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Training Can Be Dangerous

A Realistic Assessment of the Proposed
Canadian Mission to Train Afghan National
Security Forces

Michael Byers and Stewart Webb



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List of Acronyms

- ANA** Afghan National Army
- ATO** Afghan Theatre of Operations
- ANSF** Afghan National Security Forces (military and police)
- CIA** Central Intelligence Agency
- CN** Counter-Narcotics
- COIN** Counter-Insurgency
- CT** Counter-Terrorism
- FATA** Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan
- GWOT** Global War on Terrorism
- IED** Improvised Explosive Devices
- ISAF** International Security Assistance Force
- ISI** Inter-Services Intelligence
- JEM** Jaish-e-Mohammed
- LET** Lashkar-e-Taiba
- MANPADS** Man-Portable Air-Defense System
- NA** Northern Alliance
- NATO** North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- OEF** Operation ENDURING FREEDOM
- PRT** Provincial Reconstruction Teams
- RCMP** Royal Canadian Mounted Police
- RPG** Rocket Propelled Grenade
- TCN** Troop Contributing Nation
- TTP** Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan
- UAV** Unmanned Aerial Vehicles
- UNSC** United Nations Security Council
- USD** United States Dollars

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Abstract

On November 15, 2010, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced his government's plans to extend the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to the year 2014 and that Canada's military efforts would be redirected towards a supposedly safer non-combat training mission. This redirection coincides with NATO's recent emphasis on increasing the capability of the Afghan National Army and Police so that they can take over from Western forces. These major decisions concerning Canada's defence and foreign policy were made without prior Parliamentary debate. This report aims to explore the questions left unresolved because of the lack of public debate by engaging in a clear-eyed assessment of the risks facing Canadian military personnel, and of the prospects for a successful training mission. It concludes that the risk of Canadian casualties is high, while the prospects for success are slim.

Introduction

Recent developments in the United States have affected the Afghan Theatre of Operations (ATO),

with consequences for Canada's involvement. Barack Obama became the U.S. president just over two years ago determined to make Afghanistan "his war".¹ Since he took office, there has been a surge of additional American military personnel into the country.² The shift of strategy is aimed at decreasing the Taliban threat while concurrently building Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to a level where they can take over from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In the process, ISAF will be moving away from state building and reconstruction efforts.³

There are two distinct Taliban groups involved in the Afghan conflict. The first, the Afghan Taliban, had its origins as an anti-corruption, security-establishing militia in the mid-1990s that was based on the principles associated with fundamentalist Islam. The origins of the Pakistani Taliban (Tehrik-i-Taliban or TTP) are markedly different. The TTP arose from Pakistan's President General Zia ul-Haq's islamization of Pakistan's military officer corps and intelligence services in the 1970s, including the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). Since the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the ISI and Pakistan's military cadre have supported jihadist groups in

order to wage an insurgency-by-proxy in Indian-controlled Kashmir. There are many reasons why the TTP has risen in prominence recently, including the war in Afghanistan, the outlawing of some Kashmiri proxy groups by President General Pervez Musharraf,⁴ and an increased radicalization in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The TTP play a number of different roles in the Afghan conflict, including at times compromising ISAF's logistical support routes through northern Pakistan.⁵

Canadian forces have been deployed in Afghanistan for nearly ten years and — despite official assertions otherwise — the security situation on the ground has not improved. In 2009, U.S. commander General Stanley McCrystal stated: “Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating.”⁶ McCrystal's assessment contributed to the decision to mount a surge of 30,000 American troops to combat and push back the resurgent Taliban forces. In a recent UN report, 2010 was assessed to be the bloodiest year since 2001 for Afghan civilians.⁷ There was a dramatic decrease in ISAF and ANSF responsible deaths from 26 percent to 16 percent, while deaths caused by the insurgents increased significantly.⁸ On December 13, 2010, *The Telegraph* published a letter to President Obama sent by 23 leading experts on Afghanistan stating that overall ISAF strategy and the surge are not working.⁹

Making matters even worse, Hamid Karzai's government was recently in the midst of a constitutional crisis, with controversies over election fraud dominating Afghan politics.¹⁰ According to James Fergusson, a noted investigative journalist and author, the international community spent \$300 million United States Dollars (USD) on the badly flawed 2009 elections.¹¹

