

Alexander Moens

Afghanistan and the revolution in Canadian foreign policy

After the end of the Cold War, Canada continued to participate in UN peace-keeping missions and NATO operations, but there was no overall strategic sense about priorities. While defence dollars shrank by more than 20 percent in the 1990s, the 1994 white paper on defence made few hard choices or trade-offs. Even so, there was no follow-up in terms of new equipment to match strategy.

The drift was halted with the arrival of Lloyd Axworthy as the new foreign minister in 1996. Canada began to develop a new foreign policy based on a soft power variant called human security that emphasizes networking and coalition-building among civil society groups. Human security replaces

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the concept of national interest with the perspective of assisting individuals and groups at conflict inside failing states. While the idea of human security came from the world of social and economic development, Axworthy took it into the international security realm. Canada played a pivotal role in rallying the global network of nongovernmental organizations and willing governments to sign a new treaty on banning the production, sale, and use of anti-personnel landmines. Canada also played a key role in the negotiations that led to the International Criminal Court in 1998. Talks on banning small arms exports and protecting war-affected children were also initiated.

Human security influenced Canadian defence policy—as it did in like-minded allies such as the Netherlands—by developing the 3D approach in which diplomacy, development, and defence form a single team to help the population in failed states such as in Bosnia, Haiti, and Afghanistan. Canadian forces, in turn, borrowed the so-called three-block operational approach developed by the US Marine Corps whereby soldiers are trained to move quickly from peace enforcement to stabilization to humanitarian assistance and civil reconstruction operations.

The attacks of 9/11 generated the biggest change in American security policy since the onset of containment in the early 1950s. By defining the new priority as an international war on terror, the US pushed hard against the working consensus among western countries that failed states could best be fixed with a mixture of human security and development policies. The Axworthy agenda gradually moved to the background in Canada's foreign policy with Axworthy's retirement from politics.

Canada's commitment to "light" UN peacekeeping missions also began to dry up. Only 60 Canadian personnel were deployed in UN missions in 2006. In its place has come a robust commitment to creating security conditions in Afghanistan. The switch away from human security to more traditional military operations began in the last year of the Liberal government led by Paul Martin. In 2004, for the first time ever, Canada issued a *national* rather than an international security policy. It put the protection of Canadians and Canadian territory as an unambiguous priority. The international policy statement issued in 2005, still mentions the "responsibility to protect," but the defence section emphasizes stronger Canadian defence, more cooperation with the United States, and renewal of expeditionary capabilities.¹ The

¹ Government of Canada, "Canada's international policy statement: A role of pride and influence in the world," Ottawa, 2005.

policy does not abandon the approach of a three-block military, but calls for a variety of hard military assets, including special forces.

As Canadian foreign policy moved away from human security and light peacekeeping, it turned its focus to the North Atlantic alliance, which had been relegated to third-level importance (behind the United Nations, and even cooperation with the European Union) in Canadian foreign policy and diplomacy in the 1990s, even though many Canadian soldiers served in NATO operations in the Balkans. Canada became a proponent of the various schemes to revitalize NATO, including the allied transformation command in Norfolk and the NATO response force. A Canadian-EU agreement for Canada to participate in EU-led missions lost most of its lustre for Ottawa as it began to reinvest in NATO operations in Afghanistan.

Canada was among the first nations to commit troops, civilian advisers, and reconstruction aid to Afghanistan after US forces toppled the Taliban in late 2001. Some 850 Canadian infantry deployed for a short time with a US airborne brigade in Kandahar in early 2002. Canada then committed troops to the international security assistance force (ISAF) in Kabul from August 2003 till mid 2005.² ISAF was authorized by UN security council resolution 1386 in December 2001. In 2003, Canada was instrumental in turning the ISAF operations from an ad hoc coalition into a NATO-led and -commanded mission. Alongside other countries, Canada assisted Afghans in ratifying their democratic constitution in 2004 and in electing the government of Hamid Karzai. Ottawa volunteered to deploy a provincial reconstruction team to Kandahar in August 2005. In 2006, a Canadian battle group joined the United States and Britain in war-fighting operations (operation *Medusa*) against the Taliban and other insurgents. The Stephen Harper government pledged to keep some 2500 troops in the south at least till early 2009 and to submit an extension to a parliamentary vote. In addition, Canadian forces maintain a small number of officers in Kabul and a 15-member strategic advisory team assisting Karzai in setting up a central government bureaucracy.

