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The Way Forward in Afghanistan

A Report of the National Town Hall on Afghanistan

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A Joint Initiative of the **Canadian International Council**
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1. Introduction

Canada’s engagement in Afghanistan is the country’s most pressing foreign policy priority and is likely to remain so for several years. Afghanistan represents Canada’s biggest military engagement in fifty years; it is the largest recipient of Canadian bilateral development assistance; and it is the focus of intensive diplomatic engagement, both within Afghanistan and internationally. The complex and multifaceted intervention has presented a seminal test for every branch of Canada’s foreign policy establishment.

At the same time, the national discourse on Afghanistan has tended to be quite polarized. Many Canadians do not believe their country should remain in an increasingly dirty war that has shown few signs of improvement, while others do not want to abandon a country that their government has pledged to rebuild. Almost eight years after the fall of the Taliban regime, the sacrifices made by countless Canadian soldiers, diplomats and aid workers to give Afghanistan a new beginning appear more at risk than ever before, and the prospect of failure in the broader state-building effort is very real. In light of this stark reality, Canadians are eager for more information and constructive debate on the future of Afghanistan, something that has been in short supply since Canada deployed military forces to Kandahar in 2006.

On December 9, 2008, the Canadian International Council (CIC), in cooperation with The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI), convened a Town Hall on *The Way Forward in Afghanistan*, in Waterloo, Canada. Convened shortly after national elections in Canada and the United States, the Town Hall was framed as a mechanism to collect input and advice for new governments in both countries. The purpose of this discussion was threefold: to provide Canadians with a comprehensive view of the current situation in Afghanistan, to offer a forum for a wide variety of interested individuals to express their views and opinions, and to spur a genuinely inclusive national debate.



The panel of experts assembled in CIGI’s atrium

1.1 Town Hall Format

CIGI assembled a distinguished panel of experts before an audience of 250. The Town Hall format allowed for open and active participation from scholars, policy experts, government officials, civil society actors, students and concerned citizens. Moderated by CIGI Senior Fellow Mark Sedra, the panel included:

Omar Samad	<i>Afghanistan’s Ambassador to Canada</i>
Ronald Neumann	<i>Former US Ambassador to Afghanistan</i>
Kevin McCort	<i>President and CEO, CARE Canada</i>
Derek Stoffel	<i>Correspondent, CBC-Radio</i>
David Mulroney	<i>Deputy Minister, Afghanistan Task Force, Privy Council Office</i>

The Town Hall was opened to a national audience through video links to CIC branches in Victoria, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax, giving the dialogue coast-to-coast coverage. After the panelists provided short assessments of the current situation in Afghanistan and prospects for the future, each CIC Branch was given the opportunity to engage the panel with questions and comments.

1.2 Report Outline

The report that follows draws on the wealth of knowledge, concerns and opinions shared during the Town Hall on a range of critical issues pertaining to Afghanistan's reconstruction. A lesson that emerged from the vibrant discussion was that the multiplicity of issues and pervasive tensions that characterize Afghanistan's state-building process defy simple solutions. Moreover, while security, political and development challenges are often addressed with different methods, mechanisms and modalities, they are intricately intertwined in the state-building project. State-building strategies that

offer genuinely comprehensive and integrated solutions, rather than stove-piped unilateral approaches, are invariably more effective.

The following report addresses these topics in three inter-related sections. The first section summarizes the panel's assessment of the current strategic and security challenges, both within Afghanistan and across the region. The second section highlights the diverse and complicated issues of promoting human and social development in a traumatized and conflicted society recovering from three decades of conflict. The final section offers some insight on ways to strengthen stabilization efforts in Afghanistan and to empower its citizens. The appendix of the report includes short summaries of the discussions that took place at each participating CIC Branch: Victoria, Calgary, the Waterloo Region, Toronto, the National Capital Region, Montreal and Halifax.



CIGI Senior Fellow Mark Sedra

2. Security Challenges

Afghanistan remains key to global security and regional stability in Central and South Asia. Eight years after the international intervention in Afghanistan, the country has been transformed in many ways with the election of a president and parliament; the return of over five million refugees; the remarkable growth of the private sector; and the rejuvenation of some strands of civil society, such as the media. Yet Afghanistan remains a fragile transition state threatened by an emboldened insurgency, a surging drug trade and endemic poverty.

The Taliban were defeated but not destroyed in 2001. With a sanctuary in the tribal areas of Pakistan, patrons in the Gulf, and a reliable source of revenue in the form of the drug trade, they have gradually expanded their presence with each passing year, controlling whole districts and areas of the country by 2009 and fostering the perception among many Afghans that their return to power is inevitable. In the words of Ambassador Neumann, a "growing culture of fear" has gripped Afghanistan, as violence and instability grow in geographical scope and intensity. While most Afghans harbour no love for the Taliban or its ideology, its perceived strength and ability to outlast the international community has prompted many Afghans to "sit on the fence" in the ongoing conflict, refusing to overtly support the central government and the internationally supported reconstruction process out of fear of future reprisals from the Taliban. Afghans, particularly in the rural south, want to be on the right side of the conflict when the dust settles. Mr. Mulroney noted that this fence sitting has made reliable intelligence gathering immensely difficult.