In November 2010, Prime Minister Stephen Harper decided to extend the Canadian mission and shift it towards a training role. He did so without allowing for a vote or even a debate

in Parliament, arguing that the new mission is technical, safe, and non-combat: “[W]hen we're talking simply about technical or training missions, I think that is something the executive can do on its own.”¹² While Harper is constitutionally correct that the executive holds the power to make decisions concerning the defense of the realm, it is increasingly recognized that Parliament should be allowed to debate such matters and hold the executive accountable.¹³ The problem is that this particular training mission will occur in the middle of a war zone, where our troops will inevitably face danger, and within the framework of a larger NATO mission with doubtful prospects. It is true that there are no certainties in a war zone. But in the face of increasingly unfavorable Canadian public opinion, any significant operational shift in the Afghan deployment should be subject to rigorous external examination.

There has also been relatively little debate about the training mission within the Canadian media and general public — perhaps because of the concurrence of the Conservative and Liberal parties on this issue. Yet according to a recent poll conducted by Angus-Reid, 56 percent of Canadians disagree with the continuation of Canadian military operations in Afghanistan.¹⁴ Only 48 percent agree with the shift to a non-combat role.¹⁵

In this context, our report focuses on two key questions:

1. Will the training mission really be safe?
2. Will the training mission succeed?

The Canadian Mission

Canada has been instrumental in the Afghan theatre since Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) began in 2001. In 2005, Canada accepted the responsibility to conduct military and provincial reconstruction efforts in Kandahar province.¹⁶ At the time of this report, 155 Canadian

military personnel and 4 Canadian civilians have been lost; 1000s more have suffered permanent physical and/or psychological injury.

On May 17, 2006, the Canadian mission in Afghanistan was extended for two years.¹⁷ This was after a six-hour debate and a parliamentary vote of 149 for, and 145 against, the extension.¹⁸ On February 25, 2008, the Canadian mission was extended from 2009 to the end of 2011.¹⁹ This time the parliamentary vote was 198 for, and 77 against, the extension.²⁰ It should be noted that the support of the Liberal Party was conditioned on a significant shift to training and reconstruction. For the most part, the promised shift has not occurred. The latest extension came on November 15, 2010, after Prime Minister Harper announced that the Canadian mission will be extended to 2014 and refocused on the training of ANSF personnel.²¹

The NDP and the Bloc Québécois have been insistent in their calls for a Parliamentary debate about the new extension and shift to a training mission. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, has accepted Mr. Harper's assertion that a debate was neither necessary nor appropriate. As far back as June 2010, Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae "indicated his party is amenable to keeping Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan as so-called military trainers — even after the 2011 deadline."²² This created the opportunity for both the Liberals and the Conservatives to remove the issue of Afghanistan from public debate, as the two parties together form a clear majority.

Other troop contributing nations (TCNs) were concerned about the prospect of Canadian troops withdrawing from Afghanistan. According to WikiLeaks, former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown was irked by the withdrawal of Dutch and possibly Canadian troops from the volatile south of Afghanistan.²³ His concern was that few TCNs would be willing to undergo the casualties and political costs of operating in that particularly hostile region. The diplomatic pressures on Can-

ada to remain would only have increased after the Dutch withdrawal in August 2010.²⁴

On November 10, 2010, shortly after the Harper government announced the new mission, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Crowley said: "We, the United States, have been encouraging a number of countries to add trainers to help with the development of Afghan national security forces."²⁵ But if this is so, and the role is indeed safe, then why have other countries not already taken up this role much more fully? In other words, why has it fallen upon Canada — which has already contributed significantly and disproportionately in Afghanistan — to extend its mission in this way?

The argument can be made that the extension and redirection of the mission was undertaken to appease the United States. Concerns about negative trade impacts are often evoked by those who want Canada to follow U.S. initiatives such as the invasion of Iraq and ballistic missile defence. However, there is no verifiable link between negative trade impacts and Canada not responding to the immediate interests of our American neighbours. Canada did not take part in the invasion and occupation of Iraq, nor did we sign up for Missile Defence, yet the trade relationship between the United States and Canada is as strong and profitable as before.

For others it is a concern that if Afghanistan were to revert to Taliban control, it would again become a haven for extremist terrorist groups posing a threat to the West. It is widely known that the Taliban regime harboured al-Qaeda and its leadership prior to 9/11 and that was the main reason for Western intervention in the country. However, al-Qaeda has already moved on to Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere. Moreover, as U.S. actions vis-à-vis Pakistan and Yemen demonstrate, there may be other ways to control the al-Qaeda threat that do not involve having hundreds of thousands of Western troops on the ground.

