the regional commands mitigated against efforts to create and maintain a cohesive strategy. For example, the changeover of command in Kandahar Province from a Canadian to a brigade commander from another NATO country could basically re-set both the tempo and the intensity of operations; the regular rotation of Canadian battle group commanders could have a similar effect.

One of the most serious issues encountered by the Canadians in Kandahar showed up in May 2006 when LCol Hope's Battle Group, Task Force Orion, began to engage large numbers of Taliban fighting from well-prepared positions using tactics that were sophisticated and directed by a centralized and effective command and control apparatus. Canada had no helicopters, not even for the essential service of medical evacuation (medevac). The US seems to have assumed that ISAF forces would bring their own helicopter capabilities. The British had done so, but were forced by circumstances to focus their air assets on Helmand Province, to the west of Kandahar, where their troops were deployed. The Dutch brought helicopters too – ones acquired from Canada in the early

<sup>76</sup> Hilton interview

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Report of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan (Ottawa, 2008), p. 13. Henceforth Manley Report.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> See Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York, 2010); Jones; and Cordesman.

1990s – but would not allocate helicopters to the Canadians except in cases of dire emergency. The Americans wanted a central command authority for helicopter assets but this was strongly resisted by the other countries. In effect, the Americans were the only nation that Canadians could consistently count on for medevac. Hope would recall that "this made our soldiers fight harder because they could sustain themselves in the fight because they knew an American would come. There were question marks about every other nation. We found out Brits would come when they could. We weren't sure of anything else." After Hope left Afghanistan, he was posted to CENTCOM where he convinced the US to "maintain their medevac capability at Kandahar indefinitely because they knew how important it was to nations like ours."

NATO caveats hampered the earliest major Canadian operation of the war. Operation Medusa. The story of Op Medusa has been well told elsewhere and need not be repeated here.<sup>78</sup> In brief, Op Medusa was an ISAF operation in September, 2006 commanded by BGen Fraser to clear the Panjwai/Zharie district (about 30 kilometers west of Kandahar city) of massing Taliban fighters who had been entrenching themselves there at least since early May. The first Canadian battle group to venture there, Hope's Task Force Orion, had run into a major concentration of these forces as early as May 17 - some 200 enemy in four or five groups - who stood and fought with determination and intelligence. surprised. This was a trained and well-led enemy that knew what it was doing. "This was to me a threshold event," he later recalled. "We have an enemy that is standing in broad daylight fighting with us with tactics. It's a coherent force. It's not a militia that's doing their indentured service for a warlord for 10 minutes firing their weapon and then going back home."79 For the next several months, Hope's forces battled this growing concentration of Taliban. The Canadians won every encounter but did not have the troops to hold the ground they took. In fact, Hope's battle group was called upon to patrol or to fight literally from one side of Kandahar Province to the other and even west, into Helmand Province, to help British forces there. All movement was laboriously done by road. The enemy almost always knew when the Canadians were leaving their bases and Hope had to change routes frequently if he wanted to stop the Taliban from knowing where they were going.<sup>80</sup>

Fraser and ISAF headquarters were convinced the Taliban were preparing for a major move on Kandahar City. Fraser says now that he did not expect an actual assault on the city, but he did think the Taliban intended to move close enough to the city to bring it under constant mortar and rocket fire to prove to the citizens that they could do it and that the government could not protect them. Op Medusa, running from September 2-17, was planned as an all-out attack by Canadian, Dutch, American, US, UK, Danish and Afghan forces to take control of the Panjwai/Zarie district and expel the entrenched Taliban. The NATO force succeeded in its objective at a heavy cost — 5 soldiers from the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group that had taken over from Task Force Orion were killed in the battle, as well as

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Hope interview. Gen Hillier observed that the US would always do the maximum to ensure the mission was a success, including helping its allies. Other nations would not. (Hillier interview.) DFAIT officials were "unimpressed" that NATO nations found 200 helicopters for tsunami relief but could not produce any for Kandahar. Wikileaks, 07OTTAWA234, "Canada, US to Carry Same Message to NATO," February 7, 2007. In November, 2007, Canada was trying to strike a deal with Germany and NATO to provide helicopter support. Ibid., 07OTTAWA2007, November 9, 2007; 07OTTAWA2133, November 21, 2007.
<sup>78</sup> Bernd Horn, *No Lack of Courage: Operation Medusa, Afghanistan* (Toronto, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Hope interview; Ian Hope, *Dancing With the Dushman: Command Imperatives for the Counter-Insurgency in Afghanistan* (Kingston, 2008), pp. 86-90.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

two other NATO soldiers and 14 British troops who died when their helicopter crashed – but there were insufficient numbers to hold the ground that was taken. The Americans were focused on Iraq. The British had their hands very full in Helmand, and no other NATO country had or would deploy sufficient forces to follow up on the tactical victory. After the battle, Fraser concluded that "we found out what NATO could not do. We simply couldn't get everyone we needed....The Germans wouldn't come down here; the French company weren't allowed to come down here; and I couldn't get the Italians...."81 It was apparent very quickly that the Taliban were regrouping. On September 6, just after Medusa started, the full North Atlantic Council arrived at Kandahar Airfield for a briefing on Op Medusa from Gen Fraser. He told them that despite the estimated 2,500 Taliban killed in the area over the summer, "replacement Taliban continued to stream in."82 Fraser appealed to the Council for more troops, and two additional US Army companies from the east were shortly put under his command, but this was not nearly enough. The ISAF response to the Canadians' pleas was slow and hesitant. Nonetheless, there should be no doubt that the 1PPCLI and 1RCR Battle Groups' efforts around Kandahar bought ISAF time, time to begin serious training of Afghan units and time for the US to raise its troop strength in the country.

Operation Medusa came as a shock to the Canadian army, but it reacted well in the field and at home. The Canadian Manoeuvre Training Centre in Wainwright, Alberta was not a response to Medusa and, in fact, had been planned before the war. But the \$500 million centre's first commander was Col D. Craig Hilton who had come directly from ISAF in Kabul, and he reported to the Chief of Land Staff. Opening in 2005, fully operational the next year. CMTC quickly became essential to the preparation of battle groups for Kandahar. Only Task Force Orion was not run through the state of the art live fire and laser-tag simulations at the CMTC; all others were. The training area maps had Afghan names, there were populated areas with up to 200 Afghan Canadians acting as villagers or insurgents (Gen Leslie suggested half-seriously that some had been genuine insurgents very recently), 83 while other civilians played roles as coalition forces. The realistic month-long training put unit commanding officers under the gun, none knowing what was coming, as they did on most other training exercises.84 Inevitably, not every CO made the grade and a few had to be replaced. The 1RCR Battle Group that succeeded Task Force Orion in Kandahar had complained about the training, arguing that it was unrealistic to pretend to suffer 25 casualties in a day. After Operation Medusa and the heavy casualties the unit suffered on the Arghandab River, however, the RCR's second-in-command praised the unit's time at the CMTC, telling Hilton that it might have been worse without it.85

Significantly, CMTC adapted quickly to changing Taliban tactics. Col Hilton had a direct communications link to the Canadian headquarters in Kandahar and adjusted the CMTC's training regimen regularly. If the way the Taliban made or placed IEDs changed, so too did CMTC. After an IED strike in mid-April 2006, for example, or so a briefing note said, within five days changes "were being made to the tactics, techniques and procedures being

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Horn, *No Lack*, p. 46.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Memo, "NAC Visit to Kandahar Prompts Request for More Forces from ISAF," September 13, 2006, found in Wikileaks: <a href="http://ncd.state.sgov/cable/country/afg/mrn\_06KABUL4045.print">http://ncd.state.sgov/cable/country/afg/mrn\_06KABUL4045.print</a>. There are different Taliban casualty estimates in Horn, *From Cold War to New Millennium*, p. 323.
<sup>83</sup> Leslie interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> There is a good account of CMTC training in Lee Windsor et al., *Kandahar Tour: The Turning Point in Canada's Afghan Mission* (Mississauga, 2008), pp. 64ff.

practiced by the next rotation undergoing training at Wainwright."<sup>86</sup> Moreover, the training staff came directly out of the battle groups that had recently returned home.<sup>87</sup> The result was that CMTC quickly developed a reputation as the best such centre anywhere. The results showed in the progressively improving performance of the battle groups in Kandahar, with the Canadian troops shedding their peacekeeping attitudes and improving year by year into what LGen Leslie called "a razor-sharp fighting force."<sup>88</sup>