Without peace and stability in Afghanistan, the country will continue to present a serious threat to regional and international security. The panel agreed that transforming a country after 30 years of internecine conflict is a lengthy process that could perhaps be measured in decades rather than months or years. Accordingly, it is imperative that Canada and its allies remain steadfast in their

commitments to Afghanistan and see the process through to its fruition. However, the fate of Canada's military presence will not be determined by the inescapable logic of state building, but by the tenor of domestic public opinion, which has been volatile. A January 2008 survey by the Strategic Counsel found that 39% of Canadians supported our military presence in Afghanistan, while 56% opposed. Less than two years earlier, shortly after Canada deployed to Kandahar, the same survey elicited very different results with 55% of Canadians expressing support for the mission and only 41% opposing it.¹

2.1 Dimensions of Security

The security predicament confronting Afghanistan is as multifaceted and complex as it is severe. Today, more than one third of the country's districts are in partial or full control of anti-government armed groups, depriving the populations residing in these areas of basic services and development assistance. Former UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi opined in late 2008 that, with growing insecurity and instability in Afghanistan, "Afghan hopes have given way to despair, resignation and anger."²

The threats of criminality and insurgency overlap and are mutually reinforcing in Afghanistan, with the drug trade feeding the insurgency and the insurgency creating the security and administrative vacuum within which the criminalized economy can flourish. For the state to succeed, it must possess a monopoly over the use of coercive force and exercise full sovereignty over its entire national territory, including the largely lawless border region with Pakistan. Achieving this monopoly is dependent on the development of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), a process with which Canada is deeply engaged. However, as Ambassador Samad noted, this process has faced serious setbacks. While some elements of the ANSF face capacity deficits due to resource shortfalls, others could be characterized as ineffective and dysfunctional due to neglect and mismanagement.

The security predicament in Afghanistan is as multifaceted and complex as it is severe

The adverse nature of the security environment in many areas of Afghanistan, particularly the south and east, has severely limited the freedom of movement for development agencies and NGOs, thereby depriving significant portions of the population of a peace dividend. Mr. McCort explained that aid workers cannot safely access vulnerable areas without heavy protection, hindering the distribution of food, health care and reconstruction assistance. The media too is often unable to report beyond the protective shield of the military; thus, international audiences receive an incomplete picture of the situation in Afghanistan. Mr. Stoffel noted that it is often too dangerous for international journalists to access local civilians and community leaders in conflict affected areas to gauge their attitudes and perceptions.

Echoing the concerns of many policy makers and development practitioners, Ambassador Samad affirmed that security is "the necessary precondition for development to flourish." Without a baseline of security and respect for the rule of law, efforts by the Afghan state and international agencies to stimulate the economy, deliver development assistance and (re)build critical infrastructure will be for naught.

¹ Strategic Counsel, *A Report to the Globe and Mail and CTV: Economy, Leaders, Afghanistan and Carbon Tax*, 14 January 2008.

² Lakhdar Brahimi, "A New Path for Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, 7 December 2008.

2.2 Countering the Insurgency

Just as worrying for policy makers and military strategists as the growing intensity of violence in the south and east of the country, the centre of gravity for the insurgency, has been the gradual expansion of insurgent activity into previously stable areas, like the central provinces of Wardak and Loghar. Mr. Mulroneu noted that the Taliban has “largely been displaced rather than defeated,” in effect creating numerous and shifting frontlines. The Taliban lack the capacity to unseat the central government in Kabul, but that is not their short or medium-term strategy. Rather, they seek to prevent the state from fully establishing its presence across the country and delivering public goods, thereby de-legitimizing it in the eyes of the population.



Deputy Minister David Mulroneu

Some observers claim that the international community has already lost the war in Afghanistan, while others assert that a stalemate has been reached. Still others affirm that the very notions of military victory and defeat are out of place in the Afghan context, affirming that the Afghan intervention is, at its core, a political and development struggle rather than a military campaign. Opinions also differ sharply on the way forward for international military forces in Afghanistan, on whether the status quo should be maintained, a drastic change in approach undertaken, or a decision for disengagement taken. The arrival of the Obama Administration has rendered much of this debate moot, as plans for a surge in US forces that could bring up to 30,000 new troops to the country are now policy. The surge, however, raises new questions. For instance, how will these troops be used and where will they be deployed?

As Canadian counter-insurgency doctrine states, defeating an insurgency relies on more than military might. One must win the support and consent of local populations through the provision of development assistance and political outreach. This requires effective whole-of-government, integrated planning and implementation on the part of donors. Mr. Mulroneu cited Canada’s progress towards fulfilling the recommendations of the Manley Commission in this area. In particular, he noted that the government has established a Cabinet-level committee to centrally manage cross-departmental decision making, and has deployed more senior-level diplomats and aid officials to Afghanistan to balance the civil-military presence.

The challenges of engaging in irregular and unconventional warfare in Afghanistan have been manifold and transformative for Canada and its NATO allies. Countering a force capable of blending with local populations, able to retreat across porous borders, willing to sacrifice their lives to launch attacks and intent on targeting civilians and other “soft” targets represents new territory for the Canadian Forces. They have acclimated well to this new challenge but not without setbacks and tragic losses.