Just as likely, the extension and redirection of the Canadian mission results from a concern

that “losing” Afghanistan would undermine the credibility of NATO as an international security organisation.²⁶ Of course, it was thinking like this that kept the United States in Vietnam well beyond the point where any realistic analysis would have seen them pull out.

Finally, the decision to extend the Canadian mission could be based on a genuine concern for the security and well-being of Afghan civilians, even if the dramatic worsening of the security situation during the course of ISAF’s operations renders this kind of thinking less credible than it was before.

In any event, this array of possible reasons for the decision is only part of the context that needs to be taken into account.

Geopolitical Context

Article V of the NATO Charter was invoked after the United States suffered the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and because of this and political support for (and pressure from) the alliance’s leading member, NATO countries have supplied military assistance to Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) ever since. ISAF took over the Afghan mission in August 2003 on the basis of it being a Crisis Response or Peace Support Operation.²⁷ However, because of the lack of stability this was seen as contentious within NATO and many of the organization’s members refused, and still refuse, to take part in the operation.

ISAF has been American-led since 2003 and as a result its capabilities have been dependent on the vicissitudes of U.S. politics. As the United States prepared to invade Iraq, ISAF’s operational capabilities were curtailed. There were dramatic decreases in intelligence efforts, UAVs and American military personnel.²⁸

NATO was formed in 1949 to counter the Soviet Union and Article V of the NATO Charter stipulates that if one member state is attacked then the other members have a duty to defend it.

But the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) is not a war that threatens the survival of any NATO state. Indeed, some analysts believe that NATO’s operational capability has become fractured because of its involvement in Afghanistan.²⁹ The NATO states are diversely influenced by their domestic politics, and because of this some have accepted only token non-combat roles, whereas Canada has been involved in a difficult combat role for most of the Afghan mission.

In November 2010, NATO leaders announced a plan to transfer the overall security of Afghanistan to ANSF and end the alliance’s overall combat role by 2014. However, this deadline is obviously a flexible one. As Ahmed Rashid, the noted Pakistani journalist, explains: “the U.S. warned that its forces would continue fighting beyond that date if the security situation deteriorated. Clearly, the U.S. and NATO are on two different timetables.”³⁰

So what does ISAF’s exit strategy look like? The recently revised strategy was clearly and succinctly reported on by Bob Woodward, who explained the decision-making process within the White House in 2009–10 in his book *Obama’s Wars*.³¹ According to Woodward, the exit strategy is based on a three-pillared approach:

- a surge to push back the Taliban in Afghanistan;
- an increased use of drones and special forces in northern Pakistan to target Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters there;
- the training of hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police capable of taking over from NATO forces — initially by 2011, and now by 2014.

The three pillars indicate a shift from Counter-Insurgency (COIN) operations to Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations. In particular, the increased use of special forces and Predator drones is hardly conducive to a “hearts and minds” operation of national reconstruction aimed at al-

tering the perceptions of the civilian population and therefore reducing their support for the insurgency. Just as problematically, if any of the three pillars were to fall, the whole edifice could come crashing down.

In December 2009, Obama authorized the deployment of an additional 30,000 troops.³² In January 2011, he authorized a further deployment of 1,400 marines.³³ In concert with the surge, greater emphasis was put on improving the capability of ANSF, which is where Canada's new training mission comes in.

Complications Facing NATO's Plans

In the spring of 2010, a major operation began in southern Afghanistan. Operation MOSHTARAK (Dari for "Togetherness") was a joint operation consisting of 8,000 ANA personnel and 7,000 ISAF personnel that was targeted at the poppy-growing district of Helmand province. It demonstrated a number of things that complicate NATO's plans for a smooth transition to Afghan forces in 2014:

First, Afghans believe that the Taliban will come back quickly after ISAF leaves an area. A recent report published by the U.S. Department of Defense states that "[t]he Taliban's strength lies in the Afghan population's perception that Coalition forces will soon leave, giving credence to the belief that a Taliban victory is inevitable."³⁴ Therefore, the locals are hesitant to cooperate which impedes the effectiveness of our forces, and those of the ANA.