Even well-trained soldiers in small numbers, however, could not handle every threat in a large province. Op Medusa had been closely watched by Canada's NATO allies and by the foreign press and military analysts. It offered further proof, if proof was still needed, that ISAF needed more troops in the south.<sup>89</sup> In Canada at the end of the year, former diplomat Roland Paris wrote that NATO should either "Go Big or Go Home". He quoted a study by James Dobbins, then of the Rand Corporation, that revealed the pitiful level of US and NATO troops in Afghanistan compared to other recent interventions. In Kosovo, there had been approximately 20.5 "peacekeepers" to every 1000 inhabitants. In Bosnia the ratio was 19 per thousand. In Sierra Leone, 10 per thousand. In Haiti there had been 3.5 per thousand and 3 per thousand in Namibia. Adding 20,000 troops in Afghanistan would raise the level to 2 per thousand inhabitants.<sup>90</sup>

From the early fall of 2006 through to the summer of 2007 and the start of yet another Afghan fighting season, therefore, one dominating theme emerged among the coalition members fighting in Afghanistan and particularly in Canada.91 NATO did not have enough troops to do the job. Fingers were pointed at the Germans, the French, and the Italians. Stephen Harper declared in July, 2007 that the troop commitment from NATO members "was not sufficient to achieve the long-run objectives that the international community and NATO have set for themselves."92 Thus when the Prime Minister appointed the Manley Panel in the fall of 2007 to analyze and report on Canada's effort in Afghanistan, the NATO role would receive crucial attention. The panel's report listed the many inadequacies of ISAF from top to bottom and concluded that "NATO and ISAF have simply not deployed enough troops."93 From Gen Fraser's plea to the North Atlantic Council in September 2006 to send more troops through countless NATO political and military meetings, the fighting NATO countries urged those sitting on the sidelines, or whose troops were bound by caveats, to produce more troops or free up the troops already in Afghanistan. There was very little change. The Manley panel recommended that Canada not stay in Kandahar province unless some nation sent at least another thousand soldiers to help and that point was incorporated in the subsequent Parliamentary motion that extended the Canadian mission in Kandahar to 2011. As a result, the US assigned more troops to operate under Canadian command. But no matter how hard Canada and others pressed, no matter how many times

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> "Briefing Note, Army Learning Process," 28 March 2008, prepared by Capt C.I. Clark.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Hilton interview.

<sup>88</sup> Leslie interview.

See for example, STRATFOR morning intelligence briefing, September 14, 2006; New York Times, October 1, 2006; Defense News, October 2, 2006; International Crisis Group, "Countering Afghanistan's Insurgency: No Quick Fixes", November 2, 2006.
 Roland Paris, "NATO's Choice in Afghanistan's O. Since Afghanistan's Insurgency: No

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Roland Paris, "NATO's Choice in Afghanistan: Go Big or Go Home", *Policy Options* (December 2006-January 2007), pp. 35-43.

<sup>2007),</sup> pp. 35-43.

91 See, for example, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, Directorate of Strategic Analysis, "The International Community's Commitment in Afghanistan", 8 February 2007

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> Bill McAuley, 'A Discussion of Policies and Strategies for Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan, 2001-2011" a paper prepared for Strategic Studies 665, the University of Calgary, December 2010.
 <sup>93</sup> Manley Report p. 14

the Prime Minister spoke to other NATO leaders, the result was minimal. Ian Brodie was Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Harper from the beginning of the Conservative government until July 1, 2008. He would later recall: "Always the overwhelming issue was the resources...and until we...threw the fit about pulling our troops out of Kandahar unless we got more troops the answer always seemed to be 'it's very difficult over there, good luck."94

In the late spring of 2011, John Manley reflected on his committee's findings regarding Canada's experience with NATO in Afghanistan and what the country should do when there is a next time: "We have to insist with our allies that the objectives be clearly defined and that the resources be adequate and that the best strategy for departure be understood in advance, that we shouldn't go into things that are totally open ended, that are underresourced and where the objectives are at best ill defined. We have to make sure who our partners are." This is especially true, he points out, because "we are never going to do this on our own."95 That is surely correct and because of it, Canada needs to know who is on its left flank and who is on its right, what their capabilities are, and what degree of political will they will bring to the fight. It is easy to declare that this was obvious knowledge that ought to have been evaluated when the decision was made to accompany NATO when it expanded beyond Kabul, a decision made in late 2003. There could not have been anyone in Ottawa in Foreign Affairs, in National Defence Headquarters, or in the military at that time – who could not have raised or analyzed these questions. It is harder to conclude what additional actions Canada ought to have taken in Afghanistan if NATO's many weaknesses had been thoroughly studied or what the consequences might have been to Canada's campaign in Kandahar if some, at least, of those weaknesses had been resolved.

#### **CANADA GOES TO KANDAHAR**

On May 16, 2005, Defence Minister Bill Graham announced that Canada would increase its troop deployment in Afghanistan and take on a new mission to Kandahar Province. First, in August, 350 Canadians took over the PRT in Kandahar from the US. Then in the late fall, the Canadian base in Kabul, Camp Julien, closed completely. BGen David Fraser, commanding 1 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group in Edmonton, was chosen to lead a new multinational brigade operating out of Kandahar Air Field. The bulk of his force would be a Canadian mechanized battle group based on 1PPCLI but including British, Dutch, American, Afghan and other troops. This was the final shape of the commitment Graham's predecessor John McCallum had made to the North Atlantic Council meeting almost two years before.

In their book on Canada's deployment to Afghanistan, The Unexpected War, Eugene Lang, former chief of staff to John McCallum and Bill Graham, and Dr. Janice Gross Stein, Director of the Munk School of Global Affairs, devote a chapter to the reasons why Canada undertook its large and complex Kandahar mission.<sup>96</sup> They declare that by the time Canada came to choose the location for its PRT, "there was no place left in Afghanistan for Canada to deploy."97 But they also attribute the size and ambition of the Kandahar mission to the new Chief of the Defence Staff, Gen Rick Hillier, who they say convinced the government, virtually on his own, to "focus on the opportunity [of the mission] rather than the risk." The

<sup>94</sup> Ian Brodie interview (telephone), July 25, 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Manley interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Stein and Lang, pp. 178-196

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 182

general's plan was "big and bold. It was quintessential Rick Hillier...Canada would no longer be on the margins" with his plan. 98 That is an oversimplification to say the very least.

In truth, the government chose Kandahar for the Canadian PRT after considerable discussion and consultation within the Departments of Foreign Affairs and National Defence and the Canadian International Development Agency. There was significant input from Hillier, LGen Leslie as Chief of the Land Staff, Hillier's predecessor as CDS, Gen Ray Henault, RAdm Drew Robertson, Director General International Security Policy at DND, and Canada's ambassador to Afghanistan, Chris Alexander. They were key participants in pushing the government not only to establish the Canadian PRT in Kandahar, but to make a major effort by sending a brigade headquarters and a battle group there to provide security, to maintain an appropriate contribution to the Afghan effort, and to contribute to NATO/ISAF's expansion across the country. Bill Graham also endorsed the plan at a meeting on March 21, 2005.99 But they were far from alone.

Prior to selecting Kandahar, Canada had considered and rejected at least two "safer" PRT locations in Ghor and Herat provinces, the latter in conjunction with an Italian contingent, and as was proposed by Hillier himself at one point, 100 taking complete responsibility for Kabul airport. Kandahar was selected because it was close to a major airfield, thus affording good lines of supply and communication, and the province was strategically much more important than Herat. 101 In the words of one senior DFAIT participant, "the decision to go to Kandahar was a collective one between DND and DFAIT with PCO, PMO and the Cabinet involved throughout....It was what the Martin government wanted, what the CF wanted, and what DFAIT wanted. We didn't do it because someone in NATO wanted us to do it, or because the Americans made us do it....We did it because Afghanistan was a serious issue, we were a serious country...and we were determined to behave accordingly. Which is why we dismissed options like sitting on a mountain top in the middle of nowhere." 102 As Scott Reid, Prime Minister Paul Martin's communications director, put it: "There was a feeling that this was the price of being a G-8 country....It was a question of, you know, after having shown up all these years with a six-pack, whether we were finally going to tend bar."103 The US wanted Canada to take on Kandahar. The reasons were clear: Kandahar was important as the heart and soul of the Taliban, and even more important, the CF had proved itself in Kabul. In the Pentagon's view, or so Gen Leslie claimed, only the Canadians could be trusted to do this job. 104

At the same time, there is no doubt that the Canadian Forces favoured Kandahar over any other site. Fielding a mechanized battle group to provide security in the province would be a major step away from the "blue helmet" peacekeeping that Canadians in general seemed to believe was all their troops did. Hillier was eager to restore the Canadian Forces' reputation as a military, not as a troop of international boy scouts. Commanding the multinational

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 184

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> The meeting is related in detail in Bill Schiller, "The Road to Kandahar," *Toronto Star*, September 9, 2006. Confidential e-mail in possession of the authors, December 13, 2009. Hillier, pp. 342-3; Chapin interview.

