

**CANADIAN POLICY TOWARDS AFGHANISTAN BEYOND 2011:
ISSUES, PROSPECTS, OPTIONS**

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Parliamentary Information and Research Service

Library of Parliament, Ottawa

Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the

Canadian Political Science Association

Concordia University, Montreal

3 June 2010

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Introduction

The year 2011 will mark a decade since the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States by al-Qaeda and the subsequent U.S.-led military coalition against Afghanistan's Taliban government that had harboured the terrorist leadership responsible for those attacks. The toppling of the extreme Islamist regime occurred in a matter of weeks. By December 2001 an international conference held in Bonn, Germany had set the parameters for a UN-mandated successor Afghan state. Canada was a participant in these transitional events and first deployed a regular force of combat-ready troops to the country in February 2002.¹ Since then Canada has been among the principal countries making a range of contributions to Afghanistan. The country rapidly became and remains a dominant Canadian foreign and defence policy priority as well as the largest recipient of Canadian development assistance.

The intervening years have not, however, brought the hoped-for stability and peace to Afghanistan, which also remains one of the world's poorest and most corrupt countries according to international indices.² The Taliban has re-emerged as a potent insurgent force in many parts of the country. Foreign troop levels, mainly American, are rising to their highest post-invasion levels (approaching 150,000 by summer 2010). The Afghan government is still heavily dependent on foreign assistance. President Hamid Karzai, who has held that office since December 2001, was declared the winner of fraud-plagued national elections in 2009. In addition to questions of legitimacy, doubts have grown about his credibility and reliability as an adequate partner for international efforts.

Current Canadian policy, following a March 2008 House of Commons motion, is that the existing combat mission in Kandahar province will end in July 2011, with the redeployment of all Canadian Forces personnel to be completed by December 2011. Non-military contributions, of unspecified scale and scope, will continue. The government's 3 March 2010 Speech from the Throne states simply: "In Afghanistan, the Canadian Forces prepare for the end of the military mission in 2011 with the knowledge that – through great sacrifice and with great distinction – their efforts saved Kandahar province from falling back under Taliban control. After 2011, our effort in Afghanistan will focus on development and humanitarian aid."³

No official policy document has been released publicly elaborating Canada's future role in detail. How will certain Canadian capabilities be continued? How will these adapt to changing circumstances, bearing in mind that foreign policy is always influenced by external events, contingencies, and other variables? One of these will be the strength of the insurgency in 2011. According to most expert analyses, it will be years before Afghanistan can take charge of its own security needs and regional factors, notably in Pakistan, also come into play.

¹ A small number of Canadian special forces, involving covert commando operations under Joint Task Force-2 (JTF-2), did enter Afghanistan in the last several months of 2001.

² Afghanistan ranks second to last – out of 182 countries; only Niger is worse – on the 2009 United Nations Human Development Report's human development index; last among 135 countries on its human poverty index, and last among 155 countries on its gender-related development index, http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_AFG.html. The country also ranks 179th out of 180 countries – only Somalia is worse – on Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index, http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table.

³ <http://www.speech.gc.ca/eng/index.asp>.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the evolving context affecting Canadian objectives in Afghanistan and to inform debate on Canada's future policy regarding its post-2011 presence in Afghanistan. For example, even if the Canadian mission is reoriented to be of a purely civilian nature, security issues will still loom large in determining how to proceed.

The paper begins by briefly revisiting some antecedents to the current state of Canada-Afghanistan policy. It then moves to examine trends in the six areas of policy priority set out by the government in 2008. The next section surveys factors to be taken into account when assessing the overall Canadian policy-making environment. Finally, the paper looks at possible roles for Canada's principal foreign policy instruments in the areas of peace and security, development and democracy assistance, and diplomacy.

Historical Context and Canada's Evolving Role

Afghanistan is a complex, multi-ethnic, landlocked country that has been a civilizational crossroads for millennia. Although an object of invasions and geopolitical "great games" – notably between the British and Russian empires in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – it has retained a strong sense of independent national identity. Afghanistan has experienced brief periods of modernizing democratic reforms. Both its 1928 and 1964 constitutions also affirmed equality rights for women. Unfortunately, the country's politics has been highly unstable and marked by violent overthrow.

During the Cold War era, Afghanistan drew Western attention following several Communist coups and the large-scale Soviet invasion of December 1979. A great deal of support was provided, mainly by the U.S., often covertly and funnelled through Pakistan, to Islamic fighters, the 'mujahideen'.⁴ After the withdrawal in failure of Soviet troops a decade later, and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union itself, Western interest moved elsewhere. The devastating years of the civil war among rival mujahideen factions, 1992-96, was only brought to a close by the Pakistani-aided Taliban takeover of most of the country. Their extreme Islamist regime was only recognized by three countries⁵, and occasionally provoked international condemnation. However, the chief concern of Western intelligence agencies was not Taliban atrocities but the haven afforded since 1996 to Osama bin Laden and his terrorist network.⁶

Without al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on the U.S. homeland, it is very unlikely that Afghanistan would have become more than a marginal country of interest for Canadian foreign and defence policy. While Canada did not take a direct military role in the ouster of the Taliban following its refusal to surrender bin Laden, Canada was fully supportive of the international

⁴ An excellent source is the Pulitzer-prize winning book by Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001*, New York, Penguin Books, updated edition, 2005.

⁵ Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

⁶ While a number of sources address the geopolitics of Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion, much of the country's 20th century history is little known. For useful background see Paul Fitzgerald and Elizabeth Gould, *Invisible History: Afghanistan's Untold Story*, San Francisco, City Light Books, 2009. See also Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2010.

coalition that was assembled and the United Nations Security Council resolutions mandating continued international intervention. Canada participated in the Bonn Conference of December 2001 that was the first to outline a broad range of objectives for reconstituting a functioning Afghan government, establishing conditions of security, and providing for reconstruction and development.

When the Taliban fled they left behind a collapsed state with virtually no capacity to deliver minimal services to the population and reintegrate millions of refugees. The task was enormous. At this point Canada had very little knowledge of the country or time to prepare. Canada faced a steep learning curve as it scaled up its contributions. While this has included a growing civilian presence, the most visible component remains that of the Canadian Forces.

In February 2002, Canada initially deployed 850 troops to Kandahar for only six months. A year later, Canada committed to a new deployment of nearly 2,000 troops to Kabul for one year, beginning in the summer of 2003 as a lead role in the UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for which NATO assumed responsibility in August of that year. The number of CF personnel then dropped to 750. There were few Canadian casualties in these first three years.

A major shift occurred in 2005 as ISAF expanded its operations outside Kabul, notably into the increasingly dangerous Pashtun-majority southern provinces. Notwithstanding presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004-2005, a Taliban-led insurgency re-emerged as a serious threat to security in large parts of the country. Canada announced in May 2005 that it would commit some 1,200 combat troops to the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar. The first battle group arrived in August 2005, when Canada also took charge of the Kandahar provincial reconstruction team (KPRT).

Canada's military mission under the rubric Joint Task Force Afghanistan has been extended several times, in 2006 and 2008, and grown significantly to an established strength of 2,830 personnel. Although government spokespersons warned in 2005 that Canadian casualties would increase as a result of counter-insurgency operations, Canadians did not seem prepared for the much higher numbers of fatalities recorded in 2006 and since. The deterioration of the security situation also raised doubts about the effectiveness of the mission given its high costs in blood and treasure. News coverage which had dwindled after 2002 sharply increased in 2006.

After 2001 Canada also quickly ramped up its development assistance to Afghanistan and its diplomatic assets. From a small amount of humanitarian assistance, by the end of the fiscal year ending March 31, 2002, Afghanistan was already the third largest recipient of Canadian bilateral country-to-country official development assistance (ODA). In 2002-2003, Afghanistan leapt ahead to become by far the largest recipient of net Canadian ODA (which includes disbursements through multilateral agencies and debt relief), at over \$122 million.⁷

Afghanistan has topped the list in every year since, receiving a high of \$345 million in 2007-2008. Beginning with the Tokyo pledging conference of 2002 to the London conference of 2006 that approved a five-year Afghanistan Compact, to the June 2008 Paris conference,

⁷ Source: CIDA, *Statistical Reports on International Assistance*, <http://cida71.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/ACDI-CIDA.nsf/eng/JUD-4128122-G4W>.

Canada has upped its commitment to a total of \$1.9 billion in aid over the period 2001-2011. In June 2008 the government also announced that over half of Canadian aid would be devoted to “Kandahar-focused programming”. Cumulative Canadian assistance to Afghanistan from 2001-2002 through 2008-2009 reached approximately \$1.375 billion. In February 2009 Afghanistan was named one of 20 “countries of focus” for bilateral CIDA programming, accounting for 18% of the Agency’s disbursements to those countries in that fiscal year. CIDA will have expended a total of about \$1.7 billion in Afghanistan through 31 March 2011.⁸

The amount of Canadian aid to Afghanistan for reconstruction, development, and humanitarian relief can be seen as comparatively small in relation to the military costs of the Canadian mission. In an October 2008 report, the Library’s Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) projected that overall expenditures, predominantly military, could reach an estimated cumulative total of up to \$18.1 billion based on operations over 10 fiscal years from 2001-2002 through 2010-2011. However, according to the latest available government numbers, which exclude post-2011 disability and health care costs for veterans, the *incremental* cost to the Department of National Defence (DND) will total approximately \$9 billion over this same period.⁹

Canada re-established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in January 2002 and opened an embassy in Kabul in September 2003, which has since grown to become one of Canada’s largest. A senior diplomat, Dr. Glyn Berry, from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) was appointed the first political director of the Kandahar PRT in 2005. Tragically he was killed by a roadside bomb in January 2006. Following the January 2008 release of the report by the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan (Manley report), civilian capacity was further increased. A representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK) was named. In addition to departmental/agency task forces, responsibility for coordinating Canada’s “whole-of-government” effort was moved to an Afghanistan Task Force within the Privy Council Office (PCO), supporting a new cabinet committee on Afghanistan.