2.3 Regional Dimension

One cannot separate the situation in Afghanistan from wider regional political trends, security dynamics and conflict systems. Afghanistan’s neighbors, along with regional powers like India and Russia, have played a direct and indirect role in Afghanistan’s three-decade civil war.

Iran has complex and, at times, contradictory interests in Afghanistan. Its historic cultural, economic and linguistic ties with Afghanistan provide a strong incentive for a policy of constructive engagement and stabilization. Moreover, Iran’s antipathy towards the former Taliban regime, with which it almost

went to war in 1998, and its concerns over inflows of opium, feeding what is already one of the highest per capita rates of opium addiction in the world, represent strong incentives to support the consolidation of the Karzai regime. However, the perceived threat of a semi-permanent US military presence on its eastern border supported by a Western-friendly Afghan regime could overshadow the advantages conferred by a stable Afghan state. According to Ambassador Neumann, wider tensions between Iran and the US have influenced Iran's Afghan policy as evinced by Iranian weapons transfers to non-state groups.

The Americans' major ally in the region, Pakistan, has also seemingly played a "double game" in Afghanistan. While on one hand the Pakistani government has publicly declared its intention to crack down on the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the tribal areas along its border with Afghanistan, elements of its Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) have provided the group with clandestine support. The Taliban train and recruit members and launch attacks on NATO and Afghan forces from the Pakistani tribal areas, and the Taliban leadership *shura* (council) operates openly in Quetta of Pakistani Baluchistan. Ambassador Samad voiced hope that the new Pakistani leadership would work to dismantle the terrorist and insurgent infrastructure within its borders and allow NATO troops to track and target militants within Pakistani territory along the border. Mr. Mulroney posited that a major challenge for Canadian and international diplomacy was to convince all of Afghanistan's neighbors that Afghan "stability is in the self-interest" of the entire region.

Development efforts have been seriously imperilled by the deteriorating security situation

3. Development & Diplomacy

Many of the questions posed during the Town Hall related to the NATO military mission and the prospects for victory. This preoccupation with the military dimension of the Afghan situation is perhaps unsurprising considering the paucity of attention the Canadian media has dedicated to development initiatives in Afghanistan. Consequently, the average Canadian is largely ill-informed of the impact that Canadian and international development assistance has had in Afghanistan. While development assistance has materialized more slowly than anticipated and expected, significant progress has nonetheless been made. For instance, Canada contributes to the Afghan government-led National Solidarity Program (NSP), which promotes rural development through the provision of block development grants to individual communities. The funds are channeled through Community Development Councils (CDCs), which are established by the program to select appropriate projects and oversee implementation. Arguably the most successful development initiative in Afghanistan, by December 2008 the NSP had resulted in the formation of over 19,000 CDCs and the implementation of almost 40,000 community-level development projects.

Participants in the Town Hall expressed a desire to see the development of quantifiable indicators that would help assess progress in Afghanistan. The Canadian government's creation of a Quarterly Report tracking the impact of Canadian assistance using specific benchmarks was recognized as a positive step in this regard.

The deteriorating security situation has seriously imperiled the ability of development agencies to implement their programs. Mr. McCort underlined how poor security in many rural areas, where the majority of Afghans reside, has meant that a significant proportion of Afghans are seeing no development at all. The challenges of aid delivery in complex and insecure environments like Afghanistan have only been magnified by the growing role of the military in the provision of development assistance and the resultant blurring of the lines between civilian and military actors. The role of the military in providing humanitarian aid has had counterproductive effects – particularly when it is used as

a tool to secure intelligence, is withdrawn as a collective punishment for perceived community non-compliance, or when it duplicates existing programs of civilian NGOs and aid agencies. The military practice of using small scale development projects to win the consent of local populations, so-called hearts and minds activities, is a legitimate practice. However, it can send confusing messages when it is not coordinated with the work of civilian actors, divorced from countrywide development programs and priorities, or instrumentalized to reward or punish civilians. If advanced in such a manner, it can have the perverse effect of alienating local populations rather than securing their support.

Gender equality is a key concern of Canada and the international community in Afghanistan and is mainstreamed in many development programs. Key programs addressing issues of gender equality include: community level savings and loan programs; education for girls; and the promotion of female involvement in the public administration. However, the international community's determination to advance gender equality has at times conflicted with traditional Afghan norms and customs, en-

countering local resistance. Mr. McCort recounted that when he asked a group of Afghans what fuels the insurgency, the notion that the West is imposing its definition of gender equality was consistently cited. Many civilians feel aggrieved by the perceived imposition of foreign norms and values. It is imperative that international donors and NGOs alike seek to advance women's rights in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security*, reversing the terrible discriminatory policies and practices Afghan women faced under the Taliban regime. However, great care must be

Many Afghan civilians feel aggrieved by the perceived imposition of foreign norms and values

taken to advance these principles in a gradualist, culturally sensitive fashion, through consultation and education, not hectoring and imposition. The latter approach, so often employed by well-meaning but overzealous Western human rights organizations, can merely harden resistance to meaningful change.