In addition to the more than 80 soldiers who have lost their lives and hundreds of serious injuries, the financial cost of the Canadian military mission in the south has been revolutionary. Costs rose from approximately \$400 million in the 2005-06 fiscal year to \$1.5 billion the next fiscal year (out of a total of \$1.9 billion for all Canadian forces' operations). The estimated total cost of Canada's commitment to the south from 2006 to 2009,

² "Operation Athena," National Defence backgrounder, Ottawa, 17 October 2003.

including \$1.2 billion in aid and development, is \$4.3 billion.³ When seen in the context of post-Cold War Canadian foreign policy, the human and financial investment is enormous and underscores the sea change Afghanistan has created in Canadian foreign policy.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE REVIVAL OF THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Dubbed the “decade of darkness” in 2006 by Canada’s chief of defence staff, General Rick Hillier, the budget cuts of the 1990s gutted Canada’s defence from about two percent of GDP in 1989 down to 1.1 percent of GDP in 1999, and prevented Canada from replacing even the most obsolete pieces of equipment while very few new items were added. The Canadian defence budget declined in nominal dollars from \$12 billion in 1991 to \$9.7 billion in 1999. At the same time, the number of people in the armed forces declined from over 80,000 to just above 60,000. Funds for operations and training were squeezed even though Canadian troops kept being sent to the Balkans, Africa, Asia, and Central America, putting an enormous strain on manpower and morale. As Douglas Bland, the “dean” of Canadian defence management studies, has argued, Canada’s military was caught in a seemingly irreversible downward spiral towards collapse.⁴

Only in 2000 were the cuts halted. Defence became a placeholder budget with just enough tiny increases here and there to prevent the collapse of major components of the forces. A small number of 30-year-old tanks and fighter jets were upgraded while a larger number were parked for spare parts. The Paul Martin government was the first to promise major renewal projects to take effect at the end of the decade.

One of the first things the Conservative government led by Stephen Harper did when it was elected in early 2006 was to raise the 2005 Liberal promise of extra capital funding from \$13.6 billion to \$17.6 billion.⁵ In his second budget in 2007, Harper brought the spending date of major purchases set at 2010-11 forward by one year, in effect adding another \$1 billion

3 These are total figures, not corrected for spending on manpower. “Report on plans and priorities: 2006-2007 estimates for national defence,” Treasury Board of Canada, departmental overview, section 3, table 8, www.tbs-sct.gc.ca. See also Mary O’Grady, “Canada’s cut-and-run crowd,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 May 2007, 16.

4 Douglas Bland, *Canada Without Armed Forces* (Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004).

5 Brian S. MacDonald, “Budget 2006: Some light at the end of the tunnel,” the Conference of Defence Associations, 2 May 2006, www.cda-cdai.ca.

to current spending.⁶ In both the 2006 and 2007 budgets, defence spending received its biggest increase since Brian Mulroney's defence budget in 1984. The operations and maintenance budget of the Canadian forces remains under great stress. Most agree that an emergency appropriation for operations of \$1 billion is needed to boost the current base budget of \$15 billion.⁷

The Harper government acted immediately upon its promises of military equipment purchases. It began ordering strategic, tactical, and theatre airlift, trucks, modern artillery, and even tanks, all with direct application to the Afghan theatre. Canada has traditionally depended for heavy airlift on the United States or rented Russian or Ukrainian Antonovs. But with the US airlift stretched out between Iraq and Afghanistan, and given the high costs and frequent overbooking of the Antonovs, Canada decided to get its own. It decided to buy four C-17 Globemasters. After a considerable diplomatic effort, Canadian officials were able to jump the long queue and buy a few for immediate delivery. Also, the aging and badly over-stretched C-130 Hercules was pushed far beyond the limit by operational needs in Afghanistan. Sixteen new Hercules planes have been ordered. A new fleet of medium-sized trucks is in the procurement stage. Six M-777 towed howitzers were bought for immediate deployment. The lack of a large troop transport helicopter has made Canadian patrols and supply convoys vulnerable to insurgent attacks. Canada is now trying to acquire about 16 CH-47 Chinook helicopters directly from the US army, but given the high demand for these helicopters, jumping the queue may not be possible. If not, the first new Chinooks will start arriving in 2011.

In the fall of 2006 even the aging Leopard tanks proved of great use both in terms of intimidating Taliban fighters and providing direct fire support during *Medusa*. The government decided to lease 20 modern 2A6M Leopards from the Germans ready for deployment in the summer 2007. Soon after, it announced the purchase of 100 used Leopard A4 tanks from the Dutch for \$650 million.⁸ Efforts to buy or lease German or American lift helicopters for immediate use in Kandahar have not borne success.

