



The Conference of Defence Associations Institute

CDAI Testimony to Parliamentary Committees 1-2008

**Testimony of General (Retired) Paul Manson, President,
Conference of Defence Associations Institute,
and Colonel (Retired) Alain Pellerin, Executive Director,
the Conference of Defence Associations**

to the

House of Commons

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

February 14, 2008

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members,

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before your committee and to speak about Afghanistan. I am the president of the CDA Institute, which is the research arm of Canada's oldest defence organization, the Conference of Defence Associations, which celebrated its 75th anniversary last year.

I am accompanied this afternoon by Colonel (ret'd) Alain Pellerin, who is the Executive Director of the CDA.

In the short time available, allow me to present several points regarding Canada's mission in Afghanistan that I believe to be of particular importance at this critical juncture.

First, and perhaps most important, our detailed study of the situation in Afghanistan over the past five years leads us to believe that, contrary to the pessimistic view taken by many in Canada today, things are going quite well in Afghanistan. To be sure, there is yet a long way to go, but the country is seeing some remarkable improvement as it recovers from the devastation brought about by thirty years of conflict.

On the military front, the Taliban are

not occupying ground the way they did in the mid-nineties, in a brilliant military campaign that brought them to power following the soviet withdrawal and the ensuing political vacuum. This time around, the Taliban forces have been soundly defeated every time they met coalition forces head on in battle, and they have given up trying to conduct any form of conventional warfare.

Instead, they have resorted to suicide bombings, roadside bombs, assassinations and kidnappings. In my view, these are last resort measures which will not win victory for them in Afghanistan, and they are certainly not winning hearts and minds of the afghan people.

Looking at the important matter of development, here, too, the picture is encouraging. At the macro level, the gross national product is increasing at a rate reminiscent of China's, albeit starting from a very low base.

Education is burgeoning throughout the nation, with millions now attending schools, many of them young women who were not permitted to get a formal education under the Taliban regime. It is particularly interesting to note that the



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Taliban have been burning down schools by the hundreds, and murdering teachers who dare to allow girls into their classrooms. Clearly, education is anathema to the insurgents. In spite of their destructive efforts, progress continues.

Imagine the long term impact of massive education on the nation's governance, respect for the rule of law, industry, health care, infrastructure, the media, and other elements of an emerging and enlightened society.

In these early days it is mostly at the local level where development efforts are starting to make a difference, even in Kandahar province, where the Taliban are doing everything they can to disrupt development projects.

A measure of success in helping Afghanistan to get back on its feet will be the extent to which freedom of movement allows local enterprises to thrive and spread, offering the benefits of a free-market economy to all citizens, especially those who live outside the relative security of cities. Here again, there is a long way to go, but the beginnings are evident.

I don't want to paint too rosy a picture, but before I touch on some of the key problems that must be faced, I think it is important to hear from the Afghan people themselves. Recent polls indicate that about 85% of Afghans support the presence of the coalition forces, and more than 90% oppose the return of the Taliban to power.

Canadian troops, as part of the international security assistance force, are in Afghanistan under a United Nations mandate, as part of a multinational coalition operating under NATO auspices. Together with our 35

allies, we are wanted, and we are needed.

There are problems in this huge international undertaking, and some of them are very difficult. Here are the principal ones, as we see it.

First and foremost is the security challenge posed by the insurgency forces loosely referred to as the Taliban. They are nasty, murderous people who are not bound in any way by the Geneva Conventions or international humanitarian law, so they have an enormous advantage over our soldiers. They don't wear uniforms, they hide behind civilians, they use booby-traps, and they employ unimaginable brutality against their own people. And yet, as I pointed out earlier, they are not winning.

Secondly, there is the problem of a massive and illegal narcotics industry, the profits of which feed drug lords, warlords, and the Taliban. Elimination of this plague can only occur when a strong measure of central government authority is exercised over the poppy-producing regions in the southern provinces.

Third, closely related to the poppy problem, is the matter of corruption. This is not a new phenomenon in the region, but the vast profits from the heroin market have allowed a culture of corruption to exist at all levels of government.

Third, Pakistan has emerged as a source of difficulty in the battle against the Taliban, for reasons that are quite well known.

Finally, and this brings the whole matter back to Canada, there is the political question about the future of the Canadian mission.

The Manley report has offered Canadians an excellent summary of the situation in Afghanistan, and it proposes



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a reasonable way ahead for Canada's involvement in that land. Here I would like to make two very important points, which I hope you will consider in your deliberations.

It would be a disastrous error, in my view, for Canada to announce a fixed deadline for its military mission. That would be handing the Taliban enemy victory on a platter. Unless other NATO nations were willing to move in to Kandahar to fill the void left by Canada, which seems unlikely, that vital ground would be lost, with military, political and psychological consequences that could be very severe.

You can imagine, incidentally, the impact that such a move would have on Canada's international reputation. From being a much-admired leader in the war, we would be seen as having initiated a negative turn in the struggle to get Afghanistan back on its feet.

The political answer, in my estimation, is simple. Set a new mandate, to 2011 or 2012, but allow the government of the day to review the situation at that time before deciding upon the next step. No one can predict what the situation is going to look like two, three or four years downstream.

Finally, it is very troubling to note the calls for Canada to limit its military involvement to training or self-defence, with no so-called "search and destroy" mandate. That makes no

military sense. Even worse, it would place our troops in the field in an impossible position. Rules of engagement would be so complex and inhibiting that they could not operate effectively, and it would likely expose them to greater risk.

Furthermore, it is naive to expect that Canadian troops could tutor Afghan army personnel in the comfort and security of a garrison, and then send the Afghan troops out into the field on their own. It doesn't work that way. Side-by-side operations, sometimes involving combat, are essential if the mentoring is to be effective.

Mr. Chairman, members, there is so much more that I could add on what after all is an immensely complicated and sensitive subject, but Colonel Pellerin and I are now prepared to answer your questions.

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