



## **Understanding Afghanistan and Canada's National Security Interests**

by

**Don Macnamara**

### **About the Author**

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On retiring from the Canadian Forces he joined the faculty of the Queen's School of Business as a professor of international business. Although now 'emeritus', he continues as Associate Director of the Queen's Public Executive Programme.

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### **Introduction and Background**

During the Cold War, Canadians were aware of the threat of nuclear war and the need to contribute to deterrence forces through both NATO in Europe and NORAD in North America. Canada's primary vital national interest was the prevention of a nuclear conflict that could lead to the destruction of Canada.

Few understood that this was, in fact, the rationale behind our continuous contribution to various United Nations mandated peace-keeping missions - the prevention of conflicts that could escalate to an East-West confrontation and a US-USSR nuclear war.

Following the 'fall of the Wall' in 1989, this rationale was no longer relevant, but peace-keeping also changed from policing an agreed truce - a relatively benign but still essential military activity - to active intervention in conflicts in failed and failing states, a real war-fighting activity.

The stake was no longer nuclear war but rather regional and global stability and issues ranging from humanitarian intervention to rescue or pacification efforts. Often the support of the UN was only marginal leaving regional security institutions like NATO or other coalitions to intervene.

The various conflicts arising from the break-up of Yugoslavia, the invasion of Kuwait, numerous state collapses in Africa, revolutions like East Timor and dysfunctional states like Haiti saw Canadian soldiers placed in 'harm's way' in much more dangerous environments.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 - an attack on the American homeland - awakened the world to the threat of jihadist-



based terrorism, and a sense of insecurity unknown since Cold War days awakened Western societies in general. The sentiment that "without security, nothing else matters" became a media mantra, and populations expected governments to do something to protect them.

Governments, for their part, were reminded that the first and most important responsibility of government is the safety and security of the country, its citizens, their assets and their values.

Rather repressive anti-terrorist legislation was approved quickly in the wake of the attacks with overwhelming public support – support that waned over the subsequent months during which no further attacks were experienced causing public relaxation and substantial delay – almost four years – in follow-up legislation.

The fact remained, however, that Canadians and their Governments must once again pay close attention to what is going on in the world around them. A Canadian expeditionary force was quickly dispatched to Afghanistan in support of the rescue of that country from a repressive regime that harboured the Al Qaeda training for global attacks.

During the Cold War, it was a dangerous world with an adversary that threatened our existence, but was not irrational. Today, we face 'jihadist' terrorists who wish to extinguish our way of life - our civilization - and are prepared to do so by causing suffering and terror by any means for as long as it may take.

We are indeed in a changed world in terms of personal, community, national and international security.

### **Domestic versus International Issues**

The political, economic and security issues that pre-occupy Canadians and their government all start with a recognition of the fundamental importance of our relationship with the United States.

Key domestic political issues may revolve around Federal-Provincial relations,

aboriginal relations and national unity while economic issues do concentrate on international trade relations, especially with the U.S., deficit and debt management and changes resulting from restructuring of the economy.

Social issues reflect concerns about the environment, health care, education, changing demographics and multiculturalism while security matters cover Canada-US homeland defence, border security, internal security and sovereignty and international security and world order concerns.

International issues clearly intersect with domestic issues and are not uniquely Canadian. Whether the list is that of Canada's 2004 National Security Policy document, that of the UN 2004 report (*A More Secure World-Our Shared Responsibility*) or the Gallup International 'Voices of the People' 2006 World Survey, the key international security issues are essentially the same:

- terrorism;
- world order issues arising from political and economic restructuring;
- regional conflict and failed states;
- international economic issues;
- weapons proliferation—especially 'weapons of mass destruction';
- resource competition—energy, water, commodities;
- refugees, migration, human trafficking;
- HIV AIDS and other pandemics;
- environmental degradation/climate (Kyoto); and,
- organized crime, drugs and money-laundering

### **Canada's International Policy Statement 2005 – "A Role of Pride and Influence in the World"**

This policy statement clearly committed Canada to continue—indeed renew—its



involvement in world affairs. Restating again our Fundamental Values of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law, it also expressed our Fundamental Interests as ensuring continued prosperity and security for Canadians with the core policy priorities as Prosperity, Security, and Responsibility – both Regional and Global.

In addition, the matter of humanitarian intervention, was enshrined now as UN policy in the document

"The Responsibility to Protect," by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001, was a Canadian initiative (involving Mr. Michael Ingatoeff) that insists that States have a fundamental duty to protect people within their borders. But if the state fails in this duty, then the responsibility shifts to the international community. At this point other states have the right and obligation to take action that would otherwise violate the offending country's sovereignty.