6 Bob Bergen, "Defence budget a water torture of information released drop by drop," Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute column, 22 March 2007, www.cdfai.org.

7 Jack L. Granatstein, "What's gone awry at NDHQ?" CDFAI, *The Dispatch* 5, no. 1 (spring 2007): 15.

8 Allan Freeman, "Rising toll prompts purchase of tanks," *Globe and Mail*, 13 April 2007.

These purchases were badly needed given the rusting Canadian forces equipment. According to 2007 Treasury Board estimates, of the 25 major platforms (ships, tanks, planes, and trucks) in all three services, 12 were past their designated lifespan and seven had less than half their service life left. Most of the procurement processes for this equipment take between five and 10 years. By 2017, 19 out of the 25 would be beyond their life span.⁹ But it was operational needs in Kandahar more than anything else that propelled the new purchases forward. Seven replacement projects have now been started and capital expenditures will go up by 58 percent in the 2007-08 main estimates to \$3.6 billion or just over 20 percent of the defence budget.

Because the military needs this equipment immediately to save lives, the government resorted to off-the-shelf buying, bypassing the lengthy competitive bid process. This situation is a clear catch-22 as buying without competitive bidding may in fact drive up the long-term cost. The Harper government was criticized for this by Sheila Fraser, the auditor general, in March 2007. Still, 20 years of systemic under-funding leaves only radical measures once you commit military forces to a hot fight, such as in the south of Afghanistan. Spurred by Sheila Fraser's criticism, the government shelved its plan in 2007 to buy Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from a US firm without competitive bids.

No one disagrees with the principle of a competitive process, but Canadian forces in Afghanistan need more tactical airlift and aerial reconnaissance and lives could be lost as a result of delays. Though the government has the "national security exemption" in the Treasury Board guidelines as an option to speed up military purchases, it is careful not to use this too often as it may give ammunition to opposition parties who believe Canadian operations should be limited to light peacekeeping. However, the Sperwer UAV that Canada is using today can only stay in the air for a short time and has experienced trouble in the intense heat. The US-made Predator has no such trouble and can stay in the air 10 times longer. Canadian lives have been at stake during interruptions of the Sperwer. Colin Kenny, the chair of the senate's committee on national security and defence, was right in demanding that the government should skip the normal tendering process.¹⁰

9 Bruce MacDonald, "Waiting for budget 2007: A blinding flash of light at the end of the tunnel?" Conference of Defence Associations, CDA commentary 4-2007, www.cda-cdai.ca

10 Stewart Bell, "New drones could save troops' lives: Senator," *National Post*, 29 August 2007.

Only when the “independent panel on Canada’s future role in Afghanistan” (the John Manley report) stipulated that both lift helicopters and high-performance UAVs had to be in theatre in 2009 for Canada to continue its mission (as well as an extra 1000 NATO troops), was the government emboldened to make a new effort to acquire helicopters and UAVs while bypassing the official procurement process.¹¹ In late January 2008, Ottawa was negotiating a lease on American Predators to replace the less capable Sperwer drones and renewing its efforts to find helicopters to bridge the 2009-11 period before the new Chinooks can be deployed.¹² Manley’s hardware conditions can be seen as a boost to Harper’s attempt to continue the reinvestment in Canadian military equipment that will allow Canada to continue its robust operations and revolution in foreign policy.

Between 2006 and 2009, nearly the entire land force combat strength is dedicated to the Afghan mission as one of Canada’s three battle groups will be in the south, one will just have returned, and one will be preparing to go. As a result of this commitment, Hillier set demanding one-year recruitment goals: another 5000 for the regular forces and 3000 reservists, most of whom would go to combat army units. Recruitment targets for regular forces were exceeded in 2006-2007 with 6426 new sign-ups.¹³

AFGHANISTAN AND THE RAPPROCHEMENT IN CANADIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS
The human security initiatives developed by Axworthy gradually set Canada on a collision course with American foreign policy, even though Prime Minister Jean Chrétien got on well with President Bill Clinton. It is not that the Clinton government opposed the ideals of human security. After all, it played an early role in the negotiations leading to the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto protocol, and the anti-landmines treaty. On each, the Americans demanded reasonable exemptions. But Axworthy coached a coalition of states that refused to consider any compromises. As a result, American vested military interests, combined with overwhelming opposition in the US senate, pushed Clinton out of the human security agenda.

11 “Independent panel on Canada’s future role in Afghanistan,” Ministry of Public Works and Government Services, Ottawa, January 2008, 27, 38.