Second, even ANA-led operations are seen as foreign, because the Karzai government is viewed as a corrupt and ineffective puppet administration for the West. Furthermore, promotions within the ANA tend to go to those soldiers from the former Northern Alliance territories. The Tajiks, for example, dominate the officer classes of ANSF even though "U.S. training and recruitment includes a strict parity between all ethnic groups. Traditionally the Afghan officer

class has been Pashtun. Pashtun representation in the army is lower than its proportion of the population, and only 3 percent of recruits are from the volatile South."³⁵ This leads to the impression that the ANA is prejudiced against Pashtuns and attempting to impose the authority of Tajik and other minority groups on them. The choice of the Dari word "Moshtarak" for the operation in Helmand only reinforced this perception – for although Dari is the official language of the Afghan government, many Pashtuns do not speak it.

Third, even after Operation MOSHTARAK had concluded, further operations were needed to seize territory and urban areas that ISAF and the ANA had been unable to capture during the initial operation.³⁶

Fourth, according to Fergusson, Karzai's proposals for peace talks with the Taliban were undermined – rather than supported – by ISAF and ANA's activities in Helmand.³⁷

The Training Mission Will Likely Result in Canadian Casualties

Prime Minister Stephen Harper insists that risks to Canadian soldiers will be reduced. However, our analysis indicates that the risks are still significant and will likely lead to Canadian casualties; possibly quite a number of them.

The Harper government is portraying the shift to training as a non-combat role. In November 2010, Prime Minister Harper was asked whether there would be a parliamentary vote on altering Canada's mandate in Afghanistan to the training mission. He replied, as aforementioned: "[W]hen we're talking simply about technical or training missions, I think that is something the executive can do on its own."³⁸

Even if one assumes that the security situation in-and-around the bases is safe, there are risks inherent in military training exercises. Casualties occur even in the most seemingly low-risk situations. The first four Canadian deaths during the war came during a training exercise, as

the result of a friendly fire incident involving an American F-16.³⁹ Then, in February 2010, another Canadian soldier was killed and four injured during a training accident at a shooting range near Kandahar.⁴⁰ So far, six Canadian soldiers have been killed — and dozens wounded — by “friendly fire” in Afghanistan. Moreover, Canadian soldiers will have more to worry about than friendly-fire mishaps during training exercises.

For instance, the Afghan insurgency is seeking to impede ANSF recruitment, as NATO pushes to hasten the build-up of Afghan army and police. Two recent coordinated attacks are demonstrative:

On December 19, 2010, insurgents attacked a bus outside Afghanistan’s main army recruitment centre on the outskirts of Kabul, killing five soldiers. The recruitment centre is where most of the Canadian soldiers involved in the training mission will likely be stationed. On the same day, insurgents attacked an army recruitment centre in the northern city of Kunduz. Five Afghan soldiers and three policemen were killed; another 20 soldiers were wounded.⁴¹

Attacking recruitment centers and training bases can be a successful tactic for an insurgency as it potentially has an effect on both the domestic situation and the international community’s willingness to stay involved in the country. This is because every Afghan casualty will reduce the number of volunteers and demoralize new recruits and with every ISAF casualty the West’s casualty aversion increases.

Although such attacks are increasing, this is not a new tactic within Afghanistan. Ismael Khan, who will be discussed later in this report, first gained notoriety during the Soviet occupation by employing this tactic.⁴² Khan was an Afghan army captain in 1979 when he led a revolt against a Soviet base which resulted in the death of fifty Soviet officers and their wives.

The media has occasionally expressed concern about the risk of insurgent infiltration of ANSF.⁴³ Unfortunately, the question should not

be whether ANSF has been infiltrated by insurgents, but to what degree. The following is a list of recent attacks already carried out by insurgent infiltrators on ISAF personnel:

- On November 4, 2009, five British soldiers were killed by an Afghan policeman at a checkpoint in Helmand province.⁴⁴
- On July 13, 2010, three British soldiers were killed by an Afghan soldier at a base in Helmand province.⁴⁵
- The following week, two American contractors and two Afghan soldiers were killed during training by another Afghan soldier inside Camp Shaheen, an Afghan army training base outside Mazar-e-Sharif.⁴⁶
- On August 24, 2010, two Spanish policemen and their interpreter were killed by an Afghan policeman they were training in north-west Afghanistan.⁴⁷
- On October 6, 2010, an Afghan soldier fired a rocket-propelled grenade at French and Afghan forces manning an outpost north of Kabul. Fortunately, nobody was injured in the incident.⁴⁸
- On November 29, 2010, an Afghan policeman killed six of his American trainers in eastern Afghanistan. The Taliban subsequently claimed he had been sent to join the police as a sleeper agent.⁴⁹
- On January 20, 2011, an Afghan soldier shot two Italian soldiers dead on a military base.⁵⁰
- On February 18, 2011, an Afghan soldier killed three German soldiers and wounded six others on a base in Baghlan Province.⁵¹
- On April 4, 2011, an Afghan border policeman killed two American trainers inside a compound in northern Faryab Province.⁵²