3.1 Democracy

The overarching goal of the Bonn political process, inaugurated at the Bonn Conference of December 2001, was to establish the foundations of a democratic political order. By the autumn of 2005 all of Bonn's major benchmarks would be achieved, including the convening of presidential and parliamentary elections and the promulgation of a new constitution. However, Afghanistan's nascent democracy remains fragile and in need of consolidation, as the myriad of threats it now confronts demonstrate.

Afghanistan plans to hold its second presidential election in late 2009. This election will be a critical litmus test of the viability of Afghanistan's nascent democracy. It is not the first or second election that best shows the potential for democracy in a transition state, but the third, fourth and beyond. Ambassador Samad seems convinced that the overwhelming enthusiasm that accompanied Afghanistan's first election will be repeated in the upcoming presidential poll. However, in Afghanistan's present security environment, public enthusiasm alone will not guarantee the success of the election. It demands a major logistical and security operation that requires international funds, technical support and troops, much of which has yet to materialize.

3.2 Reconciliation

Societal reconciliation in the aftermath of conflict allows for the restoration of social capital and trust between individuals, groups and the state. At the core of any enduring peace is a political settlement between the warring parties. Afghanistan lacks such a settlement. The Taliban and other anti-government groups were not present at the Bonn Conference, which represented a forum to divide the spoils rather than a venue to conclude a grand bargain for peace. At the time, Taliban representa-

tion may have been, as Ambassador Samad indicated, impossible, as they were in the process of being bombed out of office by the US-led Coalition. Nonetheless, the failure to advance credible efforts to find a political rapprochement with the Taliban in the years that followed Bonn helped to create the political and security crisis that confronts Afghanistan in 2009.

Some isolated efforts such as the Peace Through Strength (PTS) program have been implemented in recent years to draw moderate Taliban away from the movement in exchange for small-scale incentives; however, such initiatives have had mixed results and were aimed at splitting the Taliban movement rather than finding a peace settlement. Developments in 2008 and early 2009 show that more serious efforts may be underway to find common ground. For instance, in October 2008, the Saudi King sponsored informal talks between the Karzai government and former Taliban leaders in Saudi Arabia. As several Town Hall participants remarked, peace talks with the Taliban will be difficult as it is not a homogenous group and many of its leaders see no reason for compromise while in a position of perceived strength. While the Afghan government has not publicly outlined its "red lines" for any prospective negotiation with the Taliban, the integrity of the constitution and its protections for individual rights, including those of women, would surely be a big one. Nonetheless, it is a positive sign that a process to forge a more inclusive political settlement may be possible and has the support of international donors.



The panel of experts makes their concluding remarks

4. Charting a Way Forward

The Town Hall provided the opportunity for a frank and honest discussion about Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Canadian participation from across the country gave a sense of the national mood towards Canada's involvement in Afghanistan. The dialogue also gave experts the opportunity to reach out to the public and convey their sentiments about the mission and what remains to be done. This unique forum demonstrated that there is not only a need but a significant demand for more inclusive public debate on Afghanistan.

4.1 Lessons Identified

The Town Hall highlighted the complexity and volatility of the current situation in Afghanistan. Canadian national media coverage has tended to be Kandahar-centric, focusing on developments in Kandahar province, particularly in relation to ongoing military operations, rather than providing an overall picture of the situation in Afghanistan. This can send misleading signals to Canadians. Just as Ontario does not define Canada, Kandahar, however strategically important, does not define Afghanistan. The national dialogue emphasized the need for the Canadian government and media to provide Canadians with a broader understanding of the situation in Afghanistan, with renewed frankness about the challenges that exist.

The Town Hall also emphasized how success in Afghanistan will be as dependent on the work of our diplomats and development practitioners as the fighting prowess of our soldiers. Security may be a precondition for development; but, it is only through economic reconstruction and institution building that peace can be consolidated.

It is also clear that the manner in which the international donor community provides assistance is as significant as the assistance levels themselves. To date, the reconstruction process has tended to be

donor-driven, featuring international rather than Afghan priorities, and implemented by a parallel bureaucracy of international aid officials and contractors rather than the Afghan state. It is a truism that all state-building processes must be domestically owned and led in order to be viable and sustainable; Afghanistan is no different. Renewed emphasis must be placed on empowering and enabling the Afghan government and individual communities to own the state-building effort. In the end it is more productive for Afghans to build their own state somewhat badly, than for the international community to do it for them well. Without a renewed emphasis on ownership, Afghans may come to see the international presence as intrusive rather than supportive and the donors themselves as neo-imperialists rather than partners.

On the security front, it is now widely accepted that there is no military solution to the Afghan conflict. The cornerstone of NATO's strategy should be an integrated approach that prioritizes support for development and governance promotion activities over combat operations. Clearing areas of insurgents has not been the problem of NATO and the Afghan government; holding and building areas liberated from the Taliban have. NATO forces must work to develop closer synergies with development agencies and NGOs to achieve greater joint effect in insecure areas.



Town Hall participants in Waterloo

Ultimately, the conflict in Afghanistan will not be won on the battlefield but in the classroom and on the training ground. Sustainable security and stability will only be achieved by building efficient, effective and accountable Afghan security forces, and an independent and fair judiciary. Setbacks have been encountered on both fronts. While the Afghan National Army has been quite effective, the Afghan National Police remain one of the most dysfunctional and corrupt institutions in the country and the judiciary is perceived as politicized and out of touch with local realities. Rebuilding the rule of law is the lynchpin for security in Afghanistan; thus, support to these institutions should be prioritized in the years ahead.