12 Mike Blanchfield and David Pugliese, “Tories mount failed search for choppers,” *National Post*, 30 January 2008, 4.

13 Bob Bergen, “Behind Canadian Forces recruiting success looms training dilemma,” Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, 4 April 2007, www.cdfai.org. See also Andrew Clark, “Mission impossible,” *Saturday Night Magazine*, November 2005, 31.

The US goodwill evaporated in 2001. The senior advisers in the George W. Bush administration were critical of the diplomatic gap that had emerged between Canada's international political agenda and that of the United States. They were also outspoken about Canada's "free-rider" status in terms of North American defence spending. Canadian overtures to the European Union in 2003 for a complementary Canadian role in military operations conducted by the EU looked to Washington as undermining NATO.

The Bush-Chrétien relationship kept deteriorating on both foreign and domestic policy. Chrétien's public and clumsy opposition to Bush's policy on Iraq plummeted the relationship to an icy low. The American invitation to redesign the 1958 North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) from an integrated tactical warning and attack assessment into a larger binational command was turned down by Canada in early 2002. Under Paul Martin, Ottawa declined American invitations to join (cost-free) in continental missile defence even though potential North Korean and Iranian missiles would fly over Canadian airspace.

Stephen Harper made it a priority to change the political relationship. He used a new Canadian commitment in Afghanistan and reinvestment in Canadian defence as the way to build respect and political capital in Washington. Though there was not much time and credibility left in the NORAD negotiations in 2006, Harper managed to add a maritime warning function to the May 2006 renewal agreement.

The top-level governmental relationship improved markedly. As US Ambassador David Wilkins put it, "there's now a feeling of shared responsibility as we tackle problems and more of a, 'let's fix the problem' rather than trying to fix the blame. And that's positive for both of us."¹⁴ Harper sought an immediate negotiated end to the softwood lumber dispute that had lingered since 2001. The 2006 softwood lumber agreement erased numerous WTO and NAFTA disputes and rebated 80 percent of some \$5 billion in Canadian-paid levies since 2002. The deal again creates a temporary *managed* trade relationship rather than *free* trade—as had all the softwood lumber agreements before it—and was not uncontroversial in either country. Still, the agreement removes a highly polarized and public Canadian-American dispute and keeps export levies in Canadian government coffers.

Harper's unambiguous assistance in the war on terror, his renewal of Canadian forces, and the quick resolution of the lumber dispute, registered

14 Peter O'Neill, "Softwood collapse won't wreck friendship," www.canada.com.

in Washington as a new beginning in bilateral cooperation. The Harper government “abandoned distance and animosity as the default position for the management of the relationship with the United States.”¹⁵ Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice noted in September 2006 that Canada’s efforts in the south of Afghanistan were “critical in the war against terror.”¹⁶ US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates praised Canada in late 2007 for playing “a really significant and powerful role in Afghanistan.”¹⁷ Business leaders in Canada also quickly noted a sea change in the relationship. While only seven percent believed the relationship to be better than average in March 2005, 61 percent did so in October 2006.¹⁸

AFGHANISTAN AND THE POLITICAL DEBATE IN CANADA

Opinion polls show that while Canadians feel proud about their soldiers’ valour and skill, there remains a lot of trepidation over the question of whether the Taliban and the drug lords can be defeated. Canadian public support for the war effort has hovered between 47 and 57 percent, including during the last half of 2006 and into 2007 when casualties were highest.¹⁹ While Canadians’ pride and support for their soldiers is growing, nearly two-thirds of respondents to an Angus Reid poll in September 2007 oppose extending the mission beyond 2009.²⁰ The split in the public makes the issue fertile ground for partisan politics.

Tapping into perennial anti-Americanism in Canada, the social democratic New Democratic Party under Jack Layton has depicted Canada’s role in

15 Michael Hart and Bill Dymond, “Waiting for Conservative trade policy,” *Policy Options* 27, no. 8: 69; see also Sheldon Alberts, “Softwood lumber deal will survive, Harper says,” *CanWest News Service*, 6 July 2006.

16 As quoted in Agence France-Presse, 13 September 2006, 12.

17 Janine Zacharia, “Canada reconsiders role in Afghanistan,” *International Herald Tribune*, 18 December 2007.

18 Compass Inc., 2006, www.compas.ca.

19 “Most Canadians support troops in light of recent investigation into Afghanistan abuses, but Canadians remain split on the continued military effort in Afghanistan,” Ipsos Reid poll, 22 February 2007, www.ipsos-na.com. See also Jack L. Granatstein, *Whose War Is It?* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, Ltd., 2007), 18-19; Richard Foot, “Mission changes Canada’s modern image of itself,” *National Post*, 9 April 2007, 8; and “Despite recent troop fatalities, majority of Canadians (52%) support role of Canada’s troops in Afghanistan,” Ipsos Reid poll, 24 April 2007, www.ipsos-na.com.