There are currently about 120 civilian Canadian government officials working in Afghanistan (up from only 20 in 2006), some 75 of these in Kandahar.¹⁰ DFAIT’s expenditures in Afghanistan are projected to total approximately \$400 million through 2011.

Considerable debate has focused on whether Canada has devoted sufficient resources to development and diplomacy in Afghanistan in comparison to its military efforts. At the same time, Canada’s share of total ISAF forces, which reached over 102,000 as of 16 April 2010, has been declining.¹¹ U.S. troop levels have been sharply increasing, from about 32,000 when President Obama took office in January 2009, to a total of about 68,000 following new commitments in the first months of his administration, to an expected near tripling when a further 30,000 troops announced by the White House 1 December 2009 are fully deployed in 2010. As of late May 2010, the Pentagon reported there were 94,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, greater than the 92,000 U.S. troops remaining in Iraq.

⁸ Ibid., consecutive fiscal years since 2001-2002.

⁹ Source: Government of Canada, “Cost of the Afghanistan Mission 2001-2011”, last updated 25 November 2009. Incremental costs include only those additional to what DND would have spent had there been no mission.

¹⁰ See Matthew Fisher, “Canadian civilians helping Afghans re-connect with government”, *Montreal Gazette*, 16 March 2010.

¹¹ Source: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/Placemats/20100303%20Placemat.pdf>.

U.S. policy on Afghanistan has been explicitly linked with its policy towards Pakistan and focused on national/international security imperatives; the “overarching goal” described as “to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.”¹²

Key Parameters of the House of Commons Motion of March 2008

...the ultimate aim of Canadian policy is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans, in a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure and to create the necessary space and conditions to allow Afghans themselves to achieve a political solution to the conflict;...

- Motion adopted by the House of Commons, 13 March 2008¹³

Following the government’s generally positive response to the Manley report, which set out modest conditions for continuing Canada’s Kandahar military presence¹⁴, the framework for the extension of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan until July 2011 was contained in a lengthy motion adopted by majority vote in the House of Commons on 13 March 2008. As cited above, the preamble asserts an extremely ambitious goal for Canadian policy that is by all accounts a long way from being realized. That goal is said to depend on having “properly trained, equipped and paid members of the four pillars of their [Afghans’] security apparatus: the army, the police, the judicial system and the correctional system”.

The main goals for the military mission are given as: training Afghan security forces to take “increasing responsibility” for Kandahar and country-wide security, providing security for development efforts in Kandahar, and continuing the Kandahar PRT. The mission extension is made expressly conditional on “the redeployment of Canadian Forces troops out of Kandahar and their replacement by Afghan forces” which is to “start as soon as possible, so that it will be completed by December 2011”. The motion is silent as to what might happen if Afghan forces are not ready to assume that responsibility. There is an implicit assumption they will be. (Since Canada is not acting alone, any eventual scenarios will have to be dealt with by the overall NATO-led mission.)

The motion calls for Canada’s reconstruction and development assistance to be “revamped and increased” so as to “strike a better balance” with Canadian military efforts. It does not specify how security is to be provided for this expanded activity once Canada’s troops are withdrawn. Areas of aid focus are: “sound judicial and correctional systems”, “strong political institutions”, addressing chronic fresh water shortages, and addressing the “narco-economy” in

¹² <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan> .

¹³ The full text of the motion can be found as Appendix I to the Report of the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, *Canada in Afghanistan*, July 2008, <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3633780&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=40&Session=2> .

¹⁴ The Conservative government-initiated panel, chaired by former Liberal deputy prime minister John Manley, was designed to appeal to support from within the ranks of the official opposition. For details of this and other recommendations cf. *Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan*, Ottawa, 20 January 2008, 37-38, http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/collection_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf .

ways that do not alienate the local population. While there is no specific mention of education, health, or anti-corruption efforts, these naturally follow under better governance and human development goals.

The motion includes a number of points regarding greater transparency and accountability to the public and Parliament. It requires that the government table in Parliament quarterly progress reports on the mission, which it has done, although these may not be as detailed and frank as some parliamentarians and members of the public would wish.

The motion also instructs the House to strike a special committee on the Canadian mission in Afghanistan authorized to travel to Afghanistan and the surrounding region and to make frequent recommendations to the government. The committee has been created, and reconstituted several times after prorogations. It has a sweeping mandate to examine any aspect of the mission. However it has not travelled or made many recommendations. It also has not reviewed “the laws and procedures governing the use of operational and national security exceptions for the withholding of information from Parliament, the Courts and the Canadian people ...”.

At the same time, the committee has become deeply enmeshed in controversy over the disclosure of uncensored documents pertaining to the transfer of detainees by Canadian Forces to Afghan authorities in light of allegations of widespread abuse and torture of Afghan prisoners by those authorities, notably the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS). The 2008 motion specifies that such transfers should only take place under the highest standards for protecting the rights of detainees and “in keeping with Canada’s international obligations”, that a NATO-wide solution should be pursued, and that “a policy of greater transparency” must be adhered to “including a commitment to report on the results of reviews or inspections of Afghan prisoners undertaken by Canadian officials”.

In the motion’s own terms, some elements have so far been achieved, others not or at best partially. Furthermore, the long-term context for progress depends on factors, many outside Canada’s control, that require an ongoing process of assessment and adjustment.

Trend Lines Affecting Canada’s Six Priorities

As Afghanistan moves into 2010, Canada’s mission remains, first and foremost, to help Afghans rebuild their country as a stable, secure, democratic and self-sufficient society.

- Government of Canada, *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Seventh Report to Parliament*, 17 March 2010¹⁵

The first required report to Parliament, released on June 10, 2008, set out six priority objectives for Canadian policy through 2011.¹⁶ Two are at a national level: building Afghan institutions and supporting democratic processes such as elections; contributing to “Afghan-led political reconciliation efforts aimed at weakening the insurgency and fostering a sustainable

¹⁵ http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/documents/r12_10/index.aspx .

¹⁶ Government of Canada, *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Setting a Course to 2011*, http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/Afghrep_en.pdf .

peace”. Four focus on Kandahar province, helping the Afghan government to: maintain a more secure environment and establish law and order through building the capacity of the Afghan army and police and supporting complementary efforts in justice and corrections; provide jobs, education, and essential services; provide needed humanitarian assistance including to refugees; enhance Afghanistan-Pakistan border management and security.

In addition, three “signature projects” were announced for Kandahar: rehabilitation of the Dahla Dam and its irrigation and canal system; building, expanding and repairing 50 schools; supporting polio immunization with a view to eradicating the disease by the end of 2009.

As indicated by the above citation from the quarterly report for the period ending 31 December 2009, Canada’s mission objectives are directly tied to “self-sufficient” Afghan capabilities in crucial security and development areas. The following sections assess the situation in Afghanistan across the six indentified dimensions of Canadian policy.

Enabling Afghan Security Forces and Promoting the Rule of Law

Canada’s Joint Task Force Afghanistan of approximately 2,830 Canadian Forces personnel includes a battle group of about 1,000 soldiers to conduct counter-insurgency and related operations in Kandahar province. In addition to Joint Task Force headquarters, tactical air and various support units, other main elements are: the military component of the 330-person Kandahar PRT, one of 27 in Afghanistan, supporting short to long-term development projects, police training, local governance, etc.; a 300-person Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) for the training of approximately 3,000 members of the Afghan National Army (ANA) grouped into five “kandaks” (battalion-sized units). The OMLT accompanies kandaks on joint operations with the Canadian battle group. Since 2007 Canada’s OMLT has expanded to include a sub-unit that works with the Afghan National Police (ANP). On 8 April 2010, Minister of Defence Peter MacKay committed up to 90 additional personnel for the training of Afghan security forces “until the end of Canada’s mission in 2011.”¹⁷

According to the latest March 2010 report of the UN Secretary-General (SG) to the Security Council: “The deterioration of Afghanistan’s security situation has continued, with 2009 being the most volatile year since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, averaging 960 security incidents per month, as compared with 741 in 2008.” Incidents in January 2010 were up 40% over January 2009. Civilian casualties increased by 50% in December 2009 compared to December 2008. “Overall, the intensification of armed conflict in the south, and its expansion into areas previously considered stable, made 2009 the worst year for civilian fatalities since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. A total of 2,412 civilian deaths were recorded, representing a 14 per cent increase over the previous year.”¹⁸

Of these deaths, 25% were attributed to “pro-Government forces”, and that number was a slight decline from 28% in 2008. U.S. General Stanley McChrystal, who took command of

¹⁷ <http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/news-nouvelles/news-nouvelles-eng.asp?cat=02&id=3325> .

¹⁸ “The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General”, S/2010/127, New York, 10 March 2010, 7, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N10/260/86/PDF/N1026086.pdf?OpenElement> .

ISAF in July 2009, has made protection of the population a central element of counter-insurgency (COIN) strategy. However, controversial night raids accounted for more than half of the nearly 600 Afghan civilian killed by foreign troops in 2009.¹⁹ In addition, with troop levels and the scale of military operations increasing, there has been decreased access for non-military government and aid workers. Out of 364 districts, 30% were “largely inaccessible” to unarmed public officials in December 2009. “Direct attacks against the aid community have limited the accessibility of development programmes in 94 districts considered very high risk and 81 districts assessed as high risk.”²⁰

The targeted strength of Afghan security forces is set to increase substantially from current levels of about 104,300 for the ANA and 96,800 for the ANP to 134,000 and 109,000 respectively by October 2010, and 171,600 and 134,000 respectively by October 2011, as approved by the London Conference on Afghanistan of 28 January 2010.²¹ The financial costs are largely borne by international donors, being far beyond the fiscal capacity of the Afghan state. General McChrystal is said to want to boost overall Afghan force strength to 400,000 by October 2013 (240,000 for the ANA, 160,000 for the ANP).²² If and when the country’s security forces climb toward such totals, this raises a major question about the long-term financial sustainability of maintaining such a large force. Afghanistan will not be able to afford to provide for its own security for a very long time.