4.2 *What Lies Ahead*

While the situation in Afghanistan will likely get worse before it gets better, this should not imply that the overall effort is lost. It is critical that the international community adjust its expectations for Afghanistan. There will not be a Switzerland in Central Asia anytime soon. But perhaps a country more like Nepal and less like the Democratic Republic of Congo can be created. Even more modest goals require steadfast resolve among donors, as there are no quick fixes for Afghanistan. Even if Canada withdraws its military forces from Afghanistan in 2011, it must be prepared to maintain a robust development and diplomatic commitment to the country, or risk squandering the significant investment it has made. Arbitrary deadlines cannot be set for such a process. As Mr. Mulroney asserts, "we must work ourselves out of a job." But Canada must do so with a clear sense of the challenges that exist, the consequences of failure and the prospects for success. Only through honest and frank dialogue with the Canadian people on these issues can the domestic consensus needed for such a long-term commitment be achieved.

Appendix: CIC Branch Reports

The joint CIC-CIGI National Town Hall on Afghanistan successfully engaged almost 400 Canadians in cities across the country. Reports from each participating CIC branch are included, covering Victoria, Calgary, the Waterloo Region, Toronto, the National Capital Region, Montreal and Halifax.

These reports provide a snapshot of the discussions in each of the participating CIC branches on Canada's current and future role in Afghanistan. The CIC branches were asked to provide a synopsis of discussions among branch participants rather than forcing a unified position. Therefore what emerged was a diverse set of views and recommendations for Canadian military and civilian engagement in Afghanistan.

National Town Hall

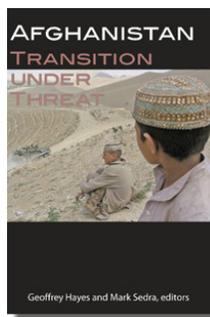
The panel discussion based at CIGI in Waterloo, Ontario, was broadcast live to participating CIC branches across Canada.

Video conferencing made the Town Hall a truly national event, enabling interactive dialogue between the panel of experts and participants at six CIC branch locations across the country.

Image at right gives a screenshot of the video broadcast



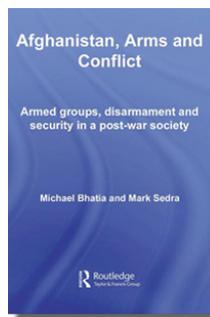
Related Resources



Afghanistan: Transition under Threat

Edited by Geoffrey Hayes and Mark Sedra, *September 2008*

Waterloo, ON: Studies in International Governance Series, WLU Press.



Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-war Society

By Michael Bhatia and Mark Sedra, *March 2008*

London, UK: Routledge.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

In these discussions, the Victoria branch participants were in agreement that notwithstanding inadequate reporting on progress being made, there has in fact been some slow progress which appears capable of building momentum in the near term. However, the uneven support of international partners appears to be compromising the success of the mission overall, with inadequate contributions of forces by NATO allies to meet the needs of securing the countryside and villages, leaving the "heavy lifting" to the United States, Britain and Canada. A more robust contribution by NATO partners will be necessary for ultimate success.

Canada's Communication Strategy

Although the Canadian government's communications effort was fragmented until very recently, it is improving, especially with the dedicated Afghanistan website (www.afghanistan.gc.ca). Regrettably, as indicated by the media panellist, the editorial dictum of "if it bleeds, it leads" results in over-emphasis on casualties and dramatic events rather than reports of day-to-day progress made by, for instance, the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). This contrasts sharply with the approach of the UK and US media. Further, travel restrictions for personal security reasons result in no "footage" for TV news; hence, any other stories (such as the development of the Kandahar obstetrics hospital wing) are not covered or reported. This is not a government problem but rather one of media emphasis to the point of bias.

It is difficult to know the best means to inform Canadians in a comprehensive manner in an age of 20-second sound bites. The situation in Afghanistan in general is too complex to lend itself to such coverage. Better contact with Canadians may be achieved through distribution via newspaper inserts (and CIC Branches) of some new explanatory materials detailing the roles and goals of the mission and quantitative indicators of contributions by Canada and Canadians (similar to the colour sheets on *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan – Progress on Canada's Six Priorities and Canada's Signature Projects*). More benchmarks and quantitative data regarding Canada's direct contributions (e.g. vaccinations and road and irrigation construction), indirect contributions (financing school construction) and multilateral contributions (microfinance projects) could assuage some of the concerns raised by interested Canadians.

Advice on the Way Forward

Policy recommendations discussed include:

- Increase commitment and reduce "caveats" of NATO partners;
- Become involved with India to assist in Indo-Pakistan efforts to stabilize the region (and reduce tensions that could lead to nuclear war);
- Develop special education programs aimed at middle and senior management in government and business;
- Emphasize local infrastructure projects to provide electricity;
- Improve coordination among Canadian development agencies and the Provincial Reconstruction Teams; and
- Facilitate cooperation between national organizations, NATO headquarters and the UN with both government agencies and NGOs involved in development work.