Before the expansion of ANSF became a political issue, there was only a vague semblance of security checks on recruits. Now, with strong political pressure for a rapid expansion, it is difficult to see how adequate security checks could be conducted on incoming personnel — especially given current conditions in Afghanistan.

Mission Creep?

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has imposed a restriction on the Canadian training mission, namely that our soldiers will remain “inside the wire” on secure bases. This so-called “caveat” raises several questions:

1. Who will provide the security for these bases?

It seems unlikely that ISAF personnel from other contributing states will provide the security for Canadian-run training bases, as none of these states wishes to incur additional risks to their personnel. But having Canadian forces securing the bases’ perimeters will increase the risks to those forces, while also raising the difficult question as to where the perimeters begin. Will Canadian soldiers end up seeking to secure buffer zones around the bases and, if so, how wide — and dangerous — will those zones become?

2. Training “inside the wire” is less effective, which will lead to pressure to go “outside”

According to Superintendent John Brewer of the RCMP, who spent nine months working with the Afghan border police, only hands-on mentoring “outside the wire” will produce a force capable of securing the country once NATO troops withdraw. Brewer claimed, “If I had been restricted to Kabul, and had to rely on third-hand information, I couldn’t have built my group.” Canadian trainers restricted to bases in Kabul would be “flying the flag” but having little operational impact. Brewer gave the following illustrative example:

You’re not going to stop corruption by getting on the phone to an Afghan 600 kilometres away and saying, “Don’t steal.” Where they are partnered, they are more effective. There’s less corruption, better skills and the equipment and facilities are better maintained.⁵³

Both Canada and the United States will want the ANSF to be effective after the training. This means that the instruction will have to include a practical mentoring phase. Canadian troops conduct many such missions now: “according to the Department of National Defence, 325 of the 2,750 Canadian military personnel in Afghanistan are currently engaged in ‘instructing, training and mentoring’ members of the Afghan army and police.”⁵⁴ The “mentoring” involves Canadian troops being embedded within ANSF operations in order to provide on-the-spot assistance and to ensure that they are conducting missions effectively.

Inevitably, there will be pressure to lift the new caveat and go “outside the wire” again, and there is every reason to believe that Prime Minister Harper would concede. After all, he was adamant that the troops would come home in 2011, until succumbing to U.S. pressure to keep them there until 2014. Once the caveat is lifted, the already significant risk to Canadian soldiers will increase and additional casualties will be incurred. Already a number of the Canadian casualties-to-date have occurred while leading Afghan soldiers or policemen on patrol.

For Whom Are We Training the Afghan Forces?

The Harper government and U.S. officials both state that training ANSF will enable the Afghan government to control its own territory. But this outcome is hardly assured.

In 2009, the rate of ANSF recruitment was approximately 2,000 recruits per month. The

ANA is currently composed of some 150,000 troops — with a goal of 240,000 by 2014.⁵⁵ But even if the rate of recruitment were greatly increased it would not solve the problem of retention. According to Rashid, the attrition rate of the Afghan army is a staggering 24 percent; in other words, nearly one-quarter of Afghan soldiers leave the army each year.⁵⁶ And the rate of desertion will surely increase if the Karzai government were to falter: In 1979, a large Soviet-trained Afghan army evaporated in the face of an insurgency, leading the Soviets to invade in an effort to protect their client Afghan government.⁵⁷

Moreover, according to Rashid, 86 percent of Afghan soldiers are “illiterate and drug use is still an endemic problem.”⁵⁸ On March 17, 2011, Defense Minister Peter MacKay announced that Canadian Forces will continue their efforts to transfer basic literacy skills to ANSF personnel.⁵⁹ Which raises the question: are Canadian forces undertaking more they can manage, including tasks they are neither trained nor well-suited to fulfill?