In terms of quality and effectiveness, while the ANA still suffers from numerous deficiencies²³, it is generally considered to have made more progress than the ANP, only an estimated 50% of whose members have received basic training according to the SG’s report. Illiteracy and drug use are major problems for the security forces.²⁴ Complaints continue to be received about police involvement in corruption, smuggling, kidnapping, and extortion. Canada’s latest quarterly report on its Afghan mission acknowledges the ongoing challenges of recruitment, retention and attrition for the ANA, ANP, and corrections officers. The ANA kandaks “fully capable of planning, executing and sustaining near autonomous operations” are stated to have increased from one to two by the end of 2009. However, due to leaves granted, none of the kandaks had an effective combat-ready strength of 70% or higher. Moreover, NATO foresees a substantial shortfall in the number of trainers needed.²⁵

The Canadian Forces area of responsibility was reduced with the arrival of U.S. troops; within that, 51% of total security operations were Afghan-led, well below the 2011 target of 65%. As well, of six key districts, an Afghan approval rating of 85% or higher for the ANA dropped to one from the 2008 baseline of four. More police were trained and a “Kandahar

¹⁹ “Night raids on militants in Afghanistan: Thinking the worst”, *The Economist*, 22 May 2010, 45-46.

²⁰ “The situation in Afghanistan”, March 2010, 7 and 18.

²¹ <http://afghanistan.hmg.gov.uk/en/conference/communique/> .

²² Ewen MacAskill, “Obama takes final gamble with Afghanistan troop surge”, *The Guardian*, 1 December 2009.

²³ A detailed analysis of these with recommendations for improvement is contained in International Crisis Group, *A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army*, Asia Report No. 190, Kabul/Brussels, 12 May 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/afghanistan.aspx> .

²⁴ A recent assessment by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is that an estimated 75% of the ANP lacks basic literacy and that up to 40% of ANP recruits fail drug tests – see Frank Cook, General Rapporteur, “Partnering with the Afghan National Security Forces”, Spring Session, 2010, <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?SHORTCUT=2084> .

²⁵ “Hundreds more trainers in Afghanistan may be needed”, *Reuters*, 18 May 2010.

Model Police Project” was agreed to with the Afghan government. Still, only 18% of police units were assessed at a capability level that they “can conduct basic law and order operations, management or leadership (appropriate to local circumstances) with occasional assistance from an international advisor or police mentor team”. The 2011 target is 80%.²⁶

In February 2010, Canadian and Afghan forces participated in a major counter-insurgency operation (“Moshtarak”) involving about 15,000 troops targeting the Marja district in Helmand province adjacent to Kandahar, the largest offensive of the war so far. At the same time, noted U.S. analyst Anthony Cordesman cautioned that any military gains “will be wasted if the Afghan government cannot deliver far better governance and economic progress both inside and outside the Helmand area.” He added: “No one has ever really won a war until they have won a lasting peace. ... Unless the Taliban collapses from within, it is unlikely that Afghan forces will be fully ready to take over the security mission until well after 2015.”²⁷ By May 2010 there were reports of some Taliban infiltration back into the Marja area, an indication of just how arduous the multi-level counter-insurgency process will be.

Non-military as well as military elements are essential to achieving sustainable progress. Canadian Chief of the Land Staff Lieutenant-General Andrew Leslie stated in 2009 after the release of DND’s *Counter-Insurgency Operations Manual*: “There’s never been a case of a counter-insurgency being successfully resolved by the application of military force alone. Ever.”²⁸ The idea is to clear and hold territory so as to enable the building of better civilian governance capacity and the eventual transfer of full responsibilities to Afghans. A larger longer-term ISAF civil-military operation (codenamed “Hamkari”) is planned for Kandahar beginning in June 2010. Its success will likely be critical to the achievement of 2011 security objectives for the province. A senior U.S. military official has even referred to the coming offensive as “our D-Day”, with Canada taking a crucial role.²⁹ But with the Taliban stepping up their attacks north and south – including brazen assaults on the two largest international military bases in Bagram and Kandahar – along with their campaign of targeted assassinations, many residents are apprehensive.³⁰

Perhaps the most sobering finding of the latest Canadian quarterly report is that: “Kandaharis did not see security as improving in any of the key districts.”³¹ More generally, although the Taliban-led insurgency has come under “unprecedented pressure” according to a Pentagon report to Congress covering the six-month period ending 31 March 2010, its “operational capabilities and operational reach are qualitatively and geographically expanding”. In addition, the “strength and ability of [insurgent-run] shadow governance to discredit the

²⁶ *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Seventh Report*, 4-5 and 14-16.

²⁷ Cordesman, “The Afghan Test Bed in ‘Marja’: Key Tests of Victory are Still Months and Years Away”, Center for Strategic & International Studies, Washington D.C., 18 February 2010, 7-8.

²⁸ Cited in Jeff Davis, “Into the Age of Counter-Insurgency”, *Embassy*, 11 March, 2009, 3.

²⁹ That hyperbole was attributed to U.S. marine Col. David Bellon, director of operations for ISAF Regional Command South, who explained: “On what we and the Taliban both say is the vital strategic ground, Canada is still in charge during this critical time.” (Reported by Matthew Fisher, “Upcoming Afghan battle ‘our D-Day’”, *The Ottawa Citizen*, 22 May 2010.

³⁰ Laura King, “ ‘Why announce an offensive in advance?’ ”, *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 May 2010.

³¹ *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Seventh Report*, 14.

authority and legitimacy of the Afghan government is increasing.”³² As well, other metrics show that Afghan perceptions of ISAF forces dropped in March 2010. While 34% were “neutral”, only 29% had a “very good or good opinion” of foreign troops.³³

In the area of the rule of law, justice and correctional systems, and human rights, the Canadian report points to several training initiatives and infrastructure projects. Nonetheless, Afghans have many reasons to be sceptical. As a briefing by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) puts it, these include: “police who prey on citizens through arbitrary arrest, extortion, routine mistreatment and torture; corrupt judges and prosecutors in pay of racketeers; appointed officials who serve the interests of drug lords not the people. A culture of impunity ... thrives under these conditions, and represents a security risk as great as that posed by the Taliban.”³⁴

The SG’s report observes that: “The fight against impunity was challenged with the publication of the law on public amnesty and national stability. The law was gazetted at the end of November 2008 but not publicized until recently. It grants amnesty to perpetrators of past serious crimes, including grave human rights abuses, in violation of the obligations of Afghanistan under its Constitution and international law.” Concerns are also expressed about a restrictive media law which entered into force in July 2009 that could leave scope for violations of freedom of expression. “Similar wording in the previous media law often resulted in the arrest and intimidation of journalists who had criticized the Government or exposed corruption.”³⁵

With respect to women’s rights, most controversial in 2009 was the “Shia Personal Status Law” approved by President Karzai, following its passage by the Afghan parliament.³⁶ The measure, which violates international conventions binding on Afghanistan, drew widespread condemnation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay stated: “For a new law in 2009 to target women in this way is extraordinary, reprehensible and reminiscent of the decrees made by the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the 1990s”.³⁷ A female Afghan parliamentarian even described it as “worse than the Taliban” since it was passed by a duly elected legislature (in which 89 of 351 members are women).³⁸ President Karzai claimed to have no problem with the law but, bowing to international pressure, submitted it to review by the justice ministry and also the conservative ‘ulemma’ (council of Islamic clerics and religious scholars). This episode had a significantly negative impact on Western public opinion. Yet the law was in fact promulgated by President Karzai in July 2009.

³² Jonathan Landay, “Pentagon issues downbeat assessment on Afghanistan”, *The Miami Herald*, 28 April 2010. The full document released that day, “Report on Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghan National Security Forces”, can be accessed at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/Report_Final_SecDef_04_26_10.pdf.

³³ Anthony Cordesman, *Shaping the War in Afghanistan: The Situation in the Spring of 2010*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C., 29 April 2010, 42, www.csis.org.

³⁴ International Center for Transitional Justice, “Stabilizing Afghanistan: Legitimacy and Accountability in Governance”, Briefing, January 2010, 1, http://www.ictj.org/static/Asia/Afghanistan/ICTJ_StabliizingAfgh_bp2010.pdf.

³⁵ *Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 March 2010, 10.

³⁶ Mike Blanchfield, “Afghan bill draws fury over women’s rights”, *The Ottawa Citizen*, 2 April 2009, p. A6; “Afghan travesty”, *National Post*, editorial, 2 April 2009.

³⁷ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Media.aspx>.

³⁸ Interview from Kabul on CBC Radio’s “As It Happens”, 2 April 2009.

The ICTJ briefing argues that the Action Plan for Peace, Reconciliation, and Justice developed by the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, approved by an international conference in the Hague in June 2005, and adopted by the Afghan government in December 2005, remains valid but unrealized – “the core of the Action Plan focused on promoting justice for past human rights violations and war crimes and ensuring that Afghan institutions are transparent and strong enough to resist corruption and further violations against the Afghan people remains unimplemented. Recommendations for senior appointments go unheeded, and many current militia leaders who have not disarmed including those against whom there is evidence of war crimes, continue to hold high positions.” Laws have not been effectively enforced for the vetting of candidates for electoral office with links to illegal armed groups. The ICTJ also calls for redoubling “efforts to carry out comprehensive disarmament, including vital demobilization of illegal militias and incorporation of any newly recruited armed groups (tribal militias) into the regular Afghan armed forces.”³⁹

The Action Plan set out timelines that expired in March 2009 and have not been extended by President Karzai. Its intent clearly conflicts with that of the amnesty law. A thorough review of transitional justice issues in Afghanistan concludes that “the government has failed to live up to its responsibilities, outlined in the Action Plan, to acknowledge the suffering of the Afghan people. ...the failure to address the legacy of impunity in Afghanistan is contributing to ongoing insecurity. Transitional justice is not just about addressing past crimes, but about dealing with continuing impunity, which delegitimises and hinders governance and counterinsurgency efforts.”⁴⁰

Strengthening Afghan Institutional Capacity to Deliver Core Services

As previously indicated, Canada has committed \$1.9 billion in development assistance through 2011, disbursing several hundred million dollars annually, half of that to Kandahar province. Core or basic services are defined in government documents as “dependable provision of education, health care, sanitation, road infrastructure and clean water for homes and farmland”. Specifically, according to the Canadian government’s latest quarterly report, Canada’s objective is that “Kandahar’s provincial administration and core ministries of the Afghan government will be better able to provide basic services to key districts of Kandahar province.” However, the assessment is that the Afghan government “does not yet have the necessary capacity to deliver these services, and the situation is further hampered at the provincial and district levels.”⁴¹ There is no indication of how long it will take to achieve that capacity but the sense is that long-term assistance will be required.