This 'doctrine' raises critical questions:

- *WHO DECIDES?*
- *WHO ACTS?*
- *WITH WHAT RESOURCES?*
- *TO WHAT END STATE?*

This brief overview may be summarized in a statement of issues:

- Canada lives in a turbulent world, and is vulnerable in physical, political, economic, socio-cultural, and military terms;
- Canada had a new, apparently coherent, national security policy and international policy statement, but now short on implementation;
- Canada has no comprehensive statement of national interests – only generalities
- Canada must be mindful of U.S. national security interests and policy – it is our security too
- Inter-departmental national security direction/ cooperation/coordination

is limited but ..... (?)

- Canada's security capabilities have been seriously under-funded and the Canadian Forces, police and intelligence services over-committed.

This brief overview describes the policy and security environments which lead to our activities in Afghanistan.

### **Afghanistan**

Before discussing the mission, it is important to have a basic understanding of Afghanistan itself.

**Geography**—Afghanistan is a land-locked country the size of Manitoba with a population of 31 million. Mainly a rocky, mountainous desert, there are many river valleys where an agricultural economy and many villages exist. The 34 provinces variously border Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – with the Vakhan corridor of the Hindu Kush range in the northeast to China.

**People** - A multi-tribal, multicultural country composed of the Pashtun in the south (42%), the Tajik (27%) in the central and north, the Hazara (9%), Uzbek (9%) and lesser others. Although Dari, spoken by about half of the population, and Pashtu, about 35%, are official languages, there are over 30 minor tribal languages. The literacy rate is about 36% but disproportionately in favour of males, about 50%, while females are at 21%.

**History** - With a troubled history dating back to Alexander the Great, Afghanistan is an historic trading crossroads—dating from Genghis Khan and Marco Polo, with various unsuccessful attempts for control by Persians, Arabs, Russians and the British.

The communist coup that preceded the Soviet Union invasion of December 1979 ended a form of democratic constitutional monarchy and introduced a 27-year period of conflict, chaos and destruction.

Following the ouster of the Soviet Union in



1989, a civil war ensued that ended in the rule of the ultra conservative Islamist Taliban and a haven for the Al Qaeda training camps that spawned the 9/11 attack on New York.

### **Canadians in Afghanistan**

Following 9/11, Canada committed the 3PPCLI Battle Group, Special Operations Force (SOF) and ships to Operation Apollo / Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan in early 2002.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was originally authorized by the UN on December 20, 2001 to assist the Afghan Transitional Authority. NATO took command and co-ordination of ISAF in August 2003.

ISAF is NATO's first mission outside the Euro-Atlantic area and operates in Afghanistan under a UN mandate. ISAF's mission was initially limited to Kabul but on 13 Oct. 2003 expanded to a wider role beyond Kabul and reaffirmed on Feb. 15, 2006.

Canada was in command in Kabul in 2004 also in command of the southern region February to November 2006 including the military components of nine Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Canada will again assume command of the Southern Region early next year.

According to Canadian Government statements, Canada's goal in Afghanistan is

*"to establish security and stability throughout the country so that Afghans will be able to live in peace and prosperity."*

Canada's approach is through:

- Stabilizing the country
- Strengthening government
- Reducing Poverty

The Canadian Forces in Afghanistan are

conducting three separate Operations:

**Operation ARGUS** is a bi-lateral relationship (not involving NATO or ISAF) between the Government of Afghanistan and the Government of Canada through which 15 CF personnel – senior officers with advanced degrees in a variety of disciplines and all with strategic planning experience - are formed as the Strategic Advisory Team to assist the ministers in the Afghanistan government in planning, priority-setting, coordinating and implementing the policies to build the country and its institutions.

**Operation ARCHER**, Canada's contribution to the United States Operation Enduring Freedom, comprises 35 CF personnel – officers and NCOs with extensive basic military and combat training experience – who are assigned to the Afghan National Training Centre near Kabul to provide collective training for the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.

**Operation ATHENA** is headquartered in Kandahar Airport in the Southern Region where much of the most intensive counter-insurgency operations are conducted.

Overall, 2,500 CF personnel support the ISAF mission. CF personnel deployed as part of *OP ATHENA* comprise the following units (all figures approximate):

- A Battle Group in Kandahar, primarily the 3rd Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment (3 R22eR) from the 5e Groupe-brigade mécanisé du Canada (5 GBMC), which includes:
  - › Soldiers from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Battalion, Royal 22e Régiment based out of CFB Valcartier, as well as various Reserve units (some 12-13% of the contingent are reservists);
  - › An engineer squadron from 5e Régiment du génie du combat (5 RGC) in Valcartier;
  - › An artillery battery from 5e



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Régiment d'artillerie légère du Canada (5 RALC) in Valcartier;