Marten, p. 219; Confidential e-mail in possession of the authors, December 12, 2009.

Confidential e-mail in possession of the authors, June 17, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> Schiller, *Toronto Star*.

<sup>104</sup> Leslie interview.

brigade in RC South and running the PRT would make the Canadian army the Taliban's "centre of gravity."

The precise role of the Department of Foreign Affairs in the selection of Kandahar is harder to determine. Young, dynamic and personable, Chris Alexander was obviously an influential figure in the decision. As Gen Ray Henault, Hillier's predecessor as CDS, would later remember, "Chris was hugely supportive of the deployment into Kandahar and felt that it was exactly the right place for Canadians to be, based on our capabilities." (Henault himself favoured Herat). Peter Harder, then Deputy Minister of the Department, thought Alexander "very ambitious" and so close to the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan that he sometimes failed to both balance and integrate all of Canada's manifold interests. He recalled that while ambassadors occasionally dealt directly with the Prime Minister's Office, ordinarily they informed their department of this. Alexander's support for the move to Kandahar "did not get expressed to DFAIT," he said. 106 But there can be little doubt that many key officials in Foreign Affairs wanted a deployment to Kandahar no less than Chris Alexander. Deciding what to do next in Afghanistan was always a joint venture between DND personnel and those from DFAIT. Wendy Gilmour from Foreign Affairs was one of the key persons on the Afghanistan file. 107 As early as October, 2003 Alexander met with a number of people at the embassy, including Gilmour and representatives from DND and NATO, where Gilmour "arqued vehemently that Canada had to undertake a post-Kabul tasking that was meaningful." In the late fall of 2004, she and another DFAIT principal travelled to NATO to campaign for Canada to move into the Kandahar PRT. 108 Nipa Bannerjee, then head of CIDA in Afghanistan, also supported Kandahar. 109

These men and women promoted Kandahar, and the Martin government sent the Canadian PRT and a Canadian battle group there, knowing this was to be a difficult mission and that the CF would suffer casualties. They did it not only because it was the correct and courageous decision, but also because they wanted the world to know that Canada had arrived back on the international scene. Bill Graham had concluded in the latter part of his tenure in Foreign Affairs that the Lloyd Axworthy "soft power" human security agenda had failed to increase Canadian influence in the world because the Canadian military had deteriorated so badly. Writing on Canada's Afghanistan mission in May, 2008 he quoted Frederick the Great: "Diplomacy without armaments is like music without instruments." He was in tune with Hillier, with DFAIT, with CIDA, and no doubt with the Prime Minister in wanting to make a dramatic gesture to restore Canada's international status. But how much did he or anyone else in Ottawa, for that matter, understand about the unique challenges that a mission to Kandahar might pose?

The information that the cabinet had in front of it when it decided to mount a large and robust deployment to Kandahar province will remain shrouded in cabinet secrecy for decades. So will the nature of the debate within the cabinet itself. The decision is obvious; what was

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>105</sup> Interview with Gen Ray Henault, June 14, 2011. Alexander does not discuss his role in his book.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Harder interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> Confidential e-mail in possession of the authors, December 12, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> Ibid..

<sup>109</sup> Chapin interview.

Confidential e-mail in possession of the authors, December 13, 2009.

<sup>111</sup> Graham interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> William C. Graham, "Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities for Canada's Foreign Policy", *The General Sir William Otter Papers* (Toronto, 2008), p 1.

taken into account by the cabinet is not. Was there a Canadian military appreciation of the mission prepared by anyone in National Defence Headquarters? Did the Policy staff at NDHQ make a recommendation to the Minister as to what geopolitical conditions would frame the Kandahar mission? Did the presence of an open border with Pakistan, and the tight connections between Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Taliban, give pause to anyone? Was the cabinet told anything about the age-old rivalries between Iran, India, and Pakistan that formed the context for virtually everything that happened in Afghanistan? How much did the decision makers know about the complex cultural structure of Kandahar province; the line-up of tribes, radical Islamic groups, al Qaeda, the Taliban, drug lords and others, or realize how much the corruption of the Karzai government had undermined stability in the region? We cannot yet know what the cabinet had before it when the decision was made. What we do know is that everyone from the minister down to the battle group commander were ultimately shocked at the intensity and complexity of the fighting and the difficulties of the mission. 113 Some, such as Louis Delvoie, High Commissioner to Pakistan from 1991 to 1994 with responsibility for Afghanistan, had warned as early as the fall of 2006 that the achievement of even "modest objectives [in Afghanistan] will require a sustained and consistent effort by western countries over many years - a military effort to combat and crush the Taliban insurgency, and a financial and technical effort in reconstruction and development." 114 We also know that many individuals (such as Gens Rick Hillier and Andrew Leslie) tried to educate themselves about Afghanistan. No one is ever truly prepared for war, of course, and no one in Ottawa can be held accountable for not seeing or understanding the multiple complexities that Canadian troops would face in Kandahar, not knowing how dangerous the mission would be, or even for not predicting how shorthanded Canadians soldiers would find themselves once LCol Hope's battle group began to encounter the Taliban in large numbers in Panjwai in May, 2006. legitimate for us to ask how much effort was made in DND, DFAIT, or the PCO to find out, and whether or not anyone in those departments attempted to put the pieces together to form as complete a picture as possible of the potential mission. 115

A number of DFAIT officers believe that Canada had ample information to go on when the decision was made to send Canadian troops to Kandahar. Interviewed in May, 2011, Chris Alexander said that the Canadian High Commission in Islamabad kept a good watch on the cross-border region and that the Canadian military attaché there had been "reasonably well prepared." But he also pointed out that "Islamabad was a sophisticated place unlike the rest of Pakistan and that diplomats there tended not to go outside city bounds." One former Canadian intelligence officer believed that "the government was quite well informed about the Big Picture when we got involved in 2002....It was clear that the area along the Pak[istan] border would be the most dangerous because it's the homeland of the Pashtuns and the Taliban." He believed "policy-makers were well informed about Kandahar in 2005, or as well informed as they had to be" and that the Canadian military attachés stationed in

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Conservative Foreign and then Defence Minister Peter MacKay: "I don't think there was a true recognition on just how difficult it was going to be to turn back the wave of insurgency." Quoted in Murray Brewster's book, *The Savage War* (Toronto, 2011), which appeared too late to be read for this paper. The quote is from a James McCarten's CP story in *Winnipeg Free Press*, October 2, 2011.

Louis A. Delvoie "Afghanistan: Realistic Expectations," Canadian Military Journal (Autumn 2006), pp. 88-90.
 See the useful survey of "The Canadian Intelligence Community after 9/11" in Journal of Military and Strategic Studies (online; Spring 2011) by Greg Fyffe which examines the growth of and changes in the organization and operations of the intelligence sector.

Islamabad made frequent visits to the Pakistan side of the Afghan-Pakistan border."<sup>117</sup> Paul Chapin, a former DFAIT Director General of International Security, remembers receiving much information from the High Commissions in both New Delhi and Islamabad and from the Americans, British, and NATO. He said that "it was no fault to us the Taliban returned [after we arrived in Kandahar]. We knew it was a tough nut to crack and anticipated casualties, but not so many. We were unprepared for the war we found."<sup>118</sup> That is fair enough. The question, however, remains: what would have given Canadian policy-makers a better understanding of the challenges they would face in Kandahar?<sup>119</sup> We will use the Pakistan connection as one example of what might have been done differently.