Varying degrees of progress are reported on specific projects and sectors. Dahla Dam rehabilitation is proceeding towards work on the irrigation system, albeit “in a highly insecure environment.” The number of jobs for Afghans increased by 50 to a total of 405; the 2011 target is 10,000. Agricultural assistance was provided to almost 8,000 Kandahar farmers to encourage

³⁹ ICTJ Briefing, January 2010, 2-3.

⁴⁰ Emily Winterbotham, *The State of Transitional Justice in Afghanistan: Actors, Approaches and Challenges*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Discussion Paper, Kabul, April 2010, 27,31, <http://www.areu.org.af/>.

⁴¹ *Seventh Report*, 5.

a shift for opium poppy cultivation to other crops such as wheat.⁴² The SG's report, using data from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime from 10 February 2010, predicts the level of opium cultivation will be the same this year as last. There was a significant decline of 36% in the past two years due to rising prices for licit crops. But those have begun to fall, "raising the possibility that farmers may again turn to opium".⁴³ At the January 2010 London conference, Canada announced an additional contribution of \$25 million for counter-narcotics efforts. (The UN estimates there are about one million drug addicts in Afghanistan.)

In education, two more schools were completed for a total of 14, and another 28 are under construction. Across Afghanistan, Canada has helped to establish 3,700 community-based schools and accelerated learning centres (more than 200 in Kandahar) for 100,000 students, the majority girls.⁴⁴ At the same time, CIDA acknowledges: "Social attitudes towards educating girls remain a concern. Families face persistent threats—even attacks—to deter the participation of girls in formal education."⁴⁵ This is a deeper problem than Taliban hostility. The number of teachers trained reached 341; the 2011 target is 3,000. Over 23,500 persons received literacy training and 4,150 received vocational training. But only 52% of Kandaharis surveyed were satisfied with the provision of education, down from a February 2008 baseline of 64%.⁴⁶

In health care, Canada has contributed to facilities at the Mirwais hospital in Kandahar, including an obstetrics unit that is the first of its kind in Afghanistan. It has also supported nine Afghan Red Crescent basic health centres and six rehabilitation centres.

The Canadian quarterly report refers to infrastructure projects being completed in 70% of communities in key districts in Kandahar, to an expansion of new business enterprises to over 1,100, and to over 1,100 clients for small loans, mostly to women, through the Microfinance Investment Support Facility, to which Canada is the top donor. Canada has launched an "Afghanistan Challenge" fund for vocational training, microfinance and scholarships for Afghan women that matches donations from Canadians (\$280,000 to the end of 2009) dollar for dollar. Canada also supported a Kandahar trade fair for small and medium-sized businesses. On a much larger scale, Canada has provided several hundred million dollars to the World Bank-administered Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, notably towards the National Solidarity Program (NSP) that supports village-level development projects. There is still a great need for economic development opportunities. 46% of Kandaharis surveyed were satisfied with the provision of employment, up slightly from 39% in February 2008. No information was provided on results achieved by the Kandahar PRT.⁴⁷

A number of the "end-2010" benchmarks in the 2006 Afghanistan Compact in support of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy may fall short of achievement. Thirteen related Afghan government ministries are being organized into four cross-cutting "clusters"—agriculture and rural development, human resource development, infrastructure and economic development, governance—each having a lead minister responsible for presenting plans to a Kabul conference now scheduled for 20 July 2010. The March 2010 SG's report continues to

⁴² Ibid., 6, 17.

⁴³ *Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 March 2010, 10-11.

⁴⁴ *Seventh Report*, 6.

⁴⁵ CIDA, *Development Results for 2009*, 19.

⁴⁶ *Seventh Report*, 18-19.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 7, 19.

express concern about the coordination and alignment of international donor aid with Afghan strategic priorities, noting that only 15 of 34 top donors provide complete data to the Afghan government, and that about 80% of aid during the first seven years of intervention bypassed the Afghan government, which would like to see 50% of total aid channelled through its budget over the next two years.⁴⁸ Of course, concerns about official corruption, about which more later, will need to be addressed as part of aid reform.

The SG's report sees some improvements in terms of revenue collection by the Afghan government, GDP growth, local procurement by international actors, and several other economic indicators. However, it observes that most development assistance is concentrated in southern and eastern parts of the country, while other areas remain "underserved". As well, "provincial development plans are not reflected in the central Government budget, and funds are not allocated to the provinces, owing to a lack of resources and the weakness of institutional delivery mechanisms."⁴⁹ Afghanistan remains one of the world's most highly centralized and aid-dependent states.

According to the Donor Financial Review released by Afghanistan's Ministry of Finance in March 2010, the country has received US\$36 billion in total loans and grants during 2001-2009, out of \$62 billion pledged. Over half of this (\$19 billion) went to the security sector. Health received 6% of total funding; education and culture 9%; agriculture and rural development 18%. \$29 billion of donor disbursements took place with little or no Afghan government input.⁵⁰

Providing Humanitarian Assistance to Vulnerable People

The most recent Canadian government quarterly report points to some achievements. Over 1.15 million children were vaccinated against polio in the last three monthly campaigns of 2009, reaching 96.8% of targeted children by the end of 2009, although nationally reported polio cases rose to 38 (22 in Kandahar) from 17 in 2007. The number of health care workers receiving training increased by 47 to 731. Canada funded 95,000 tonnes of food to the needy through the World Food Program. In de-mining activities, over 220,000 Kandaharis have received mine-risk education training. During the last quarter of 2009 there was a small incremental gain of 2.3 square kilometres of land cleared and released; the 2011 target is for a total of 500 square kilometres to be released and made available.

Some of the larger trends remain worrisome. Chief among them is lack of human security and access to humanitarian assistance in conflict zones. In the words of Sheilagh Henry, head of field coordination at the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): "If the increase in troop numbers means access to conflict areas diminishes further that will exacerbate vulnerability."⁵¹ Counting all ISAF forces and those under separate U.S. command, the total of foreign troops is expected to rise from 126,000 currently to 150,000 by August 2010. While some areas of Afghanistan are considerably safer than others, the potential

⁴⁸ *Report of the Secretary-General*, March 2010, 5-6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁰ Source: <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=88502> , Kabul, 22 March 2010.

⁵¹ "Afghanistan: Could foreign troop surge exacerbate vulnerability?", Kabul, 19 January 2010, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87782> .

for conflict is country-wide. The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) reported in January 2010 that what it calls armed opposition groups have a presence in 97% of the country.

NGO fatalities dropped to 19 in 2009 from 31 in 2008. But this could not be attributed to foreign troop protection and risks could increase this year. According to the ANSO report: “Neutrality and local acceptance, not the military and counter-insurgency, have become the dominant factors for security of NGOs in the vast areas of the country now dominated or controlled by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups.”⁵² Moreover, observing “the deteriorating security environment”, the SG’s report observes that: “In some areas, ongoing military operations have completely cut off access to populations.”

Large numbers of Afghans depend on humanitarian operations. Although the flow of returning refugees, 48,000 in 2009, was the lowest since 2002 (some 5 million have returned since 2001; 2.5 million remain in neighboring countries, mainly Pakistan), there are over 400,000 internally displaced persons. The World Food Programme (WFP) fed some nine million vulnerable Afghans in 2009. In early 2010, it was forced to temporarily suspend operations in a northwestern Afghan province after a convoy of trucks was attacked. There have been direct attacks on UN personnel, most notoriously in Kabul killing five in October 2009. Recently, on 26 April 2010, after a fresh wave of insurgent violence in Kandahar City, the UN ordered its Afghan staff to stay home and relocated international staff to Kabul.⁵³ Any curtailment in the activities of UN relief agencies negatively impacts the humanitarian situation.

Enhancing Border Security and Facilitating Afghan-Pakistani Dialogue

Afghanistan, which shares borders with the Central Asian republics, China, Iran and Pakistan, has been a major transit route for centuries. Border cooperation is essential to counter illegal movements of drugs and people. The most dangerous, disputed and porous borderland region is in the south and east with Pakistan’s turbulent Northwest frontier provinces, largely ungoverned from Islamabad and the sanctuary of the Taliban leadership (despite Pakistan army advances and U.S. drone attacks). It is from here that the flow of insurgents into and out of Afghanistan is the greatest. Many argue that Pakistan must be part of any effective counter-insurgency strategy. Yet relations between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan have been fractious at best since 2001.

The latest Canadian government quarterly report points to some forward movement on implementing a Canadian-supported March 2009 Afghanistan-Pakistan “Dubai Process Action Plan” covering counter-narcotics, law enforcement, movements of people and customs. To that end, Canada has facilitated meetings of an Afghanistan-Pakistan Joint Working Group. There was “nothing significant to report” in terms of Kandahar-Baluchistan border discussions, and construction of a Joint District Coordination Centre in Spin Boldak remained incomplete. The Canada Border Services Agency did help with the establishment and training curriculum of an Afghan National Customs Academy that opened in Kabul in January 2010, and from which the first 48 recruits graduated on March 15 (150-200 are to be trained over 12 months). In addition: “A senior Canadian civilian police officer continues to mentor the head of the Afghan Border

⁵² “Afghanistan: Warning over heightened risk to NGO staff in 2010”, Kabul, 20 January 2010,

⁵³ “Kandahar security situation worsens”, *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 April 2010.