Prepared by W. Don Macnamara, President, CIC-Victoria

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

The following opinions were expressed:

- The approach taken by Canada and the international community is not working in Afghanistan; they should leave and let the Afghan people make decisions for themselves.
- Tremendous strides were made in the early years of the mission, but there have been some reversals (particularly in the security realm) since 2007.
- Pakistan is the key to security in Afghanistan. A Pakistan strategy needs to be developed by the international community.
- Iran's cooperation is also required. This has to be a UN- or NATO-led initiative, because of the difficulties of the Iranian-American relationship.
- Reconciliation with "moderate" elements of the Taliban must be made, but on the conditions of adhering to the constitution and protecting fundamental human rights. Taliban elements that accept these conditions, even if they have nasty pasts, should be allowed to participate in the next election.
- More balance is required between the military and development spheres. This relates to the resources assigned, the emphasis of Canada and the media coverage. Afghanistan will not be solved on the battlefield, but through increases in employment, income, health, education, standard of living and quality of life.

Canada's Communication Strategy

- The Manley Report emphasized "signature" development projects. During the discussion, Mr. Mulroney discussed the dam that Canada was building. The purpose of these "signature" projects is to sell the mission to Canadians. Should Canada be communicating its mission to Afghans or Canadians? If the answer is both, can the same communication strategy be used to address both audiences?
- The Government of Canada has a lot of information (the Quarterly Reports are excellent), but only those very interested take the time to read them. The vast majority of the population relies on the media.
- Too much media coverage focuses on security issues (especially Canadian deaths) and not enough on development and governance.

Advice on the Way Forward

Policy recommendations discussed include:

- Extend the Canadian mission past 2011, and move the Canadian forces to another part of Afghanistan. We have done our time in Kandahar; let the Germans (or some other NATO country) replace us.
- Get some of the media off the base to cover non-military stories. As Mr. Stoffel made clear, staying on the base naturally leads to more military stories. Does every Canadian death require so much coverage? This overwhelms any other stories.
- The 2009 Afghan elections must not be cancelled or postponed. Such a development would send a terrible message to both Afghans and the international community.
- There needs to be a clear separation between the military mission and the development mission. Do not use soldiers to deliver humanitarian aid, because it jeopardizes the development mission.
- Support President Obama's proposal for a military surge in Afghanistan.
- Encourage more Muslim countries to join the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF); allow Turkey to play a bigger role, and bring Malaysia and Indonesia into the international effort.

Prepared by Duane Bratt, President, CIC-Calgary Branch

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

In Canada, the public discussion on Afghanistan is dominated by debate on how to define success. If military victory is the goal and exit strategy of the Canadian government, it is unlikely to be satisfied anytime soon, if ever. This war has presented numerous unconventional challenges, compelling us to measure progress differently.

Members were chiefly concerned with how the unstable security situation impacts government and civil society efforts to deliver humanitarian and development assistance. Acknowledging the need to defeat the Taliban-led and al Qaeda-supported insurgency, participants insisted that long-term success will depend on the international community's ability to foster alternatives to extremism for the Afghan people. The Afghanistan we leave must be sustainable as a state, economy, ecology and peaceful society.

Canada's Communication Strategy

Discussion participants noted that since the Manley Report, there has been improvement in how the mission is communicated to Canadians. Additionally, the creation of the Afghanistan Task Force within the Privy Council Office seems to have allowed for more effective and timely senior decision making across the various strands of the "whole-of-government" effort.

However, the problem of adequately communicating Canada's role in Afghanistan and capturing the public's imagination and support has persisted; the war even seemed to be a non-factor in the fall 2008 federal election. Some participants laid blame on the media, which itself has failed to provide Canadians with a full picture of the realities in Afghanistan. There appears to be growing evidence that there is also a problem of communication in how the mission is sold to Afghan society, as it has become harder to maintain the trust and support of the people. In the end, the Town Hall demonstrated that, despite eight years of activity, questions and concerns over the mission persist among policy-engaged citizens.

Advice on the Way Forward

Policy recommendations discussed include:

- Adhere to planned 2011 withdrawal of Canadian combat personnel from Kandahar, but continue training and capacity building in the security sector and the provision of development assistance.
- Work strategically with the Americans, as they increase troops, and with all NATO allies to ensure an integrated approach to the mission.
- Increase investments in critical infrastructure construction (utilities, highways, schools, etc...) and source local labour and materials.
- Exhaust all political and diplomatic avenues towards a resolution of the conflict, with the option of a brokered peace with the insurgents as a possible outcome.
- Ensure proper equipment (weaponry, transport, etc.) is provided to Canadian military personnel.

Prepared by Andrew Schrumm, Vice-President, CIC-Waterloo Region Branch

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

The majority of the group felt the objectives of Canada and the international community are poorly defined which leads to a confused approach to the Afghanistan engagement. Several participants saw very little evidence that measures to address security are working. Some saw foreign troops as a large component of the problem as they do not effectively differentiate between innocent Afghans and the Taliban, resulting in an unacceptable death toll among non-combatants. Many also saw Canadian and international political support of the Afghan government as problematic. They felt the government is corrupt and its centralized structure does not incorporate well-established local customs for resolving disputes, and is therefore very unlikely to gain local approval. However, others felt that concentrating on providing security first and foremost is the correct approach, but it needs to be done more effectively and with greater numbers (of both foreign troops and the Afghan National Army) to open space to allow for meaningful development investments.