20 Zacharia, “Canada reconsiders,” 2007.

Afghanistan as pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for the Americans, despite the fact that nearly 30,000 American soldiers are doing so themselves. Layton describes Canadian troops as the “pawns” in US operations and has called for Canada to pull all its 2500 troops out of combat and peace enforcement operations.²¹

French Québécois are traditionally more reluctant than English Canadians about military deployments. While Harper can usually rely on the federal wing of the Québec separatist party, the Bloc Québécois, to support him in parliament on provincial and economic issues, he cannot take this party for granted when it comes to Afghanistan. Even a large element within the Liberal party is mobilizing public opinion against Canada’s role in Afghanistan to prevent the Conservatives from becoming the alternative to the separatists in Québec in the next election. With only 126 seats in the 308-member house of commons, Harper remains vulnerable to several combinations of opposition to his Afghanistan policy.

Harper’s first trip abroad was a visit to the troops in Afghanistan. In so doing, he underscored the national profile of the mission and his personal commitment to its success. Canadian columnist Andrew Coyne called it “a master piece of political theatre,” though by no means an empty gesture. Harper invoked Canada’s “warrior heritage,” and argued that it was in Canada’s national interest to win in “the war on terror”—though the Canadian military prefers the term “campaign against terrorism.”²²

Harper narrowly won a parliamentary mandate in 2006 for troops to stay committed until 2009. By early 2007, Canada had taken the highest level of casualties per capita among the NATO members—including the US—deployed in Afghanistan. High casualty levels such as in April 2007 (temporarily) drove down Canadian public opinion and created political vulnerability for the Harper government.

The Liberal government under Paul Martin in 2005 initiated the move away from low-level security operations around Kabul to setting up a robust provincial reconstruction team in Kandahar. Interim Liberal leader Bill Graham was supportive of Harper’s move in 2006 to send a battle group to help secure the work of the PRT and to expand Canada’s military role in southern Afghanistan to counterinsurgency. However, after the leadership change, the

21 As quoted in Jeff Heinrich, “Send in observers, Layton says,” *National Post*, 13 March 2007, 6.

22 Andrew Coyne, “Harper’s mission statement,” *National Post*, 15 March 2006, 12.

Liberal party's support turned to outright opposition under its new leader, Stéphane Dion.

The Liberal attack on the Conservative government in late 2006 and 2007 concentrated on three points. The government was accused of failing to explain to the Canadian public why the troops were there, it was condemned for failing to bring the military and development capacities together, and it was accused of doing too much fighting and not enough reconstruction. The fact that Harper changed the 3D concept to the "whole-of-government-approach," and made the military the senior partner, had something to do with this grievance. In practice, Harper's approach empowered the military to take the lead over Foreign Affairs, the Canadian International Development Agency, and the NGOs. It was not so much a policy decision as an adaptation to the circumstances in theatre. In current operations in Kandahar, the military forms the umbrella under which reconstruction and development projects can take place. This has placed the traditionally independent NGOs under a military framework that many resist and resent. Lastly, Harper was criticized for not dealing with the growing production of poppy used for heroin that constituted the bulk of Afghanistan's GDP.²³

The Harper government defended its policy by arguing that there was no disagreement on the need for reconstruction and that long-term security and stability could not be obtained without it. It added, however, that reconstruction could not take hold until secure conditions were established and that Canada would not shrink away from that task. Just to be on the safe side politically, Harper announced in early 2007 that he would add another \$100 million for (re)construction and development projects for both 2007 and 2008 on top of the existing \$100 million annual aid to Afghanistan that includes funds for police training, demining, road construction, and counternarcotics.²⁴

In April 2007, the Liberal party introduced a motion to make 2009 a binding exit date for the current mission. Given Dion's unpopularity, he made sure not to designate the motion as a vote of confidence. Supported by the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals could have easily won the motion if the anti-

23 Peter H. Stone, "Iraq's latest casualty: Afghanistan," *National Journal*, 9 December 2006, 58.

24 Prime minister's office, "Canada's new government substantially boosts support to development efforts in Afghanistan," Ottawa, 26 February 2007.

war NDP did not have its own worries about triggering an election (and the rising Green party). Thus, the NDP voted with the Conservatives on the interesting principle that being against the mission, it could not support a vote that would keep it going until 2009. In early 2008, the federal Liberals reiterated their position that Canada's combat mission should end in 2009, though Canadian troops could remain to help with other tasks.