- An armoured reconnaissance troop, from The Royal Canadian Dragoons (RCD) in Petawawa and 12e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC) in Valcartier; and
- A Leopard tank squadron from the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) (LdSH(RC)) in Edmonton, Alberta;
- A Tactical Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (TUAV) unit comprised primarily of personnel from 438 Tactical Helicopter Squadron (438 ETAH) based in St-Hubert, Quebec, and members from 5 RALC in Valcartier;
- Health Service Support (HSS) personnel at the Multinational Medical Unit (MMU) at Kandahar Airfield comprised of personnel from 5e Ambulance de campagne (5 AMB C) in Valcartier, 1 Canadian Field Hospital (1 Cdn Fd Hosp) in Petawawa, and other Health Services units from across Canada;
- About 300 CF members with the National Command Element (NCE) at Kandahar Airfield. The NCE is primarily composed of personnel from 5 GBMC in Valcartier;
- About 300 CF members with the National Support Element (NSE) in Kandahar, primarily from the 5e Bataillon des service du Canada (5 BNS) in Valcartier;
- About 30 CF members with the Multi-National Brigade (MNB) Headquarters including Canadian Deputy Commander, Brigadier-General Marquis Hainse are assisting British Major-General Jacko Page in accomplishing his mission and exercising command and control over the MNB Regional Command (South) in

Afghanistan;

- In Kabul, about 50 CF personnel at ISAF Headquarters, 15 personnel with a smaller NSE Detachment and 15 personnel working at the Strategic Advisory Team (SAT) who work closely with at the Canadian Embassy;
- 250 CF members with the Theatre Support Element (TSE) in Southwest Asia.

About 250 troops are assigned to the ***Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)*** in Kandahar City providing direct aid and development assistance to the people of the region. In addition to CF members, RCMP and other municipal police, and representatives from CIDA and Foreign Affairs are included in the PRT.

***The Canadian Operational Mentor Liaison Teams (OMLT)*** advises, mentors and assists the senior leadership of the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) in their capacity building. This professional development initiative enables the ANA to help secure peace and stability in Afghanistan and extend the legitimate authority of the Government of Afghanistan.

Currently the OMLT consists of approximately 150 Canadian Forces members, primarily from LFQA and various other units across Canada, who are assisting and helping influence and shape the mentoring and training of approximately 1000 ANA soldiers.

These ANA soldiers form the 1st Brigade, 205 Corps at locations throughout Kandahar province and are broken down into three Kandaks (battalions) consisting of about 350 soldiers each.

The overall objective of the OMLT is to progressively bring the ANA to a level where it can independently plan, execute and sustain operations to provide military security for Kandahar province.

The OMLT, therefore, assists in providing the people of Afghanistan with the hope for a brighter future by helping Afghans establish



the security necessary to promote development and an environment that is conducive to the improvement of Afghan life and help Afghanistan become a self-sufficient society.

On May 15, 2007, the OMLT took over the responsibility for the mentorship of the 1/205 Corps of the ANA from the United States Army during a Transfer of Authority (TOA) parade in Kandahar City. The US, UK, and Dutch are also involved in mentoring the ANA in RC (South) including in both Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces. (Deployment details taken from [www.forces.gc.ca](http://www.forces.gc.ca))

The Battle Group of approximately 1000 combat arms troops plus support elements work with British, American, Dutch, Romanian and Polish troops in attempting to establish a secure environment so that the local people can begin to lead normal lives - after 30 years of chaos.

Major issues remain to be resolved - and it will take time to deal with them:

- Insecurity due to jihadists, war lords, criminals, corrupt officials, land mines, handicapped
- Poppy cultivation contributing an estimated 90% of street-level heroin in the world and about 40% of Afghanistan GDP, as well as funding, jihadists, criminals al Qaeda
- Corruption - an all-pervasive 'survival' mechanism in a primitive economy with no institutions or rule of law
- Poverty - 38% of rural areas have chronic / periodic food shortage
- Education- 10% women, 37% men literate, 20% of the population is school age, half attend
- Health - HIV-AIDS, Malaria, TB major problems
- Maternal Health - Approx 2% mortality in birth
- Child Mortality - 20% before age 5, 30% at birth, 50% first year
- Gender Equality - World's lowest

female literacy rate, violence to women prevalent

The magnitude of the problems reflects the history and state of a nation after nearly 30 years of war. Security remains precarious in the South, but is much better elsewhere.

However, there does appear to be a lack of coordination in all efforts across all participants in all parts of the country. It is quite feasible that the insurgency will continue, even increase, as Taliban militants, drug criminals, and other corrupt elements see their own futures threatened.

Furthermore, corruption will continue as poverty and disparities remain as great as they are, and will only be reduced with time, development and the rule of law.

## **Conclusion**

Canada must make a very long-term commitment if we mean what we say in our 'goal'. It may take 20 years or more - moving from military-assured security to military, governance and development together, to development and governance, as Afghans are able to assume responsibility for their own security - both military and police.

All Canadians, but especially governments and bureaucracy, must understand the real nature of the undertaking and the commitment - and consequences of either failure or withdrawal for Canada, Canadians and especially the Afghan people.