Canada's Communication Strategy

The group's discussion of this question painted a confused picture. Some deplored the government's attempts to describe successes of the Afghanistan engagement which they thought to be unbelievable, implausible and not reflective of the widespread insecurity documented by journalists. Others suggested media outlets are not reporting sufficiently on the mission's successes and that the government should put a stronger emphasis on the links between effective security and development. CIDA drew special attention here, with at least one observer suggesting it should put out more information about its successful micro-development projects delivered through local development councils. The majority of discussants felt a strong disconnect between government efforts to emphasize positive changes in social indicators (such as increasing numbers of girls in school and women being elected to parliament) when the most significant component of the Afghanistan engagement continued to be military-led efforts to deliver security.

Advice on the Way Forward

Discussants agreed on the need to bolster Afghan domestic capacity to allow Afghanistan to provide for its own future but responses on how to achieve this objective were far from uniform. The most significant disagreement centered on whether more Canadian and international troops should be contributed, as reflected in the points below.

Policy recommendations discussed include:

- Increase investments in local development councils to give communities ownership of infrastructure projects.
- Increase investments in security programs which have worked at least relatively well to date, specifically the most effective training programs for the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police.
- Insist on greater transparency by government when using the Canadian funds. Transparency is an important component of building a basis of government that Afghan people will trust.
- Do not force Afghan democracy to resemble Western democratic systems too closely; it should respond to local governing customs.
- Provide more troops and equipment to fight the Taliban away from population centres.
- Allocate increasing resources to non-combat objectives (including training and various kinds of aid) during the military drawdown.

Prepared by Jordan Dupuis, Program Director, CIC-National Office

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

We note that Canada's largest role in Afghanistan is as a member of the NATO mission. As such, Canada's mission is mainly military. Certainly that is the public impression, where it seems that the Canadian Forces are operating quite well. The fact that Canada seems to have proportionately higher casualties than combat operations of other countries in dangerous areas perhaps raises some question on how well we are equipped. Canada's non-combat contributions seem to be quite limited because of the poor security situation.

The effectiveness of the overall NATO mission is clearly not satisfactory. Yes, certain parts of Afghanistan are apparently making reasonable progress – but these have been away from Taliban influence. It is reported that the government is highly corrupt and ineffective. It is likely too late now, but the rush to install a democracy may have been a mistake in a society that still needs significant development. All reporting suggests that the NATO mission is poorly coordinated and that it suffers because of the collateral damage caused by Operation Enduring Freedom. Also, where the strategy was to impose security using foreign military forces, the number of troops allocated was clearly insufficient. The mission was not well planned with the right strategy at the start, as was admitted by Ambassador Neumann. It has relied too much on defence and not enough on the diplomacy and development approaches.

Canada's Communication Strategy

The communications strategy is poor and needs serious improvement in regard to informing Canadians much more thoroughly why we are there; what the risks really are; what the commitment really is; and why we should continue. There is some feeling that communications are being left to public relations professionals, which results in a sanitized message. However, governments have often sugar-coated these messages and report the wins while doing everything they can to avoid the bad news. Can we really expect anything different here? One suggestion was to have the Prime Minister himself give regular direct reports to Canadians.

We note that the news media tends to concentrate on casualties and personal interest stories rather than in-depth analysis. Also, Canadians cannot understand the conflict when the communications are only about Canada; we are a relatively small part of the whole picture.

Advice on the Way Forward

NATO needs cohesion of purpose, solidarity in commitment and sincerity in seeing the job done until peace is established in Afghanistan and there is a reasonably clean government in charge of the country.

The Afghan government itself *must* do something about the endemic corruption, which according to recent polls is more of a concern to ordinary Afghans than the Taliban. Associated with this, there is a need for a properly functioning police force. This might be better organized on a local basis, so that the police are fully part of the community they are policing.

The question of regional stability, which depends on Pakistan-Indian relations, must be addressed to some effect by the great powers.

Prepared by Craig Hunter, President, CIC-National Capital Branch

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

To address this question, the Montreal branch conducted a straw poll, resulting in: Positive-23%, Negative-30%, Not sure-47%. The discussion revealed that participants voted:

Positive, because:

- The economy is growing.
- The government is generally in control of the countryside.
- More children are going to school.

Negative, because:

- The area under Taliban control is growing.
- It is not evident that in the near term we can effectively graft western democratic institutions and processes onto Afghan political and culture practices.
- The Pakistan issue is not being managed well.
- Canada's participation in Afghanistan may have impacted domestic security. By participating in Afghanistan and thereby staking out what may be viewed as a pro-American stance, Canada's image as a helpful fixer may deteriorate and potentially cause it to become a target for extremists/terrorists.

Canada's Communication Strategy

The Montreal Branch expressed the belief that not enough is being done to publicize the effective work of reconstruction and aid undertaken by Canadians and others. For example, many of the Montreal participants are just now hearing about the recently developed Quarterly Report system of evaluation. There should be more effort to publicize such evaluations. To take another example, more effort might be given to publicizing the work of Elissa Goldberg who was executive director of the Manley Panel and has since become Canada's top civilian representative in Kandahar.