The opposition parties have grasped the opportunity to harass the government on its Afghan policy over allegations that Taliban prisoners taken by Canadian troops and handed over to Afghan authorities were mistreated or tortured. Even though Canadian troops are not accused of any wrongdoing and are obliged to hand prisoners over to the Afghan government, incomplete reporting by then-Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor and accusations of blacked-out reports on the part of the Department of Foreign Affairs about these prisoners have allowed the opposition to cast doubt on the moral high ground occupied by the government. Harper moved Peter Mackay into the defence post in a cabinet shuffle in August 2007 as O'Connor was clearly not effective in dealing with the detention issue in parliament.

Appeals to international morality and law do have sway with Canadian opinion makers, but even here the opposition has not gained much electoral ground. Both Canada and Afghanistan are signatories to the third Geneva convention. Thus, Canada has certain responsibilities that prisoners not be put at risk of torture, but it is not responsible if Afghan officials fall short in their own implementation of the accord. Canada, after all, is obliged to hand over prisoners to the sovereign government in Kabul.²⁵ Some opposition politicians are trying to invoke the ghost of Abu Ghraib, even though Canadian forces do not run any such facility, as a public relations ploy to tarnish the government's policy in Afghanistan.

While the Canadian public has rallied behind the newly empowered Canadian soldier and embraced a new sense of national pride, Canadian public opinion remains jittery about the future of Afghanistan. Canadians worry whether NATO and the west can prevail. There clearly is some blowback from Iraq in the Canadian psyche. The opposition attempt to picture Afghanistan as Harper's Iraq stung. By mid 2007, more people began to look for a so-called exit strategy. In October 2007, Harper appointed former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister John Manley to head a small panel to look

25 "Arrangement for the transfer of detainees between the Canadian Forces and the Ministry of Defence of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," www.forces.gc.ca.

into all aspects of the Afghan mission and to recommend future action (and possibly to buy time). Manley's recommendation for at least 1000 more ISAF troops on the ground in Kandahar led to a Canadian diplomatic effort in preparation for NATO's summit in Bucharest in April 2008. Canada's diplomatic push—backed strongly by the United States—paid off. At the Bucharest summit, France pledged to send some 1000 troops to the east of Afghanistan. This in turn will free up enough US Marines to join Canadian troops in Kandahar. After considerable public posturing, both Dion and Harper settled on a compromise that clearly favoured Harper's policy and the continuation of Canada's defence build-up and hard security operations in Afghanistan. At the same time, the parliamentary motion identifies training of the Afghan security forces and reconstruction and development tasks as priorities alongside providing security. The motion—which passed in a 198-77 vote as most Liberals voted with the Conservatives—stipulates that Canadian forces will leave by the end of 2011.

AFGHANISTAN AND THE FUTURE OF CANADA'S COMMITMENT

Most analysts agree that in 2003 the United States switched too much of its military attention to Iraq and subsequently allowed the security conditions to deteriorate in Afghanistan. At the same time, many nations pledged funds and troops but did not follow through. By 2006, it was clear that Kandahar and its environs could be lost again to the Taliban. It is at this crucial strategic point that the Harper government stepped up to the plate. With *Medusa*, Canada took a lead role alongside American forces to drive back a Taliban offensive. If NATO's operations indeed reached a "tipping point," as British General David Richards put it in October of 2006, it seems the alliance was able to tilt the balance back in its favour, and Canada was part of that hard tilt.²⁶ A subsequent American push in the eastern provinces has even had more success in overcoming the Taliban insurgency.

Still, attacks and terrorist incidents in Afghanistan have risen from about 100 to 150 per year in 2003 and 2004 to over 500 in 2006. The estimated death toll of these attacks was 600 for the January-September period in 2006 and is still climbing.²⁷ More than 80 percent of the victims of suicide bomb-

26 Richards is quoted in Roland Paris, "NATO's choice in Afghanistan: Go big or go home," *Policy Options* 28, no. 1 (December 2006-January 2007): 36.

27 *Ibid.*, 38.

ings since 2001 have been Afghan civilians.²⁸ A 2007 report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington outlined the slippage in security, governance, and economic (re)construction. It added ominously, “2007 is the breaking point.”²⁹

At this time, 37 nations and numerous international organizations are involved in the security and reconstruction of Afghanistan. In 2007, NATO will have 42,000 troops on the ground. Without NATO, Afghanistan has little chance of stabilizing. Of the 25,000 American troops in the country, more than 11,000 have been put under NATO command, showing the depth of the American stake in the success of NATO’s mission.

