



THE TALIBAN ARE OVERRATED

By Paul Manson

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To read current accounts of the war in Afghanistan these days, you might conclude that Canada and her allies are fighting a losing battle, and that the Taliban insurgents are making gains in their efforts to regain control of that war-torn nation.

The facts suggest the opposite. The Taliban are in trouble on just about every front.

To be sure, most media reports refer to the very real increase in casualties and suicide bombings in 2006, but these are poor indicators of how the war is really going.

Back in 1994 and 1995, when the Taliban moved into the vacuum left by the expulsion of the Soviet Army and its client communist government, they conducted a brilliant military campaign, quickly sweeping through most regions of the country and establishing their oppressive regime in Kabul.

This time around, the so-called "Taliban" (which in fact is a mix of insurgents) can lay no claim to any

degree of military success. Based on their performance in 2006, there is a hollow ring to their recent public declarations of a major spring offensive.

Those who accept such claims at face value need to look at the Taliban's recent record, as well as the their leadership's proclivity for boastful and arrogant pronouncements.

A major objective of the Taliban in 2006 was to conquer Kandahar Province and its capital, Kandahar City. This, of course, is the area where Canada has undertaken a major responsibility for security and reconstruction.

The Taliban failed, and they failed badly.

On the one occasion where they attempted to fight a large scale face-to-face battle with the NATO International Security Assistance Force in the area, they were soundly defeated. Since that engagement (called Operation Medusa by the allies), the Taliban have withdrawn to their safe havens, and have avoided military campaigns of the kind that won them the country a dozen years ago.

Instead, the Taliban have now resorted almost exclusively to four

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forms of unconventional activity, namely suicide bombings, roadside bombs, targeted assassinations of government officials, and school burnings.

The net result has been an alarming number of deaths, the great majority of the victims being Afghan people.

This dramatic shift in tactics is a measure of the bankruptcy, both militarily and morally, of the Taliban. It is hard to imagine how they hope to win over the support of the people of Afghanistan by killing them in such great numbers, through such inhuman means.

And recent declarations by insurgency leaders that they have two thousand suicide bombers at their disposal will not win many hearts and minds.

Make no mistake: the NATO mission in Afghanistan still faces huge hurdles to overcome before the nation is fully on the road to recovery, and able on its own to manage the Taliban threat, let alone the additional challenges of opium, warlordism and corruption.

Looking back at the past year, however, one can discern distinct signs that the principal enemies of Afghanistan, in the form of the Taliban, are failing in their attempt to regain power through terror and intimidation.

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