#### THE PAKISTAN-TALIBAN CONNECTION

The Pakistani military have been integrally involved with the development and sustainment of the Taliban since the early 1990s, and there are dozens of books which trace and analyze the links. They have done so for several reasons: to sustain a government in Kabul that is friendly to Pakistan; to give Pakistan "strategic depth" in the event of a major war with India; and to undermine efforts of the Indian government to "outflank" Pakistan by building strong links to the government in Kabul. It may seem fanciful to some that the Pakistan military continues to prepare for major war with India, but it does. And all these preparations are rooted in age-old rivalries that date back at least two thousand years and which have pitted nations and empires from the time of Alexander the Great in competing for the power vacuum that Afghanistan essentially is. There can be no understanding of the current war in Afghanistan without a good grasp of the historical "great game," as the old rivalry is known, and the Indian-Pakistani rivalry that frames the conflict today.<sup>120</sup>

When the decision was made in 2005 to deploy Canadian troops into Kandahar province, no one seems to have considered the role that Pakistan would play in the day-to-day military operations in the region. The US had used Pakistan as its base to help the Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation forces, and Washington surely understood how porous the border was. Nonetheless, as Bill Graham recalled in May, 2011, "We knew much less than we should have [about Kandahar]. There was little expertise within the government on the languages, culture, history, etc., and not a great deal of intelligence. We tended to discuss the mission almost entirely as a NATO matter....Less attention to things like the regional geopolitics, the porous border, the Pakistan dimension, solving the question of Kashmir..." When some of these concerns were raised with then Pakistani President Musharraf, he would brush them off by declaring "oh, nobody's ever controlled the Northwest frontier, not the Russians, not the British, not us." 121

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<sup>117</sup> Confidential email from a Canadian intelligence officer, August 14, 2011.

<sup>118</sup> Chapin interview

<sup>119</sup> See Wikileaks, 06OTTAWA137, "Canada/Afghanistan: Government Shows Resolve in Face of Kandahar Attack...," January 17, 2006, where reference is made to "the brutal requirements for success" in Kandahar after diplomat Glyn Berry's killing. The government and CF were seen by the US Embassy as realizing these requirements, the Canadian public not.
120 One of the best summaries of this complex situation is Ahmed Rashid, Descent into Chaos: The United States

One of the best summaries of this complex situation is Ahmed Rashid, Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (New York, 2008).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Graham interview (Cunningham transcript). Alexander's *Long Way Back, passim.*, leaves no doubt that he and the Canadian Embassy in Kabul were fully aware of Pakistani complicity at least from the time of his arrival in Kabul. If Ottawa, DFAIT, and the CF were unaware, this is extraordinarily puzzling. On Musharraf and the ISI's role, see the excellent piece by Dexter Filkins, "The Journalist and the Spies," *The New Yorker* (September 19,

When Col Hope's battle group deployed in Kandahar in early 2006, he had little information about Pakistan's complicity in Taliban operations or how the virtually open border would impact his troops: "We received both classified and unclassified reports, breaking down tribal and family structures in Kandahar and traditional allegiances but none that actually linked those to Pakistan and to a base of operations in Pakistan that could generate larger capacity and capability into those tribal areas. And that to me was the big intelligence failing we had in the first year of our mission, understanding the importance of Pakistan to this whole thing." BGen Fraser, Hope's immediate superior, reflected that "I will say myself I was too tactically focused on all the information that was there. Nobody was collecting information on Pakistan. Pakistan was a black hole. I went back to certain agencies in Ottawa...and I said can you help me and they said no but we'll change our collection plan." A cable sent from the US Embassy in Ottawa to Washington on July 9, 2008 (and released by Wikileaks in November 2010) suggested that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) had only begun to formulate "an inter-agency Pakistan strategy" in mid-2008.

That any number of senior Canadian diplomats, intelligence officers, strategic analysts, and policy advisors at DND were unaware or neglectful of Pakistani complicity in the Taliban insurgency or of the almost insurmountable challenges to Afghan security posed by the Taliban's safe havens just across the border seems very difficult to comprehend. American troops had been fighting Taliban infiltrators in eastern Pakistan from 2003 at least. Col Hope found that Taliban slipped across the border in large numbers among the migrant labour force that moved from Pakistan in harvest season. In fact, Afghanistan refused to establish posts along the border because it did not, and still does not, recognize the border's legitimacy and rejected the Durand Line as an imposition of British imperialism that divided the Pashtun people into those living in Afghanistan and those living in British India or Pakistan as it was after the partition of 1947. Certainly any number of commentators, American and Canadian, understood the implications of the open border and the rivalries in the region. The Department of National Defence's Directorate of Strategic Analysis published a background paper in January, 2007 that summarized the historic rivalries and Kabul's "ongoing refusal...to recognize most of the border with Pakistan along Pashtun-

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<sup>2011).</sup> On what Canada might have done better, see Murray Brewster, "Five Years in Kandahar proved Canada's Need for Better Intel, Experts say," CP story [online], July 17, 2011.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> Hope interview.

Fraser interview.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Wikileaks,08OTTAWA918, "Counsellor, CSIS Director Discuss CT Threats," July 9, 2008.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>125</sup> A Canadian intelligence official offered this contradictory assessment of the ISI role: "I have never seen much in the way of concrete evidence that ISI provided any significant support to the Taliban after 2002, including at the time of the resurgence in 2006. We watched that issue very carefully. Others, however, argued that ISI provided 'considerable' or 'significant' support after 2005-6." Confidential email from an intelligence official, August 14, 2011. Cf. Don Rassler and Vahid Brown, *The Haqqani Nexus and the Evolution of al-Qa'ida* (West Point, NY, 2011), which offers much detail on Pakistani support for the Taliban.

<sup>126</sup> Hope interview.

See, e.g., Elizabeth Rubin, "In the Land of the Taliban", *New York Times*, October 22, 2006; Carlotta Gall, "Pakistan Link Seen in Afghan Suicide Attacks,", *New York Times*, November 13, 2006; Richard Foot, Canwest News Service, "Afghan Mission to Fail Without Change in Strategy," January 6, 2007; Carlotta Gall, "Pakistani Role Seen in Taliban Surge at Border," *New York Times*, January 21, 2007.

inhabited areas." 128 The Senate's Standing Committee on National Security and Defence asked in a February, 2007 interim report; "Can we win, given how the map is drawn?" 129

Canadian battle groups deployed after the start of 2007 were both more aware of the dangers posed by the open border and, thanks to their training at CMTC, better prepared to deal with them. But the border could never be sealed. There were never enough troops to do so and the border was too long and too rugged. From the high passes of the Hindu Kush in the far north to the arid high desert near Spin Boldak, the eastern boundary of the Canadian operating area, Taliban fighters and supplies moved at will into Afghanistan, while drugs and drug money moved out and permanent sanctuary awaited. One of the major requirements to choke off any insurgency is to ensure politically and militarily that insurgents cannot come and go as they please. Canada's battle groups could never enforce that requirement, nor could the US or ISAF.

There is no blame to be apportioned here. That is not the purpose of this paper. But there is a lesson to be learned. Since wars cannot be won at the tactical level if they are lost at the strategic level. Canada needs to develop a far better capability to understand the tactical. operational, and strategic contexts in which its troops will operate. Any area in which Canada's troops will be deployed - its culture, its history, its strategic importance, its geographic, topographical, and environmental challenges - needs to be thoroughly understood and carefully analyzed. All possible threads of information that may help troops or diplomats or development workers on the ground prepare better for their mission need to be woven together. The biggest obstacle to reading intelligence is always the same - the tendency to "stove pipe" information. Such information and analysis should be available to Canada's decision-makers as a matter of course. It was certainly not available in 2004-05, and it is doubtful if it is available now. A second obstacle is the tendency for senior policy makers to believe what they want to believe. Sometimes intelligence analysts can generate the correct interpretation of events and trends only to see their work distorted higher up to conform to a politician's preordained policy or wishful thinking. The struggle to follow the proper course is never-ending, but we must strive to get it right. The lives of our soldiers and the success of our operations depend on this.

# POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Democracies cannot fight prolonged campaigns without popular support. In July, 2009 an EKOS opinion poll reported a "steady and radical transformation" of Canadian attitudes towards the war in Afghanistan with some 54 percent of those polled opposed to the war compared to 34 percent who supported it. Canadians were decisively in favour of pulling their troops from Afghanistan in 2011. This was a dramatic erosion of support from the period just after the 9/11 attacks when almost three-quarters of Canadians wanted Canada to become militarily engaged in the "global war on terror." It is a reasonable assumption that at least part of the erosion was because of public confusion about why Canada was in Afghanistan for the long haul and disgust at the partisan political manoeuvring around the war issue which arose from the struggles for survival of the three minority governments (one Liberal and two Conservative) elected in 2004, 2006 and 2008.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> DND, Directorate of Strategic Analysis, "Afghanistan's Foreign Policy", January 19, 2007.

Senate of Canada, "Canadian Troops in Afghanistan: Taking a Hard Look at the Mission: An Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence," February 2007.

Wikileaks, 09OTTAWA544, "Canadians Against Future Afghan Role," July 16, 2009.