Though NATO provides much-needed security, it is only one of the ingredients needed for ultimate success. The other elements are development assistance and (re)construction, training, military, and policy efforts to translate security into stability, less corruption, and more governance capacity on the part of Afghan government. On all three scores, the mission is still in its early stages.

It is estimated that in 2006, Afghanistan only received \$1.5 billion in development aid. Compared to international efforts in Bosnia and Kosovo, aid per capita to Afghans has been low—\$50 in 2006. Aid per capita in the other two war-ravaged countries was \$800 and \$400 respectively.³⁰ Some studies suggest that aid per capita should at least double to \$100 for stability operations to even gain a foothold.³¹ Still, in the last five years the wage for unskilled labour in Kabul had quadrupled, as has its population. Some 1000 schools, clinics, and government buildings have been built in Afghanistan the last five years.³² At the same time, insurgents often attack these to undo the achievements.

28 Stewart Bell, “Suicide bomb tactics backfire on Taliban: Study,” *National Post*, 9 March 2007, 1, 6.

29 Seema Patel and Steven Ross, “Breaking point: Measuring progress in Afghanistan,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 23 February 2007, 9.

30 Seth G. Jones, “Averting failure in Afghanistan,” *Survival* 48, no. 1 (spring 2006): 122. See also a Rand Corporation study as quoted in Peter H. Stone, “Iraq’s latest casualty: Afghanistan,” *National Journal*, 9 December 2006, 57.

31 For example James Dobbins, “The UN’s role in nation building: From the Belgian Congo to Iraq,” *Survival* 46, no. 4 (winter 2004): 81-102.

32 Paris, “NATO’s choice,” 36.

In terms of troops on the ground—believed to be a major deterrent to insurgent attacks—ISAF has only six soldiers for every 100 square kilometres. In Bosnia, NATO deployed about 117 soldiers for the same area right after the hostilities and even today there are more soldiers per 1000 civilians in Bosnia than in Afghanistan.³³ Both the United States and several ISAF nations have switched or added resources to train the Afghan national army, realizing that only a robust national army can guarantee long-term security. Some 180 Canadian trainers will be working with the Afghan army in Kandahar province in 2008. Afghan army strength as of 2008 is estimated at 47,000 and is projected to grow to 70,000 by 2010.³⁴

Though many Afghans react negatively to foreigners, it is still wrong to conclude that the Taliban has the support of the local population. Ninety percent of respondents do not want a return of Taliban rule, according to polls in the last two years. While confidence in the Hamid Karzai government and NATO was slipping in 2005 and 2006, this does not translate into more support for the Taliban. Rather, widespread corruption and the lack of speedy reconstruction explain the rise in popular critique of the Karzai government. Foreign troops (both US and NATO) are supported by more than 70 percent of the population.³⁵ Many tribal and village leaders work with the provincial reconstruction teams and their success depends on the endorsement they receive from local authorities.

Though Taliban fighters are usually soundly defeated in any conventional battle, they have a big supply of recruits, enjoy sanctuary in Pakistan, and likely will have more staying power than the foreign troops. The targets in the Afghanistan compact between the Karzai government and 60 international participants in London in 2006 included an Afghan stability capability of 70,000 for the army and some 60,000 for the police forces. The latter task, in particular, is still in its early stage. EU efforts to train Afghan police have been small and slow. In 2007, the US government promised over \$1 billion to train and finance this fledgling police force.

33 Gordon Smith, "Canada in Afghanistan: Is it working?" CDFAI, March 2007, 19.

34 "Independent panel on Canada's future role in Afghanistan," 14, 24.

35 ABC News/BBC World Service poll, 7 December 2006, news.bbc.co.uk; "Afghan approval of the Karzai government and western forces, though still strong, is declining," World Public Opinion Organization, 14 December 2006. www.worldpublicopinion.org.

The supply of insurgent fighters is greatly complicated by the fact that the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is porous, that Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf does not have direct control over large areas of north-west Pakistan, and that a large amount of the insurgency is financed by the international poppy trade.

Pakistan considers Afghanistan part of its strategic space in its tense relationship with India. Given that both the tribal and regional strategic dynamics link the two states, the future stability of any central government in Afghanistan depends on Pakistani cooperation as well as on stabilizing conditions on the ground in Afghanistan. NATO should try to be the bridge to help both governments cooperate on stability operations. Boosting economic ties with Pakistan must also form part of a western strategy to create incentives for regional cooperation.