Police, facilitate border planning among all players and assist with corruption investigations.”⁵⁴ At the end of March 2010, Canada also announced a G8 “Afghanistan Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative” focused on infrastructure, trade and economic development.⁵⁵

Canada’s 2011 objective is for Afghan institutions to “exercise stronger capacity”, in cooperation with Pakistan, in terms of border management and economic development. That said, it leaves in abeyance a resolution of the basic bilateral border disagreement. A U.S. analyst contends that:

With respect to the Afghan-Pakistan border, it is absolutely essential that the countries come to a final settlement concerning their border. The Durand Line, established by the British colonial administration, has never been fully accepted as the international border, particularly as Pashtun leaders see it as arbitrarily dividing the Pashtun people. Without a clear demarcation of the border and mutual recognition of its legitimacy, misunderstandings will inevitably arise about appropriate political jurisdictions, troop movements, governance, and so on. A treaty establishing Afghanistan’s borders once and for all, and with broad acceptance by various leaders and factions, is an essential undertaking that must be completed before foreign forces leave.⁵⁶

Advancing Afghanistan’s Capacity for Democratic Governance

The ambitious aims of democratic state-building set out in the 2001 Bonn Agreement and reaffirmed in subsequent international conferences remain very far from realization. Rather than democratic consolidation, there is evidence of backsliding in the wake of the 2009 elections marred by massive fraud, which casts doubt on the integrity of the parliamentary elections postponed to 18 September 2010. The SG’s report states that this “still does not allow sufficient time for fundamental reforms that could substantially address flaws in the electoral process.” The Canadian government quarterly report offers continued support for “the Government of Afghanistan’s efforts to reform and transform the institutions that are needed for credible, transparent and inclusive elections”. However, the Karzai government is clearly part of the problem, as is the UN itself, according to independent analyses. Some background is required to underline the seriousness of the situation.

Circumstances were far from optimal leading up to Afghanistan’s second electoral cycle. The 2004 presidential and 2005 legislative elections, while reasonably successful, left many problems unaddressed. Indeed, in late 2008, Canadian Grant Kippen, who would become chair of Afghanistan’s Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) in 2009, observed that: “The optimism surrounding the initial elections appears to have been replaced by disappointment, scepticism and frustration among the Afghan population. The deteriorating security situation,

⁵⁴ *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan: Seventh Report*, 8, 22-23.

⁵⁵ Government of Canada, “G8 Foreign Ministers announce Afghanistan-Pakistan Border Region Prosperity Initiative”, 29 March 2010.

⁵⁶ Idean Salehyan, *Transnational insurgencies and the escalation of regional conflict: lessons for Iraq and Afghanistan*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2010, 48, <http://www.policypointers.org/Page/View/10874> .

rising ethnic tensions, and the increasing influence of local warlords and commanders now threaten to undermine the upcoming electoral process.”⁵⁷

Matters were not helped in February 2009 when President Karzai, whose term was to expire on May 21, abruptly called for early April elections that would have been logistically and operationally impossible. While in the end his appointed Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) confirmed the August 20 date, with the Supreme Court ruling he should continue in office until then, the disputed tactics increased domestic and international suspicions of his motives. “[I]t is a very dangerous game that is being played here”, observed Grant Kippen about the confrontational manoeuvring for advantage over the date between the Karzai government and its political opposition in the Afghan parliament.⁵⁸

Although these were the first Afghan-led elections, they were supported by at least \$300 million in international funding, including \$35 million from Canada, managed by the UNDP’s Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (ELECT) mechanism. A thorough pre-election review by the International Crisis Group (ICG) stated at the outset: “The expense of the current exercise is unsustainable and highlights the failure after the 2005 polls to build Afghan institutions and create a more realistic electoral framework.” It went on to identify a host of deficiencies, *inter alia*: a biased IEC, unreformed electoral and political party laws, poor security and inadequate UN preparations, a much-abused voter registry update process.⁵⁹

With respect to the latter, Kippen observed: “The major issues were multiple and under-age registrations. A lot of the men registered their ‘women’ with no proof being offered or in many cases demanded by the VR [voter registration] officials. The overall registration number is probably inflated by at least one million people, and that doesn't include the cards that are being printed up in Pakistan as we speak. You will probably see a lot of Pakistani Pashtuns crossing the border in the week or so before August 20th, so that they are in-country and able to vote on election day.”⁶⁰ In addition, the provincial council elections, as remains the case for the scheduled 2010 parliamentary elections, were stuck with a very obscure (incomprehensible to the average Afghan), dysfunctional, and party-inhibiting, Single Non-Transferrable Vote (SNTV) electoral system.⁶¹

Following a rushed vetting process by the ECC, 41 presidential and 3,178 provincial council candidates were qualified for the official campaign period that began on June 16. Most of the latter ran as independents given the voting system. In any event, these councils have very little power in comparison to the presidentially-appointed provincial governors. The main focus of attention was the presidential race, with only one candidate, former foreign minister Abdullah

⁵⁷ Grant Kippen, *Elections in 2009 and 2010: Technical and Contextual Challenges to Building Democracy in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, November 2008, 6, <http://www.areu.org.af/>.

⁵⁸ Kippen, e-mail to the author from Kabul, 26 February 2009.

⁵⁹ ICG, *Afghanistan’s Election Challenges*, Asia Report No. 171, 24 June 2009, ii and passim.

⁶⁰ E-mail to author from Kabul, 25 March 2009.

⁶¹ For a detailed examination and analysis see Andrew Reynolds, “Electoral Systems Today: The Curious Case of Afghanistan,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April 2006. Although this is supposed to produce a form of proportional representation, as an indication of the perverse results in practice Reynolds observes that of the about 50% of eligible Afghans who voted in the 2005 parliamentary elections (turnout was below 35% in Kabul and below 30% in Kandahar province), fully 68% voted for candidates who lost.

Abdullah, emerging as a serious challenger to the incumbent Karzai. If the campaign was hardly fair, much worse was to come. Polling day itself, August 20, was the country's most violent day of 2009 to that point, with 300 incidents reported and 31 people killed.

In a devastating analysis of the results, the ICG documents the staggering vote rigging on Karzai's behalf abetted by the IEC.⁶² Even using its preliminary fraud-inflated vote tally released on September 16, showing Karzai the victor, turnout was dismal – only 38.7% of registered voters, far below the levels recorded in 2004-2005. The ECC was flooded with thousands of complaints. Its final audit published on October 18 threw out fully 1.2 million of 5.2 million valid votes cast, giving Karzai 48.3% to Abdullah's 31.5%, thereby necessitating a run-off. Although the Karzai camp denied responsibility for fraud and alleged foreign interference in the ECC, the IEC conceded to a second round to be held on November 7. It never happened since Abdullah withdrew citing the impossibility of a fair vote. Hence on November 2, Karzai was declared “re-elected”.

What is surprising is how muted Afghanistan's international partners were in their criticisms. In fact a senior UN official, Deputy UN Envoy to Afghanistan Peter Galbraith, was even fired for being too openly critical. (In an online debate held by The Economist magazine in May 2010, he maintains the war in Afghanistan is no longer “winnable” due to the lack of a credible Afghan partner and any prospect that one will emerge.⁶³) The ICG report cited above is almost as excoriating about the failings of the UN mission and UNDP ELECT as it is of the Afghan role in widespread fraud, going so far as to call for the resignation of then UN Special Representative Kai Eide. It states bluntly: “The international community demonstrated a complete lack of resolve in pressing for a credible electoral process.”⁶⁴ In this and subsequent reports the ICG makes clear that nothing less than a fundamental reform of the Afghan political system is required.

Even before the electoral debacle, writing about “The Long Democratic Transition”, ECC Chair Grant Kippen put the situation bluntly:

If the international community is committed to the democratization process in Afghanistan, then it needs to not only recalibrate its expectations about how long this process will take but also take a hard look at the breadth and depth of the programmatic activities that are needed to indicate a democratization process and culture among the diverse stake-holder communities in the country.⁶⁵

Among Kippen's recommendations for moving forward in practice: fewer guns (i.e., finally getting somewhere on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of illegal or extra-legal armed groups); civic education (a big challenge given over 70% illiteracy, and neglected since the 2004/2005 elections); professionalization and cleaning up (starting with the worst corruption abuses) of the civil service, executive, legislative branches and the courts, the

⁶² International Crisis Group, *Afghanistan: Elections and the Crisis of Governance*, Asia Briefing No. 96, 25 November 2009.

⁶³ The debate from 17-22 May can be accessed at: <http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/516&fsrc=nwl> . Readers were invited to vote. The final tally was 69% against the proposition that “the war in Afghanistan is winnable”.

⁶⁴ *Afghanistan: Elections and the Crisis of Governance*, 9.

⁶⁵ Grant Kippen, “The Long Democratic Transition”, Chapter 4 in Their, ed., *The Future of Afghanistan*, 2009, 36.

security forces, public institutions and political parties. He argues compellingly for “a community-focused public-awareness campaign” and for serious international and Afghan coordination, with Afghans ultimately taking over responsibilities for their own democratic affairs.⁶⁶

Increased presidential control is no way to achieve a more “Afghanized” democratic political process. In February 2010, President Karzai introduced amendments to the electoral law that would see the respected ECC fully subject to his power of appointment with no international or independent commissioners.⁶⁷ Canada protested publicly; the U.S. gave the impression of tacit acceptance.⁶⁸ In late March Afghanistan’s lower house, the Wolesi Jirga, which had earlier voted against many of the president’s cabinet choices, rejected the amendments. Karzai upped his attacks, now acknowledging that massive electoral fraud had occurred, but blaming it on foreigners, a bizarre accusation given that they had accepted his victory notwithstanding the documented evidence that his supporters were mainly responsible.