A concern was raised that balanced reporting is essential to media credibility, yet there is great dependence on the Canadian military on the part of media outlets. The military can be clearly seen as protecting, feeding and supplying transport for the Canadian media. Perhaps as much as possible, taking into consideration security concerns, the Canadian media should seek to be perceived as more independent and make a greater effort to strike out on its own.

The Montreal Branch would also suggest that more effort should be made to publicize the fact that many of the Taliban come from and receive support from outside the borders of Afghanistan.

Advice on the Way Forward

Policy recommendations discussed include:

- More thought and action should be invested on relations with Pakistan
- Two views on the same subject:
 - The American "surge" should be massive and concentrated, in order to defeat the Taliban quickly and accelerate reconstruction efforts. This may turn out to be less costly in the long run as international forces will avoid a protracted struggle.
 - The American "surge" should be carefully managed to avoid civilian casualties. Those who direct the use of military force must be fully cognizant of the overarching priority of building a relationship of trust with the Afghan population.

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Advice on the Way Forward *(continued)*

- NATO requires a more integrated military command structure and clearer lines of communication with civilian agencies (this from an aid worker operating in Afghanistan).
- Some participants had the impression that there was little if any coordination or even knowledge of aid and reconstruction activities in different parts of the country, where different nations are taking the lead. Given that there are so many actors involved, there is likely to be great benefit from the sharing of best practices information. Perhaps a biannual conference in Kabul could be held to discuss the practice and policies of reconstruction so that all areas of Afghanistan can benefit from the experience of successful projects.
- The UN should be encouraged to establish a field office of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan.
- More needs to be done to clarify military and civilian roles in reconstruction. There is concern that military efforts to leverage their own reconstruction efforts to gain tactical advantages vis-à-vis the Taliban could expose projects and civilians involved to security risks. Therefore, we suggest that military efforts that cross over into aid giving and reconstruction should give way to civilian efforts as soon as practicable.
- We believe it is important to encourage international diplomats, military forces and humanitarian missions operating in Afghanistan to ensure that local Afghan resources are the leading and public face of all operations. By creating a greater awareness among the Afghan people of the strength of their own forces and institutions, they will develop a deeper respect for the institutions being built. This will hasten the ability of the Afghan government, military and social systems to be self-sustaining.
- In addition, more effort should go into the training and expansion of the Afghan military and one aim should be to form an "elite" corps which would be a source of national pride. Perhaps this would inspire Afghans to join their armed forces in greater numbers.
- Efforts should be made to gain more substantive military support and contributions from Muslim countries.

Prepared by Toby Gilsig, President, and Stephen Gallagher, Program Chair, CIC-Montréal Branch

Assessing the Effectiveness of Canada's Approach

The multifaceted Canadian mission in Afghanistan represents the most important of our country's international engagements. This panel assembled some of the top experts on the subject, allowing for a level of discussion among Canadians that is far too infrequent. As the chief goal of Canada's mission is an eventual full transfer of authority to the Afghan government, the Halifax Branch appreciated Ambassador Samad's comments on the responsibilities taken by his government toward local capacity building and democratization. Certainly, a variety of security challenges – from insurgency to criminal activity to corruption – compound the difficulty of success.

The politics of the region play a heavy role in Afghanistan's fragile transition process. The Halifax Branch questioned the quantity and substance of Iran's contributions to reconstruction in Afghanistan. A frequent item of disagreement between the US administration and the Karzai government, participants of the discussion urged Canada to assume the role of honest broker in the Iran-Afghan bilateral relationship.

Canada's Communication Strategy

In regards to Canada's communication strategy, some participants raised the intersecting issues of elusive criteria for the mission's success and the absence of an exit strategy toward 2011. The government has yet to fully communicate its plans in this regard to Canadians. In a similar vein, others expressed concern over the seemingly sparse public impact on the mission's decision making process. Two-way communication, between the government and citizens, could be expanded through parliament and other methods to include other key stakeholders, notably expatriate Afghans.

Some members of the Halifax Branch were troubled by the comments of Mr. McCort as he described a harmonization of the work of development NGOs with that of the military. While Canadians want to see aid delivered directly to Afghans in need, participants asserted that development assistance should be handled by the proper, trained professionals.

Advice on the Way Forward

Canadian initiatives in Afghanistan must fully embrace a "whole-of-government" approach. Members were encouraged to hear of an increase of civilian personnel – foreign service and development – on the ground, and believe that continued rebalancing should be ongoing. There must be a clear division between combat and development efforts, for the blending of the two jeopardizes the delivery of both.

These efforts should be matched with wide consultation among various stakeholders both within Canada and in Afghanistan. With this knowledge, the Canadian mission increases its legitimacy of action and is able to better equip local leaders and civil society with the necessary tools as it moves towards troop withdrawal in 2011.

And lastly, as difficult decisions are made in the coming months and years, organizations like the CIC should convene more discussions like this to spur wider public awareness of - and inform the government/Parliament on - Canada's role in Afghanistan.

C I C

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL
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