Afghanistan is the source of nine-tenths of the world's heroin. Poppy is estimated to be nine times more lucrative for the grower than wheat and is estimated at 40 percent of Afghanistan's GDP.³⁶ The poppy economy has grown rapidly in the last few years, especially in Helmand province. The poppy economy is the biggest temptation for corruption inside the Karzai government and, ironically, is the largest source of Taliban income. A crop eradication program may drive farmers into the arms of the insurgency. A crop substitution plan with foreign assistance is urgently needed. Pakistan, which is currently blocking Afghanistan's traditional trading relationship with India, needs to allow agricultural exports to resume.

Any fair-minded comparative perspective on the situation in Afghanistan would suggest that reaching the objectives of stability, governance, and reconstruction will take upwards from 10 years and thus extend even beyond the Afghan compact target of 2011. Even then, Afghanistan will still be a fragile state. For NATO member countries, including Canada, this objective means providing enough military strength on the ground until insurgents and ethnic factions realize that the movement towards a stable central government in Kabul is irreversible. The daunting challenge of subsuming the political culture of warlords and tribal leaders into democratic institutions, including police and army, may require negotiations with moderate Taliban factions, if any emerge.

As the Manley report spelled out with more clarity than any previous official document, the Canadian effort in Kandahar since 2006 has made a

36 Ibid.

positive impact and does represent a genuine sacrifice that cannot be abandoned without making conditions in Afghanistan worse as well as resulting in a loss to Canada's international role and prestige. Manley's demand for more troops on the ground echoes the American lesson in Iraq after the 2007 surge policy. Indeed, just before the report came out, the US government announced that it would deploy an extra 2200 Marines to ISAF in southern Afghanistan. Manley's panel also put its finger on the feeble aid, development, and civilian effort. Of the 335-man strong PRT in Kandahar, only 20 are civilians. Clearly, the aid effort both by Canada and all ISAF nations needs bolstering and more coordination so that the increased security sought by a greater troop presence can more quickly generate development.

Given the Manley report's strong endorsement for Canada's current policy approach in Afghanistan and its specific recommendations on helicopters, UAVs, and additional NATO troops, Harper had a considerable advantage in his negotiations with the Liberal party on whether to extend the mission beyond 2009. The cooperation of the French and Americans assured that an extra 1000 troops will be in theatre beyond the currently planned deployment of US Marines in Kandahar. Upon Dion's insistence Harper settled on an end date—2011—for the Canadian mission, knowing all along that a national election is mandated for 2009 and that a new parliament with a possible Conservative majority would be free to override the motion adopted on 13 March 2008.

With the right resources, Canadian soldiers can continue to make a decisive contribution in the south of Afghanistan beyond 2009. Setting timelines rather than measurable security goals is counterproductive to the effort. Only with the active presence of ISAF forces will (re)construction, the training of Afghan army and police forces, and the rebuilding of civil society be possible. Such a presence also gives any diplomatic efforts to bring moderate Taliban factions into the government both the carrot and stick dimensions needed. A stronger diplomatic and economic initiative towards Pakistan is also needed.

Canada's efforts since 2006 give it the right to demand that NATO members such as Germany, Italy, and Spain step up and commit troops in the challenging theatre in the south of Afghanistan. The North Atlantic Council should consider a commitment whereby nations rotate between southern and northern operations.

CONCLUSION

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has changed the tone and substance of Canada's role in the world. The hallmark policy of his revolution is Afghanistan. Harper talks about dedication, sacrifice, valour, and the national interest. It is a language Canadians have not heard for decades.

The revolution in Canadian foreign policy is finally reinvesting in one of the finest militaries in the world and is creating a much stronger Canadian-American relationship. Whether Democrat or Republican, the next US president is going to look for help to speed up stability in Afghanistan in 2009. Canada's hard work and sacrifice as well as its future commitment should allow Ottawa an important stepping stool for building a constructive relationship with the new American administration.

The revolution in Canadian foreign policy means that the country no longer speaks loudly while carrying a small stick. Rather than merely investing in NGO networks, UN conferences, and development aid, Canada now plays a role in the "hard security" challenge of our day, namely how to prevent failed states and terrorist networks from rebuilding a threat to the west. Canadian military efforts in the south of Afghanistan are not just a niche function in NATO, but part of the vanguard in the fight against the Taliban. Canada's long-term commitment in Kandahar offers a challenge to European members to likewise reinvest in NATO. If the Canadian government can turn the recent change into a long commitment, it will ultimately lead to greater respect for Canadian interests and values in the international community.