Beyond the composition of the ECC, the subject of some negotiation⁶⁹, the larger question is the standing of the Karzai government as a credible and legitimate partner, both as viewed by Afghans and by donor-country publics. Interviewed after the 2009 elections, the U.S. commander of ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal, accepted that no counter-insurgency strategy could work if Afghans perceived their government as illegitimate – “we are going to have to avoid looking like we are part of the illegitimacy. That is the key thing”.⁷⁰ The Pentagon report to Congress released on 28 April 2010 found that only 24% of Afghans surveyed in 121 districts “considered strategically important because of large populations, economic resources, commercial importance or key infrastructure ... sympathize with or support Karzai’s government”.⁷¹

The latest Canadian government quarterly report refers to continued support for national projects aimed at civic education and improving women’s political participation. There is also mention of technical assistance to some important Afghan ministries and institutions. Some of this would be through the Canadian Governance Support Office, a civilian-led initiative that replaced the Canadian Forces Strategic Advisory Team Afghanistan (SAT-A) in 2008. The government has yet to indicate a contribution amount for the September 2010 parliamentary elections, which will be another important democratic test.

⁶⁶ Ibid., passim.

⁶⁷ The 2009 ECC members comprised three UN-appointed experts, one chosen by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and one by the country’s supreme court.

⁶⁸ Canadian foreign minister Lawrence Cannon issued a statement on February 23 that: “A strong and independent ECC is vital for the future of a democratic Afghanistan, and any efforts to weaken this body are disturbing”. In contrast, a US State Department spokesperson stated on February 24: “We are supportive of the Afghan government stepping up and assuming its responsibilities for its own (election) process.”

⁶⁹ Grant Kippen warns, however, that “redrawing the election laws shouldn’t be done behind closed doors.” (Interview, 19 April 2010) The SG’s report concurs: “it is important that decisions regarding the electoral process be made within the framework of the broadest possible consultations across the political spectrum, including with the opposition and civil society, in order to ensure the independence and credibility of the electoral process.” (10 March 2010, 3)

⁷⁰ Dexter Filkins, “His Long War”, *The New York Times Magazine*, 18 October 2009, 47.

⁷¹ Landay, “Pentagon issues downbeat assessment on Afghanistan”, *The Miami Herald*, 28 April 2010.

Confidence in Afghan governance institutions has been greatly undermined by persistent and pervasive corruption at all levels of the state. Indeed, the SG's report cites the finding of a January 2010 report by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime that corruption ranks even higher than security among Afghans' concerns. International donors have expressed satisfaction that President Karzai pledged to take action against corruption in his 19 November 2009 inaugural address. Additional mechanisms were agreed to at the January 2010 London conference. However, anti-corruption promises are nothing new. Various anti-corruption measures, strategies and benchmarks have been introduced in the past. The question remains one of political commitment to prosecute the worst abuses. The SG's report, while noting the creation of anti-corruption units and tribunals, observes that: "The formal justice system remains beyond the reach of many Afghans."⁷²

The Canadian quarterly report mentions support for some anti-corruption efforts aimed at building institutional capacity to address this scourge – in the Attorney General's Office, the ministries of education and the interior, the Afghan National Police – as well as to put in place sound public financial management systems. Still, the Karzai government's willingness to clean house is doubtful. Dr. Ramazan Bashardost, who resigned from the government over this issue in 2004, and who ran third in the flawed presidential elections last year, has not had much success pushing for special prosecutors and courts to bring to justice corrupt officials and alleged war criminals holding high positions in the Afghan government.⁷³

Facilitating Afghan-Led Efforts toward Political Reconciliation

Perhaps no area of policy towards Afghanistan is as contested and vexed as that concerning the establishment of a viable peace process. It is widely conceded that the conflict can only be resolved through an eventual political solution. The majority of Afghans and the international community certainly do not want to see endless insurgency or worse, a reversion to civil war. The Taliban, who were excluded from the terms of the Bonn agreement, are not a monolithic force and are mainly locally-based.⁷⁴ No negotiation may be possible with hardline elements affiliated to al Qaeda. The hope is that some parts of the insurgency, which includes other armed groups, may be amenable to political overtures from the Afghan government, already taking place for several years to little avail. These would have to be subject to firm preconditions: disarmament and a renunciation of violence, acceptance of the Afghan constitution, respect for human rights and the rule of law. In other words, a tall order, even assuming the existence of significant incentives for some insurgents to lay down arms in favour of negotiations.

With the Afghan government itself accused of using warlord alliances, president Karzai's overtures to Taliban commanders and notorious Islamist warlords such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of Hebz-e Islami have stirred up considerable controversy and opposition.⁷⁵ The SG's report takes note of the stated objectives of a program for peaceful dialogue leading to political reconciliation put forward by the president at the January 2010 London conference: "to

⁷² *Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 March 2010, 3.

⁷³ David Pugliese, "A lonely war against corruption", *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 April 2010.

⁷⁴ Steve Coll cites U.S. military estimates that about "three-quarters of Taliban guerrillas fight within five miles of their home." (Coll, "Letter from Afghanistan: War by Other Means", *The New Yorker*, 24 May 2010, 44.)

⁷⁵ See, for example, Nick Grono and Candace Rondeaux, "Dealing with brutal Afghan warlords is a mistake", *Boston Globe*, 17 January 2010.

encourage rank-and-file Taliban members and their mid-level commanders to put an end to violence and join an constructive process of reintegration ...; and to prepare the ground for a peace dialogue at the strategic level with the leadership of the Taliban-led insurgency.” It immediately goes on to add: “The success of any reconciliation process will depend on broad national support. Within Afghanistan, there is the concern that such a process could lead to an erosion of fundamental human rights that have been established in recent years.”⁷⁶

The current Karzai initiative envisages a national peace council to oversee the reintegration of armed fighters and a related peace and reintegration trust fund to provide employment opportunities and financial incentives to those who disarm and renounce violence. In London, donors pledged some US\$140 million towards such a fund, with total costs for a full reintegration program estimated at \$500 million. A proposed “Grand Peace Jirga” bringing together tribal and community leaders, including in the SG’s words, “those who have felt marginalised by the Bonn process” (possibly amenable Taliban sympathizers, though the Taliban itself vowed to disrupt the event⁷⁷), was postponed several times to 2-4 June 2010. The Afghan government has invited support from other countries in the region and has approached Saudi Arabia about opening a channel of dialogue with the Taliban leadership.

Canada has offered “timely support” to Afghan government communications, dialogue and reconciliation activities, up to \$14 million through 2011. The latest quarterly report released in March 2010 refers specifically to “the Afghanistan Government Media and Information Centre in Kabul, which distributes information, links local communities with the national government and could enable a dialogue on reconciliation issues affecting all Afghan citizens.”⁷⁸

There is little sign, however, of reconciliation objectives being met, and the issue remains fraught with mistrust of the Karzai government’s intentions.⁷⁹ The Canada-Afghanistan Solidarity Committee (CASC), in a noteworthy advocacy report on future policy towards Afghanistan released in March 2010, worries that: “President Karzai has used the phrase ‘peace at any cost’ to describe his new policy.” The prospect of a possible power-sharing accommodation with the Pashtun-based Taliban arouses suspicions of unacceptable concessions or compromises being offered that might bypass the Afghan parliament and undermine the place of Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara ethnic minorities. While Afghans are undoubtedly weary of war, the perception of such a trend could be dangerous and destabilizing.

In these circumstances peace-building is a highly complex and delicate matter. The CASC report proposes that firm parameters be adhered to –

Any negotiations process that unfolds, no matter how unlikely, must be open and transparent, accountable to ISAF member states, inclusive of all Afghan national

⁷⁶ *Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 March 2010, 4.

⁷⁷ The London Conference Communiqué refers to an environment where “Afghan men and women of all backgrounds and perspectives” can contribute, offering “an honourable place in society to those willing to renounce violence, participate in the free and open society and respect the principles that are enshrined in the Afghan constitution, cut ties with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, and pursue their political goals peacefully.”

⁷⁸ *Canada’s Engagement in Afghanistan*, Seventh Report, March 2010, 9.

⁷⁹ Observing the complex manoeuvrings among the various parties, international, regional and domestic, Steve Coll sees no coherent strategy in place for negotiating with the Taliban (“Letter from Afghanistan”, *The New Yorker*, 24 May 2010, 42-53). He adds: “Not even the most ardent advocates for talking to the Taliban are certain that negotiations can succeed.” (53)

minorities, and subject to the full engagement and consent of the Afghan Parliament. The process must also be subject to the scrutiny of Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission, the participation of a cross section of civil society groups (particularly the women's rights movement), the review of the Afghan Supreme Court, and existing commitments regarding transitional justice.⁸⁰

Factors Influencing the Canadian Policy-Making Environment

The major factors influencing Canadian policy towards Afghanistan are domestic and external. In recent years there is a sense that Canadian public opinion has become increasingly less committed to Afghanistan's future. A 23 February 2009 survey in *Macleans*' magazine found that whereas Canadian respondents gave President Obama an 82% approval rating, when asked "Should Canada stay in Afghanistan if Obama asks?", only 20% said yes.⁸¹ An Ekos poll released on 8 April 2010 found that just 36% of respondents supported "Canadian military participation in Afghanistan", dropping to 28% who supported "Canada extending its mission in Afghanistan".⁸²

Other surveys report similar findings, including a significant regional dimension, with support for the military operation highest in Atlantic Canada and Alberta and lowest in Quebec. An Angus Reid poll released on April 21 found 75% opposition in Quebec. That survey also indicated growing overall scepticism about Canada's military intervention in Afghanistan. By a margin of 42% to 36%, more Canadians thought that it was a "mistake" to have sent soldiers than that it was a correct decision. Strikingly, 13% expected an ultimate Taliban victory versus only 8% believing NATO and U.S. forces would clearly prevail. Given that, a majority of Canadians foresaw the Taliban having a role in a future Afghan government, whether through a negotiated settlement or military means. Notwithstanding a tripling of U.S. forces since 2008, just 36% of Canadians expressed confidence that the Obama administration's approach would be successful.⁸³

In light of the state of Canadian public opinion, it is hardly surprising that no federal political party favours extending the current military combat mission beyond 2011. There is also a sense that Canada has done its share, paid a high price in terms of blood and treasure, and that the Canadian Forces need a period of respite to recover from the punishing pace of operations in Kandahar. A significant number of Canadians would like to see the forces return to a larger role in "blue helmet" UN peace operations.