In the circumstances, it seems doubtful that ANSF will ever be able to control Afghanistan as a whole. Indeed, after almost ten years of U.S./NATO involvement the ANSF have not yet proven able to secure and control *any* territory on their own. It was reported recently that ANSF will be taking over six areas from ISAF, including areas that are coveted for the Canadian training mission, but these are the safest areas in Afghanistan — and a successful handover has yet to occur.⁶⁰

Even if there were reason to hope that the ANSF could control its own country one day, the character of their political masters creates another reason for concern. Although the international community has invested many millions of dollars to establish a democratic regime in Afghanistan, corruption is serious and endemic: So much so that Afghanistan tied with Myanmar for second-most-corrupt country (just ahead of Somalia) in Transparency International’s 2010

Corruption Perceptions Index — a widely respected measure of domestic, public sector corruption.⁶¹ According to Transparency International, “Widespread corruption in Afghanistan continues to seriously undermine state-building and threatens to destroy the trust of the Afghan people in their government and their institutions while fueling insecurity.”⁶²

Rashid interviewed Yousuf Pashtun, the former governor of Kandahar province, who claimed that “eighty percent of the crimes are being committed by the local militias, commanders, and the police rather than criminals, so the Taliban are not to blame for everything.”⁶³

There is good evidence that corruption is present at the highest levels of the Afghan government. President Karzai’s own brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, has been implicated in the drugs trade.⁶⁴ In another case revealed by a cable released by Wikileaks and dated August 6, 2009, U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry reported that,

In April, President Karzai pardoned five border policemen who were caught with 124 kilograms of heroin in their border police vehicle. The policemen, who have come to be known as the Zahir Five, were tried, convicted and sentenced to terms of 16 to 18 years each at the Central Narcotics Tribunal. But President Karzai pardoned all five of them on the grounds that they were distantly related to two individuals who had been martyred during the civil war.⁶⁵

In yet another cable from October 19, 2009, Ambassador Eikenberry reported that the United Arab Emirates government “had stopped Afghan Vice-President Ahmad Zia Masood entering the country with \$52 million earlier this year — a significant amount he was ultimately allowed to keep without revealing the money’s origin or destination.”⁶⁶ In the same cable, Eikenberry also reported that “Sher Khan Farnood, the Chairman of Kabul Bank, reportedly owns 39 properties on the Palm Jumeirah in Dubai and has

other financial interests spread widely beyond Afghanistan.⁶⁷

American diplomats and Transparency International are not the only ones who have expressed concern about the level of corruption in Afghanistan. According to yet another U.S. cable released by Wikileaks, dated February 23, 2010, Canadian Ambassador William Crosbie told Eikenberry that the scale of corruption within the Karzai government made his “blood boil”.⁶⁸

ISAF’s actions have had the unintended effect of incidentally facilitating the corruption of both the Karzai regime and the Afghan warlords — the former commanders of the National Alliance. These warlords treat large areas of Afghanistan as their personal fiefdoms and govern independently of Kabul’s control. As observed by Dipali Mukhopadhyay: “Many of these warlords do not feel compelled to dismantle the informal networks of power that enable [them] to control the province and assert influence in the region and Kabul.”⁶⁹

One such former NA commander is Ismael Khan, whom Karzai has refused to fire, and who has strong ties with Iran.⁷⁰ During the Afghan Civil War, following the Soviet withdrawal, the Iranians covertly supplied parts and ammunition for Khan’s Soviet-era tanks and built roads in the region.⁷¹ Iran also gave Khan refuge when the Taliban overran his forces in Herat in September 1995.⁷²

Khan is the current Afghan Minister of Energy and the former governor of the Province of Herat. During his time as governor he was notorious for refusing to hand over tax revenue; according to Rashid, he made between \$3–5 million USD a month.⁷³ Needless to say, this tax revenue should have been used to rebuild the Afghan state rather than fill the coffers of a former Afghan warlord. Other warlords also take advantage of bountiful reconstruction contracts for their own personal gain.⁷⁴

Rashid claims that Khan has diverted attention from his own nefarious affairs by encourag-

ing the mistrust and tension between the U.S. and Iran through misinformation and gossip.⁷⁵ The question therefore needs to be asked: Why does the Karzai regime tolerate such behaviour on the part of Khan and other Afghan officials?⁷⁶ The answer seems to be political survival: turning a blind eye to large-scale corruption is the price Karzai pays for support.