A brief review of the political history of the Canadian deployment to Kandahar shows that both the Liberal and Conservative parties used the Afghanistan deployment as a wedge issue after the election of the Harper government in January, 2006. Although the Martin Liberal government had publicly announced the move to Kandahar and the increase in the size of the Canadian contingent, the first Parliamentary debate – a "take note" debate--was held on November 15, 2005. The Chrétien government had initiated "take note" debates in the early 1990s. Such debates were not designed to seek Parliamentary approval for a mission; they merely put aside special blocks of time in which the Commons, in Committee of the Whole, could discuss a decision that had already been made. The November 15, 2005 debate, for example, was worded as follows: "That this Committee take note of Canada's military mission in Afghanistan."

Several months after the Conservatives were elected in January, 2006, the new government organized its own "take note" debate on April 10, 2006 on a motion worded similarly to the one of the previous fall. However, the prime minister soon decided to seek Parliamentary approval for a two year extension to the existing mission due to end in 2008. The vote was announced on May 16 and was to be held the next day. This was a different matter altogether, the first time since 1939 that any Canadian government had asked for approval before a new mission, even though in this case it was approval to extend an existing mission.

At that moment, the Opposition Liberals were in the midst of a campaign to choose a successor to Paul Martin who had resigned after his defeat in the January election. Several leadership candidates had expressed their opposition to mission extension. It is, therefore, possible, and even probable, that Prime Minister Harper's timing of this vote, well in advance of the end of the mission, was designed to force an open division in Liberal ranks. Whether intended or not, it did. Front runners split, with Michael Ignatieff and a handful of prominent Liberals, including Bill Graham, the Leader of the Opposition, voting in favour of the extension, while most of the leadership candidates, including the ultimate victor, Stéphane Dion, voted "no." Dion and others claimed they were not opposed to the mission but only to the snap vote on the matter. The NDP and the Bloc Québécois both opposed mission extension and both called for a quick end to the mission. The motion passed by the narrowest of margins, 149 to 145.

The positions of the Liberal and Conservative parties diverged notably after the May 17 vote on almost every aspect of the mission from whether or not to stay beyond 2009 to the handling of Taliban prisoners by Canadian soldiers. The division of the parties was reflected in the growing division among Canadians themselves. Or was it the other way around?

In late 2007, already chafing because of the failure of several key NATO allies to increase their commitments to Afghanistan in general and Kandahar in particular, and with Canadians taking heavy casualties, Prime Minister Harper called upon former Liberal Minister of Foreign Affairs John Manley to head an Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, the panel consisting of five prominent Canadians. Harper wanted the Manley Panel to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> See Michael Dewing and Corinne McDonald, "International Deployment of Canadian Forces: Parliament's Role", Library of Parliament, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, May 18, 2006.
<sup>132</sup> Dewing and McDonald, p. 8

recommend a course of action to Parliament that might achieve consensus between the two major parties at least. 133

The Manley Commission's report, delivered on January 21, 2008, bluntly concluded that clear policy priorities were lacking for the mission as a whole at both the Canadian and ISAF levels and that there was a decided absence of coordination and political direction of the Canadian and ISAF mission on the ground in Afghanistan. 134 In other words, almost two years after Canada went into Kandahar, the Manley Panel could discover no coherent Canadian strategy. At the same time, the Manley Panel specifically declared that, with so much left to be done in both security and reconstruction in Kandahar, "no end date [for the deployment] makes sense at this point."135

Manley was right on all counts. But the motion to extend the mission beyond 2008, resulting from negotiations between the government and the Opposition Liberals, and put before Parliament on March 13, 2008, did set an end to the Kandahar mission in 2011. The compromise motion directed that "the government of Canada notify NATO that Canada will end its presence in Kandahar as of July 2011, and, as of that date, the redeployment of Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar and their replacement by Afghan forces start as soon as possible, so that it will have been completed by December 2011." The motion left open the question whether all Canadians would leave Afghanistan, or switch to some other mission in the country. The compromise earned enough support to pass 198-77 with both the Conservative and Liberal parties supporting it.

The motion, however, brought only a form of clarity to the debate in Canada. According to one observer, partisan political imperatives remained predominant. An editorial by "Hudson on the Hill" in *Frontline* magazine summarized the government's policy shift on Afghanistan from Prime Minister Harper's declaration in Kandahar on March 13, 2006 that Canada would not "cut and run" to the government's post-Manley Panel position that all Canadian troops would be out of the country by 2011, 136 a position that the Manley Panel did not recommend and one that was a gross distortion of the Parliamentary motion that Canada deploy out of Kandahar in 2011, not out of Afghanistan.

If the public was now thoroughly confused about what the Liberal or Conservative parties (no one doubted the NDP and BQ positions which were adamantly opposed to the mission) thought of the mission, more confusion was added during the federal election in the fall of 2008. The Prime Minister declared that Afghanistan was no longer an issue dividing the Liberal and Conservative parties because both had agreed on March 13 that all Canadian troops would withdraw from Afghanistan in 2011. In fact, the resolution had not been nearly so categorical. But at that time, polls showed a significant drop in Conservative support in Quebec where the Afghanistan war was very unpopular. Since Liberal leader Stéphane Dion was certainly not going to challenge Harper's interpretation, the Kandahar mission thus went largely undiscussed and undebated in the 2008 election campaign.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>133</sup> The US Embassy noted on October 17, 2007 that "What is clear...is that the current government sees this mission as the right thing for Canada and would like to continue beyond the planned end-date. PM Harper appears ready to take a considerable political risk to do so, and the Manley Commission should help buy him some political space as he maneuvers through the minefields ahead." Wikileaks, 07OTTAWA1922, "Canada: Making the Case for the Afghan Mission."

<sup>34</sup> Manley Report, p. 39

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>&</sup>quot;Learning to Run a War", FrontLine, November 2010.

Afghanistan might have been raging in Kandahar, but it was apparently a non-issue in Canadian politics. The Americans discovered this for themselves when, in April, 2009, embassy officials quietly sounded out members of the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan, established pursuant to the Manley Panel report, as to whether Canada might entertain a request to keep troops in a combat mission after 2011. The embassy's second in command reported to Washington that "The unwillingness of Canadians to engage in substantive discussion of Canada's role in Afghanistan after 2011 would make it tough slogging for any [change] of course to the current end-date of the combat mission in 2011....Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals probably have much appetite for reviving this issue during the next federal campaign – although more specific and public requests from the US and/or NATO could change this dynamic."

Thus it was that the mission from which Canada would not "cut and run" in March, 2006 became the mission that would definitely end for the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan by the end of 2011. But even that firm position turned out to be far from firm. After the federal election of May 2, 2011 when the Conservatives were re-elected with a majority government, Prime Minister Harper, without prior Parliamentary approval, announced that Canada would keep 900-1000 soldiers in the Kabul area until 2014 to train Afghan National Security Forces.

The meanderings of Canada's Kandahar and Afghanistan commitments since the fall of 2005 show only the consistent pattern of inconsistency. We do not seek to lay blame or to question motives, but it is impossible to discern a clear and consistent government line on the Kandahar and Afghanistan mission over the course of five years. It is completely understandable that policy will change to meet changing geostrategic circumstances and even that policy will change due to the exigencies of minority government. Policies can and do alter, but no one should doubt that the political manoeuvring around these shifts in policy had a significant negative impact on Canadian public opinion about the war.

## CANADA'S CHANGING OBJECTIVES IN KANDAHAR

Canadians have almost always looked at this nation's Afghanistan effort through a straw. It is true that the Canadian military, civil, political, and police activities in both Kabul and Kandahar were significant when compared to the resources available to Canada, but this nation was but one participant in the campaign against the Taliban. The United States was the lead nation from the start, and Canadian military and political objectives in Afghanistan must be seen within the larger American and NATO context. We have already discussed NATO's lack of coherent political objectives. But what about the United States?

In 2006, American classicist and military historian Victor David Hansen wrote of the US presence in Iraq and Afghanistan: "In both places, having put the military cart before the strategic horse, the United States easily toppled oppressive regimes only to find itself hard-pressed to replace them with something both lasting and better." A report produced in the fall of 2007 for the Centre for Strategic and International Studies by Anthony Cordesman wrote that what was missing in the US and NATO efforts in Afghanistan was "something that as yet is totally invisible – at least in unclassified terms – a coherent long-term plan or plans.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Wikileaks, 09OTTAWA317, "Regional Views of Canada's Afghan Mission," April 27, 2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Victor David Hanson, *The Father of Us All: War and History – Ancient and Modern* (New York, 2010), p.128.