The external factors weighing on Canadian decision-making are more difficult to predict. A proximate one will be the relative success, or lack thereof, of the major counter-insurgency campaigns undertaken in Helmand province and planned for Kandahar province. The ISAF strategy behind these is to hold territory so that security, basic services and better governance can be delivered to the local population. Frank Harvey describes this as "beginning with what [ISAF

⁸⁰ Canada-Afghanistan Solidarity Committee, *Keeping Our Promises, Canada in Afghanistan Post-2011: The Way Forward*, Vancouver, 9 March 2010, 21, [CASC - Canada in Afghanistan Post 2011.pdf](#).

⁸¹ Charlie Gillis, "Canada's Love Affair with Obama", *Macleans*, 23 February 2009, 16-17.

⁸² http://www.ekospolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/full_report_april_8.pdf.

⁸³ Source: http://www.visioncritical.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/2010.04.21_AfghanCAN.pdf.

commander] General McChrystal describes as ‘government in a box’, essentially a government-in-waiting ready to set up when insurgents are cleared.’⁸⁴ This means that the military phase of operations must immediately be followed by large-scale civilian operations. As Harvey puts it,

... this piece of the puzzle will require a massive influx of Afghans committed to rebuilding governance structures and working with aid organizations to co-ordinate development projects. The goal here is to improve the quality of life for Afghans by providing them with a sense of responsibility for their own future. Efforts are being reinforced with what appears to be a stronger commitment to post-conflict governance and reconstruction. But these promises have been made before, and failures to accomplish these same goals in the past have produced a deeply-rooted cynicism among Afghans that will be very difficult to overcome, unless the successes are obvious.⁸⁵

With rising levels of insurgent violence in Kandahar, many Kandaharis are said to oppose the ISAF offensive.⁸⁶ Between now and July 2011, there will be a number of contingencies to be taken into account. Will Canadian objectives for the training of Afghan security forces be met? Could a worsening of security conditions complicate the scheduled withdrawal of Canadian troops? Will the regional situation become more or less stable? What will other NATO/ISAF partners do? For example, in February 2010 the Dutch government fell over the issue of maintaining its military presence in Afghanistan, with the result that almost 2,000 Dutch troops will leave Uruzgan province by the end of 2010. Following the May 2010 UK elections, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government has not set a deadline for withdrawing Britain’s 9,500 troops. However, it did announce that 8,000 of these will soon come under U.S. command. Prior to visiting Kabul in late May, defence secretary Liam Fox also expressed a desire to speed up the process of transferring security responsibilities to the Afghans so that British forces can be pulled out as soon as possible.⁸⁷

The ability of the Karzai government to demonstrate progress on longstanding international objectives in areas of governance, delivery of services, rule of law and anti-corruption will be crucial to sustain public support for continued large inflows of non-military support. This should become more apparent following the September 2010 parliamentary elections and as the Afghanistan Compact’s end-2010 deadlines are assessed.

Finally, Canada will likely face significant foreign policy pressures to maintain a substantial role in Afghanistan, notably from NATO and the U.S. administration. Canada has used its contributions to the international mission in Afghanistan to gain diplomatic credit with allies. Assuming the combat mission ends, Canada will not want to be seen as walking away from other engagements in Afghanistan, especially if Canada becomes a member of the UN Security Council in 2011. Good relations with the U.S. are a constant Canadian foreign policy

⁸⁴ Frank Harvey, “A crucial test for the West’s Afghan strategy,” *National Post*, 11 March 2010.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Afghanistan: The troubling dynamics of insurgency,” *The Economist*, 8 May 2010.

⁸⁷ In an interview with the Times of London, Fox stated provocatively: “We have to reset expectations and timelines. National security is the focus now. We are not a global policeman. We are not in Afghanistan for the sake of the education policy in a broken 13th-century country. We are there so the people of Britain and our global interests are not threatened.” (“Liam Fox Flies to Afghanistan seeking to speed up troop withdrawal”, *The Times*, 22 May 2010.)

priority. Given the increased importance of Afghanistan to the Obama administration, there may be aspects of security sector assistance and reform – e.g., training and mentoring activities – that the U.S. will encourage Canada to continue.

Prospects and Options for Future Canadian Policy

The biggest worry for Afghans is that the international community will leave.

- Grant Kippen, former Chair of the Afghanistan Electoral Complaints Commission⁸⁸

Afghanistan will need substantial amounts of international assistance for a long time if it is to achieve even minimally the goals set out for it in international agreements to which Canada is a party – i.e., to become a state that can provide for its own security, for the other basic needs of its population, and that adheres to fundamental rule of law, human rights and democratic norms. This is sometimes put in terms of generational investments. At the same time, there is no appetite within the international community for protracted military conflict. While the U.S. is still increasing troop levels, its strategy anticipates a gradual withdrawal beginning in summer 2011.

The UN Secretary-General's Report of March 2010 includes an important observation about striking a balance between military and civilian efforts in ways that support the transition to an Afghanistan capable of shouldering its sovereign responsibilities.

While I have welcomed the additional international military forces, I must at the same time caution against a militarization of the overall effort in Afghanistan. As many civilian tasks as possible must be handed over to Afghan civilian institutions. The temptation to achieve short-term results from unsustainable projects aimed at meeting political deadlines in troop-contributing countries must be resisted. And the tendency to allocate the distribution of aid according to where donors' troops are most heavily focused — while understandable and, to a certain extent, justifiable — must begin to give way to a more coherent, nationally based assistance strategy that can provide the real economic growth needed to underpin a transition strategy.⁸⁹

The costs of maintaining large numbers of foreign soldiers in Afghanistan becomes prohibitive in the long term, and arguably stokes the insurgency the more it appears as an occupation force. As well, dependence on large numbers of expensive foreign consultants, already a source of local resentment, is unsustainable if it fails to build Afghan civilian capacity.

For Canada, the ending of the high-profile military component of the mission could be an opportunity to refocus efforts on those elements of capacity building where Canadian experience and expertise most matches Afghan need.

⁸⁸ Interview, 19 April 2010.

⁸⁹ *Report of the Secretary-General*, 10 March 2010, 14.

The Role of the Canadian Forces?

Although the House of Commons motion of March 2008 is not so restrictive, one option is to have no Canadian Forces personnel left in Afghanistan after 2011. This may seem to be the most appealing one given public opinion trends. At this point it also appears to be the government's preferred option. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been quoted as saying in early 2010 that "we will not be undertaking any activities that require any kind of military presence, other than the odd security guard guarding the embassy."⁹⁰

Subsequently, during a visit to Kabul, defence minister Peter Mackay announced the sending of up to 90 additional military and civilian trainers to assist in the development of Afghan security forces. While these would also be withdrawn in July 2011, the minister left a note of ambiguity when he stated: "There are other ways we will contribute. Training is obviously one of those options, and I suspect there will be further discussion about what the mission will look like post-2011."⁹¹

The option that has been firmly ruled out is any extension of the existing combat mission in Kandahar. The argument will be over whether a very reduced and limited Canadian military presence should remain, and if so, what that should consist of. The training issue has already been raised. As well, it appears that the RCMP may continue to provide police mentors (there are currently 48) to assist the Afghan National Police. They will require security arrangements yet to be determined. How will Canadian knowledge gained over nine years of operations be transferred? Should all Canadian Forces personnel be withdrawn from ISAF headquarters in Kabul and ISAF Regional Command Headquarters in Kandahar? Another important question will be what should happen to the military component of Canada's Kandahar provincial reconstruction team, one of 27 throughout the country.

A minimalist option might be to leave just a few Canadian Forces personnel in advisory and planning capacities. In contrast, the Canada-Afghanistan Solidarity Committee advocates a much more considerable presence covering the following three elements:

Leadership and guidance to our NATO allies in Kandahar and other southern provinces; Accelerated training of the Afghan National Security Forces by building on the existing Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT) model; Accelerated contributions to the national capacity of the Afghan police services, justice services and prisons; Enhance the "human terrain" capacity of Canada's special forces, i.e. Joint Task Force – Two (JTF-2).

Canada should also consult with ANSF [Afghan National Security Forces] and NATO allies on the potential for continued contributions from elements of Canada's Air Wing, especially UAV [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles] reconnaissance and surveillance capability, and helicopter airlift services.

Canada should maintain its leadership role with the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, carrying on its polio eradication program and completing its Education and Dahla Dam signature projects. The PRT should explore the possibility of initiating further hydroelectric and irrigation projects in Kandahar province. The PRT should also assist in

⁹⁰ Cited in John Ivison, "Canada's post-Afghan role crucial", *National Post*, 31 March 2010.

⁹¹ Ethan Baron, "Canada may stay to train Afghan army, police", *Ottawa Citizen*, 9 April 2010.

the development and expansion of Kandahar University, with an emphasis on women's education and Canadian-Afghan academic partnerships, and should provide greater support for collaborative initiatives such as the Afghan-Canadian Community Centre in Kandahar City.⁹²

Proposals such as these may be questionable but merit parliamentary and public debate. An issue which may arise is the provision of security for ongoing Canadian civilian diplomatic, development and humanitarian assistance efforts.⁹³ However, Grant Kippen does not see this as requiring the presence of Canadian soldiers, pointing out that “most Canadians who are over there [in civilian roles] don't fall under any Canadian military umbrella.”⁹⁴ Indeed, some have argued that the blurring of the military and civilian missions as part of a “whole-of-government” approach has exposed the latter to greater risk. Canada, along with other donors, multilateral agencies and NGOs, already makes extensive use of private security contractors, of which there are an estimated 25,000 and counting in the country. Accountability and corruption concerns come with that, including allegations of bribing insurgents for protection.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, an indefinite presence of foreign military forces is no solution.

The Role of Canadian Development and Democracy Assistance?

More than 80% of Canadian expenditures on the Afghan mission have gone towards military operations. In theory, therefore, resources will be freed up, at least some of which could be put towards increased development and governance aid. Afghanistan is still one of the poorest countries in the world, so it would not be unreasonable for it to continue as one of CIDA's 20 countries of focus. At the same time, for some years Afghanistan has received far more Canadian aid than any other developing country. With the prospect of the aid budget being frozen in the next two fiscal years, there may be pressure to reduce the proportion going to Afghanistan.