This informal style of “strong man” politics does not foster a technocratic, rule-based approach to governance. In fact, it has the opposite effect, one that “inflicts a number of costs on the population and the state, from inefficiency to corruption and human rights abuse.”⁷⁷ Khan is also accused, by Reporters Without Borders, to have stifled the press;⁷⁸ and by Human Rights Watch to have hushed up human rights abuses.⁷⁹

It is apparent that the Karzai government is dependent for its survival on both Western financial and military support and the warlords. It is increasing likely that when ISAF leaves, the government will implode and the civil war between the former commanders of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban insurgency in the south will resume. The soldiers that we have trained, and the equipment we have paid for, will likely end up in the militias of various warlords, or as part of the Taliban.

The Security Situation: From Bad to Worse

Contrary to the claims of some NATO government officials, the security situation in Afghanistan is growing worse. Since 2006, there has been an escalation in violence, the Afghan insurgency has become more adept, and their attacks have become more complex in both tactics and equipment. They have been known to use field radios and cell phones to coordinate, and have improved their use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).⁸⁰ In addition ISAF and ANSF activities have been compromised by Taliban sympathizers, who alert the Taliban of any upcoming operation.⁸¹

The Taliban of today are far more sophisticated than the Taliban of ten years ago. Three years ago, Sean Maloney, professor at Royal Military College, drew three lessons from Canadian operations in the Zharey district of Kandahar province:

First, the insurgents stood and fought from prepared defensive positions in a coordinated fashion. Second, the presence of foreign fighters was confirmed: Punjabis and Chechens. Third, the insurgents understood the decreasing propaganda value of using the population as human shields and thereafter depopulated certain potential battle areas by insisting that the civilian population leave.⁸²

More, recently, there has been a marked emphasis on IEDs as the weapon of choice against ISAF and ANSF. These IEDs allow the Taliban to adopt a strategy of indirect warfare which is conducive to successful insurgencies. According to Tony Geraghty: “In 2009, at least 175 American and allied troops were killed [by IEDs], double the number from the year before.”⁸³ A similar assessment comes from iCasualty.org.⁸⁴ It should be noted, however, that there have also been recent incidents where the Taliban have committed themselves to a frontal attack. For instance, Al Jazeera has released footage of what appears to be the Taliban showcasing confiscated American equipment — after the Taliban captured an American base in the Korengal Valley in 2010.⁸⁵

The Taliban may also be better equipped than NATO officials would have us believe. Last summer, U.S. documents released by WikiLeaks suggested that a Canadian Chinook helicopter did not accidentally crash, but was brought down by a first generation Man-Portable Air-Defence System (MANPADS);⁸⁶ this has since been confirmed by the Canadian Forces.⁸⁷ The fact that the Taliban are using infrared-guided missiles differs from the Western media’s portrayal of them as a primitive rabble equipped with AK-

47s and RPGs. During Operation MOSHTARAK, there were reports that the Taliban had brought in Soviet-era anti-aircraft guns in preparation for the allied assault.⁸⁸

Although Pakistan remains the principal source of arms for the Taliban,⁸⁹ some of the weapons may be coming from Iran. On 5 February 2011, UK Special Forces intercepted a rocket shipment from Iran that was destined for the Taliban.⁹⁰ Increased weapons smuggling from Iran would only increase the pressure on ISAF and ANSF.

The Taliban are most definitely not a rabble. Their command structure has evolved to be “resilient: centralized enough to be efficient, but flexible and diverse enough to adapt to local contexts. (In addition, the Taliban have been pragmatic in their use of criminal gang and opium resources.)”⁹¹ Nor do suggestions that there is a degree of rivalry between the “star” Taliban commanders equate to their lacking cohesion or being divisible.⁹² Since 2006, their operational tactics have changed and their numbers increased.⁹³

The severity of the situation has been recognized by some government officials as well as credible non-government organizations. As mentioned above, General McCrystal presented an initial assessment that shocked Bob Woodward by his tone and dictation, depicting a grave situation in Afghanistan. In 2008, the United Nations also released a damning statement claiming that the security situation had become markedly worse.⁹⁴ In December 2010, a group of prominent academics and commentators gave their own candid assessment to President Obama.⁹⁵ ANSF may not be effective in improving and creating a sustainable secure situation in Afghanistan if ISAF aims to pull out by 2014. According to a recent report by al-Jazeera, locals of Bamyan province, located in north-eastern Afghanistan, are concerned about the return of the Taliban as U.S. forces begin transferring responsibilities to ANSF personnel.⁹⁶