It also requires that such plans at least be compatible in creating something approaching a coordinated approach to dealing with Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the broader challenge of violent Islamist extremism from movements like al Qaeda. At present, the closest substitute for a plan is the Afghan compact, but this is more a plan for Afghan national development than anything approaching a coherent war plan even for Afghanistan."<sup>139</sup> Cordesman's point was a simple one: the US could not know how it was doing if it did not have either a coherent objective or a means of measuring progress toward that objective.

The confusion was systemic and completely debilitating. Col Ian Hope noted in 2009 that "[W]e are witnessing a failure in the West to apply traditional strategy formulation. We are obsessing over strategic means (troop levels required in Afghanistan) before we have hammered out a collectively acceptable statement of strategic ends (the objectives of our efforts that if achieved would create "victory"). Americans and Europeans do not see the Afghan mission in the same light. They do not share the same strategic vision of obtainable objectives. Continued circular debates about better tactical applications of military force are irrelevant without agreement from key major players what exactly we are trying to achieve." How Canada saw the mission's aims, as we shall see below, was equally confused.

A number of studies of the recent history of Afghanistan, or of the United States in Afghanistan, have all concluded that from 2001 to 2008, the Bush administration had no unified set of political objectives, that its policy aims shifted back and forth, and that it was not until President Obama attempted to forge a policy in the fall of 2009 that the United States really knew what it wanted to achieve other than toppling the Taliban regime and destroying al Qaeda. Thus the question must be posed: if the United States and, thus, NATO had no coherent objectives for their military intervention in Afghanistan, if there was no readily understandable narrative that could be employed to galvanize public support in the Alliance countries, did Canada do any better? The answer, of course, is that it did not.

In the only full length study yet published about the decisions which led Canada into Kandahar, Eugene Lang and Janice Stein describe a cabinet meeting in May, 2005 in which the Kandahar mission was discussed in great detail and the decision finally made by Prime Minister Paul Martin to make a significant Canadian deployment to southern Afghanistan. There is no explanation given as to why that decision was made. We are thus forced to reiterate the points we made above as to why prominent members of the policymaking community wanted Canada to go to Kandahar. They hoped to share the load of the war on terror, to put into action the new diplomatic and political policy of helping failed states to succeed via the 3Ds of "defence, diplomacy and development" and thus to make the world a safer place, and to make a significant impression in an important mission.

Defence minister Bill Graham articulated Canada's objectives in a series of speeches he made after the May cabinet meeting. Canada's upcoming mission was "quintessentially Canadian," he declared. Canada would help to rebuild a war-torn country and give hope to a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Missing Metrics of 'Progress' in Afghanistan (and Pakistan)", a paper presented to the Conference on "Peacebuilding in Afghanistan; Taking Stock and Looking Ahead," Ottawa, December 10-11, 2007.

<sup>11, 2007.

140</sup> Hope comment, November 1, 2009 on babblingbrooks.blogspot.com. Hope was commenting on a post by Maj Shane Schreiber, "Know thyself, know thy enemy...." October 30, 2009.

See, for example, Jones; Woodward; Rashid; and Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers* (New York, 2011).
 Stein and Lang, p. 195

long suffering people by creating a stable and secure environment in Kandahar that would win over the local population through the engagement of Canadian soldiers, diplomats and aid workers.<sup>143</sup> These noble objectives may well have been possible in the summer of 2005. When LCol Ian Hope's Task Force Orion deployed to Kandahar in early 2006, he expected that the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team would be the centre of gravity of his mission. After the heavy fighting began in May, however, it was the Battle Group, and not the PRT, that became the mission's heart. Yet official mission objectives were slow to change. While the army was fighting in Kandahar to defeat the Taliban in more or less setpiece battles right through September, the Canadian public continued to be told that the mission was actually about human rights and building democracy in Afghanistan. Civil reconstruction was still on the Canadian agenda, but it could not be done until Kandahar was secured by military means. And the government's message was muted, as journalist Murray Brewster has pointed out, because the Prime Minister's Office, controlling what was said from Ottawa, could not craft a suitable formulation. Brewster quotes one PMO official as saying "the reason there was so much silence was because we were trying to figure out how to transition the communications politically from a hard terrorism message to, you know, about women voting and all that stuff."144 It goes without saying that the transition was not satisfactorily handled.

In June, 2007, with the insurgency in Kandahar well underway, the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence offered its summary of Canadian policy objectives in Afghanistan: to ensure that Afghanistan would not again become a haven for terrorism; to help the democratically-elected government of Afghanistan provide a secure environment in which "the rule of law, human rights and economic prosperity" might grow; and to support the UN, NATO and the G8 "by providing leadership in one of the most difficult operational areas." <sup>145</sup>

A little more than six months later, with the war going badly, the Manley Panel concluded that "the nature and logic of Canadian engagement have not been well understood by Canadians. While public support for Canadian troops is strong, Canadians have been uncertain about Canada's evolving mission in Afghanistan. To put things bluntly," the Panel's report stated, "Governments from the start of Canada's Afghan involvement have failed to communicate with Canadians with balance and candour about the reasons for Canadian involvement, or about the risks, difficulties and expected results of that involvement. Almost the only Government accounts that Canadians have received have come from the Department of National Defence. Important issues of Canadian diplomacy and aid in Afghanistan have scarcely been acknowledged and seldom asserted in public by ministers or officials responsible."

The Manley Panel offered "four strong reasons" for Canada to be in Kandahar: to take part in "an international response to the threat to peace and security inherent in al Qaeda's terrorist attacks;" to support the United Nations; to support NATO; and to promote and protect "human security in fragile states." All these objectives, from those laid down by Bill Graham in the summer of 2005 to those articulated by the Manley Panel in early 2008, were

144 McCarten, Winnipeg Free Press, October 2, 2011.

46 Manley Report, pp. 20-22

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Ibid., 199

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> "Canadian Forces in Afghanistan: Report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence," June. 2007.

diffuse and difficult to measure, and many could not be achieved at all under the prevailing political and social conditions in Afghanistan. With its limited number of troops and even smaller number of aid workers, capacity builders and police training teams, Canada could certainly have some effect improving conditions in a small part of Kandahar Province, but the rest of the province and country was well beyond Canada's means or reach.

Thus the Canadian public was told that Canada was fighting to build a better Afghanistan even though the media clearly showed almost every day that a better Afghanistan was not being achieved. In fact, Canada did have one core reason and one secondary reason to be in Kandahar from beginning to end. Ottawa wanted to take on a dangerous and heroic mission in a difficult struggle in order to achieve influence in determining the course of that struggle. That was so that Canada would no longer be seen in Washington and Brussels as a free rider and, secondarily, so that the limited Canadian interests in central Asia could be addressed. But no one in government wanted to put things that bluntly to Canadians, and no mechanisms were put into place to ensure that Canada would be heard at the highest policy-making levels in Washington, at least when US Afghan policy was being decided. The US might not have listened in any case, but Canada apparently did not try very hard to raise its voice. As far as we can tell, Canadian views were not sought by the Bush or the Obama White House and had no impact whatever on key US decisions regarding Afghanistan. Of course, those key US decisions directly impacted Canada's soldiers.

The Manley Panel did what it could to bring some order to Canadian policy objectives in Afghanistan. It recommended a far more concerted coordination between Canada's civil and military efforts in Afghanistan "led by the Prime Minister, supported by a cabinet committee and staffed by a single full time task force. Fulfilling Canada's commitment in Afghanistan requires the political energy only a Prime Minister can impart." That was correct. The Panel also laid down five conditions necessary for a continuing Canadian commitment to the Afghanistan mission: (1) "clearer, more comprehensive strategies and better coordination of the overall effort...by the international community...[with a] better integrated and more consistent Canadian policy approach...led by the Prime Minister;" (2) more troops (1,000) to support the Canadians in Kandahar, along with better Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and helicopters; (3) more effective and identifiably Canadian assistance projects; (4) better metrics to measure success; and (5) "a rebalancing of the Government's communications with Canadians about our activities in Afghanistan...The Government must engage Canadians in a continuous, frank and constructive dialogue about conditions in Afghanistan and the extent to which Canadian objectives are being achieved."