In terms of quantity, the options are threefold: a decrease in aid amounts; a maintenance of aid efforts at roughly the same level as in 2010-2011; a scaling up of aid efforts, including beyond Kandahar province. Especially if aid is kept at the same level or increased, there will be renewed questions about its demonstrable effectiveness and concentration in appropriate sectors.

The CASC, which calls for an ambitious Canadian program, argues that – “If CIDA is to continue as Canada's lead agency for humanitarian aid and basic services in Afghanistan, the agency must come to terms with its own shortcomings in Afghanistan – its cumbersome bureaucracy and its lack of coherent, long-term direction. Also, CIDA should step up its efforts to raise Canadian awareness of its work in Afghanistan, and CIDA should be required to make a clearer accounting of its activities, expenditures, and achievements. Similarly, CIDA-funded NGOs should be required to place a higher priority on informing Canadians of the work they are undertaking in Afghanistan.”⁹⁶

⁹² CASC, *Keeping Our Promises*, March 2010, 18.

⁹³ Matthew Fisher, “Canadians seek U.S. protection after 2011”, *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 May 2010.

⁹⁴ Interview, 19 April 2010.

⁹⁵ See David Pugliese, “When warfare goes private”, *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 April 2010.

⁹⁶ CASC, *Keeping Our Promises*, 5.

Education and professional development have been suggested as areas for Canadian concentration. Grant Kippen argues that more could be done, mobilizing the Afghan diaspora in Canada and working with Afghans, to impart skills and knowledge that will remain in the country – through enhanced educational exchanges and partnership programs, public administration training, and the like.⁹⁷ The most specific proposals that have been made in this regard are by the CASC which recommends that:

Canada should proceed with an ambitious, closely-monitored, root-and-branch investment in Afghanistan's education ministry, with the objective of universal access to primary school education, widely-accessible vocational, trades and business administration programs, and flourishing universities. (...)

Canada should further enhance Afghanistan's intellectual, academic, trades and technical capacities by fostering partnerships between Canadian and Afghan universities and institutions, and by investing in scholarships, academic exchanges, civil-service exchanges, and a range of vocational and skills-transfer programs.⁹⁸

A more controversial area which evokes considerable scepticism is that of democratic development. The debacle of the 2009 elections and the Karzai government's erratic, sometimes autocratic, moves since have eroded confidence in the Afghan political process. Moreover, Afghanistan is an "Islamic republic", and it is certainly true that democratization efforts must be sensitive to the socio-cultural sensitivities of the Afghan people if they are to be accepted.⁹⁹

At the same time, Afghanistan has committed itself to certain basic human rights, rule of law, and democratic principles. Many Afghans share democratic aspirations. However wanting the current government and state institutions, it can be argued that it would be a mistake for international partners not to hold firm in maintaining constitutional government while pushing for political and governance reforms, and providing support to indigenous pro-democratic Afghan initiatives.

The CASC is the most overt in promoting democracy assistance as a central thrust of future Canadian policy:

Canada's new mission in Afghanistan should be country-wide, long-term and well-resourced, guided by a single, overriding policy: The entrenchment, growth and development of democratic culture in Afghanistan. (...)

Canada should directly fund broad-based Afghan institutions with Afghan mandates to promote the study of democracy and the dissemination of democratic ideas, to advance national unity and the administration of justice, to elevate the legal and social status of women, and to restore Afghanistan's central place in the intellectual, cultural and economic life of Central Asia.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Interview, 19 April 2010.

⁹⁸ *Keeping Our Promises*, 3-4.

⁹⁹ For a probing survey of policy challenges see Anna Larson, "Towards an Afghan Democracy? Exploring Perceptions of Democratization in Afghanistan", Discussion Paper, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, September 2009, <http://www.areu.org.af/>.

¹⁰⁰ *Keeping Our Promises*, 3-4.

Can the electoral process be salvaged in Afghanistan? In the short term, donors will have to ensure that the system is not further weakened through an undermining of the independence of the Electoral Complaints Commission. But this does not respond to the long-term need to build up Afghan capacity between elections. As indicated earlier, there was a missed opportunity to do so after the 2004-2005 electoral cycle. Reports by the respected International Crisis Group have identified a number of failings by the international community associated with the 2009 elections. It would be facile and wrong to simply blame Afghans or claim that they are not interested in democratic self-government.

The CASC is highly critical of the Karzai government in many respects. However, it believes that democratic institution-building, including elections-related support, is still possible, and that Canada has much to contribute –

Canada's role in assisting Afghanistan with its elections processes should be elevated to include an ambitious, long-term program of education and training aimed at all participants in the elections process - prospective candidates, their campaign teams, government officials at the national, provincial and district level, and all relevant Afghan National Security Forces components. Voter education should be dramatically enhanced. Canada should actively recruit among Canadians with experience in running and monitoring elections to train and mentor their Afghan counterparts.¹⁰¹

This may be an excessively optimistic view but it merits debate.

The Role of Canadian Diplomacy?

Canada has greatly increased its diplomatic presence in Afghanistan since an embassy opened in Kabul in 2003. The move of Canadian Forces to Kandahar in 2005-2006 was also accompanied by diplomatic staff, notably the political director of the Kandahar PRT – the first, of whom, Glyn Berry, was tragically killed in January 2006 – and creation of the post of Senior Civilian Coordinator, now called the Representative of Canada in Kandahar (RoCK). There are currently about 120 civilian officials working in Kabul and Kandahar, making this Canada's largest and most expensive foreign mission. The Afghanistan task forces in DFAIT, CIDA, and the PCO number about 250 personnel counting both Ottawa-based staff and those in the field.

Issues have arisen with respect to security, turnover, and Afghan language skills. The current RoCK, Ben Rowswell, calls the ability of Canadian civilians to go “outside the wire” something that is “absolutely essential to mission success”.¹⁰² Security arrangements once Canadians soldiers leave will be an important consideration. While Canadian diplomats are learning how to operate in conflict zones, there are concerns that civilian deployments are subject to frequent turnover. William Crosbie is Canada's fifth ambassador to post-Taliban Afghanistan. Only a handful of Canadian civil servants working on and in Afghanistan have

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁰² Cited by Matthew Fisher in “Canadian civilians helping Afghans re-connect with government”, *Montreal Gazette*, 16 March 2010.

knowledge of Afghan languages. It has been argued that there should be more recruitment from Canada's 48,000-strong Afghan diaspora.¹⁰³

If Canada is to maintain or increase its diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan, these are areas to be addressed.

Canadian diplomatic initiatives are possible at several levels. Canada can continue to push for more international coordination of aid and reconstruction efforts. Canada can work with others to put pressure on the Afghan government to live up to its international commitments. This is particularly important in regard to issues of justice and human rights, electoral reform, and anti-corruption.

While most agree that the Afghanistan conflict cannot be resolved militarily, the matter of negotiations with militants remains extremely delicate. As explored earlier, Canada can offer support to political reconciliation and peacebuilding processes, with the proviso that these are tied to disarmament and the renunciation of violence, the acceptance of constitutional principles and international obligations, and that any overtures to armed opposition groups be conducted in a fully transparent and democratically-accountable manner. The "Peace Jirga" that president Karzai has called will be an early test.

Afghanistan's neighbours and regional powers, notably Pakistan and India, will have to be involved in constructive dialogue on regional security and development cooperation. Canada can use its diplomatic assets to encourage this.

Canada will still be a major donor to Afghanistan after its military engagement ends. However, it cannot assume that it will have a strong voice at the table. Vigorous diplomacy will be required if Canada is to continue to exert influence through bilateral and multilateral channels.

Conclusion

Afghanistan represents Canada's largest military commitment since the Korean war, at a cost of 146 lives lost (as of May 24), and the largest investment that Canada has ever made in a developing country. Apart from the Canada-U.S. relationship, during the past nine years no foreign policy priority has been more dominant than Canada's engagement in Afghanistan. Moreover, Canada's role in Afghanistan has become an increasingly significant issue in Canada-U.S. relations.

Within a year, Canada's Afghan mission will undergo a fundamental reorientation. Canada's combat role will cease. There may be an argument for a residual presence of Canadian Forces personnel in other roles. But the Canadian mission will become essentially a civilian one. Even if there is a scaling up of non-military assistance, Canada's expenditures on Afghanistan should fall dramatically.

Undoubtedly there is planning going on within the relevant government departments and agencies with respect to the transition from a military to a civilian mission and the nature of Canada's involvement in Afghanistan beyond 2011. Preparations have to be made that will affect the course of future Canadian policy on Afghanistan. However, there has been little public

¹⁰³ Jeff Davies, "Canadian diplomats largely speechless in Afghanistan", *Embassy*, 11 November 2009.

deliberation on Canadian policy options. While the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence began some Afghanistan-related hearings on 19 April 2010¹⁰⁴, with the exception of the question of parliamentary access to uncensored document pertaining to the treatment of Afghan detainees, the last parliamentary report with recommendations to the government was an 11-page one on helping to enhance Afghan security forces presented to the House of Commons by its Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan in June 2009.

The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan that reported in January 2008 was critical of the paucity of political debate and public engagement that surrounded Canada's 2005 shift to a robust military mission in Kandahar province. It would be ironic if that were to be repeated in the lead up to the ending of that mission. In the panel's words: "Fully informed public involvement has the best chance of producing well-founded, sustainable policy."¹⁰⁵ Let the discussion begin.

¹⁰⁴ The subject of the hearings is "the role of our Forces in Afghanistan and NATO currently and post 2011". Witnesses have been mainly military and defence personnel, although journalist Terry Glavin of the Canada-Afghanistan Solidarity Committee did testify on April 19. Available transcripts can be accessed at: http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/Committee_SenProceed.asp?Language=E&Parl=40&Ses=3&comm_id=76.

¹⁰⁵ *Report of the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan*, Ottawa, January 2008, 9.