It is clear that NATO governments have abandoned any realistic hope of developing Afghanistan's infrastructure and improving the overall welfare of its people. Nor, considering the quantitative emphasis taken to training ANSF, is NATO focused on the overall operational condition of those forces. It would be difficult enough to train a literate army, supply them with equipment and assist them with their operational development during a widespread insurgency. Yet Afghanistan is a highly *illiterate* country. It has also been ravaged by three decades of conflict and is deeply fractured along ethnic and factional lines. Efforts to develop the country's overall infrastructure have made little difference and the conditions impeding this development have not changed. Realizing this, it appears that the U.S.-led coalition is now attempting to accelerate the recruitment of ANSF in order to create a façade behind which they can bow out; to "leave with honour". Which raises the question: why should Canada's soldiers suffer more casualties in an extended "training" mission, if the decision to abandon Afghanistan to its fate has already been made?

Opportunity Costs

In October 2010, Canadian news headlines were dominated by the country's failure to win a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).⁹⁷ Arguably, a contributing factor was Canada's abandonment of its long-standing role in UN peacekeeping. Naturally, because our soldiers cannot be in two places in once, keeping Canadian forces in a NATO mission in Afghanistan reduced our ability to contribute to UN operations elsewhere. The fact that the NATO mission has been authorized by the UN Security Council does not make it a UN-led mission; nor do other countries consider it such.⁹⁸

Canada's lack of support for UN peacekeeping makes it more difficult for some of those missions to succeed. In 2006, Canadian troops were

not available for the UN peacekeeping mission in Lebanon.⁹⁹ In 2009, the Canadian government refused to make General Andrew Leslie available to serve as the UN commander in the Congo, despite the fact that he would have required the support of only a few dozen Canadian personnel.¹⁰⁰ In 2010, the deployment of Canadian Forces personnel to Haiti was curtailed just six months after the cataclysmic earthquake there.¹⁰¹

The latest global financial crisis is not over, and other ISAF troop contributing nations are making defense spending cuts. The United Kingdom is scrapping a £4 billion Nimrod aircraft project in an effort to save £200 million.¹⁰² U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has recently proposed dramatic spending cuts to assist in deflating America's ballooning deficit.¹⁰³ These recent cuts are reversing the significant increases to Western defense budgets that were made after September 11, 2001. In 2000, Canada spent \$8.292 billion USD on its military; by 2009 the annual bill had more than doubled — to \$19.869 billion.¹⁰⁴ These increases have greatly exceeded any growth in Canada's GDP: for example, in 2009 our GDP decreased by 2.4 percent while defense spending increased by nearly 10 percent.¹⁰⁵ This kind of spending is clearly not sustainable, which means that hard choices have to be made. The training mission in Afghanistan has, and will in the future, have a negative impact on the ability of the Canadian Forces to maintain and modernize its military equipment while caring for the legacy costs of our troops, veterans, and military families.

It goes without saying that the expenses associated with the training mission will also impact negatively on the Canadian government's ability to pay for other things, from employment insurance and pensions, to health and social services, to a well-resourced and effective Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The opportunity costs become all the more salient when one considers that the prospects for success in Afghanistan are so woefully low. We, and

the other ISAF troop contributing nations, are pouring much-needed money into an increasingly dark hole.

Conclusions

This report seeks to provide a clear-eyed assessment of the risks and prospects of Canada's new training mission in Afghanistan, in an effort to stimulate the kind of debate that should have occurred in Parliament. Although our conclusions are harsh, we have not come to them lightly:

1. Numerous Canadian soldiers will likely be killed or permanently injured during the training mission. Military training always carries risks and the Taliban are increasingly

targeting training facilities and infiltrating the Afghan army and police. It is almost a given Canada will be pressured into sending troops "outside the wire" in order to provide security for its own bases and mentor Afghan forces in the field.

2. The training mission will likely fail. The effort to train hundreds of thousands of new Afghan soldiers and police will be impeded by a worsening security situation, widespread illiteracy, and extremely high desertion rates. Even if the training mission were to succeed in some measure the increasingly corrupt and ineffective Karzai government seems destined to fail, raising the question as to whom the newly trained soldiers and police will serve.

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Notes

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