Sound as they were, the Manley Panel's recommendations were not the last word on what Canada was doing and should be doing in Kandahar. They were followed by conditions laid out in the Commons motion to stay in Afghanistan beyond 2009, by more objectives established by the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan (set up subsequent to the Manley Panel report and chaired not by the Prime Minister but by Trade Minister David Emerson) and by even more goals recommended by the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan. Thus by the fall of 2010, Canadians had been inundated with policy

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 28

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> House of Commons, Special Committee on Afghanistan, "Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan: Setting a Course to 2011; Report to Parliament, June 2008; Gerald J. Schmitz, "Canadian Policy Toward Afghanistan to

objectives, recommendations, and proposals about what they were doing in Kandahar and how they might achieve Ottawa's goals. Although many of these objectives were similar, it would have taken a complicated organizational chart to explain to Canadians the simple matter of why Canada was in Kandahar, what it hoped to achieve, and how it would know when its goals were reached. No such clarity was presented to Canadians. No such clarity existed even at the highest levels of government, and the Harper government, and indeed the Prime Minister himself, may have concluded that the war could not be won, was politically costly and, therefore, the less said of aims and objectives the better. 150

The overall picture of political direction, administrative organization, and communication of mission objectives to the Canadian public was, in fact, muddy from the very start and grew more so as time went on. Perhaps most of these difficulties were rooted in the three elections in 2004, 2006, and 2008 that produced successive minority governments. But whatever the cause, Canadians never received a clear picture of why Canadian soldiers were being killed in Afghanistan. The information was there, but it was never laid out clearly.

This contributed mightily to confusion about the mission, and when Canada's political leaders battled each other about objectives and issues such as the treatment of detainees, many Canadians simply tuned out. If no one could articulate why Canadians were fighting and what they were fighting for, the public seemed to have decided, it was time to leave the war to others.

#### CONCLUSION

Canadian troops fought in Afghanistan from the end of 2001 through to the middle of 2011, and the Canadian Forces suffered substantial casualties in this decade-long effort. The nation's military and political leadership learned on the job about the costs of war, the intractibilities of counter-insurgency warfare, and the difficulties of managing an increasingly unpopular war through a prolonged period of domestic political turmoil. But what specifically did Canadians learn?

The first lessons can be derived from the Canadian Forces' experiences in Kabul from 2003 to the beginning of 2006. Here, Canadians played an important role because they had capable officers in command of substantial numbers of troops who were able to act with force at a time when Canada's partners were not. The CF's intelligence resources were as good as or better than any others in theatre, the US excepted. Simultaneously, able Canadian diplomats ran the newly-created embassy and directed the country's aid program. At a time when NATO ISAF was only just being established, this confluence of abilities and power gave Canada a much more prominent voice than it usually manages to achieve in coalition operations.

As ISAF expanded over Afghanistan and the United States took on the directing role, Canada's influential voice shrank. But because the CF fought in Kandahar, and fought with great skill in critical operations, this influence was not completely lost. Capable, well-led troops that perform well in action matter. The training system in Canada from the first rotations to Kandahar in 2006 produced well-trained battle groups which were able to adapt

<sup>2011</sup> and Beyond: Issues, Prospects, Options," Library of Parliament, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, September 27, 2010.

150 Harder interview.

to changes in Taliban tactics. This also mattered, as did the fact that some senior officers deploying to Afghanistan appear to have studied the country and its history. As far as we can tell, Canada's soldiers on the ground in Kandahar adapted quickly and effectively to the changing mission they encountered. But Canada's policymakers did not. Canada had clear mission objectives in the Kabul phase of the return to Afghanistan, but as Canada left Kabul for Kandahar, those objectives became more diffuse. When Task Force Orion slammed into the Taliban in strength in the battles of May 2006, the political nature of the mission became even more unclear even as the military nature became more focused. In effect the May 2006 battles rendered the Canadian political objectives as established in 2005 obsolete but Ottawa was slow to realize that bare fact and slow to attempt to redefine the mission. In fact it took until the establishment of the Manley panel in late 2007 before any serious effort was made to revise Canadian mission objectives. Even so, Canada was handicapped in its goal of fitting the mission to the circumstances of a high intensity insurgency because both NATO and the United States did not clearly define a new strategy for Afghanistan until 2009.

The bureaucratic record is less exemplary. In Ottawa, the ordinary and daily tussle for influence among departments might be expected and permitted. But in Afghanistan, it ought not to have been tolerated. The Strategic Advisory Team—Afghanistan was a CF initiative that provided assistance to an Afghan government that was struggling to get off the ground. But jealousy at its success ensured that it was scuttled. At the same time, the CF's scruples did not permit the intelligence harvest that SAT-A ought to have provided. The tussle between departments for control in Afghanistan was less than edifying, and if Canada ever again aims at a Whole of Government approach abroad, the Prime Minister must provide early and clear direction and coordination to prevent such squabbling from occurring.

The Canadian government must also be very wary of Alliance operations. It is highly unlikely that Canada will ever conduct a major operation abroad on its own, but at the same time we cannot escape the conclusion that NATO has not functioned well, either politically or military, in Afghanistan. The Alliance agreed to enter Afghanistan, but its members hamstrung the operation of ISAF with caveats that made military success ever harder to achieve. Canada had imposed its own caveats until the end of 2005, but thereafter it did not; many of its allies retained theirs. This greatly affected Canadian commanders and soldiers in Kandahar, inflicted unnecessary casualties, and forced them to rely on US resources, the only military resources that could be counted on, for succour. At the same time, most of the Alliance members were unwilling to commit troops to Kandahar Province, even when a single battle group of Canadians in 2006 faced the Taliban's major offensive effort. Less constrained military commitments, and greater political will from NATO members, will be essential if Canada should ever again wish to place its soldiers and treasure into a major and long-lasting NATO operation. Anything less must call into question Canada's membership in the Alliance.

Before any future commitment abroad, more intelligence and a detailed awareness of the geopolitical situation is essential. The presence of Pakistan to the south of Afghanistan, the overriding importance to the Pakistani military of its long-running conflict with India, and Islamabad's willingness to finance, arm, train, and provide safe haven to the Taliban created huge and continuing problems for ISAF. While Canadian politicians, soldiers, and public servants knew of this early on, none appear to have calculated correctly the major impact this situation would pose for their operations in Kandahar after 2006. Better intelligence and

clearer awareness of its implications is and must be an essential element in deciding on future major troop commitments.

Public opinion during a war is a critical component of national will, but public opinion is fragile. If the US and NATO were unclear about what they were fighting for in Afghanistan, then Canadians were similarly confused. If Canada's political leaders were inconsistent in their aims and their explanations of them, and if there was no clearly evident strategy behind the nation's actions abroad, no one should be surprised that public opinion turned against the war. All these flaws were present, and there can be no doubt that the political manoeuvring and sham fights in Ottawa over the Afghanistan commitment through a succession of minority governments also greatly weakened public support for the war. We understand, of course, that politicians will always strive to gain advantage, but they need to realize more clearly than they did that their posturing and struggling to gain transitory advantage will have a deleterious effect on support for any war we choose to fight.

The war in Afghanistan was a just war, and Canada was right to participate. The Canadian Forces served with great distinction and, though our soldiers paid a heavy price, they fought with honour and courage. The Army's leadership for the next generation was forged in Kandahar, and significant military lessons were learned and, we trust, mastered there. But unless our politicians and bureaucrats also learned the lessons of the Afghan War, the price paid by Canada and Canadians will have been far too high.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Not everyone was convinced the Canadians made an impact, thanks to their government. Michael Yon, a US blogger who spends much time embedded with combat troops, wrote this on September 12, 2011: "Lately, the history of the Canadian troops is softly being rewritten as successful in Afghanistan. Reality differs. The Canadians troops have an excellent reputation and they served with distinction, but after nearly being swallowed whole, they were ordered to abandon their battlespace. There were many causes. The Canadian combat forces could have prevailed, but Ottawa is weak. The prime cause for the Canadian defeat was that tough men in mud homes without electricity defeated comfortable politicians in Ottawa, who seem to think that manufactured history will make them victorious." ("One Night in Zari," Michaelyon-online.com)

### **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**David Bercuson** was born in Montreal in August 1945. He attended Sir George Williams University, graduating in June 1966 with Honours in History and winning the Lieutenant-Governor's Silver Medal for the highest standing in history. After graduation he pursued graduate studies at the University of Toronto, earning an MA in history in 1967 and a Ph.D. in 1971.

Dr. Bercuson has published in academic and popular publications on a wide range of topics specializing in modern Canadian politics, Canadian defence and foreign policy, and Canadian military history. He has written, coauthored, or edited over 30 popular and academic books and does regular commentary for television and radio. He has written for the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Calgary Herald*, the *National Post* and other newspapers.

In 1988, Bercuson was elected to the Royal Society of Canada and in May 1989, he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies at The University of Calgary. In 1997 he was appointed Special Advisor to the Minister of National Defence on the Future of the Canadian Forces. He was a member of the Minister of National Defence's Monitoring Committee from 1997 to 2003. Since January 1997 he has been the Director of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary. He is also the Director of Programs for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, which is based in Calgary.

Dr. Bercuson's newest book is *The Fighting Canadians: Our Regimental History from New France to Afghanistan*, published by HarperCollins.

Dr. Bercuson is Honorary Lieutenant Colonel of the 41 Combat Engineer Regiment, a Land Force Reserve military engineer unit of the Canadian Forces.

Dr. Becuson served on the Advisory Council on National Security and is a member of the Board of Governors, RMC.

In 2002 Dr. Bercuson was awarded the J. B. Tyrrell Historical Medal from the Royal Society of Canada. In 2003, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada.

He recently became the recipient of the 2004 Vimy Award sponsored by the Conference of Defence Association Institute (CDAI) which recognizes Canadians who have made a significant and outstanding contribution to the defence and security of our nation and the preservation of our democratic values.

Jack Lawrence Granatstein was born in Toronto on 21 May 1939. He attended Toronto public schools, Le Collège militaire royal de St-Jean (Grad. Dipl., 1959), the Royal Military College, Kingston (B.A., 1961), the University of Toronto (M.A., 1962), and Duke University (Ph.D., 1966). He served in the Canadian Army (1956-66), then joined the History Department at York University, Toronto (1966-95) where, after taking early retirement, he is Distinguished Research Professor of History Emeritus. Granatstein has also taught at the University of Western Ontario and the Royal Military College. He was the Rowell Jackman Fellow at the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (1996-2000) and was a member of the Royal Military College of Canada Board of Governors (1997-2005). From 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2000, he was the Director and CEO of the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. He was then Special Adviser to the Director of the Museum (2000-01), a member of the Canadian War Museum Committee (2001-06), and chair of the Museum's Advisory Council (2001-06). He is now a member of the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Museum of Civilization (2006-), a member of its Executive and Development Committees (2009-), and is chair of the Board's Canadian War Museum Advisory Committee (2007-). The government re-appointed him to the Board of Trustees for a second three-year term.

Granatstein has been an Officer of the Order of Canada since 1996. He held the Canada Council's Killam senior fellowship twice (1982-84, 1991-93), was the editor of the <u>Canadian Historical Review</u> (1981-84), and was a founder of the Organization for the History of Canada which gave him its first National History Award in 2006. He has been a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada since 1982 and in 1992 was awarded the Society's J.B. Tyrrell Historical Gold Medal "for outstanding work in the history of Canada." His book, <u>The Generals</u> (1993), won the J.W. Dafoe Prize and the UBC Medal for Canadian Biography. Canada's National History Society named him the winner of the Pierre Berton Award for popular history (2004), and the Canadian Authors Association gave him its Lela Common Award for Canadian History in 2006. In 2008, the Conference of Defence Associations awarded him its 75th Anniversary Book Prize as "the author deemed to have made the most significant positive contribution to the general public's understanding of Canadian foreign policy, national security and defence during the past quarter century."

He has honorary doctorates from Memorial University of Newfoundland (1993), the University of Calgary (1994), Ryerson Polytechnic University (1999), the University of Western Ontario (2000), McMaster University (2000), Niagara University (2004), and the Royal Military College of Canada (2007). He is a senior Fellow of Massey College, Toronto (2000-). The Conference of Defence Associations Institute presented him the Vimy Award "for achievement and effort in the field of Canadian defence and security" (1996), and he was a Director of the CDAI and a member of its Executive Committee (2005-09). In 2007, he received the General Sir Arthur Currie Award from the Military Museums Society of Calgary, and he was named honorary historian of the Royal Canadian Military Institute.

In 1995 he served as one of three commissioners on the Special Commission on the Restructuring of the [Canadian Forces] Reserves (chaired by the Rt. Hon. Brian Dickson, former Chief Justice of Canada), and in 1997 he advised the Minister of National Defence on the future of the Canadian Forces. He was a member of the Advisory Committee of the Dominion Institute, is a national fellow of the University of Calgary's Centre for Military and Strategic Studies (1997-), is on the Research Advisory Board of the Macdonald-Laurier Institute (2010-), and was Chair of the Council for Canadian Security in the 21st Century (2001-5) for which he wrote a monthly column (2006-07). He is a Senior Research Fellow (2008-) and was a Board of Directors member (2004-10) and Chair of the Advisory Council of the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute (2001-08). He writes a monthly newspaper column for CDFAI (2008-).

Granatstein writes on 20th Century Canadian national history--the military, defence and

foreign policy, Canadian-American relations, the public service, and politics. He comments regularly on historical questions, defence, and public affairs in the press and on radio and television; he provided the historical commentary for CBC-TV's coverage of the 50th, 60th, and 65th anniversaries of D-Day (1994, 2004, 2009), V-E Day (1995, 2005), V-J Day (1995), and the 90th anniversary of Vimy Ridge (2007); and he speaks frequently here and abroad. He has been a historical consultant on many films, including "Canada's War" (Yap Films, 2004), and he wrote for the National Film Board's projects to put Canadian Great and Second World War film footage on-line. He wrote a regular book review column for Legion magazine (2006-09) and for On Track (2006-08), and he was the historical consultant for the Ontario Veterans Memorial (2005-06) and the Gardiner Museum's Battle of Britain exhibit (2006).

Granatstein's many scholarly and popular books include The Politics of Survival: The Conservative Party of Canada 1939-45 (1967, 1970), Peacekeeping: International Challenge and Canadian Response (1968), Canadian Foreign Policy Since 1945 (1969, 1970, 1973), Forum: Canadian Life and Letters 1920-1970 (1972), Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-45 (1975, 1990), Ties that Bind: Canadian-American Relations in Wartime (1975), Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada (1977, 1985), American Dollars/Canadian Prosperity (1978), A Man of Influence: Norman Robertson and Canadian Statecraft (1981), The Gouzenko Transcripts (1982), The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-57 (1982, 1998), Twentieth Century Canada (1983, 1986, 1989), Bloody Victory: Canadians and the D-Day Campaign (1984, 1994), The Great Brain Robbery: Canada's Universities on the Road to Ruin (1984), Sacred Trust: Brian Mulroney and the Conservative Party in Power (1985). Canada 1957-1967: The Years of Uncertainty and Innovation (1986), The Collins Dictionary of Canadian History (1986), How Britain's Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States (1989), Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War (1989), A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War (1989), Pirouette: Pierre Trudeau and Canadian Foreign Policy (1990,1991) Spy Wars: Canada and Espionage from Gouzenko to Glasnost (1990, 1992), Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese in World War II (1990; Japanese ed., 1994), For Better or For Worse: Canada and the United States to the 1990s (1991, 1992, 2007), War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf--Canada's Limited Wars (1991), English Canada Speaks Out (1991), Dictionary of Canadian Military History (1992, 1994), The Generals: The Canadian Army's Senior Commanders in the Second World War (1993, 1995, 2005), Empire to Umpire: Canadian Foreign Policy to the 1990s (1994; rev. ed., 2007), Victory 1945: Canadians from War to Peace (1995), The Good Fight: Canadians and World War II (1995), Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism (1996, 1997), Petrified Campus: Canada's Universities in Crisis (1997, 1998), The Canadian 100: The Hundred Most Influential Canadians of the Twentieth Century (1997, 1998), The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada (1998, 1999), Who Killed Canadian History? (1998, 1999, rev. ed., 2007), Trudeau's Shadow: The Life and Legacy of Pierre Trudeau (1998, 1999), Prime Ministers: Rating the Prime Ministers (1999, 2000), Our Century: The Canadian Journey (2000, 2001), Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace (2002, 2004), First Drafts: Eyewitness Accounts from Canada's Past (2003, 2004), Canada and the Two World Wars (2003), The Importance of Being Less Earnest: Promoting Canada's National Interests through Tighter Ties with the U.S. (2003), Who Killed the Canadian Military? (2004; paper ed., 2004, 2008), Hell's Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War (2004), Battle Lines: First Person Military Accounts from Our Past (2004), The Last Good War: An Illustrated History of Canada in the Second World War, 1939-1945 (2005), The Special Commission on the Restructuring of the Reserves, 1995: Ten Years Later (2005), The Land Newly Found: Eyewitness Accounts of the Canadian Immigration Experience (2006), Whose War Is It? How Canada Can Survive in the Post-9/11 World (2007, 2008), and A Threatened Future: Canada's Future Strategic Environment and Its Security Implications (2007). He is now preparing (with Dean Oliver) The Companion to Canadian Military History (Oxford University Press/Canadian War Museum, 2010).

Granatstein is married and lives in Toronto.

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